

## Protected Characteristics: Gender

One of the most obvious differences between people is gender - the differences between men and women. The workforce in the UK is split between men and women in roughly equal proportions, and whilst sex discrimination can apply to men it more usually affects women - with around 10,800 cases of sex discrimination submitted to employment tribunal in 2011/12.

Although it has been illegal to discriminate against women since the 1970s there remain some statistical differences between the achievements of men and women in the workplace which suggest that full equality hasn't been achieved yet.

The most obvious gender discrimination is direct discrimination where access to opportunities for advancement, training or resources is not made available to one gender, and most people will have heard of the 'glass ceiling' which is perceived as an invisible barrier which stops women climbing above a certain level in their careers. However direct discrimination is only part of the picture and to achieve true gender equality we also need to address the other causes of gender inequality.

One reason for the difference between the earnings of men and women is that not all jobs are paid the same, and the jobs which are stereotypically female tend to attract lower salaries than stereotypically male roles.

For example, the most common occupation for women is nursing which pays an average of £16.61 per hour, whilst for men the most common occupation was computer programmer and software development which pays an average of £20.21 per hour. Helping to ensure that men and women feel able to pursue non gender stereotypical roles is an important step to achieving equality in the workplace.

It's important to avoid referring to particular jobs as man's work or woman's work, and making jokes about people who hold particular roles. If you work with someone in a non-gender stereotype role avoid making their gender an issue.

Another reason is that more women than men tend to work part time - 42% of women compared to 12% of men. This is usually because women need the flexibility to fulfil their caring responsibilities such as looking after children or elderly relatives. That is not to say that some men don't also have caring responsibilities, but the majority of caring responsibilities do fall to women. This in itself is not a problem except that part-time workers tend to be paid less than full time workers.

The average salary for a part time man is 41% lower than the full time average, £7.95 per hour compared to £13.60 per hour, and 31% lower for part time female employees: £8.40 compared to £12.24.

Many women find it hard to find part-time work which is appropriate to their skills and experience, and those who leave the workplace completely for any period of time may find that their earnings never recover: Did you know that for every year a woman spends out of the workplace it is estimated that her future wages will be reduced by 5%?

One way to support gender equality in the workplace is to proactively look for ways of building flexibility into jobs and promoting job-share opportunities. This will benefit everyone at work as more and more people would prefer more flexibility in their working arrangements and a better work-life balance, not just those with caring responsibilities.

Employers have a responsibility to ensure that neither gender is treated less favourably than the other. This includes things like paying people doing a particular job the same regardless of their gender. They must provide adequate toilet and sanitary facilities, and check that their policies and procedures are not indirectly affecting one gender more than the other.