

**NEWS RELEASE: Equality South West welcomes the new Equality Act which comes into force this Friday and provides greater protection against discrimination**

If you are a woman being paid less than a man, from Friday your employer will no longer be able to take action against you for talking to your colleagues or union about your salary.

The change, which makes it easier for women to find out if they have a claim for equal pay, is one of a host of new protections that come into force on Friday <<OCTOBER 1>> under the Equality Act 2010.

Equality South West (ESW) has welcomed the new Equality Act, which brings together more than 100 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act, simplifying the law and strengthening it in key areas to help tackle discrimination and inequality.

ESW chief executive Paul Dunn said: "The Equality Act 2010 helps employers to focus on an individual's talents and abilities, and value people for what they are and what they can do, rather than on the colour of their skin, their sexual orientation or any impairments they may have."

But he noted that around 10 per cent of the Act, which gained Royal Assent in April, was not coming into force on Friday.

For example, Section 78, which enables the Government to force employers to publish details about their gender pay gap, is not being implemented yet. The Government has said it is looking at how the rest of the Act could be implemented in the best way for business.

Mr Dunn urged ministers not to delay any further: "People have a right to full protection from discrimination and harassment."

Mr Dunn also regretted the decision by the South West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership to freeze the final portion of funding for its local government Equality Programme, after the Government asked it to look again at priorities for the remaining funds.

He said: "We understand the difficulties faced by the Partnership in the context of the most challenging public finance settlement in a generation but it is disappointing that a programme aimed at helping create a more equal and a fairer society has been axed in this way."

The new Equality Act covers the same groups that were protected by existing equality laws – age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity – but extends some protections to groups not previously covered and also strengthens particular aspects of equality law.

These include:

- Protecting carers of elderly or disabled people from discrimination or harassment when shopping for goods and services or using public transport and facilities such as cafés;
- Strengthening protection from discrimination for disabled people, including 'indirect discrimination' where a policy or practice puts them at a particular disadvantage;
- Changing the test of what 'disability' means so that it is easier for someone to show they have difficulty carrying out their day-to-day activities;
- Increasing protection to transsexual people who no longer have to be under medical supervision to be protected from discrimination and harassment;
- Protecting people from discrimination because they are associated with a transsexual person or because they are wrongly believed to be transsexual;
- Banning age discrimination outside the workplace;
- Making it illegal for pregnant or breastfeeding women to receive less favourable treatment when receiving services;
- Banning discrimination in private members clubs with 25 or more members (such as golf clubs) on grounds of sex, religion or belief, or by whether they've just had a baby, are pregnant or are transsexual.
- Holding employers to account if they know an employee has been harassed repeatedly by a customer or a client and have done nothing reasonable to stop it happening;
- Extending the scope to use positive action; and
- Strengthening the powers of employment tribunals.

In the future, the Act will also extend the new Equality Duty on public sector bodies requiring them to tackle discrimination and consider how to reduce socio-economic inequalities. They will also be required to use public procurement to improve equality.

**Note to editors:** Equality South West (ESW), based in Taunton, is England's first regional equality and diversity body. It works to tackle discrimination and promote equality and diversity within public, private and third sector organisations in the South West of England.

**More information:**

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Kind regards.

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