



EQUAL RIGHTS... It's the law

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

How can we help?

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland can give advice and information on The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. Information is also available on our website.

For further information, please contact us at:

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The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006

A new law to prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people often face unacceptable prejudice in their everyday lives. Research carried out in Northern Ireland last year found that 41% had experienced homophobia when accessing goods, facilities and services (McNamee 2006).

To address this situation, new legislation was introduced on 1st January 2007 to make it unlawful for service providers to discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation in the provision of **goods, facilities, services, premises, education and public functions.**

The term 'goods, facilities and services' is used in anti-discrimination legislation in Northern Ireland to denote a wide range of activities carried out by organisations in both the public and private sector. The law covers education, housing, transport, shops, gyms, restaurants, hotels, B&B's, bars and clubs to name just a few. It applies to all organisations big or small and regardless of whether the goods, facilities or services being provided are paid for or are free of charge.

The legislation will most certainly have an impact on the tourism and hospitality sector. There have been several accounts in our national newspapers of same-sex couples being turned away from hotels and bed and breakfasts, or being refused shared accommodation when they request it. There have also been cases of same sex couples being asked to leave a restaurant for holding hands or being refused access to pub and clubs.

It is in the best interests of all service providers to comply with this new law. The business case for welcoming all customers regardless of their sexuality is compelling. Britain's 3 million gay and lesbian citizens earn over £70 billion a year. This coupled with the fact that gay and lesbians households have fewer children means that this section of the community has a greater disposable income to spend.

Furthermore, compliance with the new legislation will result in service providers avoiding:

- payment of costly legal fees,
- compensation awards and
- adverse publicity.

It therefore makes good business sense to welcome and encourage customers regardless of their sexuality.

Equality laws can be complex, but they are built on a simple principle – **respect for the dignity of all people.** We cannot claim to respect people's dignity while tolerating discrimination against them. We cannot call ourselves an inclusive society unless we give equality of opportunity to gay, lesbian and bisexual people and work to put right the disadvantage caused to them by homophobic prejudice.

For further information on the new law or on sexual orientation legislation covering employment, vocational training and further and higher education contact the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

To find out more visit www.equalityni.org or
contact 028 90 890890

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