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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Belfast conference to hear of new partnership approach to Managing Mental Health in the Workplace**

Today, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Equality Commission and Unite the Union NI are hosting a meeting attended by over 160 Northern Ireland employers and HR professionals and more than 60 union workplace reps and trade unionists to discuss how best to provide support for employees dealing with mental health issues.

“Having a focus on mental health as much as on physical health is a major issue which all employers need to address,” **Billy Gamble, a Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**, said. “The Mental Health Foundation has identified mental ill health as the leading reason for absence from work in Northern Ireland, accounting for almost one out of every three days lost (32% of all days). Mental health issues also account for 39.1% of long-term sickness leave.

“There will be a full house of employers and HR professionals at this event. Many firms have already committed to our Mental Health Charter and have started implementing it and many more are interested and want to learn what’s involved.”

**Jackie Pollock, Regional Secretary for Unite the Union, welcomed the strength of participation from the employers’ side.**

“Mental health is one of the most pressing challenges faced by our union and by workers generally. Many disciplinary cases involve underlying mental health issues and our workplace reps are often the first to be approached by employees suffering from mental health difficulties. We know that a partnership approach to this issue is necessary.

“Many people experience mental ill health during their lives but, with the right help at the right time, they can recover. It is the responsibility of everyone in the workplace to create an environment that promotes wellbeing, including reasonable adjustments for mental illness. We want to see equality of opportunity and respect for their workers suffering with mental ill health.” he said.

A leading barrister from Cloisters in London, Catherine Casserley, will talk about making reasonable adjustments in the workplace for people with mental ill health and

provide an informative, in-depth review of this crucial legal issue. From Hyster Yale Craigavon, senior managers and the Unite the Union representative will share invaluable practical experience of introducing the Mental Health Charter in that company. Lynn Carson, Chair of CIPD Northern Ireland Branch, will speak on the People Managers' Guide to Mental Health and an employer and trade union panel will answer questions from the floor.

### **Notes for editors**

The [Mental Health Charter](#) is a successful initiative led by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland with ten partners, Action Mental Health, Aware Defeat Depression, Change Your Mind, Disability Action, HSENI, Inspire, LRA, Mental Health Foundation, Mind Wise and Responsible Business Network NI.

The Mental Health Charter is not a set of quality standards or an accreditation but is a voluntary commitment to developing best practice in the workplace.

Employers who sign up to the Charter will undertake to promote good mental health which will be beneficial to their business/organisation, employees and the whole community in Northern Ireland.