

## **Equal Opportunities Policy**

Last Reviewed March 2022

Effective until March 2023

### **1) Statement of Equal Opportunity**

Rural Arts' vision is creativity at the heart of every community in North Yorkshire.

Rural Arts is a registered charity that delivers inspiring and inclusive creative opportunities that enrich lives and connect communities. We provide over 400 events and activities each year at our community arts centre in Thirsk, which is also home to an award-winning café, a gallery shop and rooms to hire. We programme 70 performances per year in rural venues and lead a range of wellbeing and employment programmes to support vulnerable people.

Rural Arts was established in 1992 and is a member of Arts Council England's National Portfolio.

Rural Arts believes that all people are equal and should be treated as such, with access to the same opportunities and experiences, where relevant and appropriate, regardless of any and all protected characteristics. Using the arts as a medium for the exploration of themes, experiences and the development of character and skills puts Rural Arts in prime position to influence, inform and educate through its programme of work.

Rural Arts also recognises the need for equality, fairness and open access in its functions as a company, organisation and employer, and thus works to an operational and well as aspirational Equal Opportunities Policy. This policy is integrated into all others within the organisation, including Data Protection, HR and Company policies.

Rural Arts is committed to:

- Celebrating the diverse communities we live, work and perform in – be that on a local or national level
- Empowering all people through programmes and performances that stress the inherent worth of the individual, rather than inflating or decreasing the importance or value of any one person, characteristic or lack of characteristic
- Ensuring the principles of equality of opportunity underpins all provision to our audiences, participants, present and potential employees

Rural Arts recognises that discrimination exists in many forms, including:

Direct discrimination: unfair treatment because of specific (actual or perceived) protected characteristics, or their association with someone with that protected characteristic.



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Indirect discrimination: where a practice, policy or rule that applies to everyone in the same way has a greater impact on people with certain protected characteristics, creating a “particular disadvantage”.

Harassment: Unwanted, offensive, humiliating and intimidation act directed at you because of protected characteristic(s). This can be in the form of gestures, spoken or written words, images or jokes.

Victimisation: Unfavourable treatment received often a reaction to the person's claim of discrimination, or because the person is supporting someone's claim of discrimination.

### **a) Legal requirements**

The Equalities Act (2010) created a robust new framework of protections to ensure fair and equal treatment for all people in the United Kingdom.

By law, Rural Arts must not discriminate against individuals or groups with any of the following protected characteristics (“types of discrimination”):

- Age
- Disability (learning, sensory, mental or physical, including progressive illnesses)
- Gender/gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Race (includes colour, ethnic/national origin and nationality)
- Religion or belief (or lack of)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

People with these characteristics can be known as “protected groups”.

Rural Arts aims to extend this protection, where possible, to include:

- Rural isolation
- Political belief (or lack of)
- Socio economic background
- Parental status
- Caring responsibilities and dependants leave
- Trade Union membership or activities
- HIV status
- Employment status
- Unrelated criminal convictions

Nor will such person be disadvantaged by conditions or requirement which cannot be shown to be justifiable.

## **2) Implementation of Equal Opportunity**

### **a) Internal**

- Rural Arts' CEO has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and its associated Action Plan
- Rural Arts' Equal Opportunities Policy and Action Plan are mandated at Board level and are reviewed quarterly
- To support the delivery and monitor the success of Rural Arts' commitments to equality, Rural Arts maintains a Single Equality Action Plan which, reviewed quarterly, creates specific targets for both projects and administrative services
- All staff have responsibilities within the Single Equality Action Plan
- The Management commits to providing training and guidance to employees regarding both Equal Opportunity policy and practice to ensure individual and team understanding of rights and responsibilities. This includes the less obvious types of discrimination that can result from general assumptions and preconceptions about the capabilities, interests and characteristics of individuals
- Employees at every level have an individual responsibility to ensure Equal Opportunities are provided to all audiences, participants and associates of Rural Arts
- Rural Arts will promote Equal Opportunities practice with all staff and freelance staff when undertaking company activity
- Rural Arts will actively encourage diversity to maximise achievement, creativity and good practice and to bring benefit to individuals and communities
- Rural Arts aims to foster an atmosphere of trust, harmony and respect. If any employee is exposed to prejudice or discrimination whilst working for Rural Arts, management is committed to supporting the individual and confronting the source of prejudice
- Rural Arts encourages all people it works with and for to contribute to an environment in which people feel comfortable expressing how they feel and what they need, knowing they will be treated with respect and that their contribution will be valued
- All employees have the right to be treated fairly. If any individual feels that they, or any colleague/s are not being treated as such, by Rural Arts or anyone in the employment of Rural Arts, they must contact the CEO or any member of the Board of Trustees



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- All allegations of discrimination will be dealt with seriously, confidentially and speedily. Rural Arts will not ignore or treat lightly grievances or complaints about unlawful discrimination from employees
- Current employees, freelancers and Trustees are asked to complete an internal monitoring form to give insight into Rural Arts' recruitment procedures and to ascertain any relevant staff needs
- In line with Rural Arts' Safeguarding Policy, all employees who come or may come into direct contact with those considered to be adults at risk must receive Certification from the Disclosure and Barring Service. Rural Arts undertakes to maintain the confidentiality of disclosures and not to allow their content to prejudice the Employee's suitability for employment. The same understanding is taken towards regulations under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act regulations
- The principles of Equal Opportunity apply to all personnel matters, including induction, promotion, transfer, training, sickness, benefits, facilities, procedures and all terms and conditions of employment, including remuneration, flexible working, TOIL, working from home etc
- Rural Arts will make reasonable adjustments to working practices, equipment and premises and offer, where appropriate, additional support to trustees, staff and volunteers to ensure they are able to take a full and active part in Rural Arts' work

#### **b) External**

- Rural Arts will endeavour to deliver services in a way that genuinely recognises the importance of an inclusive society that brings opportunities and access, not barriers to individuals
- Rural Arts will make all services, where practicable, accessible to all those appropriate for the service
- Rural Arts embraces the strength that diversity can provide a workforce, therefore disseminates information for employment across a wide range of networks and platforms
- Advertisements will aim to positively encourage applications from all suitably qualified people in order to attract applications from all sections of the community
- Where vacancies may be filled by promotion or transfer, they will be published to all eligible employees in such a way that they do not restrict applications from employees with a particular protected characteristic
- The recruitment process will be conducted in such a way as to result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job in respect of abilities and qualifications. Rural Arts is committed to applying its equal opportunities policy at all stages of recruitment and selection



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- Equal Opportunities monitoring forms are issued to all job applicants. This form has been carefully created to allow individual choice and identification, and is supported by best practice guides
- Rural Arts will regularly monitor the effects of selection decisions and personnel practices and procedures in order to assess whether equal opportunity is being achieved. This will also involve considering any possible indirectly discriminatory effects of its standard working practices
- The following strapline, or expanded / more specific versions, will be included in each employment opportunity:

*Rural Arts is committed to being an Equal Opportunities employer and encourages applications for work from all sections of the community*

- Rural Arts will also include information about alternative formats and reasonable adjustment in all advertisements, for example:

*Should you need this information in another format, or require reasonable adjustment, please let us know.*

- Rural Arts will make reasonable adjustment for all interviews and subsequent employment for staff with additional needs.