



*David Skelton
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Your ref

My ref

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Introduction

1. The Access Association welcomes the opportunity to comment on "Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People"
2. The Access Association's aim is to improve access and facilities for disabled people and consequently for all people whom would benefit from an accessible environment.
3. The Access Association was formed in response to the need to network and support professionals, whose primary responsibility was to promote and facilitate accessible environments and services for all, including people with disabilities. Members are working in
 - local authorities
 - voluntary sector organisations
 - private sector organisations.

4. The Association is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all Members.

5 What do we do?

- Support existing Access Professionals and Access Officers.
- Promote the appointment of Access Professionals in Local Authorities.
- Support Access Professionals in their role of consulting disabled people in their communities.
- Liaise with Access Groups, or in establishing such Groups where they do not already exist.
- Exchange knowledge and experience amongst Members.
- Encourage the education and training of Members in access matters.
- Monitor and ascertain the effectiveness of current guidance, legislation, practices and policies.
- Act as advisors in technical matters to organisations and individuals.
- Put forward the views of the Association to the Media, Government departments, Local Government Associations.

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People.

The Access Association welcomes the Strategy Unit's comprehensive document "Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People". We regret however that we were not on the cabinet office's consultation list. Can arrangements be made please to ensure that the Access Association is circulated, via the address above, the next time the Strategy unit wishes to consult.

We are concerned that a consultation period of 8 weeks is far too short for such a detailed document.

We are pleased to see that the report reflects many of the Access Associations concerns, about the lack of an holistic approach to addressing the needs of Disabled people. The Access Association has spent much time responding to various government departments, and making many of the points contained in your report "Improving the Life Chances of Disabled

People”. We welcome proposals for addressing these shortcomings, but wonder if some of the gaps in the Disability Bill were addressed if that would finally encourage the offending government department’s and service providers to better meet disabled peoples needs. Prior to the Disability Discrimination act Access Professionals could only use persuasion to advance the cause of disabled people. We have found legal obligations to be far more effective than moral pressure, in helping to develop inclusive environments.

The report deals extensively with the limitations of current strategies practiced by those responsible for Health, Learning and Skills and of Employment. We are disappointed that leisure does not feature in this report, since we believe that access to leisure activities is important for the healthy well-being of those in work, those seeking work, those for whom no suitable employment can currently be found and for those who have retired from work. We believe that the nations fiscal interests are best served by ensuring that as many people as possible have access to an healthy active lifestyle, to which leisure activities can greatly contribute.

The major thrust of “Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People” is that by improving the way services are provided by Health, Education, and by Employment services the nations benefit bill can ultimately be reduced. The Access Association concurs with this value judgment. However, we believe that similar attention needs to be applied to the needs of people unlikely to be able to work and those retired from work. Many of the later are discriminated against by the benefits system. The government should aim for the equitable provision of benefits and services, and opportunities for a good quality of life, for all disabled people.

We look forward to commenting the next phase of this important work.

Yours truly,

David Skelton.