

## Arden University Quality Assurance Document QA25 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

### 1 ARDEN UNIVERSITY'S ETHOS AND COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

At Arden University, we celebrate the diversity of our colleagues and students, and we are committed to ensuring that colleagues, students and other people we engage with feel empowered and respected, as part of a positive, diverse, supportive and kind culture. This aligns with our institutional values:

- We want to **Stand out** in the sector for our inclusive practice
- We are **Progressive**, driving innovation in EDI
- We are **Accessible** to our diverse colleagues and students
- We are **Resourceful** in our EDI partnerships and approaches
- We believe in **Kindness** in everything we do

We are committed to providing equal opportunities for colleagues, students and applicants, and we will not tolerate any discriminatory behaviour with respect to:

- Race, including skin colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, accent, culture, appearance and clothing
- Religion, spirituality or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity and/or gender reassignment
- Marital or civil partnership status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Age
- Disability, including neurodiversity and mental health

These characteristics align with the protected characteristics defined in the Equalities Act 2010. We are also committed to supporting colleagues and students who have minority characteristics or challenging circumstances that may not be protected by law. These include:

- Refugees and forced migrants
- Carers
- Care-experienced people
- People with challenging socio-economic circumstances

We are committed to taking a people-centric, social model approach in our practice. This means we recognise that disadvantage is not caused by characteristics, but by societal constructs and constraints, and that we believe in removing barriers to support people to thrive and flourish.

At Arden University, we are continually implementing strategies and procedures to tackle the varying forms of discrimination which may occur. These align with the following categories according to the Equality Act 2010:

- Direct discrimination – where a person is not treated equally due to any of the characteristics listed above. This includes discrimination based on association, where a person is treated less favourably because of their association with another person who has a protected characteristic, and

discrimination based on perception, where a person is treated less favourably because of a mistaken perception that they have a protected characteristic.

- Indirect discrimination – where a requirement, situation or condition, which is applied to all, has a potentially adverse effect on one or more groups.
- Harassment – where someone is subjected to unwanted conduct on the basis of one of the protected characteristics.
- Victimisation – where someone is treated less favourably due to action taken against others under equality, diversity and inclusion legislation.

This policy sets out our commitment to EDI and to continually enhancing the inclusiveness of our practice for colleagues and students at Arden University and our international partners.

## 2 IDENTITY AND RESPECT

At Arden University, we believe people should be able to bring their whole selves to their work and/or study. We are proud to commit to respecting and valuing the different identities that make up our diverse colleagues and student body. In practice, this respect includes the commitments laid out in the following paragraphs.

We commit to respecting the language and terminology people use to describe themselves, i.e. in terms of disability, neurodiversity, race, ethnicity or other characteristics or circumstances. We commit, as far as possible, to mirroring their language, and to not applying our own labels to other people's circumstances (i.e., if a person describes themselves as a wheelchair user, we will not apply the term 'confined to a wheelchair' or other outdated terms to them.)

We commit to using inclusive language in our teaching materials, guidance and policy documentation.

We commit to taking a granular approach to ethnicity and disability, in which we recognise individual differences and do not treat people as part of a single homogenous group.

We believe trans rights are human rights, and we commit to supporting our trans and non-binary students and colleagues. We will make every effort to avoid using dead names, to use people's stated pronouns, and will work towards systems that support this. We recognise this can involve a learning curve for people or may involve unlearning past behaviours, and we commit to being patient with people while they get used to this practice.

We respect our students' and colleagues' religions, faiths, beliefs, spirituality and non-faith. We will not judge or condemn anyone's beliefs. We believe in uncensored speech and academic freedom, but never to the point where it threatens the identity or safety of a person with protected characteristics. We recognise that freedom of speech does not mean that all people can express all beliefs without consequences, but that human rights must be balanced against each other; this means one person cannot claim free speech protection to incite hatred against others or put them in danger.

We will provide safe spaces that our colleagues and students may need, including prayer rooms, gender-neutral bathroom facilities and space location help (using maps or human support to help users with location challenges).

We commit to taking developmental or disciplinary action when colleagues or students intentionally violate these commitments in order to protect our inclusive and supportive university culture.

### 3 ACCESSIBILITY AND REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Arden University is committed to supporting disabled and neurodiverse students and colleagues. We aim to make our courses, study experiences and work experiences as accessible as we can at the design stage. We also commit to making, wherever possible, reasonable adjustments to our operating procedures to accommodate any needs students and colleagues may have, whilst maintaining the integrity of our academic standards and quality of our qualifications.

Adjustments may be anticipatory or responsive. Anticipatory adjustments may include, but are not limited to:

- Digital accessibility of our VLE and learning materials
- Transcripts and captions of media
- Trigger or content warnings on potentially distressing content
- Guidance and ongoing professional development and support for colleagues around inclusive teaching and reasonable adjustments

Responsive reasonable adjustments will be made on an individual basis, based on needs, academic rigour and precedent. They may include, but are not limited to:

- Special arrangements in examinations or assessments
- Extra time in examinations
- Alternative assessments or tasks
- Alternative formats available upon request
- Adjustments to classrooms and physical spaces
- Alternative formats of course materials, including enlargements and changes to fonts
- Human (non-medical) support, such as notetakers and British Sign Language interpreters
- Support in digital (distance and blended) learning through assistive technologies, such as screen readers or magnification software
- Reasonable adjustments in interviews and to working conditions, as agreed with stakeholders such as line managers, People Services and Occupational Health Advisors

We encourage students and colleagues to disclose disabilities, neurodiversity or mental health conditions or difficulties to the University as early as possible, so that we can provide timely support. For students, our Wellbeing Services Team will then endeavour to evaluate any needs the students may have and any potential implications for their study. Where appropriate, evidence may be required to support a request for special arrangements to be made.

