


Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy

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Introduction

International College of Contemporary Sciences ICCS is committed to providing a learning and working environment in which equality of opportunity, diversity of background and experience, and mutual respect between individuals are actively valued and promoted. The college recognises that students and staff come from a wide range of cultures, traditions and identities and that this diversity enriches the educational experience, strengthens intellectual enquiry and enhances preparation for employment in a global context. ICCS therefore seeks to ensure that no member of its community is treated less favourably or subjected to discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the basis of a protected characteristic or any other unjustified ground.

This Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy explains how ICCS interprets its responsibilities under equality and human rights legislation and how these responsibilities are translated into practical expectations and behaviours across the college. It sets out the scope and principles of the policy, clarifies the roles and responsibilities of different groups, and describes how equality, diversity and inclusion considerations are embedded in key processes such as recruitment, admission, teaching, assessment and student support. The policy forms part of the wider ICCS governance and quality framework and should be read alongside the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policy, the Complaints Policy and Procedures and related human resources arrangements.

Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and coherent statement of ICCS commitment to promoting equal opportunities and valuing diversity, and to translate that commitment into an operational framework that guides everyday practice and decision making. The policy is intended to give confidence to students, staff, applicants and partners that ICCS takes issues of equality and diversity seriously, that it understands its legal and moral duties, and that it has in place structures and procedures to address unfair treatment or barriers to participation wherever they may arise. It seeks to ensure that equality is not treated as an optional or peripheral concern, but as a central component of educational quality and institutional culture.

The specific aims are to prevent unlawful discrimination and to reduce disadvantage experienced by groups or individuals, to create conditions in which all members of the ICCS community can develop their full potential, and to foster an environment in which diversity is seen as a strength rather than a challenge. The policy aims to ensure that

equality considerations inform strategic planning, curriculum design, student support and staff development, and that data on participation, attainment and progression is used to identify and address gaps. It also aims to support transparency and accountability by setting out how concerns can be raised and how progress will be monitored and reported.

Legal and Regulatory Context

This policy is grounded in the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which identifies protected characteristics and prohibits discrimination, harassment and victimisation in employment and in the provision of education and services. ICCS acknowledges its responsibilities as an education provider and employer to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups. The college also takes account of the Human Rights Act, which reinforces the importance of respect for dignity, privacy and freedom of thought, conscience and belief, and of data protection legislation, which requires sensitive handling of personal information relating to identity and characteristics.

In addition to domestic legislation, ICCS operates within a regulatory environment shaped by bodies such as the Office for Students, the Department for Education and Ofqual, which set expectations for equality of opportunity, access and participation, and fair treatment in admissions, teaching and assessment. The college pays attention to relevant codes, guidance and good practice frameworks produced by these and other sector organisations, and will update this policy and associated procedures to reflect changes in law, regulation or recognised practice. In doing so ICCS seeks not only to comply with minimum requirements but to contribute positively to sector wide efforts to advance equality and inclusion.

Definitions and Key Concepts

For the purposes of this policy equality of opportunity means that access to learning, employment and services is based on relevant merit and potential, and not constrained by irrelevant or discriminatory factors. Diversity refers to the visible and non visible differences between individuals, including but not limited to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, and also social and educational background, caring responsibilities and other aspects of identity. Inclusion describes the active process of enabling different people to feel respected, valued and able to contribute on an equal footing, rather than merely being present within the institution.

Discrimination may be direct, where a person is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic, or indirect, where a provision, criterion or practice that appears neutral puts people who share a protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage without objective justification. Harassment involves unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating a person dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Victimisation occurs where a person is subjected to a detriment because they have made, or supported, a complaint or raised a concern about discrimination. Understanding these concepts is essential if the community is to identify and challenge unacceptable behaviour.

Scope

This policy applies to all aspects of ICCS activity, including governance, strategic planning, recruitment and selection of staff, admission and support of students, teaching and learning, assessment and feedback, research and scholarly activity, and the provision of facilities and services. It covers all members of the ICCS community, including applicants, students, apprentices, alumni, staff, agency workers, contractors, visitors and others who engage with the college. The policy applies to activities taking place on ICCS premises, at partner or placement sites, and online or in blended learning environments where ICCS retains responsibility for delivery or oversight.

Where ICCS works with partners, placement providers or contractors, the college will seek to ensure that contractual and collaborative agreements include appropriate expectations in relation to equality and diversity and that there is clarity about the procedures that apply when concerns arise. While ICCS cannot control every aspect of the conduct of external organisations, it will seek assurance that partners are committed to fair and inclusive practices and will be prepared to challenge or review relationships where serious concerns emerge. The policy does not replace specific procedures such as staff grievance processes or student complaints and appeals, but operates alongside them and informs their application.

Principles

The ICCS approach to equal opportunities and diversity is underpinned by a set of core principles that guide behaviour and decision making. These include respect for the intrinsic worth and dignity of every person, recognition of the value of different perspectives and experiences, and rejection of prejudice, stereotyping and unfair discrimination. The college is committed to ensuring that policies and practices are based on evidence and assessment of impact, rather than assumptions, and that

barriers to participation and progression are identified and addressed in a timely and proportionate manner. Equality is seen as an enabler of excellence in education, not as a constraint.

The policy is also based on the principle of shared responsibility. While the Governing Body and senior leadership team have particular duties to set the tone and allocate resources, all members of the ICCS community contribute to the climate of respect and inclusion through their everyday conduct. The college expects students and staff to treat one another with courtesy, to challenge discriminatory behaviour where it is safe and appropriate to do so, and to use internal processes to raise concerns. ICCS will support those who speak up about unfair treatment and will ensure that they are not disadvantaged for doing so.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Body has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that ICCS meets its legal and regulatory obligations in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion and for overseeing progress against relevant strategic objectives. The Principal and senior leadership team are responsible for translating this commitment into institutional strategies, policies and action plans and for ensuring that equality considerations are embedded in decision making, resource allocation and risk management. Designated senior leads may be appointed to champion equality and diversity, coordinate initiatives and report on progress to governance committees.

Managers and academic leaders are responsible for implementing this policy within their areas of control, including ensuring that local procedures are fair and transparent, that staff understand their responsibilities and that equality impacts are considered when changes are proposed. Human resources and student support services provide specialist advice, support training and maintain relevant data and records. All staff and students share responsibility for familiarising themselves with this policy, for treating others with respect and for participating constructively in initiatives aimed at promoting equality and diversity. Contractors and partners are expected to adhere to equivalent standards when working with ICCS.

Recruitment, Admission and Progression

ICCS is committed to fair and transparent recruitment and admission processes that are based on merit, potential and the ability to meet programme requirements, and that actively seek to widen participation from groups that have historically been under represented in further and higher education. Admissions and recruitment materials will be written in clear and inclusive language, and criteria and procedures will be applied

consistently, with decisions recorded in a way that supports accountability. Where appropriate, targeted outreach and support initiatives may be developed to encourage applications from under represented groups, consistent with regulatory expectations and institutional priorities.

Within employment, ICCS will ensure that job descriptions and person specifications focus on skills and competencies that are genuinely required, that vacancies are advertised widely, and that selection methods are objective and evidence based. In relation to students, the college will monitor application, offer, enrolment, attainment and progression data by relevant characteristics to identify gaps and will develop proportionate actions to address them. Progression and promotion for staff, and progression and award for students, will be based on transparent criteria and processes that guard against bias and recognise a range of contributions and achievements.

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

ICCS aims to design and deliver curricula that reflect the diversity of its student body and of the wider society and that enable all learners to see themselves and others represented in meaningful ways. Teaching methods will, as far as reasonably practicable, accommodate different learning styles and needs, supported by the use of accessible materials and digital platforms. Assessment strategies will be designed to enable students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes in a variety of ways, and reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled students in line with the Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policy. Inclusive practice in learning and teaching is seen as a central component of academic professionalism.

Staff involved in programme design and delivery are encouraged to reflect critically on the content, examples and perspectives used in teaching, to avoid unnecessary stereotyping and to consider issues of power, inequality and representation where this is relevant to the discipline. Student feedback, including feedback from under represented groups, will be sought and valued in the enhancement of teaching and assessment practices. ICCS will make use of sector guidance, including resources from Jisc and other bodies, to promote digital inclusion and accessibility and will address any significant disparities in attainment that may be linked to protected or other characteristics.

Preventing Harassment and Bullying

ICCS is committed to providing an environment in which all members of the community can study and work free from harassment, bullying, intimidation and violence. Behaviour which demeans, marginalises or excludes individuals on the basis of their identity or

personal characteristics is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. This includes behaviour that occurs in person, in writing, by telephone or through digital communication channels and social media. The college will take seriously any allegation of harassment or bullying and will respond through appropriate procedures, which may include student or staff disciplinary processes where warranted.

The college will raise awareness of expected standards of behaviour through codes of conduct, student and staff handbooks, induction programmes and training. Individuals who experience or witness harassment or bullying will be encouraged to seek advice and support, whether informally or through formal complaint or reporting mechanisms, and will be treated with sensitivity and respect. ICCS will ensure that those who bring forward concerns are not victimised for doing so and that alleged perpetrators are treated fairly and offered an opportunity to respond. Where systemic issues are identified, broader actions will be taken to address underlying causes and to strengthen the culture of respect.

Reasonable Adjustments and Support

ICCS recognises that equality of opportunity sometimes requires differential treatment, in the form of reasonable adjustments or additional support, to place individuals on an equivalent footing to others. Students and staff with disabilities, long term health conditions or specific learning differences will be encouraged to disclose their needs in confidence so that appropriate support can be considered. Adjustments may relate to physical access, timetabling, teaching and assessment arrangements, provision of assistive technologies or modification of working practices, and will be determined in line with legal duties, programme requirements and the Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policy.

