

The Commission looking into the possibility of a British bill of rights is supposed to support diversity and inclusivity, but is fatally compromised by its narrow membership base

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As debates on the role of the European Court of Human Rights in UK society continue, Nick Clegg and Ken Clarke have recently launched a Commission to look at the possibility for a UK Bill of Rights. [Conor Gearty](#) writes that despite its independence, the Commission is weakened by its own obvious lack of diversity.

On 18 March 2011, the justice secretary Kenneth Clarke and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg launched an independent [Commission](#) to investigate the case for a bill of rights for Britain, after months of Conservative pressure, and voiced disdain for the European Court of Human Rights. The plan is to advise on reform of the European Court of Human Rights as well as on whether a UK bill of rights would be a good thing to have, with or without the Human Rights Act. The Commission is to be headed by former senior civil servant Sir Leigh Lewis and includes eight 'human rights experts': Martin Howe QC, Anthony Lester QC, Jonathan Fisher QC, Helena Kennedy QC, Anthony Speaight QC, Philippe Sands QC, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky and Sir David Edward.

Whoops... can anyone spot the problem here? Yes, all members of the Commission are ethnically white. And with the honourable exception of Helena Kennedy, all are men. And none of these white men and one woman are particularly in the first flush of youth either – I make the average age about 62.

Now maybe none if this would matter if the Commission were tasked to advise on pensions law, or some *recherché* aspect of international finance, the sort of thing that middle-aged white professional men are good at. But shouldn't the future of human rights in Britain be discussed with inclusivity and diversity in mind, with the notions of tolerance and plurality at its heart?

Maybe those on the Commission are just marvellously imaginative people, not chosen because the two white men of a certain age who picked them had in mind their party loyalty or their [known views](#) on what needs to be discussed. Then again, maybe not.

And what about the obligation to provide equal opportunities under the section 71 Race Relations Act 1976, section 76A Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and section 49A Disability Discrimination Act 1995? As of last week, these have been replaced by the more rigorous duty under section 149 of the [Equality Act 2010](#).

Don't get me wrong. I am not vying for a place on this Commission. After all I am a middle-aged white man like the rest of them, and have no business butting in, even if I thought I had something to say (which I don't – other than that the Commission should be immediately disbanded as its task is irrelevant and its mission now in any event fatally compromised by its narrow membership base).

Ah well. We can now expect large numbers of people who are not able bodied white men around the age of 62 to be packed into the various advisory bodies that will be hastily conjured up when the problem dawns on those in charge. This is the problem with mixing only with your own kind. We know from his [Munich speech](#) on the [failings of multiculturalism](#) that the Prime Minister wants Muslims to get out more. Maybe he should say the same to his white colleagues in government.