

What is discrimination?

Discriminating against someone means treating them unfairly based on a particular aspect of their identity, especially their sex, religion, gender, age, or disability status. Discrimination can take many forms, and some are more obvious than others. Discrimination is based on prejudice, which is a preconceived negative opinion of someone that is not based on reason or experience.

For an example of discrimination, imagine that you want to visit a museum with your two friends, one of whom is Sikh and wears a turban. When you go to enter the museum, two of you are allowed to enter without your bags being checked, but your Sikh friend is taken aside and his belongings are thoroughly searched. This is an example of an unfair decision based purely on prejudice.

One aspect of discrimination that is particularly relevant to the workplace is disability discrimination. There are several reasons why an employer may hold prejudice against disabled workers - he may think that he or she may not be able to complete their work as quickly as the other employees, or that they may take more time off for hospital appointments or sick days. It is these ideas that may prevent an employer from giving a disabled worker a fair chance at a job interview or employment. Additionally, once a disabled worker is in an employed position, they may be overlooked for promotion and other opportunities for similar reasons. They may also be treated differently by other co-workers, and unfairly singled out. Although this may happen deliberately, sometimes people may not realise that they are treating a disabled person differently, or they may believe they are doing so for positive reasons, such as trying not to overburden them.



Discrimination may also occur to disabled users of a business or service - for instance, if disabled members of the public would like to shop at the supermarket, they require disabled parking spaces. Although such discrimination may not result from prejudice, it still amounts to a failure to properly consider a disabled person's needs and prevents them from using the supermarket as an able-bodied person would. In short, there are a wide variety of situations in which disabled people may find themselves at a disadvantage in their place of employment or education, or when using a business or service. This is why in 2010 The Equality Act was introduced in Britain.

What is the 2010 Equality Act and why do I need to know about it?

The Equality Act of 2010 was created to prevent instances such as those we have discussed above and also to protect other categories of people who are also common victims of discrimination, such as gay people, pregnant people, or those of a particular religion. The act covers all private, public and voluntary organisations.

The definition of 'disability' within the Equality Act is 'a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial, long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. It's important to remember that disability is not always visible, and that those suffering from 'invisible' disabilities, such as autism, are also protected under the act. Discrimination can take many different forms, and some are more obvious than others.

Some campaigners have recently argued that the law is not clear enough - for example - disfigurement is included within disability as a protected characteristic, but this is currently ignored by many agencies, parliament and other government bodies when they conduct research into support for disabled people. This can lead to those with disfigurements feeling overlooked. Often entire publications pertaining to support for disabled people contain no reference to or images of people with disfigurements.

The Equality Act brings together all of the government's previous equality laws, making the legislation easier for everyone to understand. Because it is unlawful to act in a manner that is considered discrimination, if an employee or customer believes that they have suffered discrimination, they may be entitled to take legal action, and penalties will be issued if a company or employer is found guilty of the accusation. It's essential that, as we begin to think about entering the world of work, we are aware of the Equality Act so not only do we never break the law - but also so we know our rights and are not discriminated against ourselves.

