

## Evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry: The role of the Government Equalities Office – embedding equalities across Government

Submission of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

### Introduction

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1. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has been given powers by Parliament to advise Government on the equality and human rights implications of laws and proposed laws, and to publish information and advice, including to Parliament, on equality and human rights matters. The Commission is an independent body sponsored by the Government Equalities Office ('GEO') and is established under the Equality Act 2006.<sup>1</sup> Our relationship with Government is set out in the Framework Document available on our website.<sup>2</sup>
2. The pandemic, and measures imposed in response to it, are likely to entrench and widen existing inequalities for years to come.<sup>3</sup> In order to mitigate this impact it is essential the Government puts equality and human rights at the heart of its recovery strategy and its 'levelling-up' agenda.<sup>4</sup> The GEO, and the wider Equality Hub, have an important role to play in delivering this vision.

### Summary

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3. This submission covers the following topics with recommendations set out at the end of each section:
  - Location, structure and function of the GEO and the Equality Hub
  - The role of Ministers in the GEO and Equality Hub
  - Implications of the Minister for Women and Equalities' speech
  - The GEO and Equality Hub's role in relation to equality issues and Coronavirus
  - The GEO and Equality Hub's role in supporting compliance with international obligations

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<sup>1</sup> [Equality Act 2006](#), Part 1.S

<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Office and Equality and Human Rights Commission, (2019), '[Framework Document](#)'.

<sup>3</sup> EHRC (2020), '[How Coronavirus has affected equality and human rights](#)'.

<sup>4</sup> Government Equalities Office (2020), '[Speech: Fight for Fairness](#)'



## Location, structure and function of the GEO and the Equality Hub

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### Location

4. We welcomed the Government's decision to move the GEO to the Cabinet Office and to establish the Equality Hub. We continue to support the Government's commitment to a permanent home for the GEO at the heart of government.
5. There are strategic benefits associated with locating the GEO in the Cabinet Office. The GEO's first strategic objective in its most recent 2019/2020 strategic plan is to 'put equalities at the heart of Government',<sup>5</sup> which aligns closely with one of the Cabinet Office's principal functions to coordinate and ensure effective implementation of the Prime Minister's priorities across government.<sup>6</sup> Positioning the GEO as part of the Equality Hub in Cabinet Office sends a clear signal to Ministers, government officials and the public of the importance of embedding equality considerations at the heart of government decision-making and provides a mechanism for driving concerted action across government to achieve equality improvements through public policy and service delivery. In addition, given the GEO's role in 'ensuring equalities legislation is world-leading and fit for purpose',<sup>7</sup> it is appropriate that it is positioned centrally so it can take an overview of how equality law and its associated duties – such as the Public Sector Equality Duty ('PSED') – are functioning across government.
6. A permanent home in Cabinet Office also carries practical benefits, such as the time and costs savings associated with an end to repeated machinery of government changes that have included adjusting staff terms and conditions, changing computer systems and negotiating provision of support functions with the GEO's host departments. These changes have also posed challenges for the Commission, reflected in the Government's Tailored Review. It found that: "The GEO has been under three different government departments during the first half of 2018 alone. This creates challenges for the EHRC in building relationships with the relevant senior Ministers and adapting to new administrative processes across finance, human resources and communications."<sup>8</sup> Such changes also

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<sup>5</sup> Government Equalities Office (2019), '[Government Equalities Office Strategic Plan 2019/2020](#)'

<sup>6</sup> Cabinet Office (2019), '[Cabinet Office single departmental plan – 2019](#)'.

<sup>7</sup> Government Equalities Office (2019), '[Government Equalities Office Strategic Plan 2019/2020](#)', p8

<sup>8</sup> HM Government (2018), '[Tailored Review of The Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)', page 31.

mean different departmental approaches to sponsorship, with a revised Framework Document, and can disrupt appointments to the Commission's Board.

