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PRESS RELEASE

Disability - policy changes are necessary

A new study has identified significant gaps in public policy and service delivery for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland.

The research project commissioned by the Equality Commission, brings together a range of data and evidence and has included the active participation of people with disabilities from across Northern Ireland.

It highlights the cross-cutting areas of Awareness Raising, Participation in Public life and Access to Information as requiring immediate action in order to ensure the full implementation of the requirements of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), in addition to the crucial areas of Independent Living, Education and Work and Employment.

Speaking at a seminar today (Tuesday January 31, 2012) to an audience of public policy makers, disability campaigners and users of public services, Chief Executive Evelyn Collins, CBE said: "This research brings together a robust range of data and evidence which will be of key interest to those responsible for directing the development of policies and their effective delivery to the public.

"It highlights significant gaps in policy development and service delivery, which are having a considerable negative impact on the lives of many of those who participated in the study."

Negative attitudes held by service providers and deliverers were consistently cited by participants in the research as presenting a major area of difficulty. These attitudes may

result in a disabled person being denied a service. Individuals told of not being allowed enough time to fill in a form or to find a seat on a bus and of not being provided with information in accessible formats.

They also told researchers that they are not sufficiently involved by public authorities on the decisions and policies which affect their everyday lives.

Ms. Collins added: “We began this project to find out how policy and practice comply with existing legal requirements, with a particular focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We wanted to know more about the areas in which inequality persists and to get the views of disabled people on what should change to improve their lives.

“We have identified three main areas where disabled people would like to see focus and change and we will be reporting to Government that, if these issues were successfully dealt with, the lives of disabled people in Northern Ireland could be significantly improved. We will further use the information gathered from all of these sources to inform our parallel report to the United Nations.”

“These are not the only areas requiring attention, but changes to them are likely to have a significant impact on many lives. We hope that this research will be used by Government, public bodies, representative organisations and disabled people to inform the development and implementation of better policies and practices in Northern Ireland.

The research will be used by the Equality Commission in its role, along with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, as the Independent Mechanism for Northern Ireland which monitors the Government’s implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Notes to Editor:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is an international treaty that identifies the rights of disabled people and was ratified by the United Kingdom on 8 June 2009. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission have been jointly designated, under Article 33(2) of the Convention, as the Independent Mechanism for Northern Ireland to “promote, protect and monitor implementation” of the UNCRPD.
- The research was carried out by Disability Action’s Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities.
- The research was presented to an audience drawn from councils, public authorities, representative organisations, disabled people and academics at a seminar in the Holiday Inn, Ormeau Avenue, Belfast on 31 January 2012.

Four people with a disability provided insight into their lives for our publication “Working together to close the gaps” as part of this project. A brief synopsis of each is included below:

- Elizabeth Zammitt is a mother of two; she developed a disability following deterioration in her health shortly after the birth of her daughter. Elizabeth uses a motorized wheelchair due to her severe arthritis.
- Collie McElroy is from Newry and acquired his disability when he broke his back after falling from a ladder at home. Collie has participated in local politics and is a member of the REAL Network.
- Lyndsey Ewing enjoys tenpin bowling and has trained as a chef. Lyndsey is deaf and has a slight learning disability. She has had to undergo many operations throughout her life.
- Conor Maguire is almost 21 and is a huge music fan. Conor has Down’s Syndrome.