



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX

## **Consultation on issues to be included in new guidance for Catholics on the Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 made considerable changes to the law against discrimination, as well as consolidating existing legislation. Among the new provisions are protection from discrimination on the grounds of religious belief, and new duties on the public sector in relation to eliminating discrimination and harassment.

Much of the Act affects Catholics in the same way that it does any other group in society, and indeed reflects Catholic teaching. However, some parts of the Act will affect Catholics in ways specific to them. Discrimination in employment is subject to exemptions on sex and sexuality reflecting religious beliefs; questions arise about how far a Parish can restrict the commercial letting of its hall; as employees, Catholics need to know what protection the law provides them; and as recipients of public services, Catholics need to be aware of what action they can expect of public authorities.

To address the issues specific to the Catholic Community, the Bishops' Conference has decided to draw up some first-line guidance. This is intended to be a relatively short document, setting out the basic principles that apply so that anyone can understand how the law is relevant to their own concern, and, if necessary, find where to go for further advice. It will also offer advice on how best to resolve problems without seeking legal redress.

As a first step, this letter invites you to identify the particular issues which have arisen in your experience and on which you would have found guidance helpful. In responding, could you use the form attached, or follow its headings. Only the briefest indication of the issue of concern is needed, e.g. 'Letting of Parish Halls to groups at variance with Catholic teaching', or 'Restricting advertised posts on the grounds of religion', or 'Limiting shared accommodation at retreat centres to married couples'.

A working group under my chairmanship will collate the responses and ensure that the guidance addresses the predominant issues of practical concern to the Catholic community. The guidance will be drawn up with expert legal advice, but expressed in lay terms. The Equality and Human Rights Commission will be consulted for confirmation that the guidance given is in accordance with their understanding of the law.

In responding to this consultation, various members of the working group have kindly agreed to collate and bring together responses as follows:

Respondents	Working Group Member
Catholic Charities and Agencies	Helen O'Brien (CEO Caritas and CSAN) <a href="mailto:Helen.OBrien@cbcew.org.uk">Helen.OBrien@cbcew.org.uk</a>
Catholic Schools and Colleges	Christine Fischer (Legal Advisor, CES) <a href="mailto:CFischer@cesew.org.uk">CFischer@cesew.org.uk</a>
Dioceses and Parishes	Kathy Perrin (Solicitor, CCIA) <a href="mailto:kperrin@ccia.org.uk">kperrin@ccia.org.uk</a>
Any other Responses	By email: <a href="mailto:egconsult@cbcew.org.uk">egconsult@cbcew.org.uk</a> or By post : <b>Equality Act Consultation</b> <b>39 Eccleston Square</b> <b>London SW1V 1BX</b>

**Please submit responses by 15 October 2011**



Bishop John Arnold  
Chair, Working Group  
Department of Christian Responsibility and Citizenship

## CONSULTATION ON EQUALITY ACT GUIDANCE FOR CATHOLICS

Name	
Organisation	
Address	
e-mail	
Phone	

**Note:**

All responses will be anonymised; details are only sought for the purpose of clarifying any issues raised in the response.

Please identify in summary form the most important issues concerning discrimination or harassment that have affected you **as a Catholic** in:

1	The provision of goods and services for which you are responsible
2	Use of premises under your control
3	Education
4	Your role as an employer

5	Your role as an employee
6	Your experience of public services
7	Public procurement