



Government  
**Equalities** Office

Putting equality at the heart of government



# The Equality Act, making equality real

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Easy Read Document



Easy Read

# Important

In this easy read booklet we explain what some words mean.

When we first mention any of these words, it is in **bold green** writing. A box then shows what the words mean.

These words and what they mean are also in a Words List at the back of the booklet.

If any of the words are used later in the booklet, we show them in **normal green** writing. If you see words in **normal green** writing, you can look up what they mean in the Words List.

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# Contents

- What the Equality Minister says** ..... 3
  
- The Equality Act**..... 5
  - Who the Equality Act affects** ..... 6
  - When the Equality Act became law** ..... 6
  
- What the Equality Act does** ..... 7
  - Two new duties for public bodies**..... 10
    - Family background or where a person is born  
(the Socio-economic Duty)..... 10
    - Treating people from different groups fairly and equally  
(the Equality Duty) ..... 12
  - Civil partnerships held in religious buildings** ..... 13
  - Using buying power to make equality better** ..... 14
  - More equality for people of different ages**..... 15
  - Equal pay and equality information** ..... 17
  - Using positive action to increase diversity** ..... 18
    - Positive action in elections for Parliament and  
local councils and diversity reporting ..... 20
  - Extra powers for employment tribunals**..... 21
  - New protection for people like carers** ..... 22
  - A clear law for women breast-feeding babies** ..... 23

- Taking equality into clubs** ..... 24
- Better protection for disabled people** ..... 25
  - School pupils ..... 25
  - Making the disability law clearer ..... 25
  - Costs of reasonable adjustments ..... 26
  - Making information accessible for disabled people ..... 26
  - Disabled people in buildings with shared areas ..... 26
  - Treating disabled people poorly, without a good reason ... 27
  - Pre-employment disability-related enquiries ..... 27
- Protecting people from dual discrimination** ..... 28
- Making Britain fair and equal for all** ..... 29
- Words list** ..... 30

## What the Equality Minister says

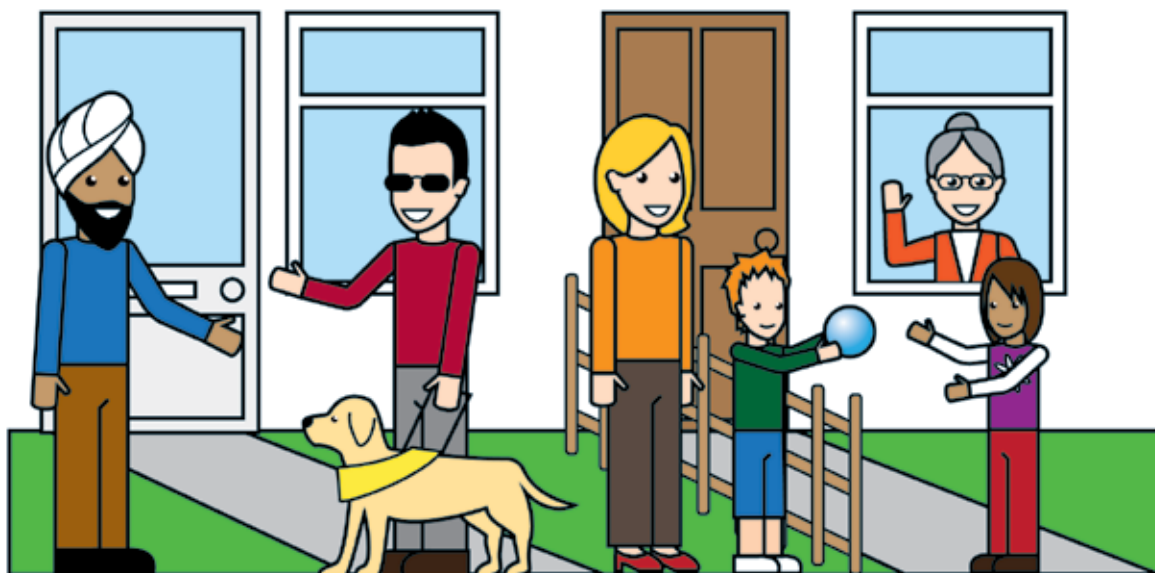
My name is Harriet Harman. I am the Minister for Women and **Equality**. **Equality** is a big part of my job and is very important to the Government.

### Equality

This means everyone having the same chances to do what they can. Some people may need extra help to get the same chances.

**Equality** is right for many reasons.

- People enjoy life more if they are treated fairly.
- The country is richer because each and every person can do what they are best at.
- It is easier for people to live side by side and get on with each other if everyone is treated fairly.



A lot has been done to help make sure people are treated fairly.

- In the 1960s new laws said **people of different races** must be treated fairly.

## People of different races

These are groups of people who come from different places, have different skin colours or have passports from different countries.

- In the 1970s new laws said men and women must be treated equally and get the same pay for the same job.
- In the 1990s new laws said disabled people must be treated fairly.
- In 2004 new laws gave **lesbian, gay** and **bisexual** people the right to become partners, like married people.

## Lesbian, gay and bisexual

Lesbians are women who are attracted to other women.

Gay men are attracted to other men.

Bisexual people are attracted to women and to men.

We wanted to bring these laws together so they are clear, strong and easy to follow. This booklet tells you how we did this.



Harriet Harman QC MP  
Minister for Women and Equality

# The Equality Act

We needed this **Equality Act** to make the **equality** laws clearer and stronger. You can find a list of the people who will be helped by this Act on page 29.

## Equality Act or the Act

This is the Government's new law to make sure all people are treated fairly. The Act became law when Parliament agreed it was right.

Stronger laws were needed because the old **equality** laws did not make **equality** happen fast enough. For example

- many women are paid less than men for the same kind of work.
- clever children from poorer families do less well at school.
- disabled people are a lot more likely to have no job.
- **people of different races** find it harder to get a job.



- many **lesbian** and **gay** people are worried about asking the police for help in case they are treated unfairly.

