

Hello

I would like to respond to the Draft Specific Duties as an Equality practitioner.

As a County Council we provide a complex range of public services from libraries to highways to child protection. Each of these has a different kind of affect on people who share a protected characteristic under the act.

I feel that the proposed Specific Duties do not provide the level of protection that the rest of the Act requires. In particular the gap the between April 5th (when the Public Duty comes into force) and 31st December (when the publication deadline is proposed) leaves too long a time lag and could lead public authorities being challenged on the principles of Equality of Opportunity, Removal of Discrimination and Promoting Good Relations, but not having put in place the kind of the concrete steps that the publication requirements would give. This could lead to a state of limbo, and poor advice being given to senior managers and governors.

The July deadline for data publication was more pragmatic and also gave clear focus for what needed to be done.

Also the requirements around engagement safeguard the implementation of the Duties - particularly as it would focus attention on all of the protected characteristics. With the current proposals there could result a hierarchy of protected characteristics, where those groups that shout the loudest will take up attention in terms of data collection, and the have their needs represented when it comes to setting Equality objectives.

Lastly the change could cause confusion, particularly as many public agencies are putting steps in place to meet the Duty.

On balance the Specific Duties proposed by the EHRC are preferable and meet both the requirements for transparency, and reduce bureaucracy compared to the Race Equality Duty that will cease to exist in April.

There will be other responses from Cumbria, however I felt it was important to give a response as a practitioner in the field.

Many thanks

Joel Rasbash

Equality and Cohesion Manager
Chief Executive's Office
Cumbria County Council
The Courts, Carlisle, CA8 3NA

Blackberry: joel.rasbash@cumbriacc.gov.uk

Mobile:07825103565