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PRESS RELEASE

Abusive Facebook page taken down

A facebook page abusing and inciting hatred against people with learning disabilities was brought to the attention of the Commission yesterday. It has since been taken down.

Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, commented, "This type of group is clearly deliberately created to shock and offend and it does both. The message of the site is deeply offensive and upsetting and it reveals profoundly disturbing attitudes and views. It does not appear to have a Northern Ireland slant nor to originate in Northern Ireland, but facebook can be accessed everywhere, including Northern Ireland.

The Commission keeps a watching brief on attitudes towards certain groups, one of which is people with learning disabilities. The huge majority of people in Northern Ireland are not prejudiced against people with learning disabilities, but are sensitive and caring. As everywhere, however, there is a small number who acknowledge that they may have a prejudice. The sentiments of this website go considerably beyond prejudice.

"We have no formal role in enforcing hate crime, however the Commission lobbied for the inclusion of disabilities including learning disabilities in the extension of Hate Crime Law and this came into effect in September 2004. This makes it unlawful to incite hatred or arouse fear on grounds of disability, which was defined as meaning any physical or mental impairment. The Commission sought this change in the law because we believe that strong legislation has an important role to play in bringing home to people the unacceptability of all crimes based on prejudice and hostility."

Note to editors

The Commission has responsibilities within Northern Ireland under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Prosecutions within Northern Ireland under the laws to combat hate crime are a matter for the Police Service for Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service.