

Understanding the Equality Act 2010

What is the Equality Act 2010?

The Equality Act 2010 is a UK law that protects people from unfair treatment and discrimination. It brought together several previous pieces of equality legislation into one Act, making it easier to understand and apply.

The Act helps ensure that individuals are treated fairly in:

- Employment
- Education
- Public services
- Housing
- Membership organisations
- The provision of goods and services

The Equality Act aims to promote a fairer society where everyone has equal opportunities to participate and succeed.

The Nine Protected Characteristics

The Act protects people who possess one or more of the following characteristics:

Protected Characteristic	What it Means
Age	Being treated unfairly because of age.
Disability	A physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term impact on daily activities.
Gender Reassignment	Protection for individuals who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a gender transition.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Protection against discrimination due to marital or civil partnership status.
Pregnancy and Maternity	Protection during pregnancy and maternity leave.
Race	Includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins.
Religion or Belief	Includes religious beliefs and philosophical beliefs.
Sex	Protection against discrimination based on being male or female.
Sexual Orientation	Protection regardless of whether someone is heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Why Does This Matter in the Workplace?

Employers have a legal and ethical responsibility to create environments where people are treated fairly and respectfully.

Benefits of promoting equality include:

- Better employee wellbeing
- Increased engagement and motivation
- Improved organisational reputation
- More innovative and diverse teams
- Reduced risk of discrimination claims

Creating an inclusive workplace is also an important aspect of social responsibility. [hr-inform.co.uk]

Discrimination and Good Practice

Types of Discrimination

Direct Discrimination

Treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic.

Example: A qualified candidate is not offered a job because of their age.

Indirect Discrimination

A policy or practice applies to everyone but disadvantages a particular group.

Example: Requiring all employees to work late evenings may disadvantage some employees with caring responsibilities.

Harassment

Unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

Example: Making offensive jokes about a person's religion.

Victimisation

Treating someone unfairly because they have made or supported a complaint about discrimination.

Example: An employee is excluded from opportunities after raising concerns about discriminatory behaviour.

What is Good Practice?

Inclusive organisations go beyond legal compliance and actively create environments where everyone can participate and succeed.

Examples include:

Inclusive Recruitment

- Using fair selection criteria.
- Advertising vacancies widely.
- Encouraging diverse applicants.

Reasonable Adjustments

- Providing specialist equipment.
- Offering flexible working arrangements.
- Adapting communication methods.

Inclusive Communication

- Using clear and respectful language.
- Providing accessible formats where needed.
- Encouraging all voices to be heard.

Equality and Diversity Training

- Raising awareness of bias and discrimination.
- Promoting respectful behaviours and inclusion.

These approaches help create workplaces where people feel valued, respected, and able to contribute fully. [\[hr-inform.co.uk\]](https://hr-inform.co.uk)

Quick Check Your Understanding

1. What are the nine protected characteristics?
 2. What is the difference between direct and indirect discrimination?
 3. What is meant by "reasonable adjustments"?
 4. Why is inclusion important in the workplace?
 5. How does promoting equality support an organisation's social responsibility?
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Key Message

Equality means treating people fairly. Equity means recognising that people may need different levels of support to achieve similar opportunities. Inclusion means creating environments where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and able to contribute.

Sources

- GOV.UK. *Equality Act 2010: Guidance*.
- CIPD. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the Workplace Factsheet*. [[hr-inform.co.uk](https://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-inform/co.uk)]