

## **“Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People”**

### **Response to the Interim Analytical Report of the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit.**

Breakthrough UK Ltd is a successful social enterprise which provides employment support to disabled people. We do this by providing one-to-one support to disabled people, and by working to influence policy and practice locally, regionally and nationally. Our approach is firmly based on the social model of disability and principles of independent living. Most members of our Board of Directors are disabled people, as are 65% of our staff.

We feel that this initiative is long overdue and we are pleased that it is happening. We are pleased to be able to respond to this consultation, and certainly welcome the social model approach.

The “Seven Needs for Independent Living” is a framework which was developed within the disabled peoples’ movement: it basically says that if the Seven Needs are met then the majority of barriers facing disabled people can be tackled. We attached a summary and brief explanation of the Seven Needs and would be more than welcome to talk further about this approach.

We would like to construct our consultation response in a way that builds on – and we hope enhances – the Interim Report. We also feel there are some omissions in the report, on which we will comment.

We have constructed our responses under the following main headings:

1. Education,
2. Employment,
3. Access to Work,
4. Benefit Reform,
5. Positive Images,
6. The Role of Charities,
7. The “Caring” Industry,
8. Disability, Illness and Impairment.

## 1. Education:

We feel the Report does not give enough attention to education.

If we can agree that one of the main purposes of education is to equip young people into adulthood then we can see that the education system largely fails young disabled people, who continue to experience low levels of qualifications, dependency, and reduced life chances and who leave the education system being “a long way from the labour market”. Indeed, we could say that currently the education system prepares disabled people for the state benefit system and for charity.

Mainstream education is more and more about academic achievement. This is not a “wrong” approach, but if it is the only approach then it fails many people. How then, and what is the appropriate “progression” measure for disabled people? In many cases we are still to be accepted as part of society, and the matter of qualifications and achievements that are linked to mainstream provision is a key to unlocking this process.

An increasing focus on academic achievement over vocational skills works against disabled people and especially people with learning difficulties. Suitability for post-education employment should not be a case of 5 GCSE’s at A-C level. It may well be an appropriate measure for some, but if post education is to be about employment achievement, and if the purpose is not served, it will only keep disabled people on benefits and charity.

Also, we must question the advisability of keeping so many disabled people – especially people with learning difficulties – in the education system focussed on academic achievement, when academic achievement is not realisable. It would be useful to consider post-14 employment as an alternative for non-academic young people, who could go to part-time college / part-time work, with a focus on developing vocational and life skills. Or consider skills

development centres, with a “career / personal development” approach; any danger of reverting to, or replicating the old ATC / Remploy model should be actively avoided.

We would offer the “Independent Living Skills” course which we have piloted with Liverpool Adult Education as an example of good practice. This focussed on personal development, and included a basic skills element, for people currently attending a local authority day centre. It is now being mainstreamed within local provision.

The increasing use of technology could also be better harnessed and with more consistency, linked to a national curriculum which pays full attention to disabled people.

The following changes would be helpful:

- Have targets to free up resources, currently spent on costly separate provision, to properly support disabled people into mainstream.
- Use the current review by the QCA to reinvigorate the qualifications / achievement paths for disabled people, especially people with learning difficulties
- Ensure a supportive environment for learning – in all provision, and for people with the widest range of abilities.

Actions should aim to help self development generally and to progress a seamless transition for all young people. It is partly the failure of transitional management, and the lack of a requirement for schools to equip young people for adulthood, that leads to distance from the labour market.

In all learning situations the environment, the curricula, and extra-curricula activities should also take full account of disabled people.

## 2. Employment:

The government’s success of the last 7 years is clear, moving a number of job-ready people into work and having the highest number of people ever working than there has ever been. But the low increase in the employment of disabled people is lamentable and it is obvious that current programmes of support are not hitting the mark.

Also, although there are undoubtedly a wide range of influencing factors it is fair to say that secondary, further and higher education are failing disabled people.

In terms of support programmes, it is important that “solutions” focus on the needs and abilities of the individual; and to recognise that there are not always “quick wins”.

In terms of support agencies, the field is wide open, uncoordinated and without performance standards. Work needs to be done on this, and the voice of disabled people’s own organisations must be central. The idea from the USA of making a direct payment so that people can buy their own support may help focus this “provision.”

