



*View from the Chair, Business Newsletter, 21 Dec 2010,
Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner, The Equality Commission.*

In 2011, there may be fewer job opportunities out there for many of us, but there is no doubt that someone who is disabled, a young person, a carer or a Traveller, faces more barriers than most. When added to the other disadvantages such people suffer this is particularly important, because a job is crucial for everyone's economic and social wellbeing and is one of the key routes to social mobility and inclusion. That is why fairness and equality in employment are matters of fundamental importance – and that remains true irrespective of our current economic difficulties.

It is for that reason that the Equality Commission has been developing an employability strategy to encourage employers to provide jobs for those who are marginalised within the labour market and to increase all employers' awareness of the issue of employability.

Our new Employability Toolkit encourages business and all employing organisations to take positive action and to reach out to under-represented groups who face difficulties in getting work.

The Employability Toolkit was developed following feedback from a series of business seminars delivered by the Commission. In these, 66% of employers surveyed said they had developed an employability initiative or intended to do so, and over half (55%) suggested that more information and training would encourage them to develop their own initiatives.

The new web-based guidance we have developed from this gives examples of best practice and a directory of the employability projects which are already in operation throughout Northern Ireland. It provides information and advice for public and private sector employers and Equality Commission staff can help employers with their responsibilities under all the equality laws.

Earlier this year, when the Commission carried out research into the impact of the economic downturn, we found that has been a particularly severe effect on certain groups, with young people, and particularly young men, most severely

affected to date. It also indicated that women, lone parents and disabled people were likely to be increasingly affected as the downturn increasingly impacts upon public sector employment and voluntary and community organisations.

For people who are disadvantaged and excluded from many of the benefits of our society, help in finding jobs can be key to a sense of belonging and an appreciation of their own worth. It is only by the inclusion of everyone in all aspects of our society, that we can build a thriving economy and an infrastructure fit for a more prosperous future.