

**In this issue:**

- Code of Practice * SUSE Conference
- 50+ Research Project * EUSE Scholarship
- Pathways to Work * Kit for Work
- Intelligent Commissioning
- Work & Pensions Speech
- Employment & Support Allowance
- Travel Options

Welcome to the July edition of the SUSE E-bulletin. There is an old Chinese curse 'May you live in interesting times' and we are certainly living in interesting times, times of great change. Change is inevitable. However, change should be progressive. We need to learn from our experiences, we need to be able to develop as individuals and as organisations. There is a lot of good practice in Supported Employment in Scotland and we need to build on it. It would be a real shame if new legislation and new Government directives were allowed to come in like a new broom sweeping away all before it just for the sake of the new.

SUSE is working for you with the Scottish Government Workforce Plus in a task group with Cosla to get a clearer picture of the best way forward and the first step will be a scoping exercise. This scoping exercise will aim to find out what is really happening in Scotland and to recognise good practice that is already going on across the country.

SUSE is also aiming to influence policy on DWP commissioning. As you will see from the article on 'Intelligent Commissioning' there are already concerns being raised about the nature of the proposed DWP commissioning strategy, which could have major implications for us all. SUSE has formed a subgroup to provide evidence to the select committee and will be expressing members concerns on this matter.

At all levels SUSE is working for you trying to influence welfare reforms, and as you can see from this Bulletin SUSE wishes to keep all its members up to date with these reforms and the issues of the day. Interesting times these may be, but we cannot let them become a curse, as members of SUSE we must work together to make these interesting times opportunities to learn, develop and make positive changes.

Alan Weaver

Chair of SUSE alan.weaver@moray.gov.uk

SUSE 10th Annual Conference 2008

Making the Pieces Fit

The Supported Employment Jigsaw in Scotland

Roths Halls, Glenrothes, Fife



The 10th SUSE Annual Conference will be held at Roth's Halls, Glenrothes, Fife on 27/28 November 2008, starting at 11am on the Thursday and finishing with lunch on Friday. The Scottish Business Diversity Awards will be presented at the Conference Dinner at Balbirnie House on Thursday 27 November and will include Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled People as Keynote Speaker.

A Conference Booking form is attached to this E-Bulletin. Any information about the Conference can be gained by contacting Sandra Wilson on 01592 583378 or email: info@fenlink.org.uk

Workshops

Workshops are integral to a successful SUSE conference, giving us the opportunity to share good practice and learn from others. Proposals are still invited for conference workshops and initial outlines should be emailed to: info@fenlink.org.uk Ideas that reflect 'The Supported Employment Jigsaw' theme of the conference, are welcome.

There will be a 50% reduction in Conference Fees for Workshop Leaders (excluding the Scottish Business Diversity Awards Dinner)

Display stands

Interested in booking one of the limited spaces for stands to promote your service or product at the SUSE annual conference? Want to reach over 150 organisations and individuals attending?

Exhibition fees will be £500 which will include an entry/advert in the Conference Programme. If you are interested in exhibiting, or sponsoring any part of the Conference Programme, please email: info@fenlink.org.uk

EUSE Scholarship

The latest EUSE bulletin is attached to this E-Bulletin. It includes information on the EUSE Scholarship Programme which will provide an opportunity for five Supported Employment Practitioners to participate in a study visit to another European State of their choice. There is a strict scholarship eligibility criteria and details can be found, along with the application form on the EUSE website:

www.euse.org/activities/euse-scholarship-2008-2009. The deadline has been extended to 1 August 08 to allow for maximum participation.

Code of Practice for Supported Employment in Scotland

The Scottish Union Of Supported Employment is proposing to introduce a Code of Practice for practitioners and organisations providing Supported Employment in Scotland. A consultation document of the proposed code of practice was attached to the last SUSE E-bulletin and we are seeking everyone's views on the content of these codes of practice with the intention of introducing them in 2009 as a first step in the recognition of the quality and professionalism of Supported Employment in Scotland.

