



## ***Rights at Work – Equality and Discrimination***

### **What is this leaflet for?**

This leaflet gives a brief outline of rights to equality and protection from discrimination. It includes basic information on:

- **Who is entitled to the rights**
- **How people complain if they are denied a right they believe they are entitled to.**

For detailed information on a particular right visit [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk).

### **Rights covered**

- Disability discrimination
- Equal pay
- Fixed-term employees
- Rehabilitation of offenders
- Part-time employees
- Race discrimination
- Religion or belief
- Sex discrimination
- Sexual orientation
- Trade union membership.

Visit the Acas website at [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) for further information on all the rights with links to detailed guidance on the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) website. Printed versions of Acas publications are available from **Acas Publications** telephone 08702 42 90 90

If you do not have easy access to the internet (world wide web) at home or at work try:

- your local library. Most medium-sized or large public libraries provide Internet access including a limited period free of charge. In some areas other sources of free access are available.
- Internet cafes, which provide access to the internet for a fee.
- UK online centres. These were set up by the Department for Education and Skills to help people with no computer skills to access the internet. There are around 6,000 UK online centres. Call the free UK online helpline **0800 77 1234** to find your nearest centre.

This leaflet is one of a series which outlines individual employment rights – other titles include ***Discipline, grievances and dismissals, Information and consultation, Parents at work, Pay, Time off and Trade unions and representation.*** Information on the law is for guidance only – you may need to seek legal advice on your particular circumstances.

Advisers on **Acas' national helpline 08457 47 47 47** can answer questions on most **employment relations matters** including rights and duties, but cannot provide legal advice. Acas also offers a wide range of products and services for organisations of all sizes and the people who work in them. Our aim is to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations.

# ***Rights to equality, and Protection from Discrimination***

## ***Disability discrimination***

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 gives disabled people at work protection from discrimination. This means that employers:

- must not treat a disabled person **less favourably** because of a reason relating to their disability, without a justifiable reason
- are required to make **reasonable adjustments** to working conditions or the workplace where that would help to accommodate a particular disabled person.

## ***Equal pay***

Employers must give men and women equal treatment in the terms and conditions of their employment contract if they are employed on:

- **'like work' – work that is the same or broadly similar**
- **work rated as equivalent under a job evaluation study, or**
- **work found to be of equal value.**

A woman is employed on 'like work' with a man if her work is of the same or a broadly similar nature. It is for the employer to show that there is a genuine reason for any difference in pay for this 'like work', which is not based on the sex of an individual.

Individuals may complain to an employment tribunal under the Equal Pay Act 1970 up to six months after leaving the employment to which their claim relates. Normally, they may claim arrears of remuneration (which includes sick pay, holiday pay, bonuses, overtime etc, as well as 'pay') for a period of generally up to six years (five years in Scotland) before the date of their tribunal application.

## ***Fixed-term employees***

The Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 aim to ensure that employees on fixed-term contracts are treated no less favourably than comparable permanent employees. Examples of fixed-term work include:

- **agricultural workers doing 'seasonal' work**
- **shop assistants working for the Christmas period**
- **employees covering maternity leave**
- **employees doing a specific task – like painting a house.**

Under the regulations these employees have the right to the same terms and conditions of employment as comparable permanent employees.

## ***Rehabilitation of offenders***

Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 many ex-offenders are given certain employment rights if their convictions become 'spent'. Broadly speaking, anyone who has been convicted of a criminal offence and who is not convicted of a further offence during a specified period (the 'rehabilitation period') becomes a 'rehabilitated person'. This means that:

- **the conviction does not have to be declared for most purposes, such as applying for a job**
- **employees are given protection against dismissal or exclusion from any office, profession, occupation or employment (with some exceptions) because of their spent conviction and**
- **employers cannot prejudice a person in any way because of a spent conviction.**

A conviction resulting in a prison sentence of more than 30 months can never become spent. There are some exceptions to the Act – broadly relating to work with children, the sick, disabled people and the administration of justice.

## ***Part-time employees***

The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 aim to ensure that part-time workers are not treated less favourably than comparable full-timers. Principally, this means they should:

- **receive the same rates of pay**
- **not be excluded from training simply because they work part-time**
- **receive holiday entitlement pro rata to comparable full-timers**
- **have any career break schemes, contractual maternity leave and parental leave made available to them in the same way as for full-time workers and**
- **not be treated less favourably when selecting workers for redundancy.**

## ***Race discrimination***

The Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) makes it illegal to treat a person less favourably than others on racial grounds.

Race discrimination covers all aspects of employment – from recruitment to pay, and training to the termination of a contract. Discrimination covers four areas:

- 1. direct discrimination – treating someone less favourably on racial grounds**
- 2. indirect discrimination – applying practices that might favour one racial group over another**
- 3. harassment – unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity and creates a hostile or degrading environment**

#### **4. victimisation – unfair treatment of an employee who has made a complaint about racial discrimination.**

However, a job may be restricted to people of a particular race or ethnic or national origin, if one of these characteristics is a genuine occupational requirement. A genuine occupational requirement or qualification may apply in limited circumstances for reasons of authenticity – for example, to achieve authenticity a theatre company may need black actors to depict certain scenes.

