

5. What equality law means for you as an employer: managing workers.

Equality Act 2010 Guidance for employers.
Vol. 5 of 7.

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Introduction

This guide is one of a series written by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to explain what you must do to meet the requirements of equality law. These guides support the introduction of the Equality Act 2010. This Act brings together lots of different equality laws, many of which we have had for a long time. By doing this, the Act makes equality law simpler and easier to understand.

There are seven guides giving advice on your responsibilities under equality law as someone who has other people working for you whether they are employees or in another legal relationship to you. The guides look at the following work situations:

1. When you recruit someone to work for you
2. Working hours and time off
3. Pay and benefits
4. Career development – training, development, promotion and transfer
5. Managing people
6. Dismissal, redundancy, retirement and after someone's left
7. Good practice: equality policies, equality training and monitoring

Other guides and alternative formats

We have also produced:

- A separate series of guides which explain what equality law means for you if you are providing services, carrying out public functions or running an association.
- Different guides for individual people who are working or using services and who want to know their rights to equality.

If you require this guide in an alternative format and/or language please contact the relevant helpline to discuss your needs.

England

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The legal status of this guidance

This guidance applies to England, Scotland and Wales. It has been aligned with the Codes of Practice on Employment and on Equal Pay. Following this guidance should have the same effect as following the Codes and may help you avoid an adverse decision by a court in proceedings brought under the Equality Act 2010.

This guide is based on equality law as it is at 1 October 2010. Any future changes in the law will be reflected in further editions.

This guide was last updated in July 2011. You should check with the Equality and Human Rights Commission if it has been replaced by a more recent version.

1. What equality law means for you as an employer: managing workers

What's in this guide

If you are an employer, and you are making a decision, or taking action following a decision, about managing your workers, equality law applies to you.

Equality law applies:

- whatever the size of your organisation
- whatever sector you work in
- whether you have one worker or ten or hundreds or thousands
- whether or not you use any formal processes or forms to help you make decisions or manage your workers.

This guide tells you how you can avoid all the different types of unlawful discrimination. It recognises that smaller and larger employers may operate with different levels of formality, but makes it clear how equality law applies to everyone, and what this means for the way you (and anyone who already works for you) must do things.

This guide covers the following situations and subjects (we explain what any unusual words mean as we go along):

- Access to facilities at work
- Dress codes
- Managing and appraising staff
- Disciplining staff
- When a worker becomes a disabled person
- Avoiding and dealing with harassment

This guide also suggests how you can, through equality good practice:

- Avoid and sort out equality-related conflict.

These can broadly be described as management issues that are not covered in the other guides in this series. All the titles in the series are listed at the beginning of this guide.

What else is in this guide

This guide also contains the following sections, which are similar in each guide in the series, and contain information you are likely to need to understand what we tell you about making decisions about managing your workers:

- Information about when you are responsible for what other people do, such as your employees.
- Information about making reasonable adjustments to remove **barriers** for disabled people who work for you or apply for a job with you.
- A Glossary containing a list of words and key ideas you need to understand this guide – all words highlighted in **bold** are in this list. They are highlighted the first time they are used in each section and sometimes on subsequent occasions.
- Advice on what to do if someone says they've been discriminated against.
- Information on where to find more advice and support.

Throughout the text, we give you some ideas on what you can do if you want to follow equality good practice. While good practice may mean doing more than equality law says you must do, many employers find it useful in recruiting talented people to their workforce and managing them well so they want to stay, which can save you money in the long run. Sometimes equality law itself doesn't tell you exactly how to do what it says you must do, and you can use our good practice tips to help you.

Making sure you know what equality law says you must do as an employer

Are you an employer?

This guide calls you an **employer** if you are the person making decisions about what happens in a work situation. Most situations are covered, even if you don't give your worker a written contract of employment or if they are a **contract worker** rather than a **worker** employed by you. Other types of worker such as trainees, apprentices and business partners are also covered. Sometimes, equality law only applies to particular types of worker, such as employees, and we make it clear if this is the case.

Protected characteristics

Make sure you know what is meant by:

- **age**
- **disability**
- **gender reassignment**
- **marriage and civil partnership**
- **pregnancy and maternity**
- **race**
- **religion or belief**
- **sex**
- **sexual orientation.**

These are known as **protected characteristics**.

What is unlawful discrimination?

Unlawful discrimination can take a number of different forms:

- You must not treat a worker **worse** than another worker because of a protected characteristic (this is called **direct discrimination**).

For example:

An employer refuses to give a worker access to facilities because of a protected characteristic.

- In the case of women who are **pregnant** or on **maternity leave**, the test is not whether the woman is treated worse than someone else, but whether she is treated **unfavourably** from the time she tells you she is pregnant to the end of her maternity leave (equality law calls this the **protected period**) because of her pregnancy or a related illness or because of maternity leave.

- You must not do something which has (or would have) a worse impact on a worker and on other people who share a particular protected characteristic than it has on people who do not have the same characteristic. Unless you can show that what you have done, or intend to do, is **objectively justified**, this will be **indirect discrimination**. 'Doing something' can include making a decision, or applying a rule or way of doing things.

For example:

An employer decides to apply a 'no hats or other headgear' rule to staff. If this rule is applied in exactly the same way to every member of staff, Sikhs, Jews, Muslims and Rastafarians who may cover their heads as part of their religion will not be able to meet the requirements of the dress code and may face disciplinary action as a result. Unless the employer can **objectively justify** using the rule, this will be indirect discrimination.

- You must not treat a disabled worker **unfavourably** because of something connected to their disability where you cannot show that what you are doing is **objectively justified**. This only applies if you know or could reasonably have been expected to know that the worker is a disabled person. This is called **discrimination arising from disability**.

For example:

An employer imposes a 'no beards' rule as part of a dress code and tells staff they will be disciplined if they do not shave. An employee is a disabled person who has a skin condition that makes shaving very painful. They have been treated unfavourably (threatened with disciplinary action) because of something arising from their disability (their inability to shave). Unless the employer can objectively justify the requirement, this may well be discrimination arising from disability if they knew, or could reasonably be expected to know, that the employee had this condition. It may also be a failure to make a reasonable adjustment.

- You must not treat a worker worse than another worker because they are **associated with** a person who has a protected characteristic.

For example:

A manager gives the father of a disabled child a bad report because they disapprove of the man's requests to attend his child's hospital appointments.

- You must not treat a worker worse than another worker because you incorrectly think they have a protected characteristic (**perception**).

For example:

An employer incorrectly thinks one of their workers is gay. They tell them they must change their clothes in a dusty stock room rather than in the communal changing area. This is likely to be discrimination because of sexual orientation based on the employer's perception, even though the worker is not gay (if the worker is gay, it would almost certainly be direct discrimination).

- You must not treat a worker badly or **victimise** them because they have complained about discrimination or helped someone else complain or have done anything to uphold their own or someone else's equality law rights.

For example:

A worker helps a colleague with a sexual harassment claim against another worker. Because of this, their manager marks them down at their annual performance review, commenting that they are 'not very loyal'. This would almost certainly be victimisation.

- You must not **harass** a worker.

For example:

A transsexual woman is subjected to offensive 'banter' at work, relating to her gender reassignment. This creates a hostile and offensive atmosphere for her, and is likely to be harassment.

You can read more about preventing and dealing with harassment later in this chapter.

In addition, to make sure that a disabled worker has the same access, as far as is reasonable, to everything that is involved in doing a job as a non-disabled worker, you must make **reasonable adjustments**.

For example:

An employer usually gives workers a written copy of their draft annual appraisal and gives them a morning to read the draft and to send any comments to their line manager. The employer arranges for a worker with severe dyslexia to meet their line manager instead and talk through the draft and provide comments. This is likely to be a reasonable adjustment for the employer to make.

You can read more about making reasonable adjustments to remove **barriers** for disabled people in Chapter 3.

At page 29 'When a worker becomes a disabled person', we look particularly at the process you should follow if one of your existing workers becomes a disabled person or if the impact of a disabled person's impairment changes.

Situations where equality law is different

Sometimes there are situations where equality law applies differently. This guide refers to these as **exceptions**.

There are two exceptions which relate to managing workers and which apply to all employers:

- The possibility that direct age discrimination can be objectively justified.
- Health and safety considerations in relation to pregnancy and maternity.

We only list the exceptions that apply to the situations covered in this guide. There are more exceptions which apply in other situations, for example, when you are recruiting someone to do a job. These are explained in the relevant guide in the series.

In addition to these exceptions, equality law allows you to:

- Use voluntary **positive action** in the way workers are managed. While positive action is most often seen as applying in recruitment, promotion and training, it can also be helpful in addressing workers' different needs when you are managing them.
- Treat disabled people better than non-disabled people.

Age

Age is different from other protected characteristics. If you can show that it is **objectively justified**, you can make a decision based on someone's age, even if this would otherwise be direct discrimination.

However, it is very unusual to be able to **objectively justify** direct age discrimination of this kind. Be careful not to use stereotypes about a person's age to make a judgement about their fitness or ability to do a job.

For example:

An employer disciplines older workers more harshly than younger workers because they expect higher standards of behaviour from older people. This is almost certainly not objectively justifiable and therefore is direct age discrimination against the older worker.

Health and safety and pregnancy and maternity

Different treatment is allowed if it is absolutely necessary to do what health and safety laws say, if these laws are designed to protect women who are pregnant or who have recently given birth or to guard against risks specific to women.

For example:

A night-shift worker who is pregnant is certified by her GP as unable to work nights. Her employer must not dismiss her (this would be direct discrimination because of pregnancy). Instead they need to manage her by either finding her daytime work or, if they cannot do this, putting her on leave with full pay.

The general principle that women should, so far as is possible, not be disadvantaged by their pregnancy or maternity continues to apply.

It is not sex discrimination against a man to make special provision for a woman in connection with her pregnancy or maternity.

Positive action

'Positive action' means the steps that you can take as an employer to address the different needs or past track record of disadvantage or low participation of a people who share a particular protected characteristic.

Although most often thought of in the context of recruitment, promotion or training, positive action is available to you in all employment situations, including how you manage people.

For example:

A large employer pays for specific counselling services for gay and lesbian members of staff who are found to experience greater incidents of homophobic bullying or harassment in the workplace. This is an example of positive action to meet a different need.

Positive action is not the same as '**positive discrimination**' or '**affirmative action**' which equality law does not allow.

Do I have to take positive action?

Taking positive action is voluntary. You do not have to take positive action. However:

- Meeting the different needs of your workforce can help make your staff more productive.
- If you are a **public authority**, positive action may help you meet the **public sector equality duty**.

When can I use positive action?

Equality law says that you have to go through a number of tests to show that positive action is needed.

The tests say that the steps you are allowed to take as part of positive action must:

- be related to the level of disadvantage that exists
- not be simply for the purposes of favouring one group of people over another where there is no different need or disadvantage or under-representation in the workforce.

You must not have a blanket policy or practice of automatically treating people who share a protected characteristic more favourably than those who do not have it in the way that you manage them. You must look at whether it is needed for a particular group in a particular situation.

Explaining why you are using positive action

Positive action may make people who do not have the particular protected characteristic feel they have not been treated as well as the people who are the target of the positive action. It is a good idea for you to explain why you have decided to use positive action. That involves showing a different need or specific disadvantage or under-representation and that you are not doing more than is needed and **proportionate** to tackle those problems.

The sort of positive action steps you can take when you are managing people

The sort of steps to consider include:

- Specific facilities or services for people with a particular protected characteristic.

For example:

- Offering additional support from a mentor to a transsexual person who is undergoing gender reassignment.
- Providing childcare facilities or vouchers.
- If your organisation is large enough, setting up networks for staff who share a particular protected characteristic.

Remember you will need to consider if such measures are needed and are proportionate. You should regularly review what you are doing to make sure positive action is still appropriate.

More detailed information on positive action

What you have to show to be able to use positive action

You can use positive action where you reasonably think (in other words, on the basis of some evidence) that:

- people who share a protected characteristic suffer a disadvantage connected to that characteristic
- people who share a protected characteristic have needs that are different from the needs of people who do not share it, or
- participation in an activity by people who share a protected characteristic is disproportionately low.

Sometimes the reasons for taking action will overlap. For example, people sharing a protected characteristic may be at a disadvantage and that disadvantage may also give rise to a different need or may be reflected in their low level of participation in particular activities.

To deal with the three situations, you can take proportionate action to:

- enable or encourage people to overcome or minimise disadvantage
- meet different needs, or
- enable or encourage participation.

The sort of evidence you can use

You can only decide to use positive action if you reasonably think that a group of people who share a particular protected characteristic is under-represented or disadvantaged or has different needs.

You will need to have some evidence to show that your belief is reasonable, but it does not need to be sophisticated statistical data or research. For example, you could look at the profile of your workforce and compare it to several comparable employers in your area or sector.

Tip for finding out about your workforce

It won't always be obvious that people in a workforce have a particular characteristic, so the best way for you to gather evidence is through **monitoring**.

Other information can be used as well – it does not have to be information you have gathered for yourself.

For example:

National research shows that, in a particular sector, women are more likely to leave their job after a relatively short period of time compared with men. An employer in the sector decides to address this different need by funding a network for their female workers with the aim of providing better support and finding solutions to **barriers** they face.

You can target more than one group with a particular protected characteristic provided that for each group you have reason to believe there is disadvantage, different need or low participation.

What 'disadvantage' means

The law does not define 'disadvantage' but it is generally understood to relate to barriers or obstacles which make it difficult for a person to enter into, or make progress in, a trade, sector or workplace.

For example:

A requirement to work full-time may act as a barrier for women to apply for a job because they need to combine paid work with family responsibilities. Adopting flexible working policies for jobs where this has not usually been offered is a form of positive action to address this disadvantage.

What 'different needs' means

Certain groups with protected characteristics may have needs which differ from those persons who do not have the protected characteristic. A need is something required because it is essential or important, rather than merely desirable to those with a particular characteristic. A need does not have to be unique to those with that particular characteristic, but it must be something that the employer reasonably believes relates to the characteristic.

What 'disproportionately low' means

Low participation may or may not be disproportionate. For you to use positive action to overcome it, participation must be low compared with the level of participation that could reasonably be expected. This might be evidenced by means of statistics, or, where these are not available, by qualitative evidence based on monitoring or consultation.

Treating disabled workers better than non-disabled workers

Separately from positive action, equality law allows you to treat a disabled worker better – or **more favourably** – than a non-disabled worker. This can be done even if the disabled worker is not at a specific disadvantage because of their disability in the particular situation. The reason the law was designed this way is to recognise that in general disabled people face a lot of barriers to participating in work and other activities.

What's next in this guide

The next part of this guide tells you more about how you can avoid all the different types of unlawful discrimination in the following situations:

- Access to facilities at work
- Dress codes
- Managing and appraising staff
- Disciplining staff
- When a worker becomes a disabled person
- Avoiding and dealing with harassment

It also suggests how you can, through equality good practice:

- Avoid and sort out equality-related conflict.

Access to facilities at work

You must avoid unlawful discrimination in allowing workers access to facilities at work.

