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The Disability Debate

Marilyn Howard is a Policy Manager for the Disability Rights Commission. Here she sets out the DRC's perspective on welfare reform.

The Disability Rights Commission is an independent statutory body set up to tackle discrimination and promote equality for disabled people. Our approach to welfare reform is based on our vision of equal citizenship, developed for the DRC's 'disability debate' www.disabilitydebate.org

EQUAL CITIZENSHIP

We have distilled equal citizenship into three principles that underpin welfare reform.

1. A fairer balance between the responsibilities of individuals and those of employers. It is unfair to require individuals to do more in return for benefit unless employers also meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Over a third of calls to our helpline concern employers failing to take action to enable people to stay in work.

2. A flexible, responsive system that supports disabled people's participation. Individuals need both income and opportunities to participate in work-related activities and community life, including public appointments. The current benefits system can create disincentives to participation.

3. Comprehensive support for work and everyday activities so that people can carry out their responsibilities. Without such support, people may be unable to meet their obligations. So it is important to have a support infrastructure in place before they are required to do more.

These three principles are interdependent and require reciprocal action by the four main groups of stakeholders: employers, individuals, government and providers.

THE GREEN PAPER AND DELIVERY WELFARE REFORM

Though there is much to welcome in the Green Paper on welfare reform, key aspects remain sketchy, such as details of the Employment and Support Allowance which will replace Incapacity Benefit and Income Support from 2008.

The Green Paper envisages a greater role for private and voluntary-sector providers in rolling out Pathways to Work pilots across the country and delivering

the new 'cities' initiative aimed at tackling worklessness and low skills. We welcome the success of the current Pathways to Work package, particularly the balance of rights, responsibilities and safeguards built into the pilots. In these pilots the obligation to attend more interviews has been accompanied by additional safeguards for people with mental health problems and people with learning difficulties before any benefit sanction is applied to non-attenders. More support is also available, such as condition management programmes and easier access to services available through Jobcentre Plus.

DISABILITY DUTIES

Design and delivery of contracts with the private and voluntary sectors should include new disability duties. From December 2006, the DDA will cover public bodies (including local authorities, central government departments and their agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus) and organisations contracted to carry out public functions. Public authorities will also have to promote disability equality.

We hope to work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on a prototype disability equality impact assessment of Incapacity Benefit reform.

You can find more information on the law at www.drc-gb.org and the Disability Equality Duty at www.dotheduty.org



Scotland update

of the labour market. This brochure provides an overview of the achievements of first-round Partnerships, and highlights the range and diversity of mainstreaming outcomes. It illustrates clearly the legacy this initiative will leave for those who experience barriers to participating in the labour market and fulfilling their potential."

ROUND 1

All Round 1 DPs in Scotland completed their Action 3 activity in February. In March, the Scottish Support Unit gathered every project's outcomes to provide an insight into **Equal**'s impact in Scotland, and has produced a brochure with examples of successful outcomes.

Mabel Hildebrand, Head of **Equal in Scotland**, comments:

*"Those of us close to the **Equal** Community Initiative in Scotland are very aware of how successful and innovative our Development Partnerships have been in testing out new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in all aspects*

ROUND 2

As Round 2 DPs approach the halfway stage of Action 2, an event in September 2006 will showcase the progress of their activities and encourage policy-makers' engagement. '**Equal in Practice 2006**' will provide a platform for DPs to highlight their successes to date and promote current and future Action 3 activity.

For copies of the brochure or to register for '**Equal in Practice 2006**', contact:
The Scottish Support Unit
Tel: **0141 582 0401**
E-mail equal@objective3.org

Or you can download the brochure and event details from our website
www.objective3.org/equal



Wales update

Two of the Development Partnerships have been approved for Action 3 of the programme - North Merthyr Tydfil Regeneration Partnership (theme A) and CYFENTER 2 (theme C), with a further two in the process of assessment.

