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NEW DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION LAWS TO INCLUDE OVER ONE MILLION MORE EMPLOYERS

Employment rights for disabled people will be dramatically improved from 1 October 2004 when the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is extended to cover all employers, except the armed forces. For the first time small employers* will be brought into the scope of the Act, accounting for an additional 1.1 million employers and seven million additional jobs.

Other key changes to the DDA Part 2, which covers employment, include:

- people working in the uniformed fire service, police force and the prison service will be protected by the Act for the first time
- qualification bodies, such as the Law Society and the General Medical Council, are covered for the first time
- trade organisations will have increased responsibilities under the Act
- practical work experience is covered for the first time

Bert Massie, Chairman of the Disability Rights Commission, said:

"Ensuring that disabled people have equal rights in employment is crucial and the new law goes a long way towards achieving this. Many firms, especially small businesses, are already successfully employing disabled people without realising it, so it's about doing more to ensure that the 1 million disabled people who want to work are able to do so."

The unemployment rate of disabled people is nearly twice as high (9%) as that of non-disabled people (5%)** meaning there is a huge pool of talent for employers to draw on. Retaining employees who become disabled also makes business sense, as employers benefit by holding on to the skills and experience of the employee, and by not having to go through a lengthy and costly recruitment process.

The DDA requires employers to make *reasonable* adjustments to enable the recruitment and retention of disabled people. Two-thirds of companies surveyed employing disabled people say they incurred no extra costs as a result of making reasonable adjustments. Two-fifths of those companies which did incur costs say these were less than £1000.***

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is publishing two Codes of Practice as well as a booklet entitled 'Top Tips for Small Businesses' to help employers and others affected by the new laws understand their new obligations. This information is available free of charge through the DRC's web site www.drc-gb.org or from the DRC Helpline on 08457 622 633.