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Belfast woman settles sex and age discrimination case against former employer Flint Studios Ltd

Susanne Rice, a 36 year old woman, has settled her claims of sex and age discrimination against her former employer Flint Studios Ltd for £15,000, paid without admission of liability. The case was supported by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Susanne had been employed as an Operations Manager with Flint Studios Ltd from June 2019. She was the only woman on the company's senior leadership team.

Susanne discovered that she was pregnant at the end of January 2020, but did not disclose her pregnancy to her employer at an early stage because of her medical history. Susanne received a letter from her GP to advise that due to COVID-19 she had been added to the shielded list, as a pregnant woman. At the beginning of April 2020 Susanne's employer asked her to send them a copy of her shielding letter.

Susanne was invited to a meeting on 21 May 2022 at which she was informed that the redundancy process was starting. Shortly after this meeting, Susanne told Flint Studios Ltd that she was 20 weeks pregnant. She was then told of her redundancy on 29 May 2020 and her contract was terminated on 1 June 2020. Susanne raised grievances with her employer, but these were not upheld and a further appeal was also dismissed.

Susanne felt she was ignored when she raised concerns and made some suggestions for improvement around management issues. She felt uncomfortable with the way she was treated by other senior male staff; she believes she was treated this way because she was a woman and also because she was young.

Susanne alleged that that her former employer excluded her from emails and meetings, preventing her from carrying out her job to the best of her ability. When she was demonstrating new software, Susanne alleged that a male colleague said to her: "I am older than you, I have more experience than you and so I know better". On another occasion she claimed that a senior male employee commented that "women have the life of it on maternity leave" and it was "like an extended holiday". Susanne claims she reminded attendees that it was a woman's right to take up to a year off on maternity leave and it certainly wasn't a holiday.

Susanne said: "I went into this job with an enthusiastic commitment to help the company achieve its goals. I felt my professional contribution was ignored, and that I had been bullied, and I felt upset and humiliated at the way I was spoken to by

senior management in front of other staff. The way my redundancy was handled severely affected my health and our family finances. However, I've moved on and am happy in my new workplace. I feel my skills are valued there and I'm now enjoying my work and my family life."

Mary Kitson, Senior Legal Officer, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, said: "All employers should be committed to diversity in the workplace, it should be led from the top and understood by all employees. A genuinely progressive organisation will carry out its legal responsibilities and provide equal opportunities. It will not stereotype and exclude women and will ensure that pregnant employees feel welcome and valued in the workplace.

"Promoting equality for women at work is a priority for the Commission, and a particular focus is encouraging women to consider careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We are delighted that Susanne is now working in a role where she feels valued and is able to give her best at work, while balancing her family life. This should be possible for all women," concluded Ms Kitson.

The case settled before it went to hearing.

As part of the settlement terms, Flint Studios Ltd affirmed its commitment to the principle of equality of opportunity in employment and Flint Studios Ltd undertook to liaise with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to review its policies and procedures relating to equal opportunities and sexual harassment.