

# Equality & equity

The focus on equality is shifting in emphasis to that of the pursuit of equity alongside diversity and inclusion. In practice, the terms equity and equality appear to be used almost interchangeably but there is a difference and the implications are significant for organisations.

## EQUALITY

Equalities legislation sets the legal framework for providing the same to everyone – everyone has an equal chance of success. The legislative framework prohibits direct and indirect discrimination.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission\* defines direct discrimination as: “when you are treated worse than another person or other people because:

- you have a protected characteristic
- someone thinks you have that protected characteristic (known as discrimination by perception)
- you are connected to someone with that protected characteristic (known as discrimination by association)”

The Commission defines indirect discrimination as: “when there is a policy that applies in the same way for everybody but disadvantages a group of people who share a protected characteristic, and you are disadvantaged as part of this group.”

With respect to employment in the UK, there are nine protected characteristics listed in the Equalities Act 2010. This legislation prohibits direct and

indirect discrimination on grounds of: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Other countries’ employment legislation may be less comprehensive. Certain factors may not be recognised (for example, same-sex marriages) or be illegal (for example, homosexuality).

## EQUITY

Equity refers to fairness and justice and thus differs from equality. The pursuit of equity recognises that individuals all start from different places – not from a level playing field – and so adjustments will be needed to address these imbalances.

The equity agenda recognises the requirements for organisational action to go beyond equal chance and promote equal access to opportunities in the workplace and an equal share of those opportunities. These include, for example, access by minority groups to – and an equal share of – leadership positions.

## ORGANISATIONAL ACTIONS

Positive action can help to facilitate equal access by minority groups to leadership roles. For example, organisations can ensure that minorities are made aware of positions that are available and are encouraged to apply for them. Positive action is not the same as positive discrimination.

Open and transparent recruitment and selection processes can help to widen access for minority groups. These include advertising all positions and adopting the use of structured interviews using diverse panels.

Minority groups tend to have fewer networks and role models. Organisational support for networks and role models can also help to widen access to career opportunities for minorities.



Equal access goes some way towards achieving equity but if minorities are unable to achieve an equal share of career opportunities and leadership positions, then true equity has not been achieved.

A culture of true equity is needed if minorities are to gain an equal share of career opportunities. Robust voice and engagement processes can ensure that the barriers faced are identified and addressed. This requires top management support. Allies can support the progression of minorities. Coaches, mentors and sponsors can also play a valuable role.

\* [www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010/direct-and-indirect-discrimination#direct-discrimination](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010/direct-and-indirect-discrimination#direct-discrimination)

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