**Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy**

Cogent Skills (Cogent) is committed to inspiring employees, customers and partners with its approach and pledge to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) throughout all aspects of employment and customer and partner engagement.

Cogent’s aim is for its workforce to be representative of society and for Cogent employees to feel respected and able to give their very best whilst at work due to working with principled and like-minded customers and partners.

Alongside this policy, it is Cogent’s ambition to ensure ED&I is a common value and theme throughout all practices and to be integral to Cogent’s future success.

1. **Policy Principles**

* The purpose of this policy is to:
* Support the approach of ensuring equality, fairness and respect for all employees or those who carry out work on Cogent’s behalf;
* Support Cogent’s legal requirement not to unlawfully discriminate in accordance with the Equality Act 2010;
* Eliminate unlawful discrimination practices through the sharing of knowledge and thorough education;
* Promote positive measures towards EDI, involving all employees;
* Set standards and monitor conduct to support Cogent’s commitment to ED&I.
* Cogent is working towards creating an environment that celebrates diversity and is inclusive of everyone.
* Accountability for diversity and inclusion drives our success and ownership for this starts at the very top of Cogent.
* It is Cogent’s policy and a strongly held belief, not to discriminate against its workers, applicants and suppliers on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation, marital or civil partner status, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability or age, pregnancy or trade union membership or the fact that they are a part-time worker or a fixed-term employee.
* Cogent’s workers, applicants and suppliers shall not be disadvantaged by any policies or conditions of service which cannot be justified as necessary for operational purposes.
* The principle of equality in relation to opportunities applies equally to the treatment of visitors, clients, customers and suppliers by members of our workforce and also ex-employees.
* Discrimination from members of the public is not acceptable and Cogent encourages its employees to report such discrimination in confidence, safe in the knowledge that Cogent will investigate and take the necessary action.

1. **Responsibility for this policy**

* The Business Unit Leaders and company Directors have overall responsibility for the effective operation and compliance of this policy.
* Business Unit Leaders and Directors need to ensure that their business area understands Cogent’s values and commitment towards ED&I and to lead by example.
* The HR department is responsible for the review of this policy on an ongoing basis to ensure it meets Cogent’s commitment towards ED&I whilst also complying with legislation.
* Employees have a responsibility to read this policy, attend training and to ensure that the practical application of this policy is carried out. If there are any questions or suggested improvements, everyone is encouraged to raise these with their BU Leader of HR.
* Employees are encouraged to become an active part of continually improving Cogent’s approach to ED&I through opportunities that become available.
* Apprentices and graduates have a responsibility to be aware of the commitment to the employer and learning provider as outlined within the ‘commitment to learning agreement’ and to support all workplace schemes and guidance in relation to ED&I.
* This policy does not form part of the contract of employment and Cogent reserves the right to make changes to this policy as required.

1. **Scope and purpose**

* Whilst Cogent will not tolerate discrimination towards the legally protected characteristics within the policy principles, Cogent views all forms of discrimination, including those characteristics that are not listed as not supportive of the company’s values or approach towards ED&I.
* This policy applies to all aspects of employment including, (but not limited to):
* The advertising of jobs and all areas of the recruitment and selection process;
* Training and development;
* Opportunities for promotion and all other new role opportunities;
* Terms and conditions of employment and service (for contractors);
* Pay, benefits and team events;
* Health and safety;
* Conduct at work;
* Grievance and disciplinary procedures;
* Termination of employment, including redundancy.

1. **Forms of discrimination**

Discrimination may be ***direct*** or ***indirect*** and it may occur intentionally or unintentionally.

