

## Promoting equality and valuing diversity

### This handout will cover:

- What is equality?
- Equality Act (2010)
- Protected Characteristics
- Types of discrimination
- What is diversity?
- Valuing equality and advancing diversity
- Ways to promote equality and value diversity
- Reading list
- Website list

### What is equality?

Equality for learners is about their right to have fair access to attend and participate in their chosen learning programme. This should be regardless of age, ability and/or circumstances. However, there could be certain entry requirements which might need to be met for some qualifications or courses. Equal opportunity is a concept underpinned by legislation in most countries. It should provide relevant and appropriate access for the participation, development and advancement of all individuals and groups within society. In the past, equality has often been described as *everyone being the same or having equal opportunities*. Nowadays, it can be described as *everyone being different, but having equal rights*. Equality of opportunity is a concept underpinned by legislation.

### Equality Act (2010)

The Equality Act (2010) replaced all previous anti-discrimination legislation and consolidated it into one Act (for England, Scotland and Wales). It provides rights for individuals and those associated with them, not to be directly discriminated against or harassed.

To ensure you comply with the Equality Act (2010) you will need to be proactive in all aspects of equality and diversity. You should make sure your delivery style, teaching, learning, assessment and quality assurance activities and resources promote and include all learners in respect of the Act's nine *protected characteristics*. These are known as the *personal attributes* of individuals and groups who are likely to be discriminated against.

### Protected Characteristics

The Act identified nine protected characteristics, these refer to aspects of a person's identity which are explicitly protected from discrimination:

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

All nine protected characteristics are covered in the employment duties of the Act. However, the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnerships is not included in the education duties of the Act. Examples include:

*Age:* older people, younger people.

*Disability:* physical or sensory impairments, mental health difficulties, long term medical conditions, learning difficulties, neurodiverse conditions such as dyslexia, autism, tourettes or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). For an impairment to be a disability, its effect on normal day-to-day activities must be substantial. The Equality Act 2010 defines substantial to mean *more than minor or trivial*.

*Gender reassignment:* transsexual people, transgender people, men and women with a transsexual history or who are in the process of becoming a transsexual person.

*Marriage and civil partnership:* married people, people in a civil partnership, single people.

*Pregnancy and maternity:* pregnant women, people on maternity leave, women who have recently given birth.

*Race:* colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, heritage.

*Religion or belief:* people from different faith groups, people with a philosophical belief, people with no religion or belief.

*Sex:* male, female.

*Sexual orientation:* gay and lesbian people, bisexual people, heterosexual/straight people.

When preparing your teaching materials and resources, you should try to use representations of people with protected characteristics as well as those without.

When possible, it's best to find ways of talking about and integrating the protected characteristics during your sessions. You could create activities based around them, or the opportunity might occur naturally.

## Types of discrimination

The Equality Act has seven different *types of discrimination* which can be legally protected against:

1. associative discrimination: direct discrimination against someone because they are associated with another person with a protected characteristic. For example, a learner receives verbal abuse because they are friends with a transsexual learner.
2. direct discrimination: discrimination because of a protected characteristic. For example, not accepting an older learner onto a course because all the other learners are younger.
3. indirect discrimination: when a rule or a policy which applies to everyone can disadvantage a person with a protected characteristic. For example, a hotel is unwilling to give a hotel reception learner a work placement as she wears a burqa. They felt their guests would rather see the receptionists' faces.
4. discrimination by perception: direct discrimination against someone because others think they have a protected characteristic. For example, a learner taunting another learner because they have a stammer, even though it's not a disability.
5. harassment: behaviour deemed offensive by the recipient. For example, a male learner telling a female learner that she has to go on a date with him, otherwise he will tell everyone she is gay.
6. harassment by a third party: the harassment of people by those not directly employed by an organisation. For example, an outside building contractor makes racist remarks to an Asian learner.
7. victimisation: discrimination against someone because they made or supported a complaint under equality legislation. For example, a Muslim learner feels victimised because they made a complaint that there is not a suitable area within which to pray.

In countries outside the UK, there will be different legislation. If this applies to you, you might like to research what the current legislation is and how it impacts upon your role.

