

# beginnings



guiding principles for ability and work

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# 1 Million Jobs?

the Next Steps

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## Report from the 2007 Beginnings Spring Event

### Introduction



**Joanne Hindle**

Corporate Services Director  
Unum

March 15th 2007 witnessed another very successful Beginnings Spring Event. There can be no doubt that this event is growing in content and quality year on year, providing some real insight and policy innovation in the welfare reform debate. This brochure is designed to give a taste of some of the highlights of the day and provide a reminder of some of the key findings.

The Spring Event included breakout sessions which discussed issues surrounding the employment, retention and progression of people with mental and physical disability. All the groups contained stimulating debate and raised some of the most pertinent issues and questions affecting the contemporary welfare reform agenda (for summary see Appendices).

The first breakout group discussed 'Mental Health in the Workplace'. The group revealed strong concern over the lack of understanding about what is specifically meant by the term 'mental health'. Employers have acknowledged an unwillingness to take on someone with a mental health condition, as the nature of the illness, leads them to fear that it may make the employee unpredictable and may have an effect on productivity; although there is no evidence to suggest that this will be the case. This is a problem which should be urgently addressed through the provision of accessible information for employers and employees to ensure that the misinformation and stigma around mental illness is reduced. The group brought up interesting suggestions for the development of an open and honest culture throughout

workplaces, with better communication between employer and employee so that help can be given earlier and more effectively.

The second breakout group addressed the question 'How can the policy agenda help employers support disabled people within the workplace?' The main policy objective identified was in making employment retention a statutory right. This is something that the Government has committed itself to, but has not so far provided a timescale for action. It was also proposed that there should be stronger legal rights around flexible working arrangements. Flexible working is a policy that would be of particular benefit to those with intermittent capacity, but would also be a positive move to encourage individuals who have been on Incapacity Benefit for a long time to take the steps necessary to re-enter the workplace at the earliest opportunity. If statutory retention became law, smaller employers might need support in the form of grants for assessment and training, such as already exist in the Republic of Ireland. Many participants expressed hope that a specific programme could be developed to help recently disabled persons into new jobs in which their disability will not be an impairment.

One of the main successes of the Beginnings Spring Event was in considering disability in the broader spectrum, particularly with regard to the older worker. The ageing UK workforce is not only leading to an increased instance of disability, but also may result in multiple

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disadvantages which may compound existing prejudices from current and potential employers.

Breakout group three addressed the issue 'What can Government do to help older workers enter and remain in the workplace and what are the implications for disabled people?' The group raised the idea of increasing employer involvement in understanding and dealing with issues surrounding older workers. Delegates heard that there is a strong business case to be made for keeping older workers in the workplace; not least due to the wealth of experience that older workers can bring and that employers can derive further benefit through enhancing the education and training of older workers. However, some employers remain to be convinced of the real business benefits. Older workers find that they are often prevented from undertaking further training because they are not able to take out loans to cover the costs of a course. This is a specific problem which should be directly addressed by the Government, so that age discriminatory policies are removed from training and skills provision.

In consideration of the issue 'Where next for Welfare Reform?', Breakout group four raised one of the primary barriers to more effective support for people with mental and physical disability re-entering the workplace: the lack of coherence in the Government approach. Stakeholders are clear that there is a lack of responsibility and accountability both inside and outside government which leads to the unacceptable situation of benefit disincentives and insufficient long-term support provided through the NHS. Full summaries of all the

groups can be found in the appendices of this document.

This report contains short articles from across the Beginnings spectrum, representing the views of employers, disability groups and the third sector. With the expected change of government in summer 2007, the year ahead will see some important political changes which will inevitably have some resonance for the progress of welfare reform. With its wealth of knowledge and expertise Beginnings is in a strong position to contribute to these important forthcoming debates.



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What support will disabled people need to return to work, and progress in the workplace and what responsibilities should we expect of the individual?



