

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a city skyline across a body of water. In the foreground, a row of black silhouettes of people of various ages and builds stands on a bridge, looking towards the city. The city skyline includes several buildings, with a prominent domed structure in the center. The water in the foreground reflects the silhouettes and the city lights.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN BUSINESS

Guidelines for addressing discrimination and promoting
integration in workplaces

“Taking action at strategic level will help shape the overall culture and values of an organisation.”



DIVERSE WORLD, DIVERSE BUSINESSES

Ireland's workforce now includes nearly 250,000 foreign nationals and the majority of products made in Ireland and services delivered from Ireland are to outside the State.

Whether you already employ a culturally diverse workforce or not, cultural diversity is an issue for your organisation. Diversity brings opportunities and challenges and should be managed carefully. Small businesses and large global corporations face similar issues with regard to diversity, but whilst these guidelines are aimed at all sizes of organisations, because of very different business structures, it is up to you to decide how your organisation should face that challenge. This guideline looks at the issues and offers some practical guidance on how to prevent discrimination and to support inclusion and integration.

Migrant and minority ethnic workers can have different concerns and it is important that business takes a lead in ensuring that they are supported and included. Employers can do a lot to highlight the positive aspects of cultural diversity, as well as meeting their legal obligations in terms of equality.

WHY SHOULD BUSINESSES TAKE ACTION?

Research and surveys indicate that diversity initiatives have a positive impact on a significant majority of businesses. The rationale for embracing diversity is driven by a combination of legal obligations and the potential business benefits and opportunities that can arise, including:

- *Compliance with equality and anti-discrimination laws*
- *Enhanced employee recruitment and retention from a wider pool of skilled workers*
- *Improved staff morale and increased commitment and loyalty from staff*
- *Meeting the needs of and reflecting your customer base, including creating new opportunities for products and customers*
- *Increased innovation and creativity*
- *Improved business image and reputation*

TACKLING DISCRIMINATION AS AN EMPLOYER Implement an Equality/Diversity Policy

Taking action at strategic level will help shape the overall culture and values of an organisation. An equality or diversity policy could provide the foundation for your organisation's overall equality/diversity strategy. Such a policy is a statement of commitment, identifying areas of activity to prevent discrimination and promote equality and diversity. It could include reference to:

- *Equality of opportunity in recruitment and in career promotion and progression*
- *Anti-Racism policy and procedures*
- *Equal access to existing induction programmes or further training and development*
- *Commitment and policies to prevent harassment and bullying at work*
- *Commitment and policies to assist individuals in balancing their family responsibilities, work and private life by implementing appropriate work-life balance policies*
- *Explaining grievance procedures as well as disciplinary policy and procedures*

It is very important that all employees are fully briefed of the existence and content of this policy.

Combat Discrimination in Recruitment and Selection

It is important to make recruitment as fair as possible. If discrimination were to occur during recruitment, it would breach the principle of equal treatment. You should consult the Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 as well as relevant IBEC Guidelines for detailed guidance.

Factors other than competence/merit should not influence the recruitment and selection decision. In order to ensure this is the case, some organisations have found it useful to:

- *Take great care when advertising a position by only including requirements that are necessary for the job*
- *Provide a standardised application form so that only relevant information is considered*



- *Train interviewers to be balanced and unbiased and to focus only on questions related to the candidate's ability to do the job*
- *Ask the same or very similar questions of all candidates*
- *When using recruitment firms ensure that their policies and conduct in relation to equality and anti-discrimination reflect the values of your organisation*

WHOM CAN I EMPLOY?

Whilst it is vital that recruitment is carried out without discrimination, EU Treaties and national immigration rules do impose certain limitations and obligations.

A 'community preference' rule means that preference in recruitment should be given to EEA nationals over non-EEA nationals not part of the Irish labour market. As long as an EU national is capable of doing the job, they should be recruited even though a non-EU candidate may seem the better candidate.

Whilst the principle of free movement of workers exists for citizens coming from within the European Economic Area

(EEA)¹, employment permits or visa permissions that allow access to the labour market are required for the employment of all nationals from outside of the EEA. The current system includes Green Cards, work permits, intra-company transfers and spousal work permits. Remember that specific rules cover the citizens of new Member States and as a result free movement rules do not yet cover Bulgarian and Romanian citizens yet.

It is appropriate, as part of the recruitment process, to take steps to verify that all prospective employees have permission to work in Ireland.

Combat Discrimination against Employees

It is important that organisations continue to combat discrimination in the workplace after individuals have been recruited. Organisations must provide for employment equality and equality of opportunity, as well as guard against racist or xenophobic abuse and harassment.

It is important for organisations to be aware that discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin is illegal under both EU and Irish law, in relation to promotion, employment and working conditions.