## Structure

7. While establishing the Equality Hub was a positive step, more could be done to clarify its purpose, role and governance. The Equality Hub was established in April 2019 and involved 'bringing together' the Government Equalities Office, Race Disparity Unit and Disability Unit and 'using the convening power of the Cabinet Office better to leverage work across Whitehall'.<sup>9</sup> However, no publicly accessible document is available setting out how the Equality Hub operates, what it is trying to achieve, the relationship between each of its constituent parts and how it is governed.<sup>10</sup>
8. Greater transparency would also be welcome in relation to the component parts of the Equality Hub. The GEO has a strategic plan for 2019/2020,<sup>11</sup> and the Race Disparity Unit ('RDU') has a two year work plan which began in April 2020<sup>12</sup>. The Disability Unit ('DU') does not have a publicly available plan but has published its survey on a cross-government National Strategy for Disabled People.<sup>13</sup> These documents do not provide sufficient clarity about the priorities of, or the relationships between, these units or about the Government's strategic approach to addressing inequalities and how the Equality Hub works to drive this approach across government.<sup>14</sup> We believe it would support transparency, effectiveness and accountability if the role and approach of the Equality Hub were clearly articulated.

## Function

9. The GEO's function is set out in its 2019/2020 strategic plan, its most recent published plan, which explains that it provides leadership on policy relating to

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<sup>9</sup> Hansard (2019), '[Debate regarding the Equalities Hub](#)', Volume 663, debated on Thursday 11 July 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Equality Hub (2020), '[About us](#)'

<sup>11</sup> Government Equalities Office (2019), '[Government Equalities Office Strategic Plan 2019/2020](#)'

<sup>12</sup> Race Disparity Unit (2020), '[Quality Improvement Plan: government ethnicity data](#)'

<sup>13</sup> Disability Unit (2021), '[Search: All publications of the Disability Unit](#)'. The Disability Unit did publish a blog regarding its approach to stakeholder engagement: Disability Unit (2020), '[News Story: Disability Unit putting lived experience at the heart of its work](#)'. See also: Disability Unit: (2021), '[News Story: National Strategy for Disabled People survey](#)'

<sup>14</sup> The Government Equalities Office strategic plan does explain that it will work with the RDU and DU 'to better understand what can be learned from our data' however no further detail is provided.

women, sexual orientation and transgender equality whilst maintaining and protecting the integrity of equalities legislation and sponsorship of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether its function has changed since this plan expired.

10. As noted above, the function of the wider Equality Hub has not been publicly clarified in detail but there are also discrepancies between the functions of its component parts.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the RDU's remit is focused on data improvement and publication and it does not have a clear policy leadership role on race equality issues.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the GEO and the DU's remits are more policy-orientated, although both have some analytical capacity.<sup>18</sup>
11. It is also unclear why some parts of government that focus on issues relating to particular protected characteristic groups are not brought within the Equality Hub. For example, the Faith Team within the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government ('MHCLG') is not within the Equality Hub. This entity recently consulted on the government's approach to engagement with faith organisations, an exercise that could provide valuable insight to the Equality Hub, such as on complex balancing rights issues.<sup>19</sup> A stronger relationship could be built if the Faith Team sat within the Equality Hub, alongside other protected characteristic strands, and under a single, coherent cross-government strategy on equality.
12. A key part of the GEO's existing role is working across government, including to ensure equality is taken into account in planning and policy development, and that commitments in the LGBT Action Plan and Gender Equality Roadmap are delivered.<sup>20</sup> The Government has not provided an annual progress update on delivery of the LGBT Action Plan since 2019, nor has there been substantive progress on implementing the Gender Equality Roadmap, referenced below at

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<sup>15</sup> Government Equalities Office (2019), '[Government Equalities Office Strategic Plan 2019/2020](#)'

