

FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD

STUDY NOTE

EXAMINATION

LEADING FIREFIGHTERS EXAMINATION

PAPER

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT

EMPLOYMENT

ITEM

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

STUDY NOTE No.

1302

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY NOTE

This study note has been prepared as the basis of study in connection with the qualifying examinations for promotion.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the information contained in the study note and understand how it should be applied:

The 'References' made at the end of the Study Note are included for information only and candidates will not be expected to study these as part of the bibliography.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. Introduction

This study note introduces the subject and importance of Equal Opportunities and Diversity in the workplace.

The provision of equal opportunities seeks to influence behaviour through legislation so that discrimination is prevented. It takes a moral and an ethical stance in promoting the rights of all members of society. The reasoning behind this is to provide a 'level playing field' on which all can compete on equal terms.

Equal Opportunities, in an employment context, relate to the ways in which employees are treated at work by their employer and their colleagues. This will mean that care and consideration will be required in the way in which people are treated to ensure respect and dignity regardless of:

- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief
- Disability
- Ageism

Equal opportunities at work are a fundamental right in which there is an expectation to be treated fairly and equally by the organisation.

Therefore, as members of the Fire Service, all staff have a duty and responsibility towards their colleagues in ensuring that they play their part in establishing a culture and an environment which is free of prejudice and discrimination.

2. What is 'Equal Opportunity'?

'Equal opportunity' is the right:

- To be treated fairly;
- To be considered with due respect and dignity for the individual;
- To be given an opportunity to develop and fulfil their potential;
- To have a balanced and harmonious workforce for the benefit of the organisation; and
- To attract and retain employees.

3. What is 'Diversity'?

'Diversity' concentrates on individuals rather than groups and focuses on improving the opportunities of all individuals and not just those in minority groups. Managing diversity involves everyone and attempts to benefit everyone.

It recognises that there are differences in the culture and background of people. In terms of the working environment, it is important for Crew Commanders to recognise and identify with these differences. This will help to achieve a better level of service delivery to the community through improved levels of motivation and the contribution of the workforce in the future.

To maximise the potential development of the organisation, it will be crucial to include and recognise that skills that all people can bring to the workplace. The organisation can benefit economically and practically by recognising the differences of people in terms of their social, educational and professional backgrounds.

As a service provider, the Fire Service seek to achieve 'diversity' by:

- Providing an equitable service for all, regardless of the communities they serve;
- Recognising and addressing the barriers to social integration;
- Encouraging and promoting a workforce which is a true representation of the community;
- Assist in the personal development, education, vocational training and qualification of all employees regardless of their background;
- Providing recruitment and selection policies to promote a representative workforce; and
- Monitoring and reviewing of employment levels and the composition of the workforce.

4. Role of the Supervisory Officer

Supervisory officers have a wider role to play by ensuring that they:

- Monitor the members of their team in their behaviour towards others and their contact with members of the public;
- Assist in the understanding of minority groups and their issues;
- Promote a positive attitude towards minority groups and their integration with the workforce;
- Understand and apply Service policies to implement fairness and diversity; assess the training needs of the team/staff members and arrange for appropriate training;
- Recognise negative work practices and implement corrective action; and
- Support and promote events/campaigns to introduce a diverse workforce.

It is important to promote a clearer understanding of the issues surrounding equality, fairness and diversity and to see that it is taken seriously. Expectations regarding behaviour should be defined and set out to ensure that employees know clearly what is expected of them and their team.

The working environment must be created to encourage all staff to participate and contribute to the aims of the organisation and should protect individuals and groups from:

- Bullying
- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Victimisation.

5. Equal Opportunities Policy

It is for the Fire Service to establish its approach to equality and fairness in the workplace. This will enable the Service to ensure that it achieves maximum benefit from its human resources. In addition, the Equal Opportunities policy can help the Service relate more effectively to the communities within which they are located and serve.

It is a statutory duty to have an Equal Opportunities policy in place. The Fire Service must therefore develop and implement such a policy. It must also promote, monitor, review and evaluate the implementation of its procedures and practices. This will help to create a positive environment built on and developed naturally in the principles of equality and fairness.

The information contained in an Equal Opportunities policy will provide specific statements to guide, direct and confirm the Service's commitments, procedures and practices underpinning:

- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief
- Disability
- Ageism.

A significant part of the policy will include a statement on equality and fairness at work. This specifically identifies the aim of the policy, its application and the commitment by the Brigade to its employees.

Crew Commanders must therefore recognise the legal significance of their actions in supervising teams in the workplace or in their service delivery role.

6. Current Legislation and Codes of Practice relating to Equal Opportunities

There is legislation in force in the United Kingdom which provides a legal framework for implementing equal opportunities in its society. That which is likely to affect the role of the Crew Commander in the general management of a watch/team is listed below:

- Race Relations Act 1976
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Act 2003
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Act 2003
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Disability Discrimination Act (Amendment) Regulations 2003

7. Useful Definitions for the Workplace

(a) Discrimination

These are actual acts or words which discriminate against a particular group in society by treating them differently purely on the grounds of their sex, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability. All discrimination is based upon assumption and personal prejudice.

(b) Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination consists of treating an individual less favourably than others on the grounds of race, colour, ethnicity or national origin, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, trade union activity, political or religious belief, etc

(c) Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination consists of a neutral requirement, criteria or practice that would put individuals or groups at a particular and unjustifiable disadvantage when compared to others due to their sexuality, race, religion or belief.

(d) Racism

This relates to racial prejudice and the use of power to oppress a person or a group because of their colour, race, nationality or ethnic origin.

(e) Ageism

This denotes discrimination that is based on age, which especially affects young and elderly people in society.

(f) Sexism

This refers to various forms of discrimination experienced or encountered by women or men on the basis of their sex.

(g) Sexual Orientation

This refers to a person's sexual preference regarding relationships with people from the same or opposite sex.

(h) Harassment

Harassment can range from offensive, frightening or distressing. It can be extreme such as intentional bullying and violence, to less obvious subtle forms as ignoring someone. Whatever the form, it will be unwanted behaviour, which is unwelcome and unpleasant.

Eg Physical contact, jokes, offensive language, gossip, slander, songs, letters, posters, obscene gestures, emblems, isolation or non-cooperation and exclusion from social activities.

(i) Positive Action

Both the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and the Race Relations Act 1976 permit employers and others to target training and recruitment efforts at those groups that are under-represented in a particular area of work or in the workforce generally, so as to enable them to compete equally for jobs. This is only permitted if it can be shown that a particular sex or racial group is considerably under-represented in the job concerned (ie, there are none or comparatively few).

Positive action does not permit positive discrimination when deciding who will be offered a job.

(j) Victimisation

This refers to the treatment of a person less favourably than another because he or she has, in good faith, made allegations about discrimination or has started legal proceedings under any of the relevant acts.

References

Race Relations Act 1976
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986
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Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Act 2003
Disability Discrimination Act 1995
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