First, use the information earlier in this chapter to make sure you know what equality law says you must do as an employer.

This does not stop you giving different workers different levels of access to facilities for a reason unrelated to any protected characteristic, such as seniority within an organisation or the nature of the job someone is doing.

However, you need to make sure that your rules about who has access to what facilities are not in themselves unlawfully discriminatory.

For example:

An employer gives a mobile phone to use for work calls to employees who have to travel a lot for work. However, phones are only given to employees who work full-time. This has a worse impact on women who are more likely to work part-time because they are combining childcare responsibilities with their paid employment. Unless the employer can **objectively justify** restricting the access to this particular facility in this way, this is likely to be indirect discrimination because of sex.

What do we mean by facilities?

Facilities can be space or equipment that is necessary for a person or group of workers to carry out their work, or they can be 'extras' that you provide for your workers.

Depending on the size and nature of your organisation, facilities can include:

- access to computers, mobile phones and other technology
- toilet and washing facilities
- sleeping facilities
- kitchen or tea and coffee making facilities
- changing/locker rooms
- showers
- canteens
- parking for cars or bicycles
- prayer and quiet rooms
- facilities for breastfeeding mothers
- crèches and child care
- social clubs
- sport and exercise facilities
- health clinics and occupational health services.

The next section of this guide looks in more detail at what avoiding unlawful discrimination means in relation to:

- Sleeping accommodation
- Single-sex facilities and transsexual workers
- Single-sex facilities and workers' religion or belief
- Facilities provided because of workers' religion or belief
- Reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

Sleeping accommodation

In certain circumstances, you are allowed to discriminate against men or women in providing communal accommodation or benefits, facilities or services linked to that accommodation. Communal accommodation means residential accommodation which has shared sleeping accommodation (eg dormitories) which for reasons of privacy or because of the sanitary arrangements should be used only by workers of the same sex.

You still have to manage the accommodation in a way which is as fair as possible to both men and women. You should take into account the frequency of demand or need for use of the accommodation by one sex or the other. If it is reasonable to do so, you must also alter or extend the accommodation or find other accommodation rather than exclude a worker altogether.

For example:

A residential training course is arranged at a residential care home which has communal sleeping accommodation for its staff who happen to be all men. A female worker wants to attend the course but is refused because there is nowhere suitable for her to sleep. Her employer should arrange alternative accommodation nearby or offer her another training course where there are no such difficulties, if it is reasonable to do so.

You are allowed to discriminate in the above circumstances against workers who are undergoing, have undergone or intend to undergo gender reassignment, but only if you can **objectively justify** doing so. You must consider on a case by case basis whether it is appropriate and necessary to exclude the **transsexual** person. Where the transsexual person is post operative and visually and for all practical purposes indistinguishable from a non-transsexual person of that gender, they should be treated in their acquired gender unless there are compelling reasons not to.

Where someone has a gender recognition certificate they should be treated in their acquired gender for all purposes and therefore should not be excluded from single-sex communal accommodation.

Facilities provided because of workers' religion or belief

It is not a legal requirement for you to provide facilities because of workers' religion or belief, although in some circumstances it may be indirect discrimination if you fail to do so.

Moreover, many employers recognise that it is good practice to provide facilities which cater for the different needs of staff with a particular religion or belief.

These might include making a room which is available to staff for prayer, providing separate fridge shelves for food that needs to be kept separate and, if an organisation provides refreshments or meals for staff, meeting dietary requirements.

For example:

An orthodox Jewish worker in a small firm has a religious requirement that her food cannot come into direct contact with pork or indirect contact through items such as cloths or sponges. As a matter of good practice, after discussion with staff, the employer allocates one shelf of a fridge for this worker's food, and separate cupboard space for the plates and cutlery that she uses. They also introduce a policy that any food brought into the workplace should be stored in sealed containers.

If you do provide this type of facility, remember that the protection from unlawful discrimination because of religion or belief covers both those who have a religion or belief and those who do not.

For example:

An employer decides to provide a prayer room for use by staff who hold religious beliefs. This risks unlawful discrimination against staff who do not hold a religious belief, who do not have access to this additional facility. A better approach may be to provide a quiet room for use by any staff for personal reflection and by people of any religion or belief or of none.

If your workplace has a canteen or restaurant, it would be good practice to make sure that special dietary needs because of religion or belief, such as halal and kosher, can be met, but it is unlikely to be a legal requirement.

Single-sex facilities and workers' religion or belief

If you provide workers with changing facilities or showers, you must do this in a way that avoids unlawful discrimination because of religion or belief.

For example:

An employer only provides communal changing facilities for staff to change into their uniforms. This places staff of a particular religion which requires its followers not to change their clothing in the presence of others, even of the same sex, at a disadvantage compared to people who do not follow this religion. They have to change their clothes in toilet cubicles, which is unhygienic. Unless the employer can **objectively justify** the provision of the communal changing facilities, this may be indirect discrimination.

Reasonable adjustments and disabled workers

When you provide facilities for your workers, you must make reasonable adjustments for disabled people who work for you. Your aim should be to make sure that a disabled worker can, as far as is reasonable, access the facilities on the same basis and to the same extent as a non-disabled worker. In some circumstances, you may need to provide additional facilities especially for a disabled worker.

For example:

- An employer provides a worker with diabetes with a private room to administer insulin.
- An employer provides a disabled worker with a small fridge in which to store medication. The employer can do this even if non-disabled workers complain that they do not have a fridge in which to store food and drinks.
- An employer provides a disabled worker with a small rest room and couch where they can lie down and take rests. The employer does not need to provide similar facilities to non-disabled workers.

You can read more about making reasonable adjustments to remove **barriers** for disabled people in Chapter 3.

Your questions answered

Q. Do I have to provide facilities in my workplace for a mother who has returned from maternity leave but is still breastfeeding her baby?

A. Yes, you have a legal duty to provide suitable rest facilities for breastfeeding mothers to use. Although there is no legal right for workers to take time off to breastfeed, you should try to accommodate mothers who wish to do this, bearing in mind that:

- you have a legal duty of care to remove any hazards for a worker who is breastfeeding, and this can include stress and fatigue, and
- a refusal to allow a woman to express milk or to adjust her working conditions to enable her to continue to breastfeed may amount to unlawful sex discrimination.

Further information and guidance is available from the Health and Safety Executive's guide for employers on *New and Expectant Mothers at Work*.

Dress codes

You must avoid unlawful discrimination in requiring workers to dress or modify their personal appearance in a particular way.

First, use the information earlier in this chapter to make sure you know what equality law says you must do as an employer.

This does not stop you having a dress code, but you must be careful that any dress code and the way it is applied does not either:

- directly discriminate against a worker, or
- indirectly discriminate against a worker and other people who share the same protected characteristic as them, unless its requirements can be **objectively justified**.

Restrictions on dress, including hairstyles, could be justifiable for health and safety reasons or for other reasons that relate to your organisation's ethos.

For example:

- An employer requires long, loose hair to be tied back to avoid danger from machinery in an industrial plant.
- Staff working in a kitchen must tie their hair back and cover it for hygiene reasons.
- An employer providing healthcare services stops staff wearing long sleeves or jewellery to reduce the transmission of infection from one patient to another.
- Staff working in a clothing company's stores are required to wear clothes made by the company itself to show customers what the clothing looks like when worn.

There are a number of other legitimate reasons for you to have a dress code – for example, a requirement not to wear jeans if a worker is in a customer-facing role or to wear a uniform that identifies staff to members of the public.

The main question to ask is whether what a member of staff wears affects their ability to do their job effectively.

If the answer to this question is 'yes', and you want to have a dress code as a result, then you must apply your dress code in a way that avoids unlawful discrimination.

Sex discrimination and dress codes

Having different rules about clothing or appearance for men and women can result in claims of sex discrimination. For example, if there is a dress code that applies to women but not to men or if the dress code is applied more strictly to one sex than the other, this could be direct discrimination. However, it has been established in the courts that employers do not have to impose exactly the same dress code on men and women. If the dress code applies 'conventional standards of dress and appearance', then it will be seen as applying an even handed approach between men and women

The standard of dress or appearance set should be the same for both women and men, such as 'business dress' or 'casual clothes'.

Religion or belief discrimination and dress codes

Imposing the same rule on everyone may indirectly discriminate against workers with a particular religion or belief.

For example:

An employer introduces a 'no beards' policy, saying this is for health and safety reasons in a plant producing food products. The policy has a disproportionate impact on workers whose religious beliefs require them not to be clean shaven. Unless the employer can **objectively justify** the policy, this will be indirect discrimination because of religion or belief. A better approach might be for the employer to provide workers with 'beard nets' to avoid the risk of hair falling into the food.

Some religions require their followers to dress in a modest way. A dress code which requires a shirt to be tucked inside trousers or a skirt may conflict with that requirement as it accentuates body shape. However, if the individual is allowed to wear the shirt over the outside of the trousers or a (long) skirt it may be quite acceptable. The question to ask is whether any requirement to stick to a dress code which does not allow a worker to do this can be **objectively justified**.

Some religions require their followers to wear particular items of jewellery or clothing. A ban on all jewellery or on the particular item of clothing may affect someone who follows one of these religions. If the wearing of the jewellery or item of clothing is not a matter of an individual follower's personal preference, but something that, if they were stopped, would place the individual and others who share the same religious belief at a particular disadvantage compared to others, then a ban on all jewellery or on that item of clothing may amount to indirect discrimination unless you can **objectively justify** it (for example, for genuine health and safety reasons).

For example:

A bank bans its workers from wearing any type of jewellery whilst at work. This is not for health and safety reasons but because the branch manager does not like body piercings. A Sikh worker who wears a Kara bracelet as an integral part of her religion complains about the rule. To avoid a claim of indirect discrimination, the employer considers allowing an exception to this rule, as in these circumstances, the employer may find it difficult to **objectively justify** the blanket ban.

Disability discrimination and dress codes

When you put in place a dress code for your workers, you must make **reasonable adjustments** for any disabled people who work for you.

For example:

An employer has a policy of requiring all customer-facing male staff to wear a tie. This disadvantages a man with a skin condition that is made worse by contact with tight clothing. As a reasonable adjustment the employer allows the man to work on the reception desk in an open-necked shirt, but still requires him to be of smart appearance.

You can read more about making reasonable adjustments to remove **barriers** for disabled people in Chapter 3.

You also need to make sure that you avoid:

- **direct discrimination** because of disability.
- **indirect discrimination** because of disability.
- **discrimination arising from disability.**

Good practice tip: implementing a dress code at work

To avoid complaints of unlawful discrimination, consider whether your dress code is necessary. If it is, then:

- explain the reasons behind it
- always keep in mind how a dress code would impact on a worker's ability to do their job
- consult with workers when developing the code, including with a recognised trade union if there is one

- provide a way for workers to appeal against a decision not to allow them to wear particular dress or attire
- keep it separate from the health and safety policy on protective clothing
- apply it consistently.

Managing and appraising staff

Every organisation manages the performance of its workers to make sure they are getting their job done in the way that the employer wants them to.

You may be managing workers' performance formally through an appraisal scheme, with regular 'line management' meetings and annual reports.

Or you may do it informally, just by talking over a worker's performance as they carry out their job.

Many organisations will have a mixture of both formal and informal management and appraisal.

You must avoid unlawful discrimination in the way that you manage and appraise workers' performance.

First, use the information earlier in this guide to make sure you know what equality law says you must do as an employer.

Good practice tip: formal or informal appraisal?

It is not a legal requirement for you to use a formal appraisal system.

But using one can help you to be sure that your staff are being assessed on the basis of whether they are getting the job done or not, rather than on more subjective tests, and this can help you if you need to defend yourself against a complaint of unlawful discrimination in the way someone has been managed and appraised.

Disciplining staff

You must avoid unlawful discrimination in the way that you discipline your workers, in other words, telling them they need to improve something about their work.

First, use the information earlier in this guide to make sure you know what equality law says you must do as an employer.

Making sure a disciplinary process is fair

This guide only tells you about equality law. There are other procedures which you need to follow to make sure a disciplinary process is fair. You can find out more about these from Acas, whose contact details are in *Further sources of information and advice*. Following the procedures will also help you avoid unlawful discrimination.

Protected characteristics and disciplinary procedures

You must not discipline someone, formally or informally, simply because they have a protected characteristic. This would be unlawful.

For example:

A worker aged 21 and a worker aged 42 are both sending and receiving personal emails at work and in working hours. Their employer gives the 21-year-old a written warning because they think that 'a younger person needs a firmer telling off', while the 42-year-old is informally told to be more careful. This is likely to be direct age discrimination against the younger worker unless the employer can **objectively justify** it, which is unlikely.

Of course, this does not mean people with protected characteristics are immune from the usual performance and conduct standards that apply in your organisation.

For example:

A male worker and a female worker are both sending and receiving personal emails at work and in working hours. Their employer gives them both an oral warning. The man says (believing it to be true) 'you would not take the situation as seriously as this if I was a woman'. By applying the same standards to both workers and having a valid reason for the disciplinary action, the employer has acted without discrimination and can show the man that his allegation is not true.

However, you need to be careful to make sure that what happened during a previous disciplinary situation does not lead to a complaint of victimisation.

For example:

The male worker who complained in the previous example must not be treated badly because of his complaint. This means that if there is a need to discipline him again, the same action must be taken against him as would be taken against someone who had not complained. To protect themselves against allegations of victimisation, the employer will find it helpful if they can demonstrate that procedures have been applied consistently; keeping records of what has been done in every disciplinary and grievance procedure will help with this.

Reasonable adjustments for disabled workers

If a worker is a disabled person, you must make reasonable adjustments so that they can participate in the disciplinary procedure, as far as is reasonable, to the same standard as a non-disabled person. This is especially important when it comes to completing and/or reading documents and attending meetings. For example, they might need:

- Documents provided in a different format – perhaps on audio CD, or in large print or in Braille, for people with a visual impairment.
- Meetings to be held in an accessible room, for people with a mobility impairment.
- A British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter if they are a Deaf person who uses BSL.
- Someone to help them complete a form if they have dyslexia.
- A personal assistant with them, in addition to their ‘official companion’ (the trade union representative or colleague who may address the meeting for them, if they decide to have one). They may need a personal assistant for this situation even if they do not normally use one at work.
- Changes to the process, such as more breaks to ask for an explanation from their official companion, if they have a learning disability.

You must also think about whether you should make reasonable adjustments to the standards you apply to workers where these standards place disabled workers at a **substantial** disadvantage compared to people who are not disabled.

If necessary, you must make reasonable adjustments to what you do as well as the way that you do it.

For example:

A disabled worker has a condition that causes them severe pain. One day, the worker shouts at their employer. This is completely out of character, and is because of the pain they are experiencing. Usually, this would lead to a worker being considered for disciplinary action. However, their employer knows about the worker's disability and, as a reasonable adjustment, operates a higher threshold before considering their behaviour to be unacceptable. (They have also encouraged the disabled worker to be open with colleagues about their condition so that other staff understand the reason for the difference in treatment.) This does not mean that the disabled worker can behave as they like; the employer only has to make reasonable adjustments, so if their behaviour is unacceptably bad, the employer still has the option of disciplinary action. If this was the case, although the disciplinary action might amount to treating the disabled worker unfavourably because of something arising from their disability (their short temper), the employer would probably be able to **objectively justify** their approach.

