

Hiring someone

When hiring, it's obviously important to find the best person for the job. But you should also check you're following the law on discrimination.

It's usually against the law to discriminate against a job applicant based on any of the following, known as 'protected characteristics':

- age
- disability
- race
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

1. Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination is against the law. In the workplace, indirect discrimination means there are rules or arrangements that apply to everyone, but which in practice could be less fair to someone because of their sex, race or other protected characteristic.

For example, your business is recruiting for a head of sales. You only advertise the job internally. The potential applicants in the business are all men. You could therefore be discriminating indirectly against women.

Another example could be a job advert that states applicants must have spent a specific amount of time doing something (for example, 10 years working in retail).

By doing this, you could be discriminating indirectly against younger applicants. The advert should instead say that the applicant needs to meet a specific level of competence or knowledge. You could also include the main tasks and skills involved in the job.

When you can ask about protected characteristics

In some cases you can ask questions about disability, race or other protected characteristics. If you do this you must follow the law.

Common examples include asking a job applicant:

- if you need to make '[reasonable adjustments](#)' for them, for example making sure that a disabled person coming for interview can access your office
- to complete an equality and diversity monitoring form, to help check your business follows the law

You can download our template for an [equality and diversity monitoring form](#).

If you ask applicants to complete an equality monitoring form:

- anyone involved in interviewing or deciding to hire them must not have access to the information
- you should not ask applicants to enter their name or any other information that identifies who they are

Other questions about someone's sex, race or other protected characteristics could be against the law.

If you're not sure of the types of questions you can ask, you can [call the Acas helpline](#) and we can help guide you. We cannot give [legal advice](#).

When a requirement is crucial or helps a disadvantaged group

You can ask that job applicants have a certain protected characteristic (for example, sex or race), but only if:

- it's crucial for the job (an 'occupational requirement')
- it helps a disadvantaged or under-represented group

If you are considering doing this, it's a good idea to [get legal advice](#) first.

It's crucial for the job

You must be able to prove that the protected characteristic is crucial for someone to do the job effectively.

For example:

- a care worker agency could ask for female applicants, if the person being cared for is female and she said she would be uncomfortable receiving this type of care from a man
- the Catholic church can ask for a priest who is a Catholic

If an occupational requirement is justified and you advertise the job again later, you must check that it still applies.

It helps a disadvantaged or under-represented group

You can ask for a protected characteristic or use it when deciding to hire someone, as long as you can prove you're doing this to help a disadvantaged or under-represented group in your business.

This is sometimes known as 'positive action'. You must also be able to prove that the person is capable of doing the job.

Example

Your business has 10 salespeople who are all men, so you know women are under-represented.

When interviewing for another salesperson, you find that 2 applicants appear equally able to do the job. One is a man, the other is a woman.

In the end you decide to hire the woman. This is because she appears able to do the job and women are under-represented in your existing workforce.

By law, you must always see if there's a less discriminatory way to make your workforce more diverse.

Trade union membership

It's against the law to treat someone unfavourably based on whether they are, or are not, a trade union member.

The way employers hire someone from outside the UK changed on 1 January 2021, when the Brexit transition period ended.

There is now a points-based immigration system. This means that:

- you'll need a sponsor licence to hire most employees and workers from outside the UK
- anyone you recruit from outside the UK will need to meet certain requirements

You should plan ahead if you want to offer a job to someone from outside the UK. It may take longer than it used to.

2. Apply for a sponsor licence

You'll need to check whether you need a sponsor licence, and what type of sponsor licence to apply for.

You do not need a licence to sponsor people in some groups, including:

- Irish citizens
- anyone with settled or pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme
- anyone with indefinite leave to remain in the UK

The type of sponsor licence depends on a number of things, including whether you want to hire someone on a temporary basis or offer someone a long-term or permanent job.

You'll need a separate sponsor licence for each person you want to hire.

Find out more about [UK visa sponsorship for employers on GOV.UK](#).

Check they have the right to work in the UK

When you offer someone a job, you must ask for proof that they have the right to work in the UK.

