



## What has the Government achieved on Equality in general?

The Government has introduced a number of practical measures to promote equality:

- On Equality in General
- On Gender
- On Race
- On Disability
- On Religion and Belief
- On Sexual Orientation
- On Age
- On Transsexuals

### On Equality in General

Initiated the biggest review of our equality institutions in the last 25 years.

- Through the Equality Act 2006, established the **Equality and Human Rights Commission**, which will challenge unlawful discrimination and help protect individuals' rights to fair treatment.
- Initiated the Discrimination Law Review in February 2005 to undertake a fundamental review of all equality legislation and bring forward proposals for a clearer and more streamlined equality legislation framework, which produces better outcomes for those who experience disadvantage. A Green Paper 'A Framework for Fairness: Proposals for a Single Equality Bill for Great Britain' was published in June 2007 and the consultation closed on 4 September 2007. The Government is now considering all the responses received.
- In July 2007 established the Government Equality Office to strengthen further the Government's ability to deliver across the entire equalities agenda.

### On Gender

- Introduced the Gender Equality Duty which requires public sector bodies to pro-actively promote gender equality of opportunity.
- Delivering on recommendations of the 2006 Women and Work Commission report with a range of actions to tackle the gender pay gap.
- Introduced the National Minimum Wage. Two-thirds of the beneficiaries are women and it has contributed to a drop in the full time median pay gap dropping from 17.4% in 1997 to 12.6% in 2006. The National Minimum Wage increased again from 1 October 2007 to £5.52.
- Introduced new rights for working families to request flexible working – employees with children under six or disabled children have had the right to require employers to seriously consider their requests to work flexibly since 2003. From April 2007 the right to request flexible working has been extended to carers of adults – the Government has also decided to extend the right to request further to parents of older children.

- Improved parental rights and pay – paid maternity leave was extended from 26 to 39 weeks from April 2007, with the flat rate increasing to £112.75 a week from April 2007. All employed women able to choose to take up to one year off work. The Government also intends to extend Statutory Maternity Pay, Maternity Allowance and Statutory Adoption Pay from 39 weeks to 52 weeks by the end of this Parliament.
- Introduced paternity leave. The Government also intends to give working fathers a new right to up to **26 weeks paternity leave**, with the aim of introducing this alongside the extension of Statutory Maternity Pay, Adoption Pay and Maternity Allowance to 12 months.
- Launched both the National Childcare Strategy in 1998 and the Ten Year Childcare Strategy in 2004, to enhance parental choice and opportunities and children’s development by expanding good quality, affordable early education and childcare (including the free entitlement for all 3 and 4 year olds), and establish integrated Sure Start early years and family support programmes.
- Introduced the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act allowing positive measures towards women’s increased political participation. Announced in 2007 the intention to extend the time available to political parties to use these special measures.

## On Race

- Built on the Race Relations Act 1976 by passing the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The 2000 Act extended the scope of the original Act, by making it clear that bodies carrying out public functions are not permitted to discriminate on racial grounds, and must in fact combat unlawful racial discrimination. The 2000 Act placed a general duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity; and good relations between people of different racial groups. Around 43,000 public bodies are now subject to this duty.
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 also introduced certain specific duties to support better performance of the general duty. These specific duties, which apply to most public authorities, are to: undertake ethnic monitoring of workforces, including recruitment and progression; assess the impact of policies and services on race equality externally; and prepare a race equality scheme showing how the public authority is carrying out the general duty.
- Implemented Council Directive 2000/43 EC, “The Race Directive”, through the Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003, which introduced an express statutory prohibition of harassment on the grounds of a person’s race or ethnic or national origins, amended the definition of indirect discrimination, changed the burden of proof, and made other changes.

