Staff Equality Networks – Operational Framework and Guidance

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1. Introduction

The University values the contribution of staff groups and networks developed by, and for, staff to build community and support around shared interests, experiences and practice.

The University seeks to formally recognise, actively engage with, and provide appropriate support to staff networks that operate to advance our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) aims.

This guidance, which may be useful for any staff groups and networks, is intended to provide a clear operational framework, setting out responsibilities and expectations for those groups or networks that wish to be recognised more formally as a Staff Equality Network.

2. Purpose of Staff Equality Networks

Staff Equality Networks typically provide peer support, social activities, and personal and professional community for staff who possess, or share an affiliation with a protected characteristic.

Additionally, Staff Equality Networks provide voice for underrepresented groups, surfacing needs and suggesting good practice to the University to advance our equality, diversity and inclusion ambitions.

Staff Equality Networks are self-governed and self-organised, with a self-determined purpose and Terms of Reference.

The University will recognise as Staff Equality Networks staff groups that demonstrate a clear contribution to:

- eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation of people on the basis of a protected characteristic;
- advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

3. Establishing a Staff Equality Network

Any staff member or group can formulate a proposal to establish a Staff Equality Network and/or seek recognition as a Staff Equality Network for an existing group. Proposers should contact the HR EDI team to obtain the necessary approvals and advice on next steps. Further information about existing staff network groups that are already established can be viewed on the EDI website.

It is expected that a Staff Equality Network and its members will:

- Operate within this Framework set out by the University;
- Abide by University policies in all Network activities and communications. Key policies include but are not limited to the Dignity and Respect Policy, Policy on Speakers & Events, Protest Guidelines, University Computing Acceptable Use Policy, and Social Media Policy;
- Comply with wider legislative duties such as GDPR, and Freedom of Information requests relating to Network business;
- Seek to ensure that the Network's voice is appropriately representative of the broader Network membership;
- Maintain positive and constructive relationships with all other Staff Equality Networks, with the University Lead for EDI, the HR EDI team, and the University Executive;
- Seek to resolve themselves any concerns about the Network, its activities or any aspect of its membership or leadership, and escalate to the HR EDI team where appropriate.

4. Leading a Staff Equality Network

Leadership of a Staff Equality Network is determined by its membership, or by formal application if the role of Chair/co-Chair has been advertised by the University. Leadership of a Staff Equality Network is a voluntary citizenship role, and agreement should be sought in advance from the relevant line manager(s) for paid time (including staff on Guaranteed Hours contracts) to undertake the Network role. This should be managed in line with business needs and individual workload. It is expected that a Network Chair will spend up to 1 day per month on Network activities, shared with any co-Chair. Support for individual case-related issues arising in the membership should be signposted and guided to line managers, HR Partners and/or the University's specialist services.

Staff Equality Networks are encouraged to regularly review their leadership and management arrangements, and may wish to do so via an Annual General Meeting. Network Chair(s) are welcome to seek advice and direction from the University Lead for EDI and/or the HR EDI team.

Leadership skills can help to ensure the success of a Staff Equality Network, for example in hosting events and meetings, liaising with colleagues across the University and/or beyond, ensuring that the voices and experiences of all members are heard, and for the discussion and development of Network actions. Network leaders are encouraged to engage with the range of opportunities for professional and personal development at: Talent and Development | The University of Edinburgh. It is expected that line managers will be supportive of the development of Network Chair(s), recognising the significant contribution of the role to the wider University.

5. Staff Equality Network structure and membership

Staff Equality Networks determine their own administrative and management structure. A steering committee structure can work well to support the chair(s) with the organisation of meetings and events, ensuring that a representative voice is held, and to enable the Network to respond to the intersectional elements of equality. Steering committee roles may be limited to members who share the relevant protected characteristic. It is expected that steering committee members will spend up to 0.5 days per month on Network activities, agreed in advance with the relevant line manager(s) as a contribution to University citizenship.

Staff Equality Network membership is drawn solely from the University's community, primarily from the staff community but may also include PhD students. The University encourages Network membership to be inclusive, but recognises the need for spaces exclusively for those who share a protected characteristic, where appropriate. Staff Equality Network Chairs are responsible for maintaining the Network membership list and securing its confidentiality.

The HR EDI team can offer support to Staff Equality Network Chairs in setting up a Network email address and mailing list.

6. Staff Equality Network communications

Staff Equality Networks will be supported by the HR EDI team to have a visible presence on the University's EDI website. The HR EDI team is responsible for ensuring that all content hosted on the public-facing website is appropriate for that purpose, and Staff Equality Network Chairs are expected to work cooperatively with the HR EDI team in delivery.

Each Network is responsible for establishing and maintaining its own peer communication channels, such as Teams groups, SharePoint sites or social media platforms, acting in accordance with all relevant University policies at all times.

The HR EDI Team can provide advice and support in raising the profile of the Networks and highlighting their positive contribution to the University.

7. Staff Equality Network meetings and activities

Staff Equality Networks are responsible for the organisation of their meetings, events and activities. The HR EDI team may be able to offer support for events and activities where these have a clear and demonstrable output or outcome that contributes to the delivery of the University's strategic EDI priorities.

Staff Equality Network activities may include, but are not limited to:

- **Awareness raising events** to increase knowledge and understanding of EDI issues across the wider University community, and to mark national awareness months and days.
- **Development opportunities for members** such as learning and skills development workshops, knowledge-sharing and peer mentoring, drawing on the skills and expertise of members or other University resources.
- **Peer support and signposting** to relevant University services or external organisations.
- **Internal and external networking events** to build professional relationships and social community for members, and share experiences and good practice.

A limited budget will be available to support Network activities, with associated costs agreed in advance. Staff Equality Networks may consider holding joint events with other groups and networks to maximise reach and impact, and share costs.

Staff Equality Networks are encouraged to consider ways to enable staff with different working patterns, on different campuses, and with different levels of flexibility in their work schedules to participate in Network meetings and activities.

8. Staff Equality Networks and EDI Governance

The University seeks to engage the voice of all Staff Equality Networks in EDI Governance and strategy development, and in wider University work to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered. Staff Equality Networks will have formal representation on the relevant EDI subcommittee(s), and will be included in meetings at higher levels of EDI governance where their input is sought on topics under discussion.

The University Lead for EDI is the Executive Sponsor for all Staff Equality Networks, providing a route to enhance visibility of the Networks and raising issues for discussion and attention with senior leadership, linking the Networks to partnership working opportunities such as input into policy and guidance development, supporting Network planning, and agreeing financial support for Network activities.

9. Staff Equality Network closure/at risk of closure

If an existing Network wishes to close or is at risk of closure, the Chair(s) should contact the HR EDI team for support and advice, including on any required communications.

10. University Intervention

It is expected that all Staff Equality Networks will operate in accordance with this Framework, wider University policies, and within a culture of respect for others. Any practice not in line with these expectations will result in appropriate University intervention.