



Equality and diversity

A professional guide for teachers

August 2026

Contents

What is this guide for?	3
What is expected of teachers?	4
How to promote and practise equality and diversity	5
Embracing equality and diversity with, and for, learners.....	5
Embracing equality and diversity with, and for, colleagues, parents and the community.....	5
Bias	6
Acting against discrimination, harassment and victimisation	6
What you can do	7
Additional GTC Scotland resources	8

What is this guide for?



Teaching is complex work which requires constant ethical decision making. What teachers value, say and do really matters. As a teacher, you are expected to act in an ethical way by striving to promote equality and diversity, ensuring that everyone is treated with respect and that individual differences are valued. Our schools, colleges and workplaces are enriched with a diverse mix of people with different experiences and from different cultures and backgrounds. Inequality against those with protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation must be addressed and prevented.

This guide is intended to inform your understanding of ethical behaviour in these areas and how they interact with legislation and your professional responsibilities. It will help support discussion and interaction to encourage an understanding of diversity, equality, inclusivity and co-operative working. It outlines what to do if you experience or witness harassment or discrimination in your workplace and prompts you to consider your actions and whether you might require further advice or professional learning.

One of GTC Scotland's roles as the independent regulator for teachers in Scotland is to champion and enhance teacher professionalism. We work in the public interest to enhance trust in teaching by setting, upholding and promoting high standards. This involves providing information or advice where we identify any risk areas, where further focus is required to embed teaching standards or when action is needed to assure trust in teaching.

For the purposes of this guide, teachers include teachers of primary, secondary, additional support needs and further education. You should read this together with the Professional Standards and the Code of Professionalism and Conduct (COPAC). Together, these form the teaching standards set by GTC Scotland which describe teacher professionalism in Scotland.

This guide is for GTC Scotland registered teachers and is also relevant to anyone, including members of the public, wishing to understand the expectations of registered teachers in the context of equality and diversity.



What is expected of teachers?

COPAC sets out the principles of conduct that are expected of teachers in meeting their professional and ethical obligations. It is designed to provide guidance and raise awareness of issues and situations which can potentially arise. Parallel to this, the professional values of social justice, trust and respect and integrity are core to teaching standards and underpin your identity as a teacher.

Your commitment to these professional values should be demonstrated in your day-to-day behaviours and actions. Teachers should be positive role models and demonstrate welcoming, encouraging and inclusive behaviours to ensure that everyone they encounter feels valued and is treated with respect. In doing so, teachers align with the expectations of the Equality Act 2010 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009, which set out the legal requirements to protect people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and for the provision of additional support for learning. It is the responsibility of all colleagues in schools, colleges and workplaces to promote and facilitate a culture and ethos of equality and diversity and to address individual and institutional discrimination. When institutional discrimination is not challenged and addressed it is indicative of systemic failure. What you say and do in your professional and private life, whether online or in person, shapes the way that people think about you and the reputation of the teaching profession in Scotland.

Employers also have expectations of teachers, and you should be familiar with these and their relevant policies.

The questions at the end of this guide, together with local policies, can be used to reflect on your own setting and to address any required changes. Teachers should have the confidence to promote equality and diversity through the creation of inclusive contexts and have the knowledge and skills to prevent and challenge inequality, harassment or victimisation, particularly against those who identify with more than one protected characteristic, or with additional support needs. This requires being aware of intersectionality and how the inequalities related to one protected characteristic may intertwine with those inequalities related to another protected characteristic.

How to promote and practise equality and diversity

Embracing equality and diversity with, and for, learners

As a teacher, you should be a positive role model to learners motivating and inspiring them to make the most of their lives, skills and opportunities. It is your professional responsibility to strive to ensure everyone feels valued and respected and to help learners understand the positive impact of an inclusive and forward-thinking culture. Some people experience discrimination because they are perceived to be different as a result of prejudice, stereotyping or oppression. It is your responsibility to highlight the isolating and destructive impact of discrimination and the emotional and mental harm and risk this may cause.

In modelling behaviours that demonstrate your commitment to the promotion of equality and diversity, you help learners understand different views, perspectives and experiences, and develop more positive relationships both within educational establishments and local communities.

Your professional responsibility includes pursuing learning to raise your awareness of issues affecting people with different lived experiences to your own.

Embracing equality and diversity with, and for, colleagues, parents and the community

Your professional practice and conduct should promote inclusion and diversity for all and not discriminate against, or cause harassment to anyone you work with, be it learners, parents, colleagues or other stakeholders within our communities. You should take all matters of discrimination or harassment seriously and ask for advice on how to address these. You should seek to build relationships with people who may be discriminated against to ensure you are effectively supporting them.

