

RIGHTS IN PRACTICE

LESSON 5: EXPLORING WORKERS' RIGHTS

Lesson aim:

- To explain what is meant by workers' rights.
- To highlight the vast array of workers' legislative entitlements and some of the main provisions.
- To explain the origin, enforcement and penalties associated with workplace rights.

Learning objectives:

At the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- explain the purpose of employment law, what workers' rights are and list them;
- understand the laws which apply to young people;
- list the legislation which applies in the workplace and the area it covers; and
- explore how complaints are made where there are breaches of the law.

Lesson outline:

Ask each student to create a mind-map of words and ideas that they associate with workers' rights. Write the words on a flipchart making sure all the students understand (this can then be used to stimulate discussions below).

Now ask students some direct questions on workers' rights:

- What do you think when people speak of workers' rights?
- What do you think it means?
- Where do workers' get their rights from?
- What do workers' rights cover?
- What does employment law mean?
- What do you think it is for? Who do you think it is for? What does it do for workers?

- What workplace situations might the law apply to?

Give students a copy of **Worksheet 3** and ask them to write down what they think each of the laws might contain.

In-class activity: Learning about employment law

As an introduction to the law ask students to complete **Worksheet 4a** which concerns the law as it applies to them at different stages of their lives. When completed the class should discuss the opinions regarding the relevance of the law.

Then ask students if they have ever heard of [select one piece of legislation from the resource and provide a copy of it to students]. Read through it ensuring all students understand the language and context. Then ask students to complete the following **Worksheet 4b**.

(NOTE: If there is only one piece of legislation to be covered due to time constraints, then teachers should start with the Protection of Young Persons in Employment Act 1996. The worksheet can be re-used for any other piece of legislation the class wishes to look into on another occasion.)

Student activity: Exercise on workers' rights

Provide students with a copy of **Handout 2** and ask them to rank the workers' rights in order of importance (one being the highest). When that is completed students should be prepared to answer the following:

- Explain the reasons for choosing your top three rights. Why are they so important to you?
- If none of these rights were available, what do you think the workplace would be like?
- If you were only able to have one right, which one would it be and why?

LESSON 5: EXPLORING WORKERS' RIGHTS (CONTINUED)

- ↘ What do you think could be done if you were not receiving some of these rights at work?
- ↘ What are the most important rights for workers and why?
- ↘ What rights do you think are missing and that you would like to see included? Why?

Individual student activity: Essay writing

Ask students to write an essay on rights in the workplace beginning with:

- ↘ "Young workers need to know about their rights because..."
- ↘ "Workers are well protected by legislation – the only problem is enforcing it."
- ↘ "A law is only as good as its enforcement."

Student research activity: Finding what's right project

Ask students to conduct some minor research into the reality of the workplace and workers' rights. Using **Worksheet 5** attempt to answer the questions by exploring them with classmates and friends. The answers should be analysed and a short report written about them. Full details are contained on this worksheet.

(NOTE: Students may need additional assistance with compiling the report at the end of the survey. Depending on the level of the students, resources and time constraints, it may be more appropriate for this activity to be carried out in groups. This would also have the advantage of enabling a broader spread of people to take part and thus providing more numbers for analysis.)

Individual student activity: Workers' charter project

Based on what has been learned so far, ask students to design a workers' charter with an outline of the rules they would wish to create. The charter should be as creative as possible but students must be able to explain the reasons and benefits to workers for each statement contained in the charter.

In-class group activity: A workers' charter

(This follows on from the previous activity, here the class will develop a workers' charter which should be agreed by the entire class.)

The outcome of this activity is to create a workers' charter and rules, agreed by all the class.

The class should be divided into groups to discuss their individual charters and rules and agree what statements and rules their group put forward to the class for inclusion in the new charter. When each group has decided what they wish to see included bring the class back together. Now they need to decide what should go into the overall workers' charter from the class. This process should be conducted in as fair a way as possible. The final charter should be put on display in the classroom (see optional exercise for suggestions).

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Teacher's note

Try to ensure that every group gets at least one of their statements/rules into the class charter. It should also be decided at the outset how each group will make decisions. Teachers should explain to students the possibilities for arriving at decisions such as consensus, majority vote etc, explaining how each works.

An important element of learning in this activity is how decisions are made, how teamwork is handled and whether each individual observes the rights of others to speak, have an opinion etc. Teachers should also take note of the following:

- How each statement is chosen – by consensus, majority, or something else?
- The ways in which disagreements or controversies that arise are handled.
- Group dynamics within the entire group and among smaller groups which may have formed.
- Group decision-making skills.
- Contribution levels of all individuals making note of those who didn't participate or get the opportunity to.

When completed the teacher should share their observations on group work with the class and discuss with them how they felt working together went.

Optional: Extension to activity

The class could create some artwork to represent their idea of workers' rights and their new charter. This could take the form of individual posters or artwork, a group collage or any other form of artistic expression that the class deems to be appropriate.