## On Disability

- The Department for Work and Pensions estimates that there are over 10 million disabled people in Britain, of whom 700,00 are children.
- Since 1997, Government has significantly extended and improved civil rights for disabled people, specifically:
  - extending the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA) in October 2004 to cover all employers and previously excluded occupations (with the exception of the armed forces), bringing an additional 1 million employers and 7 million more jobs within the scope of the employment provisions and requiring service providers, for the first time, to make reasonable

- adjustments to physical features, such as steps and counters, which act as barriers to disabled people accessing goods, services and facilities.
- the DDA introduced a duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people called the Disability Equality Duty (DED).
  - “Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People,” published in 2005 set out the Government’s vision that by 2025 all disabled people should:
    - have the same opportunities as everyone else
    - be respected as equal
    - be able to participate as equals in every aspect of family and community life
  - Established the Office for Disability Issues (ODI), a cross-Government unit to support the Minister for Disabled People and to help Government deliver its commitment to “ensure greater equality for disabled people by reducing barriers to participation”.
  - Launched Equality 2025: The UK Advisory Network on Disability Equality to act as the conduit for the voices of disabled people to influence policy and service delivery at an early stage.
  - Coordinated the signing of the UN Convention on Disability Rights. The Convention covers areas such as the right to life, access to justice, personal mobility, health, education and work.

## On Religion and Belief

- Implemented the principle of equal treatment in employment and training, irrespective of religion or belief through the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003. These Regulations prohibit discrimination in employment and vocational training on the grounds of religion or belief, including where the discrimination occurs because of a person’s lack of religion or belief. The Regulations provide protection from direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, victimisation and harassment.
- Introduced provisions contained within Part 2 of the Equality Act 2006 to complement the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations and afford protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in: the provision of goods, facilities and services, education, the disposal and management of premises and in the exercise of public functions. Part 2 of the Equality Act provides protection from direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and victimisation. The measures address an imbalance which had emerged from case-law under the Race Relations Act in which Jews and Sikhs were afforded protection in the areas outlined above while members of other, multi-ethnic, religions were not. The provisions within Part 2 came into force on 30 March 2007.
- Introduced the Racial & Religious Hatred Act 2006 which creates a new offence of incitement to religious hatred. The Act came into force on 1 October 2007.

## On Sexual Orientation

- Ensured the repeal of section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988.
- Lifted the ban on lesbians and gays serving in the armed forces in 2000.
- Introduced the Sexual Offences Amendment Act, which resulted in the age of consent becoming equal for gay men, lesbians and heterosexuals in January 2001.

- Enabled same-sex couples and civil partners to apply to adopt a child jointly through the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- Ensured the repeal of the discriminatory criminal offences of gross indecency and buggery, replacing them with offences that operate in a gender and sexuality neutral way through the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- Introduced the Criminal Justice Act 2003, empowering courts to impose tougher sentences for offences motivated or aggravated by the victim's sexual orientation.
- Extended protection against discrimination in employment on grounds of sexual orientation through the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.
- Introduced the Civil Partnership Act 2004, enabling same-sex couples to make a formal, legal commitment to each other by forming a civil partnership. The Act came into force on 5 December 2005 and by the end of 2006 the Act had enabled over 18,000 same sex couples to register their civil partnership in the UK.
- Introduced the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007, providing vital protections from discrimination on grounds of goods, facilities and services, education, the use and disposal of premises and the exercise of public functions. The Regulations came into force on 30th April 2007.

## On Age

- Introduced legislation that extends protection against discrimination in employment on grounds of age. Increased the employment rate for people aged 50 to State Pension Age from 66.3 per cent in Spring 1999 to 70.9 per cent in Spring 2007.
- Provided over 1.4 million employers and individuals with practical help and guidance on age through the Age Positive materials and website and via the 'Be Ready' national guidance campaign.
- Through the National Service Framework for Older People, have set national standards to improve services for older people, whether they are at home, in residential care or in hospital, leading with actions to address age discrimination in access to care and treatment.
- Reduced, from 13% to 8.9% in the last two years, the proportion of people aged 75 or over being delayed in hospital.
- Introduced the Pension Credit (October 2003) – specifically designed to target extra help at those with low and modest incomes or savings. Many of the poorest pensioners who have benefited most are women – of those in receipt of Pension Credit, around 58% are single women.
- Creating a Children's Commissioner to act as a children's champion independent of Government.
- Creating a new statutory duty on all relevant services to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children.

## On Transsexuals

- Introduced legislation that allows transsexual people to apply for full legal recognition in their acquired gender.

**Further information can be found on [www.equalities.gov.uk](http://www.equalities.gov.uk) or [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)  
You can also contact the Government Equalities Office on 0207 944 4400.**