You can read more about making reasonable adjustments to remove **barriers** for disabled people in Chapter 3.

When a worker becomes a disabled person

If someone who works for you becomes a disabled person, this may mean making changes to the way they do their job.

First, use the information earlier in this guide to make sure you know what equality law says you must do as an employer.

In this situation, you must think about whether there are reasonable adjustments you need to make so that, as far as is reasonable, the disabled person has the same access to everything that is involved in doing a job as a non-disabled worker.

You are under a positive and proactive duty to take steps to remove or reduce or prevent the obstacles a disabled worker faces.

Sometimes this will involve making adjustments to the way that you do things or to your premises. It could mean providing the worker with extra or adapted equipment.

You should also review any existing adjustments for a disabled person if the effects of their condition change or if they change jobs.

It will benefit your organisation to keep the worker if reasonable adjustments can be made to enable this to happen. You will be able to keep their knowledge and skills to benefit your organisation.

In addition, the cost of keeping the worker will often be less than the cost of recruiting and training a new member of staff.

Many factors will be involved in deciding what adjustments to make and they will depend on individual circumstances. Different people will need different changes, even if they appear to have similar impairments.

You only have to make adjustments where you are aware – or should reasonably be aware – that an employee has a disability.

It is advisable for you to discuss the adjustments with the disabled person. Otherwise the changes may not be effective. You may also need to get expert advice. This process is sometimes called an 'Employment Retention Assessment'.

There is a lot more information about making reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for disabled people in Chapter 3.

Avoiding and dealing with harassment

What is harassment?

Harassment at work is sometimes linked to bullying. Bullying behaviour may or may not amount to harassment in equality law.

For behaviour to count as harassment in equality law, it has to be one of three types:

Type 1: Unwanted behaviour related to the protected characteristics listed below

Type 2: Sexual harassment

Type 3: Less favourable treatment because of submission to or rejection of previous sex or gender reassignment harassment.

Type 1

The first type of harassment is unwanted behaviour related to age, disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, religion or belief or sexual orientation, which has the purpose or effect of:

- violating a person's dignity, or
- creating for that person an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

'Unwanted behaviour' can include any kind of behaviour, including spoken or written words or abuse, imagery, graffiti, physical gestures, facial expressions, mimicry, jokes, pranks, acts affecting a person's surroundings or other physical behaviour.

'Related to' a protected characteristic covers situations:

- where the harassment is related to the worker's own protected characteristic, or
- where a person is abusive to other workers generally, but a particular worker feels harassed because they have a protected characteristic.

For example:

During a training session attended by male and female workers, a male trainer directs a number of remarks of a sexual nature to the group as a whole. A female worker finds the comments offensive and humiliating to her as a woman. She can claim harassment even though the remarks were not specifically directed at her.

- where the worker who is harassed does not have the relevant protected characteristic. For example:
 - A worker might be incorrectly perceived to have a characteristic or they may be associated with a person who has a characteristic, such as a family member.
 - A worker is known not to have the protected characteristic, but nevertheless is subjected to harassment related to that characteristic.

For example:

A worker is subjected to homophobic banter and name calling, even though his colleagues know he is not gay. Because the form of the abuse relates to a protected characteristic, ie sexual orientation, this could amount to harassment related to sexual orientation.

The unwanted behaviour does not have to be specifically aimed at the person who finds it violates their dignity or creates for them an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

For example:

A white worker in an office where most of the other workers are also white finds the habitual racist comments of another member of staff also creates a hostile and intimidating environment for them. This may amount to harassment.

Male members of staff looking at pornography on work computers may create an intimidating or offensive environment for their female colleagues. Even though they do not specifically draw the women's attention to the pornography or speak about it with them, this could amount to harassment.

It may also be harassment where the unwanted conduct is *related to* the protected characteristic, but does not take place *because of* the protected characteristic.

For example:

A female worker has a relationship with her male manager. On seeing her with another male colleague, the manager suspects she is having an affair. As a result, the manager makes her working life difficult by continually criticising her work in an offensive manner. The behaviour is not because of the sex of the female worker, but because of the suspected affair, which is related to her sex. This could amount to harassment related to sex.

Type 2

The second type of harassment is sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment takes place when a person does something of a sexual nature (which might be verbal, non-verbal or physical) which has the purpose or effect of:

- violating a person's dignity, or
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

'Of a sexual nature' can include unwelcome sexual advances, touching, forms of sexual assault, sexual jokes, displaying pornographic photographs or drawings or sending emails with material of a sexual nature.

Type 3

The third type of harassment is where a worker is treated badly because they either submit to or reject sexual harassment or harassment related to sex or gender reassignment.

For example:

A shopkeeper propositions one of his shop assistants, she rejects his advances and is then turned down for promotion which she would have got if she had accepted her boss's advances. This amounts to harassment.

This kind of harassment also applies where the person who treats the worker badly is someone different from the person carrying out the original harassment.

Other things to remember about all the types of harassment:

- The word 'unwanted' means 'unwelcome' or 'uninvited'. This does not mean that express objection must be made to the conduct before it is considered unwanted. A worker does not need to make it clear in advance that offensive or stereotyped remarks are unwanted.

For example:

A project manager of Indian ethnic origin has lived in England all her life. After she gives notice that she intends to resign from her job with a company, the Director comments, 'We will probably bump into each other in future, unless you are married off in India'. This remark is unwanted conduct related to the worker's ethnic origin which, though unintended, has the effect of violating the worker's dignity. It is reasonable for the worker to take what was said as a stereotypical view of Indian women and to be offended.

In some situations, a woman may need to make clear that unexceptional behaviour is unwanted, before it can be considered harassment.

For example:

A woman is asked for a drink after work on a few occasions by her work colleague. She makes an excuse and says she cannot come. On the third occasion, she explicitly states that she does not want to go for a drink with him at all. Her colleague continues to ask her. His continued invitations after she has stated clearly that she does not want to go out with him may be harassment. On the first few occasions, before this was clear, his invitations are unlikely to be considered harassment.

- A serious one-off incident may also amount to harassment.

- If the person carrying out the unwanted behaviour actually intends to violate the other person's dignity or create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them, this will of itself amount to harassment and you will not have to consider the effect on the individual.
- If the person carrying out the unwanted behaviour does not intend to violate someone's dignity or create a hostile environment and so on, the behaviour will amount to harassment if it has the effect of creating such an environment and it is reasonable to consider that the behaviour would have that effect.

For example:

An employee with a learning disability is teased by colleagues who tell him to go to the stores and ask for non-existent items such as a 'long weight' as they think he will fall for the trick. The worker finds it humiliating so is likely to be able to bring a claim for harassment even though his colleagues may not have intended to create a hostile environment for him or undermine his dignity.

Harassment of your workers by people who don't work for you

As an employer, you can be held responsible for harassment of a worker by someone who doesn't work for you, such as a customer. This is sometimes called 'third party harassment'.

You will become legally responsible if they know that their worker has been harassed by someone who does not work for you twice before but fail to take reasonable steps to protect the worker from further harassment.

It does not have to be the same person harassing the worker on each occasion.

For example:

An employer is aware that a female bar worker has been sexually harassed on two separate occasions by two different customers. Once the employer has been told or has found out about the first two occasions, they will be liable for a third act of harassment towards the same bar worker, if they fail to take reasonably practicable steps to prevent further harassment. This will be the case even if the third act of harassment is committed by an unconnected customer.

Good practice tip for avoiding being held responsible for third party harassment

Don't wait for your worker to make two complaints about harassment. Deal with every incident of harassment when it takes place. Steps you could take include:

- making sure that any visitors, clients, suppliers or customers who come into contact with your workers or job applicants are also aware of the harassment policy and behave in line with it, for example, using signs in your reception area about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour
- speaking to the person who has harassed your worker to tell them their behaviour was not acceptable. In some cases, it may be appropriate to stop the person visiting your premises to make sure your staff are protected
- including a term in all contracts with third parties notifying them of your policy on harassment and requiring them to adhere to it
- encouraging workers to report any acts of harassment by third parties and taking action on every reported complaint
- putting notification of unacceptable behaviour on your website, on computer 'pop up' messages, on any plasma screens in your workplace
- including information regarding protection from third party harassment and the complaints procedure in your induction training for new staff, in any staff handbook or information available to service users
- including information on protection from third party harassment in any training for your key stakeholders
- amending your harassment policies to notify staff of the protection from third party harassment and what forms it could take
- speaking to frontline staff, particularly those most at risk such as reception, to check that the protection and complaints procedure is known and whether they have any ideas about how to improve awareness of the policy.

Harassment by people who work for you

You can also be held legally responsible for harassment by people who work for you. This applies whether the person who works for you harasses another of your workers or harasses someone like a customer, client or service user who could also bring a claim against you.

So it is important you take all reasonable steps to make sure your workers know that harassment will not be tolerated, both because of the impact it has on the person who is harassed, but also because of the impact it could have on your organisation.

If the person who harasses someone else is your **employee**, equality law says that you will be held legally responsible unless you can show that you took all reasonable steps to prevent them harassing someone.

If the person who harasses someone else is your **agent** (someone else who is doing something for you but with whom you don't have a contract of employment), you will be held legally responsible if they are acting under your authority.

It does not matter if you know or approve about the discriminatory acts of your employees or agents, you could still be liable.

There is more information about when you are legally responsible for what other people do in Chapter 2.

Good practice tips: What might 'all reasonable steps' to prevent harassment mean?

Equality law does not specify exactly what 'reasonable steps' are, but these steps are likely to help:

- Put in place a harassment policy (sometimes this will be included in a wider **equality policy**).
- Involve staff in the policy-making process, including agreeing the policy with a trade union and/or other worker representatives if appropriate.
- Make sure your workers are aware of the policy's existence and of their responsibilities to make it work, for example, by providing them with training.
- Make sure that any visitors, clients, suppliers or customers who come into contact with your workers or job applicants are also aware of the policy and behave in line with it, for example, using signs in your reception area.
- Use your policy to explain the steps you are taking to prevent harassment.
- What a harassment policy should do:
 - Describe the protected characteristics and clearly state that any harassment of workers or job applicants related to any of these characteristics will not be tolerated.
 - Make it clear that harassment will be treated as a disciplinary offence.
 - Clearly explain how a worker can make a complaint, informally and formally.
 - Make it clear that complaints of harassment will be dealt with within a reasonable time, treated seriously and confidentially, and that someone complaining will be protected from victimisation.
 - Describe what support is available to a worker if they think they are being harassed, for example, counselling or a worker assistance programme.

- Describe any training/other resources available for workers to help them spot and stop harassment.
- Describe how your policy will be implemented, reviewed and monitored.
- Build in a review process; this is particularly important if someone has complained of harassment, as you will need to make sure that your policy was effective in dealing with the incident.

Good practice tips for dealing with complaints of harassment

- Handle a complaint of harassment with sensitivity and with respect for everyone's rights.
- Do not dismiss what is said to have happened as the person complaining being 'oversensitive' without investigating exactly what has gone on and assessing whether it comes within the equality law definition of harassment.
- Try not to require someone complaining of harassment to repeatedly recount the events complained of where this is unnecessary, as this may be difficult and upsetting for them.
- If the worker who says they have been harassed wants to make an anonymous complaint (so that the person they are complaining about will not know who has complained) then:
 - Try to maintain their confidentiality while you find out what has happened and during any formal disciplinary proceedings you decide are necessary.
 - Remember though that the person who is said to have harassed the worker is entitled to know the details of what they are said to have done so they can defend themselves.
 - Try to make sure that workers not involved do not find out about what has happened.
- There is more general information in Chapter 2 about what to do if someone says they've been discriminated against.

Avoiding and sorting out equality-related conflict through good practice

Conflicts at work between people who have different characteristics or different aspects of the same characteristic are not especially common. Most people will get on with each other at work, because they recognise that this is the best way of getting the job done. So even people who disagree strongly – for example, they have very different religious or philosophical beliefs, or disapprove of someone else’s lifestyle, whatever that lifestyle is – will put their differences aside and work together.

Very occasionally, people’s differences because of their protected characteristics will cause conflict.

But unlawful discrimination cannot be excused just because the person who discriminates is sincerely motivated by, for example, their religion or belief. Everyone in your workplace has a responsibility to do what equality law says they must do.

The advice this section of the guide contains is not a legal requirement but it may help you avoid complaints of unlawful discrimination from your workers because of what another worker has said or done.

General information about dealing with conflicts at work

You can find out more about dealing with conflicts at work from Acas, whose contact details are in *Further sources of information and advice*.

The main way you can help avoid an equality-related conflict is by making sure all your workers understand what equality law means for them and how they must behave towards other people while they are at work.

Possible ways to make sure your staff know what equality law means for them are by:

- telling staff when they start working for you – and checking from time to time that staff remember what you told them, for example, by seeing if/how it has made a difference to how they behave. This could be a very simple checklist you talk them through, you could use some of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's guides to equality law, or you could arrange for them to have equality training
- writing down the standards of behaviour you expect using an **equality policy**
- including a requirement about behaving in line with equality law in every worker's **terms of employment** or other contract, and making it clear that breaches of equality law will be treated as disciplinary matters or breaches of contract.

You can read more about equality training and equality policies in the Equality and Human Rights Commission guide: *Good equality practice for employers: equality policies, equality training and monitoring*.

- Making sure you respond appropriately to complaints about unlawful discrimination will also help. You can read more about what to do if someone says they've been discriminated against in Chapter 2.

2. When you are responsible for what other people do

As an **employer** or in another work situation, it is not just how you personally behave that matters.

If another person who is:

- employed by you, or
- carrying out your instructions to do something (who the law calls your agent)

does something that is unlawful discrimination, **harassment** or **victimisation**, you can be held legally responsible for what they have done.

This part of the guide explains:

- When you can be held legally responsible for someone else's unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation
- How you can reduce the risk that you will be held legally responsible
- How you can make sure your employees and agents know how equality law applies to what they are doing
- When workers employed by you or your agents may be personally liable
- What happens if a person instructs someone else to do something that is against equality law
- What happens if a person helps someone else to do something that is against equality law
- What happens if you try to stop equality law applying to a situation.

When you can be held legally responsible for someone else's unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation

As an **employer**, you are legally responsible for acts of discrimination, harassment and victimisation carried out by workers who are employed by you in the course of their employment.

You are also legally responsible as the 'principal' for the acts of your **agents** done with your authority. Your agent is someone you have instructed to do something on your behalf, but who is not employed by you. It does not matter whether you have a formal contract with them.

As long as:

- the worker was acting in the course of their employment – in other words, while they were doing their job, or
- your agent was acting within the general scope of your authority – in other words, while they were carrying out your instructions

it does not matter whether or not you:

- knew about or
- approved of

what the worker or agent did.

