

Equality watchdog abolishes role of disability champion

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Britain's newly appointed disability commissioner was told just 36 hours before his first board meeting that his role as champion for the nation's 11m disabled people had been abolished.

Lord Shinkwin, who uses a wheelchair, had been given the job at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) but was abruptly told it wanted him to serve only as a general commissioner. The decision has led to a stand-off between David Isaac, the EHRC chairman, and Shinkwin, who is demanding the post be reinstated.

He said: "Most disabled people have to fight for disability equality at some point in their lives even if it's as basic as the right to be able to get into their local pub.

What I didn't expect was that I would have to fight the very body supposedly responsible for championing equality."

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, the 11-time Paralympic gold medallist, supported him, saying: "We are taking steps backwards. It needs to be reconsidered."

Shinkwin said abolishing the post "weakened the voice of disabled people".

He is also campaigning for parity in abortion laws. At present, an abortion can take place as late as necessary if tests indicate that the child may be disabled when born. There is a legal limit of 24 weeks for abortion on other grounds.

He told Isaac that "as a congenitally disabled person, I would have been a prime candidate for abortion".



Shinkwin: equality stand-off

The EHRC said it was a "vigorous champion of disabled people's rights", citing recent work on housing, the spare room subsidy, transport and football stadiums.

It said the board had decided the role of disability commissioner was no longer required.

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