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## PRESS RELEASE

### Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Report

Speaking on the publication of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, Dr Michael Wardlow said:

"What is clear to me from our work this year is that 20 years on from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, people better understand the importance and benefits of having a more equal society and that it remains central to building a fairer society in Northern Ireland.

"The Agreement had equality at its core and it is important that this be evidenced in leadership in the public square. It is simply not enough to allow equality issues to be seen as some political or cultural football to be kicked around.

"The lack of a functioning Executive for over two and a half years means that we have seen no progress to strengthen the equality laws or to implement equality strategies.

"Our proposals to harmonise our equality laws into a single piece of equality legislation, or even to revise and update those laws, are clear, practical and necessary. We are, for example, the only area of the UK without legislative protection from age discrimination (for young as well as old) in areas such as health, social care, financial services and housing.

"For our society to flourish and succeed it has to be seen as a welcoming place - a society which accommodates difference and diversity. It is important that we have the legislation and strategies in place to allow this to happen.

"The Commission will continue to work to advance equality of opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland," concluded Dr Wardlow.

#### Note to Editor

- The twentieth Annual Report of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, covering the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019, was laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and the House of Commons on 18 July 2019.
- [The Annual Report is available online \(pdf\)](#)