

Cork County PPN Equality and Diversity Policy (P6):

underpinning dignity in the PPN for staff, volunteers and others

1.0 What is this policy for

1.1 The purpose of the policy is to demonstrate the PPN's commitment to implementing and promoting measures to protect the dignity of PPN staff and volunteers, and to encourage respect for others at work (whether paid or voluntary). This is done by;

- creating an environment free from discrimination, harassment, racism, sexual harassment, bullying and disrespectful behaviour
- by dealing effectively with any complaints of such conduct, and
- by welcoming diversity and promoting equality.

1.2 This policy is to give practical guidance to PPN Workers and volunteers on:

- what is meant by discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, bullying and disrespectful behaviour;
- how this unacceptable behaviour may be deterred;
- how to raise the awareness of all involved with the PPN to identify the potential for this form of unacceptable behaviour;
- what steps to take, if it does occur, to ensure that adequate procedures are readily available to deal with the problem, to ensure that all parties, complainant and respondent, are treated fairly in resolving the problem and to prevent any recurrence.

1.3 This document sets out the PPN's policy and procedures in relation to discrimination, harassment, racism, sexual harassment and bullying and outlines the procedure to be followed if any PPN staff member or volunteer feels that they have been subjected to any of these abuses.

2. What or who does this policy apply to

This policy applies to the conduct of all staff, volunteers, contractors, suppliers and visitors whether in the PPN workplace, at activities and events organised by the PPN at other locations, or in communications connected with the PPN. This policy applies during normal working hours and at any other time when engaged in PPN-related activities. It encompasses all unacceptable behaviours set out below, which are subject to the PPN [Code of Conduct](#) (P5, p.36) and which will be addressed through the PPN [Grievance Procedure](#) (P8, p.50).

3. The PPN's commitment to equality and diversity

3.1 The PPN promotes and supports the right to dignity at work, whether paid or voluntary. ALL who work in the PPN are to be treated equally and respected for their individuality and diversity. The PPN promotes a workplace culture of dignity, respect and openness to diversity which should be reflected in the actions and behaviour of all staff and volunteers. The PPN will not tolerate discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, harassment or disrespectful behaviour by one or more staff or volunteers against another or others for any reason. Unacceptable behaviour may be in words, conduct, acts or demeanour. Where disrespect occurs, it is regarded as contravening the values of the PPN (see Section 1.3.i of our Constitution) and as such will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

3.2 The PPN is committed to equal opportunity of employment (for paid and unpaid work) and all employment policies, procedures and practices will be based on merit, qualifications and abilities. Employment and recruitment practices will not be influenced or affected by an applicant's race, colour, religion, sex, marital status, nationality, family status, sexual orientation, disability, age or membership of the Traveller community. Implied in the PPN's contracts of employment is a commitment to equal pay for equal work. Likewise, in selecting service providers, none of the grounds listed above will be used as the basis for any decision.

4.0 Types of unacceptable behaviour

Behaviour that is not respectful, is hostile, or disadvantages any person is seen as unacceptable. Broad categories of unacceptable behaviour are described below.

4.1 Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has or would have been treated, on any of the nine grounds listed below. Discrimination is also taken to have occurred where one of the nine grounds is imputed to a person, or where a person who is associated with another is treated less favourably than another person would have been by virtue of that association.

The PPN values the contribution of all staff and volunteers, and requires all staff and volunteers to refrain from any type of behaviour which may be interpreted as offending, harassing or discriminating against another/others. While not restricted to the grounds listed below, the policy prevents any form of discrimination based on the following:

- Gender
- Marital status
- Family status
- Sexual orientation
- Religious belief or lack of religious belief
- Age (16+)
- Disability or the nature of disability
- Race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins
- Traveller status

4.2 Harassment

The Employment Equality Acts, 1998 and 2004 expressly prohibits harassment. Harassment is defined as any form of unwanted conduct related to any of the nine discriminatory grounds, being conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Harassment may be explicit or implicit; it may be a single incident or occur over a period of time. It may be directed at an individual or at a group. In defining and identifying harassment it is the effect of the behaviour that is relevant not the intent. It is the impact of the behaviour on the person affected that determines whether harassment has occurred.

Such conduct may include spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material, if the action or conduct is unwelcome to the staff member or volunteer and is deemed to be offensive, humiliating or intimidating. Examples of harassment include the following:

- Verbal Harassment - jokes, comments, ridicule or songs
- Written Harassment - faxes, text messages, emails or notices
- Non-Verbal/Visual Harassment - jostling, shoving or any form of assault; gestures, posturing or threatening poses; visual displays such as posters, emblems or badges; isolation or exclusion from workplace social activities; pressure to behave in a manner that the staff member or volunteer thinks is inappropriate, e.g. being required to dress in a manner unsuited or a person's ethnic or religious background.