It is hoped that all the SUSE networks will discuss the Code of Practice as an Agenda item and provide feedback. The date for all feedback on the Code of Practice is the 1st September. After this date feedback will be provided through the E-bulletin.

Please take the time to read through and make your comments known. For copies of the proposed Code of Practice or to make suggestions or comments please contact Alan Weaver Chair of SUSE at: alan.weaver@moray.gov.uk

50+ Work Options Research Project

SUSE Members The Shaw Trust are delivering a national research project to identify how people approaching and over the age of 50, access information on working life for the over 50's. The 50+ Work Options Research Project is purely voluntary and aims to help identify how people approaching and over the age of 50, access information beneficial to their working lives and retirement plans. A flyer detailing information is attached to this E-bulletin. To take part in the research participants must be aged 45 and over, working for an employer (including self-employed) and be living in the Glasgow postcode area.

Shaw Trust can help you with:

Work Options Deferred Pension Schemes
Self Employment Money Matters
Learning New Skills Employment Law
Caring Responsibilities (elderly or sick family partners or childcare issues)
Lifestyle – keeping fit and healthy

They aim to establish where and how people of 50+ access this type of information and how best to use it. There are many organisations, agencies and other sources of information out there but it can be very confusing. The right support can make all the difference. Shaw Trust can act as a signposting service, directing you to the most appropriate form of help. This is a fantastic opportunity to make a difference by helping to shape future legislation and policies and the future of you as an individual.

Call The Shaw Trust on 0800 085 1001, and quote '50+ pilot' and arrange a convenient place and time to meet to take part in a one-to-one interview.

Intelligent Commissioning

'Ultimately, it all comes down to intelligent commissioning. If the users of a service particularly value local knowledge, then you don't want to package the contract so that only large national organisations can compete. Commissioning has to be about more than realising cost savings through competition'

Public Administration Select Committee: Press Notice 9 July 2008

PASC PUBLISHES FIRST EVER SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON THIRD SECTOR

- . No compelling evidence to support Government claim that sector provides public services in distinctive ways
- . Report also notes gap between rhetoric of 'transformation of services' and reality that sector's involvement still on small scale
- . Committee suggests 'intelligent commissioning' the key to discovering if sector has something truly distinctive to offer

The Government's policy of encouraging voluntary sector organisations to deliver public services is not based on strong evidence and may not improve service 'standards, the Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) says 'today. The Committee says "there may well be potential in some areas", but "the onus is on the Government to demonstrate the evidence base supporting its actions. In particular, the Committee says that it would not support a "mass transfer of services".

The Committee's report concludes an 18-month inquiry into the role of the third sector in providing public services. The third sector - made up of organisations such as charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises - is increasingly being seen by the Government as a partner in public service provision, in areas as diverse as employment training, probation services and social care. The Government argues that the third sector has distinctive qualities which can "transform" public services, but today's report suggests that "the evidence is simply not there" to judge whether there is anything inherently distinctive about the sector.

The MPs also argue that a "culture change" is needed across government if hoped-for benefits are to be realised. Advocates of a greater role for the sector in service delivery often call for a "level playing field" between different sectors, but the Committee says it is "unrealistic" to expect most charities ever to compete on an even basis with the public and private sectors. Instead, PASC says that if government wants to get the best out of voluntary organisations, a different approach is needed - characterised as "intelligent commissioning". The Committee's detailed recommendations to implement this include:

- concentrating on improved results for service users rather than simply delivering cost savings
- identifying opportunities to advertise contracts on a smaller scale, so that smaller organisations can compete
- working with local community organisations to identify what matters to users of a particular service, and what types of organisation might be best placed to meet those needs
- support for organisations which struggle with commissioning processes
- an end to 'perverse practices' such as clawing back surpluses from organisations who deliver at a lower cost than expected, or unnecessarily short-term contracting

The Committee rejects as 'alarmist' the suggestion that current policy is threatening the sector's independence or ability to campaign. However, the report identifies risks to service users when services are contracted out of the public sector, notably that users' rights may be unintentionally limited. The Committee calls for an extension to the Human Rights Act, declaring a principle that "the human rights of public service users should not be affected by the identity of the service provider".