For example:

- A shopkeeper goes abroad for three months and leaves a worker employed by him in charge of the shop. This worker harasses a colleague with a learning disability, by constantly criticising how they do their work. The colleague leaves the job as a result of this unwanted conduct. This could amount to harassment related to disability and the shopkeeper could be responsible for the actions of the worker.
- An employer engages a financial consultant to act on their behalf in dealing with their finances internally and with external bodies, using the employer's headed notepaper. While working on the accounts, the consultant sexually harasses an accounts assistant. The consultant would probably be considered an agent of the employer and the employer is likely to be responsible for the harassment.

However, you will not be held legally responsible if you can show that:

- you took all reasonable steps to prevent a worker employed by you acting unlawfully
- an agent acted outside the scope of your authority (in other words, that they did something so different from what you asked them to do that they could no longer be thought of as acting on your behalf).

How you can reduce the risk that you will be held legally responsible

You can reduce the risk that you will be held legally responsible for the behaviour of the people who work for you if you tell them how to behave so that they avoid unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

This does not just apply to situations where you and your staff are dealing face-to-face with other people in a work situation, but also to how you plan what happens.

When you or your workers or agents are planning what happens to people in a work situation, you need to make sure that your decisions, rules or ways of doing things are not:

- **Direct discrimination**, or
- **Indirect discrimination** that you cannot **objectively justify**, or
- **Discrimination arising from disability** that you cannot **objectively justify**, or
- **Harassment**

and that you have made **reasonable adjustments** for any disabled people who are working for you or applying for a job with you or in another work situation you are in charge of.

So it is important to make sure that your workers and agents know how equality law applies to what they are doing.

How you can make sure your workers and agents know how equality law applies to what they are doing

Tell your workers and agents what equality law says about how they must and must not behave while they are working for you.

Below are some examples of reasonable steps you can take to prevent unlawful discrimination or harassment happening in your workplace:

- telling your workers and agents when they start working for you – and checking from time to time that they remember what you told them, for example, by seeing if/how it has made a difference to how they behave. This could be a very simple checklist you talk them through, or you could give them this guide, or you could arrange for them to have **equality training**
- writing down the standards of behaviour you expect in an **equality policy**
- including a requirement about behaving in line with equality law in every worker's **terms of employment** or other contract, and making it clear that breaches of equality law will be treated as disciplinary matters or breaches of contract.

You can read more about equality training and equality policies in the Equality and Human Rights Commission guide: *Good equality practice for employers: equality policies, equality training and monitoring*.

Using written terms of employment for employees

Employment law says you must, as an employer, give every **employee** a written statement of the main terms of their employment. So you could include a sentence in these written terms that tells the person working for you they must meet the requirements of equality law, making it clear that a failure to do so will be a disciplinary offence.

Obviously, if you do this, it is important that you also tell the employee what it means. You could use an equality policy to do this, or you could just discuss it with them, or you could give them this guide to read. But it is important that they are clear on what equality law says they must and must not do, or you may be held legally responsible for what they do.

Remember, if the employee is a disabled person, it may be a reasonable adjustment to give them the information in a way that they can understand.

If you receive a complaint claiming unlawful discrimination by one of your employees or someone else in a work situation you are in charge of, you can use the written terms to show that you have taken a reasonable step to prevent unlawful discrimination and harassment occurring. However, you will have to do more than this to actively prevent discrimination.

If someone does complain, you should investigate what has taken place and, if appropriate, you may need to discipline the person who has unlawfully discriminated against or harassed someone else, give them an informal or formal warning, provide training or even dismiss them; the action you take will obviously vary according to the nature of the breach and how serious it was.

If you do find that a worker employed by you has unlawfully discriminated against someone else in a work situation, then look again at what you are telling your staff to make sure they know what equality law means for how they behave towards the people they are working with.

You can read more about what to do if someone says they've been discriminated against in Chapter 4.

Good practice tip for how you and your staff should behave

Ideally, you want anyone who works for you to treat everyone they come across with dignity and respect. This will help you provide a good working environment (not just without discriminating but more generally) and can make your workers more productive.

If your staff do unlawfully discriminate against their fellow workers or others in a work situation, your reputation may suffer even if the person on the receiving end does not bring a legal case against you.

When your workers or agents may be personally liable

A worker employed by you or your agent may be personally responsible for their own acts of discrimination, harassment or victimisation carried out during their employment or while acting with your authority. This applies where either:

- you are also liable as their employer or principal, or
- you would be responsible but you show that:
 - you took all reasonable steps to prevent your worker discriminating against, harassing or victimising someone, or
 - that your agent acted outside the scope of your authority.

For example:

A factory worker racially harasses their colleague. The employer would be liable for the worker's actions, but is able to show that they took all reasonable steps to stop the harassment. The colleague can still claim compensation against the factory worker in an Employment Tribunal.

But there is an exception to this. A worker or agent will *not* be responsible if their employer or principal has told them that there is nothing wrong with what they are doing and the employee or agent reasonably believes this to be true.

It is a criminal offence, punishable by a fine, for an employer or principal to make a false statement which an employee or agent relies upon to carry out an unlawful act.

What happens if a person instructs someone else to do something that is against equality law

An employer or principal must not instruct, cause or induce a worker employed by them or an agent to discriminate against, harass or victimise another worker, or to attempt to do so.

'Causing' or 'inducing' someone to do something can include situations where someone is made to do something or persuaded to do it, even if they were not directly instructed to do it.

Both:

- the person who receives the instruction or is caused or induced to discriminate against, harass or victimise, and
- the person who is on the receiving end of the discrimination, harassment or victimisation

have a claim against the person giving the instructions if they suffer loss or harm as a result of the instructing or causing or inducing of the discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

This applies whether or not the instruction is actually carried out.

What happens if a person helps someone else to do something that is against equality law

A person must not help someone else carry out an act which the person helping knows is unlawful under equality law.

However, if the person helping has been told by the person they help that the act is lawful and they reasonably believe this to be true, they will not be legally responsible.

It is a criminal offence, punishable by a fine, to make a false statement which another person relies on to help to carry out an unlawful act.

What happens if you try to stop equality law applying to a situation

You cannot stop equality law applying to a situation if it does in fact apply. For example, there is no point in making a statement in a contract of employment that equality law does not apply. The statement will not have any legal effect. That is, it will not be possible to enforce or rely on a term in a contract that tries to do this. This is the case even if the other person has stated they have understood the term and/or they have agreed to it.

For example:

- A worker's contract includes a term saying that they cannot bring a claim in an Employment Tribunal. Their employer sexually harasses them. The term in their contract does not stop them bringing a claim for sexual harassment in the Employment Tribunal.
- A business partner's partnership agreement contains a term that says 'equality law does not apply to this agreement'. The partner develops a visual impairment and needs reasonable adjustments to remove barriers to their continuing to do their job. The other partners instead ask them to resign from the partnership. The partner can still bring a claim in the Employment Tribunal for a failure to make reasonable adjustments and unlawful disability discrimination.
- An applicant for a job is told 'equality law does not apply to this business, it is too small'. She still agrees to go to work there. When she becomes pregnant, she is dismissed. She can still bring a claim in the Employment Tribunal for pregnancy discrimination.

3. The duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people

Equality law recognises that bringing about equality for disabled people may mean changing the way in which employment is structured, the removal of physical barriers and/or providing extra support for a disabled worker.

This is the **duty to make reasonable adjustments**.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments aims to make sure that, as far as is reasonable, a disabled worker has the same access to everything that is involved in doing and keeping a job as a non-disabled person.

When the duty arises, you are under a positive and proactive duty to take steps to remove or reduce or prevent the obstacles a disabled worker or job applicant faces.

You only have to make adjustments where you are aware – or should reasonably be aware – that a worker has a disability.

Many of the adjustments you can make will not be particularly expensive, and you are not required to do more than what is reasonable for you to do. What is reasonable for you to do depends, among other factors, on the size and nature of your organisation.

If, however, you do nothing, and a disabled worker can show that there were **barriers** you should have identified and reasonable adjustments you could have made, they can bring a claim against you in the Employment Tribunal, and you may be ordered to pay them compensation as well as make the reasonable adjustments.

In particular, the need to make adjustments for an individual worker:

- must not be a reason not to promote a worker if they are the best person for the job with the adjustments in place
- must not be a reason to dismiss a worker
- must be considered in relation to every aspect of a worker's job

provided the adjustments are reasonable for you to make.

Many factors will be involved in deciding what adjustments to make and they will depend on individual circumstances. Different people will need different changes, even if they appear to have similar impairments.

It is advisable for you to discuss the adjustments with the disabled worker, otherwise the adjustments may not be effective.

The rest of this section looks at the detail of the duty and gives examples of the sorts of adjustments you could make. It looks at:

- Which disabled people does the duty apply to?
- Finding out if someone is a disabled person
- The three requirements of the duty
- Are disabled people at a substantial disadvantage?
- Changes to policies and the way your organisation usually does things
- Dealing with physical barriers
- Providing extra equipment or aids
- Making sure an adjustment is effective
- Who pays for reasonable adjustments?
- What is meant by 'reasonable'
- Reasonable adjustments in practice
- Specific situations
 - Employment services
 - Occupational pensions.

Which disabled people does the duty apply to?

The duty applies to any disabled person who:

- works for you, or
- applies for a job with you, or
- tells you they are thinking of applying for a job with you.

It applies to all stages and aspects of employment. So, for example, where the duty arises you must make reasonable adjustments to disciplinary or dismissal procedures and decisions. It does not matter if the worker was a disabled person when they began working for you, or if they have become a disabled person while working for you.

The duty may also apply after employment has ended.

The duty also applies in relation to **employment services**, with some differences which are explained later in this chapter.

Reasonable adjustments may also be required in relation to occupational pension schemes. This is explained later in this chapter.

Finding out if someone is a disabled person

You only have to make these changes where you know or could reasonably be expected to know that a worker is a disabled person and is – or is likely to be – at a substantial disadvantage as a result. This means doing everything you can reasonably be expected to do to find out.

For example:

A worker's performance has recently got worse and they have started being late for work. Previously they had a very good record of punctuality and performance. Rather than just telling them they must improve, their employer talks to them in private. This allows the employer to check whether the change in performance could be for a disability-related reason. The worker says that they are experiencing a recurrence of depression and are not sleeping well which is making them late. Together, the employer and the worker agree to change the worker's hours slightly while they are in this situation and that the worker can ask for help whenever they are finding it difficult to start or complete a task. These are reasonable adjustments.

This does not, however, mean asking intrusive questions or ones that violate someone's dignity. Think about privacy and confidentiality in what you ask and how you ask.

Good practice tip: be prepared for making reasonable adjustments

Equality law says that you must make reasonable adjustments if you know that a worker is a disabled person, that they need adjustments and that those adjustments are reasonable.

You don't have to put reasonable adjustments in place just in case one of your existing workers becomes a disabled person.

But you may want to be prepared:

- Think in advance about what the core tasks of a particular job are and what adjustments might be possible (before starting a recruitment or promotion exercise, for example).
- Put in place a process for working out reasonable adjustments in the event of an existing worker becoming disabled or a disabled person starting work with the organisation, before being faced with an individual situation.
- Make sure you know in advance what support is available to disabled people from Access to Work.
- If you are making renovations or alterations to your building, thinking about how you can make the new parts of your building more accessible for disabled people will help you if you later employ a disabled person and will allow you to attract more potential employees.

As well as avoiding a possible Employment Tribunal claim, being open to making reasonable adjustments means you may be able to avoid losing the skills of a worker who has become a disabled person just by making a few changes.

The three requirements of the duty

The duty contains three requirements that apply in situations where a disabled person would otherwise be placed at a **substantial** disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled.

- The first requirement involves changing the way things are done (equality law talks about where the disabled job worker is put at a substantial disadvantage by a **provision, criterion or practice** of their employer).

For example:

An employer has a policy that designated car parking spaces are only offered to senior managers. A worker who is not a manager, but has a mobility impairment and needs to park very close to the office, is given a designated car parking space. This is likely to be a reasonable adjustment to the employer's car parking policy.

- The second requirement involves making changes to overcome barriers created by the **physical features** of your workplace.

For example:

Clear glass doors at the end of a corridor in a particular workplace present a hazard for a visually impaired worker. Adding stick-on signs or other indicators to the doors so that they become more visible is likely to be a reasonable adjustment for the employer to make.

- The third requirement involves providing extra equipment (which equality law calls an **auxiliary aid**) or getting someone to do something to assist the disabled person (which equality law calls an **auxiliary service**).

For example:

An employer provides specialist software for a member of staff who develops a visual impairment and whose job involves using a computer.

Each of these requirements is looked at in more detail later in this part of the guide.

Are disabled people at a substantial disadvantage?

The question you need to ask yourself is whether:

- the way you do things
- any **physical feature** of your workplace
- the absence of an auxiliary aid or service

puts a disabled worker or job applicant at a substantial disadvantage compared with a person who is not disabled.

Anything that is more than minor or trivial is a substantial disadvantage.

If a substantial disadvantage does exist, then you must make reasonable adjustments.

The aim of the adjustments you make is to remove or reduce the substantial disadvantage.

But you only have to make adjustments that are reasonable for you to make. There is more information about how to work out what is reasonable a bit later in this part of the guide.

Changes to policies and the way your organisation usually does things

The first requirement involves changing the way things are done (equality law talks about where the disabled job worker is put at a substantial disadvantage by a **provision, criterion or practice** of their employer).

This means looking at whether you need to change some written or unwritten policies, and/or some of the ways you usually do things, to remove or reduce **barriers** that would place a disabled person at a **substantial** disadvantage, for example, by preventing them from being able to work for you or stopping them being fully involved at work.

This includes your criteria for promotion or training, benefits, working conditions and contractual arrangements.

For example:

- Supervisors in an organisation are usually employed on a full-time basis. The employer agrees to a disabled person whose impairment causes severe fatigue working on a part-time or job share basis. By doing this, the employer is making a reasonable adjustment.
- The design of a particular workplace makes it difficult for a disabled person with a hearing impairment to hear, because the main office is open plan and has hard flooring, so there is a lot of background noise. Their employer agrees that staff meetings should be held in a quieter place that allows that person to fully participate in the meeting. By doing this, the employer is making a reasonable adjustment.

Dealing with physical barriers

The second requirement involves making changes to overcome barriers created by the **physical features** of your workplace.

This means you may need to make some changes to your building or premises for a disabled person who works for you, or applies for a job with you.

Exactly what kind of change you make will depend on the kind of barriers your premises present. You will need to consider the whole of your premises. You may have to make more than one change.

Physical features include: steps, stairways, kerbs, exterior surfaces and paving, parking areas, building entrances and exits (including emergency escape routes), internal and external doors, gates, toilet and washing facilities, public facilities (such as telephones, counters or service desks), lighting and ventilation, lifts and escalators, floor coverings, signs, furniture, and temporary or movable items (such as equipment and display racks). Physical features also include the sheer scale of premises (for example, the size of a building). This is not an exhaustive list.