<sup>16</sup> The Minister for Women and Equalities' speech, 'Fight for Fairness', does provide an overview of the Equality Hub's work however further detail beyond the speech is not provided on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website: Government Equalities Office (2020), '[Speech: Fight for Fairness](#)'

<sup>17</sup> Race Disparity Unit (2020), '[Quality Improvement Plan: government ethnicity data](#)'

<sup>18</sup> See for example the Government Equalities Office's research, the National LGBT Survey, which underpinned its policy work in the LGBT Action Plan: Government Equalities Office (2018), '[National LGBT Survey: Research report](#)'; Government Equalities Office, '[National LGBT Action Plan 2018: Improving the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people](#)'

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2020), '[Independent Faith Engagement Review](#)'

<sup>20</sup> Government Equalities Office (2019), '[Government Equalities Office Strategic Plan 2019/2020](#)', page 5.

paragraph 29.<sup>21</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has created an additional and urgent demand on the GEO to support departments to tackle emerging equality issues arising from the crisis in a coordinated and meaningful way.<sup>22</sup> We are concerned that the GEO may not have the resources to deliver this important cross-government work effectively. We understand that the GEO currently has fewer than the 110 staff it had in post in June 2019, with some staff having been redeployed across government to deal with the pandemic.<sup>23</sup> While it may have been appropriate and desirable to urgently redeploy resource and equality expertise across government to respond to the crisis, it is important this resource and expertise returns to the GEO to ensure it is fully equipped to support pandemic recovery and the Government's 'levelling-up' agenda.

13. We have provided further evidence on the research and data gathering remit of the Equality Hub and the GEO at paragraph 19 below.

**We recommend that:**

- The GEO should remain permanently located within the Cabinet Office, alongside other component parts of the Equality Hub. The GEO and Equality Hub should be adequately resourced to deliver their cross-government work effectively.
- The Equality Hub should provide leadership for an overarching Government strategy on equality and publish a clear strategic plan. This should outline the role, structure and governance arrangements of the Equality Hub as well as the objectives of each of its component parts.
- The Equality Hub should take over central responsibility for equality data standards and evidence, supporting its role in coordinating the Government's overarching equality strategy.
- The Equality Hub should take on responsibility for all parts of government that lead on other protected characteristic issues. The Equality Hub should

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<sup>21</sup> The Government committed to providing an annual progress update on its LGBT Action Plan commitments but has not done so since 2019: Government Equalities Office (2019), '[LGBT Action Plan: Annual progress report 2018 – 2019](#)', page 4.

<sup>22</sup> This is discussed further at paragraph 24 below.

<sup>23</sup> House of Commons (10<sup>th</sup> June 2019), '[Parliamentary question from Dawn Butler MP to Victoria Atkins MP, Minister for Women](#)'

harmonise the functions of each of its component parts to ensure adequate research, policy, legal and other functions are provided in respect of each protected characteristic, as appropriate.

## The role of Ministers in the GEO and Equality Hub

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14. The role of Minister for Women and Equalities is a role that is typically added to the portfolio of a female member of the Cabinet.<sup>24</sup> Currently the role is supported by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Women), responsible for policy on gender equality, and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Equalities), covering policy on sexual orientation and transgender equality, cross-government equality work and engagement with the Equality and Human Rights Commission.<sup>25</sup> These two roles are typically occupied by junior ministers in other departments and from both Houses of Parliament: currently Baroness Berridge is Minister for Women, leads the GEO's business in the House of Lords, and is also Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System at the Department for Education;<sup>26</sup> Kemi Badenoch MP covers GEO business in the House of Commons and is Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury.<sup>27</sup> Beyond the GEO, ministerial responsibility for the Equality Hub is also spread across departments. Julia Lopez MP is Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office and responsible for 'corporate activity' of the Equality Hub.<sup>28</sup> Despite being a Cabinet Office entity, the DU's ministerial function is provided via the Department for Work and Pensions with Thérèse Coffey MP the responsible Secretary of State.<sup>29</sup> It is unclear who has ministerial responsibility for the RDU at

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<sup>24</sup> The role was briefly split in April-July 2014, when Nicky Morgan was Minister for Women alongside her role of Financial Secretary to the Treasury and Sajid Javid was Minister for Equalities and Culture Secretary.

