**The term “equal opportunities” is the idea that all workers within an organisation should be entitled to and have access to all of the organisations facilities at every stage of employment, including before they get a job.**

**This means every individual should have:**

* An equal chance to apply and be selected for posts pre-employment[ before they get the job offer]
* An equal chance to be trained and promoted while employed with the organisation
* An equal chance to have their employment ended equally and fairly

Denying any employee or prospective employee their right to equal opportunity in the workplace is seen as discrimination, which is considered unlawful under the [**Equality Act 2010**](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/legislation/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act).

**The Equality Act has specified 9 areas that are termed in the legislation as protected characteristics. These include (in no particular order):**

* Age
* Sex
* Race
* Disability
* Pregnancy
* Marital status
* Sexual orientation.
* Gender reassignment
* Religious background
* **Discriminating against workers because of any of the nine** c**haracteristics is against the law.**

**Discriminating against workers because of any of the nine characteristics is against the law.**

**What Does Equal Opportunities Mean?**

**In the UK it has been important to promote equality in the workplace.**

**This has been done with government departments that focus on different types of discrimination:**

1. The Equal Opportunities Commission was established to tackle the issue of sex discrimination.

2. The Disability Rights Commission focused on issues related to disability discrimination

3. The Commission for Racial Equality dealt with race discrimination.

In October 2007 these three commissions were merged into the new body called the [**Equality and Human Rights Commission**](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/).

**The primary aim of the Commission is to promote and protect everyone’s right to equal opportunities in the workplace as laid down in the Equality Act 2010.**

**Resource 5.1**

***What Does Equal Opportunities Mean?***