

Building understanding of fairness, equality and good relations in Scotland

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ScotCen and NatCen



Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

Scotland

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Scottish Centre *for*
Social Research



NatCen

National Centre *for* Social Research

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Executive summary

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) has among its aims reducing inequality, eliminating discrimination, strengthening good relations between people, and promoting and protecting human rights. These are challenging aims particularly given that there are varied understandings of the concepts of equality, fairness and good relations. Not enough is known about how the public interpret and value these concepts.

This research, carried out for the Commission by ScotCen (Scottish Centre for Social Research) and NatCen (National Centre for Social Research), aims to build on existing evidence on public attitudes to explore further the Scottish public's understanding of the concepts 'equality', 'fairness' and 'good relations' and the key factors that influence public attitudes about these issues. It also considers the implications of people's understanding and attitudes for achieving change. It is part of a wider study which explored the issues across England, Scotland and Wales.

First, existing evidence on public attitudes was reviewed. Second, nine focus groups were held in Scotland followed by a stakeholder seminar. (Overall, 23 focus groups were held across Britain plus another stakeholder seminar in Wales.) The knowledge from these two stages was used to assist with the drafting of a set of survey questions which can be piloted and tested to form an instrument that measures and tracks public attitudes.

This report covers the research in Scotland only. A companion publication (Jones et al., 2010) reports on the full study and includes a detailed account of the research methods, a review of existing evidence on the three concepts and draft survey questions which have been drawn up as a result of the study, which are omitted here.

Key findings

- Participants had difficulty engaging with the subject matter which, for many, was subjective and not something which they could easily conceptualise or find words to explain. A potential explanation for this is the fact that the subject matter was not something participants readily thought about or discussed with peers.
- Of the three terms, fairness was the one which resonated most in Scotland, but there was general agreement that all three terms were interlinked and each was necessary to facilitate the other. For example, good relations were seen as being key to bring about fairness and equality.

- It was common for each term to be described through examples drawn from the media or personal experience; however use of the terms in daily life was not common, with fairness the term most likely to be used.
- There was overlap in definitions of fairness and equality (for example, the need for everyone to be treated the same and be offered the same opportunities) which appeared to be difficult to disentangle.
- It was clear that fairness and equality were more familiar and easier terms to describe than good relations. Three levels of good relations were recognised: on a personal or community level where people get on with their friends and neighbours, within an employment situation, and on an international level.
- There was general consensus that Britain was fair in some areas and unfair in others. There was wide ranging discussion of areas where Britain was fair, for example, comparison of life in Britain to other countries like America where you have to pay upfront for health care.
- Much discussion centred around employment and immigration (which is a reflection of the importance these issues had in the media at the time of fieldwork). Strong views of immigration were apparent with opposing views of immigrant workers in Britain: some thought they were taking jobs away from British people, others felt they were only taking jobs British people did not want to do.
- The general view was that Britain was not equal. There were also important distinctions by region with views expressed about inequality by postcode and area. In one rural group, participants felt inequality was more evident in their local area than in the city, where there is a broader mix of people and residents are more used to and accepting of change.
- Good relations were thought to be more prevalent in smaller than larger communities. Sectarianism was acknowledged to be an issue in Scotland and was thought to create tension within communities.
- Although most people agreed that fairness and equality are a good thing, discriminatory and prejudicial views were still evident when case studies of specific situations were discussed. There was a fairly dominant belief that making everyone equal was unrealistic because it was unattainable.

- There was concern that in order to achieve fairness, equality and good relations, the needs of the majority would be overlooked because resources and attention would become too focused on the minority, which could result in tension and splits within communities.

Implications

- Any attempt to influence attitudes must start with establishing shared understanding of these terms. They must also take account of the two distinct approaches towards equality and fairness: treating everyone the same regardless of who they are, or treating people differently according to their need.
- Good relations at the community level included intergenerational relationships but did not refer explicitly to welcoming diversity or multiculturalism. Any attempt to encourage good relations will need to take account of public priorities and understanding.
- As a whole, the concepts are viewed as overwhelming and even unobtainable. Any attempt to shape public attitudes towards them will need to apply them to specific situations. When broken down in this way the concepts attract broad public support.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report presents the findings of a study commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) which aimed to explore the general public's attitudes towards issues relating to 'equality', 'fairness' and 'good relations', across Britain. The purpose of the research was to feed into the Commission's conceptual thinking in these areas in order to help it communicate effectively and build support for its objectives. There were four key elements to the research which consisted of: a literature review; general population focus groups, stakeholder events and a questionnaire design stage. This report presents: findings from the Scottish focus groups and; implications for the Commission from the Scottish stakeholder seminar only. A full report entitled 'Building Understanding of fairness, equality and good relations' by Jones et al. (2010) which covers GB findings, has also been published on the Commission's website.

The Commission was established on 1 October 2007 and brought together the work of the three previous equality commissions, the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. In addition, the Commission has taken on responsibility for other equality areas – age, sexual orientation and religion or belief – as well as for human rights. The Commission works across Britain, and has offices in Manchester, London, Birmingham, Cardiff, Bangor, Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as regional offices elsewhere, but it does not have responsibility for Northern Ireland, which has its own commission.

As an independent, statutory body, the Commission aims to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people, and promote and protect human rights. It also enforces equality legislation on age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation and encourages compliance with the Human Rights Act, as well as giving advice and guidance to businesses, the voluntary and public sectors, and also to individuals.

One of the challenges of fulfilling the Commission's aims is that understandings of equality vary between people, situations and over time. In addition, the concepts of equality, fairness and good relations are complex and the relationship between them is not always clear. Existing research, such as the British and Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys, provides valuable insight into what people do not want, but there is little information about what people do want in terms of a positive vision of equality. In addition, the existing research has generated limited data on how and why people think the way they do, the range and nature of experiences and ideas that underlie

their attitudes and the ways in which attitudes can be changed. This research was commissioned to fill these gaps in knowledge.

1.2 Aims and objectives

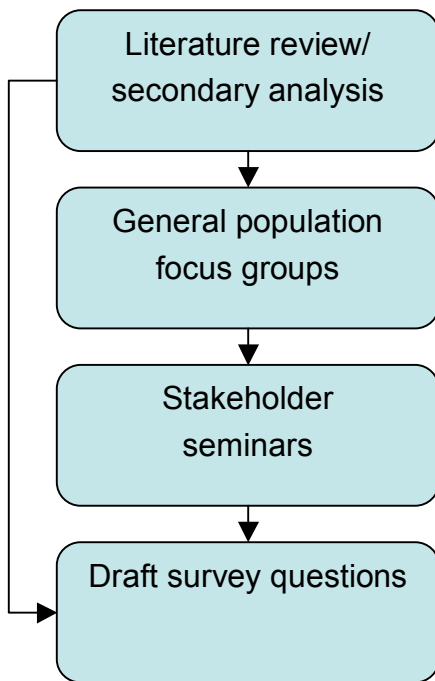
The broad aims of the research were to explore the public's **understanding** of the terms equality, fairness and good relations; the key factors that influence people's **attitudes** to these issues (including how attitudes are shaped within communities and how they vary across them); and the implications of people's understanding and attitudes for achieving **change**. Within these broad aims, the study had seven specific objectives:

- to map people's understanding of the terms fairness, equality and good relations
- to describe people's understanding of the relationship between good relations and fairness and equality
- to identify the factors that influence people's attitudes to fairness, equality and good relations
- to identify the range of ideas, experiences and concepts people use to legitimise their beliefs about fairness and equality
- to describe the factors that influence how people rank achieving equality and good relations relative to other desirable social outcomes
- to map the range of aspirations in relation to equality, fairness and good relations
- to draft a set of survey questions that will allow for further refinement and future testing. These are not included in the Scottish report, please see Jones et al. (2010).

1.3 Methodology

In order to address the objectives set out above, the research team adopted a design that included four linked and iterative stages, as illustrated in the diagram below.

As noted previously, the focus of this report is to present findings from the nine focus groups and implications for the Commission in light of the research and the Scottish stakeholder seminar only. Further details about the other three elements can be found in the main report (Jones et al. 2010).



General population focus groups

Focus groups were used to explore issues relating to the understanding of and attitudes to fairness, equality and good relations among the general population. This approach was used because of the need to map a wide range of views, which focus groups are able to do effectively, and also because the conceptual nature of the issues being discussed meant that group interaction would help participants engage with the issues.

Sampling and recruitment

Purposive sampling (Ritchie et al., 2003) was used in order to generate the sample for the focus groups. Purposive sampling aims to capture as wide a range of views and experiences as possible, rather than to be statistically representative. As such, key criteria are chosen that relate to the research objectives and are likely to be associated with differing views and experiences. For this study, the highest level of criteria was that separate groups would be conducted in England, Scotland and Wales. The second level of criteria related to the mix of participants in each of the groups. The criteria were related to equalities areas which the Commission works with: age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

The groups were deliberately composed so that each contained respondents who had enough in common to generate some shared experience, but some diversity to allow for a range of views and creative discussion. Each group was homogeneous in terms of age group and level of educational attainment. This was to minimise perceptions of status difference that could interfere with productive discussion. For the purpose of the groups, ages were split into the following four categories: 18 to 25,

26 to 46, 46 to 64 and 65 plus. Educational attainment was divided into High and Low which was defined by whether the participants had stayed at school beyond the age of 16 or not. Each group had a mix of men and women and a mixture of the secondary level criteria outlined above. This meant that the groups were very diverse in terms of ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious belief and disability. The groups also contained a mix of people who were employed, unemployed and retired.

