# Equality Policy

## Statement from President of Business Operations

At Aston Villa, we are proud to be more than just a Football Club - We Are A Family.

A claret and blue family which believes in and shares a passion, an enthusiasm, a commitment to embrace inclusion, show respect, and enable opportunities for all. We are committed to a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, harassment, and prejudice in any form.

We believe that our strength lies in our diversity across our supporters, players, staff workforce and our local communities. Different perspectives, experiences, and identities are welcomed within Aston Villa, and this enables us to create a richer, more innovative environment - one where our people can thrive, our decisions are stronger, and our impact is greater.

Our inclusive, family culture not only supports our staff and players, but also deepens our connection with our supporter groups and the communities we serve.

Creating a truly equitable environment is not a one-time effort. It's a journey that requires ongoing collaboration and determination from all of us, across the Aston Villa Family, to ensure that everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Together, we will continue to build a Club where everyone belongs.



**Francesco Calvo**
**President of Business Operations**

## Equality Statement

The Club is committed to and endorses the principle of equality and strives to ensure that everyone who wishes to be involved in the Club and its activities whether as a supporter, player, the local community, customer, community outreach participant, employee, Executive Board member, contractor, volunteer, partner or supplier:

- can be assured of an environment in which their rights, dignity and individual worth are respected, and in particular that they are able to enjoy their engagement at the Club without the threat of intimidation, victimisation, harassment, bullying and abuse; and

- have a genuine and equal opportunity to participate to the full extent of their own ambitions and abilities, without regard to their age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation.

Our aim is to embed equality across all levels of the Club. Through this Policy, the Club aims to ensure that the message of equality is followed and actively practised.

## Legal Obligation

The Club is committed to avoiding and eliminating discrimination of any kind in the Club and recognises that it is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly because of an individual's age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity. These are known as **protected characteristics**.

Individuals will be protected if they have a protected characteristic, are assumed to have a protected characteristic, are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic or with someone who is assumed to have a protected characteristic.

## Types of Discrimination

An individual may experience different forms of discrimination. Discrimination may take the form of:

**Direct discrimination –** this occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic they have.

**Indirect discrimination** – this occurs when a condition, rule, policy or practice applies to everyone but particularly disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic.

**Discrimination by association** - this is direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.

**Discrimination by perception** - this is direct discrimination against someone because an individual believes that another individual possesses a particular protected characteristic when they do not have that protected characteristic.

**Victimisation** – this occurs when someone is treated less favourably because of making or supporting a complaint about discrimination, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion because they made/supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so.

**Harassment** – this is where there is unwanted conduct, related to one of the protected characteristics (other than marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity) that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

**Bullying –** this is a form of personal harassment involving the misuse of power, influence or position to persistently criticise, humiliate or undermine an individual.

**Failure to make reasonable adjustments** this is where a physical feature or a provision, criterion or practice puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared with someone who does not have that protected characteristic and the employer has failed to make reasonable adjustments to enable the disabled person to overcome the disadvantage.

## Positive Action

As well as complying with relevant legislation, the Club is committed to promoting equality by taking positive steps to counteract the effects of physical or cultural barriers – whether real or perceived – that restrict the opportunity for all sections of the community to participate equally and fully in Club activities. The Club seeks to implement, support or contribute to appropriate measures or initiatives that enable access to the Club by:

- Committing to a programme of:
  - raising awareness;
  - educating;
  - investigating concerns;
  - applying relevant and proportionate sanctions;
  - widening diversity and representation across all areas of the workforce and fan base; and
  - promoting diverse role models.

- Developing an Equality Working Group which will review and measure initiatives that the Club implements and promote equality to all.
- Not accepting any form of intimidation, bullying or harassment including direct or indirect discrimination or victimisation, or any other form of unacceptable behaviour.
- Monitoring and reviewing this Policy regularly with an action plan developed and implemented to address any areas of concern.
- Commitment to the Disability Confident scheme since 2020.
- Commitment to the Premier League Commitment Regarding Discriminatory and Abusive Conduct since August 2021.

