

Specific Duties – Policy review
Government Equalities Office
Zone J9, 9th Floor
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

London, 21 April 2011

Re: Public Sector Equality Duty: Reducing Bureaucracy consultation

The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is the largest general membership body for charities and voluntary organisations in England, representing over 8,500 organisations. Our vision is of a society in which people are inspired to make a positive difference to their communities.

We are writing to express our concern about some of the proposed changes to regulations accompanying the public sector Equality Duty as set out in **Public Sector Equality Duty: Reducing Bureaucracy**.

Whilst the aim of achieving a shift to performance rather than process for public bodies in discharging their Public Sector Equality Duty is a worthy outcome to be pursued, there is a danger that removing a large amount of the regulations on the specific duties will cause uncertainty and confusion for both public bodies and voluntary and community organisations.

As highlighted by the Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF), the purpose of the specific duties is to give effect to the general duties in practice. We share the concerns expressed by the EDF that if the new specific duties only require the setting of a single equality objective, then they could become too narrowly focussed and not take sufficient account of real needs. We also support the comments made by Compact Voice, and specifically that government is sending a mixed message in seeking to amend local requirements that does little to help local organisations work more effectively in partnership.

NCVO has supported the move towards localism giving both local authorities and communities more discretion and flexibility to respond to the needs of their local area. We appreciate that part of this is that individual public bodies take greater responsibility for making sure that they act in accordance to their obligations. However, the concern as raised by EDF that the proposed changes will 'simply not provide the necessary and sufficient clarity for public authorities as to how they should meet their general equality duty; the result will be confusion at the local level and inevitably litigation' needs to be given urgent and serious consideration.

Please contact Elizabeth Chamberlain (Elizabeth.Chamberlain@ncvo-vol.org.uk; tel. 0207 520 2559) for further information.