The locations of the groups were selected to ensure a range of urban and rural settings and as well as a range of geographical areas.

Table 1 Age band, educational attainment and location of each group

Group	Scotland
18-25 low education	Ayr/Glasgow
18-25 high education	Elgin
26-45 low education	Edinburgh
26-45 high education	Jedburgh
46-64 low education	England only
46-64 high education	Stirling / Hawick
65+ low education	Lerwick (Shetland)
65+ high education	Renfrew

Recruitment was carried out by a specialist recruitment agency, which used a screening questionnaire to identify individuals whose characteristics met the sampling criteria. In order to facilitate participation in the research, venues were chosen that would be easy to get to and accessible for people with restricted mobility. In addition, respondents were asked at the recruitment stage if they anticipated any difficulty with travel to the venue and, if so, arrangements were made to help with their transport. All respondents were given £35 in recognition of the time and effort taken to attend the focus group.

Conduct

The focus groups were carried out by a moderator using a topic guide, which can be found at Appendix B. The purpose of the topic guide was to help focus and shape the discussion, while allowing each group to generate and discuss relevant issues as they arose in an open way. The groups were conducted using open, non-leading questions and answers were probed. Each group discussion lasted around one and a half hours. The broad topics discussed within the groups were:

- understanding of equality and fairness
- understanding of good relations

- reactions to real-life situations (using case study cards)
- views about the importance of equality
- final reflections.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data management and analysis

The data in this study were analysed with the aid of Framework (Ritchie et al., 2003), a systematic approach to qualitative data management that was developed by NatCen and is now widely used in social policy research (Pope et al., 2006). Framework involves a number of stages. First, the key topics and issues which emerge from the research objectives and the data are identified through familiarisation with the transcripts. The initial analytical framework is then drawn up and a series of thematic charts or matrices are set up, each relating to a different thematic issue. The columns in each matrix represent the key sub-themes or topics whilst the rows represent individual participants. Data from verbatim transcripts of each interview are summarised into the appropriate cell. In this way, the data are ordered in a systematic way that is grounded in participants' own accounts, yet oriented to the research objectives.

This approach was supported by a bespoke software package, *Framework*, also developed by NatCen. The software enabled a flexible approach to the creation of the matrices, allowing new columns or 'themes' to be added during the process of data management. This software also enables the summarised data to be hyperlinked to the verbatim text in the transcript so that it is possible to move back and forth from the more abstracted summary to the original data at will, depending on the level of analysis and detail required. Finally, the cases and themes that were displayed could be chosen with complete flexibility, easily allowing cases to be ordered, compared and contrasted. The Framework approach and the *Framework* software meant that each part of every transcript that was relevant to a particular theme was noted, ordered and was almost instantly accessible.

The final stage of analysis involved working through the charted data in detail, drawing out the range of experiences and views, identifying similarities and differences, developing and testing hypotheses, and interrogating the data to seek to explain emergent patterns and findings.

Stakeholder seminars

After the focus groups were analysed a Scottish stakeholder seminar was convened. The purpose of the seminar was to explore the views of stakeholders working in a range of fields (including academia, policy and service provision). Stakeholders were

selected jointly by the Commission and NatCen and sent an invitation to attend a research seminar. The seminar took the form of a short presentation by NatCen researchers on the findings emerging from the focus group research followed by a series of focused discussions about the implications of the research for both the Commission and the equalities community as a whole. The seminars were chaired by NatCen staff. Findings from the seminars are not presented as a discrete section of the report but have been incorporated into Chapter 5 which sets out implications for the Commission to consider.

1.4 Context of the research

Qualitative research aims to capture a diversity of views and to provide a range of views full enough that should the research be repeated again in the same locations with people from the same demographics and characteristics, the same themes would arise. However, any research must be situated in the wider context in which it is carried out. During the focus group phase of the study, it was clear that the media coverage at the time had a clear impact on participants' views on the subject. Had the research been done at another time, different themes might have dominated the discussions. Figure 1 (found on page 8) gives an indication of the news stories being covered at the time that the research took place.

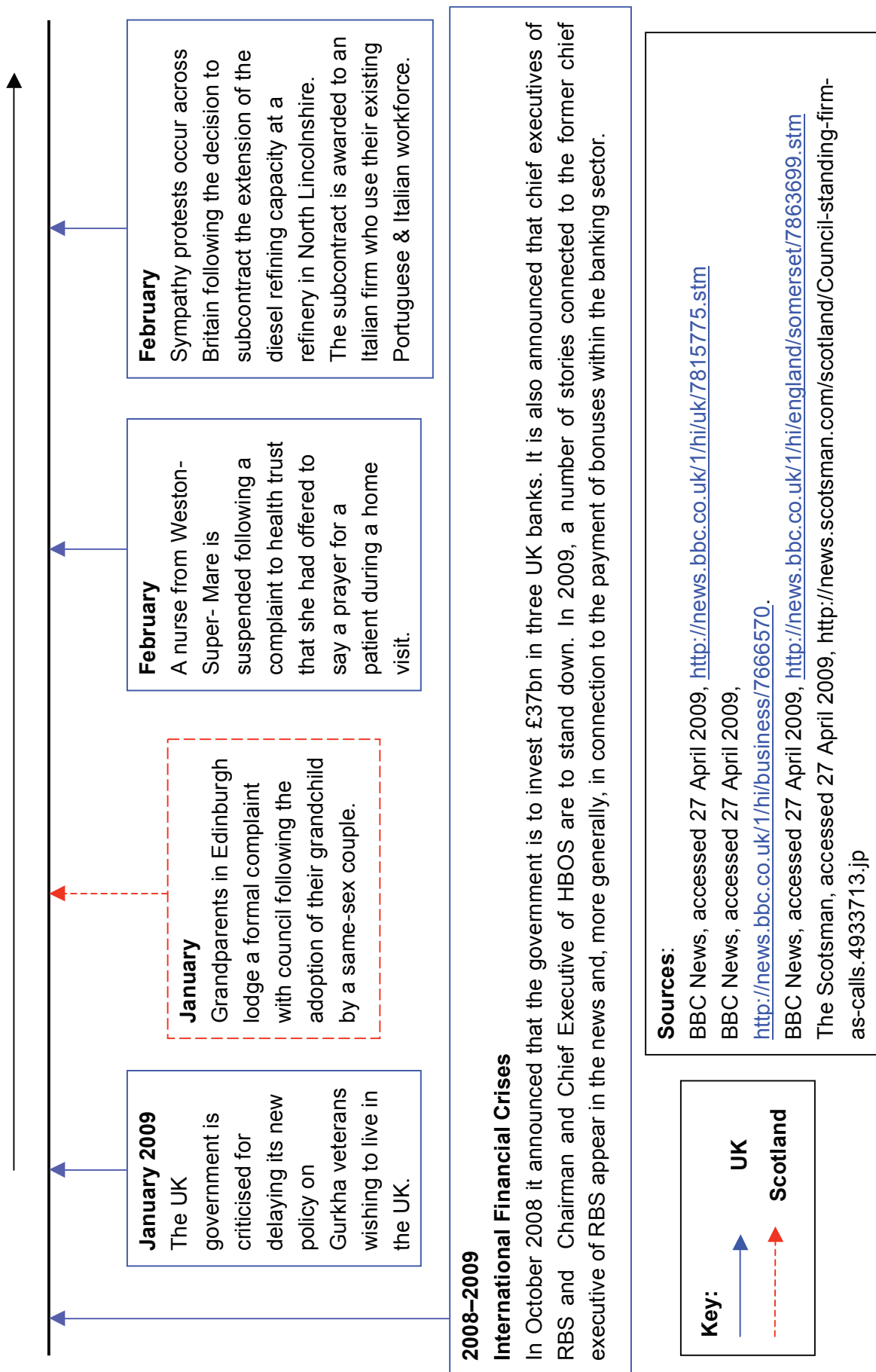
1.5 Structure of report

Chapter 2 focuses on people's understanding of fairness, equality and good relations, including a discussion of thoughts about the terms individually and how they are understood together. **Chapter 3** discusses attitudes, including views on the extent to which there is fairness, equality and good relations in Scotland, the factors that shape people's attitudes and feelings about the importance of these issues. **Chapter 4** explores how the concepts of equality, fairness and good relations play out in practice. Finally, **Chapter 5** draws out some conclusions about people's understanding and attitudes of fairness, equality and good relations and discusses the implications for the Commission, particularly in terms of the potential to change attitudes.

Throughout the report, verbatim quotations are used to illustrate the findings. Quotes are drawn from across the sample and are labelled to show the gender and age bracket of the participant. The report deliberately avoids giving numerical findings, since qualitative research cannot support numerical analysis. This is because purposive sampling seeks to achieve range and diversity among sample members rather than to build a statistically representative sample. As a result, qualitative research provides in-depth insight into the range of phenomena, their social context and the associations between issues.