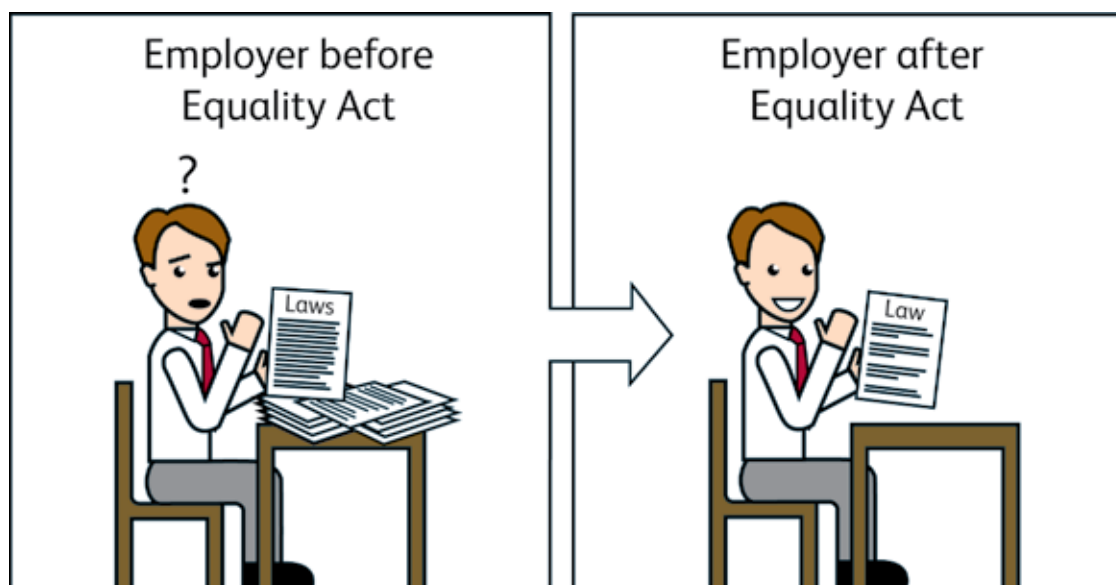
- many people who have changed their sex do not use public services like swimming pools because they think they will not be treated well.

The **Equality Act** brings together 9 big **equality** laws and about 100 smaller laws.

Bringing these laws together makes it a lot easier for **employers** and other people to know what they must do. It will also help everyone understand the law.

## Employers

These are people or companies that pay people to do work.



## Who the Equality Act affects

The **Equality Act** is for people in England, Scotland and Wales.

## When the Equality Act became law

The **Equality Act** became law in Spring 2010, but it will not 'start working' until later.

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## What the Equality Act does

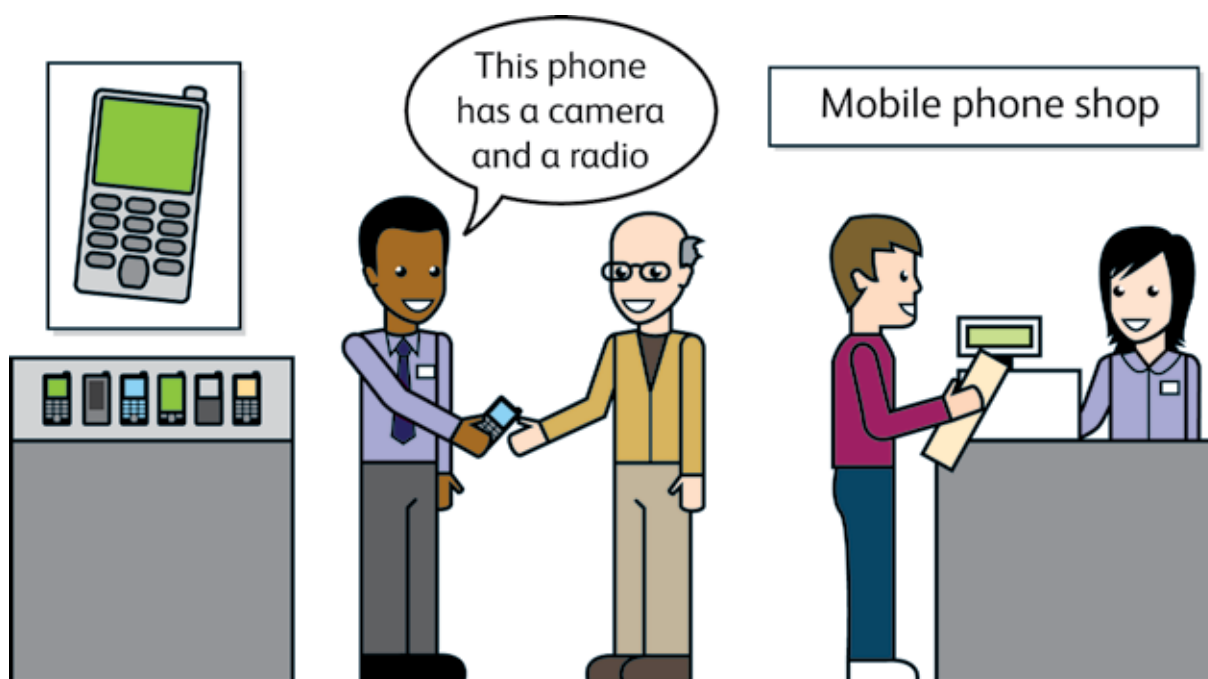
This list shows, in a few words, what the **Equality Act** does to make the **equality** laws stronger. To find out more, go to the page shown.

- **The Act** tells some **public bodies** to do 2 new things to help make **equality** happen. See page 10.

### Public bodies

These include government departments, schools, hospitals and councils.

- **The Act** will mean **public bodies** have to think about **equality** when they are buying things. See page 14.
- **The Act** has new rules to make sure older people are treated fairly. For example, some shops only help older people if they are with a young person. See page 15.



- **The Act** has 2 new ideas to make men and women's wages easier to compare. See page 17.
- **The Act** allows **employers** to use **positive action** if they want to make sure their workers are **diverse**. See page 18.

## Positive action

This lets **employers** and service providers think about **equality** when looking at who they might supply their services to or employ. It might mean providing services in a different way or giving people information or training. For **employers** it might mean choosing between two people who can do the job as well as each other.

## Diverse or diversity

This is a mix of different kinds of people. For example, men and women, young and old people, **people of different races**, disabled and non-disabled people.



- **The Act** lets **employment tribunals** do new things to help people get fair treatment. See page 21.

