

# G

## ender Equality

Equality between women and men - known as 'gender equality' - is one of the fundamental principles of European Community law. All member states have adopted European Union (EU) equal treatment legislation. Facilities managers working for international businesses must recognise that because of cultural differences, some countries have implemented the Directive at different speeds and may be more or less committed to the equal treatment of men and women.

All employers must provide equal pay for their employees, regardless of their gender. They must not discriminate about pay or any conditions attached to pay, such as overtime rules. If a job classification system is used, it must be based on the same criteria for both men and women, and different rates of pay must not be applied because of gender. If men and women are not treated equally by their employers, the employees have the right to take the matter to court.

Equal opportunities laws in the UK aim to create a level playing field so that people are employed, paid, trained and promoted only because of their skills, abilities and how they do their job. Under the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act it is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a person because of their sex or because they are married. It's also unlawful to discriminate against someone who has had, are having or intend to have, gender reassignment. This means someone, supervised by a doctor, who changes their gender.

The discrimination can be 'direct' or 'indirect', deliberate or accidental and FMs must be careful to avoid discrimination in the workplace. If someone is disadvantaged at work because of their sex, marital status or gender, it is unlawful, and the employer should stop the discrimination. Sex discrimination laws cover almost all workers (men and women) and all types of organisation in the UK. The 1970 Equal Pay Act makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate between men and women in terms of their pay and conditions where they are doing the same or similar work; work rated as equivalent in a job evaluation study by the employer; or work of equal value.

Women are under-represented in facilities management. Asset Skill's data shows the sector to be dominated by men with 59% of the workforce being male. Such disparities exist in key parts of the FM remit with women strong in cleaning and catering and men stronger in maintenance and security.

A new Equality Act will come into force on 1 October 2010. The Equality Act brings together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act. Combined, they make up a new Act that will provide a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all.

*More information on The Equality Act and gender equality issues is available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)*