**Agnes Fletcher**

Assistant Director of Communications  
Disability Rights Commission

It is important that those who can work do so, to provide for themselves and their families. For people who are disabled or have long-term health conditions to take up such a responsibility, it is important that their rights are realized in practice and that support, sometimes ongoing, is available.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has been in force for over 10 years and there has in that time been a modest improvement in the employment rate of disabled people – although the rates for people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and visual impairments remain very low. There are still very large numbers of people claiming incapacity benefit, although fewer people are now coming onto the benefit.

Employers and those covered by the DDA need to understand disability better. Research has shown that when people think of a ‘disabled person’ they think of visible physical and sensory impairments, particularly wheelchair users. They think of physical access as the key barrier. They don’t tend to think of people with invisible impairments and health conditions, who may need flexible working hours, part-time work or human support, in the form of an interpreter, support worker or mentor.

This is an issue for employers but also for ‘disabled people’ themselves – research by the Department for Work and Pensions shows that 50 per cent of those likely to be covered by the DDA don’t think of themselves that way. They may not realize that they could benefit from the Government’s Access to Work scheme, which can pay for the extra costs of getting to work or at work. They may not realize that

the New Deal for Disabled People and supported employment programmes could apply to them.

We also know from research that people are pretty hazy about the types of adjustment that could be offered to people with long-term and fluctuating health conditions – the mental health equivalent of the ramp, for example.

Reasonable adjustments could include:

- altering a person’s working hours
- allowing absences during working hours for medical treatment
- giving additional training
- getting special equipment or modifying existing equipment
- changing instructions or reference manuals
- changing an open plan working policy to accommodate someone with an anxiety condition or autism
- providing additional supervision or support
- making adjustments to premises.

It’s important for employers to be aware of the anxieties that disabled people may have. For example:

- people may feel that they will not get a job if they say they have a disability or long-term health condition
- they may be afraid that they will lose their job because they will be seen as a problem, a risk (including in relation to sickness absence) or ‘less able’
- they may not like asking for help because they feel they can manage, aren’t ‘disabled enough’ to warrant support, or because they don’t want to make a fuss.

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If people can hide a disability or health condition they often will, for the reasons outlined above. As a result they could miss out on adjustments that could enable them to perform more effectively and safely – and minimise time off.

It is in everyone's interest to encourage an open culture of disclosure in workplaces. Senior people talking about issues that they have experienced and a written disability policy (including references to people with long-term health conditions) can help.

Disabled people and employers also need to understand the business case for employing and retaining disabled people. It can:

- make workforces more representative of the local community
- attract and keep able staff
- avoid undervaluing, under-using or losing able staff
- avoid the costs and worry of recruiting or training someone new
- improve staff morale and productivity

- impress the way all staff are managed, including in areas like health and safety and sickness absence
- help to develop innovative practice that also improves customer care.

With the right support, many more disabled people could get jobs and more people could stay in work when they develop a disability or long-term health condition.



Commission for Equality and Human Rights (replaces the DRC in October 2007)

[www.cehr.org.uk](http://www.cehr.org.uk)

Disability Rights Commission

[www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

Jobcentre Plus for details of Access to Work

[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/HelpForDisabledPeople/AccessToWork](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/HelpForDisabledPeople/AccessToWork)

Office for Disability Issues

[www.officefordisability.gov.uk](http://www.officefordisability.gov.uk)

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### What else can be done to engage with employers on employing disabled people?



**Matthew Lester**

Matthew Lester, Director of Employment  
The Papworth Trust

80% of employers feel disabled people are as productive as non disabled people, and will not cost more to employ. Despite this, 45% of employers feel it would be difficult to employ a disabled person and 24% are concerned that disabled employees would make a claim if the job did not work out<sup>1</sup>.

This suggests that employers are often unaware of the usually very simple and low cost reasonable adjustments needed when employing a disabled person. As for the fear of employment tribunal claims against employers, the reality is that disabled people constitute approximately 20% of the workforce, yet only 2.3% of all claims to Employment Tribunals are for disability discrimination.

