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PRESS RELEASE

Belfast Firm Pays £25,000 in Settlement of Pregnancy Discrimination Case

A woman who lodged a tribunal case alleging sex discrimination related to her pregnancy has been paid £25,000 in a settlement by her employers, Intern Europe Limited, who have also apologised to her.

Ruth Faulkner, from Bangor, whose case was assisted by the Equality Commission, had worked there since June 2010 as a work placements officer, sourcing professional internships across Northern Ireland.

During her maternity leave Ms Faulkner had asked to work the same hours in a different pattern, to help her with her childcare commitments. Instead the company reduced her hours.

On the first day Ms. Faulkner returned to work after her maternity leave, she was immediately brought to a meeting where she was informed that her post was potentially at risk of redundancy. She alleged that she was told that the company wanted to discuss an option with her where she would choose to leave rather than go through a formal redundancy situation. Ms Faulkner claimed that she was informed that if she wanted to consider this option she could not return to her desk and had to leave the office right away.

Ms. Faulkner said: "Before I told them of my pregnancy I felt I was a respected member of their staff and that my work was appreciated. Afterwards I felt isolated, excluded, side-lined and ignored. When I returned to work after the birth of my child, to be confronted with a proposal to terminate my employment, I was shocked and upset."

"It is still too common for women who tell their employers they are pregnant to then feel they are treated in an unfair or discouraging way," Mary Kitson, Senior Legal Officer, Equality Commission, said. "Two years ago, our 'Expecting Equality' investigation found that over one third of the women interviewed felt they had been disadvantaged at work because of pregnancy or maternity leave. They cited effects on their finances, their career opportunities, their status at work and their health.

"All employers need to make sure that pregnant women and returning mothers have a supportive environment with flexible, family friendly policies and practices. That is what they are entitled to under the law. It also makes good business sense for employers themselves, enabling them to benefit from the skills and knowledge of experienced staff.

“In settling this case, Intern Europe apologised to Ms. Faulkner for any injury to feelings, distress and upset caused. It also affirmed its commitment to equality of opportunity and undertook to liaise with the Equality Commission. The Commission does extensive work with many businesses on this issue, helping them review their equal opportunities policies and encouraging the development of a supportive culture for pregnant employees and new mothers,” Ms Kitson said.

Note to editor:

In the year 2017-18, we had 895 calls to our advice line about sex discrimination, 25% of all complaints of discrimination. Of these, the largest single cause of complaint was to do with pregnancy or maternity (193, 22% of all sex discrimination complaints).

Further information

- [Pregnancy/Maternity guidance for employees](#)
- Pregnancy and maternity at work: guidance for employers in NI
- [online version](#) / [pdf download](#)