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New guidance for post-16 sector on disability

A code of practice for those providing post-16 education has been produced by the Disability Rights Committee (DRC) and is aimed at reducing inequalities experienced by disabled students. This follows changes to the law last September under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The legal changes mean that the sector cannot refuse to provide education to a student simply because they have a disability or long term health condition. For example, if a blind woman is not offered a place on an IT course because the education provider wrongly assumes that blind people cannot use computers, then this is likely to be what is legally termed 'direct discrimination' and is now unlawful.

The Code of Practice explains how a number of legal changes will impact on post-16 providers and gives examples on how these changes can be put into practice to ensure disabled students are treated fairly. The Code can be downloaded from the DRC's website at: www.drc.org.uk/library/publications/education/code_of_practice_post_16.aspx.

Pensions Bill amendment

A groundbreaking amendment to the Pensions Bill, allowing people at any point in their working lives to buy back up to nine years of 'lost' national insurance contributions for their state pension has hailed by the Equal Opportunities Commission as an opportunity to help millions more people save, particularly women.

This goes beyond the current provision which means people have to buy back incomplete contribution years within six years or lose the opportunity altogether. Often people, particularly women, don't realise until the end of their working lives that their records are incomplete and then it is too late for them to do anything about it.

Under the current pension system just 25% of women are entitled to a full basic state pension, compared to 95% of men. This shortfall is caused because the contribution women make outside of paid employment, caring for children and relatives, which has not been recognised with credits to the state pension. Low entitlement to the basic state pension means women enter retirement in poverty. Furthermore, key pension benefits, such as savings credit, are only available to those with a full basic state pension.

More information is available from the Equal Opportunities Commission website: www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=20457.

DTI consultation - Additional Paternity Leave administration

The government is consulting on the administration of Additional Paternity Leave and Pay following commitments made in November 2006 Government Response to the consultation on Additional Paternity Leave and Pay in March 2006.

Additional Paternity Leave and Pay will enable employed fathers to take up to 26 weeks Additional Paternity Leave, some of which can be paid if the mother of the child has returned to work. This new provision will be available during the second six months of the child's life, providing parents with more choice in child care responsibilities and for the first time ever, the option of dividing a period of paid leave entitlement between them.

The purpose of this consultation is to invite practical comments on the preferred administration process and some of the remaining detail of the scheme to ensure that burdens on business are minimised, whilst providing more choice for parents and allowing fathers a greater opportunity to be involved in raising a child.

Consultation documents are available on the DTI website:

www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/page39405.html

The consultation closes on 3 August.

Sexual orientation and religion or belief cases

Report of research carried out by Barry Fitzpatrick for the TUC and funded by the DTI, into cases taken under the employment Equality (Sexual Orientation and Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003.

The TUC was funded by the DTI to carry out a project studying all cases concerning the sexual orientation and religion or belief Regulations, and to prepare a report of the conclusions of that study. The work involved analysing published employment tribunal decisions and any relevant higher court judgments, as well as liaising where possible with ACAS, the Employment Tribunal Service and other sources to obtain additional information about cases that have been withdrawn, settled or otherwise disposed of.

The report is available from: www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-13485-f0.cfm

Get in touch

To contact the Equality Unit for more information about anything in this email, please use the following contacts:

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