<sup>25</sup> Government Equalities Office (2020), '[Ministerial Role: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State \(Minister for Women\)](#)' and Government Equalities Office (2020), '[Ministerial Role: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State \(Minister for Equalities\)](#)'. See also: Cabinet Office and Equality and Human Rights Commission, (2019), '[Framework Document](#)', page 3.

<sup>26</sup> HM Government (2020), '[Biography: Baroness Berridge of The Vale of Catmose](#)'

<sup>27</sup> HM Government (2020), '[Biography: Kemi Badenoch MP](#)'

<sup>28</sup> HM Government (2020), '[Biography: Julia Lopez MP](#)'

<sup>29</sup> The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work is Justin Tomlinson MP: Department for Work and Pensions (2020), '[Ministerial Role: Minister of State \(Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work\)](#)'. This is a junior ministerial role under the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions: HM Government (2020), '[Biography: The Rt Hon The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP](#)'.

Secretary of State level however this is presumed to be Michael Gove MP as Minister for the Cabinet Office.<sup>30</sup>

15. It is important that the role of Minister for Women and Equalities continues to be held by a member of the Cabinet. The profile and status of a Cabinet member is vital to ensuring that the Minister for Women and Equalities can robustly champion equality across Government, including at Cabinet meetings.
16. Despite the benefits of this approach, improvements could be made that would strengthen the ministerial function. The main existing challenge is that the Minister for Women and Equalities role is not located within the same department as her officials. This presents practical but important difficulties in that officials are accountable to their Department for staffing and budget and procedural matters, but to a Minister in a different Department for delivery of their role. This division of responsibility and accountability also impacts negatively on the Commission, in particular in relation to the arrangements for settling our budget where the Minister for Women and Equalities has statutory responsibility for providing the Commission with a budget sufficient to enable us to perform our statutory functions,<sup>31</sup> but our budget is allocated by the Department in which the GEO sits.
17. A better arrangement would be to combine a new role of Secretary of State for Equality with that of Minister for the Cabinet Office. Doing so would properly embed the equalities brief within the Cabinet Office's central Whitehall coordination function. In the event that the role was not held by a woman, it would be crucial to ensure that the equalities ministerial team as a whole properly represented the interests of women and other protected characteristics. Similarly, full-time junior Ministers for Women and Equalities should sit in Cabinet Office with responsibility for delivery of the Government's overarching strategy, through the Equality Hub.
18. The Government's work on equality will inevitably require buy-in from across government. To support this, an inter-ministerial group on equality should be established and chaired by the Secretary of State. This would help to embed a coherent vision on equality across government and drive cross-government delivery of the Government's equality strategy.

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<sup>30</sup> Cabinet Office (2020), '[Ministerial role: Minister for the Cabinet Office](#)'

<sup>31</sup> The Equality Act 2006 Section 38.



## **We recommend that:**

- The new role of Secretary of State for Equality is established and combined with the Minister for the Cabinet Office role, reinforcing the Equality Hub's important coordination function on equality issues from within the heart of government.
- Full-time positions of junior Ministers for Women and Equalities are created within the Cabinet Office to oversee coordination of the Equality Hub and ensure day-to-day delivery of the Government's equality strategy.
- The Secretary of State should chair an inter-ministerial group comprised of the ministerial equality team and other relevant ministers to drive cross-government delivery of the Government's equality strategy.