- A physical feature could be something to do with the structure of the actual building itself like steps, changes of level, emergency exits or narrow doorways.
- Or it could be something about the way the building or premises have been fitted out, things like heavy doors, inaccessible toilets or inappropriate lighting.
- It could even be the way things are arranged inside the premises such as fixtures and fittings like shelf heights in storage areas or fixed seating in canteens.

For example:

An employer has recruited a worker who is a wheelchair user and who would have difficulty negotiating her way around the office. In consultation with the new worker, the employer rearranges the layout of furniture in the office. The employer has made reasonable adjustments.

Providing extra equipment or aids

The third requirement of the duty involves providing extra equipment – which equality law calls **auxiliary aids** – and **auxiliary services**, where someone else is used to assist the disabled person, such as a reader, a sign language interpreter or a support worker.

An auxiliary aid or service may make it easier for a disabled person to do their job or to participate in an interview or selection process. So you should consider whether it is reasonable to provide this.

The kind of equipment or aid or service will depend very much on the individual disabled person and the job they are or will be doing or what is involved in the recruitment process. The disabled person themselves may have experience of what they need, or you may be able to get expert advice from some of the organisations listed in *Further sources of information and advice*.

Making sure an adjustment is effective

It may be that several adjustments are required in order to remove or reduce a range of disadvantages and sometimes these will not be obvious to you. So you should work, as much as possible, with the disabled person to identify the kind of disadvantages or problems that they face and also the potential solutions in terms of adjustments.

But even if the disabled worker does not know what to suggest, you must still consider what adjustments may be needed.

For example:

A disabled worker has been absent from work as a result of depression. Neither the worker nor their doctor is able to suggest any adjustments that could be made. Nevertheless the employer should still consider whether any adjustments, such as working from home for a time or changing working hours or offering more day-to-day support, would be reasonable.

You may be able to get expert advice from some of the organisations listed in *Further sources of information and advice*.

Who pays for reasonable adjustments?

If something is a reasonable adjustment, you must pay for it as the employer. The cost of an adjustment can be taken into account in deciding if it is reasonable or not.

However, there is a government scheme called Access to Work which can help a person whose health or disability affects their work by giving them advice and support. Access to Work can help with extra costs which would not be reasonable for an employer or prospective employer to pay.

For example, Access to Work might pay towards the cost of getting to work if the disabled person cannot use public transport, or for assistance with communication at job interviews.

A person may be able to get advice and support from Access to Work if they are:

- in a paid job, or
- unemployed and about to start a job, or
- unemployed and about to start a Work Trial, or
- self-employed

and

- their disability or health condition stops them from being able to do parts of their job.

Make sure your worker knows about Access to Work. Although the advice and support are given to the worker themselves, you will obviously benefit too. Information about Access to Work is in *Further sources of information and advice*.

What is meant by 'reasonable'

You only have to do what is reasonable.

Various factors influence whether a particular adjustment is considered reasonable. The test of what is reasonable is ultimately an objective test and not simply a matter of what you may personally think is reasonable.

When deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable you can consider:

- how effective the change will be in avoiding the disadvantage the disabled worker would otherwise experience
- its practicality
- the cost
- your organisation's resources and size
- the availability of financial support.

Your overall aim should be, as far as possible, to remove or reduce any disadvantage faced by a disabled worker.

Issues to consider:

- You can treat disabled people better or '**more favourably**' than non-disabled people and sometimes this may be part of the solution.
- The adjustment must be effective in helping to remove or reduce any disadvantage the disabled worker is facing. If it doesn't have any impact then there is no point.
- In reality it may take several different adjustments to deal with that disadvantage but each change must contribute towards this.
- You can consider whether an adjustment is practical. The easier an adjustment is, the more likely it is to be reasonable. However, just because something is difficult doesn't mean it can't also be reasonable. You need to balance this against other factors.
- If an adjustment costs little or nothing and is not disruptive, it would be reasonable unless some other factor (such as impracticality or lack of effectiveness) made it unreasonable.
- Your size and resources are another factor. If an adjustment costs a significant amount, it is more likely to be reasonable for you to make it if you have substantial financial resources. Your resources must be looked at across your whole organisation, not just for the branch or section where the disabled person is or would be working. This is an issue which you have to balance against the other factors.
- In changing policies, criteria or practices, you do not have to change the basic nature of the job, where this would go beyond what is reasonable.

- What is reasonable in one situation may be different from what is reasonable in another situation, such as where someone is already working for you and faces losing their job without an adjustment, or where someone is a job applicant. Where someone is already working for you, or about to start a long-term job with you, you would probably be expected to make more permanent changes (and, if necessary, spend more money) than you would to make adjustments for someone who is attending a job interview for an hour.
- If you are a larger rather than a smaller employer you are also more likely to have to make certain adjustments such as redeployment or flexible working patterns which may be easier for an organisation with more staff.
- If advice or support is available, for example, from Access to Work or from another organisation (sometimes charities will help with costs of adjustments), then this is more likely to make the adjustment reasonable.
- If making a particular adjustment would increase the risks to the health and safety of anybody, including the disabled worker concerned, then you can consider this when making a decision about whether that particular adjustment or solution is reasonable. But your decision must be based on a proper assessment of the potential health and safety risks. You should not make assumptions about risks which may face certain disabled workers.

If, taking all of the relevant issues into account, an adjustment is reasonable then you must make it happen.

If there is a disagreement about whether an adjustment is reasonable or not, in the end, only an Employment Tribunal can decide this.

Providing information in an alternative format

Equality law says that where providing information is involved, the steps which it is reasonable for the employer to take include steps to make sure that the information is provided in an accessible format.

For example:

- A manual worker asks for the health and safety rules to be read onto an audio CD and given to them. This is likely to be a reasonable adjustment that the employer must make.

Reasonable adjustments in practice

Examples of steps it might be reasonable for you to have to take include:

- Making adjustments to premises.

For example:

An employer makes structural or other physical changes such as widening a doorway, providing a ramp or moving furniture for a wheelchair user; relocates light switches, door handles, or shelves for someone who has difficulty in reaching; or provides appropriate contrast in decor to help the safe mobility of a visually impaired person.

- Allocating some of the disabled worker's duties to another worker.

For example:

An employer reallocates minor or subsidiary duties to another worker as a disabled worker has difficulty doing them because of their disability. For example, the job involves occasionally going onto the open roof of a building but the employer transfers this work away from a worker whose disability involves severe vertigo.

- Transferring the worker to fill an existing vacancy.

For example:

An employer should consider whether a suitable alternative post is available for a worker who becomes disabled (or whose disability worsens), where no reasonable adjustment would enable the worker to continue doing the current job. This might also involve retraining or other reasonable adjustments such as equipment for the new post or a transfer to a position on a higher grade.

- Altering the worker's hours of working or training.

For example:

An employer allows a disabled person to work flexible hours to enable them to have additional breaks to overcome fatigue arising from their disability. It could also include permitting part-time working, or different working hours to avoid the need to travel in the rush hour if this is a problem related to an impairment. A phased return to work with a gradual build-up of hours might also be appropriate in some circumstances.

- Assigning the worker to a different place of work or training.

For example:

An employer relocates the work station of a newly disabled worker (who now uses a wheelchair) from an inaccessible third floor office to an accessible one on the ground floor. If the employer operates from more than one workplace, it may be reasonable to move the worker's place of work to other premises of the same employer if the first building is inaccessible and the other premises are not.

- Allowing the worker to be absent during working or training hours for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment.

For example:

An employer allows a disabled person who has recently developed a condition to have more time off work than would be allowed to non-disabled workers to enable them to have rehabilitation. A similar adjustment would be appropriate if a disability worsens or if a disabled worker needs occasional treatment anyway.

- Giving, or arranging for, training or mentoring (whether for the disabled worker or any other worker). This could be training in particular pieces of equipment which the disabled worker uses, or an alteration to the standard workplace training to make sure it is accessible for the disabled worker.

For example:

- All workers are trained in the use of a particular machine but an employer provides slightly different or longer training for an employee with restricted hand or arm movements, or training in additional software for a visually impaired person so that they can use a computer with speech output.
- An employer provides training for workers on conducting meetings in a way that enables a Deaf staff member to participate effectively.
- A disabled person returns to work after a six-month period of absence due to a stroke. Their employer pays for them to see a work mentor, and allows time off to see the mentor, to help with their loss of confidence following the onset of their disability.

- Acquiring or modifying equipment.

For example:

An employer might have to provide special equipment (such as an adapted keyboard for someone with arthritis or a large screen for a visually impaired person), an adapted telephone for someone with a hearing impairment, or other modified equipment for disabled workers (such as longer handles on a machine).

You do not have to provide or modify equipment for personal purposes unconnected with a worker's job, such as providing a wheelchair if a person needs one in any event but does not have one. This is because the disadvantages do not flow from things you have control over.

- Modifying instructions or reference manuals.

For example:

The format of instructions and manuals might need to be modified for some disabled workers (such as being produced in Braille or on audio CD) and instructions for people with learning disabilities might need to be conveyed orally with individual demonstration or in Easy Read.

- Modifying procedures for testing or assessment.

For example:

A worker with restricted manual dexterity who was applying for promotion would be disadvantaged by a written test, so the employer gives that person an oral test instead.

- Providing a reader or interpreter.

For example:

An employer arranges for a colleague to read hard copy post to a worker with a visual impairment at particular times during the working day. Alternatively, the employer might hire a reader.

- Providing supervision or other support.

For example:

An employer provides a support worker or arranges help from a colleague, in appropriate circumstances, for someone whose disability leads to uncertainty or lack of confidence.

- Allowing a disabled worker to take a period of disability leave.

For example:

A worker who has cancer needs to undergo treatment and rehabilitation. Their employer allows a period of disability leave and permits them to return to their job at the end of this period.

- Participating in supported employment schemes, such as **WORKSTEP**.

For example:

A person applies for a job as an office assistant after several years of not working because of depression. They have been participating in a supported employment scheme where they saw the job advertised. As a reasonable adjustment the person asks the employer to let them make private phone calls during the working day to a support worker at the scheme.

- Employing a support worker to assist a disabled worker.

For example:

An adviser with a visual impairment is sometimes required to make home visits to clients. The employer employs a support worker to assist them on these visits.

- Modifying disciplinary or grievance procedures.

For example:

A worker with a learning disability is allowed to take a friend (who does not work with them) to act as an advocate at a meeting with the person's employer about a grievance. Normally the employer allows workers to be accompanied only by work colleagues. The employer also makes sure that the meeting is conducted in a way that does not disadvantage or patronise the disabled worker.

- Adjusting redundancy selection criteria.

For example:

A worker with an autoimmune disease has taken several short periods of absence during the year because of the condition. When their employer is taking the absences into account as a criterion for selecting people for redundancy, they discount these periods of disability-related absence.

- Modifying performance-related pay arrangements.

For example:

A disabled worker who is paid purely on their output needs frequent short additional breaks during their working day – something their employer agrees to as a reasonable adjustment. It is likely to be a reasonable adjustment for their employer to pay them at an agreed rate (e.g. their average hourly rate) for these breaks.

It may sometimes be necessary for an employer to take a combination of steps.

For example:

A woman who is blind is given a new job with her employer in an unfamiliar part of the building. The employer

- arranges facilities for her assistance dog in the new area
- arranges for her new instructions to be in Braille, and
- provides disability equality training to all staff.

In some situations, a reasonable adjustment will not work without the co-operation of other workers. Your other staff may therefore have an important role in helping make sure that a reasonable adjustment is carried out in practice. You must make sure that this happens. It is unlikely to be a valid 'defence' to a claim under equality law for a failure to make reasonable adjustments to argue that an adjustment was unreasonable because your other staff were obstructive or unhelpful when you tried to make an adjustment happen. You would at least need to be able to show that you took all reasonable steps to try and resolve the problem of the attitude of your other staff.

For example:

An employer makes sure that a worker with autism has a structured working day as a reasonable adjustment. As part of the reasonable adjustment, it is the responsibility of the employer to make sure that other workers co-operate with this arrangement.

If the worker does not agree to your involving other workers, you must not breach their confidentiality by telling the other workers about the disabled person's situation.

If a worker is reluctant for other staff to know, and you believe that a reasonable adjustment requires the co-operation of the worker's colleagues, explain that you cannot make the adjustment unless they are prepared for some information to be shared. It does not have to be detailed information about their condition; just enough to explain to other staff what they need to do.

Specific situations

Employment services

An employment service provider must not unlawfully discriminate against people who are using or want to use its services. There is more information about what this means in the Glossary.

In addition, an employment service provider has a duty to make reasonable adjustments, except when providing a **vocational service**.

For employment service providers, unlike for employers, the duty is 'anticipatory'. If you are an employment service provider, this means you cannot wait until a disabled person wants to use your services, but must think in advance (and on an ongoing basis) about what disabled people with a range of impairments might reasonably need, such as people who have a visual impairment, a hearing impairment, a mobility impairment, or a learning disability.

For example:

An employment agency makes sure its website is accessible to disabled people and that it can provide information about job opportunities in a range of alternative formats. It also makes sure its staff are trained to assist disabled people who approach it to find out about job opportunities.

Occupational pensions

Occupational pension schemes must not unlawfully discriminate against people. There is more information about what this means in the Equality and Human Rights Commission guide: *What equality law means for you as an employer: pay and benefits*.

In addition, an occupational pension scheme must make reasonable adjustments to any provision, criterion or practice in relation to the scheme which puts a disabled person at a **substantial** disadvantage in comparison with people who are not disabled.

For example:

The rules of an employer's final salary scheme provide that the maximum pension receivable is based on the member's salary in the last year of work. Having worked full-time for 20 years, a worker develops a condition which leads them to reduce their working hours two years before their pension age. The scheme's rules put them at a disadvantage as a result of their disability, because their pension will only be calculated on their part-time salary. The trustees decide to convert the worker's part-time salary to its full-time equivalent and make a corresponding reduction in the period of their part-time employment which counts as pensionable. In this way, their full-time earnings will be taken into account. This is likely to be a reasonable adjustment to make.

4. What to do if someone says they've been discriminated against

If a **worker** says that you or another worker employed by you or your **agent** have **unlawfully discriminated** against them in a recruitment situation, your responsibility is to deal with the complaint in a way that finds out if there has been unlawful discrimination and, if there has been, to put the situation right.

A worker may:

- complain to you
- make a claim in the Employment Tribunal.

These are not alternatives, since the person complaining still has a right to make a claim in the Employment Tribunal even if they first complained to you.

This part of this guide covers:

- If a worker complains to you
- What you can do if you find that there has been unlawful discrimination
- Monitoring the outcome
- The questions procedure, which someone can use to find out more information from you if they think they may have been unlawfully discriminated against, harassed or victimised.

- Key points about discrimination cases in a recruitment situation
 - Where claims are brought
 - Time limits for bringing a claim
 - The standard and burden of proof
 - What the Employment Tribunal can order you to do
- More information about defending an Employment Tribunal case.

