

Hello,

This is my response to the Interim Analytical Report, thanks for the word document.

Firstly: It is extraordinarily difficult to work out where to send this response. You aren't going to get many responses as it is by no means obvious - from the webpages or from the three documents - where to actually send comments / responses. Have a look at <http://www.strategy.gov.uk/output/Page5999.asp> or in the reports itself. For instance, in the Full Report it states on Pages 9 and 217 it says:

"There are a number of different ways in which comments can be made:

- In writing to the postal address and email address at the end of this report "

There is no postal address or email address at the end of the report!

In addition to this, your website is almost totally unusable by anybody using assistive technologies. You have not even used the most basic of accessibility measures - your images don't have alternative content (the ALT attribute) specified for them so anybody unable to see the images will have no idea what they portray. I notice that the Government promises that all its websites must conform to the Web Accessibility Initiative's "A" level - your website does not. This is particularly inexcusable given the potential interest of disabled people in your report. I wonder if you could respond to me to explain why you have not felt it necessary to make your website as accessible as possible to disabled people.

OK on to the main comment on the report.

I think the report is a quite comprehensive and frank assessment of the current situation in the UK for disabled people, including a surprising and welcome adherence to the Social Model for Disability.

It examines most of the more severe barriers to disabled people playing an active part in everyday life within our society.

There are some omissions, however. I don't think it addresses fully:

: - Problems with finding accessible housing for disabled people, particularly wheelchair users and those with sensory impairments

: - The problems faced by the large number of young (i.e. under 65 according to the Commission for Social Care) disabled adults in residential and nursing homes

The report does not go into the details of how it is intended for the many problems raised within the report to be addressed within British society, and what actions in detail need to be taken by the Government. I think the mission statements, shifts in mindset etc. listed in the report are all very laudable but pressure needs to be brought to bear within the report for specific changes to be made.

To give an example: I don't feel that my current situation is covered within the Report. I am also aware of many other people who are in a similar situation.

To explain: I am a relatively young (26) wheelchair user with care needs. My disability developed to a large extent after I had already left home. I was living in inaccessible accommodation and was top of the medical priority list for rehousing in our local council's housing list. I did not receive any offer of suitable accommodation throughout the two years I was at the top of the list.

In 2001, I was admitted to hospital during which time my disability got substantially worse. I urgently sought suitable accommodation and none were forthcoming. As such I was eventually forced to move into a residential home for disabled people, in Wetherby, which is a small town outside Leeds. The placement was funded by my benefits and by Social Services.

I have been continually disempowered whilst living in the residential home. Wetherby has no wheelchair accessible public transport apart from a hugely oversubscribed and practicably unusable "dial-a-ride" service, and as such I was isolated from my friends in Leeds.

Prior to going into hospital I worked for Leeds University teaching web design. I continued working for Leeds University very part time from the residential home, earning the maximum allowed rate of £20 per week.

Recently I have been headhunted as an accessible web designer by two companies. I have made extensive enquiries about the possibility of earning

more money but have been told it is not possible. Everything I earn over £20 per week will be taken off my Income Support, and if I earn more than the Income Support everything I own up to the cost of the fees of the home - £930 per week! - will be discounted off the Social Services bill.

What's more, once I earn more than the Income Support, whilst not having any more money in my pocket "benefits" such as free prescriptions, bus passes etc. would be stopped. It is also clear from speaking to many others in my position that the Benefits Agency / Social Services departments bureaucracy do not cope well with people earning and generally there are many mistakes, which mean that people end up owing, or being owed, large amounts of money.

There is therefore a financial and organisational disincentive against me working. This disincentive would not be in place if I were to be living independently in an accessible flat or house in the community, as I would be eligible for direct payments and be able to earn without penalty.

I would not mind having to pay for accommodation, food and utility bills in my current location in the residential home. However what I do object to is to having to pay for care, and having my income reduced pound for pound against my earnings. This is in no way encouraging me to take up paid work. As a result three groups of people lose out:

: - I lose out on the wages, the interest of the job and also in my self esteem in contributing back to society.

: - Society loses out, as it does not have the benefits of my skills in accessible web design. Given the current legislation people with such skills are in great demand (as evidenced by your inaccessible website)

: - The Government loses out, as not only is it having to continue to support me fully, it is missing on my tax and National Insurance contributions.

On top of this, I was informed that whilst it is not possible for me to earn any more, I could apply for an increase in my personal allowance, which is the money that I get to keep from my income support after the home's fees are paid. However I was told to attain this I would have to make a case that the extra money would increase my independence. So: it is possible to get more benefit money as long as it increases my independence, but I'm not allowed to increase my independency by earning it!

I feel that I have been put in a very unfair position here, caused by a combination of not enough wheelchair accessible housing forcing me to be in a residential home, and the benefits trap actively discouraging me from earning. I know that I am not the only person in this position - the Leonard Cheshire Foundation has many residential homes purely for physically disabled people under 65 so there must be quite a few people about.

I know you have touched upon the benefits rules being archaic, poorly administered and a deterrent to working, but I don't feel that you have explored the issue of the large number of disabled people who are incarcerated in residential and nursing homes, or the punitive benefits rules that specifically prevent them from taking an active part in society.

Nor have you fully explored the scarcity of accessible housing. This issue is compounded by the attitude taken by nearly all private rental agencies and estate agents, who have no details at all about which of their properties are accessible or could be made accessible.

Given what I have said above about how I think it would be good if you could concentrate on certain specific actions that could be taken to improve disabled people's lives, I would like to suggest the following:

: - Governmental incentives to landlords, both local authority / housing association and private, to convert properties to be as accessible as possible to disabled people

: - A legal requirement for people dealing in property - i.e. estate agents, local authorities, housing associations and private rental agencies - to keep details of which properties are accessible, which could be converted relatively easily (i.e. level access, wide doors etc.) and which aren't

: - A sliding scale for those on Income Support or receiving assistance from Social Services to meet the cost of residential / nursing care, allowing residents to keep some of their earnings whilst still contributing to their accommodation.

I hope these comments are of use, and I look forward to your response explaining why you have an inaccessible website when you clearly have disabled people as part of your target audience, and why you have made it so difficult to find where to send responses to your report.

Many thanks

Douglas Paulley