## **Implications of the Minister for Women and Equalities' speech**

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19. We agree with the Minister for Women and Equalities' acknowledgement of the importance of socio-economic inequality, in her speech on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020.<sup>32</sup> Addressing the interplay of socio-economic disadvantage with protected characteristics will be essential if the Government is to deliver on its commitment to 'levelling-up'. The Commission stands ready to support a renewed drive to identify and address the root causes of the barriers that hold people back from fulfilling their potential. This focus should support us in delivering our statutory duty to support the development of a society where each individual has equal opportunity, there is respect for and protection of each individual's human rights and there is mutual respect between groups.<sup>33</sup>
20. The Commission also has a statutory duty under section 12 of the Equality Act 2006 to independently report on the progress of equality and human rights, which we do through our Is Britain Fairer programme.<sup>34</sup> We have developed systematic methodology, outlined in our Measurement Framework,<sup>35</sup> to synthesise the

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<sup>32</sup> Government Equalities Office (2020), '[Speech: Fight for Fairness](#)'

<sup>33</sup> Equality Act 2006, Section 3(d) and (e). See also Section 10 which sets out the different groups described in the general duty placed on the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Section 3.

<sup>34</sup> EHRC (2018), '[Is Britain Fairer?](#)'

<sup>35</sup> EHRC (2017), '[Measurement framework for equality and human rights](#)'

available research and analysis and combine it with 48 statistical indicators to examine the outcomes for individuals. When assessing outcomes this approach also looks at any disparities that exist, by all nine protected characteristics, socio-economic classification, and geographical differences, as well as examining the impact on some groups at particular risk of disadvantage or discrimination.

21. Our 'Is England Fairer?' report found stark inequalities across and within different English regions in education, health, living standards and work.<sup>36</sup> We welcome a more nuanced approach that uses innovative data analysis, such as 'Is England Fairer?', to understand the interplay between socio-economic outcomes and other factors which can have a cumulative impact on people. This evidence should supplement, rather than displace, a robust understanding of inequality that exists between people who share protected characteristics. We will continue to work with the GEO to ensure that our research strategies complement each other in tackling the range of gaps in the evidence that currently exist so as to avoid duplication.
22. It is important the Government's renewed focus on identifying the root causes of the barriers that hold people back is supported by a policy home for this work to address the key findings. The most appropriate location for this policy-led function is within the Equality Hub. It must be adequately resourced to address these issues and work across government to embed them, using the evidence and tools developed by the SMC to support this activity.
23. The Socio-economic Duty is an effective lever available to Government to drive forward this work while delivering its broader 'levelling-up' agenda.<sup>37</sup> Implementation of the Duty could help to achieve the change the Minister for Women and Equalities highlighted in her speech by focussing action at all levels of government across England on addressing the key concerns that often compound inequalities. The Duty would achieve this by providing a single framework for public bodies to address the most pressing inequalities of

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<sup>36</sup> EHRC (2018), '[Is England Fairer?](#)'

<sup>37</sup> The Duty is not in force in England, but some local and combined authorities in England are voluntarily implementing the Duty and using it to focus their efforts to respond to the crisis. See: Just Fair (4<sup>th</sup> June 2020), '[Press release: North of Tyne Combined Authority Implement Socio-Economic Duty](#)'

outcome, for instance including the inequalities arising from pandemic and measures imposed in response to it.<sup>38</sup>

**We recommend that:**

- The GEO and Equality Hub should ensure that activity undertaken to identify the root causes behind unequal outcomes supplements, rather than displaces, a robust understanding of inequality that exists between people who share protected characteristics.
- The GEO analytical programme announced by the Minister for Women and Equalities should build upon the EHRC's expertise in developing the *Is Britain Fairer?* Programme, further interrogating data sources and explanatory causes. The Commission, and other research institutions, could subsequently use this work to further develop the evidence base on equalities.
- The Equality Hub should be resourced to provide a policy-led function that is equipped to address the findings arising from this analytical work. It should work across government to implement them, using the evidence and tools developed by the SMC to support this activity
- The Government should bring the Socio-economic duty into force in England and use it as a tool to support its levelling-up policy agenda.

