# **Open College of the Arts Equality & Diversity Policy**

### **Introduction**

The Open College of the Arts is committed to providing equality of opportunity for all students wishing to study courses with us, and staff wishing to work with us. The College undertakes to create and provide a positive and open learning, working and tutoring environment that foster good relations and respect at all levels of the organisation.

This policy works principally in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, informed by guidance from the Equality Challenge Unit and best practice across the Higher Education sector.

The policy as outlined here ensures the College works towards the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires all acknowledging institutions to:

* Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
* Advance equality of opportunity
* Promote positive relations between all students and staff

As the PSED stipulates, OCA will publish yearly an Equality & Diversity Action Plan which outlines specific targets and objectives for enhancing equality & diversity in operational practice at OCA.

As an organisation, the Open College of the Arts values the diversity in our student, staff, and tutor body and will work to ensuring that each individual can achieve their full potential. The Open College of the Arts charitable mission is to widen access to creative arts education for all in an evolving society; this works in tandem with this policy to open doors for the most disadvantaged in society.

All staff and students at OCA are responsible for enhancing equality & diversity in all aspects of college life. Further, all staff and students are required to familiarise themselves with this policy and the guiding principles and to adhere to this policy in function and spirit. Students or staff seeking further information should contact the Head of Student Services. The Principal at the college has overall responsibility to ensure implementation of this policy. It is the responsibility of Senior Managers at the college to embed the principles of equality & diversity in policies and processes across the institution and operationalise our approach on a daily basis.

The Equality Act 2010 permits organisations to take ‘positive action’ as a proportionate response in assisting people with protected characteristics to overcome disadvantage or to encourage uptake of particular demographics in areas of underrepresentation on a case by case basis.

In order to support this policy, our aims & values, and our statutory duties, there are a number of interlinked subsidiary policies and action plans, including those in the PSED publication, which support and form an integral part of this overarching policy.

### **Guiding Principles**

OCA undertakes to treat all staff and students, applicants, and visitors fairly and ensure that no person, group or demographic is discriminated on any grounds, including the protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This includes as criteria in the application process for staff and students. We will work to ensure that all decisions made are based upon merit and free from bias.

The College commits to creating a learning and working environment which is culturally positive, respectful, and free-thinking, and to encourage discourse in a considerate and sensitive manner.

The value and benefit of fostering a diverse community of students and staff, from different demographics and with varying opinions and outlooks is at the heart of OCA through our charitable mission.

The College will work with the students association (OCASA) to implement this and connected policies in taking action on equality and diversity and to work with OCASA to gather student feedback on our equality & diversity actions.

As part of the enrolment process with the college information on protected characteristics is requested and reported upon as part of the Colleges statutory duty to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); this information is also analysed internally by the college for planning purposes. Information on the retention of such data can be found in the Colleges Data Protection Guidelines.

### **Implementation**

This policy forms part of the Student Regulations, which upon enrolment to the College, all students agree to and are bound by. Further this policy forms part of the Staff and Tutor Handbooks and upon employment with the College, all staff agree to and are bound by.

The College will incorporate these as part of the induction processes for both staff and students upon entry to the college. Compliance with this policy will also form part of job descriptions at the college.

This Policy will be reviewed once yearly to ensure relevance with current statutory requirements, and best practice in the field of equality & diversity.

The policy and other documents, information, websites, web forums, and social media operated by the College will be made accessible for all, conforming to appropriate standards and via various media.

The information, principles, and implementation processes pertained to in this policy will be communicated to students and staff through appropriate training, and other communication channels, including the Colleges online discussion forums.

In creating policies and actions in other areas of the College we will undertake to review new policies through an Equality Impact Assessment and to make appropriate changes where the principles of this policy could be impinged.

As part of the review process of this policy, all subsidiary policies listed here will also be reviewed as part of this; Safeguarding & Wellbeing Policy, Fair Selection & Recruitment Policy, and Anti-Harassment & Bullying Policy.

### **Reporting Process**

The College takes extremely seriously any reported cases whereby a student or staff at the college feels discriminated, harassed, bullied, or victimised. In any case whereby these charges are brought, the College will implement a full investigation of the incident(s) and resolve the situation quickly and sensitively. Where a person(s) are found to have breached this policy, either students or staff, formal disciplinary procedures will be followed, and where necessary reported to local authorities including the police.

Students wishing to report any incident can do so via the Colleges Complaints Procedures, details of which are in the Student Regulations.

Staff wishing to report any incident should in the first instance talk to their line manager. Alternatively staff can do so via the Colleges Grievance Process, details of which are in the Staff Handbook.

Members of the public can submit a complaint via email to enquiries@oca.ac.uk.