

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Racial Equality Laws Now Apply in Northern Ireland

The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 means it is illegal to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of race. The Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland was established in 1997 to enforce this Order. During 1999 this function will be assumed by a new Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, this legislation covers all ethnic and racial groups - from people of Chinese, Asian and African origin to members of the Irish Traveller community. The law does not cover religious groups other than Sikhs and Jews who are recognised as racial groups.

What is discrimination?

According to the legislation, discrimination can be both direct and indirect.

Direct discrimination takes place when individuals are treated less favourably because of their race. Instances of this include being refused a job, a place at school, admission to a pub or being offered less favourable terms and conditions in the provision of goods, facilities and services, and in the disposal and management of premises.

Indirect discrimination occurs when people are put at a disadvantage because of their background. For example, insisting that job applicants have qualifications from an English institution may put someone who has trained elsewhere at a disadvantage.

The Race Relations Order covers discrimination in employment, education, housing and the provision of goods, services and facilities and the Commission can help only with problems in these specific areas.

What help can I get?

The Commission can advise and assist individuals with complaints of racial discrimination or put them in touch with other agencies who might offer support. In the first instance, however, the Commission will help you complete an application for assistance to find out whether or not you have a case in the eyes of the law. Advice from the Commission does not mean that your case will be supported.

The Commission can only give limited support and is restricted to supporting cases that test a point of law, are too complex for you to handle alone or which deserve special consideration.

As well as helping individuals, the Commission can investigate companies or organisations where there is alleged discrimination. If necessary, the Commission can impose policy changes on an organisation. It can take action against organisations which encourage or pressurise others to discriminate. The Commission can also act against job advertisements which discriminate in their wording.

The Commission issues Codes of Practice and Racial Equality Standards to help all organisations develop fair policies, procedures and practices and advises organisations in developing their own policy.

The overall aim of the Commission is to improve society for everyone through raising awareness of minority issues and preventing discrimination taking place.

Working for a just society which gives everyone an equal chance to learn, work and live free from discrimination and prejudice and from the fear of racial harassment and violence.