Tony Wright MP, Chairman of the Committee, said that the policy of commissioning from the sector showed real potential, but needed to be pursued carefully:

"We've been told for some time that the ideology of public service delivery is that there is no ideology - what matters is what works. So it's strange to discover that nobody seems to know what works. That said, the principle must be right that public services are provided by whoever will deliver the best outcomes for service users. Sometimes, that will be an organisation from the third sector. Where it is, commissioners need to be able to identify that fact and act accordingly.

Ultimately, it all comes down to intelligent commissioning. If the users of a service particularly value local knowledge, then you don't want to package the contract so that only large national organisations can compete. Commissioning has to be about more than realising cost savings through competition. I think the Government has got that message. What is needed now is to translate that message into action on the ground."

Committee Membership: Tony Wright (Chairman) (Lab) (Cannock Chase), Mr David Burrowes (Con) (Enfield, Southgate), Paul Flynn (Lab) (Newport West), David Heyes (Lab) (Ashton under Lyne), Kelvin Hopkins (Lab) (Luton North), Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Con) (Bridgewater), Julie Morgan (Lab) (Cardiff North), Mr Gordon Prentice (Lab) (Pendle), Paul Rowen (Lib Dem) (Rochdale), Charles Walker (Con) (Broxbourne), Jenny Willott (Lib Dem) (Cardiff Central)

www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/public_administration_select_committee/pasc0708pn44.cfm

Kit for Work

Kit for Work is Fife Employability Network's assistive technology loan scheme to help people with disabilities start or keep a job or take part in work-related training. The scheme lets businesses borrow assistive technology until a more permanent arrangement is made and is available to public, private and voluntary sector organisations in Fife.

It appears that businesses are often concerned about the cost of 'reasonable adjustments' to help people with disabilities in the workplace. The truth is that the average cost of an adjustment is around £75 and many cost much less or even nothing at all. Kit for Work can help by bridging the gap until Access to Work is organised or the employer has funded the adjustments, whichever is appropriate. It can also let people try out equipment, eg a mouse or a keyboard, to be sure it's the right solution. Employers can borrow from the 'kit' for new staff or to help existing staff affected by disability.

Kit for Work was originally funded in 2005 through the Scottish Enterprise Challenge Fund. Additional funding from Scottish Enterprise Fife in 2007/2008 has meant the 'kit' can be expanded in the light of lessons learned. For example, there has been more demand for items like keyboards and mice than for hi tech solutions. The resource is now also available to those engaged in employability initiatives such as Pathways to Work, New Deal and Training for Work.

The 'kit' includes laptops with specialist software such as speech screen reading software, magnification software and software to help people with dyslexia. You can also borrow adapted keyboards, mice, and other peripherals, reading rulers (small overlays), spell checkers and a range of technology to help people with hearing impairment.

The loan period is normally 4 to 6 weeks to allow time for a more permanent arrangement. Loans are kept under review and can be extended in particular circumstances, for example if an Access to Work application is almost through.

For more information about Kit for Work or Fife Employability Network please contact Sandra Wilson, Development Co-ordinator, on 01592 583378 or email . You can also visit our website at www.fifedirect.org.uk/fenlink.

A Work Culture not a Welfare Culture

www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/2008/25-06-08jp.asp

25 June 2008 Speech from Rt Hon James Purnell MP, Secretary of State for Work & Pensions at the Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion Conference, Birmingham.

Freedom of choice will be central to radical welfare reform plans, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell said today. James Purnell outlined his vision for the future of the welfare system, devolving power, and opening the door for local providers to offer their own solutions to unemployment.

Speaking at the CESI Welfare to Work conference in Birmingham, James Purnell said:

"Our mission has been to give people more power because people want to do. They don't want to be done to.

