



News Story  
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## Equality Bill receives Royal Assent

The Equality Bill has now received Royal Assent and has become the Equality Act 2006. The Act is expected to take effect from April 2007. The main feature of the new Act is the establishment of the statutory basis for a single new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR). The new Commission will bring together the work of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and it will also have responsibility for the equality areas of age, religion and belief and sexual orientation. The CEHR will be established from October 2007 but it will not take over the functions of the CRE until April 2009. It will promote equality and awareness and understanding of human rights through its general powers of giving advice, undertaking research and publishing Codes of Practice on any of the discrimination strands within its remit. It will also have power to investigate whether a person has committed an unlawful act contrary to the discrimination legislation and to issue notices recommending action to be taken.

As well as establishing the CEHR, once in force the Act will:

- Outlaw discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the provision of goods, facilities, services, premises, education and the exercise of public functions.
- Create a duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between men and women (the new 'gender duty') when preparing policies or providing services and to prohibit sex discrimination in the exercise of public functions.
- Provide powers to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities, services, premises, etc.

The duties and powers of the CEHR will include:

- A new duty to consult with stakeholders to ensure all groups have an opportunity to participate and engage in its work.
- A new duty to monitor progress on equality, human rights and good relations between communities, through publishing a regular 'state of the nation' report.
- A new duty to promote good relations between and within communities across all sections of society.
- An explicit role to combat prejudice and work to reduce crime affecting particular communities, including new powers to monitor hate crimes.
- A regional presence in England, Scotland and Wales.

The EOC has also just launched a consultation on a new Code of Practice designed to help public bodies meet their obligations under the new 'gender duty' to be introduced by the Act. The Code of Practice is intended to help public authorities prepare for the new duty. The gender duty imposes three main obligations on public authorities:

- To draw up a scheme identifying gender equality goals and showing the action it will take to implement them. The scheme will have to be published, monitored and reviewed every three years.

- To develop and publish an equal pay policy, which must include measures to ensure fair promotion and development opportunities and tackle occupational segregation.
- To publish gender impact assessments in respect of all primary and significant secondary legislation and all major proposed developments in employment, policy and services.

The consultation period closes on 15 May 2006.

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