



# A raft of Anti-discrimination legislation is now in place.

What impact is it already having on workplaces - and what further changes can employers and employees expect?

Over the last few years, the government has committed itself to stamping out all forms of discrimination in the workplace. On top of the existing legal protection for employees against discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, race and disability, we now have new rules providing protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion and belief. Coupled with this, there are new definitions for who is deemed to be disabled under the law, what constitutes post-termination discrimination, and a new offence of indirect discrimination.

Whereas the form and concept of the new rules is recognisably consistent with the existing legislation, some changes have had significant impact on employers. The new rules apply to "workers", not just employees. It also encompasses all stages of employment, from recruitment and promotion, to writing references after an employee has left. This has meant that employers have had to be far more aware of their responsibilities towards preventing discrimination at all stages of employment. In addition, employers may now be liable for the actions of their workers in terms of office banter and misuse of emails if this can be construed as harassment.

Further changes are anticipated with the government set to outline its proposals for age discrimination legislation later this year, to come into force in 2006.

Although this may be considered by many to be yet further regulation of the work place, the new legislation has provided an ideal opportunity for employers to carry out a thorough review and update of their office procedures and policies regarding discrimination, and to provide relevant training for all staff. The new changes if implemented effectively should promote awareness and diversity throughout the workplace, and employers and employees alike should benefit from this.

**If you would like further information please contact Alison Loveday on 0161 833 9211 or e-mail [alisonl@berg.co.uk](mailto:alisonl@berg.co.uk)**