Misplaced fears amongst employers inevitably manifest themselves in a reluctance to employ disabled people, as managers with budget responsibilities often find ways to recruit people they perceive as being less costly or risky. This is as true in a small business as it is in larger companies, where local managers do not always discharge the spirit of the excellent HR policies and procedures, established by some of our best employers.

Employers will react to initiatives which improve their business; therefore we must always talk in terms of how disability awareness and reasonable adjustments will help business; through developments including increasing their customer base and by increasing the pool of potential new recruits. There is a great deal of reasonably accessible information available, the problem is finding a means of ensuring the employers find it, and act upon it.

The majority of smaller employers turn to their accountants or legal experts for advice, so we need to ensure that they are aware of information and

support organisations which convert legal jargon into practical advice about how to increase the diversity of the workplace. Most of the SMEs the Papworth Trust have supported over the years say that they just needed someone or somewhere to simplify and demystify what they suspected were essentially simple employment issues, but neither they nor their expert advisors knew where to go to for help.

There is a question mark on whether any of the excellent information produced by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) will still be available when it becomes part of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) in October 2007. The new CEHR needs to ensure that it builds on the excellent work of the DRC in providing employers and employees with relevant information about ensuring impairments don't limit employability. This is an essential function of the new Commission.

I believe there is also an argument for enhancing the diversity evaluation within the Investors in People (IiP) standards and other standards, which would help improve the talent within businesses, but this is pushing rather than encouraging change.

The big question is who will fund the required employment related advice and support. There is no doubt that employers need to meet the reasonable costs of running their businesses, but we must also recognise there is a cost to all tax payers if disabled people who are able to work, and get off welfare benefits are prevented by uninformed employers. Therefore as long as employers wrongly perceive employing disabled people to be a risky venture, it will be necessary for advice to be made available to them at little or no cost.

<sup>1</sup> DRC Small Employers' Attitudes to Disability 13/7/05

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### Can UK industry realise the 'talent pool'?



**Miles Templeman**  
Director General  
Institute of Directors

My members at the IoD have long been concerned about the skill base of those entering employment, the development of those in employment and ensuring that talent is not wasted. The productivity and competitiveness of British business and the quality and cost of the provision of public services depends on this. We are continuously engaged with initiatives and organisations involved in efforts to improve skills, to help people realise their full potential both to serve employers better and for their personal benefit. With changes in the types of employment most prevalent in the UK it is becoming increasingly necessary for employers not to miss out on untapped talent and to retain the most talented people.

The final report of the Equalities Review has now been published. It is worth noting the positive statement it made about work:

“Work remains the best and fastest route out of poverty. It is also the most reliable way for an individual to achieve economic independence and prosperity. Its abundant presence is essential to the health of a community. By contrast the absence of work is the surest route to a spiral of demoralisation, loss of motivation, skills and self-confidence, worsening health and well-being for the individual.”

This statement is one that the IoD fully endorses. Our goal has to be to achieve as near to full employment as is practicable. This has benefits both for individuals and for society as a whole and employers in particular in reducing the burden on the public purse. This applies to the employment of both disabled people and to older workers.

Disabled people were identified in the Equalities Review as one of the three

groups at the greatest employment disadvantage. The Review concluded that an employment penalty is present irrespective of educational attainment and aspiration. The 2005 Labour Force Survey found that 40% of all people out of work had some degree of impairment or long-term health condition.

#### Small business

Improving the position in small businesses relies more on knowledge and ease of implementation as on legislative interventions such as the Disability Discrimination Act. Over 70% of my 52,000 plus members are directors of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. 94% of all employers in the UK are SMEs, the majority of whom employ fewer than 25 people. They face employment issues comparatively rarely. Just think; if they have a staff turnover rate of 4% they will recruit about one person a year. They recognise they are missing out on the skills and enthusiasm of a large part of the potential working population, but how can they address the issues they may face in recruitment to ensure that they do not discriminate against disabled people?

