

Equality Bill 2009

The Equality Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 24th April 2009 (first reading). The background and summary information below has been abstracted from the explanatory notes that accompany the Bill.

Background

Domestic discrimination law has developed over more than 40 years since the first Race Relations Act in 1965. Subsequently, other personal characteristics besides race have been protected from discrimination and similar conduct, sometimes as a result of domestic initiatives and sometimes through implementing European Directives.

For example, domestic law is covered by enactments such as the Equal Pay Act 1970; the Sex Discrimination Act 1975; the Race Relations Act 1976; the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006; and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007.

The main European Directives affecting domestic discrimination legislation include Council Directive 75/117/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women; and most recently the European Parliament and Council Directive 2006/54/EC (as recast) on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.

In February 2005, the Government set up the Discrimination Law Review to address concerns about inconsistencies in the current discrimination law framework. The Review was tasked with considering the fundamental principles of discrimination legislation and its underlying concepts, and the opportunities for creating a clearer and more streamlined framework of equality legislation which produces better outcomes for those who experience disadvantage.

In June 2007 the Department for Communities and Local Government published a consultation paper, *A Framework for Fairness: Proposals for a Single Equality Bill for Great Britain*.

This was followed in June and July 2008 by two 'Command Papers' published by the Government Equalities Office: *Framework for a Fairer Future – the Equality Bill (Cm 7431)*; and *The Equality Bill – Government Response to the Consultation (Cm 7454)*.

The Bill forms part of the law of England and Wales. It also, with the exception of one clause, forms part of the law of Scotland. There are also a few provisions which form part of the law of Northern Ireland

In January 2009, the Government published the *New Opportunities White Paper (Cm 7533)* which, amongst other things, committed the Government to considering legislation to address disadvantage associated with socio-economic inequality.

Command Papers

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