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Press Release

Twenty Years Since the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

“Twenty years ago, on 8 November 1995, the Disability Discrimination Act was enacted, giving disabled people a right to legal redress against discrimination for the first time,” Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said today. “The need for it, and its importance, can be seen in the fact that the Equality Commission receives more allegations of discrimination on grounds of disability than on any other equality ground. In the last year, 37% of all discrimination complaints the Commission received were about disability.”

“Strong legal protection for disabled people under the law is essential and the ‘reasonable adjustment’ duty, which is unique to the DDA, sets it apart from other equality legislation. It imposes a duty on employers and service providers to take positive steps to remove barriers which might prevent disabled people participating in employment or accessing their services. This can mean that a disabled person may be treated more favourably in order to remove a disadvantage they experience due to their disability.”

In April 2010, the Equality Act 2010 strengthened disability equality law in Great Britain, but many of those improvements have not been introduced in Northern Ireland. “We have been urging the Northern Ireland Executive to update the law here to, at a minimum, remove the significant gaps which now exist between disability equality legislation in Northern Ireland and the law in Great Britain.” Dr. Wardlow said. “As well as enhancing protection for disabled people, this could simplify the legislation and harmonise it, making it more effective and easier to understand, making it easier for employers and others to comply with their responsibilities.

“We have continued to call on Government to update and improve its Disability Strategy, in close consultation with disabled people, to ensure that all barriers which prevent them being full and equal participants in society are removed,” Dr. Wardlow said.

The Commission is also, together with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, part of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Northern Ireland (IMNI) which

promotes and monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

“As part of this role,” Dr. Wardlow said, “we have identified a number of issues affecting disabled people in Northern Ireland. These include equal recognition before the law, living independently and being included in the community, shortfalls in education and health, and the need for an adequate standard of living and social protection.”

ENDS

- The Commission’s key concerns regarding gaps in the realisation of the rights of disabled people in Northern Ireland were included in the [interim list of issues report of the UK Independent Mechanism](#) on the progress made on implementing UNCRPD.
- The report on shortfalls in Northern Ireland was based on this [research](#).
- The Commission has [proposals](#) for extending the disability discrimination law.