

PRESS RELEASE
9 March 2012



Statement on the Government's response to the consultation on the Sayce Review of specialist disability employment support

Summary

BASE welcomes the Government's pledge of continued investment in the sector and its endorsement of personalised employment support as the only way to improve unacceptably low rates of employment for people with disabilities.

We believe, however, that there is little evidence that turning supported employment into a retail marketplace through personal budgets will help large numbers of disabled people achieve sustainable and fulfilling careers, and that Government and its partners should continue to explore the best ways of commissioning effective employment support.

Finally, BASE recognises that supported businesses can provide valuable intermediate labour markets, that Government should play a more active role in supporting business development for the sector, especially around public procurement, and is concerned that appropriate support is offered to those whose jobs will go as a result of the closure of commercially unsustainable supported businesses.

Our response in detail

BASE notes the publication of the Government's response to the consultation on the Sayce review of the future of specialist disability employment support, *Getting In, staying in and getting on*. We support the policy intent of the Government's response with its focus on co-production, personalised support and continued investment in the sector.

Employment rates for disabled people, particularly those with substantial disabilities, have been unacceptably low for too long. We welcome the Government's commitment to consider what further steps will be needed to improve these rates and await further information on the co-production process that is promised within the document. We recognise that a genuine process of co-production will require resources and we look forward to further details of how this is to be managed.

BASE wishes to see better personalised support and we welcome the Government's commitment to this. We are concerned, however, that a retail model driven by personal budgets is sometimes seen as the only way to deliver that personalised support. BASE believes there is a lack of evidence demonstrating that the use of personal budgets

delivers improved employment outcomes for people. It is clear that much work is needed before Personal and Individual Budgets can be considered as an effective method of ensuring that more people with disabilities secure employment and that disabled people have the choice and control to fund the support they want and need to achieve sustainable careers.

BASE recognizes that there are resources available across education, social care, health and employment and these could be combined much better to fund a coherent system of support. An initiative which combines strategic commissioning, individual budgets and payment by results is about to commence as part of the *Right to Control* initiative, and we believe that further debate, informed by such pilots, is needed before we can find workable solutions.

The Government's response to the Sayce Review states that we "need to ensure that disabled people with the greatest barriers are able to enjoy the same opportunities as other people, and that specialist support is particularly important for groups currently poorly represented in the labour market". Unfortunately, this support is becoming more difficult to access. Supported employment funded by local authorities is being scaled back in many places, eligibility for support is tightening and, in many places, people with substantial disabilities are unable to enter the capped Work Choice programme. It is currently difficult to debate the merits of Work Choice as the programme is only 17 months old and we are yet to see any data on participation and outcomes. We call on the Government to make this data available as a matter of urgency to facilitate a genuine process of co-production.

There is little, if any, reference in the Government's response to supported employment as an evidence-based model of best practice. Previous cross Government documents have described and acknowledged what constitutes best practice. BASE believes the debate should now move on to focus on how we can best fund and commission this support. A consultation on National Occupational Standards for supported employment by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service has just closed, and we would welcome the Government's support in ensuring that this high quality, evidence-based support is widely available for disabled people, especially for those with the most substantial level of impairment.

We welcome the intent to recycle monies made available within the sector and strongly urge the use of evidence based best practice in deciding the detail of this reinvestment.

The proposals included on Remploy will cause uncertainty and anxiety amongst disabled people working within Remploy factories and the wider supported business sector. We recognise that some of the subsidies are unsustainable. We welcome the guarantee of a comprehensive package of personalised and individually tailored support and advice to those workers affected. Previous experience suggests that, with a considerable number of the closures in areas most badly affected by the recession, many of the displaced workers will either retire early or leave the labour market. We are

anxious to examine the detail of how this personalised and individually tailored support will be delivered to ensure displaced workers can remain active in the labour market.

We would like to see detailed discussion on a way forward for supported businesses – a debate which should include all stakeholders. Supported businesses have a valuable role to play as intermediate labour markets, and BASE welcomes the Government's recognition of this. Some businesses are profitable without Government intervention but much more could be done to support business development within the sector.

The Government has done little to encourage the use of public procurement to improve the supported business sector, and we would urge the Government to consider this to promote the future viability of as many supported businesses as possible. Where supported businesses are regarded as unsustainable, Government should be working to signpost their commercial customers to others in the sector, and where the spend is from Central Government this focus should be even greater.

Access to Work is undoubtedly a success story and we welcome the proposals to encourage more people with learning disabilities and mental health needs to access this support. Its potential use within internships and work experience is particularly welcome, and we also applaud the commitment to target small and medium sized companies. But we recognize that we must safeguard against this funding being used to support long term unpaid work experience, and that overall much more needs to be done across Government to ensure that more young disabled people leaving education move straight into work.

We urge the Government to engage closely with the residential training colleges in planning a direction forward. We welcome the commitment to continue the existing funding for 2012-13 but recognise that colleges will need to be clear on the implications for future provision and how this can be funded through alternative sources.

We are pleased that the need for advocacy is recognized in the Government's response. We would expect this commitment for advocacy support to begin during any co-production period to ensure this is a genuine process.

BASE is keen to work with the various Government Departments to make the changes that will increase the employment rates for disabled people. We believe that the evidence overwhelmingly points towards the wider use of supported employment as an evidence-based model of support. The question of how we best fund it and how we ensure its quality remain, and we are keen to continue to collaborate with the Government to achieve this so that more disabled people achieve sustainable and fulfilling careers.

Notes

Further information regarding this statement is available from Huw Davies, Chief Executive.

Tel. 01204 880733 (office), 07946 537286 (mobile)
Huw.davies@base-uk.org

The British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) is a national charity whose 185 organisational members are providers of specialist employment support across England, Scotland and Wales. The Association was founded in 2005 through the merger of two separate predecessor associations and exists to promote the principles and high quality delivery of supported employment.

BASE members deliver a range of provision including DWP funded programmes and/or contracts funded locally through adult social care, health, education or charitable funding streams. Our members range in size from large national providers through to small voluntary sector organisations.