## Implementation

The following steps will be taken to publicise this Policy and promote equality at the Club:

- A copy of this document will be published on the Club's website.
- The Club's Executive Board will take overall accountability for ensuring that the Policy is observed.
- The Club's Executive Board will take full account of the Policy in arriving at all decisions in relation to activities of the Club.
- The Club will implement regular audits and create surveys and other initiatives designed to assess the level of participation of different sections of the community in the Club and will take account of the findings in developing measures to promote and enhance equality in the Club.
- The Club will provide access to a rolling programme of training (for example, online, face-to-face, briefings) for all of its Executive Board, players, match-day fans, staff, participants in outreach programmes and other people engaged with the Club's activities to raise awareness of both collective and individual responsibilities.

## Complaints and Compliance

The Club consider all forms of discriminatory behaviour, including (but not limited to) behaviour described in the Legal Obligations section of this Policy as unacceptable, and is concerned with ensuring individuals feel able to raise any bona fide grievance, report or complaint related to such behaviour without fear of being penalised for doing so.

Appropriate sanctions will be taken against any Executive Board member, staff, player, match day fan, participant in outreach programmes and other people engaged with the Club's activities who violate this Equality Policy.

Any individual who believes that he or she has been treated in a way that they consider to be in breach of this Policy by an Executive Board member, staff, player, match day fan, participant in outreach programmes and other people engaged with the Club's activities should in the first instance, complain to that person. If that does not resolve the matter, or in the case of allegations against the Club itself, the individual may raise the matter by writing directly to: **equality@avfc.co.uk** as well as adding a case on 'MyConcern' and adding EDI as a tag. (please click here for 'MyConcern' process.

### Club Investigation

The Club will investigate the reported allegations. The investigation will be conducted impartially, confidentially and without avoidable delay. Any person against whom a complaint is made will be informed of what is alleged and given the opportunity to present their side of the matter. The parties in question will be notified of the outcome of the investigation, in writing.

If the investigation reveals unacceptable discriminatory behaviour, then the Club may impose sanctions on that person or organisation. In imposing a sanction, the Club will consider the severity of the matter and take into account any mitigating circumstances.

Sanctions may range from a written reminder concerning future conduct extending to temporary or permanent exclusion from Club activities.

In addition, if the Club believes that there may be a violation of this Policy by way of harassment, victimisation or discrimination which amounts to a criminal offence, the appropriate authority will be informed. The Club will co-operate fully with any investigation carried out by the appropriate authorities and, subject to the outcome, may consider taking action as detailed above in relation to the matter concerned.

## Hate Incidents

The Club supports the work of West Midlands Police in tackling hate crime. The police and Crown Prosecution Service have agreed a common definition of hate incidents. They say something is a hate incident if the victim or anyone else think an incident was motivated by hostility or prejudice based on one of the following things:

- disability;
- race;
- religion;
- gender reassignment; or
- sexual orientation.

This means that if **you** believe something is a hate incident it should be recorded as such by the person you are reporting it to. All police forces record hate incidents based on these five personal characteristics.

### Police Actions

#### In response to a hate incident, the Police:

- may make an arrest.
- will deal with any incident in which a person who receives or views an offensive post or message perceives them to be threatening, abusive, homophobic or racist. There are no set terms or phrases.

### West Midlands Police Reporting Process for online abuse

- If possible, take a screen shot of the post/message in question either using your phone or computer. Please try and capture within the picture/s the time and date the item was posted, the name of the user/profile and any news feed below (This will prove to the court how fellow users have reacted to the post/message).
- Please do not begin your own investigation into the origins of the sender by accessing their accounts as this may hinder the prosecution.
- There are a few ways you can report incident of this nature:
  - **Call Police on 101 – Quote "Operation Valdivian"**
  - www.west-midlands.police.uk
  - www.twitter.com/wmpolice
  - https://www.kickitout.org/forms/online-reporting-form

The Police will require you to provide a statement and produce stills of the messages whether hard copy or digital in order to prosecute the offender in court.

