

Discrimination
at work
It's so over

New laws mean you don't
have to put up with grief
over your sexual orientation.
Not anymore.





Tell us about the old days


When Shirley's life as a teacher was made a misery by homophobic pupils, her headteacher told her she would just have to "grit her teeth". It couldn't happen now.

When Peter found he wasn't really getting anywhere in his career as a health worker, he knew it was because he was gay. The clue? He was getting bullied by his manager. It couldn't happen now.

When Lisa was refused a pass for her partner even though her contract promised free travel for her "spouse or dependents", it was because her partner was female. It couldn't happen now.

The treatment that gay men, lesbians and bisexuals have had to swallow because of their sexual orientation – stuff like sacking, harassment, fewer perks, lack of promotion, is now over. Finished. Against the law.

Just make sure you use that law.



With new laws, there are now three sorts of unfair treatment you don't have to put up with at work.

Direct discrimination

Anything that is OK for straight employees is now OK for you. If straight folks are allowed to hold hands at work, for example, so are you. Obviously, if straight folks aren't allowed to do it, that also applies to you.

One in 25 lesbians, gay men and bisexuals reckon they've been sacked for their sexual orientation. Now we don't have to stand for it.

Indirect discrimination

This means your employer can't hand out goodies – perks, promotions, you name it – to straight employees that you too can't benefit from. If unmarried partners are invited to a work do, your partner is also welcome. Automatically.

Almost one in ten lesbians, gay men and bisexuals reckon they've been turned down for promotion because of their sexual orientation. Now we don't have to stand for it.

Harassment

Employers or colleagues who think they can make your life hell by generally creating an atmosphere no lesbian, gay man or bisexual would want to be in, have got another think coming.

Even if you're not out at work you don't have to stand for it any more.

One in five lesbians, gay men and bisexuals reckon they have been harassed because of their sexual orientation. Now they don't have to stand for it either.

Exceptions

Benefits for married couples

So far, pensions and some financial benefits for married (straight) partners won't automatically be available to gay partners. Good employers may already provide these.

Occupational requirements

In theory, there may be some jobs where you have to be straight (or lesbian, gay or bisexual) to be able to do a job properly. At the moment, no one can quite think of any.

Organised religion

In a few rare cases, employers in an organised religion may still refuse to employ lesbians, gay men and bisexuals if it's at odds with their convictions. Even so, it's still worth complaining if you're not being treated fairly.

So, what are you going to do about it?

Can you talk to your harasser? Could you explain why they are upsetting you?

If not do you have a decent human resources or personnel manager? Would anything you say to them be confidential? Find out.

Are you a member of a staff association or trade union? They'll take your complaint very seriously, will know the legislation inside out and will do only what you want them to.

Is it easier to talk to a total stranger at your Citizens Advice Bureau or on a lesbian and gay helpline?

If the worst comes to the worst, there's a tribunal with powers to give you cash from your employers as compensation for discrimination or harassment, and there's no limit depending on the seriousness of the case.

And before you panic, it's also unlawful for an employer to victimise you if you do decide to make a formal complaint.

That should get it into everyone's heads that discrimination is over. Forever.