See our companion volume, Jones et al. (2010) for a full account of the wider GB study including the research methods, the review of existing evidence on the concepts of equality, fairness and good relations, and draft survey questions which have been compiled as a result of this study.

Figure 1 Context of focus groups



2. Understandings of fairness, equality and good relations

Taking part in a focus group discussion can be daunting at the best of times but to be in a group and asked your opinion on subject matter you may not be familiar with or fully understand made discussion challenging. Comprehension of the subject matter was problematic, with long silences common as participants thought about the terms and how to explain them. There were also occasions where groups pressed the facilitator for more information as they struggled to think of what the term/question meant, suggesting a need for some sort of reference, or context to hinge the discussion on. A degree of apprehension at the start of some of the groups was also evident because participants did not want to upset others by not knowing the correct language to use particularly around the strands of sexual orientation, ethnicity and disability.

You upset people nowadays because you don't know the correct words to say, what is politically correct or not. So that's kind of a worry that I have as well you know. I hope I don't offend anyone. (Female, 26-45)

This chapter explores Scottish understandings of the concepts fairness, equality and good relations, looking at how they are interpreted individually as well as the key similarities and differences between them, and provides some key comparisons with understandings in England and Wales.

2.1 Understandings of fairness

Of the three key concepts explored by this research, fairness was the one that resonated most, not only in Scotland but in England and Wales as well. Participants responded to discussions around the idea of fairness with many examples drawn from the media or from their personal experience. It was much easier for participants to discuss examples that they felt were unfair rather than examples of fairness.

When asked what fairness was, initial responses focused on everyone being treated the same: the same rules, the same chances, the same opportunities. Discussions drew out a strong link with the idea of equality and terms such as 'being equal', 'equal rights' and equality were all used spontaneously.

I want to be treated fairly. Be given the same opportunity, no matter what background or race, colour. (Female, 18-25)

If something is going to be set in place, everything should be the same for everybody, no matter what or where you come from. (Male, 18-25)

Inherent within this concept of fairness was also the idea of judgement; that fairness meant not judging people on the basis of their personal characteristics, such as their sex, age or race. Similarly, the concept of **respect** was important in the Scottish discussion groups, encompassing the idea that individuals should treat others the way that they would want to be treated themselves.

You have got to see a person for who they are, not look at them and take them on face value, you have got to treat everybody the same and not take them for what colour their skin is, or what they have done, whether they are a drug addict or not. (Female 18-25)

However, further discussions within some groups also demonstrated a second aspect of the concept of fairness: equality of **outcome**. This was underpinned by a recognition that people are different and that treating people the same will not necessarily result in the same outcome. Inequality of outcome was seen as inevitable and in some ways necessary, on the basis that a range of jobs and roles are needed in society.

A third aspect of fairness, linked to this, was the view that people should be treated according to their **needs**, rather than treated the same. A development on this view was that it was not fair to treat people the same if one person was less deserving than another, if for example they were not 'pulling their weight' or taking responsibility for their actions. Similar views were found in English and Welsh groups.

The idea that fairness was underpinned by individuals taking personal responsibility and being active members of society came out in a number of discussions. This was expressed in terms of equality coming about when people 'work together' and 'abide by the law'.

Discussions of fairness were driven by things participants had read in the press, seen on the television or personal experience of things which they felt had been unfair. The point was also made that people were more likely to talk about things when they are unfair since fairness is taken for granted. And that opinion of what makes something fair or unfair will vary from person to person and depend on their personal situation and life experiences.

Unfairness was mainly defined as the opposite of fairness: people being treated differently, an 'inconsistency of approach', in particular if that was done on the basis of their personal characteristics. However, examples that were given of unfair treatment indicated that unfairness also carried the idea of 'unreasonable' or 'unjust'. These comments arose particularly in relation to areas such as buildings adjustments and immigration policies, where participants perceived that minority groups were

receiving **preferential treatment** at the expense of the majority group. The idea that there is such a thing as being too fair and that this is akin to being unfair is discussed further in Chapter 4 and is something that arose in England and Wales also. Preferential treatment received by celebrities in law courts, or privileges bought through private education were also seen as unfair.

Since there was a broad agreement on what fairness is, discussions focused on the variety of contexts in which fairness or unfairness might occur. This included a distinction between fairness within Scotland or Britain as a whole and fairness in Britain as compared to other countries. This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

2.2 Understandings of equality

Equality was described in very similar terms to fairness, with a primary emphasis on it being about everyone being treated the same regardless of their circumstances and whether they are 'rich, poor, gay, straight, Chinese or Scottish'. This is very similar to the response in England and Wales.

In relation to equality, terms such as equal rights, equal chances and equal opportunities were used in the group discussions. Perhaps because of debates in the media, the language of equality appeared to generate particular types of examples, including discussions about economic inequality, regional inequality (for example in health services and labour markets) and gender inequality. Inequality arising from differential educational experiences was also a recurring theme. Responding to the question of what equality means, participants had the following exchange:

Male 1: Everybody gets the opportunities. Same opportunities.

Male 2: Yeah. And... and there's nae hurdles in your way. Like the public schoolboy might get preferential treatment in a regiment, or gawn intae [going into]... Well, it's proved that the amount o' them that go into certain sectors o' bankin' an' that fae the certain public schools. (Discussion between two male participants, 26-45)

Specific questions were asked in one of the older groups (65+) around the difference between equality and equal opportunity. This group saw a difference between the two which suggested that for equality to be defined it had to be contextualised.

Facilitator: What's the difference between equality and equal opportunity?

Male respondent: Well I don't think you can get equality, but you could achieve equal opportunity for everyone?

Facilitator: Why, why couldn't we get equality?, coz I saw a lot of people agreeing with you.

Male respondent: I don't really know what it means. You know? I don't know ...Equality of what?

In further discussions about equality in the groups, similar concepts emerged to those discussed around fairness. The view that equality of treatment and equality of opportunity did not result in equality of outcome due to the differences between people was expressed. The same sentiments were expressed in England and Wales. In Scotland, there were some references to what were described as unrealistic and undesirable aims of communism trying to make everyone equal.

As found with the English and Welsh groups inequality was not a term used as freely as unfairness. However, descriptions of the term were similar to unfairness; with inequality primarily described as treating people differently. The outcome of inequality was felt to be negative: causing jealousy, resentment and friction among people.

2.3 Understandings of good relations

It was clear that as a term 'good relations' did not have as much immediate definitive meaning for respondents as fairness and equality. There were multiple definitions of the term although many of them were along the same lines and focused on aspects of people's behaviour towards each other. In this context, participants mentioned a number of elements of good relations: people getting on with each other, having a good rapport, tolerating others and seeing someone else's point of view, having respect for one another and acting with trust and honesty.

A second aspect of good relations that emerged from discussions was the idea of co-operation: working together as a team. Linked to this was the idea that good relations involved a mutually beneficial relationship.

Good relations were seen as occurring on three levels. On a personal or community level where people spoke about getting on with their friends and neighbours; within employment situations; and on an international level. These three levels were identified across Britain, suggesting that although people did not necessarily use the term themselves, there was some shared understanding of its meaning. When asked where they had heard of the term, participants referred to the relationship between different countries. The good (or bad) relations existing between countries appeared to be particularly linked to the idea of a mutually beneficial relationship. One group spoke about good relations as being about money and the financial relationships that exist between different nations. They suggested that Britain and America had good relations because they shared wealth, but that 'Scotland and Africa for instance, there's no relation there because there's nothing for each other'.

In line with discussions about equality and fairness, there was mention of the impact of bad relations which were seen to include wars between countries and bickering and unrest between individuals or communities.

2.4 Understanding the terms together

As discussed above, participants found it difficult to define the three different terms, and in particular, there were many overlaps in the way that fairness and equality were discussed. It was also difficult for participants to think about how they differ from each other:

I don't know. I'm just trying to think how to explain how I think it's different but I do think it's different. I don't think they're the same. I mean I think they go along together, but I don't think... they're exactly the same
(Female, 46-64)

There was a general consensus that all three terms were linked and interdependent in some way or another, but to varying degrees. For example, a common view was that good relations were key to bringing about fairness and equality, 'it's good relations that bring equality'. The idea here was that if everyone got on better, through good relations, then the world would be more equal and fair. Conversely, the view of interdependence between the concepts meant that good relations were seen as being based on equality and fairness:

If you're not fair, and if you're not equal, you shouldn't expect to have good relations with like other people or other establishments or whatever.
(Female, 18-25)

Fairness and equality appeared to be particularly difficult to disentangle: one view was that in order to have equality you need to have fairness whereas others argued that there can not be fairness without equality. However, participants discussed examples where it was clearly felt that moves towards equality had undermined fairness. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.1 where views of how fair Britain is are presented.

It was felt that fairness can be a relative and more personal concept and what seems fair from one person's point of view is not fair from another, if they are disadvantaged as a result.

There were examples where good relations could be viewed independently from fairness and equality, in particular where good relations was used in the context of relationships between countries. Here, good relations were more likely to be linked to a mutually beneficial relationship, and were not necessarily underpinned by, or leading towards, equality.