## Matchday Reporting Procedures

The Club's Lead Safety Officer is responsible for managing the following two procedures on a matchday; however all employees must report any acts of discrimination, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour which they witness. Discrimination, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour of any kind, which goes against the spirit of this Policy and the Club's Dignity at Work Policy, by anyone is unacceptable on Club premises.

- **Procedure for Stewards and Security employees working on a Matchday**

  If you personally witness discriminatory behaviour, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour whilst on duty as a steward, you must make an immediate note of the language used or behaviour witnessed and then notify Stadium Control. Stadium Control will immediately liaise with the Police with a view to having the culprit arrested and/or ejected from Villa Park. If an incident of discriminatory behaviour, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour is reported to you, you must make an immediate note of the language used or behaviour alleged to have taken place, collect contact details for all witnesses and take all reasonable steps to identify the culprit and his/her seat number. Once this information has been obtained, you should contact Stadium Control who will immediately liaise with the Police with a view to having the culprit arrested and/or ejected from Villa Park. You are not expected to and should not put your safety at risk by entering into any confrontation with any person who you believe is guilty of discriminatory behaviour, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour.

  If you have witnessed discriminatory behaviour, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour or have had it reported to you, you have a duty to make yourself available to the Police in their investigations and may be required to provide a witness statement as well as to appear as a witness in any subsequent legal proceedings. The Club will support you in all reasonable ways during such a process, including allowing you to have time off work to attend Court.

  The Club will consider banning those who use discriminatory behaviour, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour; even if legal proceedings are not brought against an alleged culprit or where legal proceedings result in an acquittal.

- **For all other employees (including Non-Stewards / Security employees) working on a Matchday**

  If any employee (including Non-Stewards / Security employees) working on a Matchday witness discriminatory behaviour, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour at Villa Park, you should notify the nearest steward at your earliest opportunity. You should give the steward details of the behaviour and/or language you have witnessed as well as provide the steward with as much information as possible to enable them to identify the culprit e.g. seat number and description. If you witness or are subjected to discriminatory behaviour, discriminatory language or unacceptable behaviour (as described in this Policy) you are not expected to and should not put your safety at risk by entering into any confrontation with that person.

## Potential Outcomes

There are a number of potential outcomes depending on the offence. The majority of cases are dealt with in court where there is sufficient evidence. However, in certain circumstances, we can look for out of court disposals. Many of these will be alongside education programmes supported by Kick It Out. Any out of court disposal requires an admission of guilt and evidence of remorse. We aim that every potential outcome is victim led.

## Responsibility, Monitoring and Evaluation

The Executive Board will be accountable for ensuring the implementation of this Policy.

The Club's Chief Operating Officer and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead will be responsible for the day-to-day implementation of equality, diversity and inclusion across the Club.

The Equality Working Group will review and measure initiatives that the Club may implement or take part in to promote and enhance equality in the Club and will report their findings annually to the Executive Board.

## Review

This Equality Policy will be reviewed by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead every three years, or sooner where new developments in employment legislation necessitate such a review, where factual clarification is required or changes to operational practices take place.

**The next review will be 31.07.2028**

**Policy Version 1: 10.02.2021**
**Policy Version 2: 05.08.2022**
**Policy Version 3: 14.02.2024**
**Policy Version 4: 05.11.2025**

## Linked Policies

1. **Adoption Leave Policy**
2. **Dignity at Work Policy**
3. **Equal Opportunity & Diversity Policy**
4. **Maternity Leave Policy**
5. **Paternity Leave Policy**
6. **Recruitment and Selection Policy**
7. **Shared Parental Leave (Adoptions) Policy**
8. **Shared Parent Leave (Birth) Policy**
9. **Social Media Confidentiality and Player Announcement Policy**
10. **Transitioning at Work Policy**