

Defend equality laws

Britain has perhaps the world's most comprehensive equality and anti-discrimination laws. These laws have made our country more tolerant, free and inclusive; while undermining the privilege that has historically marginalised certain groups. These laws have brought us closer to being a secular democracy, where no one faces discrimination because of religion or belief.

Despite this many people continue to experience discrimination because of their (or others') religion or belief (or non-belief). With our existing equality laws, common sense and good will, this can be stopped.

What's the problem?

Equality laws have many exceptions, some to protect religious freedom, and some to allow religious groups to discriminate – including when delivering public services. While most people of all faiths and none are happy with anti-discrimination laws, a small minority want to weaken them so they can be free to impose their dogma on others, or to allow religious rights to sit at the top of a hierarchy.

Such groups promote a lot of myths about equality cases. They are particularly concerned about a loss of Christian exceptionalism and a growth of LGBT equality. The previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, is among those who have criticised such groups for being unreasonable and [told them to 'grow up'](#).

One strategy for such groups is to promote calls for "reasonable accommodations", 'conscience clauses' and exemptions – which would [open the door](#) to discrimination. Their skewed version of 'religious freedom' would only undermine the real freedom of religion and belief our equality laws protect.

Of course, equality laws are never perfect, and some degree of exemptions and fudging is necessary to balance out different rights, but this should never be used to protect privilege or legitimise discrimination.

What are we doing?

- We fully engaged with a recent Equality and Human Rights Commission inquiry into the effectiveness of current equality and human rights legislation on religion or belief. We welcomed the [subsequent report](#), which found that that existing legislation was "generally effective", as we had argued, and rejected demands for a duty of so-called "reasonable accommodation".
- We continue to lobby the Commission and the Government to tackle the equality issues stemming from faith-based schools in the area of employment and religious discrimination – areas subject to equality Act exemptions.

What you can do:

[Religious freedom isn't a 'right' to discriminate. I support the NSS campaign to defend our equality laws.](#)

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More information

- [Intervention at European Court of Human Rights](#)

In 2012, the National Secular Society intervened at the ECHR to argue that Britain's equality laws should be upheld and not compromised by religious exemptions.

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- [European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics](#)

The NSS are founder members of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics (EPPSP) which formed in 2009 to give voice to the secularist movement in Europe.

[Read More](#)

- [The unreasonableness of 'reasonable accommodation'](#)

Why a new workplace duty of 'reasonable accommodation' for religion and belief would risk new forms of discrimination.

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- [Religion in the workplace](#)

Balancing freedom of and from religion: a common sense approach to workplace issues.

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While you're here

We're been challenging religious threats to equality and human rights for over 150 years. Our huge progress needs to be protected and there's still work to be done. Will you help?

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)