You could be fined up to £20,000 if you do not check this.

Find out more about [checking a job applicant's right to work on GOV.UK](#).

If you already employ EU, EEA or Swiss citizens

EU, EEA and Swiss citizens have until 30 June 2021 to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme, as long as they started living in the UK on or before 31 December 2020.

The EEA includes the EU countries and also Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

Irish citizens do not need to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme.

Find out more about [employing EU citizens on GOV.UK](#).

Find out more

For detailed guidance on how to hire someone from outside the UK, see [recruiting people from outside the UK guidance on GOV.UK](#).

You're not legally required to advertise a job, but it's a good idea to do so.

Advertising a job means:

- you're less likely to break the law by [discriminating](#), even if you did not intend to
- you'll probably get a wider range of applicants who are suitable for the job

If your business has written rules (for example, a recruitment policy) in place you should follow them.

For example, your rules might say:

- whether you have to advertise a job
- where you should advertise
- who you must advertise to (for example, internal or external applicants)

If your business has written rules, they must be applied the same way for everyone.

Related content

[Check you're following discrimination law](#)

According to the law, you cannot usually refer to '[protected characteristics](#)' (such as a person's sex or race) in a job advert.

Examples that could be discriminating unfairly against protected characteristics include:

- terms like 'recent graduate' or 'highly experienced' – these can discriminate against age (you must be able to prove you have a good reason for any job requirement in your advert)
- terms like 'barmaid' or 'handyman' – these can discriminate against someone's sex
- language requirements – 'German sales rep' could discriminate against race, so 'German-speaking sales rep' would be more appropriate
- clothing requirements, for example wearing a hairnet in a kitchen could discriminate against someone who for religious reasons covers their head in other ways

3. Describe what the job involves

To make clear what the job requires and help avoid unintended [discrimination](#), it's a good idea to provide the following:

- job description
- job application form
- person specification
- information about your business
- equality and diversity monitoring form

They should be provided as part of your advert or once you've received applications.

You can use Acas templates for:

- [job application forms](#)
- [job descriptions](#)
- [person specification](#)

Tell applicants what you'll need from them

You should also provide information that tells applicants about anything else you'll need from them, such as:

- proof that they have the right to work in the UK
- whether they'll need a reference
- whether the person who gets the job will need a health check before they start work

Your business could be fined up to £20,000 if you do not check that the person you hire is allowed to work in the UK. Find out more about the [right to work in the UK on GOV.UK](#).

Check that forms do not discriminate. For example, stating that the applicant must fill out the job application form in their own handwriting may discriminate against people with dyslexia, if handwritten English is not crucial to the job.

Protecting applicants' personal information

You need to tell applicants how you'll use their personal information. Find out more about [protecting personal information on the Information Commissioner's Office website](#).

Check your advert reaches a wide range of people

It's a good idea to advertise in at least 2 channels. For example, in a newspaper and on a jobs website. This helps you:

- reach a wider range of people
- [avoid discrimination](#)

Consider whether the channels you use reach a diverse range of people. For example, if you only use social media to advertise the job you could miss out on applicants who do not use it.

Advertising online

You could be discriminating if the only job advert you use on the internet is a targeted one. A targeted job advert can only be seen by specific groups of people. For example, if you put an advert on a social media site such as Facebook, and only make it visible to users in a certain age group.

Related content

[Job application form templates](#)

[Job description templates](#)

Avoid using information that's on someone's social media profile to decide whether you interview or hire them.

You might be breaking the law, particularly if either of the following points apply:

- they did not agree to you using the information in this way
- you looked at some applicants' social media profiles, but not others

Example

While using Facebook you discover the profile of someone who has applied to you for a job as a personal assistant. You notice a picture of her with 2 toddlers in a pushchair and think she looks too young to be a mum.

You've now already started making a judgement – even if you did not intend to – about whether she's the best applicant for the job.

If you then decide not to interview her and she discovered you'd seen her profile, she could argue that your decision discriminated against her because of her sex or age.

