

Equality Advisory and Support Service

The new Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS), funded by the Government Equality Office, began operation on **1st October 2012**.

The new service replaces the helpline run by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which had operated in Scotland, Wales and England for some time and ceased to function from 1st October 2012.

The new service is directed towards people who think they may have experienced discrimination and will not be available to employers, service providers or educators. The service aims to support individuals referred from local organisations, advisory groups, faith based organisations and other groups working within the community that support people experiencing discrimination.

The EASS will be different to the EHRC's helpline in some significant ways:

- It will work collaboratively with advice agencies and other local organisations who are often the first points of contact to which people turn when they have discrimination problems, receiving referrals and feeding back on the outcome for individual clients
- It focuses on prevention and preventing escalation and will use informal resolution wherever possible.
- Where informal resolution is not possible or not what the client wants, the new service will offer, for discrimination problems, referrals to mediation or conciliation services and, for individuals who are representing themselves in a discrimination claim, information about and support with preparing a claim but not legal advice or representation ("pre-claim support").
- From its work it will assemble statistics about discrimination problems and share this with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Governments (UK Government, Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government) and more broadly within the advice and voluntary and community sector.

The EASS will:

Provide advice and information on discrimination and human rights issues, specifically:-

- explain what the law says and how this applies to individuals in the country they live in
- explain how a situation could be resolved by you

For discrimination issues the service will also be able to

- support you in attempting to resolve your issue informally
- if you can't resolve your issue informally then refer you to a conciliation or mediation service
- If you need or want to seek a legal solution, help you work out if you if you are eligible for civil legal aid
- if you are not eligible for civil legal aid then help you find an accessible legal service, or assist you to represent yourself by giving you information and support on how to prepare and lodge a claim.

The EASS will not:

- provide legal advice
- provide information, advice and support on anything other than discrimination and human rights
- represent you when providing pre-claim support
- advise on the strength of your case
- advise on what evidence is needed to prove your case
- advise on court/sheriff court/tribunal proceedings once a claim has been issued.

Local groups and organisations are encouraged to refer in cases of discrimination to the EASS. The EASS will work with both individuals and organisations in order to seek resolutions for those who have a protected characteristic and who have experienced discrimination. The EASS can also provide specialist advice on human rights problems.

The service will, additionally, work with both the Equality and Human Rights Commission and devolved institutions to identify cases with a strategic interest and refer them to these bodies for consideration.

To refer a case in, all that is required is for contact to be made to the EASS. You can:

- Call the voice line on the new number from October 1st - 0800 444 205.
- Text users can dial 0800 444 206
- Skype video BSL calls via the Royal Association for the Deaf
- Visit www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

The new service is intended as a resource for organisations that assist people who may have experienced discrimination. It will not be advertised to the general public so please do broadcast this news to your advice worker colleagues, but not to the general public.

The EASS will be run by SITEL in partnership with Disability Rights UK. The Law Centres Federation, the British Institute for Human Rights, Voiceability, and the RAD Deaf Law Centre are providing support services to this new venture.