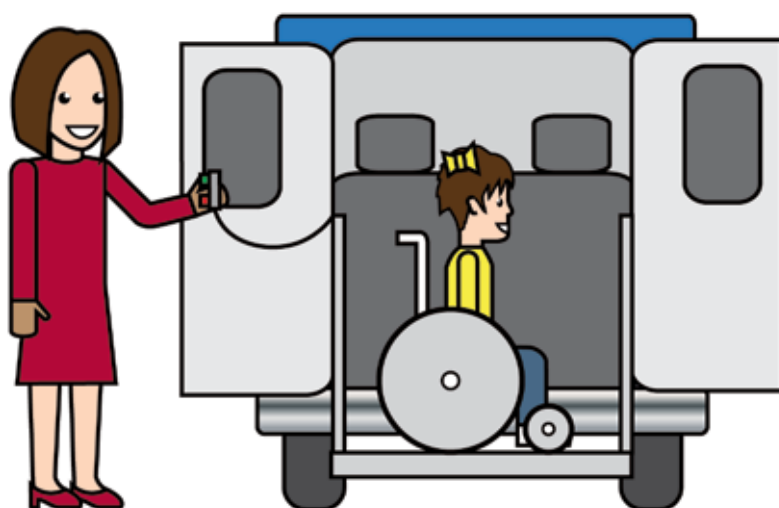
## Employment tribunals

These sort out arguments between **employers** and workers.

- **The Act** protects people who are looking after someone, like **carers**, from being treated unfairly. See page 22.

## Carers

Carers look after people who are too ill or disabled or old to look after themselves.



- **The Act** makes it clear that women can breast-feed their babies in shops, cafés and other places. See page 23.
- **The Act** makes sure clubs do not treat people unfairly. See page 24.
- **The Act** includes more to stop disabled people being treated unfairly. See page 25.

These changes and other things in **the Act** will make Great Britain a better place to live and work, now and in the future.

## Two new duties for public bodies

The **Equality Act** gives **public bodies** 2 new **duties**.

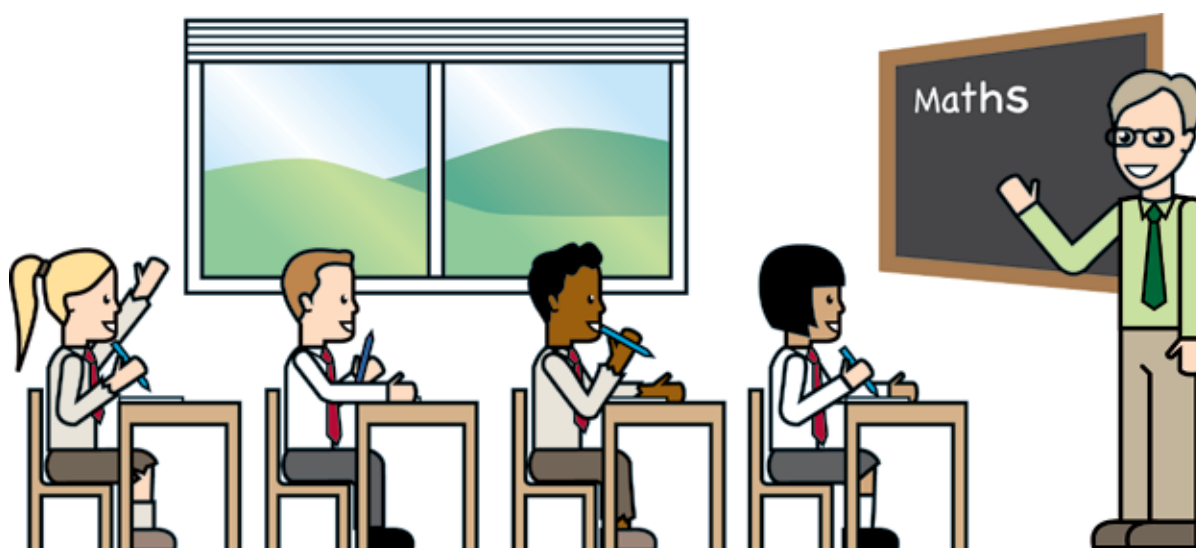
- Some **public bodies** will have to think about how they can help to stop people doing less well than other people because of their family background or where they were born.
- All **public bodies** must think about treating people from different groups fairly and equally.

### Duties

These are things the law says someone must do.

### Family background or where a person is born (the Socio-economic Duty)

Family background or where a person is born still affects their life. For example, a child from a rich family often does better at school than a child from a poor family, even if the poorer child is cleverer. This is sometimes called socio-economic inequality.



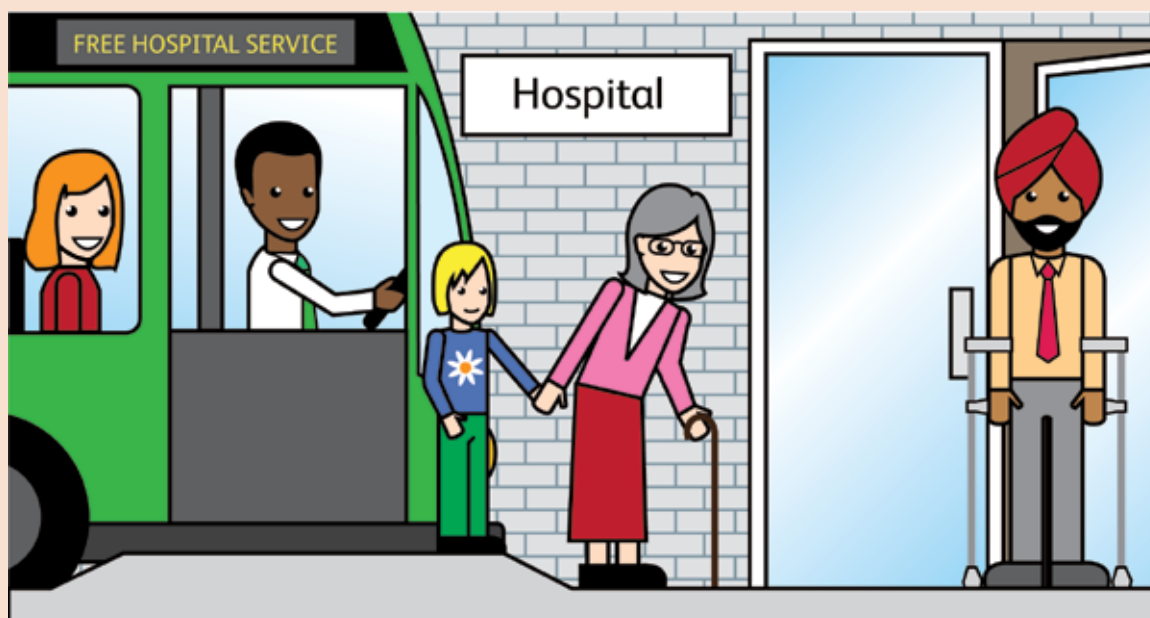
The **Equality Act** tells some **public bodies** that they will have to think about what they can do to make their services more helpful to poorer people.

### How this might work

A local council in charge of a town's bus services checks to find out if buses meet the needs of local people. It finds that people in a poor part of town have more trouble than other people getting to the local hospital. The council finds this was because of 3 things.

- There are only a few buses to the hospital each day.
- Most people do not have a car.
- It costs a lot to park cars at the hospital.

The council works with the hospital to find ways to make it easier for people from the poorer parts of town to get to the hospital. They decide to pay for a free bus service from the town to the hospital.



## Treating people from different groups fairly and equally (the Equality Duty)

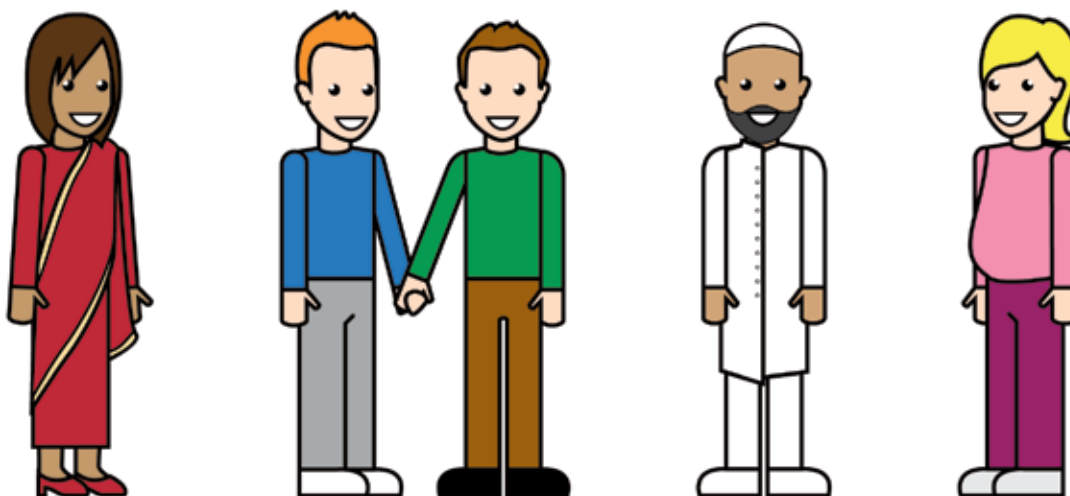
All **public bodies** must think about treating people from different groups fairly and equally. This is called the **Equality Duty**.

### Equality Duty

This is a law for **public bodies** telling them they must think about how they can make sure their work supports **equality**. For example, in their services, through their jobs, and through the money they spend.

Public bodies already need to think about treating **people of different races**, disabled people, and men and women fairly and equally. **The Act** adds extra groups of people to the **Equality Duty**.

- People of different ages – younger and older people.
- **Lesbian, gay** and **bisexual** people.
- The **duty** now fully covers people who have changed their sex or are in the process of doing so.



- People with a religion or belief, or people without a religion or belief.
- Women having a baby, and women just after they have had a baby.

### How this might work

For older people, a local council might put extra seats in a park so older people can enjoy the park as well as younger people.



For **lesbian**, **gay** and **bisexual** people, a school might do more to make sure **lesbian**, **gay** and **bisexual** children are not bullied.

For people with a religion or belief, a local council's meals on wheels service might cook different meals for people who need to eat special food because of their religion. For example, they might make special meals for Jewish people and special meals for Muslim people.

## Civil partnerships held in religious buildings

**The Act** will let civil partnerships for **gay** and **lesbian** couples be held in religious buildings.

## Using buying power to make equality better

**Public bodies** spend over £220 billion pounds a year. That gives them a lot of **buying power** to tell companies they buy things from that they want them to include **equality** in the way they work.

### Buying power

This is the effect buyers can have on companies they buy things from. Because **public bodies** buy a lot of things, they can encourage suppliers to treat people fairly in the way they do their work.

**The Act** enables the Government to tell some **public bodies** to think about how they can do this.





## More equality for people of different ages

In the next 20 years there are going to be a lot more older people. We need to make sure they are treated fairly and are not told they are too old to do the things they want to do.



The law already said **employers** cannot say someone is too old or too young for a job. But older people still say they get treated unfairly in other ways that did not break the law. For example

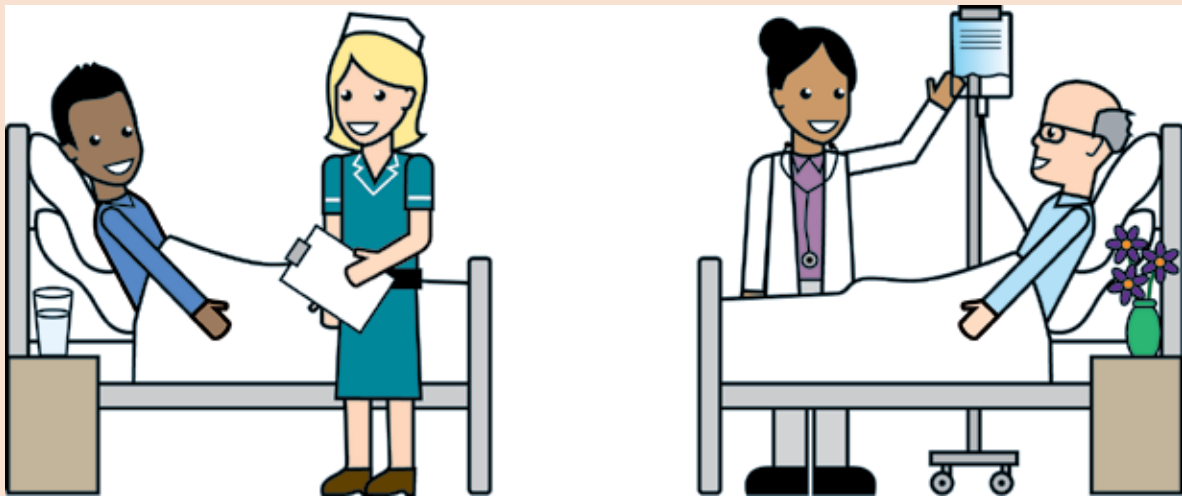
- some shops only help older people if they are with a young person. They think older people cannot understand about new things like mobile phones.
- some companies make older people pay more than younger people for a service, without having a good reason.
- some older people do not get the same health and care services that younger people get.

The **Equality Act** includes changes to the law to stop these things happening to people of different ages (aged 18 or over).

### How this might work

Here are some examples of how things might change for older people because of the **Equality Act**.

- Older people paying the same as younger people for services, unless the company has good reasons for asking for more money.
- Older people getting the same care in hospital as younger people.



