

Employment E-Brief 10

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EMPLOYERS SHOULD BEGIN PREPARING FOR THE EQUAL
TREATMENT DIRECTIVE

The Equal Treatment Directive will make discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and religious belief unlawful from December 2003, which means employers need to start thinking about amending their equal opportunities policies to ensure they are not in breach of the law.

As well as adapting current practices employers should introduce new ones, such as, training to prevent racist or homophobic abuse. Employers should also make changes to pay and benefits. For example, if things like pensions are open to spouses, policies will need to be amended to include same-sex partners. The penalties for not doing so could be serious in terms of financial pay-out and damaging publicity.

The Government's announcement of measures to make compliance with equal pay legislation simpler should also be taken on board. Only recently we saw Schroder branded as "sexist" on the back of city analyst Julia Bower being awarded £1.4m compensation after claiming sex discrimination and unfair dismissal.

Finally, according to ACAS's Annual Report, individual complaints to employment tribunals concerning work place discrimination rose by 21% last year. Meaning employers need to be constantly on guard to avoid claims.

This update is for guidance purposes only and should not be regarded as a substitute for taking specific legal advice from your usual Metcalfes' contact.