**The GEO and Equality Hub's role in relation to equalities issues and Coronavirus**

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24. The Equality Hub has delivered important work to highlight the equalities issues arising from the pandemic, including the Minister for Equalities' reports on the Covid-19 disparities experienced by ethnic minorities.<sup>39</sup> While this has been welcome, as we highlighted at paragraph 12 above, we are concerned that the GEO may not be resourced to deliver its important cross-government work effectively. We believe this could have inhibited its ability to support departments to identify equality and human rights issues arising from the pandemic, however

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<sup>38</sup> EHRC (2020), '[How Coronavirus has affected equality and human rights](#)'.

<sup>39</sup> Race Disparity Unit (2020), '[Press release: Minister for Equalities sets out government action to tackle Covid disparities](#)'. See also the Government's second quarterly report: Race Disparity Unit (2021), '[Second quarterly report on progress to address Covid-19 health inequalities](#)'.

this question is hard to assess without greater access to information concerning the GEO's cross-departmental work

25. This is illustrated by the lack of information available regarding the GEO's engagement with the Department for Health and Social Care ('DHSC') in relation to the Government's reports on the Coronavirus Act 2020. Section 97 of the Act requires the Government to provide reports every two months on the implementation of the Act's non-devolved provisions.<sup>40</sup> The legislation included significant changes to fundamental rights and we therefore recommended that greater parliamentary scrutiny should be facilitated by addressing the impact of provisions on equality and human rights in the two-monthly reports.<sup>41</sup> The DHSC included analysis of the impact on equality and human rights, for the first time, in its sixth edition of the two-monthly reports in January 2021.<sup>42</sup>
26. We welcome this step, however, we think more could have been done to include this analysis earlier and produce a more thorough analysis of the impact of individual measures that reflects the views and experiences of groups sharing protected characteristics. The GEO has not publicly clarified in detail what work it is undertaking across government on Coronavirus, including with the DHSC. Without this information it is difficult to assess whether more could be done to support departments to identify and address the equality issues arising from the pandemic and whether the GEO's available resources are limiting this engagement or not. Further transparency regarding the work the GEO is undertaking across government in relation to Coronavirus is needed. Providing this would also support stakeholders, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission, to understand where to target their own efforts to contribute effectively.
27. We expect there to be continued demand for the the GEO and Equality Hub's support as departments look to develop their approaches to recovery.

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<sup>40</sup> Section 97 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 requires the Secretary of State to prepare and publish a report on the status of the main non-devolved provisions in the Act

<sup>41</sup> EHRC (1<sup>st</sup> May 2020), '[Evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee on its inquiry on coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and the impact on people with protected characteristics](#)'. See also: EHRC (24<sup>th</sup> September 2020), '[Briefing for the Coronavirus Act 2020 Six Month Review Debate House of Commons](#)'

<sup>42</sup> Department of Health and Social Care (2021), '[Two monthly report on the status of the non-devolved provisions of the Coronavirus Act 2020](#)'. See also: Department of Health and Social Care (2020), '[Collection: Coronavirus Act two-monthly reports](#)'

Redistributing GEO staff across government may have been an appropriate measure to support the Government's initial response to the national crisis, however it is important this does not result in a permanent reduction in the GEO's staff resources. The GEO's expertise will be vital to ensuring the Government can 'build back better' and deliver its 'levelling-up' agenda and the GEO must be adequately resourced to provide it.

**We recommend that:**

- The GEO is resourced adequately to ensure it can effectively deliver its important cross-government work to support departments with the equalities issues arising in relation to Coronavirus and in their approaches to recovery. Staffing levels at the GEO should not remain depleted following the staff redistribution across government to support the initial crisis response.
- The GEO should publish a summary outlining all of the cross-government work it is undertaking on Coronavirus on a regular basis.

