

## **RESPONSE OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S STRATEGY UNIT'S INTERIM REPORT ON IMPROVING THE LIFE CHANCES OF DISABLED PEOPLE**

1. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit on the interim report "Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People".
2. The NUT welcomes the use of the social rather than medical model contained within the report. The links made to social class, occupation and age within the analysis provide an inclusive perspective to the report. The overall aims of the project are to be welcomed and applauded particularly those which put disabled people squarely at the centre of their own decision-making.
3. The recognition within the paper of the geographical inequalities in provision and resources for disabled people is useful analysis. The solutions outlined in the "Wider Roles within the Analysis of the Issues" section sets out a positive way forward for disabled people, although there should be more emphasis on factors that promote independent living. Disabled people are fellow builders of society and not simply recipients of its charity.
4. It would, however, be helpful for the report to highlight the expertise which already exists amongst disabled people and to reinforce an awareness that disabled people are the experts on their impairment rather than medical practitioners or service providers. There should be recognition of work already being carried out in disability equality training for employers, such as the Disability Champions project set up by AMICUS for the European Year of Disabled People.
5. The NUT welcomes the recognition in the report of the importance of disabled young people receiving appropriate and substantial support in the early years. The current focus on the role of the lead professional, a role which is discussed in the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters', should encompass supporting families with a disabled child or children.
6. For the measures outlined in the report to be effective, substantial dovetailing with the reorganisation of the delivery of children's services and the Government's SEN Strategy 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' will be required.
7. As the report says, simple changes can make a great deal of difference and schools need to be given the confidence to both learn about and embrace the changes required to facilitate inclusion.
8. It is important for the life chances of disabled people that society moves away from marginalising the experiences and expertise of its disabled citizens. It is essential that the voice of young disabled people is heard and incorporated. Disabled pupils need to be empowered to have confidence in themselves and their abilities. Often they are surrounded by parents and professionals who have very low expectations of their potential. This locks them into a 'special' system which is completely separate from the rest of society.

9. The NUT welcomes the recognition of assessments which are needs-led and which address disability barriers as well as needs related to impairment. This applies equally to education and health. Too often disabled people are faced with barriers created by limited resources. Discussions of promoting disability should centre on ways of removing barriers – financial, physical, attitudinal and educational.
10. The prevention of impairment is very important, particularly in professions such as teaching where there are physical dangers to health from which workers need to be protected. It is essential that disabled employees are entitled and enabled to enter the workplace. It is also critical, however, to focus on safeguarding the health, both physical and mental, of all employees. Creating and enforcing an entitlement to a work/life balance of all employees working in the public sector should be at the centre of an analysis of life chances.
11. In terms of the employment of disabled teachers the NUT applauds the report's aims. The NUT itself would wish to work closely with other organisations in enhancing the support and information offered to employers and to employees to increase the successful recruitment and retention of disabled people.
12. With the forthcoming changes to the Disability Discrimination Act on classifications of disability to include cancer and other progressive illnesses the Union expects to see an increase in casework relating to 'reasonable adjustments' for teachers. The Union believes that an important element of celebrating and facilitating the diversity of the teaching profession is developing strategies to increase the numbers of disabled teachers in mainstream schools.
13. Education ought to open up a real choice of employment for disabled people. In order to provide the best possible education for our disabled children and adults there needs to be greater investment in providing a full range of resources at local level so that all students, regardless of their age, get the widest range of opportunities to acquire training and skills and can move into fulfilling work with all the economic and social benefits that brings.
14. Disabled people are able to help shape a fully inclusive society but government and local policy makers must be willing to be led by them and support their life chances through properly funded provision.
15. The new Commission for Equality and Human Rights will have a critical role to play in improving the life chances of disabled people through the strategic enforcement of discrimination legislation, supporting individuals to secure their rights and investigating deep rooted and systemic discrimination. The NUT welcomes the publication of the White Paper on the new commission and will respond separately to that consultation.