

**'View from the Chair' article published in the Business Newsletter, 13 Jan 2015
by Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI**

Why age discrimination law reform is needed

Recently I joined with the Commissioners for Older People and Children and Young People to express our dismay that the Northern Ireland Executive is not going to proceed during this Assembly mandate with legislation to protect people from discrimination on grounds of age when accessing goods, facilities and services.

The law in Northern Ireland protects people against age discrimination in the workplace only; and this gap in protection can affect people in a wide range of areas. These can include the purchase of goods, using financial or insurance services, accessing hotels or restaurants, as well as public services such as health and social care or transport.

Elsewhere in the United Kingdom the law has covered these issues, though only for people over the age of 18, since 2010, but people in Northern Ireland continue to have no recourse if they suffer this type of discrimination because of their age. The Equality Commission has long argued that this should be changed and the Executive's Programme for Government 2012-15 included a commitment to extend the scope of the existing age discrimination law to deal with the issue.

It is a great disappointment that the Executive has made it clear that this promise will not now be fulfilled during this Assembly.

We will continue our work, together with all those in the age sector, to have this gap in the legislation filled. But of course, even though there is no legislation governing this particular area, people who are providing services and selling goods to the public will be well aware of the benefits of making their business as open and welcoming as possible to all sections of the community.

That is good business – to reach out to as wide a demographic as possible. It is also good for our society in helping to break down unnecessary barriers which exclude people and limit their options in life. No-one should be treated less favourably because they are seen as part of a particular group. That is true when we talk about disability, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation; and it is equally true when we come to

consider people who are older, younger or any age in between.

We should always see the person - not the label; and deal with that person fairly and equally on the basis of their individual capabilities and needs.

Read more about [Age Law Reform](#)