

**Equality and
Human Rights
Commission**

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Preparing For Our Three-Year
Strategic Plan:

A Stakeholder Discussion Guide

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Introduction

The Equality and Human Rights Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people and promote and protect human rights, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.

Earlier this year we published our first annual business plan. This plan was developed by working closely with those with an interest in what we do, to ensure that our priorities and future work plans meet the needs of those we strive to bring about changes for, in our society.

Looking ahead, our focus is now turning to the development of our three-year strategic plan which will be published in April 2009. We are also looking at the development of our three-year equality scheme and at ways in which we can shape our grants programme in line with our strategic priorities. There will be separate consultation programmes for the equality scheme and the grants programme, to take into account stakeholders' views.

We began the process of working together with stakeholders earlier this year when a number of consultation and involvement events were held. We intend to follow the same approach for the development of our three-year strategic plan.

The outcomes from the consultation and involvement events will be used to inform our thinking so your views really do matter.

This discussion guide is designed to provoke and stimulate your thoughts and ideas ahead of attending one of our consultation and involvement events. The discussion guide, as well as providing more information on our process for engaging and consulting, provides some information on our emerging thinking and key topics for debate.

If you are interested in getting more involved you will find details on how to do so in this document. We look forward to hearing from you.

Patrick Diamond
Strategy Group Director

Working Together

The Commission views equality, human rights and good relations between people as something that affects us all, regardless of our backgrounds, and we are committed to working closely with all those who are interested in, or affected by, our work. We see this as an on-going process enabling individuals and organisations to influence and shape our work.

In developing our three-year strategic plan, we will proactively engage with stakeholders by putting into practice an extensive involvement and consultation plan.

By consultation we mean ‘involve, seek out, and engage with, other’s views about a matter, with the conscious purpose of being influenced in some way by the nature of the views expressed’.

We will holding a two stage involvement and consultation process to help us shape our future strategy.

For the first stage regional and national events will be held across England, Scotland and Wales over the Autumn and Winter. These will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to network with a diverse range of organisations from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors who

share our commitment and vision for achieving social change.

We will also give stakeholders an opportunity to comment online through our website:
www.equalityhumanrights.com/consultations

From December 2008 we will start the second stage of involvement and consultation where we will seek feedback on our emerging priorities. This will involve focus groups and again an opportunity to comment on line. This feedback will shape our three-year strategy that will be published in April 2009.

We will endeavour to make this consultation and engagement process as transparent as possible. The outputs of the meetings and all comments and submissions to the online consultation will be made fully available.

While we will collect some personal information, we will not link any comments to an individual and all comments made, at events or online, will be reported without attribution.

There will be separate consultation programmes on the equality scheme and the grants programme to take into account stakeholders' views for both of these important areas of our work.

Question:

Do you have any suggestions on how the Commission can improve contact with its stakeholders and share information more effectively?

About the Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the independent advocate for equality and human rights in Britain. We challenge prejudice and discrimination and promote the importance of human rights.

Formed on 1 October 2007, the Commission is an independent statutory body, established under the Equality Act 2006, which took over the responsibilities of the Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Rights Commission and Equal Opportunities Commission.

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

By acting directly and fostering partnerships locally, regionally and nationally, we stimulate debate on equality and human rights. We give advice and guidance to businesses, the voluntary sector, and individuals. By developing an evidence-based understanding of the causes and effects of inequality for people across Britain, we are an authoritative voice for reform.

Our Statutory Powers and 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

- 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).

The Scottish Commission for Human Rights has now been established by the Scottish Parliament, and work on human rights is shared by our two organisations. Human rights issues arising from matters reserved to the Westminster Parliament, are for the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Issues arising from devolved matters are for the Scottish Commission unless the Scottish Commission gives its consent for us to handle them.

For more information on the Commission, this discussion guide should be read in conjunction with our booklet 'Who we are and what we do'.

Strategic Plan

The Commission sees the development of a clear strategy for our work as critically important. The strategy, which binds together all the parts of our broad remit into one plan and which is developed through involvement with our stakeholders, will be key in helping us achieve our vision of social change.

We have 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 our priorities and programme of work for that period.

Earlier this year we published our first annual business plan, which was based on the theme of bringing people together. The plan was clear in its mission: “We will work with others to narrow equality gaps, break down barriers between communities and tackle the root causes of prejudice and intolerance. We will promote interaction between individuals from different backgrounds, developing shared values to create a strong society”.