* **Direct discrimination** occurs when an individual is treated less favourably than another person due to a protected characteristic (listed in section 3) or due to an association to another person who has a protected characteristic. It is irrelevant that the person may believe they are acting in the interests of the individual if the less favourable treatment is based on one of the protected characteristic grounds. This is classed as **direct discrimination**.
* **Indirect discrimination** is treating people the same way but in a way which adversely affects those with a protected characteristic. An example would be telling everyone to work late. Whilst this instruction applies to the whole team, it may adversely affect those who have childcare responsibilities.
* Some examples of actions that are considered to be in breach of this policy and could present as discrimination are:
* Displaying flags or emblems (including on clothing, jewellery or tattoos);
* Displaying posters, cartoons or graffiti or circulating literature that is liable to cause offence;
* Displaying ‘pin ups’, pornography, inflammatory or abusive literature;
* Banter, jokes or other kinds of remarks that are liable to cause offence because they are about a protected characteristic;
* Making comments, whether positive or negative about personal characteristics and clothing;
* Innuendo, insults, name-calling or lewd comments or gestures;
* Touching (physical contact) colleagues, learners or customers other than when it is appropriate to the business situation;
* Ridiculing or undermining behaviour;
* Physical or the threat of physical assault;
* Intimidating, coercive or threatening behaviour;
* Putting pressure on someone for sexual or other favours – unwelcome sexual advances;
* Isolation, non-cooperation or deliberate exclusion;
* Spreading rumours or gossip regarding a protected characteristic;
* Wearing football or sports shirts.
* Discrimination by association comes about when someone is treated unfavourably on the basis of another person’s protected characteristic. This can be when an individual is not employed or overlooked for promotion because they are related or associated with someone who has a protected characteristic. An example would be a parent of a disabled child not being considered for promotion due to the child’s disability.
* Discrimination by perception is when someone is treated unfavourably because others believe they have a protected characteristic even though in reality they don’t – it is perceived. An example would be an applicant for a job is refused to progress due to their name sounding to be a certain sex (male or female).
* Discrimination includes **victimisation** and thisoccurs when an individual is treated less favourably by colleagues for asserting the above rights and this would not have occurred had if these rights had not been asserted (such as logging a complaint). For further details please refer to our anti-harassment and bullying policy.
* **Harassment** takes many forms but whatever form it takes, it is always serious and is totally unacceptable. Harassment may come from a service user, client, customer, etc. It is still harassment if the incident occurs during working hours or whilst at a working function / social gathering and it should be dealt with in conjunction with this policy. Employees are able to make a complaint regarding harassment even if the offensive behaviour is not being directed at the employee, and the employee need not be from the group that is being discriminated against. Cogent support the rights and needs of all our employees and seek to protect against any form of harassment in the work place.
* Acts of harassment, bullying, intimidation or discrimination will not be tolerated. Allegations or breaches of this policy will be treated seriously.
* Those candidates and employees who do have a disability should know that Cogent will be fully supportive and will also make adjustments to ensure that there is no disadvantage within the workplace due to the disability. The support that Cogent will consider providing starts when disabled candidates apply for a role and will continue if they are appointed.

**5. Recruitment and Selection**

* Cogent recognises that a diverse, high-achieving multi-skilled workforce is a competitive advantage that will differentiate Cogent from its competitors. To better serve our customers, we work towards attracting, developing, promoting and retaining a diverse workforce.
* Cogent’s recruitment procedures include fair and objectively justified criteria and Cogent will not apply any requirements or conditions that are not necessary for the needs of the post or the business.
* Recruitment and selection procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure that individuals are treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities and, that diverse sectors of the community are reached.
* All roles will have a full job description that includes a person specification and all roles will be publicised internally unless it is considered that specialist skills and experience required are not within the company.
* Recruitment, promotion, and selection exercises such as redundancy selection will be conducted on the basis of merit against objective criteria that avoids discrimination.
* Shortlisting during recruitment, promotion and selection exercises will be completed by more than one person and with the involvement of human resources.
* Vacancies will generally be advertised to a diverse section of the labour market. Advertisements will avoid stereotyping or using wording that may discourage particular groups from applying.
* Job applicants should not be asked questions which might suggest an intention to discriminate on the grounds of a protected characteristic. For example, applicants should not be asked whether they are pregnant, planning to have children or whether they have care commitments.
* Job applicants should not be asked about health or disability before a job offer is made. There are exceptions which should only be used with the approval of the human resources department. For example:
* Questions necessary to establish if an applicant can perform an intrinsic part of the job (subject to any reasonable adjustments);
* Questions to establish if an applicant is able to attend an assessment or interview and whether adjustments may be needed;
* Equal opportunities monitoring (which will not form part of the selection or decision making process).
* Cogent are required by law to ensure that all employees are entitled to work in the UK. Assumptions about immigration status should not be made based on appearance or apparent nationality. All prospective employees, apprentices and workers, regardless of nationality, must be able to produce original documents (such as a passport), before employer begins to satisfy current immigration legislation. The list of acceptable documents is available from HR.

Cogent ensure that all those involved in the recruitment process receive specialist training on eligibility to work in the UK.

* To ensure that this policy is operating effectively, and to identify groups that may be underrepresented or disadvantaged, Cogent monitors applicants’ ethnic group, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and age as part of the recruitment process. Provision of this information is voluntary and it will not adversely affect an individual’s chances of recruitment or any other decision related to their employment. The information is kept in an anonymised format solely for the purposed stated in this policy. Analysing this data helps Cogent to take steps to avoid discrimination and improve equality.

