

Diversity, equality and the law in the UK

Topic 4: What are protected characteristics and why do we need them?

Learning intentions:

- Identify the protected characteristics that are set out in the Equality Act 2010
- Recognise different types of discrimination
- Assess the extent to which protected characteristics help make our country more equal and explain their point of view

Discrimination in the UK

Pose the question to the whole class: 'Does discrimination happen in UK?'

Ask students to think of some examples of discrimination in everyday life, for example in the workplace, at school, in the community.

Hint: ask them to think about race, sexual orientation, age etc.

Ask students to write down their own definition of discrimination and compare it with the one offered by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

- **Discrimination** is the unfair treatment of someone because of their particular characteristics e.g. race, religion, gender etc.

Protected characteristics

Introduce students to the term **protected characteristics** by asking students to read *resource sheet 6*. Ask them to summarise what they have read by answering the following questions:

- What is the Equality Act 2010?
- What are the Protected Characteristics?

Next, using mini white boards or the cards on *resource sheet 6*, ask students to write down or hold up the card to indicate the type of discrimination they think is being described in each of the following scenarios - or to indicate that no protected characteristic is being described.

- A restaurant refuses to employ a man because he is gay (Protected characteristic – **sexual orientation**).
- A careers adviser tells a girl not to take a course in engineering because it is unsuitable for a female (Protected characteristic – **sex**).
- A company refuses to provide a disabled access for an employee in a wheelchair (Protected characteristic – **disability**).
- Research shows that tall people are more successful at job interviews than short people. (No Protected characteristic)

Tell students that any individual who believes that they have been **discriminated against, harassed or victimised** can make a claim under the Equality Act 2010 and can seek advice from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

Do protected characteristics help make our country more equal?

Organise students into small groups to discuss and consider the following motion statement and questions.

“Protected characteristics in law help make our country more equal.”

- Would our country be more or less equal if protected characteristics were removed from law?
- What might happen if the protected characteristics were removed from law?

Ask each group to consider the different arguments that could be made ‘for’ and ‘against’ the statement and then prepare a short written response to share with the class. Encourage students to draw on what they learned in the first part of this topic.

The group should then decide which their strongest response to share with the class is.

Students can be given a sentence starter to help them:

“We believe protected characteristics in law help make our country more equal because...”

“We don't believe protected characteristics in law help make our country more equal because...”

Class debrief and discussion

Use the group responses to hold a class discussion on the motion statement. Ensure the full range of viewpoints is expressed and that each group has contributed.

Resource sheet 6

The Equality Act 2010

1. A new Equality Act was introduced in 2010 to replace all previous equality laws. The new law was intended to help make equality law easier to understand and simpler to use.
2. The Act makes it law that every private, public and voluntary organisation must not discriminate against their employees or the people that use their services because of their particular characteristics.

Protected Characteristics

1. The 2010 Equality Act protects people with particular characteristics from discrimination. The protected characteristics are:
 - a. Age
 - b. Disability
 - c. Gender reassignment
 - d. Marriage and civil partnership
 - e. Pregnancy or maternity
 - f. Race
 - g. Religion or belief
 - h. Sex
 - i. Sexual orientation (gay, lesbian or bi-sexual)

Positive Action

The Equality Act 2010 allows **Positive Action** so that public bodies (such as schools) can provide additional benefits to some groups to help tackle disadvantage. For example, a school may provide additional lessons for Travellers and Gypsies.