The next meeting of the EQUAL Wales Management Committee will be held on the **25th September 2006**.

The second round of the EQUAL Programme is approaching the second year of Action 2 - the implementation phase. Each of the 15 Development Partnerships are progressing well and are on target to achieve their individual outcomes.

Lights, Action, Evaluation!

Evaluation reports average 64 pages in length, are read by 2.4 people, and cost thousands of pounds to produce. So instead, the CEMENT Development Partnership (DP) has sought a more dynamic evaluation approach to add value to the project, its dissemination and mainstreaming. The solution: to use film.

The DP's evaluator, Gill Sandell, is a formal project evaluator and also a producer of community films. By using film as an evaluation medium, CEMENT can capture more accurately the project's qualitative developments, soft outcomes, successes and challenges.

An initial DVD shows the project's starting point/baseline, capturing the feelings, attitudes and perceptions of strategic and delivery partners, together with case studies from the first beneficiaries. Ongoing evaluation filming during the remainder of the project will result in a second DVD showing the distance travelled by the project, its successes and barriers overcome.

Using film as an evaluation medium has many positives:

- People speak more openly in front of the camera.
- Film footage is made available to the management group and helps to steer the project's direction and identify good practice and potential problems.
- Evaluation in DVD format provides an innovative report, and a valuable dissemination and mainstreaming tool as well.
- The evaluation report's audience (for example, policy-makers) is more receptive to the medium of DVD, where the key messages are conveyed in sight and sound.

Copies of the CEMENT evaluation DVD 1 are available from
Robert Morrall
Email: robertmorrall@aol.com



Equal, disability and employment

*Across the eight themes of **Equal** many Development Partnerships (DPs) are combating discrimination on the basis of disability, and are promoting equality and inclusive working practices.*

Three DPs from various themes of the **Equal** programme have adopted a range of strategies to tackle issues around disability and employment and incorporating people with disabilities in the workplace. Strategies include working with employers to demonstrate a business case for diversity, harnessing modern technology to empower individuals with disabilities, and providing tailored information, advice and guidance (IAG) and skills needs assessments for individuals.

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS TO DEMONSTRATE A BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY

Employers can often see diversity as a compulsory bolt-on they are forced to consider on top of everything else. The DDA can seem particularly daunting to employers, as taking action on disability is too often seen as extra work and a cost. However, many employers already practise diversity in many areas of their business without actually realising it.

The Demonstrating a Business Case for Diversity and Flexible Working DP is striving to dispel some of the myths around disability as well as making the subject of diversity relevant to employers' individual circumstances. A major thrust of the DP is to show the benefits that employers can gain from thinking about diversity more widely, as "diversity isn't just about the business case, it's also about the business need". The DP shows employers how they are already practising diversity, and the best

practice is harnessed to create a baseline against which further action can be measured. Diversity is shown to be integral to every aspect of the organisation, from business planning, through recruitment and retention of the workforce, to existing and potential customers. The key drivers of an organisation – such as attracting a new customer base – are used as a hook to get employers on board.

The DP aims to make diversity issues relevant to the particular business needs of each organisation. An important aspect of the project is making employers understand that disability issues are relevant to all of them, not just those who have members of staff with disabilities. Employers are made to see that if a member of their workforce becomes disabled, this does not mean that they are lost as a worker. The importance of preventative measures is also highlighted in minimising risks in the workplace.

The project is developing an internet-based 'accessibility framework' aimed at employers and written in a language they can understand. The framework is based around a set of organisational diversity criteria and questions on employers' current practices and needs. Based on their answers, employers are signposted to relevant sources of help and shown what action they could take. Also forming part of the framework is a network of regional disability organisations, which acts as a first point of call for employers wanting to find out about disability issues in



Equal, disability and employment cont

their region. The network interprets employers' and signposts them to the right organisations.

A key message of the DP is that taking action on disability is an investment rather than a cost. Organisations that reflect the demographics of their customer base have been shown to be more commercially successful, as their staff are more likely to understand the various customer groups and can relate better to their needs and experiences.