#### ***Religion or belief***

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 protect people from discrimination on the grounds of religion and/or beliefs.

The Regulations mean that an organisation's recruitment and selection procedures, as well as employment practices, must treat everyone fairly regardless of religion or belief.

#### ***Sex discrimination***

Under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended), generally employers should not discriminate on grounds of sex, marriage or because someone intends to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone gender reassignment.

Sex discrimination covers all aspects of employment – from recruitment to termination of a contract, and training and pay. It also includes applying requirements or conditions which, though applied equally to all, have a disproportionate effect on one sex or on married people which cannot be shown to be justifiable (for instance to be job-related).

There are limited exceptions: the Act permits employers, under certain conditions, to train employees of one sex in order to fit them for particular work in which their sex has recently been under-represented; they may also encourage the underrepresented sex to take up opportunities to do that work.

#### ***Sexual orientation***

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 give protection from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. This includes 'orientation towards someone of the same sex (lesbian or gay men), opposite sex (heterosexual) or both sexes (bisexual)'.

The Regulations mean that an organisation's recruitment and selection procedures, as well as employment practices, must treat everyone fairly regardless of their sexual orientation or religion or belief.

## ***Trade union membership***

Employees have various rights to be protected against discrimination because they belong or do not belong to a trade union. For example, it is unlawful to:

- **specify union membership in advertising a job limit recruitment to trade union members**
- **be refused employment or the services of an employment agency because of membership or non-membership of a trade union**
- **be dismissed or chosen for redundancy because of membership or non-membership of a trade union.**

For other rights related to union membership see the leaflet in this series Trade ***unions and representation***.

## ***Who has these rights?***

**Most people are entitled to the statutory rights listed in this leaflet, although, in many cases,** qualifying conditions must be fulfilled before a right may be claimed. Some rights apply to all employees as soon as they start work; others depend on factors such as length of service, continuity of employment and activities in addition to the job (e.g. union work). For certain rights, various groups of people are excluded. Most rights apply only to employees but some apply to wider groups of workers. Always check detailed information on qualifying conditions using the links provided on the Acas website at [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk).

Employers and employees are free to agree better terms than those required by legislation in their contract of employment. A contract of employment is an agreement entered into by an employer and employee under which they have certain mutual obligations – for more information visit the Department of Trade and Industry website at [www.dti.gov.uk/er](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er).

Employers must give employees **a written statement of the main particulars of employment within two months** of the beginning of the **employment**. It should include, among other things, details of pay, hours, holidays, notice period and an additional note on disciplinary and grievance procedures.

## ***What happens if there is a dispute about rights at work?***

If employers and employees have a dispute about any of the rights listed in this leaflet they have the following options:

1. **Settle the dispute.** Employees should always try to resolve a problem or dispute with their manager or employer first. This might be through the organisation's own grievance procedure. Both sides can also come to Acas for advice, either from the helpline or an Acas adviser.
2. An employee can make a **complaint to an employment tribunal** if he or she believes an employment right has been denied or infringed. In most cases, people who are treated detrimentally for exercising their rights may also complain to a tribunal. Complaints normally must be made within three months of the date of the alleged infringement – although there are exceptions (follow the links on the Acas website for details). For nearly all types of complaint, once an application is received an Acas conciliator will contact both parties to see if a settlement can be reached before the case reaches a hearing.

3. **Acas Arbitration Scheme.** For cases of alleged unfair dismissal and complaints under the right to request flexible working only, both parties can choose to have their case heard by an independent arbitrator appointed by Acas. The hearing is private, informal, non-legalistic, quick and confidential and the arbitrator's decision final. The remedies are the same as through an employment tribunal.
4. A **tribunal hearing** has various remedies and awards it can make, depending on the type of case. For example, if the tribunal decides an employee has been unfairly dismissed, the remedy could be re-instatement, re-engagement or monetary compensation, depending on the circumstances. Costs can also be awarded. A tribunal hearing is public.

## ***Acas Publications***

Whether you need to know how to write a contract of employment, how much holiday you are entitled to or about the latest employment legislation, our range of booklets and leaflets give practical information and advice for both employers and employees on employment matters.

You can choose from our handbooks offering comprehensive guidance to the modern workplace or our Getting it Right pocket guides, providing vital checklists to help small firms run their business.

View and order online at [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) or call Acas Publications on **08702 42 90 90**. Other Acas material on this subject includes:

*Acas Advisory Booklet – Tackling discrimination and promoting equality*

*Acas Employment Equality Legislation Guides – Religion or belief and Sexual orientation in the workplace*