People talk about having interview panels and interviewers with specific skills and knowledge. Firstly, it is highly unlikely an SME will have an interview panel but it is even less likely that their workforce will contain people who have the range of skills to accommodate every conceivable recruitment scenario. So what might be done? Encourage development of skills: yes – but it will be a slow process. Over time build skills into the general educational system: yes – but again it will be a slow process, although one with benefits well

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beyond the workplace. But whatever we do the average SME will probably never have in-house the full range of skills to be able to ensure that they are able to realise the talent pool.

There is scope here for the voluntary sector. Many specialist voluntary organisations have access to people with skills that they could provide as a service to employers with benefits both to the employer and those the voluntary organisation is there to help, but this has to be on a basis that the employer sees as being economically advantageous and not just yet another cost burden of employment. However, business does not need quotas, and burdensome regulation that will stifle enterprise and opportunities among and for the very people we are trying to bring into the working population and whose talent we want to maximise.

## Older workers

When we look at older workers we know that many people will have to go on working for longer in order to secure a satisfactory level of income in their increasingly lengthy and, in many cases, healthy and active old age. Others simply want to continue working because of the non-financial benefits it affords. But they may not wish to work on the same basis as they have for the previous 25-30 years. The over 50s now take more foreign holidays than any other group. They want to enjoy the fruits of all those years of work. We may want to work in a different employment or on a more flexible basis.

## Age legislation

More and more employers recognise the benefits of older workers, but are grappling with the implications of recent legislation. IoD members, who in principle have no problems with the idea of retaining or recruiting older workers, face considerable practical and cost burdens in doing so.

Where an older worker seeks new employment employers know they cannot discriminate on grounds of age. However, they have to grapple with that in practical terms of what it means for their business. Almost inevitably there is a cost involved in taking on any new employee. There will be costs of induction and training. However much talent and experience is brought by an older employee this has to be balanced against the benefit that the employer will gain. But the same is true of younger workers. They are unlikely to see an employment as a job for life, so employers must fairly assess the older candidate and not assume that the 'payback period' will be shorter.

Retaining older workers also raises issues for employers. An example would be in the provision of death in service insurance. It will come as no surprise to anyone that the cost of securing this increases with age. However, if someone is retained after what would in the past have been their 'normal retirement age' the employer has no choice but to continue providing this benefit on the same terms as before, although the cost to him may have greatly increased. Such burdens are unlikely to encourage employers to accede to requests to stay on.

## Conclusion

There is a lot of goodwill among employers. Realising the talent of the whole of the potential workforce is a clear advantage for employers, both directly for their own productivity and competitiveness, but also through cost benefits of the reduction in numbers who depend upon state benefits. But employers, particularly small employers, need to be assisted to do this. Government policies can assist – through active interventions helping benefit claimants into or back into work. These do not impose a direct burden on the employer, but instead help individuals. Particularly in relation to the employment of disabled people much can also be achieved through advice, assistance and guidance, particularly of a practical nature. Ignorance is a great disincentive to employing anyone.

## Employment And Disability



**Keith Faulkner**  
Managing Director  
Working Links

Working Links places around 1,000 long term unemployed and disadvantaged people each month, 80,000 in total since we began in April 2000. Our research suggests that about 40% of these people have some form of disability as one of their barriers to employment. Two issues lie behind these broad statistics. First our jobseekers may be on Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), the benefit category is quite a poor proxy for disability with many JSA claimants deserving proper condition assessment and management advice, especially where low level mental health problems are evident. Equally a number of IB claimants do not have a disability that represents a significant barrier to accessing work, a lack of basic skills may be the bigger issue. Second, and leading on from this first point, Working Links believe that it is essential that everybody is seen as an individual. 'Labelling' people as disabled, lone parents or '50 plus' – all titles of Government New Deal programmes – is extremely unhelpful, unhelpful to the individuals, their advocates and their potential employers.

