

**Equality and
Human Rights
Commission**

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Strategic Priorities

Consultation Document

Introduction

The Commission has a statutory duty to publish a three-year strategic plan and our first will be published in April 2009. The plan will set out a clear vision and strategy for April 2009 to March 2012, as well as describing the programme of work for that period. The purpose of this consultation document is to build on our initial consultation and set out the proposed strategic priorities on which your further views and ideas are welcome.

The Commission views equality, human rights and good relations between people as something that affects us all, regardless of background and we remain committed to working closely with those who are interested in or affected by our work through involvement and consultation.

In recent months we have been working closely with our colleagues across the Commission, public and private sector organisations, and voluntary and community sector organisations. The Commission would like to thank everyone who has participated in the involvement and consultation so far and also for taking the time to read this latest consultation document.

We have received more than 320 submissions into the on-line consultation and have welcomed more than 550 people to the stakeholder events we have been running in England, Scotland and Wales.

The statutory responsibilities of the Commission outlined in the 2006 Equality Act, the prospect of new equality legislation, the changing economic and political climate, and the involvement and consultation process itself, have all been key influences on our thinking and on the proposed strategic priorities. These strategic priorities will be the foundation on which we build the final three-year strategic plan and associated programme of work.

The development of the strategic plan is an ongoing and inclusive process enabling many different people and organisations, who share our commitment to improving society, to influence and shape our work. Thank you again for your involvement and we look forward to receiving your views on our strategic priorities.

Foreword by Nicola Brewer

As we begin the New Year I'd like to take the opportunity to reflect back on what has been both a challenging and rewarding time for the Commission and everyone we have been working with during the past 12 months.

When the Commission was formed it was difficult to envisage at that time just how complex a challenge it would be to merge the legacy Commissions while also maintaining the momentum on making progress towards creating a society built on fairness and respect. I am really proud of what we have achieved so far and truly believe that we are building an authoritative organisation which can make a real and lasting impact.

We have had many notable successes.

We have supported and won some key court victories. Specifically we saw the successful conclusion of the cases of Sharon Coleman v Attridge Law & Steve Law which provides protection for Britain's 7 million carers. We also supported cases which help to speed up equal pay for women and challenge the use of physical restraint on young people in secure training centres.

We have allocated nearly £11 million worth of grants including capacity building, launched three inquiries, and commissioned 14 new research projects covering the newer areas of our mandate, worked on around 1,000 pieces of case work and answered more than 44,000 of calls to our helpline.

We are using our legal powers to encourage public authorities to do more to help the 3 million women a year who experience domestic violence. In addition we launched a new digital strategy to help us to engage with a much broader audience. We have received UN National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) accreditation.

In November we launched a document to mark our one year anniversary. Called 'One Year, Ten Stories', the document reflects on just a handful of people whose lives have been touched by the Commission since we opened and gives an insight into exactly what the Commission is here to achieve. Real change for real people.

Looking ahead our focus is firmly on the development of our three-year strategic plan and the programme of work that will help us to deliver our core statutory responsibilities. I am determined that our plan will be realistic and achievable, but also ambitious and striving with a positive message of change.

We have listened with great interest to your views and ideas. Our plan will set out how we will continue to follow an approach based on working together in partnership to promote equality, human rights and good relations. The Commission is the custodian of equality law with unique powers and levers at its disposal, and we intend to work collaboratively with leaders and organisations to maximise the impact of our work.

Foreword

Most critically for the Commission as a whole we must ensure that the proposed new Equalities Bill is implemented effectively, while acting on the findings of our Human Rights Inquiry to embed human-rights based approach throughout the public sector. These are critical tasks for the Commission over the next three years providing a further opportunity to protect and strengthen current equality legislation enabling us to deliver our statutory responsibilities more productively.

We recognise the importance of our role as a public interest regulator. Our aim is to develop a modern, risk-based approach using promotion, effective inspection, compliance

and enforcement to make best use of our resources. Our three-year plan will set out how we intend to achieve this.

