

## **National Association for Supported Employment (NASE)**

### **Response to Prime Minister's Strategy Unit Interim Report**

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

##### **Nase - background**

NASE was set up in 1992. It is a national organisation that aims to promote and develop supported employment opportunities for disabled people and provides a unified, nationally recognised voice that speaks on behalf of its members.

NASE has 104 member organisations that are involved in the provision or facilitation of paid employment for people with disabilities.

Our members include Local Authorities, voluntary bodies, charitable trusts and 'not for profit' organisations and others who are involved, or have an interest in, the delivery of Supported Employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Nase:

- Facilitates meetings, shares information and offers support to its members.
- Identifies and recommends initiatives to improve the scope and effectiveness of supported employment programmes.
- Monitors and responds to government legislation and development of policy, representing members views to relevant government bodies.
- Promotes awareness of supported employment and the contribution people with disabilities can make in employment.

##### **Nase Response**

Nase agrees with the general analysis of the report, its key findings and its aspirations for the future.

Nase would like to see the values and principals of true social inclusion for disabled people firmly embedded in the framework of Government policy.

Nase supports the positive action that the report recommends and identifies with the issues and challenges that will be faced in bringing about further change.

Nase would encourage Government, working with disabled people and other stakeholders, to develop a clear action plan over an extended period that will implement change that are the rights of disabled people as equal citizens within our society. This strategy should counter the history of disability and much of present day service, which has been based on imposed segregation. This view needs to be challenged whilst at the same time recognising the

benefits of disabled people having control of their own lives as a matter of choice.

Nase agrees with the analysis of the disadvantages and the barriers that are presented to disabled people and that need to be overcome. Nase also supports the vision presented within the report to overcome both discrimination and obstacles - allowing people with disabilities to live inclusive lives.

Whilst Nase agrees with the analysis of the report and sees no serious omissions, as an organisation it would emphasise the following points:

- The increasing role played by the community and voluntary sectors in delivering both mainstream and added value services and the need for Government to invest in this sector. This will become an increasing issue with the demise of European Social Funding.
- Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Services preventing people from falling out of the labour market onto long term sickness benefits. This would include the necessity for clear requirements regarding the role of employers within absence management policies, occupational health and vocational rehabilitation for people who acquire a disability or long term health problem.
- Transport in rural areas being seen as a priority area within overall transport policy
- The identification and filling of gaps in vocational and/or skills training prior to supported employment initiatives. These gaps are very often the issue of conflicting eligibility criteria across related provision.
- Service provision and access to opportunities that are both integrated and provided within a local community.
- Review of the application of eligibility criteria across all service provision.

Within the UK public organisations and businesses are becoming increasingly aware of their social and legal responsibilities regarding disability equality and access issues. Nase believe it is vital that future provision should:

- Develop accessible, integrated facilities that will create a bridge across the community, reducing prejudice and increasing understanding.
- Further develop best practice in services that give disabled people access to learning and experiences which help them to progress towards their own goals and aspirations.
- Support disabled people in pursuing and achieving independent living with greater access to, and involvement in, the community.

We feel there continues to be a separation of employment and health services which has a detrimental effect on how people can be supported back into work. This can be demonstrated by:

- Lack of information within the NHS of the means of re-integrating individuals into employment. This is compounded by the attitude of many GP's and how they perceive their role. i.e. Clinical only.
- Vocational rehabilitation is usually only considered after the completion of health treatment. For many people this increases the psychological barriers to eventually return to work
- Many rehabilitation services are predominately focused on promoting independence in personal daily life and enabling people to leave hospital rather than a return to productive work. Rehabilitation is often targeted at assisting early hospital discharge or maintaining those with disabilities in the community.
- Lack of Absence Management Schemes, Occupational Health and Welfare Support from employers. Strategies directed towards job retention are of proven value: they are needed in the first months of sickness absence.
- A shortage of work based training provision and accessible and appropriate skills training to help people meet the needs of the labour market.

Appropriately focused health care has the potential to prevent the progression of patients on to incapacity benefits. This needs to be developed through GPs.

Investment needs to be made in services available to and training for both external providers and Jobcentre Plus staff. This will overcome further barriers presented by:

- Inadequate access to health professionals
- Inadequate availability of vocational rehabilitation services
- Inadequate funding of vocational rehabilitation services
- Lack of recognised career paths for vocational rehabilitation professionals
- Lack of legal obligation on the State or employers to provide rehabilitation services

The potential value of Occupational Health Services in facilitating employment rehabilitation is poorly recognised by the NHS. Provision in the UK is variable and patchy. General practitioners have a pivotal part to play in vocational rehabilitation. Because they have responsibility for certification for fitness for work they are in a position to trigger access to vocational rehabilitation. The

current shortage of resources combined with a lack of GP focus on employment generally precludes this.

In developing future Government policy more discretion and autonomy should be facilitated at a local level through powers invested in commissioning and funding agencies and matching the needs of local communities with their own living environment.