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PRESS RELEASE

25 years on, Disability Discrimination Act is as essential as ever

Today (3 December) marks International Day of Persons with Disabilities - a day dedicated to promote full and equal participation of people with disabilities and to take action for their inclusion in all aspects of society and development.

In Northern Ireland, one in five people live with a disability. They are a very diverse group, with a wide range of abilities, skills and aptitudes but many experience discrimination. The Disability Discrimination Act was enacted on 8 November 1995, providing disabled people a right to legal redress against discrimination for the first time.

A quarter of a century later, it is clear those protections are still needed. Every year the Commission's advice team receives more potential complaints of discrimination on grounds of disability than on any other ground. Last year 47.5% of all potential discrimination complaints the Commission received were about disability, 72.3% of those related to employment.

This year, in addition to supporting those who have experienced discrimination, we have also committed to working to encourage more and better jobs for disabled people. Many people with a disability are eager to find paid employment and further their careers. They are a very diverse group with a wide range of abilities, skills and aptitudes, many would be valuable assets to our economy. We are working with a range of organisations and stakeholders on this including the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment.

Northern Ireland's economy has suffered greatly as a result of Covid-19, with many businesses closed and employees made redundant. The reality is that jobs have become scarcer. But, as we prepare for economic recovery, we must ensure it is an inclusive recovery. It must be one which continues to uphold the law, protecting disabled people from discrimination in employment, and it should also include employment schemes for disabled people, positive action measures and reasonable adjustments to ensure no one gets left behind.

Many people with a disability have worked throughout the pandemic, some were unable to, while others still wish to join the workforce. But the employment rate in Northern Ireland for disabled people is 37.3%, the lowest figure across all of the UK regions. It is reported that disabled people have to apply for 60% more jobs than those without a disability before securing one.

For so many of us our job is part of our identity, secures our place in society and provides us with financial independence. To this end we remain committed to working in partnership to assist more people with a disability to secure and retain employment – which would be a significant step towards equality and inclusion for disabled people everywhere.

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