

Equal opportunities policy 2021

The South Devon Players are committed to offering equal opportunities for people to become involved in theatre and film productions regardless of background, race, sexuality, religion, or gender.

These rules apply both to any time the group are working together at rehearsals, shows, or social events, as well as in online spaces (discussion, research, preparation for shows, or simply socialising.)

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company seeks to ensure that equality and diversity principles – accessibility, inclusivity, respect and difference – underpin all areas of our work and aims to promote them within its working practices, and across its creative platforms

Diversity, ironically, means different things to different people. At The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company, it simply means that everyone's invited.

This policy isn't as selfless as it sounds. The work this company makes and the impact it has are truly at their best when those who make and experience that work – artists, audiences, communities and staff – come from *all* walks of life.

The Cultural Imperative

We know that the arts in our home area, as well as nationally, will be stronger, more exciting and relevant to more people if companies such as ourselves embrace diversity. And if we are to produce and present exciting and compelling work, appropriate to our times, we cannot ignore the wide range of people and communities who comprise twenty-first century society, both in our home area, and as the internet crosses borders and all cultures and other demographics, worldwide. .

The arts help us to understand difference. But they also help us to investigate and express the things we have in common and our place in the world; past, present and future. We aspire to be a part of a fair-minded and tolerant society that's impatient of disadvantage, which embraces equality and celebrates difference.

In our home area, Torbay in South Devon, UK, we are based in one of the top ten most socially deprived areas of the UK, with low percentages of ethnic diversity. Created originally by local residents, to develop work, aspirations and engagement in the performing arts, this aim remains at the core of all our projects. As such, and in an area which attracts very low amounts of artistic funding, we strive to ensure that all of our team, regardless of experience, demographics, and role within the organisation, are rewarded to the very best of our ability. Just because we are not based in a bigger city does not mean that people's skills or abilities are any less. Our company directors do not take any additional payment for being company directors, in the interests of equality with the rest of the team.

Definitions

We want everyone who reads or uses this policy to understand what we mean by "Equality" and "Diversity"

Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents, and believing that no one should have poorer life chances because of where, what

or whom they were born, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Equality recognises that historically, certain groups of people with particular characteristics e.g. race, disability, sex and sexuality, have experienced discrimination *and that it may be necessary to take positive action to address this.*

Diversity literally means difference. It is about recognising individual as well as group differences, treating people as individuals, and placing positive value on diversity in the community and in our organisation. For us, this means embracing and celebrating the richness of society and ensuring under-represented communities have a stake in it – and in us. It is also about valuing the unique skills, experiences and perspectives of every individual and finding ways to bring the best out of them. Diversity brings richness to our culture, society and economy and society. It teaches us how to relate and co-exist with people who are different from ourselves.

The Ethical Rationale

A commitment to equality and diversity embodies sensitive and ethical appreciation and recognition of cultural differences. It:

- Values and celebrates the diversity of contemporary society in Torbay
- Expresses a commitment to access and equity
- Demonstrates ethical beliefs, conduct and behaviour
 - Respects human dignity through the recognition of each person's/group's cultural rights
- Appreciates the importance of cross-cultural knowledge
- Demonstrates acceptance of cultural diversity, and
- Aims to ensure that the diverse nature of society is reflected in all aspects of our work

Commitment

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company is committed to:

Identifying and eliminating unlawful and unfair discrimination

Encouraging and championing diversity both within our organisation and in the activities we undertake

Promoting a positive, safe and harmonious creative environment in which all individuals are treated with respect, are able to give of their best, are not subject to harassment or bullying and where all decisions regarding their involvement or opportunities to participate are based on merit.

Actively working to encourage and attain diversity across our team that is representative of modern society.. This may include taking lawful affirmative or positive action, where appropriate and practicable, to promote equality of opportunity and encourage diversity.