How do we do this? By putting skills at the heart of welfare. And by reforming welfare so that it demands personal responsibility. We will shortly be publishing our Welfare Reform Green Paper. We will provide better support, and expect more responsibility in return. Claimants should have the choice over how to get back to work, not whether they should go back to work

We want a work culture, not a welfare culture. Over the last ten years, we've transformed the welfare state from an essentially passive one, to a profoundly active one - and today, there are more people in employment than ever before, with a higher employment rate than the US.

Claimants should have the choice over how to get back to work, not whether they should go back to work. We want a work culture, not a welfare culture and we can only achieve this by reforming the system so that it demands personal responsibility. I want to give more power to customers, providers and regions. We are reforming the Welfare State from an essentially passive one to a profoundly active one. "

Mr Purnell set out a radical approach to developing employment schemes. He said the Government recognised one of the strengths of local providers is the potential to develop new solutions to existing problems. Under the new "right to bid" process every serious idea will be properly evaluated, by a DWP commissioning team, who will report to the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary. James Purnell said: "I want to hear their proposals. I want to be able to harness this creativity, and test the ideas we receive so that we can develop the innovative ideas for future programmes or enhance the effectiveness of current ones to help even more people back into work.

Hence our first goal: integrating welfare and skills, so that when you sign on for benefits, you sign on for skills. That's why we will improve the training we offer claimants, but also legislate to be able to require them to take up that training.

Accountability is key. It can be done in different ways: ideally by making the service accountable to the citizen, by giving them choice over what they get and from whom. Where that's not possible, accountability can be through targets and inspection, or through information and elections.

To devolve power to those who are responsible for delivering the service because they know best how to run the service for their customers. So how can we move power to where it can be used most effectively? Triple Devolution.

To our customers, to our providers and to communities.

Most unemployed people want to get back to work and we should trust them to choose how, within a framework that has clear sanctions for playing the system. The second devolution is to our providers - whether public, private or third sector. That means freeing up Jobcentre Plus advisers.

The strength of our provider organisations, your strength, is the potential to develop new solutions. We need to put ourselves in a position to tap into that supplier innovation more creatively. To this end I have asked my officials to develop just such a route, putting in place what I would call a 'right to bid'.

Where providers identify a part of our service, or a customer group that they think they could do more for in a particular region, I want to hear their proposals. I want to be able to harness this creativity, and test your ideas so that together we can develop the innovative ideas for future programmes or enhance the effectiveness of current ones to do yet more to help people back into work.

We won't guarantee that we'll take up every idea. But we will promise that every serious idea will be properly evaluated, by our commissioning team, who will report to myself and Leigh Lewis. And we will give you reasons for our decisions, whether to go forward or not. We will pursue a new delivery model, with a common spine across the country, but local flexibility to local circumstances.

Getting people back in to work is no longer just about job search. It's also about skills, health, addiction treatment, childcare, transport. If local areas can show that they are drawing resources together in a way that adds to the size of the contracts on offer, to their reach, and to their effectiveness, we will look to devolve contracting decisions, including exploring whether this could include ESF funding.

Most radically, for the most committed areas, we want to experiment with a fully devolved model. We want to challenge areas to meet strict criteria - including ambitious pooling of budgets and a record of successful delivery, partnership working and clear governance arrangements. In return we will offer greater freedom to choose."

Announcing an additional £5m to extend City Strategy pilots for a further two years, Mr Purnell said he wanted to investigate giving regions more control over improving employment in their area: "Today, no region has a claimant unemployment level higher than four per cent. But in all of our regions, there are parts of our community that have been left behind. As the problems of worklessness have become more localised, so the solutions have too.

"To get those bespoke solutions, I want to devolve power to the local level, so that cities and sub-regions can pool funding. Put their budgets together to develop a comprehensive solution, not dozens of small interventions."

We are extending the 15 City Strategy Pathfinders for a further two years until 2011, with a further £5 million to continue to build their capacity. The 15 areas are: Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country, Blackburn with Darwen, **Dundee**, East London, **Edinburgh, Glasgow**, Heads of the Valley, Leicester, Liverpool, Greater Manchester, Nottingham, Rhyl, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and West London.

