

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Equality Impact Assessments are a practical tool that can help identify discrimination in the workplace. They should help you ensure that a policy or practice does not disadvantage anyone. They also improve or promote equality. In most cases, discrimination is un-intended and can remain undetected until someone complains or is let down. And not everything needs impact assessed, only policies and practices that are relevant to the protected characteristics.

What might need an Equality Impact Assessment? Changing work patterns, introducing new flexi-time, new lighting in the car park, introducing a new menu in the canteen, team awaydays, installing new stairways, moving a team to a new location in the office, buying new computers, moving members of staff to different teams, bringing two teams together to form one, larger team, downsizing the department...can you think of any changes that have occurred where you work that might have caused a disadvantage to a minority group?

So, what should you be looking for to make you think you'd need one? You're looking for bias that can occur when there is significant difference between the aforementioned groups of people in a way that a policy or new practice has impacted on them. Let's look at one of the situations from earlier, introducing new flexi-time. This might have a significant impact on women; this might have a significant impact on older members of staff; this might have a significant impact on those from a different religion or ethnic background; this might have a significant impact on people with a disability. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment would need to be carried out before this policy was introduced. Often, one rule for all ends up, unintentionally, as indirect discrimination. A few years ago, the rules for joining the Police Force were changed because there was a significant impact on a minority group. The minimum height restriction was removed because it impacted unfairly against those from ethnic backgrounds who may be genetically predisposed to be shorter. This made the application process fairer for all.

An Equality Impact Assessment is made carried out in 4 stages –

- Stage 1 – The Scope of the Assessment – which equalities groups do you need to focus on
- Stage 2 – Gathering and Assessing the Evidence – which equalities groups might be affected; what do you know about the needs of these equalities groups; who do you consult
- Stage 3 – Analysis – what is the likely positive or negative impact on these groups; are barriers being created;
- Stage 4 – Making the Changes

Most decisions you make will not require an Equality Impact Assessment, but if any change is proposed that might affect an equalities group then it might be something you should think about.

As I said above, most of the time, any discrimination that occurs through change of work practice or proposal is unintended. However, it can have a serious impact on the person or people who are affected up to the point when they leave the organisation. A well thought out Equality Impact Assessment can prevent this happening, giving the workforce more trust in you and the business; it creates a more transparent workplace and it encourages people to speak up if they feel they are being discriminated against.