

The business benefits of diversity

Employment legislation and diversity

It is unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation and religion or other belief.

Over the years, the government has created laws to provide a framework between employers and employees. A number of these laws relate to diversity in the workplace. These are designed to make sure everyone has the same opportunities. These laws set the minimum standards that businesses must comply with.

National legislation



Some laws are created at national level by UK Parliament. For example, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA) makes it illegal to discriminate because of an individual's sex, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership. It covers many areas including employment, vocational training, education, the provision and sale of goods, facilities and services, and premises.

Businesses must also comply with the Civil Partnership Act (2004) which came into force on 5th December 2005. Civil partnership is a new legal relationship. It can be registered by two people of the same sex who are over 16 years of age. It means same sex couples can obtain legal recognition for their relationship and gives them the right to be treated in the same way as married couples. This covers a wide range of legal matters including:

- * next-of-kin rights, including benefiting under a partner's will without having to pay inheritance tax
- * assessment for tax purposes, child support or income-related benefits
- * employment and pension benefits
- * recognition for immigration and nationality purposes.

International legislation

At a higher level, laws are created by the European Union for all member countries.

Good employers obey the law. The best employers go further than this and recognise how diversity can benefit the business.

For example, the European Union Equal Treatment Directive makes it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sexual

orientation and religion or other belief.

Sexual orientation is an orientation towards persons of the same sex (lesbians or gay men), towards a person of the opposite sex (heterosexual) or towards persons of the same sex and the opposite sex (bisexual). The Sexual Orientation Regulations provide protection from discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation. An individual who has been treated less favourably than another because of their sexual orientation has the right to make a legal complaint.