Fulfilling all our legal obligations under the equality legislation and associated codes of practice, complying with our own Equality and Diversity Policy and associated policies and regarding all breaches of our Equality and Diversity Policy as misconduct which could lead to disciplinary proceedings.

The Legal Framework

The **Equality Act 2010** brings together a number of existing laws into one place so that it is easier to use. It sets out the personal characteristics that are protected by the law and the behaviour that is unlawful. Everyone in Britain is protected by the Act. The “protected characteristics” under the Act are:

Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion and belief, Sex, Sexual orientation

Under the Act people are not allowed to discriminate, harass or victimise another person because they have any of the protected characteristics. There is also protection against discrimination where someone is perceived to have one of the protected characteristics or where they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic.

Discrimination means

-treating one person worse than another because of a protected characteristic (known as direct discrimination) or

-putting in place a rule or policy or way of doing things that has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one, when this cannot be objectively justified (known as indirect discrimination).

Harassment includes unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating someone’s dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone with a protected characteristic.

Our Commitments as a professional organisation.

Overview: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company acknowledges that it has particular responsibilities, to advocate and lead by example but also recognises that it has much to learn from the practices of other organisations. It will therefore seek opportunities to exchange ideas, working methods and solutions and to share learning widely across the sector. .

Awareness Training: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company will ensure that our team understand the Equality Act, what it means for the team, and that they are given opportunities to explore and discuss how practices could be improved.

Policy development: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company will ensure that when policies are introduced or amended, an assessment is conducted to ensure that policies and procedures are fair and that they do not inadvertently disadvantage a protected group.

The Work We Do: Our Commitments

Overview: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company is committed to encouraging as many people as possible to enjoy and take part in the arts – as practitioners, participants and audience members –including by reaching out to people who may have experienced barriers to taking part or attending.

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company is committed to offering opportunities for a diverse community and will seek to reflect this in the activities it undertakes, the performers and other artists it seeks to engage in those activities and the audiences it seeks to attract through its marketing, publicity and on-line presence.

Casting and Artist Development: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company is committed to ensuring that the work it produces reflects the diversity of the regional artistic community. The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company pursues a strategy of integrated casting and seek to ensure that it attracts performers from all sections of our society. We will consider, audition and cast actors without regard to race or colour unless the race of the character is considered to be essential to the reading of the work and/or where casting actors of a particular ethnic origin and/or cultural background may give an extra depth or dimension to the production.

Marketing: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company continually research and explore new marketing tools designed to reach out to a wider cross section of the population regionally and (via digital; globally) – in new ways and in new places.

Pricing: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company will ensure that concessions will be available for all its productions and activities for those who are not employed and for senior citizens and will take steps to ensure that, where the ticket pricing structure is governed by a venue's own policies, the capacity of local people to pay to attend a performance will influence the pricing decision.

Access: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company strive to find ways of making our work accessible to everyone (practitioners, participants and audience members), including people with mobility difficulties, people for whom English is not a first language, people with visual or hearing impairments and people who live in remote rural areas and/or who cannot easily travel. In addition to, wherever possible, choosing venues with access considerations in mind, practical interventions may include (but are not limited to) static, seated alternatives for promenade productions, and installation of temporary access ramps. As funding becomes available to do so, The South Devon Players Theatre Film Company will also explore the possibilities of offering audio described, signed and relaxed performances, sur/subtitles, bilingual/multi-lingual productions, special coaches etc. The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company actively seek to communicate with groups of people who may have specific access needs to learn more about how to include them.

Cultural diversity: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company will take positive action to increase the cultural diversity within The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company, throughout the range of activities we deliver, and amongst the audiences and participants we reach.

Our Commitments

Overview: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company aims to promote equality and diversity and to ensure that nobody receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable within the context of this policy.

Discrimination: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company regards discrimination, harassment, abuse, victimisation or bullying of team members, volunteers or of others in the course of work as disciplinary offences that are likely to be regarded as misconduct. Condoning such behaviour could also be treated as a disciplinary offence. As well as disciplining the perpetrator(s), we will give appropriate support to people who complain of harassment of themselves or others, or signpost to organisations which may be able to provide additional support.

