

ON BUSINESS AND FOR PLEASURE

An Upper Intermediate Course
For Business English students

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Unit 7



UNIT 7: DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Read through the following article, and then decide whether the following statements are True or False:

- a. Workers from other countries have had a positive effect on the level of unemployment.
- b. According to the TUC, there is evidence to indicate workers from other countries are not being paid the minimum wage.
- c. The number of workers from other countries entering the UK has increased in the last few years.
- d. There is evidence to show that workers from overseas who accept low-paid jobs take jobs away from British workers.
- e. According to the government, workers from overseas are of benefit to our economy.

Migrant workers 'help UK economy'

Migrant workers have boosted the UK economy, with their influx not having a negative effect on employment or wage levels, the TUC has argued.

Foreign workers made a positive net economic contribution, it said, with their share of tax paid exceeding the cost of supplying public services.

But the TUC warned that workers were vulnerable to "unscrupulous" employers not adhering to employment rights.

Ensuring firms paid the minimum wage had to be a priority, it added.

'Substantial contribution'

The UK has seen an influx of migrant workers from eastern Europe since 2004 when a host of new countries joined the European Union.

This has fuelled concerns that workers willing to take low-paid jobs in sectors such as construction, farming and domestic service would depress wages and force other low-skilled workers out of jobs.

Publishing a new report, the TUC said these fears had not been vindicated, partly due to the strength of the economy in recent years.

"Migrant workers are making a substantial contribution to Britain's economy," said Brendan Barber, the TUC's general secretary.

"They haven't caused mass unemployment or held down wages as some would have us believe."

'Exploitation'

But the TUC said that workers with little or no English and no knowledge of their employment rights needed greater protection from exploitation.

"We do not do enough to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation," Mr Barber added.

"If migrant workers are treated fairly and paid a decent wage they can only add to the economy."

Working in small groups, discuss the following questions and then report back to the rest of the class with your findings:

- a. As a foreigner, have you ever been discriminated against when you have applied for jobs in this country? What do you think can be done to prevent this taking place?
- b. Do you think the Government should provide the unemployed with benefits indefinitely or should they only receive them for a fixed period of time? And if so, how long should it be for?
- c. Would you agree that the only way to reduce unemployment is to control immigration because foreigners are taking jobs that should be reserved for British people?
- d. Do you think there should be positive discrimination in favour of black people, the over forties, women, gay people, and foreigners to ensure they have a better chance of obtaining work?
- e. What do you think of the suggestion that work permits should be issued to anyone who applies for one regardless of where they come from or what their qualifications might be?
- f. Do you think the establishment of a minimum wage a good or a bad idea?



Read through the text to find words which mean the same as:

a. apparently “accidentally”, but actually on purpose touching / b. teasing people on account of / c. eradicated / d. made to suffer for / e. considered by certain people / f. improved a lot / g. relieving frustration / h. rejected when applying for a better position / i. be responsible for creating a bad atmosphere

Discrimination in the Workplace

Brushing up against the office blonde, picking on someone's dreadlocks and dodgy remarks about a person's unfortunate stutter, are all gladly things of the past. Or are they?

Picking on people because they are somehow perceived to be different is obviously wrong and should be something that is kicked into touch from the workplace in the 21st century. But prejudice, like all things that develop, has evolved into a much subtler element of the workplace.

People are still castigated for being coloured, a woman can still earn less than her male counterpart doing the same job, disabled people are constantly reminded that they will not be productive in a work environment and all the other excuses used against people deemed by some to be easy targets, is plainly abuse.

Discrimination laws have come a long way from the heady days when verbal and physical abuse (predominantly perpetuated by men) was seen as the office culture. It was a way of letting off steam. The classic "it's only a joke...haven't you got a sense of humour?", "get that chip off your shoulder" were calls for many people to accept abuse as normal office banter. Recent changes and developments in legislation have rightfully outlawed this behaviour, which protects those who are the subject of discrimination.

In its broadest terms discrimination in the workplace is when an employer or their employee treats you less favourably than anyone else, and it can manifest itself into two main types – direct and indirect.

Direct discrimination tends to cover straightforward actions where an employee is obviously being treated less favourably because of their sex or race. For instance, if a woman who obviously is more qualified than his/her counterpart but is turned down for promotion. You are treated less favourably because you are pregnant.

As for indirect discrimination, it is a subtler version where it is not always obvious when the discrimination takes place. An example of this would be when there is an imposed requirement or condition, which results in discrimination against individuals on the grounds of gender or race. For instance: Imposing an age requirement in a job advert, Not promoting women who are pregnant , or setting tests and or asking for qualifications above the requirement for the post.