Good practice tips for avoiding and sorting out claims about discrimination by a job applicant

A job applicant who believes they have experienced unlawful discrimination has a right to make an Employment Tribunal claim.

Defending an Employment Tribunal claim can be lengthy, expensive and draining, and it can have a damaging impact on the reputation of your organisation.

It is likely to be in everyone's interest to try to put things right before a claim is made to an Employment Tribunal.

If you have good procedures for sorting out complaints about discrimination, you may be able to avoid the person feeling it is necessary to bring a claim against you.

An important factor will be for all your workers to be sure that complaints about unlawful discrimination will be taken seriously, and that something will happen to put the situation right if someone has discriminated unlawfully.

Make it clear what will happen if, after investigating, you find out that someone has discriminated unlawfully against someone else:

- that if necessary you will take any disciplinary action you decide is appropriate
- that if necessary you will change the way you do things so the same thing does not happen again, then make sure you do this.

Also:

- consider **equality training** for yourself and/or people working for you
- think about having an **equality policy**.

If a job applicant complains to you

If a job applicant complains to you that your selection methods or recruitment decision were discriminatory or failed to make reasonable adjustments, you need to investigate.

Make sure that in the way you respond to a complaint, you do not unlawfully discriminate against anyone.

For example:

A disabled job applicant with learning difficulties complains to an employer about comments made to them during the recruitment process. The employer takes what the disabled person says less seriously than what the person complained about says in response. If the employer's attitude is because of the disabled person's learning disability, this is likely to be unlawful discrimination.

If anyone involved in a complaint is a disabled person who needs **reasonable adjustments** to remove **barriers** they would otherwise face in taking part in the complaints process, you must make these. You can read more about reasonable adjustments in Chapter 3.

Dealing with the complaint

If the complaint is about the way you or your organisation does something, think about getting it changed.

Make sure you tell the job applicant what the result of their complaint is, otherwise they may bring an Employment Tribunal claim.

What you can do if you find that there has been unlawful discrimination

The action you take will depend on the specific details of the case and its seriousness. You should take into consideration any underlying circumstances and the outcome of previous similar cases. Actions you take could be:

- **Equality training** for the person who discriminated.
- Appropriate disciplinary action (you can find out more about disciplinary procedures from Acas) against the person who discriminated.

Monitoring the outcome

Whether you decide that there had been unlawful discrimination or not, make sure that you do not treat the person who complained badly. For example, making sure the person is not shortlisted on any future job applications would amount to **victimisation**.

If the job applicant is not satisfied with what has happened, they may decide to bring a claim in the Employment Tribunal.

The questions procedure

If a job applicant thinks they may have been unlawfully discriminated against, harassed or victimised against equality law, then they can obtain information from you to help them decide if they have a valid claim or not.

There is a set form to help them do this which you can access at:

http://www.equalities.gov.uk/news/equality_act_2010_forms_for_ob.aspx,

but their questions will still count even if they do not use the form, so long as they use the same questions. The form is sometimes called a 'questionnaire'.

If you receive questions from a job applicant, you are not legally required to reply to the request, or to answer the questions, but it may harm your case if you do not.

The questions and the answers can form part of the evidence in a case brought under the Equality Act 2010.

A job applicant can send you the questions before a claim is made to the Employment Tribunal, or at the same time, or after the claim has been sent.

If it is before, then you must receive the questions within three months of what the person complaining says happened that was unlawful discrimination. If a claim has already been made to the Employment Tribunal, then you must receive the questions within 28 days of the claim being sent to the Employment Tribunal.

If you do not respond to the questions within eight weeks of them being sent to you, the Employment Tribunal can take that into account when making its decision. The Employment Tribunal can also take into account answers which are evasive or unclear.

- There is an exception to this. The Employment Tribunal cannot take the failure to answer into account if a person or organisation states that to give an answer could prejudice criminal proceedings and this is reasonable. Most of the time, breaking equality law only leads to a claim in a civil tribunal or court. Occasionally, breaking equality law can be punished by the criminal courts. In that situation, the person or organisation may be able to refuse to answer the questions, if in answering they might incriminate themselves and it is reasonable for them not to answer. If you think this might apply to you, you should get more advice on what to do.

If someone sends you questions, you must not treat them badly, eg in respect of future job applications, because they have done this. If you did, it would be **victimisation**.

Key points about discrimination cases in a work situation

The key points this guide explains are:

- Where claims are brought
- Time limits for bringing a claim
- The standard and burden of proof
- What the Employment Tribunal can order you to do.
- Settling a dispute

Where claims are brought

An Employment Tribunal can decide a complaint involving unlawful discrimination in a work situation.

Employment Tribunals can also decide cases about:

- Collective agreements, which can cover any terms of employment, such as pay or other benefits or working conditions.
- Equal pay and occupational pensions cases, which you can read more about in the Equality and Human Rights Commission guide: *What equality law means for you as an employer: pay and benefits*.
- Requirements an employer places on someone to discriminate against people as part of their job, for example, if someone works in a shop, telling them not to serve customers with a particular protected characteristic.

If the complaint is about a health- or disability-related enquiry during recruitment, the Employment Tribunal cannot hear a case just because an enquiry was made. Only the Equality and Human Rights Commission can take up this sort of case.

But a job applicant who believes they were discriminated against because of disability, or for a reason connected with their disability, can bring a claim in the Employment Tribunal.

For example:

A job applicant who is a disabled person is asked questions about their health and disability during their interview. They do not get the job. They believe this is because of the answers they gave to the questions. They can bring a claim in the Employment Tribunal. However, only the Equality and Human Rights Commission could take up the wider case (in the County Court in England or Wales, and the Sheriff Court in Scotland) to challenge the employer just for asking the questions if no individual was personally affected.

An Employment Tribunal can only hear a case from a member of the armed forces if their **service complaint** has been decided.

Time limits for bringing a claim

A person must bring their claim within three months (less one day) of the claimed unlawful discrimination taking place.

There are two situations where this is slightly different:

- in equal pay cases, different time limits apply – see the Equality and Human Rights Commission guide: *What equality law means for you as an employer: pay and benefits*, and
- for cases involving the armed forces, the time limit is six months (less one day).

If a person brings a claim after this, it is up to the Employment Tribunal to decide whether it is fair to everyone concerned, including both the employer and the employee, to allow a claim to be brought later than this.

When a claim concerns behaviour over a length of time, the time limit starts when the behaviour has ended.

If the person is complaining about a failure to do something, for example, a failure to make **reasonable adjustments**, then the three months begins when the decision was made not to do it. If there is no solid evidence of a decision, then the decision is assumed to have been made either:

- when the person who failed to do the thing does something else which shows they don't intend to do it, or
- at the end of the time when they might reasonably have been expected to do the thing.

For example:

A visually impaired job applicant hears about a job and asks the employer to send the application pack recorded on an audio tape. The employer does not refuse to do this, but just doesn't get around to doing it. Once the closing date for applications has passed, the employer clearly does not intend to send the tape. The applicant should probably count the three months from the day before the closing date, which is the past day when the employer could have ensured the tape got to the applicant in time to apply.

A tribunal can hear a claim if it is brought outside the time limit if the tribunal thinks that it would be 'just and equitable' (fair to both sides) for it to do this.

The standard and burden of proof

The standard of proof in discrimination cases is the usual one in civil (non-criminal) cases. Each side must try to prove the facts of their case are true on the balance of probabilities, in other words, that it is more likely than not in the view of the tribunal that their version of events is true.

If a job applicant is claiming unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation against you, then the **burden of proof** begins with them. There are two situations in which the burden of proof will shift onto you:

1. If they prove enough facts from which the tribunal can decide, without any other explanation, that the discrimination, harassment or victimisation has taken place, or

2. If their complaint is that they have not been offered a job because you found out about their disability having asked questions which you were not allowed to ask under the rules against **pre-employment health or disability enquiries**.

In either of these situations, the burden then shifts onto you to show that you or someone whose actions or omissions you were responsible for did not discriminate, harass or victimise the person making the claim.

What the Employment Tribunal can order you to do

If the job applicant wins their case, the tribunal can order what is called a remedy.

The main remedies available to the Employment Tribunal are to:

- Make a declaration that you have discriminated.
- Award compensation to be paid for the financial loss the claimant has suffered (for example, loss of earnings), and damages for injury to the claimant's feelings. There is no legal upper limit on the amount of compensation.
- Make a recommendation, requiring the employer to do something specific within a certain time to remove or reduce the bad effects which the claim has shown to exist on the individual.

For example:

Providing a reference or reinstating the person to their job, if the tribunal thinks this would work despite the previous history.

The Employment Tribunal can also make a recommendation requiring the employer to do something specific within a certain time to remove or reduce the bad effects which the claim has shown to exist on the wider workforce (although not in equal pay cases). This might be particularly applicable where the claimant has already left that employer so any individual recommendation would be pointless.

For example:

- introducing an equal opportunities policy
- ensuring its harassment policy is more effectively implemented
- setting up a review panel to deal with equal opportunities and harassment/grievance procedures
- re-training staff, or

- making public the selection criteria used for transfer or promotion of staff.

If the recommendation relates to an individual and if an employer does not do what they have been told to do, the tribunal may order them to pay compensation, or an increased amount of compensation, to the claimant instead.

In cases of **indirect discrimination**, if you can prove that you did not intend what you did to be discriminatory, the tribunal must consider all of the remedies before looking at damages.

The tribunal can also order you to pay the legal costs and expenses of the person bringing the claim on top of your own legal costs and expenses, although this does not often happen in Employment Tribunal cases.

Settling a dispute

Taking legal proceedings can be a stressful and time consuming experience. It may be in the best interest of everyone to try to settle a dispute i.e. reach an agreement with your worker where possible to avoid going to an employment tribunal hearing (or the court where the case relates to an occupational pension scheme). There are three ways in which a dispute can be settled:

- Agreement between you and the worker
- Acas conciliation service
- Qualifying compromise agreement

Agreement between you and the worker

Before a claim is issued by your worker in the employment tribunal, you can agree to settle a dispute directly with them. An agreement to settle a dispute can include any terms that you agree with the worker and can cover compensation, future actions by you and the worker and other lawful matters.

Example

A worker raises a grievance with her employers alleging a failure to make reasonable adjustments. The employer investigates the worker's complaint and upholds her grievance. The employer agrees with the worker to put the reasonable adjustments in place and offers her a written apology, which she accepts.

Acas

You may also seek assistance from Acas which offers a conciliation service for parties in dispute, whether or not a claim has been made to an employment tribunal.

Example

A worker raises a grievance with her employer alleging sex discrimination. The employer dismisses her grievance. She makes a claim to the tribunal but before the hearing she seeks assistance from Acas to conciliate in the dispute. As a result of the conciliation, the worker and her employer agree to settle the claim on terms which are agreeable to both of them.

Qualifying compromise agreement

You and the worker can also settle a claim or potential claim to the Employment Tribunal by way of a 'qualifying compromise contract'. There are specific conditions which must be satisfied if a claim is settled in this way:

- the agreement must be in writing
- the conditions in the agreement must be tailored to the circumstances of the claim
- the worker must have received legal advice about the terms of the agreement from an independent advisor who is insured against the risk of a claim arising from that advice
- the person who provides the worker with independent legal advice on the compromise agreement must be a lawyer; a trade union representative with written authority from the trade union or an advice centre worker with written authority from the centre to give this advice.

More information about defending an Employment Tribunal case

You can find out more about what to do if someone brings an Employment Tribunal case against you from:

- In England and Wales: Business Link – see in *Further sources of information and advice* for contact details.
- In Scotland: Business Gateway Scotland – see in *Further sources of information and advice* for contact details.

5. Further sources of information and advice

Equality and Human Rights Commission:

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the independent advocate for equality and human rights in Britain. It aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights. The Equality and Human Rights Commission helplines advise both individuals and organisations such as employers and service providers.

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Helpline – England

Email: info@equalityhumanrights.com

Telephone: 0845 604 6610

Textphone: 0845 604 6620

Fax: 0845 604 6630

08:00–18:00 Monday to Friday

Helpline – Wales

Email: wales@equalityhumanrights.com

Telephone: 0845 604 8810

Textphone: 0845 604 8820

Fax: 0845 604 8830

08:00–18:00 Monday to Friday

Helpline – Scotland

Email: scotland@equalityhumanrights.com

Telephone: 0845 604 5510

Textphone: 0845 604 5520

Fax: 0845 604 5530

08:00–18:00 Monday to Friday

Acas – The Independent Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service:

Acas aims to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations. It provides impartial advice, training, information and a range of problem resolution services.

Website: www.acas.org.uk

Telephone: 08457 47 47 47 (Monday–Friday: 08:00–20:00; Saturday: 09:00–13:00)

Access to Work:

Access to Work can help disabled people or their employers if their condition or disability affects the ease by which they can carry out their job or gain employment. It gives advice and support with extra costs which may arise because of certain needs.

Website:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople/employmentsupport/workschemesandprogrammes

London, East England and South East England:

Telephone: 020 8426 3110

Email: atwosu.london@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Wales, South West England, West Midlands and East Midlands:

Telephone: 02920 423 29

Email: atwosu.cardiff@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Scotland, North West England, North East England and Yorkshire and Humberside:

Telephone: 0141 950 5327

Email: atwosu.glasgow@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Association of Disabled Professionals (ADP):

The ADP website offers advice, support, resources and general information for disabled professionals, entrepreneurs and employers.

Website: www.adp.org.uk

Telephone: 01204 431638 (answerphone only service)

Fax: 01204 431638

Email: info@adp.org.uk

British Chambers of Commerce (BCC):

The BCC is the national body for a network of accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK; each Chamber provides representation, services, information and guidance to its members.

Website: www.britishchambers.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7654 5800

Fax: 020 7654 5819

Email: info@britishchambers.org.uk

British Retail Consortium (BRC):

The BRC is a trade association representing a broad range of retailers. It provides advice and information for its members.

Website: www.brc.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7854 8900
Fax: 020 7854 8901

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS):

BIS is the UK government department with responsibility for trade, business growth, employment and company law and regional economic development.

Website: ww.bis.gov.uk
Telephone: 020 7215 5000

Business Gateway:

Business Gateway provides practical help, advice and support for new and growing businesses in Scotland.

Website: www.bgateway.com
Telephone: 0845 609 6611

Business in the Community:

Business in the Community mobilises businesses for good, working to improve businesses in terms of their responsibilities to both the local and global community, helping to work towards a sustainable future.

Website: www.bitc.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7566 8650
Email: information@bitc.org.uk
Twitter: @BITC1

Business Link:

Business Link is a free business advice and support service, available online and through local advisers.

Website: www.businesslink.gov.uk
Telephone: 0845 600 9 006
Minicom: 0845 606 2666

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD):

The CIPD is Europe's largest human resources development professional body, with over 135,000 members. It supports and develops those responsible for the management and development of people within organisations.

Website: www.cipd.co.uk

Telephone: 020 8612 6208

ChildcareLink:

ChildcareLink provides details of local childcare providers for employees and employers, as well as general information about childcare.

