



International Rights  
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# Supporting veganism in the workplace

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**Disclaimer:** This guide aims to provide general information to support workplace leaders. It does not constitute legal advice. The Vegan Society encourages workplace leaders to address each and every situation with vegans on an individual basis and seek formal legal advice if necessary. The Vegan Society is not liable for losses brought about by relying on the information contained in this guide.

## About this guide

Ethical veganism attracts protection under human rights<sup>1</sup> and British equality law.<sup>2</sup> This guide has been created by The Vegan Society to help inform workplace leaders in Britain about veganism and explain steps leaders can take to create a vegan inclusive workplace.

## What is veganism?

Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals, for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.<sup>3</sup>

The belief intrinsic to the definition above, that it is morally wrong to exploit nonhuman animals, is recognised under human rights<sup>4</sup> and equality law.<sup>5</sup> Ethical vegans aim to live with compassion and make choices and decisions in their daily lives to avoid participating in animal exploitation. Living according to the vegan philosophy is an expression of deeply held convictions and identity.

There are a variety of reasons why individuals adopt veganism, many starting with changes to their diet once they become aware of the immense suffering inflicted on farmed animals. Others might arrive at veganism through environmental and climate concerns, or because they have become aware of evidence regarding the health benefits of avoiding meat and dairy products. The one thing all vegans have in common is increased knowledge, awareness and understanding, and the intention to align their conviction with their practice by making important practical adjustments in their daily lives.

You can find lots more information about veganism from The Vegan Society's website:

[vegansociety.com](https://vegansociety.com)

<sup>1</sup> Article 9: Freedom of thought, belief and religion (2021): <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/human-rights/human-rights-act/article-9-freedom-of-thought-belief-and-religion>.

<sup>2</sup> *Casamitjana v The League Against Cruel Sports* [2021] UKET 3331129/2018. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e3419ece5274a08dc828fdd/Mr\\_J\\_Casamitjana\\_Costa\\_v\\_The\\_League\\_Against\\_Cruel\\_Sports\\_-\\_3331129-18\\_-\\_Open\\_Preliminary\\_Hearing\\_Judgment\\_Reasons.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e3419ece5274a08dc828fdd/Mr_J_Casamitjana_Costa_v_The_League_Against_Cruel_Sports_-_3331129-18_-_Open_Preliminary_Hearing_Judgment_Reasons.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism>.

<sup>4</sup> European Court of Human Rights, 'Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion' (2025).

<sup>5</sup> See 2 above.

## Veganism and the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination on several grounds including the protected characteristic 'religion or belief.'<sup>6</sup> Under the Equality Act 2010, 'belief' means any religious or philosophical belief as well as a lack of belief. Ethical veganism is a particular philosophical belief that falls under the protected characteristic religion or belief.

To qualify for legal protection under the Equality Act, a philosophical belief is first examined against a set of criteria. The criteria are sometimes referred to as a 'legal test'. For a philosophical belief to be protected:

- It must be genuinely held.
- It must be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available.
- It must be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour.
- It must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance.
- It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.<sup>7</sup>

Ethical veganism has been shown to meet this test and it is prohibited to discriminate against ethical vegans in education, in the provision of goods and services and in employment.

## Prohibited conduct

The Equality Act 2010 explains different types of prohibited conduct. The following examples show how each type is applicable to ethical vegans:

**Direct discrimination:** Direct discrimination happens if an ethical vegan is treated less favourably than another person because they are vegan. There is no justification for this type of discrimination.

**Indirect discrimination:** Indirect discrimination could result if a rule, practice or policy (or other requirement), that is applicable to everyone, causes an ethical vegan a particular disadvantage and the requirement cannot be shown to be objectively justified.

**Harassment:** Harassment can happen if an ethical vegan feels they have been treated in a way that violated their dignity or subjected them to a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment is a broad category that takes into account the subjective feelings of the offended person. It recognises that offence can be caused by written or spoken words, images, physical gestures, facial expressions, pranks, mimicry, jokes and 'banter', and other acts and behaviour.