Our experience at Working Links clearly demonstrates these risks of generalisation. Where we have been able to work with IB claimants as part of wider groups we have found that most jobseekers benefit. They learn and draw encouragement from how others have overcome different barriers to employment – and give that same benefit to others around them who may have a prison record, be struggling with single parenthood or a history of alcohol or drug abuse. In practice the necessary pre-employment support or training, the workplace flexibilities or adjustments and the post placement

mentoring are, to some degree, common to all groups. This challenges the design and delivery of Jobcentre Plus programmes like Pathways or its predecessor, New Deal for Disabled People, that categorise the barrier as disability and are therefore more likely to contract out services to specialist disability providers. This encourages rather more focus than is necessary on the disability rather than the persons ability.

It is important at this point not to appear to be understating the importance of the voluntary sector organisations who do deliver employment focused programmes with great success. We would not ourselves achieve the level of placements that we do without strong partnership arrangements with exactly those same organisations. Trust is one vital component in supporting people back into work and often it is the voluntary provider who has earned that precious asset because of their status and the wider range of support mechanisms that they deliver. Certain forms of disability do benefit from specialist knowledge of the adjustments that will make sustainable employment a more realistic goal. Finally, employers also need their confidence reinforced and may gain a greater sense security from working with a specialist charity.

This last point introduces the other side of this equation, the employers. However positive their policies on diversity, all sorts of unintentional barriers can be raised in practice at either the recruitment stage or after an appointment has been made. This is why intermediaries can be so important. The job must be right, which means taking time to really understand an employers expectations

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and work environment before putting a jobseeker forward. A job that doesn't work out will leave most people more discouraged and upset than they were when they started jobsearch. At the end of the day the role of the intermediary, whether from the public, private or voluntary sector, is to help the jobseeker to compete, to demonstrate that they are the best applicant. It is about confidence, the right skills and capability for the role and the evident enthusiasm and commitment towards the work opportunity. With the right prospective employer won over, agreeing any necessary workplace adjustments becomes just a final enabling step, not a reason to silently wonder about the wisdom of taking on 'someone with a disability'.

Whatever the barriers applicants faced, the right post placement support is essential (to be fair, the best private sector recruitment agencies recognise this for every applicant they place). Working Links' experience confirms that it more often the employer than the employee that actually seeks that support. They want the job to work out but time keeping problems, a seemingly poor attitude to taking instructions or productivity issues

might come up and they may find it hard to tackle them effectively. Using our experience and acting as a willing intermediary to negotiate changes resolves the majority of problems that could otherwise lead to a premature end to employment.

The Working Links vision is summed up as "changing lives, creating futures". For those with a disability access to employment means so many things; economic independence, expanded social opportunities; heightened self respect and sense of worth, more harmonious domestic relationships and a renewed sense of purpose. To employers it is access to a wider pool of talent, an employee with a greater willingness to learn and reduced recruitment and training cost through improved retention. Importantly those are benefits that don't just flow from fresh recruitment, its about retaining valuable experience when employees suffer serious illness or accident. It falls to intermediaries to make the case so that other employers, like Chubb, realise the benefits. As Hazel, from our case study, remarked "Imran's dedication to overcoming his barriers has paved the way for more disabled jobseekers to find employment at Chubb.

Imran was only 21 years old and had been unemployed for almost a year after a back injury ended his job as a supermarket shelf stacker, he feared that he would never work again. His lack of qualifications presented an additional barrier. Yusuf, a Jobcentre Plus IB Personal Adviser, provided initial guidance and support and then referred Imran to Hazel, a consultant at Working Links. Together they prepared a CV and worked on Imran's confidence and interview skills. The Working Links marketing team identified an appropriate job opportunity at Chubb Security Personnel. Imran faced two interviews, a four day induction course and an exam. Supported and encouraged by Hazel he was offered a good job with prospects for progress. Chubb's reaction was that "Working Links really listened to our recruitment needs and ensured that Imran was a good fit for the job. He has settled in well". Imran's own comment was that "This time last year my motivation and self esteem were very low. I was ready to give up looking for a job. Working Links showed me that I've got a lot to offer, helped and supported me and I'm really enjoying my new job – I can look forward to a New Year and a new life".