Good relations was also seen as independent from equality where people could work with co-operation and respect, despite there being inequality of wealth or status.

Use of the terms fairness, equality and good relations did not appear to be common as most groups used them 'now and again' or never, with young people more likely to say they used the terms in conversation with their peers. Out of all three terms, fairness was the most commonly used in daily life. When fairness was discussed it was usually the result of hearing something on the news or reading a newspaper article. Fairness also tended to be discussed if something was likely to have a personal effect on the individual, for example, being asked to do something in work that was thought to be unfair.

Participants' understanding of these concepts has relatively little to say about the dimensions of inequality that underpin the single equality concept. This concept, proposed by the Equalities Review (2007) and subsequently revised, underpins the development of the Equality Measurement Framework (EMF). The EMF is in turn underpinned by the concept that there are three distinct aspects of inequality that can arise between individuals and groups, namely inequality of outcome (what people achieve), autonomy (the independence people have) and process (the treatment people receive in institutions and systems) (Alkire et al. 2009).

Discussions of fairness included the notion that achieving equality of process could, in practice, involve treating people the same or treating them differently, and the latter may be justified in certain circumstances. But there are two sides to this: treating people differently to create equality of opportunity and unequal treatment (for example, because some people are felt to be less deserving). So views were both in tune with and at odds with the single equality concept. However, treating people the same and treating them differently were not seen as mutually exclusive, with some implicit support for the idea of creating equality of opportunity through differential treatment.

2.5 Summary

- Of the three terms fairness, equality and good relations, fairness was the term that participants were most comfortable using.
- Definitions of fairness focused on everyone being treated the same with the same rules, chances and opportunities. Equality of outcome and treating people according to their needs were also raised in discussion.

- Equality was described in a similar way to fairness. There was recognition that equality of treatment and equality of opportunity did not necessarily result in equality of outcome, due to differences between people.
- Three levels of good relations were recognised: on a personal or community level where people get on with their friends and neighbours, within an employment situation, and on an international level.
- The three terms were seen to be linked and interdependent to varying degrees.

3. Attitudes toward fairness, equality and good relations

This chapter explores perceptions of the level of fairness, equality and good relations in Scotland and, more widely, in Britain. We look at factors that shape attitudes towards the terms, explore the importance of fairness, equality and good relations, and how they relate to the equality strands.

3.1 To what extent is there fairness, equality and good relations in Britain?

How fair is Britain?

Participants were asked a tough question when they were asked 'Is Britain fair'? Not surprisingly this prompted discussion as to whether they should answer the question in relation to themselves or others. Also asked was whether it was specific to Scotland or Britain as a whole or at a local community level only. Participants also wondered in what context they should answer, for example, in relation to politics or justice. All of this resulted in interesting discussion, but made it difficult for participants to decide on a straightforward yes or no answer, with some simply saying 'I really can't make a call' or 'it depends on the context'.

Analysis of the English and Welsh groups found that three main views emerged in relation to how fair Britain was; that Britain was fair, that it was fair in certain circumstances but not in others, or that it was unfair, including 'too fair'. Opinion from the Scottish groups can also be mapped into these distinct areas but centred mostly on the middle view that Britain was fair in some areas and unfair in others. These aspects are discussed in more detail below.

One approach was to compare Britain with other countries, with Britain coming out more favourably in terms of fairness. For example, there was a suggestion that Britain is fair when compared to South Africa 'where they don't even have money for bread' or America where people live in fear of losing their jobs because they would lose their health insurance. Others compared the Britain of today with the past, and felt that as a country, Britain was fairer than it had been, 'the aristocracy has more or less gone'.

However, there were also participants who felt that in fact 'fairness' had gone too far, and that now Britain was too fair. This belief was based on the feeling that minority groups were treated too favourably, which was 'unfair' for the majority. Inappropriate approaches to equality, such as positive discrimination, were seen as pervasive. A related view was that the government was trying too hard to be seen to be doing the 'right thing':

M: ...there are times when I think Britain is too fair. You know, we bend over backwards to implement rules that are imposed by the EEC. (Male, 65+, Scotland)

M: ...Trying to make it fair makes it unfair... sometimes they [government] go over the top by making... trying to make it fair for other people, and it shifts the balance... that can often create racism. (Male, 26-45, Scotland)

Several examples were discussed in relation to fairness in Britain with the most dominant being employment and immigration, which was not surprising considering the importance they have in the media and the current economic climate. There were two opposing views on immigration which were prevalent in all groups. The first was one of resentment because of the perceived (government driven) encouragement of immigrants to come into Britain and work in British jobs; this was an especially prevalent view in relation to Polish immigrants.

F1: Do you not think the people coming into the country are taking jobs as well?

F2: Do you mean Poles?

F1: We have got a lot of Polish people in our area, we are just a wee village, and there is one and she has got two jobs, and a lot of the men are working on farms or doing a lot of work. (Discussion between two females, 46-64).

There was also a perception that immigrant workers can come into Britain and 'get everything handed to them', for example, health services, housing and benefits, which was seen as unfair. There were two different reasons given for why this was not fair. First, immigrants have not paid their contributions to the welfare state unlike people who have worked here all their life and second, there are many homeless people living 'out on the streets' who need help and resources.

The second view of immigrants was that they were only taking jobs people in Britain do not want, that they are contributing to the economy and paying taxes so should be allowed to work. It was also argued that employers are at fault for pushing wages down to very low levels. Examples used to illustrate these points came from the media, for example, coverage of the recent strikes by British workers over Italian workers in an oil refinery.

Discussion around immigrant workers was not just focused on people coming from outside of Britain, but was also an issue within Britain. For example, the Shetland group thought it was unfair that 'incomers' from mainland Scotland or England came

and took 'all the good jobs'. These 'incomers' were viewed as unsuited to the job, with more suitable and experienced people in the local community overlooked because they did not have the right qualifications.

Employment was another important area of discussion, where views of unfairness were dominated by discussions around financial inequality. A central theme related to the media coverage at the time was the 'fat cats' who were paid large sums of money to run the banks and 'have almost brought the banking system to its knees'. There was also a view that young people would miss out on work opportunities because of the recent recession, which was unfair. So too was the level of pay some people receive in comparison to others, who were thought to contribute less – for example, surgeons and nurses, 'who save lives' getting paid less than footballers.

Linked to employment was discussion around the unfairness of the benefit system, with one view being that too many people are not prepared to work because they receive benefits from the government. An example used to illustrate this was young girls given council houses because they were pregnant, over 'more deserving cases'. However, another view was that resources are too focused on drug abusers and alcoholics and not people who need them, like single parents.

There were two contrasting types of opinion of fairness in relation to crime and punishment. The first centred around negative views of the justice system which was perceived to be unfair because sentences were too lenient. This is contrasted with the opinion from others who either had a criminal record, or had close family members with a criminal record, and thought it was unfair that it was hard to find employment once they had served their sentence.

Finally, a Scotland-specific angle was evident in discussion of the media's portrayal of Scots as 'subsidy junkies', who receive more money from the UK Government than England and Wales. Participants saw this as untrue and unfair. Linked to this was the unequal manner in which the media reports sporting events; if someone from Scotland wins a sporting event they are British but if someone from England wins they are English.

How equal is Britain?

We now turn to look at discussion around whether Britain was equal or not. All groups seemed to find it easier to answer this question and all said that Britain was not equal. This could be the result of the focus group schedule – this question was asked after a detailed discussion about fairness in Britain – but it could also have been an easier question to answer because it was a more familiar term. However, despite groups having a definite view that Britain was not equal there was not much

discussion to explain why, just several examples of inequality, most of which were similar to those cited for unfairness. For example, MPs were used as an example of inequality – this mainly centred around the freedom they are perceived to have in relation to their expenses and who to employ:

The best person to be in Britain just now is a member of Parliament... You're getting a basic rate salary of £63,000, and that again, and you can employ your son, your mother, your auntie and your uncle, and they're all on your expenses, and you don't have to tell anybody about it... It's the degree of freedom these guys have... and the fact that they will not publish their expenses. I pay their expenses. If you've got expenses to claim, you don't just submit a list and get the money. (Male, 65+)

Despite the agreement that full equality does not exist in Britain there was an acknowledgement of and praise for the laws that exist to protect human rights, which were not thought to exist in other countries. However, participants were not asked to define 'human rights' so we do not know whether they felt that these laws included equality issues or not. In addition, the more cynical view, that you need to have money to afford a good lawyer in order to have equal access to good justice, was also expressed.

There was also a view that there will always be a divide between people and this is 'just how the world works', especially in the workplace. Added to this was a belief that 'we can't be equal all time', so if you were the same as your boss you would have nothing to move up to.

That's just hundreds of years since man began there is always going to be a divide between different people and there always will be, I don't think you will ever change that in terms of richer or poorer. It's just unfortunate that's the way world works unfortunately. (Male, 26-45)

There was considerable discussion around regional aspects and differences in equality. A rural group of young people thought that cities like London and Aberdeen appeared to be more equal than rural communities because they have a broader mix of people and urban residents are more used to and more likely to accept change. It was also suggested that there are more opportunities in the way of work in urban areas which leads to greater equality of opportunity, whereas in smaller villages, people are averse to change or to trying new things. However, another rural group of older people felt that their community was very equal (discussed below).