Information on jobs and business networking sites

When recruiting, you can usually use information that someone puts on a jobs website, or a business social networking site such as LinkedIn.

When posting information on these sites, users will be aware that the purpose is to show their work experience and professionalism. You must still make sure that you [use this information in a way that does not discriminate](#).

Related content

[Check you're following discrimination law](#)

You do not have to interview someone before giving them a job unless your business has rules that say you do.

Even if you do not have to interview, doing so is a good idea so that you:

- can find out if the person really is right for that job
- do not leave anyone thinking you might be [discriminating](#) against other people who could do the job

Avoid using [information on someone's social media profile](#) when deciding who to interview.

5. Decide who's involved in selecting and interviewing

It's a good idea for the people involved in selecting and interviewing applicants to:

- come from a diverse range of backgrounds
- use a consistent decision-making process, such as a scoring system

Ideally, 2 or more people should be involved in choosing who to interview. This is so that the business can avoid discriminating indirectly.

How to select applicants for interview

Select the applicants who best match the job description and person specification. Do this in a fair way for each person.

One way of doing this is a scoring system. You can:

1. Turn each point in the [job description](#) and [person specification](#) into a checklist of, for example, 10 points.
2. Assess the information in each application form against the checklist.
3. Score each application form against the checklist. For example, if the applicant meets 7 of the 10 points, you can score the application as 7 out of 10.

Related content

[Job description templates](#)

[Job application form templates](#)

Once you've [chosen who to interview](#), it's a good idea to prepare a set of questions to ask at the interview. Questions must not discriminate.

Find out more about [discrimination and the law](#).

If possible, each interview should be carried out by more than 1 person to reduce the risk of discriminating.

It's a good idea to check before the interview that the interviewers are:

- prepared
- understand the law on discrimination

By law you must ask anyone coming to an interview to tell you if they need ['reasonable adjustments'](#) so they can attend. For example, making sure your office is accessible for an applicant with a disability.

When interviewing it's a good idea to ask each applicant the same questions where possible, to ensure you're treating applicants in the same way.

Once all the interviews have taken place, make sure you're fair and treat everyone the same when deciding who should get the job. For example, check your decisions are based on how each applicant met each point in the job specification and person specification.

Once you've decided who to hire, you'll need to make them a job offer.

You can make a job offer verbally, but it's better in writing to avoid misunderstandings later on.

Avoid using [information on someone's social media profile](#) when deciding whether to offer them a job.

6. What to include in a job offer letter

A job offer letter should include:

- the job title
- confirmation you've offered them the job
- any conditions, for example that the offer depends on suitable references or a health check

- the terms – including salary, hours, benefits, pension arrangements, holiday entitlement and the location of work
- start date and any probationary period
- what they need to do to accept the offer or to decline it
- the name of the person to contact, with their contact details, in case of any questions

[Download job offer templates and a checklist.](#)

It's a good idea to ask the applicant to confirm in writing they've accepted the job.

Check their right to work in the UK

Before they start work, you must check they have the right to work in the UK. You could be fined up to £20,000 if you do not check this.

Find out more about [checking a job applicant's right to work on GOV.UK](#).

Hiring someone from outside the UK

From 1 January 2021, you may need a sponsor licence to hire employees and workers from outside the UK. And anyone you recruit from outside the UK will need to meet certain requirements.

Find out more about [hiring someone from outside the UK](#).

If you change your mind

You can [withdraw the job offer](#) if the applicant did not meet the offer's conditions. For example:

- suitable references
- criminal record checks

It's a good idea to tell them the reasons you're withdrawing the offer.

If you did not include any conditions as part of the job offer, it's known as an [unconditional job offer](#). Withdrawing it could be against the law.

If you feel unsure about withdrawing an unconditional job offer, [call the Acas helpline](#). We cannot tell you what to do or give [legal advice](#).

Information you must give them when they start work

You must give [written terms](#) (a 'written statement of employment particulars') to anyone who's classed as an [employee or a worker](#). You must provide them on or before the person's first day of work.

Related content

[Job offer templates](#)

[Staff induction checklist](#)

[Job description templates](#)