## National Supply or Local Demand - with Employers leading or following?



**Peter Barnett**

Head of External Affairs  
Unum

The stated aim of the Welfare Reform process, of which the Welfare Reform Bill is a part, is to get one million individuals off Incapacity Benefit (IB). At the recent Beginnings Spring Event, the delegates were invited to consider how employers could be encouraged to consider playing a bigger part in the Welfare Reform process, perhaps by making sure that their workplace is one that such individuals will find welcoming, and we should not underestimate how much work, in the right circumstances can contribute to recovery from accident or injury.

For in their recent paper, Waddell and Burton<sup>1</sup> showed us definitively that work was on the whole good for us and being unemployed was bad for our health, as well as our wealth.

To improve the employment chances of disabled and disadvantaged people, the recent Freud report<sup>2</sup> recommends an expanded role from 2008 for the private and third sectors with harder to reach clients, albeit only after JobCentre Plus has been the sole provider for the first 12 months. This is to be achieved through greater centralisation, by reaching the disadvantaged through 11 regional "Prime Contractors".

Freud envisages a transfer of risk to the private sector, together with the funding, thereby removing the costs from the government balance sheet and out of the Spending Review process.

The report also gives the retention and progression agendas favourable treatment, but alongside greater conditionality with individual responsibilities as well as rights.

In terms of the employer, Freud favours a supply-side rhetoric with employers, as individuals become work-ready, required to be more

flexible in adapting the workplace to meet their needs.

The Leitch report on Skills<sup>3</sup> also picks up on this theme but instead favours a demand approach from employers, in a sense starting with the employer and looking back. Leitch envisages that the employer will specify competency, culture, skills and experience, i.e. requirements which job applicants have to meet. Thus work-readiness would terminate much closer to the workplace than in the supply model. Leitch's aim of 95% of adults having basic numeracy and literacy by 2020 and the threshold skills level of employment rising from level 2 to 3 is to be admired, but coupling this with the government's aim of an 80% employment rate makes it a very ambitious strategy.

In order to achieve this, as well as the IB caseload reducing by 1 million, the lone-parent rate would have to increase to 70% and the number of older workers (>50) would need to increase by a million. Thus, this framework will require serious investment from government within a tight fiscal regime.

Despite this, eventual local political autonomy for welfare and employment rates seems inevitable. The new National Commission on Employment and Skills which is to be employer led, with employment and skills boards operating at a sub-regional level, may be one way of seeing the employer as a customer in the delivery system of work-ready skilled applicants from the talent pool of the disabled and disadvantaged.

The employment theme is also picked up from a location perspective, in the City Strategies initiative. This cross department project is focussed

<sup>1</sup> G Waddell, AK Burton. *Is work good for your health and well being?* London, 2006

<sup>2</sup> D Freud *Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity: options for the future of welfare to work* London, 2007)

<sup>3</sup> HM Treasury, *Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills* London, 2006

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on the most disadvantaged areas and individuals, with decentralised decision making, helping local markets and economies meet local needs. The City Strategy pathfinder approach, with its own ring fenced discretionary approach, is another attempt to invite local partners to find out what works best in their areas. It seems to move from an approach that categorises people by their disadvantages towards one that favours overcoming individual barriers to work.

This is an interesting change of emphasis as the current “client group” approach to welfare may not always pick up the fact that often disadvantages work together and reinforce each other in terms of low engagement rates. This can vary from location to location, in some cases over a few miles.

Again, this initiative takes Freud ‘head-on’ in terms of the fault line between national planning guidelines and local enfranchisement and democracy.

