

Mainstreaming disability equality in the public sector

“On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we’re taking the opportunity to remind everyone that everyone is entitled to equal opportunity at work, regardless of whether or not they have a disability,” Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, said today.

Dr. Wardlow was opening a conference organized by the Equality Commission at Malone House in Belfast to mark the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

‘Disability Action Plans - Delivering Results’, addresses access to public services for people with disabilities and inclusive employment practices, amongst other topics. The Conference is aimed at helping public sector bodies use disability action plans to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in their work. It draws on expert legal advice and good practice examples from the public sector in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

“The DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) bans disability discrimination and harassment against disabled job seekers and employees,” Dr Wardlow said. “The duty to make reasonable adjustments, contained in the legislation, is very significant and distinguishes the DDA from other anti-discrimination laws.”

The Equality Commission still receives more complaints to its legal team every year about disability discrimination than it receives about any other type of discrimination. Last year these amounted to 39% of all discrimination complaints.

“People with disabilities are entitled to be full and equal participants in every aspect of society - and that includes the workplace, Dr Wardlow concluded. “We need to ensure that barriers which prevent that, whether they are physical or in attitudes and practices, are removed. It’s vital that employers treat all employees and job applicants equally,”

The picture shows speakers at today’s conference in Belfast to mark the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities: Vince Fletcher, Scottish Prison Service; Jacqui McKee, Director, Advice & Compliance, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; Jack Keyes, former County Manager, Cavan Council; Catherine Casserley, BL, Cloisters Chambers; Orla McCann, Access Manager, Disability Action and Paul Browne, Queen’s University, Belfast.