Some older groups discussed 'postcode inequality' in services, with examples of people not being able to receive cancer treatment because of their postcode (which was dictated by which Health Board or Health Authority they belonged to). There was

also a perception that people who lived in a 'posh area' received better treatment from the council – for example, having their streets cleaned more regularly. Linked to this was the preconceived ideas people have depending on whether you come from a good or bad area. Inequality as a result of class and celebrity status was also discussed, for example the perception that people from private schools have a better chance of getting a job than those from state schools and the perception that celebrities who break the law are treated more leniently than the general public.

The inequality of two-tier education and health services was raised in some groups, whereby access to wealth enabled some people to access better services and privileges that could improve their life opportunities. In this context, it was noted that Scotland was felt to be fairer than the rest of Britain because of not having to pay prescription charges.

The only exception to the majority view that Britain was not equal came from the Shetland group (older people 65+) who felt that Shetland was equal, unlike the rest of Britain, and gave the example of being on first name terms with the bank manager, which 'wouldn't happen in Edinburgh'. The group felt this was partly due to there being no class system in Shetland and partly because education was equal (there are no private schools in Shetland). But it could also be a reflection of island life and the fact that a need to support each other results in a stronger community spirit.

Are there good relations in Britain?

Although participants were not explicitly asked if they thought there were good relations in society, discussion of the term indicated the perception that good relations are less prevalent in society than 30 years ago, and where good relations do exist they are more common in small towns and villages. For example, people living in rural areas spoke of helping one another 'in a wee village we all pull together', and speaking to one another in the street, which they did not think was common in cities.

I think they have lost a lot of the community spirit in the towns and cities now. The village where XXX lives is definitely a lot friendlier. Everybody speaks to each other. (Male, 46-64)

Sectarianism was seen to limit good relations in communities and create tension, as people judged each other on the basis of their religion or the football team they supported. This view was not expressed in England or Wales and is, perhaps, more of an issue in Scotland.

Some participants also described how they felt people in England were suspicious of them when they heard a Scottish accent and often reverted to stereotypical language

such as 'Och aye the noo', when talking to them. But they also acknowledged that they felt people from parts of England were 'snobby' and 'uppity'.

3.2 The importance of the equality strands

Having discussed understanding and perceived levels of fairness, equality and good relations in Britain, this section explores views of what is fair/unfair, equal/unequal in society in relation to the equality strands. For the purposes of this research they are understood to be age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Other issues that were related to the Commission's remit or considered to be important by participants were also explored, such as social class.

In relation to race, sexual orientation, and social class, the dominant view was that people were treated unfairly because they were different and 'stood out from the crowd'. However, an alternative position was the view that minority groups were treated too favourably which was unfair for the majority.

Age

Age did not feature prominently in the groups but was mentioned in relation to the current recession where concern was expressed that young people will miss out on opportunities because there are fewer jobs. One young people's group discussed the inconsistency of age-related regulations – for example, you can get married at 16 but can't vote or 'go out on the town' until you are 18. Some older participants had experience of having been made redundant because they were over 50, and challenged the wisdom of losing staff who had the most experience.

I took early retirement/redundancy; the company just went who's 50? It was done on age, it didn't matter whether you had been hitting the numbers, doing the targets, running a good branch or whatever, they just go who's 50? And they make it worth your while financially but it still is ageist ... because it's an easier way to get people off the books. And they tend to be earning more money. (Male, 46-64)

Sexual orientation

Issues around sexuality were prominent in discussions, especially because it featured in one of the case studies (see Chapter 4), and personal examples of discrimination on the grounds of sexuality were given. A sharp contrast of views was evident among the young people in the sample. While there were those who showed liberal views and knew gay, lesbian or bisexual people, others held extremely homophobic views. Those who showed a more tolerant view of sexuality accepted that times had changed and agreed that discrimination on the grounds of sexuality was wrong. However, while this view came across strongly in hypothetical

discussions, more prejudiced views emerged when real-life case studies were explored (see 3.3 below).

Gender

Gender did not feature prominently in group discussions, suggesting that legislation has had an impact on gender discrimination. When gender was mentioned it was in relation to the unfair distribution of labour and pay between men and women. The view was that people are still treated differently because of their gender, 'the male sex is usually treated better' and that women are expected to run a home and work yet still get paid less than men.

Race

Discussion around race centred around the perception that there was too much emphasis on the rights of ethnic minorities, and that positive discrimination was unfair because people should be given a job on their skill and experience and not ethnicity. However, race was also one of the main characteristics mentioned by people when commenting on the need to avoid making judgements on the basis of people's characteristics.

Disability

There were two main issues discussed in relation to disability. First, participants had personal experience of finding it hard to get a job where an employer was not able to finance appropriate adaptations. Second, participants queried the extent to which it was fair to ask employers, or individuals, to make costly adaptations to buildings when it was only to benefit a small minority.

Disability also featured in the sorting card exercise for one young person's group where their top issue was 'fairer treatment for people with a disability'. One of the young people in this group had a disability and another was a young carer who looked after his disabled sister, so this will have had an impact on responses within the group.

Religion or belief was not discussed at great length and was the topic of discussion around unfairness for only one group (65+). This was in relation to an individual's right to practice their own religion. However, the point was also made that religion can cause conflict and war.

Finally, **social class** emerged as an issue during the groups, particularly in relation to leverage in the labour market. For example, locals believed that 'incomers' who got jobs at the expense of local rural people did so on the basis of their qualifications, but did not have the experience that the local people had. Social class was also felt

to be relevant where people went to private school and, therefore, stood a better chance of getting a job.

Despite not being one of the equality strands, **immigration** was discussed in all groups, especially in relation to employment, housing and benefits where one view was that immigrants were exploiting Britain and taking jobs away from British citizens. Immigration also featured in one of the rural Highland groups where it was felt to be unfair that 'immigrants' from the mainland came into the village and took jobs away from local people.

3.3 Factors that shape people's attitudes

As already mentioned, personal experience and the media contribute to opinions about fairness, equality and good relations. In addition to this, personal characteristics such as age and gender and other factors also influence attitudes. A range of attitudes emerged from the groups, regardless of background. Analysis of case study discussion suggested that females tended to have more tolerant and liberal views than males, and age seemed to have an impact on responses in the sorting card exercise, described in Section 3.4. In addition, attitudes were shaped by affiliation (that is if the participant was themselves in a minority group) and peer group – those with peers or friends from minority groups (such as lesbian/gay, disabled or different ethnicity) were more likely to hold more liberal attitudes than those with peers similar to themselves.

Analysis of the case studies clearly illustrates a contradiction between views of fairness and equality in general and actual views specific to real life. This contradiction was apparent in most of the groups with the general consensus being that fairness and equality are good things and should be aspired to, but when the case studies were discussed, discrimination, prejudice and homophobia were expressed. So, it appears that earlier comments about treating people the same regardless of colour, religion and/or sexual orientation were disregarded. This contradiction was picked up in some of the groups and challenged.

F: Well, just a few minutes ago, you were saying how it is that everybody was equal in Britain, so I mean what about this poor gay couple?

M: [laughs] Some things are more equal than others [laughter].
(Discussion between a male and female participant, 65+)

3.4 Importance of fairness, equality and good relations

There was strong agreement within the groups that fairness was very important, without it there would be 'unrest' and friction. However, this was countered in some groups by the argument that if everything was fair, the world would be a 'very boring

place' and a belief that unfairness could be positive as it might make you strive for a better life,

Unfairness kind o' makes people... er ...strive to get better. Like sometimes you need a wee bit of hardship. Like everything can't be like... easy-peasy.
(Female, 18-24)

A variation on the view that fairness was clearly important was that it was only important if it was something that was happening directly to you. However, this view did not go unchallenged:

M: I think fairness is a very personal thing, if things are being done fairly to you everything is OK... I think the further away things are then the less that you are really paying that much attention.

F: No I don't agree with that. If there is something that doesn't involve me but I don't think it's fair I still take notice and listen and think I don't think it's fair. (Exchange between a male and female participant, age 46-64)

Similarly, participants agreed that aiming for equality was definitely important, but again this was qualified with a fairly dominant belief that making everyone equal was unrealistic because equality was unattainable. Furthermore, as already discussed, one aspect of aiming for equality that concerned people was where they felt that the needs of the majority group (themselves) were being overlooked because resources and attention were paid instead to minority groups. This was felt to cause tension and splits within communities.

Good relations were seen as important especially for society – people need good relations to work together and to feel safe walking down the street.

In order to explore the importance of fairness, equality and good relations in relation to other social outcomes, participants were given 15 show cards and asked to select the three most important and the three least important, and to explain why they had made those choices (see Appendix B). The top three choices reflected earlier discussions and highlighted an interesting distinction by age; there was consistency in the top three issues across all groups ('equal health care for everyone', 'good education for everyone' and 'a thriving economy') except the 18-25 year olds, where there was less of a consensus in their top answers with different sorting cards appearing in each group. In other words, there was no consistency in the top three.

Despite immigration being a focal point of discussion and one of the issues listed on the show cards (as 'controlled immigration'), it did not feature prominently during this

exercise. Choices specifically relating to equality were ranked differently across the groups and were not consistently placed at the top, middle or bottom.

