

CORPORATE

# Equality and Human Rights Commission Strategic Plan Revision for 2015/16

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 4(4) of the Equality Act 2006

March 2015

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# Contents

Foreword .....	4
Introduction .....	6
The devolved context .....	8
Our strategic priorities .....	9
An exemplar modern public service organisation .....	12
Future revision of our Strategic Plan .....	13
Contacts .....	14

# Foreword

In 2012 the Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) published its three-year Strategic Plan. We have now revised the Plan to extend it to cover 2015/16, when we will be in a better position to thoroughly assess our progress and our future priorities. Since 2012 we have delivered significant programmes of work in line with our Strategic Plan, promoting and enforcing the laws which protect our rights to fairness, dignity and respect.

In the next business year to March 2016, we will consolidate our ongoing work on deaths of adults with mental health conditions in State detention, on recruitment of women to Board positions in FTSE 350 companies, and on assessing the adequacy of the legal framework protecting religion or belief. We will also revisit our inquiry into disability-related harassment, with a report on progress against our recommendations to public authorities. We will continue our core activities as a National Human Rights Institution, including monitoring and reporting on United Nations human rights treaties, and scrutinising proposed legislation for both equality and human rights implications.

We will also begin important new projects under each of the priorities identified in this Strategic Plan:

## **Fairness and equality of opportunity in the economy**

- to understand and develop effective methods for addressing the specific factors which contribute to pay gaps on gender, disability and race, in order to develop a strategy and action plan for narrowing pay gaps in partnership with others

## **Fair access, autonomy and dignity in public services**

- examining the state of access to civil justice and the availability of good quality advice and redress on equality and human rights issues

## **Dignity, respect and safety**

- assessing the relationship between prejudiced attitudes, values and behaviours, to identify levers that can prevent and respond to unlawful discrimination, harassment and identity-based violence.

During 2015 the Commission will also deliver our report to Parliament on progress in advancing equality and protecting human rights in Great Britain. This analysis will ask the question, 'Is Britain Fairer?', and will be fundamental to informing our priorities as an organisation in the years to come and helping other organisations with their strategic planning and choices.

In the meantime, the strategic priorities set out in our current Strategic Plan remain valid, having underpinned our work over the last three years. We have reviewed our Strategic Plan, as we are required by the Equality Act 2006 to do every three years. After a period of public consultation, our Board decided to retain the existing Strategic Plan and issue this revision of it to address the changes that have occurred since 2012.

The full text of our [2012-15 Strategic Plan](#), including our analysis of the challenges facing the economy, society and countries of Great Britain, remains broadly valid and continues to inform our strategic priorities.

From Autumn this year we will carry out a detailed analysis of our strategic priorities in the light of 'Is Britain Fairer?', and consult fully on our new Strategic Plan for 2016-19.

Mark Hammond

**Chief Executive**

Baroness Onora O'Neill

**Chair**

# Introduction

1. Parliament has given the Commission the mandate to challenge discrimination, and protect and promote equality and human rights. We live in a country with a long history of upholding people's rights, valuing diversity and challenging intolerance. The Commission seeks to maintain and strengthen this heritage while identifying and tackling areas where there is still unfair discrimination or where human rights are not being respected.
2. Our strategy was developed in the context of shrinking resources, which has informed our aspirations and our ways of working. Our budget has fallen from £36.9 million in 2012/13 to £17.1million by the end of 2015/16, with access to £6.5m additional programme funding. In part this reduction in our funding reflected the UK Government's decision to deliver our Helpline through other means, and to remove the budget for our Strategic Grants Programme and Legal Grants Programme.
3. To maximise the impact of our remaining budget, we aim to work with others to avoid duplication and join forces wherever we can. We behave in a proportionate way and in line with the principles of good regulation. Our new strategic litigation policy<sup>1</sup> will help to ensure that we receive appropriate referrals of potentially strategic legal cases, and guide our decisions about where to provide support or to intervene.
4. Our approach makes good use of the powers given to us by Parliament to help us deliver our mandate. These include:
  - undertaking formal inquiries, and investigations
  - undertaking assessments and entering into agreements to ensure compliance with the public sector equality duty
  - publishing research, ideas and information
  - funding discrimination cases in the courts, taking cases in our own name, or intervening in other legal proceedings.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/commission/strategic-litigation-policy>

5. In developing our plans we are mindful of the UN's requirements on us as a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), the independent authority on Britain's human rights performance. These include:
  - making recommendations to governments, parliaments and the courts about the effectiveness of the law
  - monitoring and reporting on Britain's progress and compliance with international conventions
  - educating and promoting understanding and protection of human rights and efforts to combat discrimination
  - co-operating with others dedicated to promoting equality and human rights, including on an international level.
6. In 2015 we will be subject to re-accreditation by the UN's International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs. We will review our work and structures with reference to the Paris Principles (which set out the requirements for NHRIs) to inform our submission concerning our re-accreditation.