## What is diversity?

Diversity is about valuing and respecting the differences in learners. If you have two or more learners, you will experience diversity.

Combined together, equality and diversity will help embrace learners' experiences, cultures and differences. This should enable each individual's maximum potential to be achieved in a safe and positive learning environment. In a diverse and multicultural society, recognising and accepting individual differences is part of embracing equality and diversity.

## Valuing equality and advancing diversity

If you ever feel unsure as to whether you, or other learners and colleagues are valuing equality and diversity, just ask yourself the following:

- Is this fair?
- How would I feel in this situation?
- Would I want to be treated this way?

If your answer is a negative one, then make sure you do something about it. However, you may not always have the answer to these questions, especially where there is a difficulty in meeting the conflicting needs of learners.

### Ways to promote equality and value diversity:

- Have a positive attitude and the ability to be proactive rather than to be reactive to situations.
- Deal with any issues of harassment, discrimination, stereotyping or bullying which might occur within your sessions, as soon as possible.
- Remind learners that their point of view is not necessarily the same as others (under the Equality Act (2010) learners can claim something is offensive even when it is not directed at them).
- Know about your organisation's policies and procedures for dealing with your learners' complaints. This should have been shared with learners during the induction process.
- Treat any complaints seriously, regardless of who brings them, and investigate the complaint thoroughly.
- Deal quickly and firmly with anyone who acts inappropriately.
- Deal with matters informally and internally if possible. The solution may be as simple as pointing out to a learner the effect that their behaviour has on others and asking them to stop.
- Mix learners during group activities so that everyone has the opportunity to work with others.
- Ensure that all your learners' experiences are acknowledged, included and valued.
- Hold theme weeks based on different cultures, religions, disabilities etc.
- Plan your scheme of work to include aspects such as special dates/religious holidays, and plan activities around them e.g. Chinese New Year.
- Plan your sessions to use differentiated activities and resources.
- Be consistent and fair with all assessment decisions.
- Create resources in accessible fonts (most could be available in electronic format for easy access and adaptation).
- If printing handouts, use pastel coloured paper for everyone - this helps a learner with dyslexia and doesn't single them out.
- Use a range of teaching styles.

- Face your learners when speaking to them.
- Use group tutorials as a forum for activities and discussions.
- Create an environment free of prejudice, discrimination and harassment, where learners can contribute fully and freely, and feel valued.
- Agree ground rules and establish acceptable behaviour.
- Use icebreakers to help learners get to know each other.
- Share your resources and collaborate with others to create new ones e.g. quizzes.

### Reading list

Gravells A & Simpson S (2012) *Equality and Diversity in the Lifelong Learning Sector* (2nd Edn) London Learning Matters.

Hiddleston P & Unwin L (2012) *Teaching and Learning in Further Education: Diversity and Change* Abingdon Routledge

Knowles G (2011) *Diversity, Equality and Achievement in Education* London SAGE Publications Ltd

Patel J & Yafai G (2016) *Demystifying Diversity: A Handbook to Navigate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* London Gilgamesh

Peart S (2014) *Equality and Diversity in Further Education* Northwich Critical Publications Ltd

Powell S & Tummons J (2011) *Inclusive Practice in the Lifelong Learning Sector* Exeter Learning Matters

Race P (2014) *Making Learning Happen* London SAGE Publications Ltd

Spencerley L (2014) *Inclusion in Further Education* Northwich Critical Publications Ltd

Thompson N (2011) *Promoting Equality: Working with Diversity and Difference* Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan

Zaidi N (2015) *Embedding Equality and Diversity into the Curriculum – a literature review* London Education and Training Consultants Ltd

### Website list

Differentiated teaching and learning activities - [www.tes.com/teaching-resource/challenge-toolkit-6063318](http://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/challenge-toolkit-6063318)

Disability Equality in Education – [www.worldofinclusion.com/inclusion\\_education.htm](http://www.worldofinclusion.com/inclusion_education.htm)

Disability Now - <https://disabilitynow.org.uk>

Disability Rights UK - [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

Equality and Diversity Forum – [www.edf.org.uk](http://www.edf.org.uk)

Equality and Human Rights Commission – [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en)

