

about us

Equality in a Diverse Ireland



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS

What is the Equality Authority ?

The Equality Authority is an independent body set up under the Employment Equality Act 1998. It was established on 18th October 1999. Policy is decided by the Board of the Equality Authority. The Board is appointed by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and comprises 12 members including an Independent Chair and Vice-Chair. Board members are drawn from employer organisations, employee organisations, and organisations and groups who have a knowledge of, or experience in, equality issues relating to gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller Community. Board members serve a four year term.

The Equality Authority replaced the Employment Equality Agency, and has greatly expanded its roles and functions. The Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status legislation outlaw discrimination in employment, vocational training, advertising, collective agreements, the provision of goods and services and other opportunities to which the public generally have access. Discrimination is outlawed on nine distinct grounds. These are:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender• Marital Status• Family Status• Age• Disability• Race• Sexual Orientation• Religious Belief• Membership of the Traveller Community | <p>Discrimination is described in the Act as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated on any of these nine grounds.</p> |
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The Role of the Equality Authority

Under the legislation, the Equality Authority has 4 main functions:

- **to work towards the elimination of discrimination in employment, in the provision of goods and services, education, property and other opportunities to which the public generally have access**
- **to promote equality of opportunity in matters to which the legislation applies**
- **to provide information to the public**
- **to monitor and review the operations of the Employment Equality Act, 1998, the Maternity Protection Act, 1994, the Adoptive Leave Act, 1995, the Parental Leave Act, 1998, the Pensions Act, 1990, and, when enacted, the Equal Status legislation.**

Legal Service

The Equality Authority has an in-house legal service and provides a free confidential information and advisory service to employers, service providers, individuals, trade unions and the legal profession on the implementation of the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status legislation. The Equality Authority deals with queries in relation to equality and discrimination. In many instances queries and complaints can be resolved without involvement of the legal process. However, some complaints may proceed for investigation.

The Authority can help individual complainants in a number of ways. For example by :

- **explaining the current legal position on an issue**
- **advising on the facts as presented**
- **communication with the employer on behalf of the complainant**
- **preparing written submissions for the Director of Equality Investigations and for the Labour Court**
- **representing and/or providing free legal representation for the complainant during the investigation**
- **contributing to the preparation of codes of practice covering the integrated equality agenda.**

The Authority will ask complainants to complete a questionnaire at the preliminary stage of an enquiry. This helps to identify the basis of the complaint and to decide whether the matter comes within the scope of the legislation. The Equality Authority staff meet complainants as part of this process. Decisions regarding free representation are made by the Equality Authority. Given Authority resources, it may not be possible to represent all those who request it.

Cases within the remit of the legislation may be referred to the Director of Equality Investigations. Investigations are conducted by an Equality Officer. Dismissal cases must be referred in the first instance to the Labour Court. A person who has been discriminated against on the gender ground may opt to seek redress through the Circuit Court.

Development

The new legislation gives the Equality Authority powers to ensure the development of a pro-active, equality conscious approach to equal opportunities in the workplace and, on enactment of the Equal Status legislation, in the provision of goods, facilities and services.

The Development Section deals with the promotion of equality of opportunity in relation to the equality legislation. The Section is engaged in:

- **resourcing an equality focus in the formulation and implementation of national policies and measures by working with other organisations and public bodies**
- **developing a research programme and demonstration projects in pursuit of equality in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services**
- **implementing a strategy for equality reviews and action plans**
- **supporting the development of equality structures and practices across the state-sponsored sector**
- **resourcing the development of policies and measures to give substance to the legislative provisions on positive action**
- **contributing to the building of a wider culture of equality in Irish society and supporting complementarity of effort in so doing.**

Communications

The Equality Authority's Communications Unit is responsible for promoting the rights established by the legislation. There is a Communications Strategy in place to ensure that the public are informed about the work and services of the Equality Authority and that the information and advice is accessible.

This involves the development of:

- **a proactive media strategy**
- **a public education campaign - e.g. conferences and seminars**
- **an interactive website (with links to other relevant sites where information can be obtained and queries can be posted)**
- **publications in a range of formats (video, Braille, audio)**
- **translations of main publications**

Publications

The Equality Authority's current publications include a Customer Service Action Plan, the Strategy Statement 2000-2002; leaflets and other explanatory material on the legislation and a quarterly newsletter.

Events - conferences, symposia, briefings, speakers and training are organised for key target audiences on equality and discrimination developments.

Library - the Equality Authority reference library is available to the public. Anyone wishing to use the library should ring for an appointment.

The Equality Authority information stand is available for seminars and exhibitions.