



Grand Court of the Masonic Order of Athelstan in England, Wales and its Provinces Overseas

Equality & Inclusion Policy

1. Purpose

The Grand Court of the Masonic Order of Athelstan affirms its commitment to equality, inclusion, and respectful conduct throughout the Order in England, Wales, and its Provinces Overseas. This Policy establishes the standards expected of all Courts, Provinces, Officers, and members, and ensures alignment with the Equality Act 2010, including amendments in 2023 and interpretive guidance following the 2025 Supreme Court ruling. This commitment reflects the historic principles of integrity, honour, and fraternal respect upon which the Order is founded.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to all individuals engaged with the Order, including:

- Members at all ranks
- Applicants for membership
- Visitors and guests
- Grand, Provincial, and Court Officers
- Volunteers, contractors, and individuals acting on behalf of the Order
- All Courts, Provinces, and subordinate bodies under the authority of Grand Court

It governs all activities including ceremonies, convocations, administrative processes, communications (including digital formats), events, and disciplinary matters, regardless of geographical location.

3. Principles

The Grand Court is committed to:

- Upholding dignity, courtesy, and respect for all
- Ensuring equality of opportunity in membership, progression, and participation
- Preventing discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Maintaining an inclusive environment across all Provinces and Courts



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- Ensuring decisions are made impartially, transparently, and in accordance with established regulations
- Promoting accountability for maintaining an inclusive culture at every level of the Order
- Ensuring anticipatory consideration of reasonable adjustments, in line with the 2025 Supreme Court ruling

These principles reflect the Order's values of integrity, honour, and good governance.

4. Protected Characteristics

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, the Order does not discriminate on the grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Order recognises that discrimination relating to breastfeeding, menopause, and menstruation may constitute sex, age, or disability discrimination.

For the purposes of single-sex services and spaces, "sex" refers to **biological sex**, in line with the ruling in *For Women Scotland Ltd v Scottish Ministers*.

5. Definitions

5.1 Discrimination

Unlawful discrimination includes:

- **Direct discrimination:** Less favourable treatment because of a protected characteristic.



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- **Indirect discrimination:** A rule or practice that appears neutral but disadvantages individuals with a protected characteristic and cannot be justified.

Indirect discrimination may be claimed even if the claimant does not share the protected characteristic but suffers the same disadvantage.

Discrimination includes **associative discrimination**, where an individual is treated unfavourably because of a protected characteristic held by someone with whom they are connected, even if that person is outside the Order.

5.2 Harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that violates dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. This may include jokes, comments, actions, or omissions. As noted in the Policy:

“That could be a joke, a comment or an action or omission.”

Harassment includes conduct related to breastfeeding, menopause, or menstruation.

Harassment protections extend to volunteers, contractors, and individuals performing work on behalf of the Order.

5.3 Victimisation

Unfavourable treatment because an individual has raised, or supported, a concern or complaint. As noted:

“This will usually apply even if the complaint of discrimination or harassment has no merit.”

Malicious or knowingly false complaints are not protected.

5.4 Reasonable Adjustments

Practical steps taken to support participation by individuals with disabilities or particular needs, where reasonable and proportionate. Examples include seating



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adjustments, lighting changes, alternative formats, ritual modifications, or administrative support. As noted:

“What is reasonable will depend on the disability and the circumstances.”

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is **anticipatory**. Courts and Provinces must proactively consider potential barriers in ritual, administration, and digital communication.

Neurodiversity: Conditions that substantially affect memorisation or ritual performance may constitute disabilities requiring adjustments.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Members

All members must:

- Uphold this Policy
- Treat others with courtesy and respect
- Avoid discriminatory behaviour
- Report concerns appropriately

6.2 Grand, Provincial, and Court Officers

Officers must:

- Apply procedures impartially
- Consider reasonable and anticipatory adjustments
- Ensure communications and decisions are fair and transparent
- Model inclusive behaviour in ceremonials and administration

6.3 Provincial Responsibilities

Provinces must:

- Support Courts in applying this Policy
- Provide guidance and advice where required
- Ensure consistent standards across their jurisdiction



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6.4 Grand Court

Grand Court will:

- Oversee compliance across all Provinces and Courts
- Review practices for inclusivity
- Provide guidance where required
- Address complaints or concerns in accordance with established regulations

7. Membership Processes

7.1 Applications

Applications must be assessed objectively. No applicant may be refused membership on discriminatory grounds. Courts must make reasonable adjustments for applicants, visitors, and guests, including at white table events. As noted:

“No applicant should be rejected on the grounds of their disability unless advice has been taken.”

Courts must consider whether any requirement creates **practical barriers**, including digital formats, physical access, or ritual expectations.

7.2 Progression and Appointment

Progression through the grades and appointment to office must be based on merit, participation, and suitability—not on protected characteristics.

7.3 Access to Activities

Members should have equitable access to convocations, ceremonials, events, and facilities. Reasonable and anticipatory adjustments should be considered where appropriate.

7.4 Ritual

Advice is available from the Grand Secretary’s Office on variations to ritual to accommodate a candidate’s disability. As noted:



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“Nobody who has tried his best should be made to feel unwelcome for imperfect ritual.”

Neurodiversity may constitute a disability where it substantially affects memorisation or performance. Courts must therefore consider adjustments such as alternative wording, prompts, or supportive formats, provided ritual integrity is preserved.

8. Conduct and Behaviour

The Order expects behaviour consistent with its values. The following are prohibited:

- Discriminatory remarks or actions
- Harassment, bullying, or exclusionary behaviour
- Microaggressions or repeated subtle behaviours that undermine dignity
- Misuse of authority or office
- Conduct inconsistent with the dignity of the Order
- Behaviour that undermines or dismisses menopause-related symptoms, breastfeeding needs, or neurodiverse conditions

Breaches may result in disciplinary action under Grand Court Statutes.

9. Complaints Procedure

Concerns relating to discrimination, harassment, or victimisation may be raised through the established Court, Provincial, or Grand Court complaints process.

Complaints will be:

- Taken seriously
- Acknowledged promptly
- Investigated impartially
- Addressed within reasonable timescales
- Treated confidentially

No member will be disadvantaged for raising a legitimate concern.



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Complaints involving associative discrimination or anticipatory failures to make reasonable adjustments must be assessed with the same seriousness as direct discrimination.

10. Review and Monitoring

Grand Court will periodically review this Policy—at least every two years—to ensure:

- Continued compliance with legislation
- Alignment with best practice
- Suitability for the Order's needs across all Provinces

Updates will be communicated through official channels.

11. Guidance and Support

This guidance is intended to assist Courts and Provinces in applying the Policy. It is not a substitute for professional legal advice where required. As noted:

“Please contact your Provincial Grand Court if you have any questions.”

Guidance is available on digital accessibility, menopause-related adjustments, breastfeeding accommodations, and neurodiversity-inclusive ritual practice.

12. Statement of Commitment

The Grand Court of the Masonic Order of Athelstan reaffirms its commitment to equality, inclusion, and respectful conduct. This Policy supports the values of the Order and ensures that all who engage with us—whether in England, Wales, or our Provinces Overseas—may do so confidently, safely, and without disadvantage.