<sup>6</sup> Equality Act 2010: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1>.

<sup>7</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, Equality Act 2010 Statutory Code of Practice Employment (2011): <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/employercode.pdf>.

**Victimisation:** Victimisation happens when a vegan is subjected to a detriment because they did a 'protected act' under the Equality Act 2010. Protected acts include raising an issue relating to the protective measures of the Act. Detriment is not defined in the Equality Act but is thought to include "anything which the individual concerned might reasonably consider changed their position for the worse or put them at a disadvantage."<sup>8</sup>

## Case study

In 2022, an employment tribunal in Glasgow awarded an ethical vegan £10,000 for injury to feelings due to **harassment** after their line manager repeatedly laughed, made jokes about the employee's veganism, waved meat in their face and encouraged them to handle and eat meat. The tribunal stated that comments made encouraging the claimant to eat meat and handle meat products and waving meat products close to the claimant's face was unwanted conduct that created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating and offensive environment.<sup>9</sup>

## The Public Sector Equality Duty

Public bodies such as schools, health providers and local councils are required by law to go further than merely avoid discrimination. They must also proactively promote equality. This legal requirement is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).<sup>10</sup>

The PSED requires public bodies to keep protected characteristics in mind and consider and continually review how they provide for and promote equality across all their functions, including when they make decisions, create policies, buy goods and services and how they recruit and manage employees.

The PSED has three main aims:<sup>11</sup>

- Eliminate discrimination.
- Create equality of opportunity, including by taking steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics.
- Encourage good relationships between people with protected characteristics and those without the protected characteristic. One of the reasons for this particular requirement is to deal with prejudice.

You can find more information about the Equality Act 2010 online including on the Gov.UK website: [www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance).

<sup>8</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, Equality Act 2010 Statutory Code of Practice Employment (2011): [equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/employercode.pdf](http://equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/employercode.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Ms K Reilly v RT Management Bridgeton Ltd [2022] UKET 4107984/2020: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62c833aed3bf7f3005f623a7/Ms\\_K\\_Reilly\\_v\\_RT\\_Management\\_Bridgeton\\_Ltd\\_-\\_4107984.2020\\_-\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62c833aed3bf7f3005f623a7/Ms_K_Reilly_v_RT_Management_Bridgeton_Ltd_-_4107984.2020_-_Final.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Equality Act 2010: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/11/chapter/1>.

<sup>11</sup> The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED, 2022): <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/public-sector-equality-duty-psed>.

## The importance of robust policy

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) recommends creating a workplace policy covering equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).<sup>12</sup> A good workplace EDI policy will emphasise that the business prioritises and promotes a culture of equality and inclusion, and will not tolerate bullying, harassment or discrimination. It will also explain a commitment to training all staff about their rights, responsibilities and liabilities; and that complaints about bullying, harassment and victimisation will be dealt with seriously, including as misconduct under the organisation's disciplinary procedures.

The EDI policy and training should reference all protected characteristics, including veganism, and must be made available to all employees. It should reassure all employees that complaints are taken seriously, and include information about, and a link to, a clear complaints process. It is good practice to review employment practices and procedures regularly and make adjustments as necessary. A template EDI policy can be obtained from ACAS.<sup>13</sup>

Leaders in public sector workplaces should consider the needs of vegans at the point of decision making and continually promote equality. You can take steps to comply with the PSED towards vegans by:

- Acknowledging veganism as a protected characteristic relevant to efforts to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
- Identifying and addressing the disadvantages vegans experience by taking steps to meet their needs.
- Promoting understanding about veganism in your efforts to break down prejudice and foster good relations between vegans and non-vegans.