Website: www.childcarelink.gov.uk

Telephone: 0800 2346 346

Close the Gap Scotland:

Close the Gap Scotland works to close the gender pay gap by working with companies and trade unions as well as carrying out research to illustrate the gender pay gap.

Website: www.closethegap.org.uk

Telephone: 0141 337 8131

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI):

The CBI is the UK's leading business organisation, speaking for some 240,000 businesses that together employ around a third of the private sector workforce.

Website: www.cbi.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7379 7400

Directgov:

Directgov is the UK government's digital service for people in England and Wales. It delivers information and practical advice about public services, bringing them all together in one place.

Website: www.direct.gov.uk

EEF:

EEF is a membership organisation which provides business services to help members manage people, processes, environment and more, so that members can meet their regulatory commitments.

Website: www.eef.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7222 7777
Fax: 020 7222 2782

Employers Forum on Age (EFA):

EFA is an independent network of leading employers who recognise the value of an age diverse workforce. In addition to supporting employers, the EFA influences Government, business and trade unions, campaigning for real practical change in preventing age discrimination at work and in the job market.

Website: www.efa.org.uk
Telephone: 0845 456 2495
Email: efa@efa.org.uk

Employers Forum on Belief (EFB):

EFB offers employers practical guidance and shares good practice around issues such as dress codes, religious holidays, the inter-relationship between religious belief and other diversity strands and conflict in the workplace. The forum is not affiliated to any religious group or philosophical belief.

Website: www.efbelief.org.uk
Telephone: 0207785 6533
Email: info@efbelief.org.uk

Employers Forum on Disability (EFD):

EFD is the world's leading employers' organisation focused on disability as it affects business.

Website: www.efd.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7403 3020
Email: enquiries@staging.efd.org.uk

Equality Britain:

Equality Britain aims to promote opportunities in employment, education, housing and sport to people from ethnic minorities.

Website: www.equalitybritain.co.uk
Telephone: 0151 707 6688

Federation of Small Businesses (FSB):

The FSB works to protect, promote, and further the interests of the self-employed and small business sector. It provides a range of member services.

Website: www.fsb.org.uk
Telephone: 01253 336 000
Fax: 01253 348 046

Flexible Support for Business:

Flexible Support for Business provides information and advice for businesses in Wales across all areas of commerce, working with specialists within the Government to help businesses expand, save time and money with instant access to clear, simple and trustworthy advice.

Website: www.business-support-wales.gov.uk
Telephone: 03000 6 03000
Email: businesssupport@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES):

GIRES provides a wide range of information and training for Trans people, their families and professionals who care for them.

Website: www.gires.org.uk
Telephone: 01372 801 554
Fax: 01372 272 297
Email: info@gires.org.uk

The Gender Trust:

The Gender Trust is the UK's largest charity working to support Transsexual, Gender Dysphoric and Transgender people or those who are affected by gender identity issues. It has a helpline and provides training and information for employers and organisations.

Website: www.gendertrust.org.uk
Telephone: 0845 231 0505

Government Equalities Office (GEO):

The GEO is the Government department responsible for equalities legislation and policy in the UK.

Website: www.equalities.gov.uk
Telephone: 0303 444 0000

Health and Safety Executive (HSE):

The HSE provides information and guidance on health and safety.

Website: www.hse.gov.uk
Telephone: 08701 545 500
Email: hseinformationsservices@natbrit.com

Healthy Minds at Work:

Healthy Minds at Work is a Wales-based initiative to help prevent absence from work due to stress-related illnesses through improving the welfare of employees.

Website: www.healthymindsatwork.org.uk
Email: info@healthymindsatwork.org.uk

Investors in People (IiP):

IiP offers a business improvement tool designed to help all kinds of organisations develop performance through their people. It provides tailored assessments designed to support organisations in planning, implementing and evaluating effective strategies and is relevant for organisations of all sizes and sectors.

Website: www.investorsinpeople.co.uk
Telephone: 020 7467 1900
Email: info@investorsinpeople.co.uk

Mindful Employer:

Mindful Employer provides information, advice and practical support for people whose mental health affects their ability to find or remain in employment, training, education and voluntary work.

Website: www.mindfulemployer.net
Telephone: 01392 208 833
Email: info@mindfulemployer.net

Opportunity Now:

Opportunity Now is a membership organisation representing employers who want to ensure inclusiveness for women, supporting their potential to be as economically active as men. Opportunity Now is part of Business in the Community.

Website: www.opportunity.org.uk
Telephone: 0207 566 8650

Press for Change (PfC):

PfC is a political lobbying and educational organisation. It campaigns to achieve equality and human rights for all Trans people in the UK through legislation and social change. It provides legal advice, training and consultancy for employers and organisations as well as undertaking commissioned research.

Website: www.transequality.co.uk / www.pfc.org.uk
Telephone: 0161 432 1915 (10:00–17:00, Thursdays only until further notice)
Email: transequality@pfc.org.uk

Race for Opportunity (RfO):

RfO is a network of private and public sector organisations working across the UK to promote the business case for race and diversity. It is part of Business in the Community.

Website: www.raceforopportunity.org.uk
Telephone: 0207 566 8716

Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health:

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health works to improve the quality of life for people with mental health conditions. It carries out research, policy work and analysis to improve practice and influence policy in mental health as well as public services.

Website: www.scmh.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7827 8300
Email: contact@scmh.org.uk

Small Business UK:

Small Business UK provides resources, products and services for small business owners and start-ups. It offers free online advice in the form of news articles, guides, tips and features to help people set up and run small businesses.

Website: www.smallbusiness.co.uk
Telephone: 020 7250 7010

Stonewall:

Stonewall is the UK's leading lesbian, gay and bisexual charity and carries out campaigning, lobbying and research work as well as providing a free information service for individuals, organisations and employers.

Website: www.stonewall.org.uk
Telephone: 08000 50 20 20
Email: info@stonewall.org.uk

The Age and Employment Network (TAEN):

An independent charity whose mission is to promote an effective job market that serves the needs of people in mid- and later life, employers and the economy.

Website: www.taen.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7843 1590

TUC – the Trades Union Congress (England and Wales):

With 59 member unions representing over six and a half million working people, the TUC campaigns for a fair deal at work and for social justice at home and abroad.

Website: www.tuc.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7636 4030

Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC):

Website: www.stuc.org.uk

Telephone: 0141 337 8100

Email: info@stuc.org.uk

Train to Gain:

Advice and resources for businesses looking for support in training their staff.

Website: www.traintogain.gov.uk

Telephone: 0845 600 9006

Working Families:

Working Families is a work–life balance organisation, helping children, working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work.

Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 013 0313

Email: office@workingfamilies.org.uk

Workwise:

Workwise aims to make the UK one of the most progressive economies in the world by encouraging the widespread adoption of smarter working practices in order to gain better productivity and to balance work–life pressures.

Website: www.workwiseuk.org

Telephone: 01252 311 557

Email: enquiries@workwiseuk.org

6. Glossary

accessible venue	A building designed and/or altered to ensure that people, including disabled people, can enter and move round freely and access its events and facilities.
Act	A law or piece of legislation passed by both Houses of Parliament and agreed to by the Crown, which then becomes part of statutory law (ie is <i>enacted</i>).
affirmative action	Positive steps taken to increase the participation of under-represented groups in the workplace. It may encompass such terms as positive action and positive discrimination. The term, which originates from the United States of America, is not used in the Equality Act.
age	This refers to a person belonging to a particular age group, which can mean people of the same age (e.g. 32-year-olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18–30-year-olds, 'middle-aged people' or people over 50).
agent	A person who has authority to act on behalf of another ('the principal') but who is not an employee or worker employed by the employer.
alternative format	Media formats which are accessible to disabled people with specific impairments, for example Braille, audio description, subtitles and Easy Read.
armed forces	Refers to military service personnel.
associated with	This is used in a situation where the reason a job applicant or worker is discriminated against is not because they have a particular protected characteristic, but because they are 'associated with' another person who has that protected characteristic, eg the other person is their friend or relative. For example, an employer decides not to recruit a non-disabled worker because they have a disabled child. This is sometimes referred to as discrimination 'by association'.

association, by	As in ‘discrimination by association’. See associated with .
auxiliary aid	Usually a special piece of equipment to improve accessibility.
auxiliary service	A service to improve access to something often involving the provision of a helper/assistant.
barriers	In this guide, this term refers to obstacles which get in the way of equality for disabled workers and other workers put at a disadvantage because of their protected characteristics. Unless explicitly stated, ‘barriers’ does not exclusively mean physical barriers. For more on barriers in relation to disabled workers, see duty to make reasonable adjustments .
Bill	A draft Act, not passed by Parliament.
burden of proof	This refers to whether, in an Employment Tribunal, it is for the worker to prove that discrimination occurred or it is for the employer to disprove it. Broadly speaking, a worker must prove facts which, if unexplained, indicate discrimination. The burden of proof then shifts to the employer to prove there was no discrimination. If the employer cannot then prove that no discrimination was involved, the worker will win their case.
charity	A body (whether corporate or not) which is for a statutory charitable purpose that provides a benefit to the public.
Code of Practice	A statutory guidance document which must be taken into account by courts and tribunals when applying the law and which may assist people to understand and comply with the law.
comparator	Direct discrimination occurs when an employer treats a job applicant or worker less favourably than they treat or would treat another worker in similar circumstances because of a protected characteristic. The worker with whom the job applicant or worker compares their treatment is called a ‘comparator’. Sometimes there is no actual comparator, but the worker can still claim that another worker without their protected characteristic

would have been treated better by the employer. This is a 'hypothetical' comparator.

contract worker

Under the Equality Act, this has a special meaning. It means a person who is sent by their employer to do work for someone else (the 'principal'), under a contract between the employer and the principal. For example, a person employed by an agency to work for someone else ('an end-user') or a person employed by a privatised company to work on contracted out services for a public authority, may be a contract worker. The Equality Act makes it unlawful for the principal to discriminate against the contract worker.

data protection

Safeguards concerning personal data are provided for by statute, mainly the Data Protection Act 1998.

direct discrimination

Less favourable treatment of a person compared with another person because of a protected characteristic. This may be their own protected characteristic, or a protected characteristic of someone else, eg someone with whom they are **associated**. It is also direct discrimination to treat someone less favourably because the employer wrongly perceives them to have a protected characteristic.

disability

A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a **substantial** and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

disabled person

Someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a **substantial** and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

disadvantage

A detriment or impediment – something that the individual affected might reasonably consider changes their position for the worse.

discrimination arising from disability

When a person is treated unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of their disability, eg an employer dismisses a worker because of the length of time they have been on sick leave. The reason the worker has been off sick is because of their disability. If it is **objectively justifiable** to treat a person

unfavourably because of something arising from their disability, then the treatment will not be unlawful. It is unlikely to be justifiable if the employer has not first made any **reasonable adjustments**.

disproportionately low

Refers to situations where people with a protected characteristic are under-represented compared to their numbers in the population or in the relevant workplace.

diversity

This tends to be used to refer to a group of people with many different types of protected characteristic, eg people of all ages, religions, ethnic background etc.

duty to make reasonable adjustments

This duty arises where

- (1) a physical feature of the workplace or
- (2) a provision, criterion or practice applied by an employer puts a disabled worker or job applicant at a **substantial** disadvantage in comparison with people who are not disabled. It also applies where a worker or job applicant would be put at a substantial disadvantage but for the provision of an auxiliary aid. The employer has a duty to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage by (i) changing provisions, criteria or practices, (ii) altering, removing or providing a reasonable alternative means of avoiding physical features, and (iii) providing auxiliary aids. In many situations, an employer must treat the disabled worker or job applicant more favourably than others as part of the reasonable adjustment. More detail of the law and examples of reasonable adjustments are set out in sub-section 3 of this guide.

educational establishments

Schools, colleges and higher educational institutions.

employee

In this guide, the word 'employee' is used only to refer to the definition in the Employment Rights Act 1996, ie a person who works under a contract of employment. This definition is fairly limited. It is only employees in this sense who have certain rights, eg to have a written statement of employment particulars; to use the formal procedure to request flexible working; and to claim unfair dismissal.

The Equality Act uses the word 'employee' more widely,

to include a person working on a contract of employment or a contract of apprenticeship or a contract personally to do work; or a person who carries out work for the Crown or a relevant member of the Houses of Parliament staff. To avoid confusion with the narrower definition of 'employee' applicable under the Employment Rights Act, this guide refers to someone in this wider category of workers covered by equality law as a 'worker'. See **worker**.

employer

A person who makes work available under a contract of employment, a contract of service, a contract of apprenticeship, the Crown or a relevant member of the Houses of Parliament staff.

employment service provider

A person who provides vocational training and guidance, careers services and may supply employers with workers.

employment services

Vocational training and guidance, finding employment for people, supplying employers with workers.

Employment Tribunal

Cases of discrimination in work situations (as well as unfair dismissal and most other employment law claims) are heard by Employment Tribunals. A full Hearing is usually handled by a three person panel – a Judge and two non-legal members.

equal pay audit

An exercise to compare the pay of women and men who are doing equal work in an organisation, and investigate the causes of any pay gaps identified; also known as an 'equal pay review'. The provisions in the Equality Act directly relating to equal pay refer to sex equality but an equal pay audit could be applied to other protected characteristics to help an employer equality proof their business.

equal work

A woman's work is equal to a man's in the same employment (and vice versa) if it is the same or broadly similar (like work); rated as equivalent to his work under a job evaluation scheme or if she can show that her work is of equal value to his in terms of the demands made of her.

equality clause	A sex equality clause is read into a person's contract of employment so that where there is a term which is less favourable than that enjoyed by someone of the opposite sex doing equal work, that term will be modified to provide equal terms.
equality policy	A statement of an organisation's commitment to the principle of equality of opportunity in the workplace.
equality training	Training on equality law and effective equality practice.
ET	Abbreviation for Employment Tribunal .
exceptions	Where, in specified circumstances, a provision of the Act does not apply.
flexible working	Alternative work patterns, such as working different hours or at home, including to accommodate disability or childcare commitments. See also right to request flexible working .
gender reassignment	The process of changing or transitioning from one gender to another. The Equality Act prohibits discrimination against a person who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process, or part of a process, for the purpose of reassigning their sex. See also transsexual person.
gender recognition certificate	A certificate issued under the Gender Recognition Act to a transsexual person who has, or has had gender dysphoria, has lived in the acquired gender throughout the preceding two years, and intends to continue to live in the acquired gender until death.
guaranteed interview scheme	This is a scheme for disabled people which means that an applicant will be invited for interview if they meet the essential specified requirements of the job.
harass	To behave towards someone in a way that violates their dignity, or creates a degrading, humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment for them.
harassment	Unwanted behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creates a degrading,

	humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment for them. <i>See also</i> sexual harassment .
impairment	A functional limitation which may lead to a person being defined as disabled according to the definition under the Act. <i>See also</i> disability .
indirect discrimination	Where an employer applies (or would apply) an apparently neutral practice, provision or criterion which puts people with a particular protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with others who do not share that characteristic, unless applying the practice, provision or criterion can be objectively justified by the employer.
instruction to discriminate	When someone who is in a position to do so instructs another to discriminate against a third party. For example, if a GP instructed their receptionist not to register anyone who might need help from an interpreter, this would amount to an instruction to discriminate.
job evaluation scheme	See job evaluation study
job evaluation study	This is a study undertaken to assess the relative value of different jobs in an organisation, using factors such as effort, skill and decision-making. This can establish whether the work done by a woman and a man is equal, for equal pay purposes. <i>See also</i> equal work .
judicial review	A procedure by which the High Court supervises the exercise of public authority power to ensure that it remains within the bounds of what is lawful.
less favourably	Worse – so ‘less favourable treatment’ means the same as ‘worse treatment’.
liability	Legal responsibility. An employer is legally responsible for discrimination carried out by workers employed by you or by your agents, unless you have taken all reasonable preventative steps.
like work	See equal work .
marriage and civil partnership	Marriage is defined as a 'union between a man and a woman'. Same-sex couples can have their relationships

legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples.

