

Protection against discrimination at work on grounds of religion or belief.

New legislation coming into force on 2nd December 2003 will offer protection for workers from discrimination and harassment at work on grounds of religion or belief.

The new Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 will for the first time, outlaw discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief in large and small workplaces in England, Scotland and Wales, both in the private and public sectors. They will cover all aspects of the employment relationship, including recruitment, pay, working conditions, training, promotion, dismissal and references. They represent a significant addition to our domestic equality legislation and will make a practical difference to the lives of millions of people.

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

The regulations will 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 legislation will outlaw:

- **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.

Business benefits

Many companies have already accepted 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.

Where can I get more information?

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

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) is producing guidance on how the regulations will work in practice. The guidance includes good practice advice, including possible scenarios and frequently asked questions. More information on the guidance can be found on the Acas Website www.acas.org.uk

Acas also operate a telephone helpline (tel. 08457 47 47 47, textphone 08457 06 16 00), which provides information and advice across a wide range of employment issues.

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