### 3. Access to Work (DWP scheme)

We are concerned at reports that there is a lot of pressure nationally on the Access to Work budget. We would hope and expect that the Treasury will not look for quick gains ahead of sustained affordability and effectiveness. The Access to Work scheme is increasingly successful in supporting disabled people in work: to look for simple reductions is a false economy.

If the employer is expected to pay more then that is a clear disincentive to employ a disabled person, when a non-disabled person will be a “cheaper” employee. Perhaps the best answer in terms of more efficient use of resources is to stop subsidising very profitable organisations through the scheme. There could be an exemption process linked to annual submissions of accounts to Companies House, for example. Perhaps the long overdue review of the Companies Act could be linked in.

Inaccessible transport is cited by disabled people as one of the biggest barriers to employment. In this sense the Access to Work scheme is directly subsidising / compensating for an inaccessible “public” transport system. The “Fares to Work” budget, at least, should be directly supported by transport funding. It is worth noting that if the government were quicker to implement and enforce the DDA in the field of transport then “compensatory” costs would go down.

### 4. Benefit Reform

This is not a matter which will go away. Nor will it be fully addressed by focusing on Incapacity Benefit claimants. For many disabled people the benefits system is a positive disincentive to take up work: this must be tackled.

We would suggest a simple integrated tax and benefit system that would not cause the transitional problems we have at present and would work to counter the “dependency culture”.

To integrate the benefit system and PAYE would need initial major front-loading financially, in order to establish the system, but there should be long term gains through having a system which provides incentives into work.

Such a scheme would also encompass the range of employment “tasters” and work experience, removing the fear factor about “getting back on benefits.” This could also be effectively linked to a working disabled person’s tax credit which would take the place of Access to Work.

The variety of support requirements that disabled people have could be encompassed in a range of tax allowances, thus catering for the “cost of impairment”.

What would have been paid as a benefit, then, comes through the tax system. The stigma which still attaches to impairment would begin to be addressed: disabled people would be regarded as non-productive rather than dependent, and programmes would be structured accordingly.

For an early demonstration of a workable model, consider a dual system of benefits and wages, with a built-in benefit taper, operated through genuine work experience which ultimately leads to a firm job offer.

## 5. Positive Images:

The strongest action the government could take would be to lead by example.

We suggest being guided by a range of disabled people, including those whose voices are traditionally not heard – people with learning difficulties for example – and those whose views have been influenced and developed through close involvement of the disabled peoples’ movement.

It is worth pointing out that what may have seemed a positive image 5 years ago may now be quite ordinary.

with charities and the role of charities as disabled people, and perhaps most particularly disabled children and older people.

If the government is serious about civil rights for disabled people, and about linking rights to responsibilities, then it must fundamentally examine the role that charities have played – and continue to play - in maintaining the dependence and segregation of disabled people.

This would include, for example, the continued existence of segregated provision in terms of housing and employment; the (mis)use of our images in charity advertising and fundraising; the continued governance of “disability charities” by vast numbers of non-disabled people; and their regrettable record in failing to employ disabled people themselves.

Only recently are the charities starting to wear the badges of social inclusion: we wonder whether this is the result of some critical social analysis into discrimination and exclusion or merely a response to “the way the wind blows”. It remains to be seen whether the charities will “walk the walk” as well as “talk the talk”.

As many charities have been going since before the 1880’s we must question both their intent and their effectiveness. Above all, we would question how appropriate it is for charities to have such a profound impact on the lives of disabled people. For no other group do we expect discrimination to be tackled through charitable means.

## 7. The “Caring” Industry:

It is time that the distinction between “caring” services and the kind of support required by disabled people to be independent was recognised.

A small but significant and increasing number of disabled people require personal support in order to be independent: the training and provision of “carers” is not the answer. It is worth remembering also that people cannot hold down employment if they are not independent.

It is important then that the problems of this sector are addressed.

There are diminishing numbers of P.A.s and personal support as there are now fewer and fewer people doing the jobs. There is a need to value and respect the role of the ‘caring industry’, which is not a valued occupation, whilst at the same time developing reform that ensures that the very different role of PA / support worker is recognised within the system.

