

Memorandum submitted by Lord Low of Dalston [BY EMAIL]

You have asked for short submissions for your inquiry into the work of the EHRC. You will find that they don't come much shorter than this. I don't have a lot to say, but I do have a perspective on the work of the EHRC, having been active in disability organisations for a long time, a member of the National Disability Council 1996–2000, a Disability Rights Commissioner 2000–2002, Chair of RNIB 2000–2009, Vice-President of the Disability Alliance 1999– and President of SKILL 2008–.

I am aware that the EHRC has not been a happy organisation and the leaders of the Disability Committee have found it difficult to get a sympathetic hearing for their agenda within the Commission. Much of this is put down to the management style of the Chairman but most of this is anecdotal, and I realise is not hard evidence. What is more concrete and incontrovertible, is that as a Parliamentarian I have witnessed a dramatic transformation in the level of briefing we have received as a result of the transition from the DRC to the EHRC. The DRC would send us a constant stream of substantial, well-researched briefings—maybe at the rate of two or three a month—on matters of moment to disabled people, which assisted us materially to keep disability to the fore in Parliament. With the advent of the EHRC, this has slowed to a trickle and almost completely dried up. If we get anything at all, this is often only as a result of proactive requests. This has been disappointing, and is certainly not to the advantage of disabled people in Parliament. At times one has almost been tempted to think of the EHRC as a failing organisation.

I think some of this may stem from the EHRC's determination to approach equality in a holistic, cross-strand fashion. There is certainly merit in this approach but it is a mistake to set up a rigid antithesis between a holistic and a strand-based approach. A desire to approach equality holistically should not be at the expense of a proper focus on the specific strands of the equality agenda, such as disability, when that is called for.

5 November 2009