

What would an Equality body do?



The Disability and Inclusion Strategy proposes the creation of an independent equality and rights organisation for Guernsey.

If this proposal is agreed in principle by the States in November, the Policy Council will report back with a full business case. This body is unlikely to be entirely self-funding and may only be established when States' funding is made available.

The equality body would promote equality of opportunity and protect people from discrimination on the basis of many characteristics such as gender, age, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion....

Initially, the organisation's primary focus would be on sex and disability because the ordinances (laws) to protect these groups either have been passed, or are proposed. However, advice on best practice with regard to respecting human rights and diversity in general, could also be available.

The equality body would be created by the States but would operate independently. It would have a board of trustees or commissioners to whom a small staff team would report.

The role of an equality and rights organisation

1. To promote equality

The core of the Disability and Inclusion Strategy is the need to change attitudes towards disabled people and carers in Guernsey. There is a similar need to improve attitudes towards people who are older, of a different gender, of a different sexual persuasion, religion or race. Attitudes are deep seated and change will only happen slowly without focused and concerted effort.

The equality body will organise awareness campaigns, both for the general public and in schools. It will also provide information and education programmes to businesses and other organisations.

2. To provide information and advice

The equality body will provide information and advice to individuals about their rights and to organisations about their responsibilities. It may administer a reasonable adjustment fund to assist small businesses to buy equipment or make adaptations.

3. To arbitrate

Most people and organisations don't knowingly discriminate. It is therefore anticipated that most issues can be resolved by talking them through. The equality body will provide an impartial arbitration service to resolve discrimination issues before they reach tribunal.

4. To protect

If Guernsey purely relies on individuals being brave enough to make a complaint, attitudes will change very slowly. The equality body will be able to challenge organisations, issue enforcement notices and take complaints to tribunal itself.

5. To report

The equality body will monitor attitude change, legislative changes and compliance with UN Conventions and highlight areas requiring action.

Why does the equality body need to be independent?

- A. Because this is a requirement of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Guernsey intends to request the UK to extend the Convention to the island once disability equality law is in place.
- B. Because the body may need to challenge the States itself.
- C. Because the body may wish to charge for services to offset its costs or or accept donations for particular projects.