

Protection against discrimination on grounds of religion or belief in employment and vocational training

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 outlaw discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief in workplaces large or small throughout Great Britain, both in the private and public sectors. They cover all aspects of the employment relationship, including recruitment, pay, working conditions, training, promotion, dismissal and references.

The Government introduced rights in this area because unfair discrimination has a damaging impact on people's lives and because businesses will prosper if they harness the talents of all their employees.

The regulations enable individuals to take prompt and effective action to tackle harassment, and enable people to have an equal chance of training and promotion, whatever their religion or belief.

What protection does the legislation give?

The law protects people from discrimination on the grounds of their religion or belief in employment and vocational training.

It outlaws:

- **Direct discrimination** – treating people less favourably than others because of their religion or belief.
- **Indirect discrimination** – applying a provision, criterion or practice which disadvantages people of a particular religion or belief and which is not justified in objective terms.
- **Harassment** – unwanted conduct that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
- **Victimisation** – treating people less favourably because of action they have taken under or in connection with the new legislation – for example, if someone made a formal complaint of discrimination or given evidence in a tribunal case.

The law covers perceptions of religion or belief too. So it protects people who are assumed - correctly or incorrectly - to have a particular religion or belief.

The law also protects people who are on being discriminated against because of the religion or belief of the people with whom they associate, for example, their family and friends.

Business benefits

Many companies already recognise that there are considerable benefits in adopting employment policies based on principles of equality. Tackling discrimination helps to attract, motivate and retain staff. It helps employers make the best use of skills and experience and can lead to a more diverse workforce, new ideas, access to wider markets and a better image.

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The DTI drives our ambition of 'prosperity for all' by working to create the best environment for business success in the UK. We help people and companies become more productive by promoting enterprise, innovation and creativity.

We champion UK business at home and abroad. We invest heavily in world-class science and technology. We protect the rights of working people and consumers. And we stand up for fair and open markets in the UK, Europe and the world.

Where can I get more information?

More information on the new legislation can be found on the DTI website www.dti.gov.uk

Acas, the independent employment relations service, provides information and good practice advice to employers and employees on a wide range of employment relations issues through its website (www.acas.org.uk), helpline (08457 47 47 47), publications and training. Acas has Equality and Diversity Advisers who specialise in providing practical hands-on help to businesses of all sizes and sectors on equality and diversity issues in the workplace. Acas also runs Equality Direct, a helpline for questions on managing equality in the workplace (08456 00 34 44).

