Equality Act 2010

Everyone has the right to be treated fairly, and not to be discriminated against or harassed as they go about their everyday lives. Discrimination means treating someone differently and unfairly because of a particular characteristic they may have, or are believed to have. Harassment is when someone is verbally abused, threatened, has rumours spread about them or is picked on because of a particular characteristic they may have, or are believed to have.

The law that protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment is called the Equality Act 2010. This act defines nine 'protected characteristics' on the grounds of which it is illegal to discriminate against people or treat them differently. This law applies when you are at work, or when someone is providing goods or services to you - for example in hospital, in a shop, when using public transport, or when receiving care and support.

The characteristics that are protected by the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age
- disability
- gender identity and gender reassignment
- marriage or civil partnership (in employment only)
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

The law also protects two other groups of people:

- Carers are protected from being treated unfairly on grounds that the person they are caring for has a protected characteristic.
- Women who are breastfeeding are protected against being harassed or treated unfairly while they are feeding their child - for example they cannot be asked to leave a restaurant or public place.

Other information and advice

Citizens’ Advice Bureau has lots of information on how to recognise and deal with discrimination and harassment.

ACAS has advice on discrimination in the workplace, for employers and employees.

The Equality & Human Rights Commission has information, resources and training materials on various discrimination, diversity and equality issues.

Action on Hearing Loss offer additional information on disability discrimination and your rights under the Equality Act.