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Trade Unions and Equal Opportunities Employers

Chris Ball



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A Study of London Employers' Equality Policies and Processes, Based on Reports of Union Representatives

Chris Ball

Manufacturing Science and Finance Union London Region

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This publication is based on research conducted in the London Region of MSF in 1987/88. It has been widely discussed in the Union's London Region Equal Opportunities Committee. The views expressed and arguments employed herein are those of the author; they do not necessarily represent official policy of the union.

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For unions (and for that matter employ
opportunities issues, the lesson would s
representatives on equality issues is likely to
greater progress being realised in areas of p
with individual grievances of employees w
discrimination.

14. Conclusions

What conclusions then may we draw as a res
evidence seemed to emphasize repeatedly
unionisation, and union involvment in sec
opportunities issues. Where (as in our sample)
greater proportion of employers claiming "equ
status, were able to produce written polices i
the case with a mixed sample of unionised and
In only two thirds of the cases identified in our
to support equal opportunities, had the policy
and in a similar proportion of cases employees
the policy or were otherwise aware of it. Takin
that were defined as important if the policy it
was found that on average such features were four times more likely to occur in union-agreed policies than in those which had been arbitrarily imposed by an employer. Predictably, equality issues were more likely to be discussed with employees where a union was recognised than where this was not the case, though in union and non-union workplaces alike, it would seem that there is too little discussion in progress for one to feel confident that employers are in general justifying their claims to be "working for equality". Where equal opportunities committees were established there appeared to be markedly more discussion of equality issues than in other unionised companies where no committee existed. Moreover, there was fairly strong evidence that training workplace representatives has a positive effect on the "*equality process*".

Employers would not seem to be doing enough to justify their claims to be "equal opportunities employers". And while trade unions (including MSF) can doubtless do more too, it would seem clear that they can exert a positive influence on the drive for more equal workplaces, where they are allowed to do so. This finding has important implications for employers, trade unions, and governments, concerned to provide equal rights and eliminate forms of discrimination from the workplace. Employers should recognise the positive role that unions can and do play, and should not attempt (as some appear to want to do) to "go it alone" on equality policies and practice. Unions should recognise too that they have the capacity to influence events and practice, and that it is

Notes

(1) See references below. In addition CRE papers include: "Equal Opportunity in Employment", "Monitoring an Equal Opportunities Policy", "Equal Opportunity in Employment - why positive action?" EOC papers giving guidance include: "Guidelines for Equal Opportunities Employers", and "A Model Equal Opportunities Policy".

(2) "Race Relations Code of Practice". Commission for Racial Equality 1984.

(3) "Code of Practice for the elimination of discrimination on grounds of sex and marriage and the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment". Equal Opportunities Commission 1986.

(4) See note (1) above

(5) "Race Relations Code of Practice". (CRE Code) para 1.2.

(6) EOC Code of Practice (EOC code) para 35.

(7) EOC code para 35.

(8) CRE code para 1.4. (c).

(9) See for example "Employing People with Disabilities". Institute of Personnel Management, Outset 1988.

(10) CRE code para 1 - 29.

(11) EOC code para 32 (a).

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- Linda Dickens, Barbara Townley and David Winchester "Tackling Sex Discrimination through Collective Bargaining" 1988
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- Sonia Liff "Assessing Equal Opportunities Policies" Personnel Review 18.1.1989
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