But the **Equality Act** will not change things that are good for people of different ages, like free bus passes and flu injections for older people or travel passes for students.

## Equal pay and equality information

40 years ago a new **equal pay law** told **employers** that men and women should get equal pay for doing the same sort of work, but many men still get more wages than women.

### Equal pay law

This is a law that tells **employers** that men and women must get the same pay for doing the same work.



To put this right we need to know where it is happening. So the **Equality Act** includes 2 new ideas to help make **equal pay** happen.

- If a company has 250 or more workers, it may have to publish information about differences in men and women's pay.
- **The Act** also enables the Government to tell **public bodies** to publish information about equal pay and how many workers it has who are disabled or **people of different races**. The Government plans to do this for **public bodies** with 150 or more workers.

**The Act** also stops **employers** telling workers they must not talk to each other about how much they get paid.

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## Using positive action to increase diversity

Even when **people of different races** and women do well at school and college, they do not get their fair share of the top jobs. For example

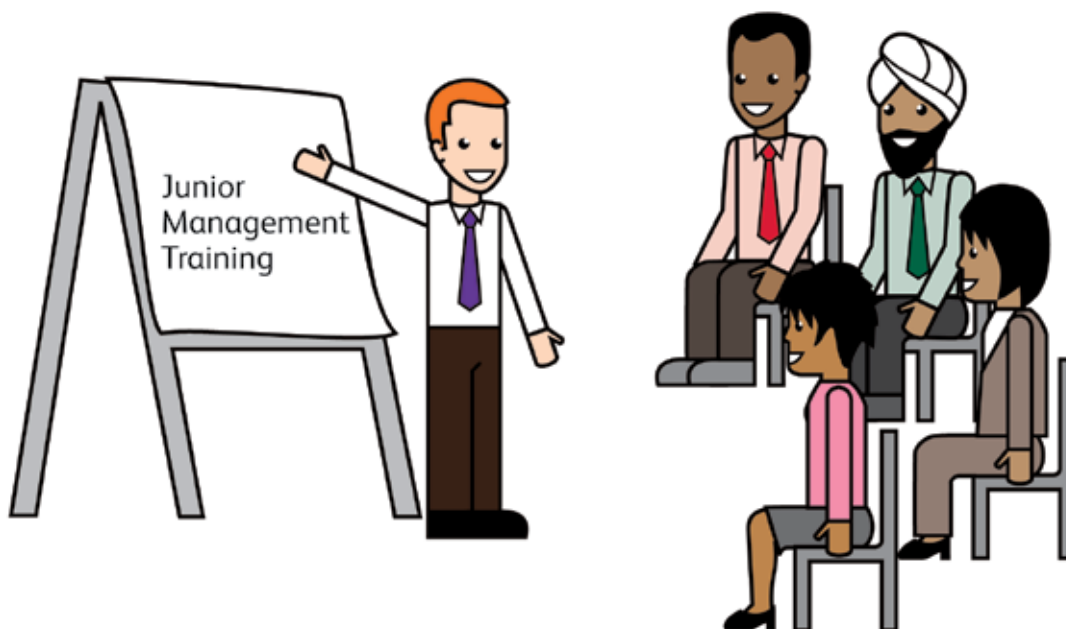
- only 15 Members of Parliament are **people of different races**. Looking at the **diversity** of this country, there should be 60.
- only 3 top judges are **people of different races**.
- fewer than 1 in every 6 top people in universities is a woman. To be fair, 3 out of every 6 should be women.
- only 1 out of every 10 top people in big companies is a woman.



The law already lets **employers** do some kinds of **positive action**.

- Job adverts can be aimed at **people of different races**, women or some other groups if an **employer** wants to make their workforce more **diverse** because they do not have any, or enough, people from those groups.

- **Employers** can train women, **people of different races** or people from some other groups to give them more chance of getting a better job with the **employer**. They can only do this when they have, for example, too few people who are black or too few women.



**The Act** makes it easier for **employers** to use **positive action** and it lets them choose a person who will make their workers more **diverse**, when choosing between people who are right for the job.

### Example

A company needs a new person for 1 of its top jobs. All its other top jobs are done by men. When people apply for the job, the company finds 2 people are just right for the job – a woman and a man.

The company can use **positive action** to give the job to the woman. This is because it will make the company's top people more **diverse**. But the company cannot give the job to the woman if the man is better for the job.

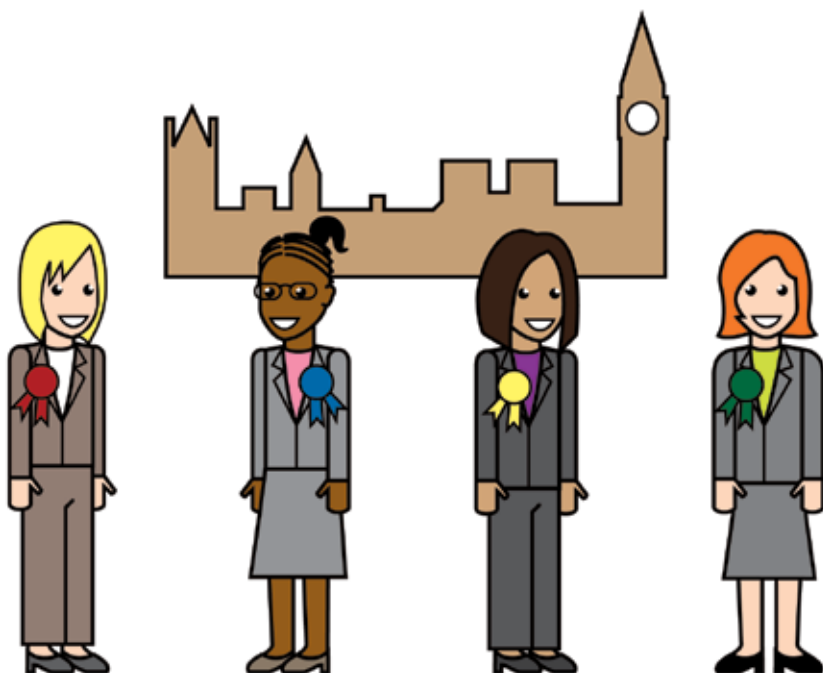
## Positive action in elections for Parliament and local councils and diversity reporting

It is important that the people in Parliament and on local councils are as **diverse** as all the people in the country. That is not happening yet.

It is already possible for political parties to choose only women for **elections** in some areas. **The Act** will let political parties have these women-only lists until 2030.

