

Mainstreaming

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Focus: To start to understand and unpick the implications of mainstreaming.

Background

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".¹⁶

A recent structural/organization change with regards to mainstreaming is the establishment of The Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in October 2007. The EHRC has since taken on the roles and functions of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), with new

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responsibilities for sexual orientation, age, religion and belief, and human rights.

Mainstreaming: what's good about it?

Some of the positive elements of mainstreaming have been identified as being because it:

- focuses minds on equality/inclusion issues from the outset;
- improves policy-making and delivery of public services;
- ensures greater transparency and openness in the policy process through better information;
- changes the structures, behaviours and attitudes that contribute to or sustain inequality and discrimination;
- avoids policies being adopted which continue existing inequalities or make them worse;
- compliments lawful positive action that is designed to address long term historic disadvantage experienced by specific groups;
- helps to comply with equality legislation. ¹⁴

Mainstreaming: the case against

Some of the negative elements of mainstreaming have been identified as being:

- sidelining of specialist organisations: there is a general trend to mainstream equality. This can be seen as moving away from self-determination and empowerment whereby marginalised groups come together and develop their own solutions to the discrimination they face. Preference is being given to large generic providers that can meet all the public bodies' needs, rather than small specific groups that challenge the status quo.
- conflict within Equalities Groups: there is a presumption that all Equalities groups are the same. There have been ongoing conflicts between equalities within the sector such as those between religion and sexual orientation. Race and religion maybe another area where there may be potential for confusion and conflict.

- marginalisation: equalities groups are diverse, both in the issues they contend with and the values they may espouse. Mainstreaming may be seen as a dilution of equality issues and certain issues or groups may be sidelined. Further, the question of representation arises.

Mainstreaming and what it means for the Third Sector:

Increased VCS Engagement:

As public sector organisations move towards mainstreaming equalities across all their departments, they will need to consult with equality groups as to how policies will impact upon their communities. The voluntary sector can expect increased opportunity to contribute their knowledge and expertise at all stages of policy development, formulation, implementation and monitoring, ensuring consideration of the issues of their particular groups.

Mainstreaming Within the VCS:

Voluntary organisations are frequently centred on the interests of different equality groups so it is hoped that mainstreaming equalities will be advanced throughout the sector.

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.

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