## Inclusion

Research shows that inclusion in the workplace is linked with employee satisfaction and reduced absenteeism.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, creating a positive environment where everyone, regardless of their identity or background, feels welcome and valued, not only fosters a sense of wellbeing, but also enhances motivation and productivity. Creating an inclusive workplace where vegans feel able to bring their authentic selves to work and contribute fully to objectives, initiatives and activities through a sense of belonging, can also contribute to the success of your organisation.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.acas.org.uk/improving-equality-diversity-and-inclusion>.

<sup>13</sup> Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Template, ACAS: <https://www.acas.org.uk/equality-policy-template>.

<sup>14</sup> CIPD, 'Building Inclusive Workplaces: Research Report' (2019): [https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/building-inclusive-workplaces-report-sept-2019\\_tcm18-64154.pdf](https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/building-inclusive-workplaces-report-sept-2019_tcm18-64154.pdf).

# How to support vegans in the workplace

## Understand veganism

The first and most obvious thing you can do is to learn about veganism and understand the needs of vegans. We recommend checking out The Vegan Society web pages for more information.<sup>15</sup> After expanding your knowledge on veganism, you might find it helpful to assess your existing policies and practices to consider the potential for discrimination against vegans.

## Accommodating the needs of vegans

All employees, including vegans, should be made to feel comfortable to discuss their needs should they wish to. Vegans in the workplace are likely to be only too pleased to offer assistance with the development of workplace policies and practices when they are comfortable and feel valued.

Here are some helpful ways you can ensure your vegan employees feel included and valued:

- Send out a 'dietary requirements' sheet for all catered meetings and events. Vegans will then be able to access food that meets their dietary needs.
- If resources allow, consider allocating dedicated kitchen space for all employees who have adopted vegan, plant-based and meat-free living for ethical reasons. Consider providing dedicated kitchen utensils and vegan-friendly cleaning products.
- As a minimum in limited kitchen spaces, think about how you might provide dedicated food storage areas for vegans, such as a shelf in the fridge above non-vegan foods to avoid cross-contamination.
- Ensure that vegans have access to vegan-friendly clothing requirements such as personal protective equipment, safety shoes and boots, and gloves.
- Foster a culture of inclusivity by arranging corporate and team events that everyone feels comfortable to attend. As a minimum, on request, exempt vegans from a requirement to attend corporate and team building events that revolve specifically around animal products and animal exploitation.
- Create a robust company code of conduct and ensure it is prominently displayed across the workspace to encourage a culture of respect between colleagues in the workplace. Make sure all co-workers understand that unacceptable levels of 'banter' and jokes about individual characteristics and identities are prohibited and will not be tolerated.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.vegansociety.com/>

- Consider the tasks you ask of vegans in the team and consider whether it's possible to exempt them from participating in buying (or signing off on the purchase of) non-vegan products.
- Support vegan employees to discuss their pension investment options with a relevant team member.
- Ensure all co-workers, including vegans, feel comfortable to approach team leaders to discuss their needs as a vegan or any related issues arising.

## Create a positive atmosphere

Fostering a general attitude of respect towards vegan employees is key. Guidance on inclusion from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development<sup>16</sup> notes five potential areas for examination. These are:

1. Employee behaviour.
2. Line manager capability.
3. Senior leadership.
4. Policies and wider people management practices.
5. Organisational culture, climate and values.

## Train staff

Alongside developing your knowledge about veganism and assessing your existing policies and practices, it is vital that training is provided to all team members about the principles of the Equality Act 2010, and about your specific Equality and Diversity Policy. During this general training, including a discussion about veganism as an example of a philosophical belief that is protected under the Equality Act 2010, will show that you aim to be inclusive and foster a supportive environment for all.<sup>17</sup>

Training sessions should also inform team leaders about how they can avoid discrimination against vegans and how they should conduct discussions with vegans to help provide a supportive workplace environment.