As with all legislation, it is one thing to identify someone breaking the law but another when it comes to implementing the rules. The office is a close community, at least in terms of people's distance from each other, so any small ripple will make big noises elsewhere. It is easy to feel intimidated and frightened as no one likes to 'rock the boat'. But the only way to get rid of bad practice is to highlight it when you see it.

(adapted from www.jobsite.co.uk Copyright © Jobsite UK (Worldwide) Limited., accessed 3/07/07).



Homophones

Homophones are pairs of words with the same pronunciation but with a different spelling and a different meaning.

Answer the clues below to find pairs of homophones:

- 1a. We'll have to up all the pros and cons before we come to any decision.
- 1b. I know it seems to be an impossible task but we'll find a somehow. After all, we have no choice.
- 2a. To do this kind of work, you need to have nerves of
- 2b. If you from your own company, it's known as embezzlement.
- 3a. There's no need to worry because I'm sure everything will work out all in the end. Somehow it always does.
- 3b. You need to all the details of what happened on this complaints form please.
- 4a. Managing to pull off such an important deal would be an amazing and one to be very proud of.
- 4b. I hope you won't get cold at the last minute and that you'll remain resolute or else we'll have no chance.
- 5a. I need these extra problems like a in my head – I have more than enough trouble on my hands as it is.
- 5b. On the, I agree with you but not on every single point.
- 6a. I'm not the kind of person who likes to be tied down so I don't suppose I'll stay in this job very long..
- 6b. They say time and tide wait for no man and that's why you've really got no time to lose.
- 7a. He arrived just when he said he would, right on
- 7b. There's a queue of people waiting for the bank to open, stretching right round the block.
- 8a. As long as you're prepared to be patient, I'm sure you'll find what you're looking for in the end. All you need to do is to remember that there's a will there's a way.
- 8b. You don't need to a uniform, just a suit and tie.
- 9a. As the sole to her father's estate, she's set to inherit a fortune.
- 9b. I don't know what's going to happen. Everything's up in the at the moment.
- 10a. Please don't make a – you're embarrassing me.
- 10b. I seem to have mislaid the contract you gave me to sign. Have you it anywhere?

Employees are protected from discrimination by legislation broadly falling within the following areas: Sex, Race, Pay, Marital, and Disability. Read through these notes and then add the missing prepositions:

Race, Sex and Marital Discrimination

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976 protect men and women 1. discrimination 2. the grounds of sex, marital status, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins. The law protects applicants and employees who may be contract, self-employed, or part-time workers. The employer is ultimately responsible 3. the actions of their employees.

If any member of a staff discriminates 4. another, then it is both the staff member and the company who will be liable 5. not taking reasonable steps to prevent the discrimination.

Pay Discrimination

The Equal Pay Act 1970 makes it unlawful to discriminate 6. men and women 7. regards to pay and other terms of employment. A person is entitled 8. equal treatment 9. someone 10. the opposite sex who is employed on work of the same or broadly similar nature, and on work 11. equal value.

Disability Discrimination

12. the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 employees are protected 13. discrimination 14. the grounds of their disability and employers should take preventative and reasonable measures, so that a disabled person is not placed 15. a disadvantage.

Conditionals

- 0 If you want to get to the top, you need to be more determined.
- 1 If you want to get to the top, you'll need to be more determined.
- 2 If you wanted to get to the top, you'd need to be more determined.
- 3 If you had wanted to get to the top, you'd have needed to be more determined.

The zero conditional is used to express general truths, the first conditional is used to talk about possibilities, the second conditional is used to express unlikely or impossible situations, and the third conditional refers to the past. Other combinations are possible too and are known as mixed conditionals.

Match the numbers on the left with the letters on the right to complete the sentences:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Had I known all the facts before the meeting, | a. I don't know what I'd do. |
| 2. If I didn't have a wife and children to support, | b. I'll have no choice but to ask you to leave. |
| 3. If the talks come to nothing again, | c. I'd walk out of the job today. |
| 4. If you're hoping to make a good impression on the new boss, | d. please do not hesitate to contact us. |
| 5. If you're the sort of person who's afraid of hard work, | e. the advantage is that you save both time and money. |
| 6. If you can work from home, | f. then I wouldn't have come unstuck the way that I did. |
| 7. If you hadn't been so inflexible, | g. then some form of industrial action will be inevitable. |
| 8. If you hadn't turned up late for the interview, | h. then you really can't expect to get very far. |
| 9. If you miss this opportunity, | i. we could have completed the deal. |
| 10. If you produced shoddy work like that for me, | j. you might have got the job. |
| 11. If you want to find a good job, | k. you really need to learn the language first. |
| 12. If you were dissatisfied with the goods for any reason, | l. you'll really have to do a lot better than that. |
| 13. Should you have any further questions, | m. you'll regret it for the rest of your life. |
| 14. Unless you change your attitude, | n. you'd be entitled to a full refund. |
| 15. Were I to be made redundant, | o. you wouldn't last a day in the job. |

