

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Version 2.1

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Visual Meaning Ltd ("VM") is committed to encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion among our workforce, and eliminating unlawful discrimination.

We aim to ensure that all employees and job applicants are given equal opportunity and that, as we increase in size, our organisation is representative of all sections of society. We want for each employee to feel respected and valued, and able to give their best as a result.

Visual Meaning is also committed to preventing unlawful discrimination of customers, suppliers and the public.

This policy is fully supported by the Management Team.

Objective of the Policy

This policy sets out expectations and measures to support VM to meet its legal and ethical obligations to:

1. Provide equality, fairness and respect for all in our employment, whether temporary, part-time or full-time.
2. Not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage and civil partnership
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin)
 - religion or belief
 - sex
 - sexual orientation

These are Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

3. Oppose and avoid all forms of unlawful discrimination. This includes in:
 - pay and benefits
 - terms and conditions of employment
 - dealing with grievances and discipline

- dismissal
 - redundancy
 - leave for parents
 - requests for flexible working
 - selection for employment, promotion, training or other developmental opportunities.
4. Oppose sexual harassment and take steps to prevent it occurring in VM.

The Policy - What to expect of VM

VM commits to:

1. Encourage equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace, promoting a culture of dignity and respect for all employees, customers and suppliers and where the individual differences and contributions of all staff are recognised and valued. This is the right thing to do, is core to our VM Principles and it makes good business sense.
2. Create a working environment free of bullying, harassment including sexual harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination. This commitment includes training all employees about their rights and responsibilities under the equality, diversity and inclusion policy. It also includes taking steps to prevent sexual harassment. The first step in this is recognising sexual harassment. Please see Appendix 1 for further information about sexual harassment.
3. Take seriously allegations of bullying, harassment including sexual harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of VM's work activities. Allegations will be taken seriously irrespective of the job role or status of the person reporting.
 - Allegations will be handled confidentially and sympathetically.
 - Records of incidents will be made.
 - If a formal complaint is made, then VM will follow formal grievance procedures.
 - Formal complaints of bullying, harassment including sexual harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, if upheld, may be deemed misconduct under the organisation's grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, and appropriate action will be taken. Serious complaints could amount to gross misconduct and lead to dismissal without notice. They could potentially also result in legal action being taken.
 - If a formal complaint is not made then it will be handled informally, if possible. However, depending on the circumstances, including if the issue is not resolved, VM might choose to deal with it formally since it has a duty of care to look after the wellbeing of all employees.
 - VM will take into account how the person who raised the issue would like it to be handled and resolved.

- Informal actions that VM might take include¹: providing support and advice on how to handle the issue, conducting an informal investigation, having an informal discussion with the relevant person, facilitating an apology from the relevant person and mediation between the parties.
 - If the issue is resolved informally VM will keep a record of the actions taken and the outcomes and keep in touch with the person who made the complaint to check things are still okay.
 - At any stage in an informal process, VM might decide there is no need for further action. In that case, they will keep a written record of the reasons for that decision and update the person who made the informal complaint.
4. Make opportunities for training, development and progress available to all staff, who will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential, so their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.
 5. Make decisions concerning staff based on merit (apart from in any necessary and limited exemptions and exceptions allowed under the Equality Act).
 6. Review employment practices and procedures when necessary to ensure fairness, and to update them and the policy when necessary to take account of changes in the law.
 7. Periodically review how the equality, diversity and inclusion policy, and any supporting action plan, are working in practice and taking action to address any issues.

Our disciplinary and grievance procedures

Details of the organisation's grievance and disciplinary policies and procedures can be found in employees' employment contracts and may be updated on the VM Hub from time to time. This includes with whom an employee should raise a grievance – usually the Operations Lead or a company Director.

The Policy - What VM expects from employees and subcontractors

VM employees and subcontractors have a responsibility to uphold an inclusive culture, promoting dignity and respect for all employees, customers and suppliers and recognising and valuing the individual differences and contributions of others.

VM employees and subcontractors have a responsibility to conduct themselves so as to help VM provide equal opportunities in employment, and prevent bullying, harassment including sexual harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination.

Employees and subcontractors should understand that they, as well as VM as their employer, can be held personally criminally liable under UK law for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation and

¹ <https://www.acas.org.uk/handling-a-bullying-harassment-discrimination-complaint/how-to-approach-a-complaint>

unlawful discrimination, in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public.

Employees and subcontractors should understand that sexual harassment may amount to both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in sexual assault allegations. In addition, harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – which is not limited to circumstances where harassment relates to a protected characteristic – is a criminal offence.

Resources

ACAS, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, is a government funded independent public body, which provides many useful and free resources in this area.

The following pages may be helpful:

<https://www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-bullying-and-harassment>

<https://www.acas.org.uk/sexual-harassment>

There is a helpline offering confidential, free advice to employees and other workers. The number is 0300 123 1100. Please see here for details: www.acas.org.uk/contact

Appendix 1: Recognising Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, which must have either:

- violated someone's dignity
- created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone

It can be sexual harassment if the behaviour:

- has one of these effects even if it was not intended
- intended to have one of these effects even if it did not have that effect

Sexual harassment can happen to men, women and people of any sexual orientation. It can be carried out by anyone of the same sex, another sex or anyone of any sexual orientation.

Sexual harassment can be a one-off incident or an ongoing pattern of behaviour. It can happen in person. It can also happen online, for example in meetings, email, social media or messaging tools.

Examples include:

- making sexual remarks about someone's body, clothing or appearance
- asking questions about someone's sex life
- telling sexually offensive jokes
- making sexual comments or jokes about someone's sexual orientation or gender reassignment
- displaying or sharing pornographic or sexual images, or other sexual content
- touching someone against their will, for example hugging them
- sexual assault or rape

What some people might consider as joking, 'banter' or part of their workplace culture can still be sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is usually directed at an individual, but it's not always the case. Sometimes there can be a culture of behaviour that's not specifically aimed at one person – such as sharing sexual images. Someone could still make a complaint of sexual harassment in this situation.

Source: [What sexual harassment is - Sexual harassment - Acas](#)

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