### Election

This is when everyone over 18 can vote for the person they want to be their Member of Parliament or their local councillor.



The **Equality Act** also lets political groups help some people like **people of different races** and **lesbian, gay** and **bisexual** people have a chance to get elected. **The Act** also lets the Government make political parties publish information on the **diversity** of their candidates.

## Extra powers for employment tribunals

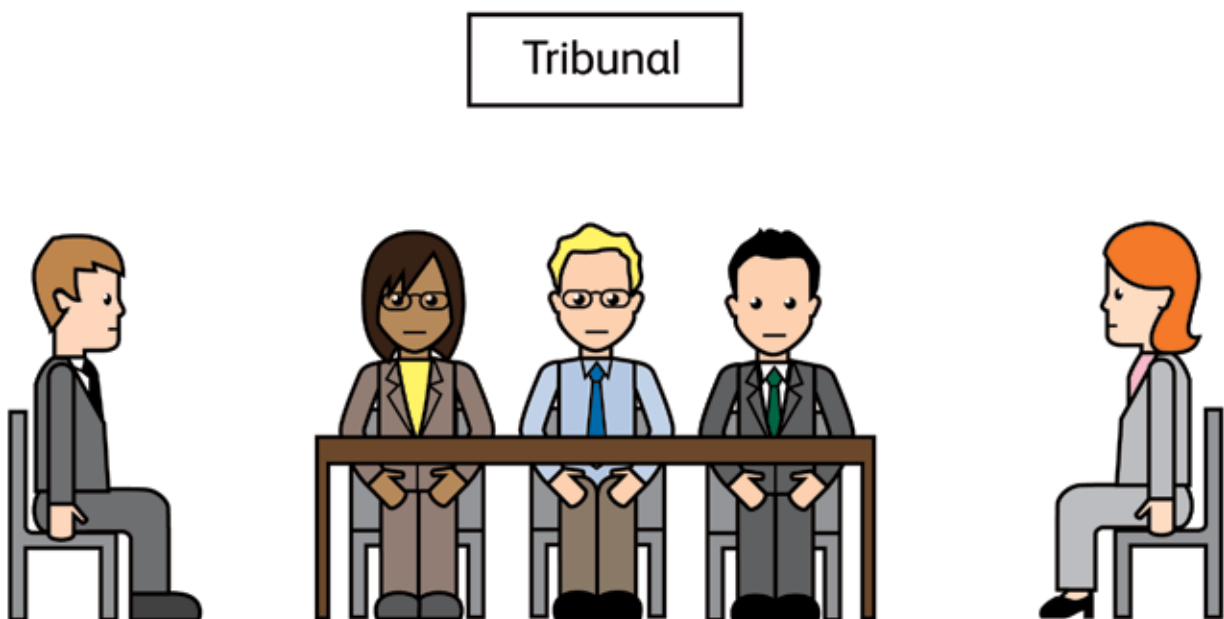
**Employment tribunals** can suggest how an employer can put things right for a worker if they were treated unfairly. But most of the time this does not help the **employer's** other workers, because most people who complain to **employment tribunals** have stopped working for the **employer**.

The **Equality Act** allows the **employment tribunal** to tell the **employer** their advice should apply to all their workers, even when the one who complained doesn't work there any more.

### Example

A woman complains because she says her **employer** has treated her unfairly because she is a woman. The **employment tribunal** agrees, but the woman has stopped working for the **employer**.

The **employment tribunal** can tell the **employer** how to change the way they do things so their other women workers are treated fairly in future.

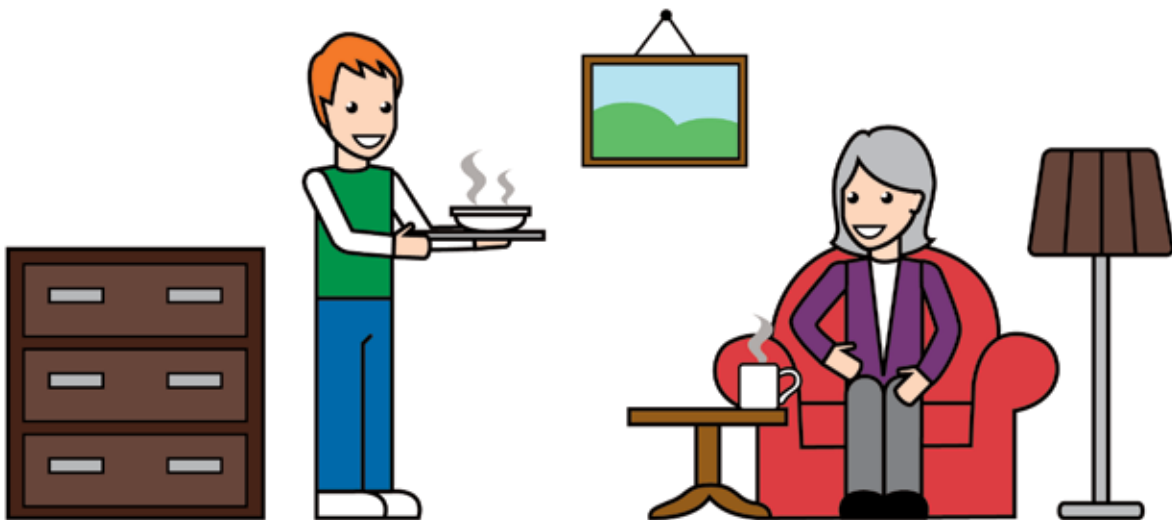


## New protection for people like carers

We already have laws to protect many groups of people from being treated unfairly – for example

- because they are **people of different races**.
- because they are **lesbian, gay** or **bisexual** people.

But those laws did not always protect **carers** looking after someone the law protects.



Under the **Equality Act**, **carers** of disabled and older people get protection.

