



**‘View from the Chair’ article published in the Business Newsletter, 19 Jan 2016  
by Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI**

**Why employers can benefit from having an Equality Plan**

Legislation to challenge discrimination in the workplace has been with us for years. Protection against gender based discrimination, for example, has been in place for 40 years, but it accounts for the second highest number of calls to our advice team, with almost 1,000 contacts last year alone. Indeed only last week the Commission highlighted the case of a Finance Manager who was paid £50,000 by her employer in settlement of a sex discrimination case.

For some employers, too often their only experience of dealing with equality issues is a reactive one, arising in response to a problem when it becomes a case of “firefighting” grievances or complaints.

Practically speaking, when you’re running a business, I appreciate that it is the present day to day priorities which demand your immediate attention. However, all good business people know that it is vital to take a step back to take stock of the bigger picture, anticipating potential risks for the business and deciding how to plan to mitigate or avoid them. It is clear that employers who have taken the time to put equality policies and sound procedures in place, who build equality of opportunity into their ethos, are both more likely to avoid problems and better equipped to deal with any difficulties which arise.

The Equality Commission supports many employers with practical help in this process. Indeed, providing high quality training to employers on a wide range of equality issues is one of our central priorities. One way we do this is by offering free, expert help to businesses in how to draw up and implement practical equality plans to help manage their equality responsibilities.

An equality plan is a framework - practical, cohesive and, most importantly, manageable – which will coordinate all aspects of equality work undertaken within any organisation. It can be tailored to meet the specific needs of each company, allowing it to be responsive to its particular priorities. Such a plan will help a business review and audit its employment policies against legislative requirements and best practice, prepare for new developments in the law, assess and manage risks and coordinate all equality-related work throughout an organisation.

The Commission is hosting a free lunchtime event, at Malone House, Belfast on 10 February from 12.30 – 2pm. Local employers who have developed equality plans will be talking about their experience and how planning ahead has helped their business.

Any employer who is interested in coming along to this event and hearing more about developing an equality plan can find details on our website [www.equalityni.org/EqualityPlanSeminar](http://www.equalityni.org/EqualityPlanSeminar)