In certain circumstances (i.e. where there is an urgent or severe need, or where the circumstances of the case demand it) reasonable adjustments can be made if

a student has not disclosed a disability or engaged with the Wellbeing Services team. Training will be provided for staff to ensure they feel confident knowing when and how to make these reasonable adjustments (please review the QA81 Disability and Reasonable Adjustments Policy).

Complex requests, or requests for adjustments without precedent will be referred to the EDI Referrals Panel for review and recommendation. They may also be escalated to the Academic Board, or other bodies as appropriate, if they require a policy decision to be made.

## 4 STUDENT AND COLLEAGUE EXPECTATIONS

At Arden University, we recognise that our colleagues and students have the right to have certain expectations of us as their employer or higher education provider. Similarly, we have the right to have expectations of them. These expectations are laid out in the following sections.

### 4.1 Colleague expectations

Arden University is an equal opportunity employer and is fully committed to a policy of treating all its employees and job applicants equally. Arden University colleagues can expect us to avoid discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment and selection, promotion, transfer, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, other terms of employment, discipline, selection for redundancy and dismissal. We will make reasonable adjustments to interviews and standard working practices to overcome disability-related barriers. We will regularly monitor the effects of selection decisions, pay practices and procedures in order to assess whether equal opportunity and dignity at work are being achieved, and will make changes to our practices where necessary. We also operate colleague networks for diverse groups and our colleagues can expect us to ensure those networks' voices are heard in university governance committees.

Arden University will take all reasonable steps to provide a work environment in which all employees are treated with respect and dignity and that is free of harassment based upon an employee's race, skin colour, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, marital or civil partnership status or disability. Arden University will not condone any form of harassment, discrimination or bullying, whether engaged in by employees or by outside third parties who do business with the university, such as clients, customers, contractors and suppliers.

Arden University employees have a moral and contractual duty to co-operate to ensure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination, harassment or bullying. Action will be taken under the university's staff disciplinary procedure against any employee who is found to have committed an act of unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or intimidation. Serious breaches of this policy will be treated as potential gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal. Employees can be held personally liable for any act of unlawful discrimination.

All colleagues new to Arden University are required to complete mandatory online modules on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Unconscious Bias. Further training and development opportunities on EDI, accessibility and mental wellbeing are available and are run regularly (at least quarterly.)

## 4.2 Student expectations

Arden University offers equality of access to all its programmes and encourages the recruitment of students from the widest possible audience both nationally and internationally in adherence with its widening access ambition. Our students can expect us to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded into every aspect of the student learning journey, including:

- Enrolment
- Induction
- Student Support
- Teaching, curriculum and Academic Support
- Assessment
- Pastoral Support
- Achievement Reporting and Self-Assessment.

We commit to support this through:

- Marketing literature with diverse representation of different student groups, produced for all programmes
- An admissions process which is sensitive and supportive to the needs of all students
- A dedicated Wellbeing Services team who support students to disclose disabilities, seek support for mental health, process safeguarding issues and support students in hardship
- The creation of courses and materials in line with the Arden University Excellence Framework for Inclusive Curriculum, to ensure all study materials and assessment do not contain anything which could be considered discriminatory or offensive to individual students or groups.
- A programme review process that monitors the curriculum, student progress and achievement to ensure that programmes are equitable.

We expect our students, like our colleagues, to be supportive and inclusive of the other members of Arden University staff and student community. Students must not bully, harass, intimidate or discriminate against other students or colleagues based on their race, skin colour, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, marital or civil partnership status or disability. Developmental or disciplinary action will be taken when students are found to have committed an act of unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or intimidation. Further information can be found in our Student Code of Conduct.

Statistical information regarding student equality and diversity will be provided to monitor the equality of our provision. This includes enrolment data by equality characteristics, as monitored by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and student continuation, completion and progression data by age, gender, disability status and ethnicity.

## 5 COMMITMENT TO ONGOING IMPROVEMENT

At Arden University, we recognise that EDI is a constantly evolving field, and we continue to strive to improve. We recognise that we will make mistakes at times, but we commit to a culture of lifelong learning and to adopting an evolving, holistic view of EDI, which is human-centred and compassionate.

We commit to continually enhancing our processes and approaches, and to working in partnership with our diverse students and colleagues. We will continue to offer development opportunities for colleagues and students, to raise awareness of EDI and equip colleagues and students with practical skills to be inclusive in their approaches. We encourage students and colleagues to feel confident in speaking out and raising awareness of any areas in which improvement is needed.

We commit to promoting EDI, celebrating the unique characteristics of our student and colleague communities, and promoting our good practice externally, in order to encourage the higher education sector to be more inclusive.

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