



break through

Including Disabled People

Breakthrough UK Ltd.

## **Policy Think Tank**

*Office for Disability Issues Consultation  
Equality for Disabled People*

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ODI Consultation – Equality for Disabled People

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## **Introduction:**

Breakthrough UK Ltd welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ODI consultation on Equality for Disabled People. This work is especially timely in relation to the growing activity around implementing recommendations from the 'Improving the Life Chances Report' published by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in January 2005, and in respect of the forthcoming establishment of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

It must be noted that disabled people live very different lives to non-disabled people, largely because of the way society is constructed, rather than because of particular characteristics of the individual. This means that finding useful comparators between disabled and non-disabled people is also difficult<sup>1</sup>, and we expect that the testing of some of the measures suggested here will be helpful.

Although this consultation is a welcome initiative, nevertheless it is fraught with difficulties in terms of measuring progress and identifying indicators. We understand this difficulty, and have aimed to identify targets and measures that can easily be derived from existing mainstream sources. As a general rule all targets relating to individuals should reflect the 6 strands of diversity to be addressed by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, namely disability, gender, race, sexuality, age, faith and belief. This principle should be applied to all the measures suggested in this document.

Whilst we have broadly followed the structure of the consultation questions nevertheless we have inevitably strayed, and have not directly answered all the questions. We hope, however, that the points and suggestions we have made are useful – they are certainly pertinent.

We note that there are 17 years until 2025, and suggest that the earliest adoption of measures such as those laid out here will help to track changes and promote the development of equality for disabled people.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, it has been estimated that visually impaired people have to go through some 5 or 6 extra layers to access web-based information.

## **Breakthrough UK Ltd:**

Breakthrough UK is a successful independent company managed and staffed mainly by disabled people. We bring together disabled people, local businesses, and other agencies to plan and deliver projects and services to promote and support the independence of disabled people. Based in the North West of England, Breakthrough UK provides training, employment, independent living and business opportunities to disabled people, working within the social model of disability. On average 60-70% of Breakthrough's staff are disabled people, with first hand knowledge and experience of the barriers to independence and employment.

The Policy Think Tank is a response to what we see as a 'policy vacuum' in relation to disability. Its membership brings together a small but significant group of disabled people known to subscribe to the social model of disability. They are known for their analytical approach, and their tendency to stretch the boundaries in a variety of areas: members cover a range of sectors and disciplines. This response to the consultation has been produced collaboratively, with input from many Think Tank members.

The Policy Think Tank has two major aims:

- To influence government, or other strategic bodies, on matters to do with disability, from a 'social model' perspective.
- To provide briefings on current matters to do with disability for general dissemination.

The Social Model of Disability: traditionally disabled people have been seen as a problem, to be tackled by focusing interventions on the individual. These interventions have tried to either 'fix' disabled people so that they fit the given norms of society, or 'compensate' or 'care' for us if the fixing is not successful. Developed by disabled people themselves, the social model locates the problem with the structures and organisation of society, which take little or no account of what disabled people need to be autonomous and to live independently. Using the social model as a basis for solutions the focus of the problem shifts from the individual to organised society.

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Format of our response – the consultation questions are produced in italics, whilst the Policy Think Tank points are in plain text. Our suggested measures are in priority order, within their respective headings.

**General consultation questions:**

1. *What does equality for disabled people mean to you?*
2. *Can you describe any examples of equality for disabled people you have experienced or know about?*
3. *Do you think there should be a single measure of equality, or that we need to measure progress on different aspects of disabled peoples' lives?*

1. Equality would mean that disabled people would have the same opportunities as everyone else, whether it is in education, family life, housing, leisure, independence, travel, etc. To do this, society would have to take into account our access requirements, whether this is physical, attitudinal or organisational. The social model of disability would lead the way, but also taking into account people's specific impairment needs where required.

Equality for disabled people means simply that the opportunities, choices, and life chances available to them are comparable to those available to non-disabled people. In this respect, some examples preventing equality that can be highlighted are:

- Lack of access to public transport, and the difference that 'mainstreaming' all forms of transport would make to the lives of disabled people,
- Lack of access to the leisure and entertainment industry, whether or not public places provide mobility equipment – scooters, wheelchairs, e.g.) for disabled people to access their 'product'.
- The continuing generally negative portrayal of disabled people by the media, and the undoubted impact this has on perceptions of disabled people.

2. A good example of equality would be the work that our, and others' organisations undertake and how we treat disabled people. When looking at employing disabled people, when considering the best candidate for the post,

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we look at the person's skills and do not look at their impairment. This is only considered after we have decided who to recruit and then only to ensure that we meet their access needs.

There are some service providers that now make sure that their services are easily accessible for disabled people, whether it is sports stadiums, shops or other leisure facilities. For example, one Policy Think Tank member says

“during a recent visit to the USA, I never had to ask in advance whether I could access a restaurant in the evening. Everyone had accessible facilities for me as a wheelchair user. This was a strange experience and certainly something I could not do in the UK. This is starting to change slowly with the legislation of the DDA.”

3. We are not convinced that a single notion of equality is measurable, beyond stating that -

'disabled people should be afforded the range of options, activities and experiences enjoyed by non-disabled people, and that appropriate additional support, assistive technology, equipment, and so on, should be readily available to aid disabled peoples' access to otherwise inaccessible environments...'

Disabled people's lives are affected by every aspect of society. It would be extremely difficult to have one single measure of equality. Equality is otherwise contextual and thus is difficult to pin down to one or even a couple of measures: in fact it is the view of the Policy Think Tank that the adoption of a single measure would create further barriers and would, in itself therefore, be oppressive.

