



## NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### Good employment practice case study

#### Renewing an equality and diversity policy

*Tracy Ray, Diversity Officer for Suffolk Association for Voluntary Organisations (SAVO) explained to us how she renewed her organisation's Equal Opportunities and Equality and Diversity policies in light of the Equality Act 2010.*

#### How did this come about – what brought the issue to light?

SAVO reviews all of its policies annually. However with the Equality Act 2010 coming into force on 1 October, this triggered an earlier review of the organisation's Equal Opportunities and Equality and Diversity policies.

#### Who was involved in the process?

Tracy, SAVO's Chief Executive, Corporate Manager, Training manager, the senior management team and the trustees.

#### What did the process involve?

- **Benchmarking the organisation's policies with other organisations.** Tracy researched policies from other organisations to highlight actions for their own policy.
- **Merging separate equal opportunities and equality and diversity policies into one single document.** *"Our equal opportunities policy was 7 pages long and our equality and diversity policy was 9 pages. Both policies contain a lot of information which was the same. I've brought those two together to create one policy."*
- **Involving others in the policy development.** Tracy involved a small sub group of staff members in the development of the policy to provide feedback on each of the draft versions. *"Involving other people who have an interest in equalities and diversity helped to shape the development process of the policy and provided support and comments when going through each draft. Sometimes diversity and equality work can be left to the diversity officer with little or no support available."*
- **Fact finding on policy application.** *"We went on a fact finding mission to see whether we were really following the policy's monitoring requirements... We spoke with everybody who was employed in the last year and asked them if they thought we had followed the policy in recruitment. The answer was, yes we do."*

- **Cutting out duplication.** Rather than repeat sections from other policies, Tracy introduced improved cross-referencing between one policy and another. This made the policies more concise and easier to update in the future.
- **Spotting inconsistencies between policies.** Tracy worked to ensure that all equality and diversity statements were uniform and updated.
- **Removing sections which aren't applied – or enforcing them if they should be.** *“For example, in the AGM, do we have an area titled ‘equality and diversity’? When you’re reviewing practices this is important. You’re looking for gaps and areas for compliance. The Charity Commission is interested if you can show where you are planning to make progress rather than just identifying the issues.”*
- **Reviewing the redrafted policy to comply with the Equality Act.** *“I worked from the original Act and explanatory notes rather than the guidance that came along later. You have a battle to work out which bits actually apply to your organisation, to the public sector, or colleges and universities. It’s quite hard work.”*
- **Submitting the finalised policy to the board of trustees for approval.** After approval by the Governance committee, the Board of Trustees approved the policy during November.

### What will be the big impact of these changes?

- **Future policy updates will be easier.** With greater cross-referencing between policies, the need to update several documents is minimised.
- **The policy itself is clearer.** By bringing the diversity and equality and equal opportunities policies into a single document, it is much easier to follow and keep consistent statements.
- **Ownership is clearer.** With a simpler policy, it is also possible to group the responsibilities of different sub-committees more intuitively.

### What were the main challenges?

Tracy said her biggest challenge was to find the right wording for the definitions of different discrimination and personal characteristics.

*“The good thing about rewording it is that people understand what it means. If people don’t understand the wording we give examples to explain its meaning - such as for victimisation. It makes the policy longer but it’s understandable to everyone.”*

The next biggest challenge is ensuring that the sub group is representative and those participating in it have a genuine interest in equality and diversity.

*“Diversity officers are often the first point of call for anything related to the equality or diversity agenda. But often when they need support it can be very hard to identify someone who is interested in the subject who would be able to provide good feedback or to consult with on a document. Having a good mix of abilities in a sub group also means that we can learn from each other and improve our on skills and knowledge in this area.”*

### Are there any future developments in the pipeline?

- **Article for SAVO’s magazine, Vollies.** Tracy has already written an article on the Equality Act 2010 and its implications for charity constitutions.

- **Website guidance.** Tracy has written guidance for organisations on the Equality Act 2010 and its implications for charity constitutions, equality and diversity policies and how this can impact on activities within an organisation.
- **Model equal and diversity policy.** Tracy has tailored her policy for other groups to use. This is now available as part of the Good Employers' Policies and Procedures toolkit. [Read SAVO's Diversity on the Agenda](#)
- **Equality and diversity toolkit.** Tracy is also planning to develop a toolkit to help voluntary and community organisations implement good equality and diversity practice.
- **Training course pilot.** In November and December 2010, Tracy is piloting new equality and diversity training course. The training will include material inspired by the Equality Act 2010 event run in London by NCVO and led by Royston John, NCBI.
- **Training for staff on the new Equality Act.** During November, SAVO staff were given a briefing on the Act and the implications on the way SAVO delivers services.

### **Any advice for organisations looking to revamp their equality and diversity policy and practice?**

Tracy said that many organisations know they need to review their policies but haven't thought about how they're going to do it. In practice, equality and diversity touches upon a wide spectrum of activities.

*"From scratch, I'd sit down and go through the Equality Act bit by bit into areas, and look at the organisation in terms of how the policy needs to be written. It has to be tailored. For example, whether you can ask disability-related questions at the application stage of recruitment really depends on what you're going to use that information for or the legal requirement for it.*

*"Then check the monitoring that you have within your current policy. Is it required? It is up to date? Is it applied?"*

*"You've got to be realistic. With whatever legislation you're looking at it's going to be complex. We're all human, we make mistakes. But we're also going to learn."*

### **About SAVO's HR and workforce**

- **How many paid staff do you have?** 14 staff
- **How many trustees sit on your board?** 10 trustees
- **How many volunteers do you have?** 0 volunteers