

Anne James
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Dear Anne,

Women's Forum submission to consultation on Single Equalities Scheme, March 2009

The Women's Forum is concerned about the move to a Single Equalities Scheme. It is sceptical about the scope for achieving an equitable balance between existing equalities strands and is concerned that many targets of the existing Gender Equality Scheme have not been achieved to date.

The Forum recognises that a Single Equalities Scheme might be better suited to tackling multiple layers of discrimination for instance around harassment. However, its overarching worry is that gender – women's equality issues - gets squeezed out as a well known result of the informal "hierarchy of inequalities". Preliminary results of the UWE study on how gender equality is negotiated within a Single Equalities Scheme compounds this worry. There is a feeling that 'gender has been done' because it was the first equalities stream, which is very worrying given that there are plenty of challenges left (pay gap and violence against women to name a couple). As a case in point: taking over from the EOC, the EHRC has been seen by many to have effectively dropped gender. There is the danger that a generic scheme reverts back to the dominant model (i.e. white male middle class). The consultation questionnaire reflects this trend in that the 'boxes' and headings suit targets around disability and race discrimination but not gender – and as such offers an uninspiring read.

Moreover, the targets and aims are vague at the moment and the devil lies in the detail of what SMART targets are eventually adopted. Bristol lacks a funded infrastructure of a lobby for women's equality and women's equality expertise. The question therefore is: how will it be ensured that the devil in the detail can actually be spotted, especially regarding the threat of losing track of gender inequality?

The Forum understands that the single equalities scheme is envisaged to be embedded similarly to the LAA. There is the danger that difficult targets will get taken out as people don't want to set themselves up to fail. The Forum would also like some assurance that there would be adequate resources to implement targets as well as consequences if targets are not met.

The Women's Forum would like to highlight the following omissions and suggestions for inclusion in the Scheme:

- Sustainable protected funding for a lobby for women's equality lobby until equality has been achieved
- Improvement of understanding of multiple discrimination; BME women are not mentioned for example
- City-wide strategy tackling violence against women and a body to take the lead in implementing it and feeding into the Single Equality Scheme. This should include awareness raising.
- A comprehensive database of stakeholders (e.g. women's groups) in Bristol – the consultation team has developed good methodologies around citizen consultation but not experts or stakeholders. This would also be crucial for equality impact assessments
- For the Bristol Partnership to take an active role in setting itself and the city targets around equal pay
- A central women's centre plus information services in neighbourhoods for women (this has been identified time again as a priority in local consultations run by the Forum)
- Action on awareness raising around women's equality. This will be essential to uphold the importance of action on gender equality within a single scheme.
- Human trafficking is missed off the scheme. The Council has signed up to the Declaration against human trafficking and this should be a key target alongside FGM, forced marriage etc. These would fall naturally into a city-wide strategy on violence against women.
- Cross authority dialogue on gender equality within a single scheme
- Celebration of International Women's Day – brought up at every consultation the Women's Forum undertakes
- Around occupational segregation and recruitment, ensure that this remains a priority and that 50% of BME intake are women
- Strong targets around CYPS as it has hardly met its gender equality targets, and that it should have the capacity to meet objectives.
- There is an expectation that corporate monitoring and impact assessments will pick up gaps and that these will be addressed e.g. in sports facilities etc.

The Forum would like to see all targets from the Gender Equality Scheme carried forward into the single scheme.

The Women's Forum would like the opportunity to comment on the draft scheme before it is finalised, especially as the actual details are worked out and the targets are set.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Gray and Val Jenkins, Co-chairs
On behalf of the Women's Forum