### Example

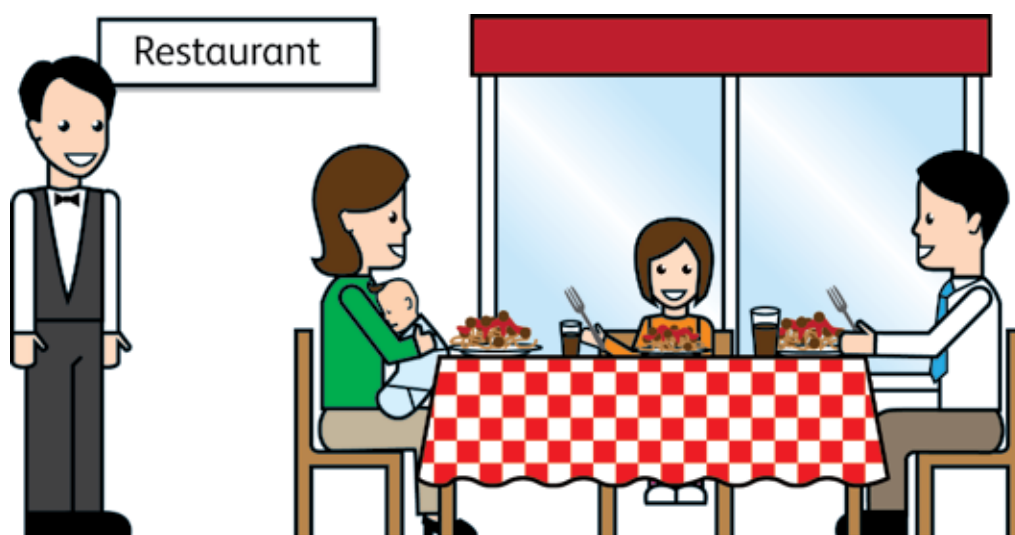
A company is looking for staff. A woman, who has a disabled daughter, applies for a job. The company must not turn her down just because they think she will take too much time off work to care for her daughter.



## A clear law for women breast-feeding babies

The Government supports women who want to breast-feed their baby. But many women do not know what their rights are. As a result, many woman do not breast-feed their babies in shops, cafés and other public places, in case the owner asks them to leave.

So the **Equality Act** makes it clear that it is against the law to stop a woman breast-feeding her baby in places like coffee shops, buses, and restaurants , or to ask her to leave.



### Example

A bus driver cannot ask a woman to get off the bus just because she is breast-feeding her baby.

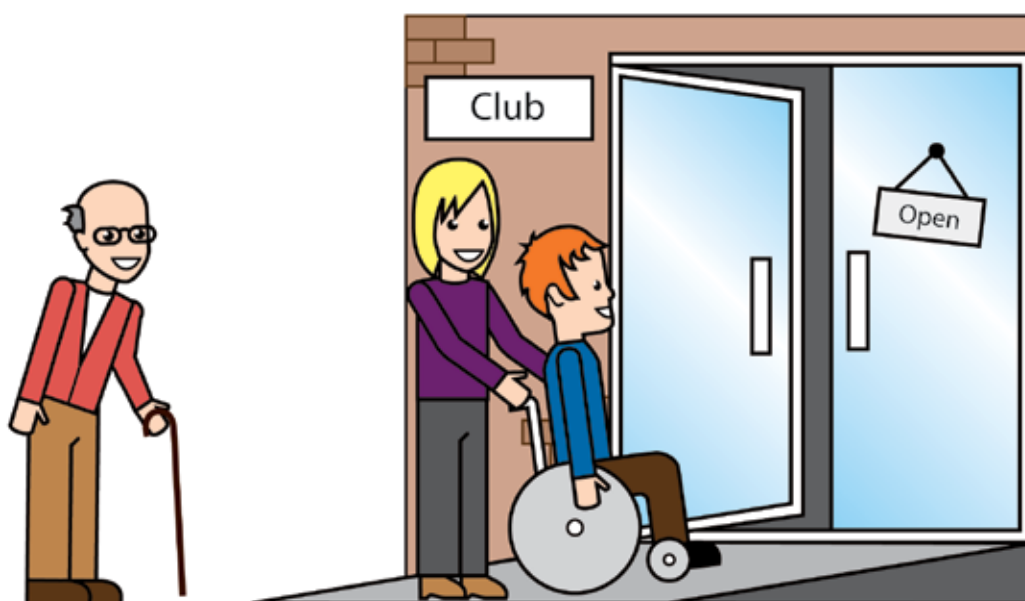
## Taking equality into clubs

The **Equality Act** **does** make it against the law for clubs which are for everyone to treat some members and guests unfairly. We know that it is good for some groups of people to have their own places where they can meet and enjoy themselves. That is why the **Equality Act** **does not** stop women-only and men-only clubs, or clubs for people who share a characteristic like their age or their religion or belief, like an over-60s club.

### Examples

A golf club with men and women members cannot let men play at any time while women can only play in the mornings.

A club that lets members bring their partners cannot say disabled partners are not allowed. If the building is difficult for disabled people to use, the club must make fair changes so disabled people **can** use it.

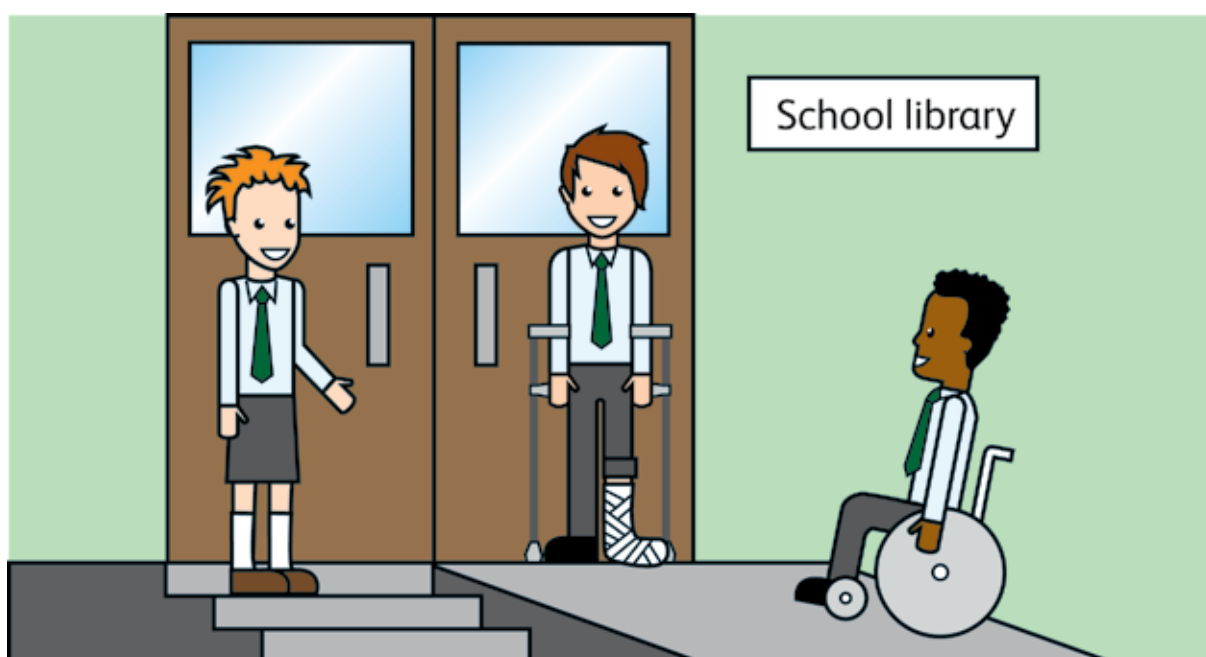


## Better protection for disabled people

The **Equality Act** has several new rules to protect disabled people better.

