



**Press Release**

**10 November 2015**

## **Annual Report 2014-15**

“In a year which brought a high media profile for some areas of our work, the Equality Commission has continued to deliver against all our important statutory responsibilities across the full range of the equality legislation,” Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, said today

The Chief Commissioner was reflecting on the Commission’s work over the past year on the publication of the Equality Commission’s 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, for the year 2014/15.

“We continued to work on a daily basis with employers and service providers to help put equality at the heart of their policies, both in employment and in how they provide services to the public,” the Chief Commissioner said. “We provided free and confidential advice to over 3,300 individuals who believed they may have suffered discrimination over the last twelve months and supported 59 cases across all six grounds covered by the anti-discrimination legislation.”

“This year, as in previous years, the Commission received more complaints about discrimination on grounds of disability than on any other equality ground. “It is a matter of real concern that, 20 years after the Disability Discrimination Act was enacted, so many disabled people are still confronted by a lack of understanding of their rights under the law and by outright discrimination, both in the workplace and when they are accessing services,” Dr. Wardlow said.

The Commission, together with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, forms the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Northern Ireland in respect of the UNCRPD. During the year of this report, as part of this role, we commissioned research which identified a number of issues affecting disabled people in Northern Ireland which was used as the basis of our report to the United Nations on the progress made on implementing that body’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

“The research showed substantive shortfalls in crucial areas of life for disabled people in Northern Ireland,” Dr. Wardlow said. These included equal recognition before the law, living independently and being included in the community, education, health and having an adequate standard of living and social protection, as well as continuing discrimination. We will continue to work with employers, service providers and public bodies to ensure that rights in law are translated into practical improvements in the lives of disabled people.”

This year, the Commission has also continued to press the Northern Ireland Executive to bring forward important strategies on gender, childcare, race and sexual orientation which it committed to in the Programme for Government 2012 – 2015. The proposals to extend legislation on age discrimination in goods, facilities and services have now been the subject of consultation by OFMDFM and we hope it will be passed into legislation. The Commission also continued to urge that the law be extended to afford protection to everyone and not just those over the age of 16.

“One legal case we supported attracted significant publicity and initiated wide-ranging public discourse in Northern Ireland regarding the extent to which suppliers of goods and services can refuse service on grounds of sexual orientation, religious belief and political opinion. This has been an important debate which we will continue to be engaged in over the next period,” Dr. Wardlow said.

Throughout the year the Commission, in pursuance of its responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, offered advice and engaged with public authorities to help them comply with their Equality Schemes and ensure that their policies and decisions are made with the principles of equality of opportunity and good relations at their heart.

“The Commission has a crucial, independent, role to play in making Northern Ireland a fairer and more equal place for everyone irrespective of their background or characteristics,” Dr. Wardlow said. “We will continue to work using a combination of all our powers and duties to promote equality of opportunity and tackle inequality and discrimination in our society.”

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#### **Notes to Editor:**

- The Commission’s [fifteenth annual report](#) (downloads as pdf) covers the period from 1 April 2014 to 31 March and outlines the scale of the Commission’s remit

and responsibilities and how these have been delivered upon during the reporting period.

- The Commission's list of issues affecting people with disabilities in Northern Ireland was included in the [interim report of the UK Independent Mechanism](#) (downloads as pdf) on the progress made on implementing UNCRPD.
- The report on shortfalls in Northern Ireland was based on this [research](#), (downloads as pdf).
- Our [proposals for reform of the age discrimination law](#) are online.