The college will also be mindful of the needs of individuals who may face disadvantage for other reasons, such as caring responsibilities, socio economic background or cultural and linguistic factors, and will seek to provide support through existing services and, where appropriate, targeted initiatives. Support arrangements will be kept under review and adapted as circumstances change, in dialogue with those affected. In all cases ICCS will seek to balance individual needs with the interests of the wider community and the need to maintain academic and professional standards, and will explain the rationale for decisions clearly and respectfully.

Data, Monitoring and Reporting

ICCS collects and analyses data on the composition and experiences of its student and staff populations in order to understand patterns of access, attainment, progression and

satisfaction and to identify areas where action may be required to advance equality of opportunity. Data may be considered by reference to protected characteristics and other relevant variables, subject to data protection requirements and the need to protect confidentiality. The college will use this information to inform strategic and operational planning, to evaluate the impact of initiatives and to meet external reporting obligations where they apply, for example in relation to access and participation plans.

Responsibility for the collection, management and analysis of equality related data will rest with designated teams, working in collaboration with academic and professional services colleagues. Findings will be reported through governance structures at appropriate intervals, and summaries may be shared with students and staff to support transparency and engagement. ICCS will ensure that data is used responsibly and ethically, avoiding inappropriate labelling or assumptions, and will provide opportunities for qualitative feedback to complement quantitative indicators. Where disparities are identified, the college will consider carefully the range of potential explanations and the most effective and proportionate responses.

Training, Awareness and Communication

ICCS recognises that effective implementation of this policy depends on awareness, understanding and confidence among staff and students. The college will therefore provide appropriate training and development opportunities on equality, diversity and inclusion themes for staff at all levels, including induction for new starters and more in depth provision for those with particular responsibilities, such as managers, admissions tutors and student support staff. Topics may include understanding legal duties, recognising and challenging unconscious bias, inclusive curriculum design and responding to disclosures of harassment or discrimination.

Information about this policy and related procedures will be communicated through handbooks, the ICCS website, staff briefings and student induction activities, and will be kept under review to ensure clarity and accessibility. ICCS will seek to create spaces for constructive dialogue about equality and diversity issues, including through student representation structures, staff networks or forums and engagement with external partners. By integrating equality themes into ongoing communication and development activities, the college aims to move beyond compliance and to build a sustained culture of reflection, learning and improvement in this area.

Complaints and Concerns about Discrimination

ICCS encourages any student, member of staff or other stakeholder who believes they have experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment or victimisation to raise their

concerns so that they can be addressed. In many cases individuals may wish to seek informal resolution, for example through discussion with a tutor, line manager or adviser, and ICCS will support this where it is appropriate and safe. However, the college recognises that informal routes are not always suitable and therefore provides formal procedures, including the Complaints Policy and Procedures and staff grievance processes, through which concerns can be investigated and resolved.

Those using these procedures will be treated with respect and their concerns will be taken seriously, while ensuring that others who may be the subject of allegations are also treated fairly. ICCS will strive to handle cases sensitively and confidentially, sharing information only with those who need it to respond effectively, and will provide clear information about possible outcomes and sources of support. Where investigations substantiate allegations of discrimination or related misconduct, appropriate action will be taken in line with disciplinary or other relevant procedures and any lessons learned will be used to strengthen practice and prevent recurrence.

Monitoring, Review and Continuous Improvement

The operation and impact of this Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy will be monitored through regular review of equality related data, feedback from students and staff, outcomes of complaints and grievances, and findings from internal and external audits, reviews or inspections. Governance bodies will receive reports that highlight key trends, achievements and challenges, and will oversee the development and implementation of action plans where needed. Progress in relation to equality and diversity objectives will be kept under active scrutiny and will inform wider strategic planning and resource allocation within ICCS.

This policy will normally be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, regulatory expectations or institutional structure, or if monitoring indicates that revisions are needed to improve clarity or effectiveness. Revisions will be developed in consultation with students, staff and other stakeholders as appropriate and will be approved through established ICCS governance processes. The intention is that the policy remains a living document that evolves in response to evidence and experience and continues to support ICCS aspiration to be an inclusive and equitable place to study and work.

References

- Equality Act 2010 and associated regulations.
- Human Rights Act 1998, in so far as it relates to dignity, respect and non discrimination.

- Data Protection Act 2018 and the United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation UK GDPR.
- Guidance from the Office for Students, including expectations on access, participation and equality of opportunity.
- Relevant guidance from the Department for Education and Ofqual on equality, diversity and inclusion in education.
- Recognised sector guidance on inclusive practice and digital accessibility, including materials published by Jisc and other sector bodies.