### School pupils

If a school pupil needs special equipment or help because of their disability the school must provide it if it would not be too much trouble.



### Making the disability law clearer

The **Equality Act** makes the law on **reasonable adjustments** clearer.

### Reasonable adjustments

These are changes an **employer** or someone providing a service has to make so that disabled people can do something, like getting into a shop to do their shopping or a council or bank sending information in the best way for them to use, like in large print or in easy to read words.

## Costs of reasonable adjustments

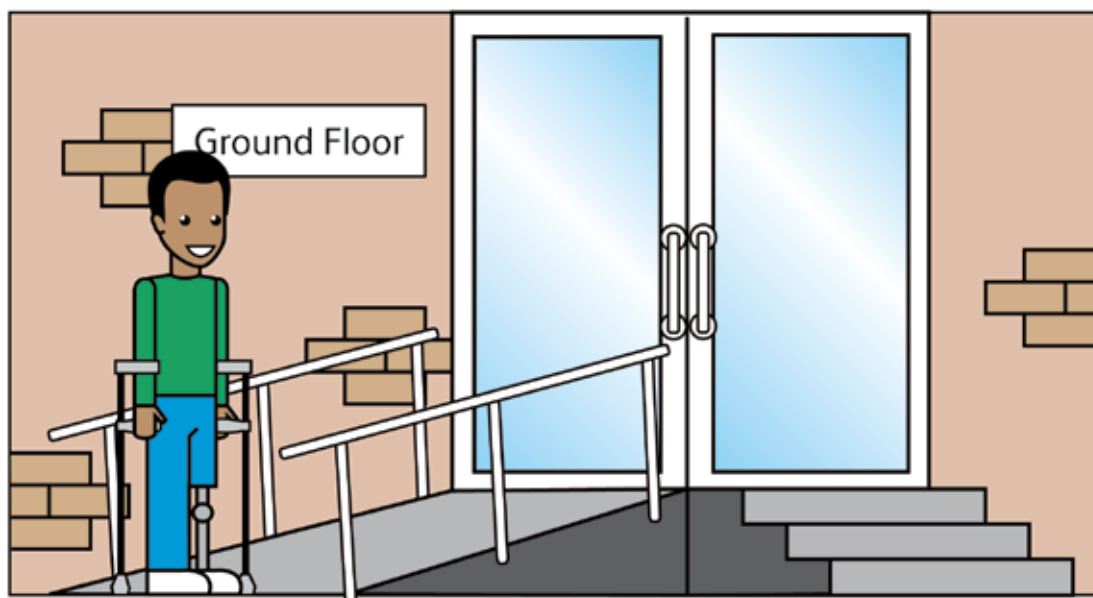
Sometimes when an **employer** or someone providing a service makes a **reasonable adjustment** so that a disabled person can do something it will cost them extra money. The **Equality Act** says that most of the time they can't expect the disabled person to pay them that extra money back.

## Making information accessible for disabled people

Disabled people need to be able to understand the information they are sent by people like their council or their bank so that they know what to do. This is a **reasonable adjustment**.

## Disabled people in buildings with shared areas

If a disabled person lives in a building with shared areas – like stairs and hallways – the disabled person can ask the landlord to make any fair changes so the disabled person can use them. The disabled person would have to pay for the changes.



## Treating disabled people poorly, without a good reason

A court decision has made it harder for disabled people to show they have been treated poorly because their disability makes them do something. The Government has used the **Equality Act** to make it easier for disabled people to get their rights again.

### Example

A man's disability makes him mumble his words. He is thrown out of a pub because the owner thinks he is drunk. The owner breaks the law if he knew the man is disabled, and has no good reason to ask him to leave.

## Pre-employment disability-related enquiries

When a person applies for a job the **employer** can ask if the person is disabled, and if they say they are disabled the **employer** might not give them the job. This is unfair.

The **Equality Act** will make it harder for an **employer** to be unfair because it says they can only sometimes ask if a person is disabled. For example, an **employer** might need to know if a person is disabled so they can make changes to a test or a job interview.

## Protecting people from dual discrimination

Dual discrimination is when someone is treated worse than other people because of a combination of two things.

- if they are a woman or a man.
- if they are transsexual.
- if they have a disability.
- if they are straight, **lesbian, gay** or **bisexual**.
- their age.
- their race.
- their religion or belief.

**The Act** makes dual discrimination against the law.

### Example

Mary works for an employer who treats black men and white women fairly but treats Mary worse because she is a black woman. Mary is discriminated against because of the combination of being a woman and black. This is dual discrimination and **the Act** protects Mary.

## Making Britain fair and equal for all

This booklet has shown how the **Equality Act** helps many of the different groups of people in England, Scotland and Wales who sometimes get treated unfairly.

- Women and men.
- **People of different races.**
- Disabled people.
- People with different religions or beliefs or with no religion or belief.
- People of different ages.
- **Lesbian, gay and bisexual** and straight people.
- People who have changed their sex.

The **Equality Act** and the many other kinds of **equality** work the Government is doing will make Britain a more fair and equal place for everyone.



## Words list

### Buying power

This is the effect buyers can have on companies they buy things from. Because **public bodies** buy a lot of things, they can encourage suppliers to include **equality** in the way they do their work..... 14

### Carers

Carers look after people who are too ill or disabled or old to look after themselves..... 9

### Diverse or diversity

This is a mix of different kinds of people. For example, men and women, young and old people, **people of different races**, disabled and non-disabled people..... 8

### Duties

These are things the law says a **public body** must do ..... 10

### Election

This is when everyone over 18 can vote for the person they want to be their Member of Parliament or their local councillor ..... 20

### Employers

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## Employment tribunals

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## Equality

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Public bodies already needed to think about treating **people of different races**, disabled people, and men and women fairly and equally ..... 12

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## Lesbian, gay and bisexual

Lesbians are women who are attracted to other women.

Gay men are attracted to other men.

Bisexual people are attracted to women and to men ..... 4

## People of different races

These are groups of people who come from different places, have different skin colours or have passports from different countries..... 4

## Positive action

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