3.5 Summary

- People generally felt that Britain was fair in some areas and unfair in others. There was a view that some people were treated unfairly because they stood out as a minority group, but the alternative view was that Britain had become too fair at the expense of the majority.
- Britain was not seen to be equal.
- Good relations were felt to be more prevalent in smaller than larger communities. However, sectarianism was acknowledged to be an issue in Scotland and was thought to create tension within communities.
- There is a contradiction between views of equality and fairness in general and in practice. Although most agreed that fairness and equality are a good thing, discriminatory and prejudicial views were still in evidence when case studies were discussed.
- Even though aiming for equality was seen to be important, there was a fairly dominant belief amongst participants that making everyone equal was unrealistic because it was unattainable.

4 Equality, fairness and good relations in practice

The previous chapters explored the concepts of fairness, equality and good relations and indicated that people's understandings of these terms are complex and often contradictory. It has also been highlighted that people find it easiest to explore these concepts when they are contextualised. This chapter reviews how people respond to situations where fairness, equality and good relations could play a role. While specific examples were given by participants throughout the research, case studies or 'vignettes' were also used to tease out responses to specific situations including some that the Commission provides guidance on.

This chapter draws on both spontaneous participant discussions and responses to the case studies.

4.1 Examples of unfairness and inequality

Examples of unfairness and inequality given by participants were clearly influenced by stories that had been widely reported in the media during the time of the research, and these clearly had an impact on people's views (see Figure 1.1). One recurrent theme across Scotland as well as the rest of Britain which illustrated unfairness and inequality was the wages of bankers and financiers in the economic crisis.

Participants considered that financiers earned unfair salaries compared with other professions:

How's it equal for bankers/financiers?... They say they work hard but they're earning... a million pounds a year, and another half million pound bonus coz they work hard. They didnae work any harder as a brickie in the winter, or a plumber... is just nonsense. We all work hard. (Male, 26-45)

4.2 Case study examples

Case studies or 'vignettes' were used to explore issues of fairness and equality in specific situations. Not each case study was discussed in every group as time did not permit this, but they were all discussed across the different groups. Participants were asked about their general thoughts about the case studies rather than if they were fair or unfair, equal or unequal, to explore their responses and the language they used. The case studies were then broadened out to introduce other situations to see how attitudes changed in relation to the context. Interestingly, some groups raised the specific examples posed by the case studies before these were presented to the group, and in these instances alternative case studies were used.

Case study 1

Respondents were asked about a footballer who earned £3 million per year compared with a shop assistant or nurse who earned far less.

There was general agreement that the amount of money the footballer earned was 'ridiculous'; however views on whether this was fair or not varied. Male respondents were more likely to justify the amount because footballers have a short career and can suffer personal injury, or spoke about the amount of effort they need to put into training, or the fact that they were celebrities so you would expect them to receive a lot of money. Footballer' talent and the effect of market forces were also cited as justifications for their large salaries.

However, others felt it was unfair that the shop assistant and nurse should get less because they work harder and longer hours than the footballer. There was one argument that it was more unfair when the comparison was a nurse because of the life-saving work they do.

Others were indifferent because they weren't paying the salary and it didn't affect them. However, opinion on economic inequality came through more clearly when the footballer was changed to a Bank Manager which was viewed with less tolerance because 'we pay their salaries' and, in light of the recent banking crisis, was thought to be a ridiculous sum of money. This suggests that economic inequality becomes more of an issue when it affects us personally.

Case study 2

A gay couple apply to rent a property but the landlord tells them that it has already been let. They later learn that the property had not really been let when they asked and was actually let two weeks later to a straight couple.

This case study generated a lot of discussion with strong and opposing opinions. Initial discussion tended to be around the unfairness of the landlord with some groups spontaneously using terms such as 'bigoted landlord', 'prejudice' and 'discrimination'. In general opinion was divided; with one view being that the landlord was acting unfairly and the gay couple should have been given the flat because sexuality should make no difference. It was argued that landlords should put their personal views aside and look at it purely as an income and whether or not the couple were good tenants and paid the rent on time.

The polar view was that because the landlord owned the property it was their right to refuse to let it to anybody that he/she did not want to. It was argued that they may have reasons why they do not want to let the flat to a gay couple, for example, they feel they need to take account of the views of other tenants.

Males were more likely to think the landlord was being unfair if the couple was changed from being gay to black, with one view being that the hypothetical black couple were fine because they were straight and not doing anything 'morally wrong'.

Case study 3

A Muslim hairdresser is not allowed to wear her veil because it was thought to be bad for business.

Views on the Muslim hairdresser asked not to wear her veil also prompted plenty of discussion around whether this was fair or unfair. There were two main views: first, the mainly female view that it was discrimination to expect the hairdresser not to wear her veil, because it is her religion and this needs to be respected; second, the opposing view that the hairdresser should not be allowed to wear her veil because she is living in Britain and should abide by British rules and regulations. There was also some suggestion that it may be bad for business, although this was countered by the argument that what mattered was whether she was good at cutting hair.

Others took a middle of the road view, believing that if the employer's expectation was that the veil would not be worn when working was made clear at interview stage then it is not discrimination. Similar views were expressed when the hairdresser was changed from a female to a male wanting to wear a turban.

Case study 4

A disabled employee requires time off for doctor's appointments, hospital appointments, aids and adaptation appointments. Her employer says she is taking too much time off and says she must book them as holidays.

There was more support for employers when the disabled case study was discussed (it should be noted that this was only discussed with two groups), with participants understanding that the employer would not want to pay for someone to go to hospital appointments. There was also some sympathy for the employee, especially from participants who had similar personal experience or knew of similar cases, and felt that it was unfair to be expected to take holiday to cover this kind of appointment.

Case study 5

The London Metropolitan Police decides that the number of black Police Officers it employs is too small and does not represent the number of black people living in London. It therefore places a job advert that encourages black people to apply.

As mentioned already, time did not permit all cases studies to be explored and because this one referred to the London Metropolitan Police it was not used as often as the other case studies with Scottish participants. Where positive discrimination¹ was discussed, two contrasting perspectives were evident. The first was that positive discrimination was necessary to rectify past discrimination and to represent society at large – that is the police population should mirror the general population.

M: You would expect in the police scenario, if 5 per cent of the population are black Afro-Caribbeans, then hopefully then 5 per cent of police officers would be black Afro-Caribbean.

F: And if not why not?
(Conversation between male and female aged, 46-64)

However, the second perspective disagreed with positive discrimination. This was based on a perception that positive discrimination was unfair because it made it easier for minority groups to get a job. It was felt everyone should have equal access to employment irrespective of certain characteristics, such as race, age or gender.

As noted previously, the case studies showed a contradiction between views of fairness and equality in general and actual views specific to real life, but they also suggest that views and perceptions are shaped by the media (for example, views of bank chief executives influenced by recent press coverage) and personal experience (such as knowing someone who has experienced something similar). In addition gender was also important with females tending to show more liberal attitudes than males.

4.3 Relative acceptability of inequalities or unfairness

A question which arises from the analysis of these case studies is the extent to which some inequalities were seen as more or less acceptable than others. Arguably, economic inequality was seen as more acceptable than other inequalities for the

¹ Participants spoke of 'positive discrimination', but this is, in fact, unlawful. It means that applicants from certain groups would receive preferential treatment in the recruitment process. In contrast positive action, which is lawful, is currently limited to training and encouragement for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

reasons discussed above. The example of the footballer being paid more than the shop assistant was justified because of the skill required and the value of the footballer to society. But even among those who said that they felt the difference was too large, there was an implicit acceptance of some economic inequality. This relates back to the view that it is fair that those people who put less into the system (financially) should receive less in return. Similarly, it was suggested that inequality is acceptable if people are given the same opportunities or the means to access the same opportunities, but do not take them.

Aside from these points there were no inequalities that stood out as being more or less acceptable – how people spoke about inequalities or prioritised them, unsurprisingly, related to their personal circumstances. For example, if someone had work challenges then employment inequality was more important to them, whereas if they knew someone who was unwell then health inequalities took priority.

4.4 Summary

- Participants found it easiest to explore the concepts of fairness, equality and good relations when they were contextualised, using specific examples to explain their views.
- Groups were often divided in their opinions of these examples.
- People used the language of fairness and unfairness rather than equality or good relations in discussion of these, despite the fact that some of the case studies were more about inequality than fairness. This may be because people use the terms 'fair' and 'fairness' themselves in everyday conversation, whereas they are less likely to talk about equality.

5. Implications

This final chapter raises some of the implications arising from these findings for measuring and shaping attitudes.

The research highlights the diversity and complexity of public attitudes towards equality, fairness and good relations. These are not concepts that provoke clear and shared understandings. Views of their meaning and value are shaped by a range of personal characteristics, experiences and external factors. Underpinning this diversity, however, is a set of findings that the Commission can use to advance its conceptual thinking. The remainder of this chapter looks at the implications of these findings for the Commission in measuring, tracking and potentially shaping public attitudes.

