

'Fight For Fairness' speech to set out government's new approach to equality

- Liz Truss to set out government's move to root out inequality that impacts people across the UK
- New evidence-based approach to tackle geographical inequality and break down barriers to social mobility – moving away from current way of thinking
- Equality Hub to relocate to the North and take on sponsorship of the Social Mobility Commission to give this agenda real teeth and coherence

Minister for Women and Equalities, Liz Truss, will today (Thursday 17th December) set out the Government's new approach to tackling inequality in the UK.

In a speech, 'The New Fight for Fairness', at the Centre for Policy Studies, the Minister will make the case for change, saying:

"The British story has been driven from its earliest days by the desire for liberty, agency and fairness. In the simplest sense it is the notion that in Britain you will have the opportunity to succeed at whatever you wish to do professionally, that you can be whoever you want to be, dress however you want to dress, love whoever you wish to love and achieve your dreams."

She will also set out the current problem with the debate around equality in this country:

"Too often, the equality debate has been dominated by a small number of unrepresentative voices, and by those who believe people are defined by their protected characteristic and not by their individual character."

The speech marks a new approach to the Government's equality policy, with a commitment to individual dignity and opportunity at its heart. The Minister will also launch the Equality Data Programme in the speech, the large-scale project will gather data in order to better understand the barriers that people from every background are facing across the UK.

This is a significant change from the previous work of the Equality Hub, which often focused on people with a single protected characteristic and compared outcomes narrowly within those groups. The Minister will set out why this approach hasn't worked, and has often created further divides. She will say:

"Underlying this [approach] is the soft bigotry of low expectations, where people from certain backgrounds are never expected or considered able enough to reach high standards.

"This diminishes individual humanity and dignity.

"Because when you choose on the basis of protected characteristics, you end

up excluding people.”

By considering a wide range of issues, such as geography and social background, the Data Programme will deliver on a manifesto commitment to improve evidence on equality and to support levelling up ambitions. The information gathered will be used to inform policy decisions across government, and will allow the Equality Hub to deliver on the public’s priorities.

Liz Truss is expected to say:

“Just as our forebears fought for change, we must fight for change again – challenging whatever is unfair and unjust today.

“It is not right that sometimes having a particular surname or accent can make it harder for people to get a job.

“It is appalling that pregnant women suffer discrimination at work. Or that women may be encouraged to dress in a certain way to get ahead. Or that some employers overlook the capabilities of people with disabilities.

“Now is the time to root the equality debate in the real concerns people face, delivering quality housing, cutting commute times, improving public transport, ending discrimination in our offices, factories and shop floors, and improving our schools so every child has the same chances in life.

“It is our duty to deliver, because if right-thinking people do not lead the fight for fairness, then it will be led by those whose ideas do not work.”

In another move, the Social Mobility Commission will move to be sponsored by the Equality Hub following recommendations from the Commission itself and the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. This will place the social mobility agenda at the heart of government and further advancing the influence it has on the development of evidence-based action.

To further demonstrate the Government’s commitment to levelling up the whole country and listening to the voices of everyone in the UK, the Equality Hub will also relocate to the North of England. Existing data clearly shows a gap between London and the South East and the rest of the UK in things such as life expectancy, pay and GDP.

The Minister is expected to say:

“...The equality agenda must be prosecuted with fierce determination and clarity of purpose up and down the country not just in London board rooms and Whitehall offices.

“Whether that be making the case for free schools in deprived areas or using data to help regional businesses attract investment we will use the power of evidence to drive reform and tailor that reform to local needs.

“We will drive this action from the North of England, where we are moving the Equality Hub. And we will also take on the power of the Social Mobility

Commission and give this agenda real teeth.”

The speech will also give a strong government-wide commitment to continue the Equality Hub’s work related to race and ethnic disparities, women’s economic empowerment, LGBT rights and the National Strategy for Disabled People.

And next year, the UK will also use its role as President of the G7 to ramp up work on championing freedom, human rights and the equality of opportunity. During her speech the Minister will make it clear that there is a strong economic case to continue the fight for equality of opportunity, especially as up to £250bn could be added to the economy if women opened businesses at the same rate as men.

Robert Colvile, Director of the Centre for Policy Studies said:

“If the pandemic has shown us anything, it’s that there are still vast inequalities across the country which need to be addressed. It is welcome news that the work of Equality Hub won’t be limited to individual protected characteristics, but rather take into account the needs of every part of society, levelling up the regions and empowering our youth, restoring dignity and offering the same opportunities to all, irrespective of their postcode, gender or heritage.”

Steven Cooper and Sandra Wallace, co-chairs of the Social Mobility Commission said:

“We are delighted that the Prime Minister has backed our proposal for a greater focus on social mobility at the heart of Whitehall. We look forward to helping drive the levelling up agenda in the regions whilst continuing our important research work and delivery programmes with key partners such as major employers. We value our independence and will continue to be a big voice advocating for progress and change.”