In addition, we must not forget that all of our work will be delivered against the backdrop of an economic downturn. We see ourselves having a fundamental role in ensuring that the most disadvantaged groups are not unfairly affected by the recession.

We welcome your valuable contributions and your continued involvement.

Nicola Brewer
Chief Executive

The Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the independent advocate for equality, human rights and good relations in Britain. Challenging prejudice and disadvantage, and promoting the importance of human rights, our vision is a society built on fairness and respect with people confident in all aspects of their diversity.

Formed on 1 October 2007, the Commission is an independent statutory body established under the Equality Act 2006 which sets out our functions and powers. Our sponsor department is the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

We enforce equality legislation on age, disability, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation, and encourage compliance with the Human Rights Act. We are an intelligence-driven and evidence-based organisation and we continue to use our own commissioned research and that published by others to inform our thinking.

We use our influence and authority to ensure that equality and human rights remain at the top of the agenda for government and employers, media and society.

Acting directly and by building partnerships locally, regionally and nationally, we stimulate debate on equality, human rights and good relations. We provide advice and guidance to businesses, the voluntary and community sector, and individuals. By developing understanding of the causes and effects of inequality for people across Britain we are an authoritative voice for reform.

Our statutory duties

The Commission's statutory duties, set out in the Equality Act 2006, are to:

- Promote understanding of the importance of equality and diversity.
- Encourage good practice in relation to equality and diversity.
- Promote equality of opportunity.
- Promote awareness and understanding of rights under the equality enactments.
- Enforce the equality enactments.
- Work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination.
- Work towards the elimination of unlawful harassment.
- Encourage good practice in relation to human rights.

The Commission

- Promote awareness, understanding and protection of human rights.
- Promote good relations among and between groups and others, where groups include a group or class of persons who share a common attribute in respect of any of the protected grounds.
- Monitor the effectiveness of laws relating to equality and human rights and monitor and report progress towards identified desired outcomes.
- Encourage public authorities to comply with section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 (compliance with Convention rights).

We also work closely with our colleagues in the Scottish Commission for Human Rights which has been established by the Scottish Parliament to work on human rights matters specific to Scotland.

Our three statutory committees

The Commission has three statutory committees which are responsible for ensuring that the overall work of the Commission reflects the needs and priorities of Scotland and Wales and the interests of disabled people, as well as developing their own specific work programmes and taking a lead role in working with our stakeholders.

Developing our strategic priorities

An important step in the development of the 2009–12 strategic plan is the identification of the strategic priorities which set the framework and direction for the work we will undertake during that period.

The strategic priorities proposed by our Board have been shaped by our statutory remit, our analysis of the challenges we expect to arise from the evolving political and economic environment, the need to deliver on our existing commitments such as the implementation of the new Equalities Bill, and informed by the many valuable contributions made during our involvement and consultation process to date.

The Economic, Political and Social Context

The evolving economic and political environment has influenced the development of our strategic plan.

The slowdown in the global economy is having a significant impact on the most disadvantaged groups in relation to living standards, and in its influence on employment and public spending. We must ensure through our continued work that those most at risk from the effects of the economic downturn are protected.

We must also continue to respond to and manage the effects of the changing political landscape, including the impact of devolution in Scotland and Wales. As a society we are becoming increasingly diverse, and there are important differences across communities and localities.

Involving stakeholders

The involvement and consultation began in November 2008. We have been delighted by the level of participation from stakeholders across the private, public, voluntary and community sectors in both the online consultation and the series of stakeholder events we have been running across England, Scotland and Wales.

In the online consultation and stakeholder events we asked a number of questions that we considered were critical areas for discussion to help shape the strategic priorities:

- As the Commission is here to support all 60 million people living in Britain, where should it focus its resources for the greatest public benefit?
- Do the seven protected grounds (age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation) in the Equality Act adequately describe the drivers of inequality that persist in Britain?
- In what ways will changes in the economic and political landscape over the next three years, impact on equality and human rights in Britain?
- Over the next three years, what are likely to be the most significant forms of disadvantage that the Commission should focus on?
- What can the Commission **uniquely** do to tackle these forms of disadvantage?