We know that devolved decision making and individual placement and personal support is a very important model for resolving mental health issues and the Personal Adviser has become a critical role in the delivery of the UK Welfare to work services in the terms of devolved City Strategies. The ‘local solutions for local problems’ mantra also underlined in the arguments that if the early promising results of the Personal Adviser model are to be expanded successfully the current patchy local availability of psychological therapists, particularly “talk-therapists”, will have to be improved. However the cost benefit case for such interventions appears to have a major logic fault.

For despite the undoubted social benefits of therapies like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in terms of improved outcomes in Primary care situations, the causal relationship with improved employment prospects has not been proven and remains tantalisingly intuitive. For example in the “Pathways to Work” pilots, within which mental health forms a significant part, condition management with CBT was only used in 12% of cases and so the value of psychological therapy has not been proven.

So what impact will the current roll-out of Pathways to Work (PTW) have on the incidence of mental health if psychological therapists (PT) are generally not available locally? Currently Primary Care Trusts are ignoring “mandatory” NICE guidelines on the degree of PT provision which they must provide, claiming cost as the reason. Presumably, in the absence of a judicial review, this state of affairs will continue, so we can expect little change in the primary care approach to PT with a corresponding low impact on a major component of successful PTW outcomes.

The Government’s rhetoric on child poverty sees parental employment as one of the key routes for breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty, as work is the most sustainable route out of poverty for many families. It talks about targeted retention and progression and “work-first”, the value of success and training and the expansion of eligibility to the “working poor”. The report also seeks an expanded role for the private and voluntary sectors and notes that local devolution of decision-making is the best way to get local issues solved.

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In the recent Budget, two further initiatives were announced, one of the themes was increasing employment opportunity for all. A key plank of this agenda for underpinning welfare reform will be the piloting of local employment partnerships with large retail employers, Tesco's, B&Q and Sainsbury's have been signed up, working in partnership with JobCentre Plus at a local level to help the long-term unemployed and economically inactive back to work. Despite these laudable efforts by UK PLC, the fact is that most people work for SMEs, so to what extent will the models and lessons be mapped to a local employment model? The 2006 Budget also announced a review of the policies needed to improve mental health and employment outcomes and Budget 2007 promised that the review, informed we believe by Unum research by Oxford Economics, will report as part of the 2007 CSR.

For the government to fulfil its stated aims in these various initiatives after joining them up, it will have to oversee the application of the national economic levers to local solutions through local area agreements, public service contracts and new sub-national locally based integrated delivery partnerships, towards a shared common agenda. This will not be easy and the non resolution of the tensions, between supply and demand on the employer side and central and local management on the government side, will make it harder for employers to strive alongside the work-ready disabled and disadvantaged to find secure long lasting jobs.

So is the face of welfare reform to be employer led with a national view - or client led with a local focus? Retention and RTW measures and

communications that work well in a nationally driven, employer demand led, environment, will by definition be different from a local, employee supply led, market. We believe if both are allowed to operate in an un-controlled manner at the same time the desired outcomes of 1 million people in work will remain permanently out of reach and thus we have to work together to help Government decide both which it wants and how to achieve that end.



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## Appendices

**The feedback from these breakout groups suggested that, among the key stakeholders present, there was a high degree of consensus about what action needs to be taken both by government and by employers themselves. These focused on combating stigma, raising awareness of support programmes available, and increasing funding to help individuals enter and remain in the workplace.**

## Breakout group one: Mental Health in the Workplace

### Key findings:

- There is a lack of understanding about what is meant by the term 'mental health'. Employers find it difficult to take on someone with a mental health problem as the perception is that the nature of the illness may make the employee's performance unpredictable and may have an effect on productivity, although there is no evidence to suggest that an employee with mental illness is any less reliable.
- Education should be given to reduce the stigma around mental illness. The breakout group brought up suggestions to develop an open and honest culture throughout workplaces, with better communication between employer and employee so that help can be given earlier and more effectively. More (appropriate) support should be offered to the sufferer in the workplace, such as confidence training. The Government should launch a national campaign to challenge stereotypes around mental illness.
- Further, GPs need to be better educated on the implications of their 'advice' to sufferers. They should give more detailed information to sufferers so that they fully understand their illness. Overall, more NHS funding needs to be devoted to issues around mental health.