1. The EEA includes all the member states of the European Union plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Switzerland has a bilateral agreement with the EU and as a result, Swiss citizens should be treated like EU citizens for the purposes of employment in the EU.

Raise Awareness and Delegate Responsibility

With or without an equality/ diversity policy new measures have to be appropriately implemented. The communication of new company policies throughout the organisation by informing employees as to why these issues are being tackled is essential. Other potentially effective steps include:

- *Appointing an equality officer or manager with responsibilities for equality/diversity*
- *Within any existing structure of employee committees advice could be sought or an equality/diversity committee could be set up. Care should be taken to include migrant and minority ethnic representation in these roles, where appropriate*
- *Raise awareness about the diversity in your workplace*
- *Raise awareness and make clear that racism is not acceptable in the workplace*
- *The provision of appropriate training can be particularly useful*

Making Cultural and Language Allowances in the Workplace

To ease the integration of migrant workers, organisations may need to go beyond their legal obligations and take active measures to highlight diversity. Aspects of the workplace can be adapted to accommodate cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity. Employers should be aware of cultural differences and try where possible to acknowledge those differences. Consulting migrant and minority ethnic workers to assess what their cultural requirements are and to identify where tensions might arise can be helpful. Where appropriate adapting workplace rules and practices to take account of specific cultural needs can also be appropriate. Examples of this would include:

- *Try to ensure that organised events, such as work social occasions, take account of cultural sensitivities so as to ensure as much involvement as possible*
- *Accommodate, where possible, the religious or cultural dress codes of migrant and ethnic minority workers*

- *If you have an employee canteen, adapt menus to allow for any specific dietary requirements*
- *Provide time and possibly a venue for religious observance*
- *Allow for flexibility with regard to annual leave to allow migrant workers to visit their families in their home countries*
- *Introduce a mentoring system to help new employees find their way.*
- *Introduce activities that focus on team building*
- **Supports in the area of English language** can be particularly challenging in deciding what is best for your organisation. In all cases any supports should complement rather than replace other actions. Examine if it would be possible to use the language/s of the migrant workers for some documents, where practical and beneficial. This might include company procedures and health and safety rules.
- *If you have a number of employees who do not have strong English language skills, ensure that signs do not rely too heavily on the use of words, but rather introduce explanatory images*
- *Some employers have provided assistance with language supports through local structures or by providing English language training*
- *As with all policies, it is important to monitor and evaluate your actions to ensure that measures continue to be relevant and appropriate*

Induction and Training

Having an induction process or orientation training is helpful for all new employees, but especially for migrant and minority ethnic workers. The provision of appropriate induction and orientation training for these workers can begin their integration and inclusion in your workplace. As you would with all employees, organisations could:

- *Introduce the organisation, describing the business, products and services*
- *Describe job/career structures and where employees 'fit in' to that structure*

- *Explain the terms and conditions of their employment, in particular areas where the Irish system may be different than in other countries*
- *Explain or direct employees to information on the Irish tax and social welfare systems, paying attention to the contributions being made on their behalf and what benefits they can avail of. It would be worth explaining what your payslips look like and what the different possible deductions that might be made, as this can be particularly confusing*
- *Describe any education and training opportunities that are available within the organisation*
- *Inform all new employees about the organisation's various policies and procedures*
- *Many organisations assist or provide information on the local area and how/where to access services such as opening bank accounts, registering for PPS numbers and registering with the Revenue as well as the best way to search for accommodation*
- *Many employers prepare a welcome pack with much of this information collected together so that new employees can consider it at their leisure*

Training can provide individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to develop to their full potential. Training can also foster a more positive and open working environment by beginning to address attitudes and behaviour of employees with regard to racism, discrimination and diversity.

- *Migrant workers will need the same job training as their colleagues. There may be a need for slightly specific training for migrants if their language capacity is weak to ensure that everything is understood. This may simply mean slowing down slightly or seeing whether parts of the training could be conducted in their own language or perhaps translating some of the material. This may be particularly important if it concerns health and safety training*
- *HR managers, line managers and other employees could receive formal training on equality and diversity issues in the workplace.*

TACKLING DISCRIMINATION AS A BUSINESS OR SERVICE PROVIDER

In addition to tackling discrimination within their organisation, businesses should also consider extending their strategy to activities outside of their organisation and interactions with various stakeholders. It is illegal to discriminate on grounds of racial or ethnic origin in the provision of services.

