

NEXT

Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Policy

February 2026

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NEXT

Purpose

NEXT is dedicated to supporting diversity and encouraging an inclusive culture. Our business is about people and being an employer for everyone in an environment where people feel respected, valued, able to fulfill their potential and be their very best. We will do all we can to provide a positive working and learning environment, where all employees are valued for their contribution and individuality.

We are committed to equal opportunity in all aspects of employment and oppose any form of unlawful or unfair discrimination. We recognise the potential that all people bring to the workplace and are committed to providing equality and fairness to all regardless of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender Reassignment
- Pregnancy or Maternity
- Ethnicity including race, colour and nationality
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion or belief
- Marital status including civil partnership

These are all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Additionally, in Northern Ireland, we are committed to ensuring the fair participation in employment for both traditions in the community. In practice, this means ensuring that job applicants and existing employees will not suffer discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion, securing fair participation for all community backgrounds. This includes fulfilling all legal obligations under the relevant legislation and associated Codes of Practice as outlined below.

- Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended)
- Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970 (as amended)
- Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended)
- Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended)
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003
- Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended)
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006

Who is covered?

This policy covers all employees of NEXT whether full or part time, on temporary contract, apprentices, placement students regardless of job role and status. It also covers contractors, agency workers, public visitors, and anyone else our employees come into contact with at work.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that we have respect, dignity, inclusion and equality across our business. Any behaviour that seriously threatens this will not be tolerated.

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This policy is supported by our disciplinary and grievance procedures and applies to all employment policies and practices including those relating to:

- Recruitment and selection
- Promotion and career progression
- Learning and Development
- Reward and benefits
- Diversity monitoring

NEXT Commits to

- Actively supporting diversity and inclusion, to ensure that all our employees are valued, treated with dignity and respect.
- Promoting an environment where individual differences and the contributions of everyone is valued. Not tolerating any form of intimidation, bullying or harassment.
- Promoting equality in the workplace.
- Ensuring that decisions affecting employment, training, promotion and career development are based on an individual's ability.
- Complying with relevant legislation requiring all employees to meet the required standard of behaviour and conduct in terms of how they treat each other, but also people that they have contact with as part of their work with NEXT.
- Regularly reviewing this policy and its practical application.
- Additional responsibility for the practical application of our approach to diversity and inclusion lies with our Directors, Managers and HR involved in the day to day management of employees, recruitment, selection, promotion and training of employees and other people in our business.

Employee Responsibilities

- All employees are responsible for the practical application of this policy to include job applicants, colleagues, customers, contractors, temporary staff, suppliers and visitors.
- To familiarise themselves with the policy and act in line with our diversity and inclusion commitment at all times. Promote an environment free from discrimination or harassment where we treat each other with respect and dignity.
- Be aware of the potential impact of their behaviour on colleagues, customers, visitors, suppliers, contractors and temporary staff.
- Work with Managers to sustain an inclusive working environment in which everyone's contribution is recognised and valued.
- Take personal responsibility to advise Managers if there is a genuine belief this policy is not being adhered to.

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion is the practice of creating an environment where all individuals, regardless of their background or characteristics, are welcomed, respected, and valued as integral members of a group. It involves actively dismantling barriers to participation and ensuring everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute and feel a sense of belonging. Inclusion moves beyond simply

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allowing differences to exist and instead uses these differences to create a stronger, more effective organisation.

Key aspects of inclusion:

- **Active participation:** Inclusion is an action, not just a concept. It involves creating systems and cultures that enable everyone to fully participate and be heard.
- **Valuing difference:** It goes beyond simple tolerance to recognising that diverse perspectives, skills, and experiences are a benefit to the whole.
- **Sense of belonging:** Individuals feel respected, their opinions are valued, and they are seen as essential members of the group.
- **Equity, not just equality:** Inclusion often involves creating equitable situations by removing specific barriers that some groups face, rather than treating everyone the same way and ignoring their different needs.
- **Broad application:** Creating a culture that respects all employees.

What is 'unlawful discrimination'

Direct discrimination

Treating someone less favourably because of one or more of the protected characteristics (as outlined previously.)

Indirect discrimination

Where a policy, practice or decision, whether intended or not, puts a particular group of people or person, with a protected characteristic at a disadvantage.

Disability by Association

Disability by association is discrimination against an individual because of someone they have a connection to who is disabled, such as a partner, child.

Employees who feel they have been unfairly treated contrary to this policy should raise their concerns with their manager in the first instance, if it isn't appropriate to raise it with their direct manager they should raise it with another manager or HR. If the concerns are not resolved, the individual can raise a grievance using the company grievance procedure. All complaints will be investigated thoroughly and without delay.

Employees should feel confident that raising a grievance will not have an adverse effect on them. Any breach of this policy by way of bullying, harassment or discrimination against a colleague will be fully investigated and dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure which could lead to dismissal.

What is Harassment?

Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating

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or offensive environment for that person. It is important to note that a single one-off incident can amount to harassment.

Unlawful harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment), or it may be related to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. However, harassment is completely unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these specific protected categories.

To ensure a safe and inclusive environment for everyone, our understanding of harassment includes the following key principles:

- **Intent vs. Effect:** A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended target of the conduct, and even if the individual had no explicit intent to harass.
- **Broad Application:** Unacceptable conduct is not limited to the physical office. This applies to your place of work, while working from home, during your commute, at work-related social events, business trips, and extends to conduct outside of work, including on social media, where it impacts a colleague or the working environment.
- **Third-Party Harassment:** Harassment will not be tolerated regardless of who the perpetrator is. This includes unwanted conduct from third parties such as customers, suppliers, clients, or visitors to our premises.
- **Protection from Victimisation:** We strictly prohibit victimisation. No individual will be treated badly, disciplined, or subjected to detrimental treatment for making a complaint of harassment in good faith, or for assisting a colleague with a complaint (for example, by acting as a witness)

Please note: Specific provisions, examples, and reporting guidelines regarding Sexual Harassment, please see the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy and supporting guidelines.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is the use of force, coercion, hurtful teasing or threat, to abuse, aggressively dominate or intimidate. The behavior is often repeated and habitual.

Examples of Bullying and Harassment

- Targeted social isolation – ‘silent treatment’
- Making remarks, jokes, or innuendos that may demean, ridicule, intimidate exclude, stereotype, discriminate or offend
- Direct or indirect comments on social media platforms
- Unwanted offensive or intimidating messages/calls
- Unwanted physical contact
- Ridiculing someone in front of others or singling them out to perform tasks not related to their job
- Personal attacks on an individual’s private life or personal traits
- Sabotaging work
- Displaying or circulating offensive pictures or materials in print or electronic form
- Spreading malicious gossip or rumours
- To stir up hatred with threatening or abusive behavior

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(This is not an exhaustive list and other acts may be considered as bullying and/or harassment)

For more details in relation to raising a complaint, please refer to the Grievance Policy, and/or for the Prevention of Bullying Policy.

Version	1.4	Last Review	25/2/26
Authors	Policy Group	Approver/ Owner	Lionel Mason
Previous Version	Comments		
1.2	REBRAND		
1.3	Added definition of bullying. Added section on inclusion. Added disability by association. Added bullet point under examples - To stir up hatred with threatening or abusive behavior		

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