This also applies to disability. For example, the DP's work with Mothercare has shown that the company has benefited immensely from making its products more accessible to a wider range of customer groups. The catalogue and website have been made more visually accessible, and the company has tapped into a new customer base as a result. Grandparents, who often have visual impairments, are able to shop with added ease. The catalogue also highlights which products are wheelchair friendly, or suitable for different groups.

The DP also turns legislation and red tape into a promotional tool, by showing companies what their competitors are doing and how they may be gaining a competitive edge. Employers can access case studies of other companies which have taken action on disability, and see what kinds of business gains they have made.

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS IN THE LABOUR MARKET THROUGH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The Through Assistive Technology to Employment (TATE) DP helps individuals with learning disabilities to become more independent and employable through the use of electronic assistive technology (AT). Although AT is proven to help people with physical disabilities, there is limited research on how it can benefit those with learning disabilities. *TATE* is developing new AT devices which can give prompts or spoken instructions for individuals, staff members or family carers. A computer-based assessment tool is also being developed to determine individual support needs with regard to remaining in a workplace, and for finding employment.

The assistive technology can be based at home or in the workplace. It shows people what they need to do to organise their daily personal and work lives. The technology gives electronic prompts to people by speaking to them, for example to say that the fridge has been left open for too long and they should close the door, or to remind them to close the curtains when it is dark.

TATE is also developing AT to help people to get ready for interviews, and to manage their finances and workload. Technology such as a video shows people what they need to do to get ready for an interview (for example, setting their alarm clock the evening before). It is also possible to zoom in on objects more closely to see exactly what the person in the video is doing to get ready. AT can also help people to get to their workplace by showing them photographs of the bus number and

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of the bus stops where they need to get on and off. In the workplace, technology can perform a task analysis and then remind people to perform the necessary tasks.

The computer-based assessment tool will determine individual requirements in the workplace as well as the types of support mechanisms that employers need to provide. The tool can be used by people with a disability, members of staff or carers, and professionals. It includes a set of accessible questions with multiple-choice answers which can be ticked by touching the screen. The answers then point the user to the right AT. To engage employers, the DP is working with a supported employment agency, which will develop links with employers and seek work placements.

PERSONALISED IAG AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS AND AWARENESS-RAISING WITH EMPLOYERS

People with disabilities often slip through the training net, and hence their employment opportunities are limited. Lack of awareness among employers of the business case for greater diversity, and of the types of support mechanisms available, works against employing people with disabilities.

The Equinex DP works with individuals who have a range of sensory impairments and physical and learning disabilities, and also with employers. Individuals have been helped into employment by increasing their employability. With employers, *Equinex* raises their awareness of the kinds of support mechanisms they can draw on when employing people with disabilities. The DP also highlights the business case for employing a more diverse workforce.

Equinex is building closer links between employers and agencies that work with people with disabilities. The National Autistic Society – a project partner – is developing a social skills curriculum for people with higher functioning autistic spectrum disorders. The DP is also developing a tool to assess individual barriers to learning. This will be used to improve people's skills base and thus enable them to become more employable.

Equinex has conducted a survey of employers' awareness of schemes dealing with disability, and their experiences of the agencies working in this area. The DP is also looking at best practice examples in education and training. Employers will be targeted by events and visits, and research findings will be reported at a Chamber of Commerce event also aiming to build links between

agencies and employers. The research findings will determine the project's next steps, and guidance for employers will be developed according to what employers say they need. This information will be distilled into a directory of information on the support available locally.

The DP also offers direct support to individuals through transition officers, who help people who have previously slipped through the training net; referrals are received from social services. These transition officers are able to offer IAG with an added personal touch, tailoring support mechanisms to what individuals would like and need. In addition, the officers try to find suitable employers for work placements. *Equinex* is also pulling together support groups for individuals with disabilities, to act as advocates.

