# Aim

This policy communicates the commitment of the Directors to the promotion of equality of opportunity in Meridio. It also sets out standards of behaviour and provides a means for making complaints of discrimination.

# Policy

It is the Company's policy to provide employment equality to all, irrespective of gender, marital or family status, religious belief or political opinion, disability, race or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, nationality or age.

We are opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. All full time and part time employees and job applicants (actual or potential) will be treated fairly and selection for employment, promotion, training or any other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability.

We are committed to:

* Preventing any form of direct or indirect discrimination or victimisation
* Promoting a good and harmonious working environment where all men and women are
* treated with respect and dignity and in which no form of intimidation or harassment will
* be tolerated.
* Fulfilling all legal obligations under the relevant legislation and associated Codes of
* Practice
* Taking any necessary positive / affirmative action, including setting goals and timetables.
* Breaches of our equal opportunities policy and practice will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings.

# Implementation

The Human Resources Manager has specific responsibility for the implementation of this policy. Each director and manager also has responsibilities and we expect all of our employees to abide by the policy and help create the equality environment which is its objective.

In order to implement this policy, we will ensure that:

* The policy is communicated to all employees through induction training and display on the Intranet. It will also be made known to job applicants.
* Appropriate training and guidance will be provided, including training on induction and management courses. In particular, all those involved in assessing candidates for recruitment or promotion will be trained in non-discriminatory recruitment and selection techniques.
* Adequate resources are made available to fulfill the aims of this policy.

# Monitoring and Review

The provision of equality of opportunity between women and men will be monitored through the collection and analysis of data on the sex, marital status and family status of all full time and part time employees and job applicants. We will also monitor our workforce composition and undertake periodic reviews as required by Section 31 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

Progress on the implementation of this policy and any equal opportunities and affirmative / positive action programmes will be reviewed annually.

# Harassment

Harassment at work in any form is unacceptable behaviour and will not be permitted or condoned. Sexual, sectarian and racial harassment, as well as harassing a disabled person on account of disability, constitute discrimination, and are unlawful under the sex discrimination, fair employment, race relations and disability legislation. Harassment may also be a civil offence, a criminal offence and it may contravene health and safety legislation.

Harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual / sectarian / racial / disability nature or other conduct based on sex, religious belief, political opinion, race or disability affecting the dignity of women and men at work. This can include unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct. Such behaviour is unacceptable:

* Where it is unwanted, unreasonable and offensive to the recipient Where it is used as the basis for an employment decision
* Where it creates a hostile working environment

Some examples are given below, but many forms of behaviour can constitute harassment.

* Physical conduct, ranging from touching to serious assault
* Verbal and written harassment through jokes, racist remarks, offensive language, gossip and slander, sectarian songs, threats, letters
* Visual displays of posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, flags, bunting or emblems or any other offensive material.
* Isolation or non cooperation at work, exclusion from social activities Coercion, including pressure for sexual favours, pressure to participate in political / religious groups Intrusion by pestering, spying, following etc.

It should be noted that it is the impact of the behaviour which is relevant and not the motive or intent behind it.

# Victimisation

Every effort will be made to ensure that employees making complaints will not be victimised. Victimisation occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another because that person has, for example, asserted rights under any of the discrimination laws, has helped another person to assert such rights, given information to the relevant statutory body, or because it is suspected that the person might do any of these things.

# Complaints

All employees have the right to a working environment free from unfair discrimination, harassment or victimisation of any kind. In addition employees have the right to have any complaints they have relating to harassment treated with sensitivity and respect. If you are experiencing any of these types of behaviour you should follow the procedure below.

* **The informal stage** is appropriate if you simply want the behaviour to stop, where the behaviour is not serious, or has not been repeated. If you feel able to do so, make it clear to the person concerned that you find their behaviour offensive and ask them to stop it. Ask a colleague or manager to be present if you prefer. If it is too difficult or embarrassing to do this personally, you may request a supervisor, manager or HR to do this on your behalf (with the understanding that such help at this informal stage is in the role of assisting and supporting only).
* **The formal complaint procedure** is appropriate if the harassment is serious, if you prefer this or if the situation persists after informal procedures have been used. You may raise your complaint with a Manager or HR. A full investigation will take place to gather sufficient information to show whether or not there are reasonable grounds to uphold your complaint. If this is the case, then the matter will be dealt with under the Disciplinary policy, which may, in serious cases, lead to the dismissal of the offender.

A complaint should be made as soon as possible after the alleged discrimination takes place. It is preferable that it is made in writing, but a formal investigation can still take place following a verbal complaint.

Making a complaint is a serious issue and will be treated as such. Do not be put off because you do not want to be seen as making a fuss. You have a duty to yourself and to other colleagues to alert the Company to problems such as these so that action can be taken. However, where complaints are not found to have been made in good faith, such as a malicious allegation or accusation that is known or ought to be known to be untrue, the matter will be treated as misconduct and dealt with appropriately under the Disciplinary Policy.

Managers who are approached with a complaint by an employee should always notify HR, whether the complaint is formal or informal.

# Statutory Rights

This procedure does not replace or detract from the rights of employees under relevant equality legislation.

*The relevant legislation is the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (or Northern Ireland Order 1976), the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Race Relations Act 1976 (or Northern Ireland Order 1997) and the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976.*