1. **An Inclusive Workplace**

* To ensure Cogent is an inclusive and understanding work place where employees can thrive, everyone will receive ED&I training as part of an induction. This includes board members, employees and contractors. Further information can be found in the Employee Training and Promotion section of this policy.
* As part of Cogent’s commitment to ED&I Cogent is developing a strategy to ensure that ED&I is always present within the workplace and seeks to make Cogent a great place to work. Initiatives that will be further developed include:
* An employee working group to support and promote ED&I initiatives;
* Board reporting on ED&I initiatives;
* Specialist training for those involved within the recruitment and selection process.
* Cogent asks everyone to think about the language and conversations that take place in the workplace. What may seem like ‘banter’ to one person, may be offensive to another. To be an inclusive workplace, we ask that employees carefully consider whether group conversational topics are appropriate and also to question any banter in the workplace that could be construed as inappropriate.
* From time-to-time, Cogent may run team and company events, whether this is tied to a charity or for social or business reasons. Cogent will make these events as inclusive as possible, to ensure that everyone can be involved. Equally, we ask employees to contribute by providing ideas and suggestions that are inclusive to everyone.
* Cogent aims for its offices to be welcoming and inclusive to all. Employees are encouraged (either through the working group or via their BU Leader) to make suggestions for improvements to the working environment.

**6. Employee Training and Promotion**

* Training needs will be identified through regular performance review meetings and in line with the Employee Development and Further Education Policy. All employees will be given appropriate access to training to enable them to progress (including internal transfers). All promotion decisions will be made on the basis of merit.
* The movement of employees into different roles will be monitored to ensure equality of opportunity within Cogent. Where appropriate, steps will be taken to identify and remove unnecessary or unjustifiable barriers and to provide facilities to meet the needs of disadvantaged or under-represented groups.
* Cogent’s terms and conditions, benefits and facilities will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they reflective of all employee needs. This review will include looking at pay, bonus, policies benefits offered (along with potential benefits) along with office facilities.

**7. Diversity and Inclusion**

* If an employee is disabled or develops a disability whilst working for Cogent, Cogent will work with the employee to understand the condition and support through education and adjustments. This will be done by also obtaining professional external support, to ensure that expert advice is taken into account. This referral to Occupational Health is done by HR working with the employee and line manager.
* Trust, mutual respect and dignity are fundamental beliefs that are reflected in Cogent values and in employee behaviours and actions.
* Cogent is aware of the imbalance in gender profile in (some of the) industries it serves. Cogent employees will be equipped with the knowledge and resources to encourage a more representative demographic in applications for vacancies, and to challenge any gender stereotyping in a positive manner.

**8. Breaches of the policy**

* Everyone is expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is not discriminatory and Cogent will take all possible steps to ensure that equal opportunities is maintained.
* If an employee makes an allegation in good faith, the employee will not be treated less favourably as a result. However, if the allegation proves to be false or if the allegation has been made in bad faith, this will be dealt with via the disciplinary policy.
* If an employee is found to have acted in a discriminatory way after investigation, disciplinary action may apply up to and including summary dismissal as Cogent takes discrimination of any kind extremely seriously.
* **All** employees and those acting on behalf of Cogent are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is not discriminatory.
* If an employee or someone acting on Cogent’s behalf believes there may have been disadvantaged on any of the unlawful grounds, the employee is encouraged to raise the matter through Cogent’s grievance procedure. This normally means that in the first instance, there would be a discussion on the matter with the line manager.
* Cogent may suggest mediation as part of a solution to improve the work environment. This will be led by an independent third party and whilst it is voluntary, we would encourage everyone to participate. The purpose of mediation is for all parties to come together in a safe environment to discuss concerns and hopefully agree on a way to work together in the future (if this is appropriate).

**9. Monitoring and revision of policy**

* All policies are reviewed periodically. Cogent is committed to providing relevant training for all employees on their responsibilities under this policy.
* Cogent’s commitment is to:
* Create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of everyone are recognised and valued;
* Create a working environment that promotes dignity and respect to all, where intimidation, bullying or harassment are not tolerated;
* Promote equality in the workplace;
* Provide training, development and progression opportunities that are available to all;
* Promote vacancies for all and to encourage applications from minority groups;
* Review all our employment practices and procedures to ensure fairness;
* Work with employers and providers to ensure that they are aware of their own duties under the Equality Act 2010;
* Ensure that this policy is fully supported by senior management;
* Collect, monitor and report on diversity data, using this information to inform strategy;
* Work with apprenticeship employers and providers to ensure that they are aware of their duties under the Equality Act 2010.

**10. Notes and Associated Documents**

* Bullying and Harassment policy
* Grievance policy
* Disciplinary policy
* Recruitment & Selection policy
* Redundancy policy