See page 8 for contact details.





Reforming welfare

The Government's Green Paper, 'A new deal for welfare: Empowering people to work', sets out proposals to advance the welfare agenda.

On launching the Paper in January, John Hutton, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, said:

"Our plans will redefine the role of the welfare state. The fundamental emphasis will be on what people can do, not what they cannot. Essentially we want to return to fundamental principles where the welfare state is able to respond to people's abilities and help them into the workplace – not one that condemns them to a life on benefits."

The Government aspires to an 80% employment rate for working-age people. The Paper outlines targets to:

- reduce by 1 million the number on Incapacity Benefit;
- help 300,000 lone parents into work; and
- increase by 1 million the number of older workers.

PROPOSALS FOR INCAPACITY BENEFIT

Much of the Green Paper is about reforming Incapacity Benefits. Currently, over 2.7 million people are on Incapacity Benefit, and the Paper states that 80-90% of those making a claim want and expect to return to work. Yet after two years on Incapacity Benefit, a person is more likely to have died or retired than found a new job.

The Government proposes measures in three key areas:

1. increasing the numbers who remain in work when they fall sick or become disabled;
2. increasing the number leaving benefits and finding employment; and
3. better addressing the needs of those who require extra support.

Incapacity Benefit reform is underpinned by the new Employment and Support Allowance, which will replace Incapacity Benefit for all new claimants and is intended to simplify the current system. From April 2008, this integrated contributory and income-related allowance will replace Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claimants. For most, it will be paid in return for undertaking work-related interviews, agreeing an action plan and, as resources allow, participating in some work-related activity.

To increase the numbers returning to work, the new system intends to boost support for claimants by replacing the 'one size fits all' model with a "tailored, active system that addresses each individual's capacity". The Government's Pathways to Work programme (which offers financial support and improved work prospects) will be extended across the country by 2008. Future provision will be delivered primarily by the private and voluntary sectors, with payment by results.

The Green Paper acknowledges the need for local partnerships and a multi-agency approach to enable people to achieve their work aspirations, and refers to the voluntary and private sectors as major contributors to success.

"The fundamental emphasis will be on what people can do, not what they cannot."



DPs ARE ALREADY RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE

Many Equal DPs tackle labour inequalities, and a number provide innovative programmes to maximise the potential of disabled people (many of whom are on Incapacity Benefit) with aspirations to move into employment. DPs undertake a wide range of activities to promote employability, including confidence-building programmes, developing CV and interview skills, providing work placements and mentors, and designing employer toolkits.

For welfare reform to succeed, the Government acknowledges the importance of actively engaging with employers. DPs have sought to address this issue. *Disability Equals Business* aims to increase employment opportunities for disabled people, working directly with employers to identify the benefits of addressing disability in their workplace. Partners such as Impact's 'Workability Project' then work directly with disabled people to action plan their career aspirations and provide appropriate stepping stones into employment. By working with employers and disabled people, partner organisations complement each other's work.

Pathways to Work delivers programmes in partnership with the NHS to help people to manage their health conditions, and identifies GPs as key stakeholders for progression. DPs have also been taking a more joined-up approach to engaging with and enabling disabled people to return to work. *Equal Access* creates better linkages among services contributing to employability. In addition to the more traditional employment services, the DP emphasises health services' role in helping to overcome barriers to working. It promotes realignment of social work and health resources to focus more on supporting those looking for work and those in work.

Like many DPs, *Equal Access* uses various avenues to engage with disabled people. As well as referrals from public-sector services (Jobcentre Plus, GPs, Primary Care Trusts), the DP has gone directly to the local community, using door-to-door visits to engage with those who do not access traditional services.

Other DPs work with specific groups of disabled people. *Visage* engages with blind and partially sighted people to help them to achieve career goals. A range of methods are used to progress people into or towards employment, including work experience, guidance for setting up a social enterprise, and on-going support for employers.