# The devolved context

7. The Commission has the advantage of working in England, Scotland and Wales where differing approaches to public service changes and the public sector equality duty offer us the chance to look at different solutions and initiatives and see what works best. We continue to learn from the experiences of the three countries. Those differences in approach are fully reflected in the work programmes for Scotland and Wales which form part of the Commission's Business Plan for the year ahead.
8. In light of the Smith and the Silk Commissions, and cross-party commitments to further devolution, the Commission is alive to the need to adapt to new constitutional arrangements in coming years. We are engaging with the national debate on devolution, pressing the case that any new settlements will need to address:
  - how monitoring, reporting and enforcement accountabilities can best reflect the specific relationships of Scotland and of Wales to the rest of the UK
  - protecting and where possible enhancing the realisation of equality and human rights, and
  - securing coherent and workable frameworks of legal and administrative responsibilities between bodies within devolved nations and between them and the rest of the UK.



# Our strategic priorities

9. We expect our work to continue to concentrate on the three strategic priorities we identified when we published our Strategic Plan in 2012. The only change we have made is to amend the wording of our third strategic priority to make it more cogent. Our strategic priorities are outlined below, along with our key objectives under each of them, and an indication of the programmes and projects we will undertake until the end of this Strategic Plan period. These will be further detailed in our Business Plan for 2015/16.

## **Strategic Priority 1: To promote fairness and equality of opportunity in Britain's future economy**

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Our key objectives are:

- **promoting fair access to employment for all**
  - including tackling unlawful discrimination in recruitment practices, and supporting the television broadcasting industry to increase diversity.
- **ensuring fair treatment of workers**
  - including tackling pregnancy and maternity discrimination, supporting employers to understand their responsibilities in relation to religion or belief in the workplace, following up our inquiry into employment practices in the cleaning sector, supporting businesses to respect human rights, and addressing pay gaps.
- **tackling under-representation at senior levels**
  - including promoting diversity on FTSE 350 Boards.

## **Strategic Priority 2: To promote fair access to public services, and autonomy and dignity in service delivery**

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Our key objectives are:

- **ensuring services treat everyone fairly**
  - including increasing participation of under-represented groups in sport, developing training with the College of Policing to improve stop and search encounters, tackling discrimination and disadvantage experienced by Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, and examining the state of access to civil justice and advice and redress on equality and human rights issues.
- **maximising the potential for key public services to close equality gaps and protect human rights**
  - including raising levels of equality and human rights compliance in health and social care, and supporting the Further and Higher Education sectors to develop equality strategies.
- **providing tools to help public bodies**
  - including developing more effective practical guidance on the public sector equality duty, supporting schools to increase participation and attainment among disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and collaborating with non-economic regulators and inspectorates to help embed equality and human rights in their approach to improving public services.

## **Strategic Priority 3: To promote dignity and respect and contribute to keeping people safe**

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Our key objectives are:

- **tackling prejudice and reducing identity-based violence**
  - including improving the reporting of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender hate crime, reducing the incidence of identity-based bullying and harassment in schools, and assessing the relationship between prejudiced attitudes, values and behaviours.
- **safeguarding those least able to assert their own rights**

- including following up the findings of our inquiries into deaths of adults with mental health conditions in State detention and disability-related harassment, and reporting to the UN on the UK's performance in relation to its treaty obligations.

# An exemplar modern public service organisation

10. In line with our reduced budget, we have been changing the way we work to deliver better value for money and higher impact in everything we do. Our aim is to be an exemplary modern public service organisation.
11. Our performance will continue to be subject to oversight by scrutiny bodies including Parliament, the UN (which will review our 'A' status accreditation as a National Human Rights Institution), the Better Regulation Executive and the National Audit Office, as well as the media and the public.
12. We aim to operate in a way that is agile, authoritative, ambitious, accessible and accountable. To achieve this, we have worked to improve our governance and our programme management arrangements. We have also delivered significant efficiency savings of £3 million – or 40 per cent – on our corporate support costs over the last two years. We are concluding a benchmarking exercise of our corporate services functions to inform possible further efficiencies.

# Future revision of our Strategic Plan

13. This document is the March 2015 revision of the Commission's Strategic Plan, as required by section 4 of the Equality Act 2006. Later this year we intend to conduct a further review of the Strategic Plan, informed by the outcome of 'Is Britain Fairer?'
14. We will take stock of the social, economic, legislative and constitutional context for our work, the priorities that we need to focus on, and what we have learnt from developing our ways of working over the last few years. In developing our next Strategic Plan for 2016-19 we will consult widely and listen to the views of our partners and critics, both in terms of understanding how we should best direct our efforts and in relation to our methods and approach to fulfilling our mandate.
15. We look forward to engaging in a productive debate about equality and human rights in contemporary Britain and our role in the development of a society based on dignity, respect and fair opportunity.

# Contacts

This publication and related equality and human rights reports and guides are available from the Commission's website: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

For advice, information or guidance on equality, discrimination or human rights issues, please contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service, a free and independent service.

Website [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

Telephone 0808 800 0082

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