## **Specific questions:**

### ***Early years and family support –***

1. *What aspects of life for disabled children and their families do you think it is most important to monitor over time?*
2. *Which 3 measures do you think would be the most important indicators of equality in this area?*

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- a) The annual percentage increase / decrease in the number of terminations carried out on the basis of impairment of the foetus.
- b) The number of schools – at all levels –
  - a. Adopting, and
  - b. Implementing inclusion policies
- c) The annual changes in the number of children attending mainstream as opposed to special schools.
- d) The numbers of children and parents expressing satisfaction with the physical, cultural and emotional educational environment.
- e) The number of parents who wanted their children to attend mainstream school, but did not get their choice.

***Transition to adulthood:***

- 3. *What aspects of transition to adulthood for young disabled people do you think it is most important to monitor over time?*
- 4. *Which 3 measures do you think would be the most important indicators of equality in this area?*
  - a) The number of young disabled people (up to age 30) who are living away from their parents, but not in residential care.
  - b) The number of young disabled people who
    - a. take up direct payments, and
    - b. sustain direct payments, and
    - c. express satisfaction with this facility.
  - c) Qualitative research on the frequency with which young disabled people
    - a. Go out socially
    - b. The range of leisure activities they engage in, and
    - c. The barriers they say prevent them taking up leisure activities.
  - d) The development and implementation of a national policy on ‘transition’, with the involvement of disabled people – including young people.

***Employment:***

- 5. *What do you think are the most important issues in respect of employment that we ought to monitor?*

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6. *Which 3 measures do you think would be the most important indicators of equality in this area?*
- a) The number of disabled people securing employment, as a percentage of the total size of the labour market, by job-type.
  - b) The number of disabled people accessing and using the *Access to Work* scheme each year. These figures should also compare disabled people getting support from government departments, compared to the figure before the scheme excluded these departments.
  - c) The percentage change in the aspirations of young disabled people aged 16 to 26 regarding employment, compared with those of non-disabled people.<sup>2</sup>
  - d) The number of disabled people entering the labour market each year.

The points (a, c and d) should be included in the Labour Force Survey as questions to monitor progress.

***Independent living:***

7. *What do you think are the most important issues in respect of independent living that we ought to monitor?*
8. *Which 3 measures do you think would be the most important indicators of equality in this area?*
- a) The elimination of charging policies, by a date agreed through a wide consultation process.
  - b) The year on year percentage increase in houses being built to ‘Lifetime Homes’ standards in
    - a. The social housing sector,
    - b. The private sector
  - c) The percentage increase, year on year, of the average age at which older people go into residential care.
  - d) The number of disabled people who have been denied support to live independently and an analysis of the reason(s) why.

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<sup>2</sup> Tanya Burchardt, LSE, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/0565.asp>

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- e) Nationally agreed eligibility criteria for services, which ensures that everyone who needs a service receives it. This would ensure the end of the “postcode lottery”, enable disabled people to become more mobile, therefore increasing their economic options.
- f) The number of ‘Independent Living Skills’ courses being designed and delivered by disabled peoples’ organisations.
- g) The national standardisation of charging policies, and provision of direct payments, by 2010.
- h) The amount of time between requesting a Community Care Assessment and receiving it.
- i) The percentage reduction of time between –
  - a. a need for equipment being recognised, and
  - b. the relevant item(s) being satisfactorily in use.
- j) Monitoring the amount of Local Authorities that have a Disability Housing Register in place and the effectiveness of their accessible housing allocation, compared to those without such a register.
- k) The number of Centres for Independent Living (CIL’S) established across the UK, the adequacy of their resources (both in terms of staff and their services).

***Other areas not covered:***

- 9. *Are there any other issues in respect of disability equality that we ought to monitor?*
- 10. *Which 3 measures do you think would be the most important indicators of equality in this area?*
  - a) A nationally agreed policy change entitling disabled parents to independent living support for their parenting role.
  - b) The annual percentage increase in the number of ‘mainstream’ inspection regimes (e.g. Health & Safety) that include inspection of provision of access.
  - c) A national body of disabled people established to monitor and ensure public bodies’ compliance with the Disability Equality Duty.
  - d) The number of disabled parents taking up the new entitlement, measured annually.
  - e) The number of children taken from disabled parents and into care, by impairment.

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- f) A national body of disabled people established to monitor and ensure public bodies' compliance with the Disability Equality Duty
- g) The establishment of a similar scheme to *Access to Work* to enable disabled people to undertake voluntary work
- h) An enforceable code of practice for call centres to ensure that have systems in place to meet the needs of those disabled people who can't use a "standard" telephone.

## Conclusion:

In our response to this consultation the Breakthrough Policy Think Tank has considered the matter of equality for disabled people from a social model perspective. We have welcomed the opportunity to respond, and hope that our suggested measures will be useful.

The measures we have suggested can largely be derived from existing data collection exercises or from minor adaptations to those exercises. Whilst we think that *all* the suggested measures are important, the order of our suggestions can be considered a prioritised list for each section.

This is the first real government exercise in measuring equality for disabled people; we anticipate that the exercise will need repeating in 3 years, when there has been a chance to assess the usefulness of the measures adopted, to amend them accordingly, and to adopt new measures as knowledge increases.

It would be fitting to repeat this exercise in 2010, the target year for establishing a CIL-type organisation in every local authority area.

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