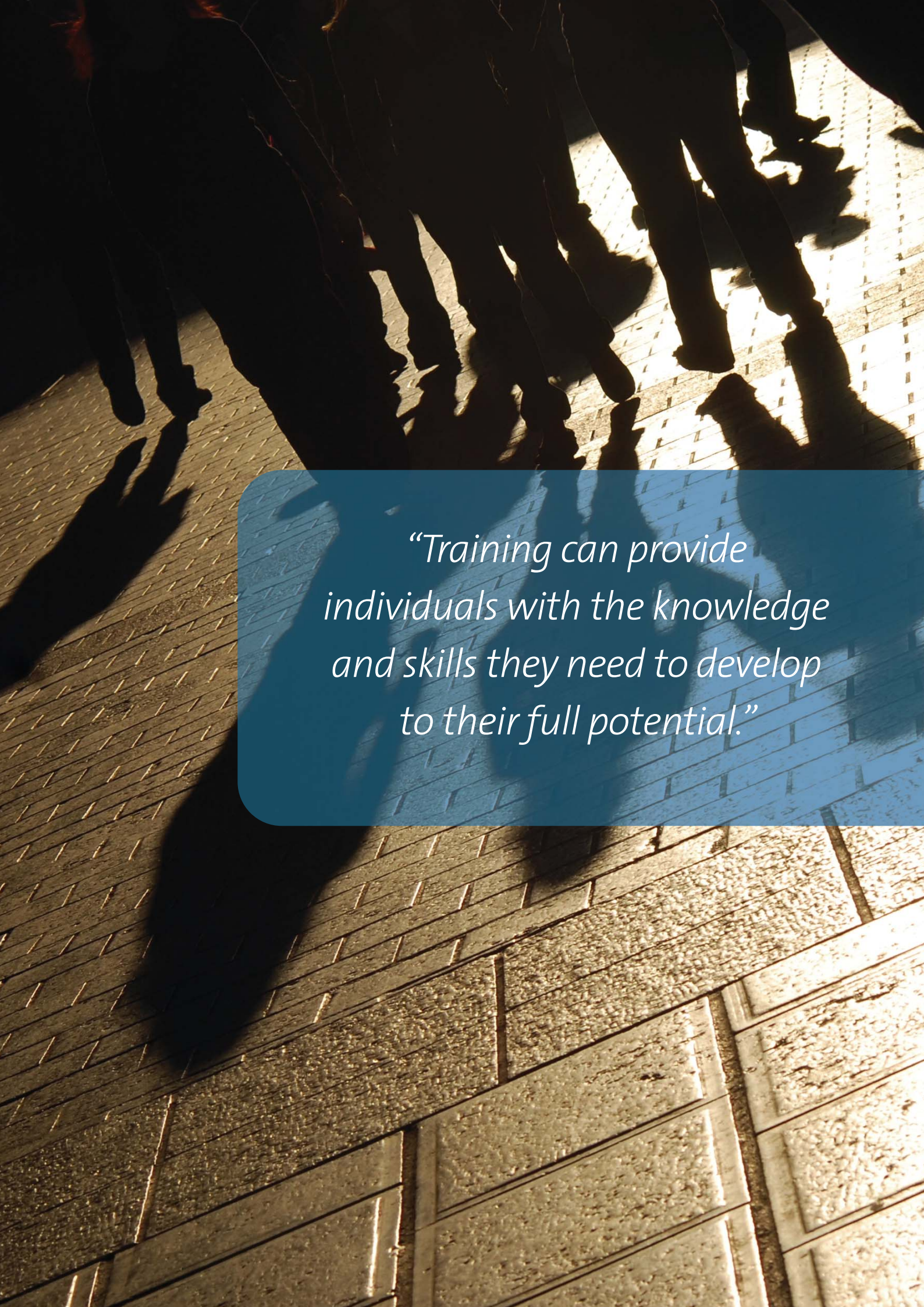
It may be useful, within your overall strategy for diversity, to take full advantage of the opportunities that come from diversity by:

- *Tailoring some products or services to meet the needs of a particular country or culture, which may open up new markets at home or abroad*
- *Recruiting employees from diverse backgrounds to provide appropriate services to a diverse customer base*
- *Taking account of cultural diversity and sensitivities when marketing and selling products and services*
- *Building your strategy into your supply chain and dealings with intermediaries*
- *It may be useful for you to continue to develop your understanding of new developments and best practice through local networks of employers or other groups or working at regional/national and international level through IBEC/SFA and others.*

Further assistance

IBEC and the SFA can provide further assistance and guidance in a number of the areas dealt with in this publication. In particular members should refer to the IBEC website for detailed guidelines, including those on: Bullying/Harassment in the Workplace, Recruitment and Selection, Employment Equality and Employing non-Irish nationals.

A number of organisations provide training in the areas mentioned, including IBEC. Further information on courses available can be found on the dedicated training and development website <http://www.ibectraining.ie>

A low-angle, high-contrast photograph showing the silhouettes of several people walking on a brick-paved path. The sun is low in the sky, creating long, dark shadows that stretch across the bricks. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box is overlaid on the middle of the image, containing a quote in white text.

“Training can provide individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to develop to their full potential.”



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