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## **DAERA settles Disability Discrimination Case for £50,000**

A hearing-impaired man has settled his disability discrimination case against the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) for £50,000, paid without admission of liability. The case was supported by the Equality Commission.

Christopher Morrow worked as a park ranger at Crawfordsburn Country Park, through an agency, from approximately May 2018 for three and a half years.

Mr Morrow has moderate to severe hearing loss. He wears hearing aids in both ears and reads facial expressions and body language. His proximity to others and the layout and acoustics of his surroundings can also make it hard for him to hear.

Permanent park ranger jobs were advertised during his time working at Crawfordsburn Country Park. Mr Morrow applied for a position and indicated on his application form that he had a disability. Before his interview Mr Morrow says that he asked a manager if it was possible for him to have the interview questions in front of him in written form during the interview. This would have greatly helped him to hear the interview questions and then answer them without having to ask for them to be repeated. This request was immediately refused. He also emailed the Human Resources department to ask them to ensure that all the panel members were aware of his disability.

In February 2021, Mr Morrow went for interview. The interview room was large, with a wooden floor and a high ceiling. The panel members were seated behind a screen about 15 – 20 feet away from him. Mr Morrow says that a panel member talked with his head down and spoke very quickly. Mr Morrow found hearing very difficult in this environment. The interview panel members did not ask him if he needed any adjustments with the interview.

Fifteen park rangers were appointed, but Mr Morrow was not one of them. Feedback from his interview included the comment *'candidate asked for multiple repetitions of questions meaning the interview ran over time.'*

Mr Morrow said: "I tried on several occasions to make DAERA aware of my disability and requested some simple adjustments at interview that would have really helped me in the recruitment process. I was very disappointed indeed that I missed out on the opportunity for a permanent position in a job I really enjoyed. I had a legal right to reasonable adjustments which would allow me to compete on a level playing field, and I think what I asked for was simple and straightforward."

Speaking about the settlement, Mary Kitson, Senior Legal Officer, Equality Commission, said: "The Disability Discrimination Act requires employers to introduce reasonable adjustments to recruitment and selection procedures for applicants with disabilities, to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged. The purpose of the duty is to enable job applicants who have disabilities to enjoy the same opportunities as all other candidates to obtain and remain in work.

" What is reasonable may be different in every case – the law says employers must take such steps as are reasonable to remove any physical or procedural barriers which the disabled person may face when seeking work. The primary aim of the duty is to enable a disabled person to obtain, remain in or return to work. An important consideration therefore is whether a proposed adjustment will help to achieve that goal. We offer both advice and training on this issue and are happy to help employers with specific queries, just phone or email us."

As part of the settlement, DAERA, in conjunction with the Department of Finance, has undertaken to liaise with the Equality Commission to review its policies, practices and procedures and their application to ensure that they are effective and conform with disability legislation. It has also agreed to implement any reasonable recommendations the Commission may make, including any regarding the training of management and staff. DAERA also affirmed its strong commitment to equality of opportunity in employment.