For further information on City Strategies see
www.dwp.gov.uk/welfare-reform/cities_strategy.asp

Textphone: 020 3267 5145

Website: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/>

NDDP Successful Bidders

The tendering exercise for New Deal for Disabled People has now been completed, and the successful bidders in Scotland are as follows:

District	Preferred Bidder
Ayrshire, Dumfries, Galloway & Inverclyde	Wise Group Working Links
Glasgow	Shaw Trust A4E Sencia
Highlands & Islands, Clyde Coast & Grampian	Working Links Shaw Trust
Lanarkshire	Shaw Trust Reed

Pathways to Work

There appears to be some concerns from service users regarding Pathways to Work. An example of this can be seen at:

<http://bonkersbob.wordpress.com/2008/05/15/pathways-to-work/>

which comes from an online blog from someone with schizophrenia.

The Employment & Support Allowance

Take up thy bed and work
Employment and Support Allowance
and the new politics of disability

<http://gptublog.blogspot.com/2008/07/take-up-thy-bed-and-work-employment-and.html>

This is the text of a speech by Mark Baker of Royal National Institute for Deaf people that he gave to the PCS conference in Brighton in July. He was asked to give the speech as Chair of the Policy Group of the Disability Benefits Consortium. The speech, therefore, was an expression of the consortium's views, rather than RNID's.

First of all, let me thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today, and give you a perspective on welfare reform from the viewpoint of the claimant.

If I can just introduce myself - I've been working in the disability sector since 1997, and currently chair the policy group of the Disability Benefits Consortium. The DBC consists of over 25 national organisations that represent the needs of people who rely on disability benefits, providing an information-sharing resource as well as a campaigning function. It is this latter capacity that we have been involved in the ongoing programme of welfare reform over the past four years or so, lobbying ministers and meeting with civil servants.

When I first came to Cardiff in the dying years of the Thatcher regime, it was, I have to say, a city showing signs of neglect, with a future based more on hope than expectation. Twenty years on, and the transformation is remarkable - Cardiff has become a modern European capital city with a future to look forward to. But the success of Cardiff must not be allowed to mask the deep scars that remain in many parts of South Wales, scars left by deindustrialization that mark not only the landscape, but the communities and the people that live in them. The policies of successive governments have neglected too many people, leaving them to lives of poverty and exclusion, meaning that pockets of South Wales have some of the highest rates of Incapacity benefit claimants in the UK.

The aims of the ongoing process of welfare reform, we are told, is to give people the opportunity and the practical tools to lift themselves out of poverty and into paid work.

And I expect that we'll hear a lot about the theoretical debate behind welfare reform today - the ideological and scientific approaches and the vision of a flexible, engaging and unified welfare system. I'm here to look at the practical side of the equation, and show the gulf that is emerging between theory and practice - a gulf that too many of the people I represent may fall into. I'm sure we all recall the clarion cry at the heart of reform - the oft-repeated promise to 'get one million people off Incapacity Benefit and into work'.

This would be achieved by striking a new balance between rights and responsibilities - a 'something for something' culture wherein those who wish to claim from the state have to fulfil a series of duties not incumbent upon others. These include, for most claimants, engaging in work-related activity in the understanding that failure to do may result in the application of (I believe unnecessary) sanctions and a reduction in benefit. In exchange for this, the government has promised better support, both financially and in terms of help in getting back to work. These, then, are the government's conditions for conditionality - the carrot by which they justify the stick. We give you more, but we shall expect more from you in return. This, then, is the new politics of Disability.

Being immersed in the detail of this complex reform over such a period of time can make it difficult to select areas of particular concern, but with so much of the programme already in place, waiting to be launched onto a largely unsuspecting public, I'd like to concentrate on three issues that will affect not merely those people who will be likely to claim Employment and Support Allowance, but also those who are in contact with them, including JCP staff.

