

Inclusive Public Services

1. We make this submission on behalf of members of Labour Humanists.
2. Labour is the party for public services. It is Labour who brought in, protected and promoted some of the most vital legal rights for those working in and those accessing and receiving public services. The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) has been vital in ensuring service users are protected from discrimination or disadvantage by the state or other providers of state-funded services. The Equality Act 2010 and has enshrined and protected individual rights from unfair and unnecessary discrimination, including on grounds of gender, sexual orientation, and race.
3. As Labour people who are passionate about equality, human rights and freedom of speech and belief, we strongly support and welcome Labour's continuing commitment to high-quality public services to which we all have access.
4. Governments are seeking to contract out public services to a range of private and voluntary sector organisations. This was a policy of New Labour and the Coalition Government is similarly committed to creating a market in state-funded public services.
5. Our particular concern is where public services are contracted to religious organisations. This is because those groups have significant exemptions from the Equality Act which allow them to discriminate: in employment; in the way they provide services; and in who they provide them to. They are also not bound by the HRA, and there is little to stop them from providing services in ways that are simply not inclusive.
6. Our concerns are widely shared and have been raised by Labour members in both Houses of Parliament. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has also made public its concerns about the possible discrimination and inequality specific to the contracting out of public services to religious organisations, as have women's groups and others concerned to protect the secular nature of public services.
7. **Key points for Labour to consider**
 - It seems only fair that all organisations providing public services on behalf of the state should be bound by the same equality and human rights conditions, legal and contractual.
 - It is only legitimate that employees providing those vital services, including those public service workers transferred to a contracted provider, enjoy the same rights and protections as if they were employed directly by the state.
 - It must be right that service users can expect the same high-quality services with equal access and their human rights protected, whether they receive a service from a public authority or a contracted organisation.
8. The fact is that people who receive public services from contracted religious organisations, and those who work for them including those transferred from a public body, have far less security and protection from discrimination than those who happen to receive a service from any other provider. This cannot be right.

9. Policy options

Labour should take action and have a clear policy to ensure public services are equal, inclusive, and protect and promote human rights. All organisations, including religious groups working under public contract to provide public services, must operate in an inclusive, secular way. In practice that would mean:

- A. No discrimination on religious or other grounds in employment**
- B. No discrimination on religious or other grounds against service users**
- C. No religious element part of the service, including prayers or proselytising**

10. It is vital that a commitment to inclusive public services with no religious discrimination is in Labour's 2015 manifesto.

Labour Humanists

Labour Humanists is affiliated to the British Humanist Association (BHA) and we aim to become an affiliated society of the Labour Party.

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