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Software developer settles disability discrimination case

Stephen Campbell, a software developer has settled his disability discrimination case against both his former employer the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the HSC Business Services Organisation (BSO) for £3,000. The case was settled without admission of liability and was supported by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Stephen worked in the ICT department at the Western Trust, as part of the software development team, where he jointly managed and developed the Trust's intranet service for staff. Stephen is registered blind and uses a screen reader to interact with laptops.

When a promotional opportunity arose, Stephen wished to apply. However, the application process for this job required using an application wizard on the Health and Social Care Northern Ireland (HSCNI) jobs website to download and submit the completed application form. Stephen discovered that this technology could not be activated by the screen reader technology he used, making the application process inaccessible to him.

Stephen could not find anything on the HSCNI website regarding reasonable adjustments required by disabled people trying to access its services via the website.

Stephen Campbell said: "For two job applications, the Western Trust did accommodate me by stalling the recruitment exercise and reasonable adjustments were made to facilitate me. However, I was keen to apply for other jobs and promotional opportunities in software within the NHS and other Trusts, but when I applied, I encountered the same accessibility issues on the website.

"I thought this was unfair and I needed to challenge it. So, I brought this case to both raise awareness of the issue and hopefully remove this barrier to accessing employment for disabled people in the health service here. I welcome that as part of my settlement BSO have agreed to keep RNIB updated on development of the HSCNI website."

Eoin O'Neill, Director of Legal Services, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, said: "The employment rate for disabled people in Northern Ireland is 36%, it is the lowest of all the UK regions. We know disabled people face barriers to employment, but we also know they are a diverse group of people with skills and talents that our economy needs across both the public and private sectors.

“As employers, all public sector organisations must comply with equality legislation. Their websites should be accessible for all service users including those with disabilities. Employers must also ensure that they do not discriminate against or treat disabled candidates less favourably during the recruitment and selection process.

“The Commission remains committed to working with partners, organisations across the disability sector and individuals to help more disabled people find and retain paid employment,” concluded Mr O’Neill.

Notes to Editor

- As part of the settlement terms, the Western Trust and the BSO confirmed their commitment to the principle of equality of access to goods, facilities and services provided by them. They also committed to ensuring they comply with their obligations under all relevant equality legislation. Both organisations undertook to liaise with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to consider their respective policies, practices, and procedures in respect of recruitment access for blind people.