We also published our first set of strategic priorities:

- Analyse, define and target key equality and human rights challenges
- Change policy and organisational practice to provide better public services alongside an efficient and dynamic economy
- Engage, involve and empower the public, especially people from disadvantaged communities and areas
- Anticipate social change, develop new narratives and reach new audiences in ways that strengthen equality and human rights.

The programme of work set out in the annual business plan, which was based on our strategic priorities, is progressing well.

Some key successes include: the launch of the Human Rights Inquiry to find out how human rights work in Britain; ‘Working Better’, an initiative to identify and promote innovative ways of working; and the positive conclusion of the case Sharon Coleman v Attridge Law & Steve Law funded by the Commission, which provides protection for Britain’s carers.

The Commission is also continuing to make progress on its other important commitments which include:

- Conducting inquiries and enforcing compliance
- Influencing and building support for the Single Equality Bill
- Developing our approach to Human Rights
- Delivering equality outcomes by using a risk-based approach to monitoring and enforcing the public duties
- Building the evidence base, including developing measurement frameworks and producing our first three-yearly report on the state of equality in Britain.

We will report more fully on our achievements to date in our annual report, due to be published in December 2008.

You can order a copy of our 2008/9 business plan and annual report, when it is available, by calling one of our helplines (details at the back of this document) or by visiting our website:
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Towards our Three-Year Strategic Plan

We envisage that many of the themes and ideas from our first year of operation will be carried forward and reflected into our three-year strategic plan.

The three-year plan will also be shaped by analysing the changing social, political and economic landscape, as well as our desire to apply the Commission's powers and duties in a more strategic way.

We have now started the process to determine the priorities that will guide our work for April 2009 to March 2012. Our work so far has focused on developing a number of key questions, which we believe will help us to shape the focus areas for the Commission in our three-year strategic plan.

Key Questions:

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. In what ways will changes in the economic and political landscape over the next three years, impact on equality and human rights in Britain?
4. Over the next three years, what are likely to be the most significant forms of disadvantage that the Commission should focus on?
5. What can the Commission **uniquely** do to tackle these forms of disadvantage?

The Commission has already started to consider these questions at the highest levels in our organisation. However, in order to ensure that the three-year plan is both meaningful and relevant for the people on whose behalf we exist, we also want to involve and engage others in these key questions, through our consultation plan.

We are sharing our early thinking with you, which is still under development, and we would welcome all views on the questions above as well as your views or comments on the general approach to developing our three-year strategic plan.

Question:

Do you have any comments on the general approach to the development of our strategic plan?

The Future Role of Grants

The Commission is empowered to give financial assistance to organisations concerned with the promotion of equality and diversity, good relations and human rights.

The Commission is currently operating a £10.9 million interim programme and is funding 285 organisations.

The overall purpose of the grants programme is to be a key enabler of the Commission's strategic priorities and operational plans. The grants programme needs to reflect not just the aims and strategic priorities of the Commission as a body, but also to provide vital intelligence on public concern around issues of human rights and social cohesion.

We wish to explore with stakeholders various aspects of the strategic focus of our grants programme; how we most effectively deliver long-term sustainable results through the grants programme; and how all concerned can extract maximum value through partnership work.

We envisage a grants programme which would include: providing long-term support (up to three years) for organisations to deliver a programme of work which will directly support or deliver all

or some of our overall strategic priorities; as well as grants for short-term project-based activities. We believe that this would enable us to achieve a meaningful long-term change. During the grants consultation programme, we will be seeking stakeholder views on the following questions:

Questions:

1. What are the implications of the proposed approach to undertake a two-tier series of activity, consisting of funding for strategic and project work?
2. What is the most effective framework to govern the Commission's relationship with its funded partners? How desirable is it for the Commission to insist that funded organisations work to a set of equality standards?
3. What are the implications of the proposal to introduce long-term grants?

Getting Involved

Throughout the winter, we will be hosting an online consultation which you will be able to access through our website at: www.equalityhumanrights.com/consultations

To submit your thoughts and opinions on the matters arising at one of the events, please respond by post or email to:

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Contact Us

You can find out more or get in touch with us via our website at: www.equalityhumanrights.com or by contacting one of our helplines below.

This publication is also available in Welsh as a bilingual publication.

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language please contact the relevant helpline to discuss your needs. All publications are also available to download and order in a variety of formats from our website.

Equality and Human Rights Commission helpline – England

Telephone: 08456 046 610

Textphone: 08456 046 620

Fax: 08456 046 630

9am–5pm, Monday to Friday,
except Wednesday 9am–8pm

Equality and Human Rights Commission helpline – Scotland

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