

face equality

What policy-makers must do to make face equality a reality



In the UK today one person in 111 has a significant disfigurement to their face and many more have disfigurements on their body or hands. Disfigurement can affect anyone at any time from any ethnic group, gender or background. Common causes include birthmarks, cleft lips and palates, scarring from accidents, warfare or violence, cancer surgery, skin and eye conditions and facial paralysis.

A public attitudes survey conducted in January 2008 revealed that 90% of the UK public find it difficult to attach positive qualities to people with disfigurements. Whilst not believing they do this, they implicitly judge people with disfigurements as being less attractive, less likely to succeed, less socially skilled and less likely to lead happy lives.

If left unchallenged, such attitudes can lead to unwitting discrimination, affecting how children, young people and adults who have disfiguring conditions are treated in school, at work, in public situations and as service users and customers.

People with scars, birthmarks, skin and other conditions are often seen to be less intelligent at school, are rejected at job interviews, provided with inadequate health-care, ridiculed in public places and are portrayed in negative and uniformed ways in the media.

Ending such 'disfigurement discrimination' requires a nationwide shift in public attitudes and behaviour. Improvements must also be made to policies and procedures that shape education, employment, health and social care, the media and creative industries.

RADAR supports the Face Equality campaign because we want a just and equal society whose strength is human difference. That means rooting out discrimination in all its forms – from insidious prejudice to outright bullying. We wish the campaign every success.

Phil Friend OBE, Chair and Liz Sayce, Chief Executive,
RADAR (Royal Association for Disability Rights)

Disfigurement in law

Although disfigurement is sometimes associated with functional impairment, the main issue is that systemic prejudices towards people with disfigurements can adversely affect their opportunities in all aspects of life – which can be disabling.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 established legal protection for people with 'severe disfigurement.' *Changing Faces* believes 'significant disfigurement' would offer better legal protection as severity does not correlate with the levels of discrimination or psychological distress that an individual can experience.

Current equality legislation continues to send the strong message about the need to respect, protect and promote the rights of people with disfigurements.

FACE EQUALITY IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

“ When I go to hospital, the surgeon refers to my condition as a defect, an abnormality – not knowing how that makes me feel as a person. I realise surgery is important, but I am a person not just a condition. ”

Without adequate access to psycho-social care, patients with disfigurements are more likely to need longer physical recovery time and are vulnerable to common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety in later life.

Changing Faces calls on policy-makers in health and social care to:

- improve access to disfigurement-specific psychological therapy services for people with disfiguring conditions, through adequate referral systems – such as in burn care, cancer services and dermatology
- strengthen the quality of psychological therapy services through NICE-compliant treatment - integrated into patient pathways – with outcomes that are routinely monitored using clinical and service indicators
- train all staff so they have a thorough understanding and knowledge of disfigurement and its causes and effects
- adopt health promotion and prevention initiatives to reduce future psycho-social problems.

By doing this, you will ensure better mental health and well-being of people with disfigurements and their families.

FACE EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

“ People often assume that I have learning difficulties because of my appearance. At school I was bullied because of the way I looked. To get to where I am now was like running up the down escalator. ”

Negative attitudes amongst staff and peers can affect children and young people throughout their education and make it harder for them to achieve and to enjoy school, leading to potential psychological and social problems in adulthood. To ensure that children and young people with disfigurements are not disadvantaged at school requires prompt action with reasonable adjustments made, in early years, throughout school and in further and higher education.

Changing Faces calls on policy-makers in education to:

- equip and train all professionals in all education settings so that they learn positive attitudes and behaviours towards pupils with disfigurement and high expectations about their future
- ensure all governing bodies charged with equality duties promote face equality, positive attitudes and participation
- track progress on tackling appearance-related teasing and bullying through an active school council which includes pupils with conditions that affect their appearance.

By doing this, you will create a culture of inclusion for all children and young people throughout their education.



FACE EQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT

“ I got more and more disheartened when interview after interview, I would walk into the room and see the panel's faces when they looked up and saw me – they really didn't know how to deal with my disfigurement and this no doubt affected how they judged me. ”

People with disfigurements often face long periods of unemployment, are under-employed and receive poorer customer service.

Changing Faces calls on policy-makers in employment to:

- challenge negative attitudes about disfigurement and address issues of appearance-related bullying and harassment at work
- promote positive and equal treatment for people who have disfigurements at every stage of employment
- equip all staff, volunteers, contractors and others with the knowledge, awareness, skills and confidence to interact confidently with people with disfigurements
- equip those who work in customer care or services with the knowledge, awareness, skills and confidence to provide excellent customer service to customers or clients with disfigurements.

By doing this you will ensure that disfigurement discrimination is eliminated from the UK workforce and employees, clients and customers with disfigurements are guaranteed respect, fair treatment and equality of opportunity.

FACE EQUALITY IN MEDIA, CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

“ For years I believed that many opportunities were not open to me in life because I never saw any positive role models of people who had disfigurements in the media or advertising. ”

Media, advertising and other portrayals of people with disfigurements can reinforce negative social assumptions and stereotypes about – and hence behaviours towards – them. Such assumptions include seeing disfigurement as a problem to be 'fixed' by surgery, as a tragedy or as associated with criminality or low intelligence.

Changing Faces calls on policy-makers in the media and creative industries to:

- train all staff so that they have a thorough understanding and knowledge of disfigurement, its causes and effects and the stereotypes and myths associated with it
- actively encourage people with disfigurements to enter the industry
- show and portray people with disfigurements in a variety of roles including incidental, everyday roles that 'normalise' the experience
- make more explicit reference to disfigurement within existing policies and procedures related to diversity and equality.

By doing this, you will ensure that the overall portrayal, coverage and reporting of disfigurement in the media and the creative industries is informed, balanced, fair and non-prejudicial.



The Face Equality campaign

Changing Faces launched the Face Equality campaign in 2008, to make sure that everyone, irrespective of facial appearance, is treated fairly and equally. We aim to raise people's awareness of and familiarity with disfigurement, and of the unwitting prejudices and negative assumptions that may be held about people who have disfigurements.

Such efforts need to be supported by policy and legislation.

Politicians and policy-makers across all levels of government and those who make and influence policy in education, employment, health and social care and in media, culture and the creative industries must commit to tackling prejudice and discrimination towards people with disfigurements.

For further information go to www.changingfaces.org.uk

Best practice and reasonable adjustments in policy and law

Changing Faces calls on governments, policy makers and regulators in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to enhance existing equality and human rights legislation (the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995) to ensure that it strengthens the legal grounds of disfigurement discrimination. In particular we urge those departments dealing with:

- *Health and social care* to develop policies and guidelines to ensure that the social and psychological needs of their patients are given as much consideration as their medical/surgical needs.
- *Children, schools and families* to develop policies and guidelines to ensure that schools, colleges and other educational institutions are equipped to create a culture of inclusion for children with disfigurements in schools.
- *Work and pensions* to develop policies and guidelines to ensure that discrimination against people with disfigurements is outlawed in employment.
- *Media, culture and the creative industries* to develop policies based on *Changing Faces'* guidelines aimed at ensuring fairer, broader, and more factual reporting and portrayals of disfigurement.

Changing faces
the way you face
disfigurement

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