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PRESS RELEASE

Strengthening Protection for Children and Young People

Children and young people should be protected from age discrimination when accessing goods facilities and services, a conference in Belfast was told today.

The event, hosted jointly by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Commissioner for Children and Young People, was addressed by leading human rights lawyers, government spokespersons and by legal and policy experts from ECNI and NICCY.



Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said: “This is part of our efforts to encourage the extension of the law so that people of all ages are protected against age discrimination when they are accessing goods, facilities or services. The underlying principle for this is the same as for all forms of unlawful discrimination - people should not be treated less favourably because of their membership of a particular group. That is true for people who suffer discrimination because of their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or because they have a disability; and it should be equally true for people who are treated unfairly because they are young, old or any age in between.

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People said: “Discriminating against children and young people is simply wrong. There should be no barrier to accessing goods, facilities or services without justification.

“While children and young people must be protected from age restricted goods such as tobacco and alcohol they must not be discriminated against in education, in health, in financial services or in any situation where they are treated less favourably than an adult with comparable needs. This is not just my view – it is the view of legal experts, research and most importantly it is the view of children and young people themselves.”

Speaking at the event OFMdFM Junior Minister Jennifer McCann said: “Our Programme for Government shows we are determined to promote the best interests of our children and young people. The contribution of our children and young people is key to our future.

“Our Delivering Social Change and United Community Strategies have children’s rights, needs and issues at their very core. Eliminating unfair and unjustifiable age-based discrimination raises questions for all age groups. Children and young people have their particular needs and we must provide legislation that will provide clarity and the appropriate levels of protection.”

“I thank NICCY and the Equality Commission for their contributions on this legislation which has added considerably to our discussions. Through genuine partnership and collaboration we will meet the needs of all our children and young people.”

The two organisations have published a report recommending that people of all ages, including children and young people, should be protected against unlawful age discrimination and harassment when accessing goods, facilities and services. They argue that young people should not, without good reason, have their access to a service restricted or receive an inferior service, simply because of their age.

They recognise that, in certain circumstances, it may be right and proper to treat children and young people differently than adults and the law should reflect that through exemptions and concessions. Where there are statutory age limits on such matters as the purchasing of alcohol or where there are concessions which take account of the vulnerability and particular needs of young people, this should be reflected in the law.

Leading equality and human rights experts, Robin Allen QC and Dee Masters BL presented the legal perspective which underpins the two organisations' joint proposals. They argue that there is a real opportunity in the proposed Northern Ireland legislation, by including people under 18, to give a higher standard of protection against age discrimination in goods facilities and service and avoid inconsistencies of treatment.

The conference also heard from a member of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Linda Jordan, of the National Development Team for Inclusion about the implications for disabled children and young people when accessing health and social care. The NICCY Youth Panel also gave examples of the type of discriminatory behaviour encountered by young people.

NOTES

It is anticipated that the Northern Ireland Executive will consult on the proposed age discrimination legislation in the Winter of 2013/14.

ECNI and NICCY are working together to persuade government to include children and young people in the new law.

For more information on our joint recommendations on the areas which age discrimination should cover, please visit our webpages:

- [Equality Commission NI](#)
- [NICCY](#)

Photo caption: NI Commissioner for Children and Young People Patricia Lewsley; Jill Lapping, Lagan College; Junior Minister Jennifer McCann MLA and Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI