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PRESS RELEASE

Equality Commission comment on Ulster University Review of Mental Health Policies in Northern Ireland: Making Parity a Reality

“The Equality Commission welcomes the publication of the Ulster University’s ‘Review of Mental Health Policies in Northern Ireland: Making Parity a Reality’, launched today in Belfast, says Dr Evelyn Collins, its Chief Executive.

“The report highlights that Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK that does not have an overarching mental health strategy and that the delivery of mental health treatments and care is fragmented and not properly resourced. It also highlighted ‘the issue for NI mental health care is not a lack of knowledge or awareness of what is required. Rather it is a lack of commitment to prioritise, adequately resource and implement recommendations that have already been made’.

“The Equality Commission has responsibilities to promote equality of opportunity and challenge discrimination on the grounds of disability, including mental ill health, under the Disability Discrimination Act,” Dr Collins explains. “We also work as part of a UK-wide monitoring body which seeks to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

“The last Mental Health Strategy in Northern Ireland lapsed in 2008 and has not been replaced. It’s important to note that health, including the provision of mental health services, is a devolved matter. The Commission has called for the Government to develop and implement a new strategy to address mental health issues in our society.

“One shocking statistic that was shared today is that ‘more people in NI have taken their own lives since the signing of the peace agreement in 1999 than were killed as a result of the Troubles between 1969 and 1997’. In our UNCRPD work, we have stressed the need to address the underfunding of mental health services and high rates of mental ill-health that prevail here.

“This valuable and interesting report summarises what has been done in mental health provision over the past ten years and the Commission supports the calls for action and change.”