

Training for all

The Government recognises that a dynamic economy can only be achieved by giving everyone an equal chance to develop their skills and maximise their employment potential.

Equal access to vocational training means greater employability for workers and enhanced workplace satisfaction.

Under the new discrimination laws age will not be a barrier when it comes to young or old employees seeking vocational training.

The new regulations will affect workplaces from 1 October 2006.

Which employers will this affect?

The Regulations apply to all employers and providers of vocational training, whatever their size and whether in the public or private sector.

Under the new Regulations training providers will not be able to set age limits for entry to training, *unless they can show there is a real need to apply such limits.*

Training providers include:

- employers;
- further, or higher education institutions in receipt of public funds;
- private, public or voluntary sector training bodies; and
- adult education programmes.

All courses offered by universities and other institutions of further or higher education will also be covered. This will create a uniform regime and provide legal certainty for both institutions and individuals.

Although the bulk of the Regulations focus on employers and vocational trainers, they also cover the bodies that confer qualifications, that result from such training.

All schools, including sixth-form education providers, are excluded from the regulations on the grounds that the education of pupils in schools is not vocational training. However, schools will be subject to the laws in their role as employers.

Understanding the new procedures

Employers, training providers, colleges or universities will all need to consider the following issues:

- Is there a set minimum or maximum age for entry generally or for admission to particular courses? If so, has it been 'objectively justified'?
- If there are no formal minimum or maximum ages, is age taken into account when considering applications for admission?
- Are there upper or lower age thresholds for funding availability?

Illustrative example

Laura Jackson, 16, from Exeter, applied for vocational training to enhance her workplace performance and increase promotion opportunities.

She was refused entry to her company's training scheme on the grounds that she was too young.

Under the new regulations her employer would not be allowed to prevent her from seeking further training due to her age.

By giving her workplace training her employer would benefit from having a more experienced and motivated member of staff, which would have a positive impact on output.

The full regulations can be found at www.dti.gov.uk/employment/discrimination/age-discrimination/index.html

Further detailed guidance on the law can be found at www.acas.org.uk

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