In addition, the current system of having support workers at work, and different schemes or systems for outside work, is clearly a waste of resources and unnecessarily onerous for the disabled person.

## 8. Disability, Illness and Impairment:

We are pleased that the report has recognised the distinction between these three terms, but fear there is a lack of consistency in the detail of the report, in terms of observing and actively promoting this approach. For example, in the employment section there remains confusion in relation to sickness absence and disability.

## 9. Conclusion:

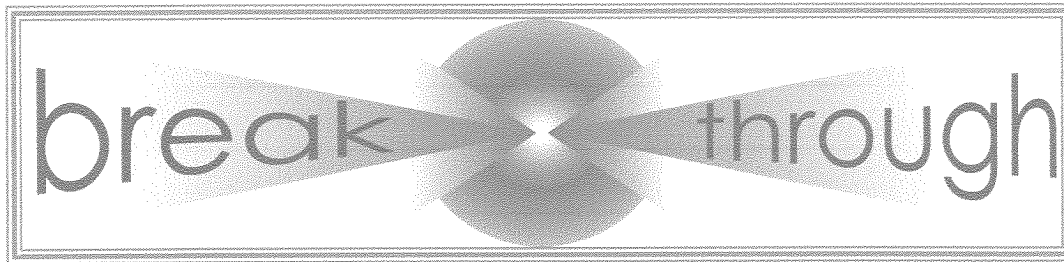
We have been encouraged by the approach that has been taken in the report and by our contact with the members of the Unit carrying out the study. Our comments are intended to be constructive, and we hope that they are received in this way.

We would be more than pleased to discuss and expand upon the points we have made, if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L. Gradwell".

Lorraine Gradwell, Chief Executive,  
on behalf of the Board of Directors.



**BREAKTHROUGH UK LTD** is a company which is committed to the Social Model of Disability, in terms of how it operates as an organisation and its employment and service delivery practices. We are also committed to work in inclusive ways and to actively promote principles of independent living; this brief sheet is intended to briefly explain this approach, and to give basic information on what the social model is, and what it means.

## **The Social and Medical Models of Disability**

The "Medical Model" of disability is the traditional way of looking at disabled people as being "lacking" in some respect and needing to be either "looked after" or helped to "fit in" wherever possible. People are identified by their particular impairment - an "arthritic", an "epileptic", etc - and much attention is given to the effects of impairment on the individual and their ability to "cope". The medical model puts the responsibility onto the disabled person to adapt to a society that is neither built nor organised to take their needs into account.

The "Social Model" has been developed and refined by disabled people themselves as a response to the way that they have been traditionally defined by medical and welfare professionals - the medical model. Rather than seeing people as being "disabled" by their particular impairment, the social model looks to society at large and the way that it is organised, and how people with impairments are excluded from taking part in society's activities, resulting in a lack of physical access, lack of opportunities to jobs and education, lack of choice and denial of rights.

## **Principles of Independent Living**

Independence is not necessarily about doing absolutely everything for yourself - nobody does this. Rather it is about being in control of your daily life and taking your own decisions.

Involvement is about having a say in the matters that affect you, for example in the design and delivery of services.

Integration describes disabled people's full involvement in all society's activities; it is not about leaving disabled people in the community with little or no support but is about disabled people being a full part of our communities and not being seen as "separate", or "special".

### **SEVEN NEEDS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING**

**The analysis of the disabled peoples' movement says that there are seven fundamental needs which have to be satisfied if independent living is to become a realistic proposition. These Seven Needs are:-**

- **INFORMATION** - to make informed choices. Such information needs to be in a format which is accessible to the person receiving it (e.g. braille, tape, print, large print).
- **PEER COUNSELLING** - help in making decisions, based upon the direct experiences of people who have been in similar situations.
- **HOUSING** - which is appropriate and is in the location of your choice.
- **TECHNICAL AIDS** - may be required once in your own home.
- **PERSONAL ASSISTANCE** - may be required when technical aids are not enough. Personal assistants should be personally chosen and be available when required.
- **TRANSPORT** - which is accessible to all in order to participate in society.
- **ACCESS** - is vital, buildings and the general environment need to be accessible, not just to mobility impaired people who use wheelchairs, but also those with other impairments.