maternity

See **pregnancy and maternity**.

maternity leave

Leave which a woman can take whilst she is pregnant and after the birth of her child. Statutory maternity leave is divided into compulsory, ordinary and additional maternity leave. How much leave a woman is entitled to, and how much of it is paid, will vary, but all women employees are entitled to 52 weeks.

monitoring

Monitoring for equality data to check if people with protected characteristics are participating and being treated equally. For example, monitoring the representation of women, or disabled people, in the workforce or at senior levels within organisations.

monitoring form

A form which organisations use to collect equality monitoring data – from, for example, job applicants or service users. It records information about a person's sex, age, disability, race, religion, or sexual orientation. It is kept separately from any identifying information about the person.

more favourably

To treat somebody better than someone else. This is unlawful under the Act if it is because of a protected characteristic except in very limited circumstances. The law requires an employer to make reasonable adjustments for a disabled person to remove any disadvantage caused by their disability, and this often *requires* treating them more favourably. An employer can also *chose* to treat a disabled worker more favourably in other ways, eg by automatically shortlisting them for a job, even if they are not at a particular disadvantage on the relevant occasion. The law can also require pregnant workers to be treated more favourably in some circumstances.

national security

The security of the nation and its protection from external and internal threats, particularly from activities such as terrorism and threats from other nations.

normal retirement age	This is the retirement age at which, in practice, employees in a particular job and workplace would normally expect to retire. Normal retirement age can differ from the contractual retirement age. If it is under 65, it must be objectively justified.
objective justification	See objectively justified .
objectively justified	This phrase is a shorthand way of referring to the legal test of objective justification, ie that the employer's treatment of the worker must be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. The Act uses this test in several situations. For example, once a worker has proved that the employer has treated them unfavourably because of something arising from their disability, or that the employer has indirectly discriminated against them or that the employer has directly discriminated against them because of age, the employer can defend the claim by proving their treatment (i) is in order to achieve a legitimate aim, and (ii) is proportionate, ie appropriate and necessary. If there is a less discriminatory way of achieving the same aim, it should be adopted. See also proportionate .
occupational health	Occupational health has no legal meaning in the context of the Equality Act, but it can be used to refer to the ongoing maintenance and promotion of physical, mental and social wellbeing for all workers. The phrase is often used as a shorthand way of referring to occupational health services provided by the employer.
occupational health practitioner	A health professional providing occupational health services.
occupational health service	This usually refers to doctors or nurses employed in-house by an employer or through an external provider who the employer may ask to see workers and give medical advice on their health when workplace issues arise.
occupational pension	A pension which an employee may receive after retirement as a contractual benefit.

occupational requirement	An employer can discriminate against a worker in very limited circumstances where it is an 'occupational requirement' to have a particular protected characteristic and the application of the requirement is objectively justified . There are two particular occupational requirement exceptions where employment is for the purposes of an organised religion or the employer has an ethos based on religion or belief, but very specific requirements need to be fulfilled.
office-holders	There are personal and public offices. A personal office is a remunerated office or post to which a person is appointed personally under the direction of someone else. A person is appointed to a public office by a member of the government, or the appointment is recommended by them, or the appointment can be made on the recommendation or with the approval of both Houses of Parliament, the Scottish Parliament or the National Assembly for Wales.
palantypist	Also known as 'Speech to Text Reporter'. A palantypist reproduces speech into a text format onto a computer screen at verbatim speeds for Deaf or hard of hearing people to read.
past disability	A person who has had a disability as defined by the Equality Act.
perception	This refers to a belief that someone has a protected characteristic, whether or not they do have it. Discrimination because of a perceived protected characteristic is unlawful. The idea of discrimination because of perception is not explicitly referred to in the Equality Act, but it is incorporated because of the way the definition of direct discrimination is worded.
physical barriers	A physical feature of a building or premises which places disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled people when accessing goods, facilities and services or employment. See <i>also</i> physical features .
physical features	Anything that forms part of the design or construction of a place of work, including any fixtures, such as doors,

stairs etc. Physical features do not include furniture, furnishings, materials, equipment or other chattels in or on the premises.

positive action

If an employer reasonably thinks that people sharing a certain protected characteristic suffer a disadvantage connected to that characteristic or have different needs, or if their participation in work or other activity is disproportionately low, an employer can take any action (which would otherwise be discrimination against other people) which is a proportionate means of enabling or encouraging those people to overcome or minimise their disadvantage or to participate in work or other activities or meeting their needs. For example, an employer can put on training courses exclusively for workers with a particular protected characteristic. An employer is not allowed to give preference to a worker in recruitment or promotion because they have a protected characteristic.

positive discrimination

Treating someone with a protected characteristic more favourably to counteract the effects of past discrimination. It is generally not lawful, although more favourable treatment of workers because of their disability is permitted if the employer so wishes. Moreover, the duty to make reasonable adjustments may require an employer to treat a worker more favourably if that is needed to avoid a disadvantage.

pre-employment disability and health enquiries

Generally, an employer must not ask about disabilities or the health of a job applicant before they have been offered the job. If the employer does ask such questions and then fails to offer the applicant the job, the fact that the employer made such enquiries will shift the **burden of proof** if the applicant brings a claim for disability discrimination. The Equality and Human Rights Commission can also take legal action against the employer if such enquiries are wrongly made. More detail is set out in the guide, 'What equality law means for you as an employer: when you recruit someone to work for you'.

pregnancy and maternity

Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after

the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context where special protections apply.

principal

In the context of a **contract worker**, this is someone who makes work available for a worker who is employed by someone else and supplied by that employer under a contract between the employer and the principal. See **contract worker**.

procurement

The term used in relation to the range of goods and services a public body or authority commissions and delivers. It includes sourcing and appointment of a service provider and the subsequent management of the goods and services being provided.

proportionate

This refers to measures or actions that are appropriate and necessary. Whether something is proportionate in the circumstances will be a question of fact and will involve weighing up the discriminatory impact of the action against the reasons for it, and asking if there is any other way of achieving the aim.

protected characteristics

These are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful. The characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

protected period

This refers to the time in a work context when the specific prohibition against unfavourable treatment of expectant and new mothers applies. The period begins at the start of a woman's pregnancy and continues until the end of her maternity leave.

provision, criterion or practice

Identifying a provision, criterion or practice is key to establishing **indirect discrimination**. It can include, for example, any formal or informal policies, decisions, rules, practices, arrangements, criteria, conditions, prerequisites or qualifications.

public authority

For the purposes of this Guidance a 'public authority' means: government departments, local authorities, courts and tribunals, health authorities and hospitals, schools, prisons, and police.

Note that only those public authorities listed in Schedule 19 to the Equality Act 2010 are subject to the public sector equality duty.

public bodies

For the purpose of this Guidance 'public bodies' includes public authorities (as above) as well as organisations which have a role in the processes of national governments but are not a government department or part of one. They operate to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from Ministers.- departmental government body or an inspectorate. This is not an exhaustive list.

public functions

A 'public function' for the purposes of this Guidance is any act or activities of a public nature carried out by a public authority or public body or by the private or voluntary sectors which is not already covered by the other sections of the Act dealing with services, housing, education and employment. Specifically, in relation to the private and voluntary sectors it is any act or activities carried out on behalf of the state.

Examples of public functions include: determining frameworks for entitlement to benefits or services; law enforcement; receiving someone into prison or immigration detention facility; planning control; licensing; parking controls; trading standards; environmental health; regulatory functions; investigation of complaints; child protection. This is not an exhaustive list.

Any act or activity undertaken by a public authority in relation to delivery of a public service or carrying out duties or functions of a public nature e.g. the provision of policing and prison services, including, government policy-making or local authority planning services.

public sector equality duty

The duty on a public authority when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, foster good relations and advance equality of opportunity.

qualifications bodies

An authority or body which can confer qualifications.

questionnaire

See **questions procedure**.

questions procedure	A discrimination law procedure whereby written pre-action questions are issued to the respondent, i.e. the person or organisation against whom a discrimination claim may be made. The questions are usually put onto a standard written form which is often called a 'questionnaire'.
race	Refers to the protected characteristic of race. It refers to a group of people defined by their colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins.
rated as equivalent	An equal pay concept – see equal work .
reasonable adjustment	See the duty to make reasonable adjustments .
regulations	Secondary legislation made under an Act of Parliament (or European legislation) setting out subsidiary matters which assist in the Act's implementation.
religion or belief	Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
religion or belief organisations	An organisation founded on an ethos based on a religion or belief. Faith schools are one example of a religion or belief organisation. See also religion or belief .
religious organisation	See religion or belief organisations .
retirement age	The age at which an employee retires or is expected to retire. This may be the default retirement age of 65 (until abolished on 1 October 2011), or an age which is set in the employee's contract of employment or the normal retirement age in that employment. The employer may also impose a retirement age on workers who are not employees, but this must be objectively justified even if it is 65 or above.
right to request flexible working	Employees with at least 26 weeks' service have the right to request flexible working under a formal procedure in order to care for children or certain adult relatives. This is simply an entitlement to go through a formal procedure to have the request considered in a

meeting and to receive written reasons for any refusal. The substantive right to be allowed to work flexibly for care reasons applies more widely to workers and is covered by indirect sex discrimination law under the Equality Act.

same employment

An equal pay concept (see **equal work**). Generally, women and men can compare their pay and other conditions with those employed by the same or an associated employer.

service complaint

Where the discrimination occurred while the worker was serving as a member of the armed forces, an employment tribunal cannot decide the claim unless the worker has made a service complaint about the matter which has not been withdrawn.

service provider

Someone (including an organisation) who provides services, goods or facilities to the general public or a section of it.

sex

This is a protected characteristic. It refers to whether a person is a man or a woman (of any age).

sexual harassment

Any conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted by the recipient, including verbal, non-verbal and physical behaviour, and which violates the victim's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment for them.

sexual orientation

Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

single-sex facilities

Facilities which are only available to men or to women, the provision of which may be lawful under the Equality Act.

stakeholders

People with an interest in a subject or issue who are likely to be affected by any decision relating to it and/or have responsibilities relating to it.

substantial

This word tends to come up most in connection with the definition of disability and the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers. The Equality Act says only that 'substantial' means more than minor or trivial. This means that disabled workers do not need to be put

at a huge disadvantage before an employer's equality duties are triggered.

terms of employment

The provisions of a person's contract of employment, whether provided for expressly in the contract itself or incorporated by statute, custom and practice or common law etc.

textphone

A type of telephone for Deaf or hard of hearing people which is attached to a keyboard and a screen on which the messages sent and received are displayed.

third party harassment

This is where workers are harassed by members of the public (such as customers) or by other people who the employer does not employ (such as suppliers). If an employer is aware that one of their workers has been subjected to harassment by third parties on at least two occasions, the employer will be legally responsible for any further third party harassment unless the employer takes all reasonable steps to prevent it.

trade unions

These are organisations formed to represent workers' rights and interests to their employers, for example in order to improve working conditions, wages or benefits. They also advocate more widely on behalf of their members' interests and make recommendations to government, industry bodies and other policy makers.

transsexual person

Refers to a person who has the protected characteristic of **gender reassignment**. This may be a woman who has transitioned or is transitioning to be a man, or a man who has transitioned or is transitioning to be a woman. The law does not require a person to undergo a medical procedure to be recognised as a transsexual person. Once a transsexual person has acquired a **gender recognition certificate**, it is probably the case that they should be treated entirely as their acquired gender.

tribunal

See **Employment Tribunal**

two ticks symbol

A sign awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers who are positive about employing disabled people and are committed to employing, keeping and developing disabled staff.

UK Text Relay Service	Text Relay is a national telephone relay service for deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, deafblind and speech-impaired people. It lets them use a textphone to access any services that are available on standard telephone systems.
unfavourably	The term is used (instead of less favourable) where a comparator is not required to show that someone has been subjected to a detriment or disadvantage because of a protected characteristic – for example in relation to pregnancy and maternity discrimination, or discrimination arising from disability.
vicarious liability	This term is sometimes used to describe the fact that an employer is legally responsible for discrimination carried out by its employees. See also liability .
victimisation	Subjecting a person to a detriment because they have done a protected act or there is a belief that they have done a protected act i.e. bringing proceedings under the Equality Act; giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under the Act; doing any other thing for the purposes or in connection with the Act; making an allegation that a person has contravened the Act; or making a relevant pay disclosure.
victimise	The act of victimisation.
vocational service	A range of services to enable people to retain and gain paid employment and mainstream education.
vocational training	Training to do a particular job or task.
work of equal value	See equal work .
WORKSTEP	The WORKSTEP employment programme provides support to disabled people facing complex barriers to getting and keeping a job. It also offers practical assistance to employers.
worker	In this guide, ‘worker’ is used to refer to any person working for an employer, whether they are employed on a contract of employment (ie an ‘ employee ’) or on a contract personally to do work, or more generally as a

contract worker. In employment law, the term 'worker' has a similar meaning to those people covered by the Equality Act. However, it is not quite identical to that and has its own definition; the term is used, for example, to people covered by the Working Time Regulations and the law on the minimum wage.

Contact us

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights.

You can find out more or get in touch with us via our website at www.equalityhumanrights.com or by contacting one of our helplines below. If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language please contact the relevant helpline to discuss your needs.

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This guide is one of a series written by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to explain your responsibilities under equality law if you are a person or organisation employing people to work for you.

There are 7 guides:

1. What equality law means for you as an employer: when you recruit someone to work for you
2. What equality law means for you as an employer: working hours, flexible working and time off
3. What equality law means for you as an employer: pay and benefits
4. What equality law means for you as an employer: training, development, promotion and transfer
5. What equality law means for you as an employer: managing workers
6. What equality law means for you as an employer: dismissal, redundancy, retirement and after a worker has left
7. Good equality practice for employers: equality policies, equality training and monitoring

We have also produced:

- A separate series of guides explaining the responsibilities people and organisations have if they are providing services, carrying out public functions or running an association
- Different guides which explain people's rights at work and in relation to people and organisations providing services, carrying out public functions or running an association

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