

Equalities

17th June 2008

Focus: To begin to identify a regional voice for Equalities Groups in the East Midlands

Background

In 2002, the UK Government consulted on the then existing structures for the Statutory Equality Bodies that were responsible for enforcing anti-discrimination legislation on race, sex and disability equality: the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Disability Rights Commission (DRC). The consultation indicated there was overwhelming support for the establishment of a single equality body to take over the role of the three Commissions and also assume responsibility for tackling discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion and belief and age.

On 30th April 2007, the Equality Act 2006 came into force with the purpose of:

- creating a single commission with responsibility for all the equality strands and the remit to promote human rights. The EHRC came into existence in October 2007;
- creating a duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between men and women and tackle sex discrimination in the workplace; and
- making it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief or sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities and services, the management of premises, education and the exercise of public functions.¹⁸

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was established in October 2007 and has since taken on the roles and functions of EOC, CRE and DRC with new responsibilities for sexual orientation, age, religion and belief, and human rights.¹⁷

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Mainstreaming Equalities:

Structural changes at Government level are reflecting functional changes in terms of mainstreaming equalities. There are numerous definitions that identify what mainstreaming equality means. However, in the present context we shall identify its meaning as: "the systematic consideration of the particular effects of all policies, at the point of planning, implementation and evaluation, on disadvantaged groups."¹ Mainstreaming therefore is a long-term process that essentially means that policy makers, researchers, and those delivering services should take account of and reflect the diverse needs of the population and consider how the policies and projects they develop, impact these different communities."²

The European Commission's focus is on mainstreaming gender equal opportunities. The UK definition goes wider, stating that mainstreaming involves the assessment of adverse impact on any disadvantaged group. At a national level, an English Equal Opportunities Mainstreaming Action Plan was developed to define the approach in more detail. This plan states that: "Equal Opportunities mainstreaming involves a systematic process of identification and integration of equal opportunities into all aspects of the planning and implementation of the programme including monitoring and evaluation. It involves identifying lessons learned and promoting good practice in equal opportunities through appropriate selection and dissemination strategies".³

The regional dimension

Each of the other English regions has a regional voluntary and community sector equalities network which is often independent of the regional voluntary sector network. No network exists in the East Midlands. Facilitating the development of a network is a priority for EMSP and regional funders.

Voice EM

Voice EM is a registered charity that works with and supports BME organisations throughout the East Midlands.

It aims to advocate, help, resource, develop and enable the Black and minority ethnic third sector to play a meaningful role in the economic, social and cultural development of the East Midlands.

Author(s)

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