## Breakout group two: How can the policy agenda help employers support disabled people within the workplace?

### Key findings:

- The main policy objective should be to make employment retention a statutory right. The Government has committed itself to this but has not provided a timescale for action. If this became law, smaller employers might need support in the form of grants for assessment and training; these already exist in the Republic of Ireland. There should also be a programme to help recently disabled people into new jobs in which their disability will not be an impairment.
- The breakout group raised the issue of employer involvement in understanding and dealing with issues surrounding older workers. This will help to challenge prejudiced attitudes and prevalent fears about the cost and perceived risks of employing older workers. There should be some incentives for employers.
- Funding is crucial to changing the culture. At present, rehabilitation services are insufficient and therefore present a serious barrier to getting people back to work. There could be a financial incentive to encourage companies to include rehabilitation services within their insurance provisions and to overcome the initial costs involved in equipping and training the workplace. The business case for this can be made effectively, and should be demonstrated for

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employers of all sizes as a long-term investment.

- The Government should aim to create a movement on this issue similar to the current debate on climate change, where people are involved at all levels to voice opinions and enact change, with an emphasis on immediacy.

## Breakout group three: What can government do to help older workers enter and remain in the workplace and what are the implications for disabled people?

### Key findings:

- Employers need to be persuaded of the benefits of keeping older workers on, including the provision of skills and training. There should be stronger legal rights around flexible working arrangements, which will also help to persuade employees to stay on at work. There is a strong business case that can be made for these points.
- Older workers are often prevented from undertaking further training because they are not able to take out loans to cover the costs of a course. They need support and flexible programmes to take away the myth that older people can't be retrained.
- The benefits of retaining individuals with experience should be promoted and the stigma surrounding the older worker must be removed. This will become unavoidable as the population continues to age.

## Breakout group four: Where next for Welfare Reform?

### Key findings:

- The breakout group provided suggestions on what they would like to see in the forthcoming welfare reform agenda. It was strongly felt that government departments need to be more 'joined-up' and have better awareness of existing programmes for return to work options, to eliminate misinformation. These programmes should also be better publicised, perhaps in the style of the healthy eating campaign and through the engagement of a public figure to champion the issue and take the debate forward, as this will help remove the stigma that surrounds mental health.
- The welfare system should provide more appropriate support at the appropriate time – not necessarily in the form of early intervention. Cases should be

managed individually with the emphasis on timely intervention. Greater resources will be needed to achieve this, but it is a cost effective investment. It should not just be about government action, however, other organisations should work together to share expertise and increase the supply of jobs. They should be willing to share knowledge and build partnerships in the private sector.

- Certain barriers were also highlighted, including a lack of responsibility and accountability both inside and outside government which leads to benefit disincentives and insufficient long-term support provided through the NHS. This problem is exacerbated by inflexible targets forced on the NHS which does not fully recognise the nature of the problem. The discussion highlighted the cost of mental illness on the UK economy and showed that this would be significantly reduced with more initial outlay into mental health and rehabilitation services.



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## About Beginnings

Beginnings is a coalition of the private sector, employer and employee organisations, service providers and groups of and for disabled people, who believe that placing and keeping disabled people in productive employment will provide them with fulfilment, self-esteem and economic independence, as well as benefiting wider society.

## About Unum

Unum is the leading disability insurer, for employers. We safeguard one of their most valuable resources by helping employees return to work following long-term absence. Our customers benefit from our expertise in the specialist areas of disability, rehabilitation and return-to-work. We enable individuals to protect their incomes, ensuring their financial security if they are unable to work because of illness and injury. Unum is the sponsor of Beginnings.

For more information please visit

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