

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People

General comment

This is a really comprehensive and valuable report. I welcomed the fact that this report clearly takes a social model approach and uses this as the basis to analyse disabled people's position and the barriers they face. It is unfortunately rare to read government reports which take a social model approach to disability: in some cases the social model will be referred to, but often it is confused with something else, or it is not reflected throughout the report. The explanation of the definition of "disabled" on page 12 is excellent and very clear. I plan to quote this as an example of good practice in a briefing to colleagues on taking a social model or barriers approach to disability.

It is good to see that disability has been clearly defined in this way, rather than attempting to promote such concepts as "disablism", which are rather clumsy and are not widely accepted amongst disabled people and their organisations.

The example of barriers listed on page 17 is good, it is great to see "lack of support with parenting and caring roles" recognised.

Other comments

Page 4 Emerging key policy questions:

Who should be responsible for the removal of disabling environments and social barriers?

This should be a shared responsibility with the government taking a lead. However, the individual approach promoted by the Disability Discrimination Act does not go far enough in removing and indeed preventing disabling barriers, and this can be a hindrance at times. At best, policy officers and others who are implementing the DDA but are committed to removing disabling barriers have to be canny in making the most of the anticipatory duty under the DDA, for instance.

Agree (page 33) that barriers must be tackled collectively.

How should government work with disabled people to address barriers to inclusion?

How can government empower disabled people to promote their own inclusion and rights?

Local and national government should prioritise working with representative organisations of disabled people. Unfortunately, these organisations are typically under-resourced and do not have the capacity to carry out this type of work or even engage with government. Resources to enable local and national organisations OF disabled people to build their capacity, skills and knowledge are needed from central and local government.

Government should pay serious attention to the concerns about merging the Disability Rights Commission into a single equality body: that this will be a backward step in promoting disabled people's inclusion and rights. As well as the DRC's own concerns, disabled people have also said that either more

disabled people should be involved and work for the DRC, or that the DRC ought to do more outreach and consultation work with disabled people. This is unlikely to happen under a single equality body.

It must be noted that good engagement with disabled people takes considerable time and resources. The moves by the authors of the report to consult with disabled people are to be commended.

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The difficulties of measuring discrimination against disabled people seems to be becoming more acute. There are so many different ways of measuring numbers of disabled people in the population, advocated by different government departments. For instance, there are different definitions of disability in the census, from the Dept. for Work and Pensions, of benefit recipients and for Best Value performance indicators. The Office for the Deputy Prime Minister has recently recognised the discrepancies and inconsistencies in current consultation on new and amended BVPIs.

Page 43: Mainstream policies

The public sector must ensure that the interests of disabled people are taken fully into account in the design of mainstream policies.

Hopefully the proposed new duty for public bodies to promote equality for disabled people, as part of the draft Disability Discrimination Bill, will help ensure that disabled people's interests are taken into account. This is more likely to happen if accompanying guidance is clear and explicit and gives some examples of disabled people's needs. Public bodies can be more effective if they involve and take advice from disabled people *with the knowledge* of a wide range of disabling barriers and how to avoid them.

Page 121 onwards: Routes into employment

The government needs to seriously tackle the issue of how to integrate those disabled people into employment who clearly want and are able to work but who need a significant amount of support or who need significant changes or flexibilities to the basic structure of work. For instance, those people who can only work for part of the year, perhaps due to illness, or for whom regular hours are too inflexible. Some disabled people's health situation, for instance coping with pain or fatigue, changes on a daily basis. Homeworking and flexible hours might not go far enough in meeting needs, and it can be difficult for employers to balance service or business needs with those of disabled employees.

There are some good examples of support for disabled employees, such as personal assistants, communication support workers and so on. However, these are relatively rare and isolated examples, and there is limited funding (such as Access to Work funding) available. How can disabled people receive the full support they need in employment?

This can only happen if the government takes the holistic view advocated on page 139 of the report, looking at the positive effect employment has on disabled people and thinking about reducing the significant costs to society and the economy of large numbers of disabled people not working.

There clearly needs to be more government funding available to support disabled people in work.

There are also some very difficult issues around retraining or redeployment, following a worker becoming disabled. In some cases it can be very difficult, despite the best efforts of the person, employers, rehabilitation services, support services, for someone to return to work at all. This could be because of the huge barriers that people face for instance in transport, the build environment, communication and information, and lack of support. Or it could be due to the huge life change that someone has experienced that might make it difficult for them to envisage working again. If someone becomes disabled later in their working life they might feel it is too late to retrain.

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