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Equality and Diversity in the workplace

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Equality and Diversity

Equality and diversity can be defined as “promoting equality of opportunity for all, through diversity, giving each individual the chance to achieve their potential, free from prejudice and discrimination.”

What is Discrimination?

A number of acts have been placed into the law to help ensure individuals have the same rights regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy and age.

These acts include:

- Equality Act
- Sex Discrimination Act
- Disability Discrimination Act
- Race Relations Act
- Human Rights Act

Most employers are familiar with the concepts of equality and discrimination, ie that they must not treat employees unfavourably on certain grounds such as sex or race. Diversity, on the other hand, may be a less familiar concept.

Diversity is about:

- Recognising that people are different from one another
- Valuing and respecting people as individuals irrespective of their differences and differing needs
- Accommodating differences where possible.

What is equal opportunity?

Equal opportunity (or equal opportunities) relates to the understanding that all people are treated as individuals without judgements made on them based on stereotypes. By understanding and appreciating the different skill sets within its workforce, organisations have the opportunity to be an employer of choice. The UK legislation requires all job opportunities to follow guidelines on equality.



Equality and Diversity Responsibilities

Employers' Duties

- Employers have a duty to ensure that employees and potential employees are not subject to discrimination because of any of the protected characteristics.
- An equal opportunities policy is not a legal requirement for UK organisations but it is seen as good practice to promote equality and diversity in the workplace.
- It is advisable for employers to set out a positive duty on their managers and supervisors to implement an equal opportunities policy and take action to ensure compliance with it.
- Employers should place a positive duty on all their employees to comply with the employer's equal opportunities policy and to ensure that their colleagues are treated with respect and dignity.
- It is important to both communicate and promote the equal opportunities policy to employees on a regular basis.

Employees' Duties

- Employees have a duty not to discriminate against any of their colleagues because of any of the protected characteristics. Employees who perpetrate acts of discrimination may be ordered by an employment tribunal personally to pay compensation to their victims.
- Diversity and equal opportunities policies place a positive duty on all employees to comply with the policy and to ensure that colleagues are treated with respect and dignity.
- All employees are under a duty not to engage in any behaviour that could be interpreted as harassment on related to any of the protected characteristics, irrespective of motive.

Equality and Diversity in the Workplace

Why do we need a diverse workforce?

A diverse workforce allows an organisation to offer a wide range of skills, resources and ideas to give the business a competitive edge.

Some key benefits of diversity management include;

- Cultural – knowledge of different areas of the community
- Access to additional market sectors
- Access to a wider talent pool when recruiting
- Staff have a better understanding and respect for difference



Benefits to the business by promoting equality and diversity

By actively encouraging equality and diversity an organisation can benefit from:

- A varied workforce, where employees with roots in other countries or cultures can help an organisation build relations with a wider range of customers, allowing marketing of products and services more appropriately and sensitively
- A more efficient workforce due to shared values amongst workers where an environment of fairness, dignity, tolerance and respect prevails
- Access to a wider pool of talent for recruitment – ensuring the best person is selected for the job
- A more accommodating work environment, where employees can achieve a good work-life balance through arrangements that suit both parties when outside influences affect the worker – i.e. flexible hours due to childcare arrangements or working from home where agreed while on long-term sick

Positive effects on staff when equality and diversity is encouraged

Studies have shown that in a diverse working environment the overall organisation performs better than those without such policies. Productivity is increased, and employees actively pursue organic business growth due to them feeling appreciated rather than restricted in their role.

Workers become empowered knowing that they have equal opportunities for promotion and career progression without fear that their beliefs, gender, race or disabilities will hold them back in their role. They are able to appreciate that their employment is down to their ability rather than a demographic dynamic.

Promote Equality and Diversity at work

Put equality policies in place

Everyone should be treated fairly in all day-to-day activities and work-related decisions (recruitment, training, promotion, allocating work, pay, etc.). We should be embracing people's differences. A more diverse workforce is more profitable too! Everyone must be treated fairly in all day-to-day activities and work-related decisions (recruitment, training, promotion, allocating work, pay, etc.).

Mind your language

Check that all your communications are free of discriminatory and sexist language. Careless or sloppy language and stereotyping, however unintentional, can create a perception of inequality and make people feel vulnerable.

Be proactive

Don't slavishly follow rules if you think they are wrong, if they create unintentional bias, or lead to some groups being treated less favourably than others. Instead, work to get them changed. If no one steps up to change the status quo, these unconscious biases will continue to dictate our workplaces.

Get advice if needed

Your HR or Legal & Compliance departments will be able to offer sound advice on how to avoid unconscious bias or discrimination when making complex decisions such as terminating contracts or making people redundant to ensure that the rules are followed correctly.

Watch out for indirect discrimination

Make sure that your company policies don't inadvertently put certain groups at a disadvantage. For example, a requirement to be 'clean-cut' could discriminate against anyone who wears their hair long for religious reasons. Don't pretend not to notice harassment by a predatory manager because "it's just banter" or "he doesn't mean anything by it".

Know your customers

If you think your business should reflect who your customers are, plan services and make better use of resources and understand local trends. It is important to really understand your customers. Do some customer profiling work and in particular review how you communicate with customers – an important part of this will be reviewing your websites and translations and interpreting services.

Find out more:

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