4.3 Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is prohibited by the Employment Equality Acts, 1998 and 2004. Sexual harassment is defined as conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Many forms of behaviour can constitute sexual harassment and a single incident may constitute sexual harassment. The following is a listing of potential forms of sexual harassment, which is not exhaustive:

- Verbal Harassment - unwelcome sexual advances, propositions, or pressure for sexual activity; unwelcome pressure for social contact; sexually suggestive jokes, remarks or innuendoes.
- Physical Harassment - unwelcome physical contact such as groping, pinching, patting, unnecessary touching or brushing against another person's body; indecent exposure; unwelcome fondling or kissing; sexual assault or rape.
- Non-Verbal/Visual Harassment - the display of sexually suggestive or pornographic pictures and calendars, objects, written materials, emails, text messages or faxes; leering, offensive gestures, whistling.

4.4 Bullying

All forms of bullying are prohibited. Workplace bullying is repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work. An isolated incident of the behaviour described in this definition may be an affront to dignity at work but, as a once off incident, is not considered to be bullying.

4.4.i Forms of Bullying

Bullying occurs in many guises and reveals itself through obvious and direct methods as well as in less direct and subtle forms. Bullying may manifest itself across the organisational and management structure. It can occur within peer groups, from line management or the Secretariat to staff and from staff to management or the Secretariat. Bullying may be categorised in a number of forms including behaviour that may:

- Humiliate: Preventing a colleague from speaking by using aggressive and/or obscene language, sneering or ridicule including horseplay or practical jokes, and criticising their efforts often in front of others;
- Intimidate: physical abuse or threats of abuse, open aggression, threats, staring, shouting abuse or obscenities;
- Verbal abuse: persistent unwarranted criticism;
- Victimise: manipulation of a colleagues reputation by rumour, gossip ridicule and/or innuendo;
- Exclude and isolate: social exclusion and isolation;
- Intrude: through pestering, spying or stalking;
- Manipulate the nature of work by withholding information, setting meaningless tasks, giving repeated unreasonable assignments or duties that are obviously unfavourable to one individual, giving repeated impossible deadlines or impossible tasks, or regularly taking the credit for somebody's work, but never taking the blame when things go wrong;
- Undermine a person's authority.

4.5 Lack of Respect

Lack of respect is prohibited by the PPN. It can be shown by direct comments, sarcasm, snide remarks, inappropriate jokes or banter towards a colleague. It can arise where colleagues are ignored, overlooked, avoided or shunned without good reason and in a manner likely to be hurtful or disrespectful. Jokes or comments directed at, or referred to, a colleague could be thought amusing by others but may be unpleasant, uncomfortable or hurtful to that colleague.

Respect should be shown to all colleagues. Respect is also earned. By showing respect to others and honouring their personal dignity, a person will earn their respect.

4.6 Intent

It is the effect of the treatment on the harassed or bullied individual, and not the intent of the alleged perpetrator, that will be taken into consideration when determining whether or not the treatment constitutes harassment, sexual harassment or bullying.

5.0 Effects of unacceptable behaviour

Harassment, sexual harassment and bullying exact a high price from staff, volunteers and the PPN alike. Staff and volunteers can be subject to fear, stress and anxiety, which may put great strains on personal and

family life. Individuals working in a climate of fear and resentment do not perform to their capabilities. The result is not just poor morale but increased absenteeism, reduced volunteers and higher staff turnover, reduced productivity, reduced efficiency and unhappy and divided workplace.

6.0 Responsibility of management and the PPN staff

All individuals, whether directly employed, contracted by, or volunteering with the PPN, have a duty and responsibility to uphold the principles of this policy. While each staff member and volunteer has a responsibility to ensure that unacceptable behaviour is prevented, line managers and the Secretariat have a specific responsibility to promote the provisions of this policy.

7.0 Rights of those involved, in the event of a complaint of unacceptable behaviour

All complaints will be treated seriously. Current nationally-agreed PPN procedures for dealing with complaints of bullying or harassment/sexual harassment or other types of unacceptable behaviour will be followed. Where these are not available, the PPN's Complaints Procedure will be used.

Any individual is free to make a complaint. They will not be victimised for making a complaint. However, if a complaint is found to be false or malicious, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate, up to and including dismissal or exclusion from the PPN. Complaints will be handled according to the PPN [Grievance Policy](#) (P8, p.50).

All parties involved will be treated with respect. The alleged perpetrator is entitled to representation, a fair and impartial hearing and the right to challenge the claim made against them. An allegation remains an allegation until it is found, following investigation, to be proven.

Where a staff member or volunteer is found to have engaged in unacceptable behaviour, they will be subject to the disciplinary procedure and disciplinary action, as appropriate, up to and including dismissal or expulsion from the PPN. (Expulsion from the PPN may affect individuals or their member groups or both.)

It is important to note that while the PPN cannot guarantee confidentiality, it will make every effort to ensure that everyone involved observes confidentiality while a complaint is being investigated.

Where it is necessary to interview witnesses as part of an investigation they will be expected to respect the privacy of the parties involved by refraining from discussing the allegations with other work colleagues or persons outside of the organisation.

7.1 Protection against retaliation

Retaliation is a serious violation of this policy and should be reported immediately. Any PPN staff member or volunteer found to have retaliated against another for filing a complaint or assisting in an investigation will be subject to disciplinary action.

Nothing in this policy overrules a person's legal and statutory rights.

Date approved by Plenary:

23/04/2026