A survey is the only instrument capable of tracking attitudinal change over time. To provide robust estimates of change over time it is essential for the survey to: ask the same questions, in the same order and format; use a comparable sample design (for example, drawn from the same source with few changes to its technical specification); and use a large enough sample to be able to detect changes over time to an agreed level of precision. Establishing time series data can be particularly challenging as changes in question design or survey methodology will invalidate the time series. This means that the questions need to be stable and subject to only minimal essential changes after the early years.

As a result of this research, a series of questions have been drafted that could be used in a future attitudinal survey. They can be found in Appendix A of our companion volume (Jones et al. 2010) which also contains a fuller discussion of our concluding points.

Implications for shaping attitudes

It is clear from this research that there are no shared understandings of equality, fairness or good relations and that for shared definitions of the concepts to be achieved a clear context must be provided. Discussions in the stakeholder workshops suggested that any attempt to influence attitudes must start with the establishment of a shared understanding of these terms. This shared understanding will need to include a lucid and well communicated set of definitions from the Commission.

Any attempt to shape public attitudes will need to take account of the two clear approaches to fairness and equality emerging from the research. On the one hand is a discussion about the need to treat everyone the same no matter who they are. On

the other is a view that people should be treated differentially according to need in order to give people the opportunity to achieve the same outcomes.

Although the Commission does not yet have a full definition of good relations, its working definitions refer to concepts such as multiculturalism and integration. This research indicates that public attitudes approach this concept from a slightly different angle: people getting on with each other at a community level. While this refers to strengthening intergenerational relationships, it does not refer to welcoming diversity or multiculturalism in the same way as the Commission, which looks to the future and takes account of modern social diversity. This disjuncture in attitudes has implications for the establishment of good relations. First, there clearly needs to be a stronger shared understanding of what this means. Second, any attempt to encourage good relations must take account of public priorities and ensure that these are addressed.

Any advance in the Commission's conceptual thinking needs to take account of language. Fairness is a term that people are comfortable with and likely to use in their everyday lives. The same is not true of equality and good relations. People will talk in terms of things being equal or unequal but are more likely to use the language of fairness.

Another implication for shaping attitudes is the view expressed by some participants that fairness and equality simply are not attainable. People are less likely to subscribe to the idea of fairness and equality if they think it cannot actually be a reality.

Overall, the findings from this research suggest that any attempt to shape public attitudes will need to focus on very specific aspects of fairness, equality and good relations. As a whole the concepts are viewed as overwhelming and even unobtainable. When broken down and applied to specific situations and with a meaning for each attached, these concepts attract broad public support and are recognised as being important components of modern society.

However, the varied levels of understanding and the extent to which these concepts were also contested has implications for the Commission and what its future role should be. Delegates at the Scottish seminar discussed the need for the Commission to assume an educational role to provide people with the knowledge necessary before their attitudes can change. This was seen as particularly important in relation to immigration issues. However, a regulatory or enforcing role was also identified for the Commission by Scottish stakeholders, which is concerned with securing institutional equality via the law. The two are, of course, not mutually exclusive and

the potential impact of the Equality Bill on business and public services suggests a role for a Commission that aims to shift perceptions, in order to assist with the efficacy of its regulatory role.

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Appendix A Recruitment leaflet

<p>Our responsibilities to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We guard your privacy: your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Your contribution will be used for research purposes only. Neither individual people, nor where we carry out the research will be identified in the report. • We respect your wishes: participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to. • We answer your questions: we will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.  <p>NatCen National Centre for Social Research</p>	 <p>NatCen National Centre for Social Research</p>	<p>Building understanding of fairness and equality in England, Wales and in Scotland</p> <p>The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) has been asked by The Equality and Human Rights Commission to explore people's understanding of equality and fairness. We would like you to help us with this.</p>  <p>NatCen National Centre for Social Research</p>  <p>Equality and Human Rights Commission</p>  <p>equalityhumanrights.com</p> <p>This leaflet provides you with information about the study.</p>
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<p>Who is the National Centre for Social Research?</p> <p>We are an independent research organisation that carries out research in all areas of social policy. Our Qualitative Research Unit (QRU) specialises in speaking to members of the public to find out their views on a wide range of issues. This may be in the form of a discussion group, such as the one we're inviting you to, or as an interview. We are carrying out this research for The Equality and Human Rights Commission to try and understand what people think of the terms fairness and equality. Although we are carrying out the research for someone else, we remain completely independent and are interested only in what you have to say.</p> <p>What is the research about?</p> <p>We want to explore people's understandings of equality and fairness, what people consider to be fair and unfair and whether people consider fairness and equality to be important.</p> <p>What do I have to do?</p> <p>Taking part involves coming to a group discussion to talk about what you think about fairness and equality. You will not need to do anything before coming along and there are definitely no right or wrong answers.</p>	<p>During the group there will be people from different backgrounds that may have different beliefs, preferences, opinions and experiences to each other, but we are really interested in hearing your views.</p> <p>A researcher from NatCen will run the discussion group, which will be informal and would last about an hour and a half. The discussion will be audio recorded so that we have an accurate record of what people say.</p> <p>What will happen with what I tell you?</p> <p>Taking part is confidential and anonymous. We will not say who said what in the report. We don't use people's names or pass on any of your information to anyone outside the research team.</p> <p>Do I have to take part?</p> <p>No - taking part is voluntary. You do not have to take part. It is completely up to you and you can change your mind at any time.</p> <p>Will I get anything for taking part?</p> <p>Every person that takes part in one of our discussion groups will be given £35 as a thank you for giving up their time.</p>	<p>What if I have some more questions?</p> <p><i>If you have any other questions, please feel free to get in touch with:</i></p> <p>Rachel Kinsella Email: r.kinsella@natcen.ac.uk Phone: 020 7549 9543</p> <p>Project Team</p> <p>Naomi Jones – Research Director Rachel Kinsella – Researcher Naomi Day – Researcher Alan Ross – Researcher Robin Legard – Fieldwork Advisor</p> <p>National Centre for Social Research 35 Northampton Square London EC1V 0AX Tel: +44 (0)20 7250 1866 Fax: +44 (0)20 7250 1524 Web: www.natcen.ac.uk</p> <p>The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is the largest independent social research institute in Britain. We design, carry out, and analyse, research studies in the fields of social and public policy. NatCen is a company limited by guarantee (Company registration number: 4392418) and a registered charity (Charity number 1091768)</p>
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Appendix B Topic Guide

Qualitative study: Building understanding of fairness and equality in England, Wales and Scotland Note: Introduction to the topic guide

As this is an investigative and exploratory study, we wish to encourage participants to discuss their views, perceptions, attitudes and experiences in an open way without excluding issues which may be of importance to the study. Therefore, unlike a survey questionnaire or semi-structured interview, the questioning will be responsive to the issues raised in group discussion.

The following guide does not contain pre-set questions but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored within each group. It does not include follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as it is assumed that participants' contributions will be fully explored throughout in order to understand how and why views are held.

The topics will be introduced and explored in turn within each group. The amount of time spent on different themes will vary between groups in response to the discussion generated amongst participants.

NB: text in italics within the guide denotes instruction to the researcher.

Aims and Objectives:

The aim of this study is to explore participants' understanding of, and views on equality and fairness.

The key objectives are:

- To explore participants' understanding of the terms fairness, equalities and good relations (GR).
- To explore how participants understand good relations and how they relate this to understandings of fairness and equality.
- To explore what factors drive participants' attitudes to fairness and equality and GR including:
 - Social knowledge
 - Values
 - Social context
 - Life course experience
- To explore how participants legitimise their beliefs about fairness and equality
- To explore how participants rank achieving equality and GR in relation to other desirable social outcomes
- To explore participants' aspirations in relation to equality and fairness and GR both for themselves and for wider society
- To explore the language that participants use in relation to equality and fairness and GR in order to inform survey questions

1. Introduction (5 mins)

Aim: to introduce the research and set the context for the focus group.

- Introduce **self and NatCen**. Explain why two researchers are present (where applicable)
- **Introduce the study and the Commission:**
NatCen has been asked to carry out this research by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. The purpose of the study is to find out what the general public think about equality and fairness. This is so that the Commission can make sure that the work they do fits well with what people think.
- **Stress independence of NatCen:**
Although NatCen is carrying out this research on behalf of the Equalities and Human Rights commission we are completely independent. We have no particular agenda in doing this research, we're simply here to listen to what you have to say.
- Details about their participation:
 - **voluntary** nature of participation - both overall and in relation to any specific questions and discussions
 - **recording** of focus group
 - **confidentiality**, and how findings will be reported
 - Ask people to **respect** each other's views and confidentiality
 - Emphasise that there is no need for people to share personal experiences unless they want to.
 - length of group –**1.5 hours**. Will finish on time
- Explain there are **no wrong or right** answers – interested in views, opinions and experiences.
- Explain that we're not expecting them to be experts and that we're certainly not experts ourselves. We're not interested in catching them out, just hearing what they have to say.
- Basic ground rules:
 - **mobile phones off/on silent**
 - **no consensus** sought – range of views useful
 - **talking one at a time** (recording)
- Any **questions** they have.

2. Background (7 mins)

Aim: to allow each participant to introduce themselves to the facilitator and the group.