All participants in the involvement and consultation programme were asked to openly share with us their views, experience, knowledge and insights as well as their energy and commitment. We also asked for ideas as well as challenging perspectives that we could take back into the Commission.

The common themes that emerged from the online consultation and the stakeholder events were:

- Support for the Commission to exercise its statutory powers robustly to meet its duties.
- Recognition of the value of early education to instil awareness of equality and human rights in children and young people.
- The need to address the link between social class, poverty and equality of life opportunities.
- Concern about the impact of the recession on the most vulnerable groups and the Commission's role in protecting them.
- Continued relevance of the equality agenda with the changing economic and political environment.
- Need for increased communication on the Commission's role and functions.
- Need for increased and improved provision of accessible information and guidance on rights.
- Support for a cross-mandate approach.
- Clear recognition that the Commission can only deliver on its wide remit by working in partnership with other organisations.

Delivering the Commission's existing commitments

Our existing programme of work, which continues into the period April 2009 to March 2012, is significant.

This includes implementing the new Equalities Bill, acting on the findings of the Human Rights Inquiry, finalising both the equality and good relations measurement frameworks, maximising the impact of the public sector duties, and beginning to monitor trends for our triennial review reporting on the state of inequality across Britain.

In addition we will continue to focus on the delivery of our statutory requirement by the enforcement of equality enactments, providing information, advice and guidance, and the production of codes of practice and guidance.

Our five strategic priorities

The five proposed strategic priorities are closely interconnected and build on the Commission's work so far:

1. Build a society without prejudice – promoting good relations and fostering a vibrant equality and human rights culture in Britain.
2. A fairer Britain for all – reducing the gap in outcomes to secure fair life chances, access to services and dignified treatment.
3. Secure and implement an effective legislative and regulatory framework for equality and human rights.
4. Promote awareness and understanding of rights.
5. Build an authoritative and responsive organisation.

Priority 1:

Build a society without prejudice – promoting good relations and fostering a vibrant equality and human rights culture in Britain

During 2008/9 we have begun to promote a culture of equality, human rights and good relations in Britain. In particular we have worked with young people to start to develop a generation without prejudice.

In our three-year strategic plan the Commission will commit to promoting changes in attitude and behaviour by identifying what influences and triggers prejudice and discrimination in our society.

We will engage with public opinion to advance the debate as to the type of society we wish to create, built on fairness and respect.

We will bring people together to promote shared understanding, tolerance and respect of diverse cultures and beliefs to encourage social and community cohesion. We will promote understanding and positive attitudes to difference and diversity across generations to address the underlying causes of tension.

The Commission will address the need for access and participation in decision making for marginalised and excluded groups. We will work towards improving safety and security for groups experiencing targeted violence, harassment and abuse.

We propose to do this by:

- Commissioning attitudinal research and developing means for measuring public understanding and attitudes towards equality, fairness and good relations which will inform the Commission's strategic and policy development.
- Continuing to build on our youth programme and initiatives developed in projects such as Croeso, Our Space, Equally Different and Young Brits@Art.
- Extending our New Voices programme to address the need for a greater voice, access and participation in decision making for marginalised and excluded groups.
- Monitoring and taking action to eliminate crime motivated by prejudice against particular groups, including violence against women, as well as disability, homophobic, transphobic, race and religious hate crime.
- Working with partners in the public and voluntary sectors to develop and implement a shared strategy for promoting the safety and security of disabled people, based on our recent research into their experiences.
- Acting determinedly on harassment and workplace bullying, especially homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- Engaging with the media to drive forward an agenda of equality and good relations.

Question

To what extent do you believe this should be a priority for the Commission?

Question

To what extent do you believe this approach would promote changes needed to build a society without prejudice?

Priority 2:

A fairer Britain for all – reducing the gap in outcomes to secure fair life chances, access to services and dignified treatment

During the last year the Commission has commissioned research and initiated projects to promote better practices in the workplace. For example we have launched the Working Better project to promote innovative new ideas about how work could be organised and people employed to meet the challenges of the 21st Century in helping the Commission to determine its position on the future of care and support.