A Jigsaw Reading: Common Issues Surrounding Discrimination

Note for Teachers: Arrange the students into groups of three, Group A, Group B and Group C. The idea is that each group has different information from a different part of the text and they must tell other members of the class about the part of the text they have read. This way the students construct meaning from the text collectively. When each group has completed their task, ask them to arrange themselves in new groups of three (one person from Group A, one person from Group B, and one person from Group C) to tell each other what they have read about.

A: Pay

A person doing the same job or of equal value to the work of another employee should expect to get the same pay, irrespective of the sex. A recent report by the Equal Opportunities Commission's Equal Pay Task Force, found that women working full time can expect to take home between 70 to 80% less in pay than a male colleague doing the exact same job. This report highlights the problems of the gender pay gap, which still perseveres. With modern businesses the differences are not always in the pay packet. The difference can be attributed to many things, such as benefits affecting company policy leftover from years ago. These include better perks and side benefits for male employees, and old pay scales

B. Sex

There are still obstacles in the way for many women when it comes to achieving a management role. A recent Glasgow University research study showed that the number of women in management positions has not improved since the 30's. Many of the problems associated with the 'glass ceiling' are often to do with normal business practice. Many employers are simply unaware that they are discriminating against women. For instance, many company policies surrounding promotion and interviews are often set by men.

The criteria for what is expected by a man may be different to a woman, so in turn disadvantaging any potential women seeking promotion or a management job. Successful claims against the Police Force regarding over pay and sex discrimination has helped to transform their working and recruitment practices. More targeting of ethnic minorities and women is helping to build a police force more representative of its communities.

C. Disability

It is common to see job advertisements, which state that the company holds an "equal opportunities policy". This is a good sign and one where, if the statement is to be believed, means the company will only look at your ability to do the job and not look at your disabilities, race or sex as a barrier to the job. Yet research by disability charity Leonard Cheshire found that only 14% of people worked with someone who was disabled with 40% of people who thought disabled people cannot do their job as well as a non-disabled person.

It is quite common to find larger organisations stating that they will guarantee an interview with a disabled person. Many able-bodied members of society think this is unfair and say this is reverse discrimination. But the point is that disabled people still hardly get a look-in in the grand scale of things when applying for jobs generally. Able-bodied people will still be able to apply for more jobs and have a better chance of getting those jobs when compared to a disabled person.

It is easy to lump everyone with a disability card in the same stew but some peoples perceived hindrance may not even be visible to the eye. Many companies have a positive attitude towards employing people with a disability, claiming that disabled people are willing to put more effort into their job due to the harsh experiences they have been through. They can empathise better with customers and are more likely to see a job through. But not all employers are the same. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 it is the responsibility of employers to make sure that reasonable measures have been taken to stop discrimination against disabled employees.



Answer Key (and Notes for Teachers)

Unit 7 Discrimination in the Workplace

Migrant Workers 'help UK economy': a. False / b. False / c. True / d. False / e. False

Discrimination in the Workplace: a. brushing up against / b. picking on people because of / c. kicked into touch / d. castigated for / e. deemed by some / f. come a long way / g. letting off steam / h. turned down for promotion / i. 'rock the boat'

Homophones: 1a. weigh 1b. way / 2a. steel 2b. steal / 3a. right 3b. write / 4a. feat 4b. feet / 5a. hole 5b. whole / 6a. tied 6b. tide / 7a. cue 7b. queue / 8a. where 8b. wear / 9a. heir 9b. air / 10a. scene 10b. seen

Race, Sex and Marital Discrimination: 1. against 2. on 3. for 4. against 5. for 6. between 7. with 8. to 9. with 10. of 11. of 12. Under 13. against 14. on 15. at

Conditionals: 1-f 2-c 3-g 4-l 5-h 6-e 7-i 8-j 9-m 10-o 11-k 12-n 13-d 14-b 15-a