Visage is also researching the employment perceptions and requirements of employers and disabled people. The findings will enable the DP to tailor activity to address different audiences' needs in the most effective way. This will be aided by the active involvement of employers and blind or partially sighted people in any toolkit which is developed to promote moving into employment.

Ensuring Positive Futures comprises partners encompassing the HIV sector, trade unions, employers and the public sector. The aim is to increase the employability of people living with HIV and AIDS. The DP has developed links with other organisations to enable it to reach a greater audience, for example teaming up with other charities to run an event for employers under the banner of 'hidden disabilities'. Trevor Skingle from the DP said that word of mouth, plus engaging with Pathways to Work and other inter-agency links (for example, NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) and the Skills Council Board), has led to encouraging early indications of success. More beneficiaries have accessed the project, and the numbers joining are increasing all the time.

See page 8 for contact details.

newspublicationswebsitesevents

Delivering on Gender Equality: A progress report

This document aims to chart progress on the gender equality public service agreement across a range of indicators, as part of the Government's objectives on equality and social inclusion

http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/publications/delivering_genderequality_report.pdf

Department for Communities and Local Government - ODPM Race Equality Scheme

The Race Equality Scheme sets out a clear strategy and action plan that demonstrates commitment to diversity and inclusion in creating sustainable

communities, as well as meeting its legal duty to promote racial equality.

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1164062>

Publication of DWP research report 325: survey of employers' policies, practices and preferences relating to age

New research published on 9 March by the Department for Work and Pensions in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry explores the extent to which current employment policies and practices accord with equal opportunity with respect to age.

The report provides findings from a quantitative survey of around 2000 employers in Great Britain, and was designed as a baseline to evaluate the effects of the forthcoming Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006. It provides information on practices relating to equal opportunities, pay and benefits, retirement, recruitment, appraisal, training, promotion and redundancy as well as attitudes and awareness.

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/2006/mar/emp031-090306.asp>

On 6 April 2006, the CRE's new statutory code of practice on racial equality in employment took legal effect in England, Scotland and Wales. It contains a set of recommendations and guidance on how to avoid unlawful racial discrimination and harassment in employment. The code outlines employers' legal obligations under the Race Relations Act 1976, and provides general advice on the policies they will need to safeguard against discrimination and harassment, as well as more detailed recommendations on the procedure and practice that will help ensure fair treatment for everyone.

DP Name:	Contact:	Email:
Disability & Employment Article Demonstrating the business case for diversity and flexible working TATE DP EQUINEX	Kirsty Light Ms Ann Aspinall Alison Preece	k.tanner@exemplas.com ann.aspinall@hft.org.uk alison.preece@newport.ac.uk
Reforming Welfare Article Disability Equals Business Equal Access DP Visage Ensuring Positive Futures	Lee Townsend Lynne Ward Andy Taylor Andrew Little	lee.townsend@disabilityequalsbusiness.org.uk lward@northlan.gov.uk visage@afbp.org alittle@ukcoalition.org
Lights, Action, Evaluation ! CEMENT	Robert Morrall	robertmorrall@aol.com

GB Equal Support Unit

Priestley House
12-26 Albert Street
Birmingham B4 7UD UK

General Helpline: **0121 616 3660**
Fax: 0121 616 3662
E-mail: equal@ecotec.co.uk
Web: www.equal.ecotec.co.uk

Scottish Equal Support Unit

Contact: **Sharon Thomson**
Scottish ESF Objective 3 Partnership
Caithness House
127 St Vincent Street
Glasgow G2 5JF

Telephone: **0141 582 0401**
E-mail: s.thomson@objective3.org
Web: www.objective3.org/equal

Welsh Equal Support Unit

Contact: **Michelle Howarth**
The Equal Team
Welsh Funding Office
The Old Primary School Machynlleth
Wales SY20 8PE

Telephone: **01654 704 900**
E-mail: equal@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Web: www.wefo.wales.gov.uk/newprogs/equal

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