In our three-year strategic plan the Commission aims to address the most severe and persistent disadvantage in our society. Our aim is not just to reduce discrimination, but to make society fairer by promoting equality of opportunity.

Our work will address the issues of disadvantage identified in the Government's Equality Public Service Agreement (PSA 15) and contribute towards the delivery plan led by the Government Equalities Office (GEO). One example is our work on earning inequalities which promotes good equal pay practice in the work place. We will support equivalent targets for quality in public service in Scotland and Wales.

We will seek to ensure that public services meet the specific needs of different groups in accordance with the values of fairness, respect and dignity, as required by the public sector equality duties. We will identify and address social inequalities that arise from poverty, to increase opportunity for the most disadvantaged including narrowing persistent gaps in educational outcomes.

We will also focus on helping to develop and promote better practices in the workplace which encourage supportive ways of working particularly for those with caring responsibilities or who require adjustments.

We propose to do this by:

- Promoting the public sector equality duties as the key to understanding and addressing the needs of different groups and service users.
- Changing the culture of public services in partnership with the public sector inspectorates, central government and other key players through promoting the public sector duties and a human rights approach.
- Building further on the work already started in our Social Care Reform project we will continue to influence the Government's Green Paper on the future shape of the care and support system in England. We will also advocate independent living with a cost benefit analysis of a reformed system of care, and work with the Scottish Government to support the delivery of its independent living agenda.
- Promoting equality goals to increase staying-on rates in schools, widening participation in vocational programmes and challenge occupational segregation at the earliest stages of schooling in England.
- Continuing with our Working Better programme which aims to remove barriers to re-entering the workplace which often exist for women returning to work after having children and for the over fifties and for those requiring flexibilities or adjustments relating to disability or mental health conditions.
- Ensuring a systematic and effective approach to public sector procurement promoting equality practice amongst private sector contractors and suppliers using for example the public sector duties.

Question

To what extent do you believe this should be a priority for the Commission?

Question

To what extent do you believe this approach would promote changes needed to create a fairer Britain for all?

Priority 3:

Secure and implement an effective legislative and regulatory framework for equality and human rights

Through 2008/9 the Commission has been working with the Government to influence the development of the new Equalities Bill. In April 2008 we launched an inquiry to find out how human rights work in England and Wales and we will publish our final report in spring 2009. We have also launched formal inquiries into the financial services and construction sectors and the treatment of workers in the meat processing industry.

In our three-year strategic plan we will set out a programme of work to implement a modern approach to risk-based regulation. This will enable us to use our resources more effectively and we will continue to address the worst offending institutions which fail to meet their duties, where necessary through enforcement and strategic litigation.

Our work will focus on securing and implementing an effective legislative and regulatory framework for equality and human rights, taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by the new Equalities Bill, and our Human Rights Inquiry. We will work with inspectorates, public bodies and service users to embed human rights principles alongside the public sector equality duties, developing performance measures and sharing best practice. In Scotland our duties and powers do not extend to human rights issues in public services and we will work closely on these issues with the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

The Commission has the responsibility to promote, protect and monitor the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In Scotland we share this responsibility with the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

We propose to do this by:

- Supporting the Government Equalities Office in implementing the new Equalities Bill, streamlining our approach to compliance and enforcement, adopting a practice of prevention and promotion and developing user-friendly codes of practice and practical guidance.
- Acting on the findings of the Human Rights Inquiry for England and Wales working with public bodies, and service users to promote awareness and understanding of human rights.
- Continuing to undertake individual cases, investigations, public duty enforcement and inquiries.
- Working to improve the quality of information and data available to the public on the public sector duties compliance. We will develop a new online system to monitor and assess progress across all public authorities.
- Influencing economic and public service inspectorates and regulators, ensuring that equality is at the heart of their performance assessment frameworks. We will set out to negotiate memoranda of understanding with a range of regulatory bodies.
- Taking a proactive approach to promoting, protecting and monitoring the implementation of relevant United Nations human rights treaties. We will report on Britain's performance in relation to implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Working alongside our European partners to support, influence and ensure effective implementation of EU legislation including the Article 13 anti-discrimination directive.

