

Written Ministerial Statement

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Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

AGE DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION

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Mr Robinson and Mr McGuinness: (The First Minister and the deputy First Minister): While we have an extensive body of anti-discrimination law in place here, there is one major gap— legal protection from unjustifiable age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to close this gap. We remain committed to eradicating harmful and unjustifiable age discrimination in this area and we are today, announcing our decision to take forward proposals to prohibit unjustifiable age - differentiated practices against people aged 16 and over by those providing goods, facilities and services.

The proposals and subsequent legislation will put age discrimination outside work on a similar footing to discrimination in the workplace. It will give individuals confidence that it is their right to be treated fairly. It will also help service providers to eliminate harmful age discrimination by providing them with a clear legal framework within which to deliver services.

While the intention is to outlaw age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, we recognise that there are times when it is justified and indeed beneficial to treat people differently because of their age, for example age based state benefits or the prohibition on the sale of alcohol to people under 18. Therefore the proposals will not affect other legislation which currently imposes statutory age limits.

The aim of the new legislation is to protect young people aged 16 and 17 and adults from discrimination because of their age. We recognise this may come as a disappointment to some.

We intend to bring forward a consultation document in the Spring which will set out our policy proposals, taking account of the current legislation in Great Britain and Ireland and submissions made to date by the Children's Commissioner, the Older People's Commissioner, the Equality Commission and members of the children's and older people's sector. We will want to ensure the policy document has robust rationale for exceptions to any anti-age discrimination legislation.

When we have concluded our policy consultation and agreed a robust policy position we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly.