

7.2 Equal Opportunities

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The Importance of Equal Opportunities

An important part of HR is to ensure that all job applicants and employees have equal rights and opportunities. HR decisions and processes must be fair and unbiased, based on objective and measurable criteria. There should not be direct or indirect discrimination against anyone in the school environment. This is a hallmark of the education sector and its numerous schools which set the example for the future. Adhering to the principle of equality in all facets of life is a part of being educated.

The principles of equality and equal opportunities (EO) in the school system applies to gender, age, marital status, disability, and social and cultural factors.

In HR practice in the teaching service the principle of equal opportunities specifically applies to:

- Recruitment of teachers
- Participation in professional development
- Opportunities for study leave
- Promotion
- Acquiring senior and leadership positions.

It also applies in the daily interaction between employees in the teaching service. When employees feel equal, respect one another and are given equal opportunities in their jobs, the work environment tends to be conducive for employees to utilise their talents fully, participate in teamwork, be creative and innovative and be more engaged, demonstrating a high standard of teaching.

In schools it is the responsibility of the education authorities and school leaders to ensure equality in the workplace and equal rights and opportunities for teachers and students. This is part of the success criteria of the school system.

In the teaching service in Sierra Leone, gender imbalance among teachers and pupils remains a major concern. There are far fewer female teachers than male, girl pupils perform less well than boys, and instances of harassment persist. However, there has been significant improvement in the numbers of girls attending school.

Equal opportunities also apply to teachers and pupils with disabilities. It is important that people with disabilities who have an aptitude for teaching are encouraged to become teachers and that teacher training colleges and schools offer adequate facilities supported by regulation and investment for both teachers and pupils.

Who is responsible

Institutions with a responsibility for upholding employee equal opportunities in public and private organisations can provide information on relevant regulations. These include:

- TSC, Department of Teacher-Employer Relations
- Sierra Leone Teachers' Union (SLTU)
- Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC)
- Ministry of Labour
- Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
- National Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)
- Human Rights Commission

Rules: Equal Opportunities

- The teaching service is mandated by law to uphold equal rights and opportunities for teachers and school leaders.
- The TSC is committed to a recruitment policy and HR management that ensures equal and inclusive employment and career opportunities in the teaching service.
- The TSC shall prohibit discrimination against teachers in all aspects of employment.
- The TSC shall prohibit discrimination based on gender, age, disability, marital status, social and cultural factors and any other category protected by the laws of Sierra Leone.
- Teachers with disabilities can teach in any school of their choice provided they fulfil the usual requirements.
- Qualified female and male teachers can teach in any school provided they fulfil the usual requirements.

Best Practice: How to uphold Equal Opportunities in schools

- Ensure all teachers/students have equal access to opportunities and participation.
- Ensure policies and procedures do not discriminate against anyone.
- Ensure all HR practices are merit-based, transparent in execution, unaffected by personal biases or favouritism, fair, and based on objective criteria.
- Apply the above principle in recruitment, deployment, promotion, selection for professional development, study leave, all forms of benefits, and managerial and leadership appointments, and all other areas of HR.
- Organise sensitisation workshops and meetings for teachers on EO.
- Promote the publication of articles and cases on EO in the media.
- Organise conferences and seminars on the subject.
- Perform drama and jingles on the EO theme.
- Ensure strict adherence to and oversight of the Code of Conduct.
- Apply inclusive and participatory teaching methods in schools to involve all.
- Organise all-inclusive sport activities in schools that consider teachers and pupils with disabilities.
- Engage teachers and pupils with disabilities in school activities and responsibilities.
- Ensure facilities are available in all schools for teachers and students with disabilities, such as ramps, special toilets, etc.
- Ensure learning materials do not discriminate against anyone and are adapted where necessary, e.g. large print or audio tape format.

Best Practice: How to deal with discrimination

If you are discriminated against – or you witness discrimination against another – because of gender, age, social status, cultural factors, marital status, disability, or for any other reason, you are encouraged to report it.

There are three reporting options depending on the severity of the discrimination and/or the option you are most comfortable with:

- Report to SMC/BoG
- Report to TSC-DO
- Report to TSC-HQ via the TSC website grm.tsc.gov.sl

It is preferable to report the incident in writing and, if possible, provide documentation. The TSC guarantees confidentiality.

For minor instances of discrimination such as verbal discriminatory language you may wish to handle the matter informally through the school leader, provided the school leader is not involved and you trust him or her.