Question

To what extent do you believe this should be a priority for the Commission?

Question

To what extent do you believe the approach we are proposing will promote changes needed to secure and implement an effective legislative and regulatory framework?

Priority 4:

Promote awareness and understanding of rights and duties

The Commission is committed to ensuring ease of access to information and guidance on all matters relating to equality, human rights and good relations.

Since April 2008 we have answered more than 44,000 calls to our helpline service from individuals, employers, service providers and legal representatives. We've also taken the first steps to update our website to make it easier to use and to find the information users are searching for, including improving the way in which users switch between the English and Welsh language versions of the site. Although some improvements have been made we fully recognise that we still have a lot more to do.

Our three-year strategic plan will set out our commitment to raise further public awareness of the existence of the Commission, and how we will continue to deliver timely and accurate information, advice and guidance to those with rights and those with duties across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

In particular, we will ensure the production and promotion of high quality statutory and non-statutory guidance for the new Equalities Act.

As custodians of Britain's equality and human rights enactments, we recognise our role in providing authoritative, timely and accessible updates on developments in the law.

We propose to do this by:

- Continuing to provide a range of high quality, accessible and practical information, advice and guidance to the public concerning their rights and how to secure them. For example we will continue to monitor and enforce a new European Regulation designed to make air travel easier for up to 15 million people who are disabled or who have limited mobility travelling through airports. We will do this through our website and helpline and through collaborating with and supporting advice organisations.
- Producing practical guidance on the law for those with duties including employers and service providers, based on their identified priorities, and facilitating the exchange of good practice.
- Ensuring all those with rights and responsibilities under the new Equalities Act have access to timely, accurate and accessible Codes of Practice, guidance and advice, through collaboration with advice agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and business organisations including Chambers of Commerce and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).
- Providing regular updates on case law, legal interventions and enforcement action via our website, email bulletin, events and the media; together with practical guidance on the implications for individuals and organisations.

Question

To what extent do you believe this should be a priority for the Commission?

Question

To what extent do you believe this approach would promote awareness and understanding of rights?

Priority 5:

Build an authoritative and responsive organisation

Over the past 15 months we have been focused on the task of creating a single Commission with a clear sense of purpose and direction.

We have been building an authoritative research and evidence base right across the seven strands in our mandate. We have also been working with the GEO and carried out extensive consultation with stakeholders, government departments, devolved governments and statistic providers to develop an Equalities Measurement Framework that will enable us to measure the state of inequality in Britain.

Over the next three years the Commission will continue to develop the capabilities of our staff and aspire to build a high-performance organisation that is accessible, authoritative, ambitious, accountable and agile and delivering value for money.

We propose to do this by:

- Continuing to invest in the development of an authoritative research and evidence base, and building research partnerships.
- Finalising the equalities and good relations measurement frameworks.
- Identifying inequalities within and between different equality groups and monitoring trends in different sectors through our triennial review to report on the state of inequality in Britain.
- Investing in our people through our Learning and Development programme and a new Performance Management system.
- Building long-term partnerships with stakeholders to achieve shared equality goals and mobilise support for equality human right causes.

Question

To what extent do you believe this should be a priority for the Commission?

Question

To what extent do you believe this approach would promote changes needed to build an authoritative and responsive organisation?

Getting Involved

As part of the ongoing involvement and consultation programme we will be running a further series of events to provide an opportunity for discussion and feedback on the strategic priorities. There will also be another period of online consultation which can be accessed at: www.equalityhumanrights.com/consultations

In addition to the online consultation, we are holding national consultation and involvement events in England (Manchester and London), Scotland (Glasgow) and Wales (Cardiff).

For more information please contact: businessplanning@equalityhumanrights.com

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You can also find out more about the Commission or get in touch with us via our website at:

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