All team and senior leaders should understand that they are under a duty to treat vegans with respect and have due regard for their needs in the workplace. They should also feel well-informed to deal appropriately with requests or complaints from vegans and confident to deal fairly with inappropriate behaviour directed towards vegan employees.

<sup>16</sup> CIPD (2019), 'Building Inclusive Workplaces: Assessing the Evidence': <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/evidence-reviews/building-inclusive-workplaces/>.

<sup>17</sup> As noted above, Equality Diversity and Inclusion policy templates area available from ACAS. See 12 above.

## Reassure employees

Employees, including vegans, should not feel anxious about raising complaints and they should be reassured that, if they have a specific need or wish to raise a complaint, they will be treated fairly and taken seriously. Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to victimise someone who raises an issue relevant to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. If a vegan makes a request or a complaint under the Act and is subsequently treated badly for doing so, this could amount to a claim of victimisation. Reassuring employees will ensure that they feel confident enough to discuss their needs and raise issues without fear of victimisation.

## Take appropriate, prompt action

If you become aware that a vegan in your organisation is being subjected to unfair treatment because they are vegan, or if a vegan complains that they are coping with inappropriate behaviour because they are vegan, do not ignore it. It is in your best interests to take action to deal with the problem immediately. Doing so will ensure that matters do not escalate, perpetrators are educated and/or disciplined and demonstrate that you are committed to fostering respect for everyone, including vegans, in the workplace. Prompt action will evidence that you are serious about respect, fairness, inclusion, equality and diversity, and that you will act to deal with claims of unfair treatment in a timely manner.

## Making use of vegan knowledge

Consider the ways in which vegans can help contribute to workplace activities, policies and practices. One excellent initiative is the creation of Vegan Staff Networks. Vegan colleagues at Suffolk County Council launched a Vegan Staff Network over 5 years ago and have since been able to contribute to meeting agendas, decisions and events.<sup>18</sup> Including vegans in workplace culture and creating Vegan Staff Networks can support a range of workplace initiatives, including sustainability ideas and actions, climate and environmental activities, volunteering events, recognising the diversity of celebration days, including World Vegan Day and Veganuary, ethical development initiatives and so much more.

<sup>18</sup> Vegan Staff Network, <https://vegannetwork.co.uk/>.

## Acting within the law

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination in employment. It is vital that you address and eliminate direct discrimination immediately and consider how existing workplace policies, practices, other activities and rules may inadvertently negatively impact vegans. By examining these in relation to the needs of vegans, you should be able to address and resolve any unintentional indirect discrimination and ensure vegans feel respected and valued.

Equality law requires that you take a balanced view regarding the needs of employees in relation to the needs of your business. Workplace indirect discrimination will only be permissible if there is a clear, legitimate aim that cannot be met without a degree of interference with the protected characteristic in question. Any discrimination suffered by individual employees, including vegans, must be proportional to the legitimate aim sought. In the event of discrimination claims, the employer must be able to show that they did everything they possibly could to avoid discrimination.

If you don't already have a workplace equality and inclusion policy that includes your commitment to prohibiting bullying and harassment, you should consider the free templates available to you from online services such as ACAS (noted above) and ensure all co-workers understand their obligations and responsibilities towards each other.

## Authoritative guidance

**Equality Act guidance:** [gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance](https://gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance)

**Equality and Human Rights Commission, Employment Statutory Code of Practice:** [equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/employercode.pdf](https://equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/employercode.pdf)

**Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS):** [acas.org.uk](https://acas.org.uk)

**Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD):** [cipd.org.uk](https://cipd.org.uk)

The Vegan Society's can provide information and support to employers on request: contact [knowyourrights@vegansociety.com](mailto:knowyourrights@vegansociety.com)

## **The Vegan Society**

Donald Watson House

21 Hylton Street,

Birmingham,

B18 6HJ

**email:** [info@vegansociety.com](mailto:info@vegansociety.com)

**telephone:** 0121 523 1730

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