



19 July 2021

Equality Commission's Annual Report 2020-21 published

The Equality Commission today published its Annual Report 2020-21.

Chief Commissioner, Geraldine McGahey OBE said: "Looking back at the last year or so, we can all agree it has been a time like no other, with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting on people's health, income, education and everyday routines.

"COVID 19 has shone a spotlight on the inequalities affecting many people's lives and we will be living with the aftermath of the pandemic for years to come. The Commission has been clear that the promotion of equality and good relations must be central to the continuing COVID-19 response and recovery plans, as well as the next Programme for Government, if we are to address these inequalities.

"Our Annual Report shows how the Commission delivered on its statutory obligations throughout the pandemic. We took every opportunity to promote the use of the equality law framework, including effective implementation of the equality and good relations duties set out in S75 of the Northern Ireland Act in policy making, so that equality considerations were considered by Ministers and Government Departments as they navigated their way through the pandemic.

"We highlighted the pressing need for adequate equality data, so that policies and resources could be targeted effectively. We moved our employer training programme online and produced guidance for employers and service providers to help deal with the new realities of business and employment, covering important issues such as furlough, redundancy and ensuring equality for disabled employees as they returned to work.

"The pandemic has reinforced the need for law reform including the introduction of legislation to protect people from discrimination on grounds of age in the provision of goods, facilities and services. We also emphasised the need for the Executive to focus on getting equality strategies in place, including a childcare strategy, to ensure the provision of affordable, good quality, accessible childcare provision as fundamental to economic recovery and economic participation.

"But strategies alone are not enough, concrete actions are needed and full and effective implementation of these. This was demonstrated during the Black Lives Matters protests and their aftermath when the inaction around the Executive's Racial Equality Strategy was laid bare. We need the Executive to improve the lives of all ethnic minority people living here if we are to progress as a society.

Ms McGahey concluded: "There is much work to be done as we navigate our way back to some level of normality. We must ensure that no one is left behind. The Commission will take forward the determination and flexibility that has characterised our work over the last year, with renewed focus on continuing engagement and

applying the lessons of this extraordinary year to promoting equality and challenging discrimination in Northern Ireland.”

- [Equality Commission Annual Report and Account 2020-21](#) (*pdf*)