

# Aquinas FC - Equality and Inclusion Policy

## Introduction

Aquinas Football Club is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion at all levels of the club. We believe that everyone, regardless of their background or personal characteristics, should have the opportunity to participate fully in football and club activities in an environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, and prejudice.

This policy is aligned with the Irish Football Association (IFA) guidelines and relevant Northern Ireland equality legislation, including the **Equality Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**, and the **Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO) 1998**.

## Policy Statement

Aquinas Football Club is committed to:

- **Promoting Equality:** Ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly and equally in all aspects of their participation with the club.
- **Encouraging Inclusion:** Creating an environment that welcomes people from all backgrounds and encourages full participation regardless of age, race, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, or any other protected characteristic.
- **Challenging Discrimination:** Taking proactive steps to identify and address any form of discrimination, whether direct or indirect, within the club or its activities.
- **Fostering Respect and Tolerance:** Promoting mutual respect and understanding between different groups of people and encouraging positive interactions among players, staff, coaches, volunteers, and parents.

## Legal Framework

This policy adheres to the following key pieces of legislation in Northern Ireland:

- **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998:** Requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across nine categories, including gender, race, and disability.
- **Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998:** Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion in employment and service provision.
- **Disability Discrimination Act 1995:** Requires reasonable adjustments to be made to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to services, including football activities and facilities.
- **Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997:** Prohibits racial discrimination in employment, training, and the provision of services.
- **Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976:** Prohibits discrimination based on sex or marital status in employment and services.

## Scope

This policy applies to:

- All members of Aquinas Football Club, including players, coaches, volunteers, staff, and parents.
- All club activities, including matches, training sessions, social events, and any other club-related engagements.
- All external parties engaged by the club, such as sponsors, contractors, and visiting teams.

## Equality and Diversity Objectives

Aquinas Football Club aims to:

- **Increase Participation:** Actively encourage participation in football among underrepresented groups, including girls and women, people with disabilities, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- **Accessible Facilities:** Ensure that all club facilities are accessible to everyone, with appropriate adjustments made to accommodate individuals with disabilities.
- **Inclusive Opportunities:** Provide training, development, and playing opportunities for all players, regardless of their ability or background.
- **Education and Awareness:** Offer training and resources to all members to raise awareness of equality, diversity, and inclusion, and to promote a culture of respect and understanding.

## Code of Conduct

To ensure an inclusive and equal environment, all members of Aquinas Football Club must adhere to the following principles:

- **Respect for Others:** Show respect for every individual, including fellow players, coaches, match officials, and opponents, regardless of background or identity.
- **Zero Tolerance for Discrimination:** Refrain from any form of discrimination, harassment, or bullying based on protected characteristics, including race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or age.
- **Inclusive Language:** Use language that is respectful and inclusive, avoiding any offensive or derogatory terms that could cause harm or discomfort to others.
- **Promote Equality:** Actively promote equality and inclusion, and challenge any behaviors or actions that undermine these values.

## Reporting and Addressing Complaints

Aquinas Football Club takes any incidents of discrimination or exclusion seriously. If any member, player, or parent experiences or witnesses any form of discriminatory behavior or harassment, they should follow the procedures below:

- **Report:** The issue should be reported immediately to the club's Equality Officer or another senior member of the club's management team.
- **Investigation:** The club will investigate the complaint thoroughly, confidentially, and promptly in accordance with the club's disciplinary procedures.
- **Action:** If the complaint is upheld, appropriate action will be taken, which may include disciplinary measures against the offending party. This could result in suspension or expulsion from the club in serious cases.

The club is also committed to resolving any concerns through informal discussions where appropriate and encourages open dialogue to address issues early.

## Accessibility

Aquinas Football Club will ensure that:

- **Facilities are Accessible:** All club facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities, including making reasonable adjustments where necessary.
- **Communication is Inclusive:** Information about the club's activities is available in formats that are accessible to all, including those with disabilities or language barriers.

## Training and Awareness

To support the effective implementation of this policy, Aquinas Football Club will:

- **Provide Training:** Deliver training to coaches, volunteers, and staff on equality, inclusion, and diversity, in line with IFA guidelines.
- **Raise Awareness:** Promote awareness of this policy and the principles of equality and inclusion across the club.
- **Monitor Progress:** Regularly review participation rates and feedback to assess the effectiveness of our equality and inclusion practices.

## Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier if necessary, to ensure it remains relevant and in line with current legislation and IFA guidance. We are committed to continuous improvement and will take steps to address any gaps or areas for development identified through feedback and monitoring.

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Designated Equality and Inclusion Officer

[Name]

Contact Information: [Phone Number] | [Email]