All partners should be welcomed and included as part of your learning community, which is free from discrimination and harassment, where everyone values the contributions of all, and is set within an inclusive culture and ethos. This should be demonstrated by responding to the needs, experiences and views of all, including those with protected characteristics and additional support needs. Positively embracing equality and diversity means ensuring different views and opinions are present in the classroom, school and beyond, and not solely from the mainstream group, making sure voices from different perspectives are heard and valued.

Bias

There are varying definitions of bias: conscious/explicit, unconscious/implicit. Teachers should undertake further professional learning around bias, in all its definitions, to support understanding as to how bias can impact on your actions and decisions and cause discrimination. For example, the impact on bias and behaviour when high-profile issues are covered in the media. A greater understanding of bias will, in turn, increase your ability to open discussions and sensitively, and knowledgeably, challenge bias and discrimination. However subtle an incident, by addressing the root cause of bias or discrimination (as opposed to shutting down or silencing discussions around incidents) you demonstrate the seriousness of the situation.

Acting against discrimination, harassment and victimisation

Discrimination, harassment, victimisation or bullying of any kind should not be tolerated. If met with silence, this can send a harmful message that discriminatory behaviour is acceptable, that some voices are valued above others, enabling discrimination to grow. It may also have a long term and detrimental impact on the individual or group experiencing this negative behaviour, one which may continue long after the situation is resolved. You can make a positive difference by talking with colleagues, speaking out and addressing uncomfortable and problematic behaviour. You should be familiar with the policies in place on equality and diversity, anti-bullying, discrimination, inequalities and whistleblowing (or equivalents), and ensure you act on this advice. Equally, you should know where and how to access support and protection for yourself or others. This could be from colleagues, your local authority, or the wider education community including professional associations.

As a teacher, you must be an upstander and speak up against any type of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, being mindful of your personal safety. You should be proactive in ensuring that complaints are followed up. The message should be very clear that these socially unacceptable, and often illegal behaviours, are not tolerated and that the teaching profession will not stand by and accept or be part of them but actively challenge them and seek to change these attitudes.



What you can do



To help you understand and implement equality and diversity in practice, you should ask yourself:

- what are my beliefs and how am I managing them? How do I judge people?
- do I know who to talk to and what I should do when I have questions about equality and diversity?
- do I reflect on the opportunities I offer to others? Do I demonstrate commitment to equal access to all?
- do I model inclusive behaviour, welcoming the opinion and comments from all without showing bias?
- do I know my learners, colleagues and context well and do I consider and respond to their cultural and/or religious norms, and their physical and emotional needs?
- how can I find out more about how individuals define their identities and to what extent they wish others to know about these?
- am I aware of my own biases and unconscious influences, and do I challenge these in my interactions, to ensure equality for all? Do I have the courage to professionally challenge bias demonstrated by others? Do I make professional judgements free from bias?
- can I recognise racist behaviours in everyday social interactions (everyday racism), and know how to respond to and oppose them (racial literacy)?
- do I understand and recognise the language of discrimination and know how to respond to verbal abuse aimed at me or others?
- how would I respond to discrimination, harassment or victimisation directed to myself or another?
- am I keeping myself up to date with the correct language when referring to people with protected characteristics and if not, where can I seek further information?
- how do I overcome any language, learning or physical barriers that might disadvantage others in fully engaging with their learning or as part of our learning community?
- have I accessed professional learning to improve my practice and to develop more effective approaches towards supporting and addressing the wider agenda of equality and diversity?
- if I identify as part of a minority community, have I acknowledged and considered how my positionality and identity could influence, shape and support the thinking of others if I choose to be a visible role model in my context? Do I feel safe and supported enough myself to support, encourage and reassure learners, parents and others who may feel isolated, challenged or not recognised and valued?
- how do I play my part in enacting workplace policies to ensure visiting students, provisionally registered teachers and any new members of staff are not subjected to discrimination, harassment or victimisation?
- have I reviewed the [Ethics in teaching: speaking up guide](#) to ensure I maintain my position of trust as a teacher?
- have I reviewed the [Engaging online, AI and expression of views guide](#) to consider how I promote equality and inclusion online and in public?

Additional GTC Scotland website resources



Equality and diversity hub





The General Teaching Council for Scotland

We are the independent regulator for teachers in Scotland. We work in the public interest to enhance trust in teachers by setting, upholding and promoting high standards.

www.gtcs.org.uk
gtcs@gtcs.org.uk