Recruitment Practices: Selection, recruitment, training, promotion and working practices generally will be subject to regular review to ensure that they comply with the Equality and Diversity Policy. These practices include ensuring that all opportunities are communicated to all sections of the community within our ability and that, where appropriate and possible, the advertising of opportunities includes media directly aimed at ethnic minority and disabled communities. They also include providing training in equality and diversity issues, particularly for anyone involved in recruitment and selection.

Flexible working: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company will attempt to accommodate team requests to work flexibly, whether part-time or some other working arrangement, for whatever reason, so long as agreement is consistent with the needs of the organisation.

Reasonable Adjustments: We recognise that organisations are obliged under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled people and to enable them to carry out their role without unnecessary difficulty. We will make adjustments which are reasonable & within our power, whether or not we are obliged to do so by law, and whether or not a disabled person working with use is covered by the definition of disabled under the Equality Act. We actively encourage any person joining our team to contact us to discuss any such adjustments at the earliest opportunity.

Religion and Belief: We accept our obligation not to discriminate against applicants and team members on the basis of their religion or belief. We will try to accommodate team members' religious beliefs in any way which is compatible with the work of the organisation by, for example, allowing for prayers during the working day and at the workplace; considering dietary requirements in providing facilities for team members to eat and store food; allowing team members to take their holidays for religious festivals; trying to arrange meetings at times when they do not clash with important religious festivals; and not imposing a dress code with which people of a particular religion cannot comply.

Age: The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company will not discriminate against any adult on grounds of age in recruitment, promotion, or training.

Criminal records: We do not usually ask new team members about any previous criminal records, although if someone is helping with tasks such as cash handling, working with children, people's personal details, etc, we reserve the right to require references (which would be followed up by the company directors) and /or DBS clearances (as applicable).

Behaviour/ Discipline: Everyone working with our team is expected to behave in a socially acceptable manner at all times, upholding the conventions of polite society. They must not cause distress, discomfort, distraction, fear or harm to others.

Upholding this equal opportunities policy is counted among the requirements of acceptable behaviour in this team.

If behaviour deemed to be problematical occurs, the company will invoke a disciplinary procedure. If the incident is a minor issue, the show director, stage manager, or company director reserve the right to speak with the person involved and issue a formal warning. If the problematic behaviour continues the team member may be required to leave.

If the issue is deemed to be serious (involving physical harm, harassment, threats, aggressive intimidation, shouting at other team/ audience members, derogatory name-calling, or sexual impropriety, for example) or affecting the professionalism, rehearsal process, and/or audience enjoyment of the theatre production itself (severe regular lack of discipline, causing distraction,

etc) then the company directors reserve the right to immediately require the offender to leave the team, and reserve the right to contact law enforcement authorities if the nature of the problem is deemed to require such a response.

Responsibilities

Everyone working with The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company are responsible for upholding this policy and for reporting any discrimination, intentional or otherwise, of which they become aware. All forms of discrimination are unacceptable, regardless of whether there was any intention to discriminate or not. All individuals working with or on behalf of The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company have a duty to co-operate with The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company to ensure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination.

Publicising the Policy

All team-members will be informed that an Equality and Diversity Policy is in operation and that they are bound to comply with its requirements.
Copies of the whole policy are freely available on the company website.

Complaints

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company grievance and disciplinary procedures will be used to deal with any complaints about discrimination, harassment or bullying involving staff.

Complaints from members of the public or people using The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company will be addressed through the company's complaints procedure

Appendix A: Sources of advice

ACAS:

Publications offering guidance for organisations about their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are available as free downloads at <http://www.acas.org.uk/> under "Equality" in the A-Z advice section

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Publications offering guidance for organisations about their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are available as free downloads at <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/private-and-public-sector-guidance/employing-people/guidance-employers>