Participants should pair up and take 2 minutes to gather the following information about each other. Each person states their name first and then feedbacks the key information for their partner to the group.

- Background about themselves
 - What they do as a main activity
 - How long they have lived in the area
 - Family background
- Something that happened to them in the last month that they considered to be unfair (*stress that this could be anything at all*)

3. Understanding of equality and fairness

Aims:

- 1) *To explore what participants understand by the terms equality and fairness.*
- 2) *To explore the language that participants use around equality and fairness*
- 3) *To explore what participants think about good relations and it's relationship to equality and fairness*

3a: Fairness (12 mins)

Link: We've been hearing a bit about your experiences of something you considered unfair thinking now about fairness more broadly I'd like to start by asking

Is Britain fair?

Prompts

What ways do they think that it is and isn't and why

- What does the term "fairness" mean
 - What makes something "fair"
 - What makes something "unfair"
- In what situations would they think about "fairness"
- Is fairness important?
- When do they talk about something being fair or unfair?
- Where is "fairness" important – in what contexts/situations/ Why?

Allow for spontaneous response. If not mentioned prompt with:

Housing

Education

Healthcare

Employment

- What are the effects of unfairness: examples?
- Is fairness a term that they would normally use?

3b: Equality (12 mins)

Is Britain equal?

Prompts

- Is equality a good thing? (where is and isn't it)
- What ways do they think that it is and isn't and why
- What does the term "equal/equality" mean
 - What makes something "equal"
- What helps to create equality?
- In what contexts would they think in terms of equality?
- How do they think equality differs from fairness?
- Where is equality important; in what sorts of situations? Why?

Allow spontaneous response, then prompt with:

Housing
Healthcare
Education
Employment

- What do they see as inequality?
- What are the implications of inequality?

3c: Good relations (12 mins)

What do participants understand by the term ‘good relations’

If asked to define then ask participants what they think it means

Flip chart exercise

Prompts

- Terms that they’re familiar with?
- In what situations have they heard it used? (people getting on with their communities? International relations?)
- What sorts of things contribute to good relations?
- How does good relations relate to equality? How does it relate to fairness?
- To what extent can good relations be independent of equality or fairness?
- Are good relations important in society? Where? Where not?
- Is it worth trying to achieve equality?
- What happens when you do not have “good relations”? Examples (*if extra prompting needed, ask what communities getting on well might look like*)
- What are the effects of poor relations?
- What do they understand by the following terms
If not already mentioned in any of the discussions:
Prejudice
Community cohesion
Justice
Discrimination
Neighbourliness

4. Real life situations (20 mins)

Aim: to understand what factors shape participants’ understanding of, and attitude to, equality and fairness.

Hand out the cards with the case studies on one by one and read them out

N.B. In each group you should go through three case studies but which ones you use is at your discretion

Case Study 1 (Economic Inequality)

A premier league footballer earns around £3 million a year while a shop assistant earns around £18,000 a year. What do you think about this?

Prompts

- What's the difference if:
The shop assistant is a nurse
The footballer is chief executive of a large bank
- What would make this more/less acceptable?

Case Study 2 (Discrimination)

A gay couple apply to rent a property but the landlord tells them that it has already been let. They later learn that the property had not really been let when they asked and was actually let two weeks later to a straight couple. What do you think about this?

Prompts

- Do they see this as being right or wrong?
- Would it have made any difference if the landlord had explicitly said in the advert that he didn't want a gay couple. Why?
- What would make this more/less acceptable?

Case Study 3 (Employment, faith and discrimination)

A Muslim women working as a hairdresser is asked not to wear a veil as her manager thinks that covering hair is bad for business. The hairdresser wants to wear her veil as it is an important part of her religion.

What do you think about this?

Prompts

- Would it make a difference if the woman was in a different job? What?
- Would it make a difference if the hairdresser was male and wore a turban?
- What do they think about employers telling staff how to dress generally?

Case Study 4 (Positive discrimination)

The London Metropolitan Police decides that the number of black Police Officers it employs is too small and doesn't represent the number of black people living in London. It therefore places a job advert that encourages black people to apply.

What do you think about this?

Prompts

- What would the difference be if the Police were looking to recruit more:
Women

Gay or Lesbian officers
People with a disability

- What if the advert did not explicitly say that the Police were looking for black applicants but the advert was placed in specialist magazines and newspapers read by large numbers of black people?
- Would it make any difference if it was the NHS putting out this advert? Or a large financial firm?

Case study 5 (Disability)

A disabled employee requires time off for doctor's appointments, hospital appointments, aids and adaptations appointments etc. Her employer says that she is taking too much time off and says she must book them as holidays. What do you think?

Prompts

- Does the nature of the disability make any difference?
- What factors would make this more or less acceptable?

5. Importance of equality (15 mins)

Aim; To explore how participants prioritise fairness and equality in relation to other social outcomes

Split groups into two and hand out a set of cards to each group. Ask each group to come up with the 3 cards that represent the issues that they see as being most important to the UK today and the 3 cards that they see as being the least important.

Allow 8 minutes for discussion then ask them to come back together and explain their choices to the other group.

Sorting cards:

A thriving economy
Equal healthcare for everyone
Good race relations
Controlled immigration
Low unemployment
Strong community spirit
Environmentally friendly behaviour
Tougher punishment for crime
Low gas and electricity prices
Good education for everyone
Higher minimum wage
Lower crime
Higher tax for high earners
Better public transport
Fairer treatment of people with disabilities

Prompts

- What did they disagree/ agree on?
- Reasons for the order

- Any situations in which they would move X higher up
- Difficulty or ease of deciding order
- Do any of these issues relate to equality and fairness
 - Which ones
 - Why
- Would there answers have been different 6 months ago

6. Reflections (8 mins)

Aim: to give group participants the opportunity to give overall thoughts on equality and fairness.

- Are these subjects that participants would normally have thought about?
- Why/Why not?
- How important do they consider them to be?
- Thoughts on the group in general
- If they were in government what would their recommendations for equality and fairness be?
- How comfortable did you feel talking about these issues with each other?

Bring discussion to close, thank respondents and reiterate confidential nature of the group.

Any questions about us or the research?

Give out incentives

Appendix C Focus group participant breakdown**England**

Group No.	No. participants	Ethnic minority	Mental or physical disability	Lesbian gay, or bisexual	Religious belief - Christian	Religious belief - Muslim	Religious belief - Other
1	6	2	0	1	1	0	4
2	8	0	3	0	2	0	1
3	8	3	1	2	0	1	1
4	8	0	2	0	5	0	1
5	8	2	1	2	2	1	1
6	9	0	4	0	6	0	1
7	9	2	3	2	3	2	3
8	7	2	1	1	5	0	1
21	9	3	0	0	4	0	2
Total	72	14	15	8	28	4	15
Quotas	64	9	6	4	8	3	0

Scotland

Group No.	No. participants	Ethnic minority	Mental or physical disability	Lesbian gay, or bisexual	Religious Belief - Christian	Religious Belief - Muslim	Religious Belief - Other
9	9	0	0	0	7	0	0
10	6	0	0	0	4	0	0
11	9	2	2	2	5	0	1
12	9	0	1	0	7	0	0
13	7	2	1	0	3	0	0
14	8	0	4	0	7	0	0
15	9	0	1	2	4	0	0
16	9	0	1	1	3	0	0
22	9	0	8	0	6	0	1
Total	75	4	18	5	46	0	2
Quotas	72	4	6	4	8	2	0

Wales

Group No.	No. participants	Ethnic minority	Mental or physical disability	Lesbian, gay or bisexual	Welsh speakers	Religious Belief - Christian
17	8	3	1	3	0	2
18	8	0	0	0	3	2
19	7	0	2	0	0	7
20	8	0	1	1	8	4
23	8	1	1	3	0	1
Total	39	4	5	7	11	16
Quotas	32	2	3	4	8	5

Contacts

England

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline
FREEPOST RRLG-GHUX-CTR
Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester M4 3AQ

Main number 0845 604 6610
Textphone 0845 604 6620
Fax 0845 604 6630

Scotland

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline
FREEPOST RSAB-YJEJ-EXUJ
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DU

Main number 0845 604 55 10
Textphone 0845 604 5520
Fax 0845 604 5530

Wales

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline
FREEPOST RRLR-UEYB-UYZL
3rd Floor, 3 Callaghan Square, Cardiff CF10 5BT

Main number 0845 604 8810
Textphone 0845 604 8820
Fax 0845 604 8830

Helpline opening times

Monday to Friday: 8am – 6pm

Calls from BT landlines are charged at local rates, but calls from mobiles and other providers may vary.

Calls may be monitored for training and quality purposes.

Interpreting service available through Language Line, when you call our helplines.

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language please contact the relevant helpline to discuss your needs. All publications are also available to download and order in a variety of formats from our website

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Building understanding of fairness, equality and good relations in Scotland

by Fiona Dobbie et al.

This study explores public understanding of the concepts 'equality', 'fairness' and 'good relations' and the key factors that influence attitudes about these issues in Scotland. It also considers the implications of people's understanding and attitudes for achieving change. It reports on focus groups and a stakeholder seminar held in Scotland and is part of a larger British-wide study (see Building understanding of fairness, equality and good relations, report 53).