

# 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

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