

Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)

The government plans to set up a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR). A key aim of the CEHR is to end discrimination and harassment of people because of their disability, race, age, gender, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

The new commission will merge three existing equality commissions. These are the:

- Disability Rights Commission
- Commission for Racial Equality
- Equal Opportunities Commission

The CEHR should be up and running by October 2007.

Why a single commission?

The government believes a single commission will have many benefits, including:

- bringing together equality experts and act as a single source of information and advice - instead of the current separate organisations
- being a single point of contact for individuals, businesses and the voluntary and public sectors
- helping businesses by promoting awareness of equality issues, which may prevent costly court and tribunal cases
- tackling discrimination on multiple levels - some people may face more than one type of discrimination
- giving older people a powerful national body to tackle age discrimination

For the first time the equality areas of age, religion and belief and sexual orientation will come under the remit of a single equality body, as well as continuing work that has been done previously to tackle racism and other forms of discrimination. It will have a range of powers to enforce legislation and promote equality for all.

The Commission will also promote awareness and understanding of human rights and encourage good practice by public authorities in meeting their Human Rights Act obligations.

The CEHR will be required to produce a regular 'equality health check' for Britain and to work with individuals, communities, businesses and public services to find new, more effective ways to give everyone in society the chance to achieve their full potential.

The Act will introduce a new 'gender duty' which will require public bodies to take account of the different needs of men and women to ensure equality of opportunity when preparing policies or providing services.

The Act will outlaw discrimination on grounds of religion or belief in providing goods, facilities or services, education or rented accommodation.