## **The GEO and Equality Hub's role in supporting compliance with international obligations**

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28. The GEO has oversight of the UK's implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),<sup>43</sup> and therefore plays an important role in supporting compliance with the UK Government's international human rights obligations under the UN treaties it has ratified.<sup>44</sup> During the Women and Equalities Committee's 2018 inquiry regarding the CEDAW Committee's eighth periodic review of the UK,<sup>45</sup> the EHRC provided evidence regarding the GEO's role in relation to CEDAW,<sup>46</sup> and a number of the concerns we raised remain relevant.

29. Firstly, there remains a lack of a comprehensive government strategy for implementing CEDAW, as recommended by both the CEDAW Committee<sup>47</sup> and

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<sup>43</sup> Government Equalities Office (2021), '[Government Equalities Office: About Us](#)'. See also Government Equalities Office (2018), '[8th report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#)'

<sup>44</sup> See more information about the UN treaties ratified by the UK on EHRC, [Human Rights Tracker](#).

<sup>45</sup> Women and Equalities Committee (2018), '[Inquiry: The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)'.

<sup>46</sup> EHRC (2018), 'Letter to the Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee: follow-up to oral evidence session'.

the Women and Equalities Committee in 2019.<sup>48</sup> While the GEO published a gender equality roadmap in 2019 following the last CEDAW review,<sup>49</sup> this strategy is focused on women's economic empowerment; as such, it does not cover the full range of rights protected under CEDAW, nor does it address how the UK Government will implement the specific recommendations made by the CEDAW Committee in 2019.<sup>50</sup>

30. More broadly, the UK Government lacks a coordinated mechanism at government level for reviewing and implementing UN recommendations, including those received under CEDAW.<sup>51</sup> Currently, responsibility for overseeing the different UN human rights treaties is spread across multiple government departments.<sup>52</sup> For some time, we have argued that the UK should establish a National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF) to effectively and efficiently implement the provisions and recommendations emanating from the UN human rights system.

31. The UK Government is due to submit a follow-up report to the CEDAW Committee by March 2021, in which it is required to report on the steps taken to implement a number of recommendations from the Committee, including regarding the establishment of a NMIRF.<sup>53</sup> The GEO and wider Equality Hub will have an essential role in this process.

### **We recommend that:**

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<sup>47</sup> CEDAW Committee (2019), '[Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#)', paragraph 26.

<sup>48</sup> Women and Equalities Committee (2019), '[Letter to the UN Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, concerning the UK's review](#)'.

<sup>49</sup> GEO (2019), '[Gender equality at every stage: a roadmap for change](#)'.

<sup>50</sup> CEDAW Committee (2019), '[Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#)'. During the CEDAW review, we recommended that the GEO ensure that implementation plans were published in follow-up to CEDAW: EHRC (2018), '[Pressing for progress: women's rights and gender equality in 2018](#)'.

<sup>51</sup> EHRC (2018), 'Letter to the Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee: follow-up to oral evidence session'.

<sup>52</sup> In relation to the non-discrimination treaties, while the GEO leads on CEDAW, the Disability Unit leads on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (having replaced the Office for Disability Issues), and the MHCLG leads on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Department for Education leads on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Ministry of Justice leads on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment Against Torture; and the UK's participation in the Universal Periodic Review process.

<sup>53</sup> Required under paragraph 64 of the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations: Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (2019), '[Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#)'.

- The Government works with civil society organisations and national human rights institutions, including the EHRC, to develop and publish a comprehensive strategy for implementing CEDAW in the UK, as recommended by the Women and Equalities Committee in 2019.
- The Government implements a comprehensive national mechanism for monitoring and reporting on progress to ensure effective implementation of treaty body and the Universal Periodic Review recommendations, including recommendations from the CEDAW Committee.

## **Further information**

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The Equality and Human Rights Commission is a statutory body established under the Equality Act 2006. Find out more about our work on [our website](#).

**March 2021**