The issues are:

- The Work
- The rates at which ESA will be paid
- Employment services and long-term claimants
- The Work Capability Assessment

The Work Capability Assessment (or WCA) is the name of the new gateway for ESA, and its introduction will have major ramifications for new and current claimants alike. Its predecessor, the Personal Capability Assessment was widely rated as being one of the most stringent gateways to disability benefits in Western Europe. Well, it just got tougher. There are welcome improvements. The greater understanding of the barriers faced by people with mental illness, learning difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Disorder is a step forward, as is the combination of mental and physical disabilities. However, pilot studies undertaken by the DWP have shown that there will be a significant disallowance rate - one in eight of those who would have received IB will not receive ESA.

What does this mean? Well, for one thing, it means that the Government's target of getting one million people off Incapacity Benefit is starting to look a lot easier. The most obvious ramification is that there will be people with long-term health conditions and disabilities who will be denied access to ESA. The Government believes that there will be 60,000 more failed applications for ESA per annum than there are for IB. That's up to 60,000 people every year who will have to claim JSA or Income Support instead.

A further issue concerns those people who are currently claiming IB, but who will either be migrated across to ESA in time, or will be subjected to the new WCA as the gateway to their current benefit. It can be assumed that the 12 per cent disallowance rate can be applied to these people, too. Currently, we have over 2.7 million people claiming incapacity benefits - and crudely, 12 per cent of 2.7 million is 324,000. If the WCA were applied immediately to the current Incapacity Benefit caseload, the government would already be more than halfway to its target. This does rather suggest that there is a policy gulf between getting a million people off IB and getting them into work.

Now, what happens to those people who had been claiming IB, but are found to be ineligible for ESA? The answer, effectively given by Lord McKenzie of Luton in answer to a question by Baroness Greengross last week is 'nothing' - they can apply for JSA and Income Support, and can access such support as these benefits provide. According to the Secretary of State James Purnell, these people are now 'not disabled' and therefore do not require specialist help. These people, who had been found to be disabled have been magically recategorized as 'able bodied', merely by the application of the new assessment.

So, for these people, many of whom will have been out of work for some time, having been on long-term IB with no support in finding work, life will change a great deal. They will have to engage with the harsher regime of life on JSA, but they will not be eligible to receive the support that ESA had appeared to promise. There will be no tailored interventions, no condition management and no return-to-work payments for these people - and given the success rates of JSA, particularly with people aged over 40 with a poor health record, there will be little chance of finding work. Furthermore, these people will be poorer. And as the first group earmarked for migration is younger people, this may well mean the further impoverishment of young families. For some people, the reality of welfare reform appears to differ markedly from its promise. The rates at which ESA will be paid. What about those who are deemed eligible for Employment and Support Allowance?

First of all, they will have to go through a thirteen week assessment phase, wherein they will receive a rate equivalent to that of Job Seekers Allowance. At the end of this period, successful claimants will not have their benefit backdated to the start of the claim, irrespective of how obvious their need might be.

The majority of successful claimants will be placed on the element of ESA that sees the claimant having to fulfil certain conditions - for today's purposes, I shall refer to it as the 'conditional' group - these people will have to engage in work-related activity in order to continue to receive their benefit. A smaller minority of people with more complex barriers will be placed in the 'support' category - it having been recognised that they cannot reasonably be expected to engage with the world of work. How will these two groups of people fare under the new system?

In a letter to the 100 MPs with the highest number of Incapacity Benefit claimants on the 3rd of January 2006, then Secretary of State John Hutton promised reform that would "give genuine protection to those who truly cannot work", and stated that we should not accept "a system that perpetuates hardship". In the foreword to the Green Paper, he further stated that the welfare state must "focus its energy on tackling poverty and social exclusion". As well as these, repeated assurances were given by Ministers on the floors of both Houses that the main phase rate of ESA for those in the conditional group would be "paid above the present long-term IB rate". How do these promises measure up?

When the benefit rates were announced in March of this year, they were identical to the recently updated long-term rates of Incapacity Benefit. The argument for this apparent volte-face being that the statements made were correct, in that the current ESA rates are higher than the rate of IB was at the time. However, we believe that whilst this may be technically correct, the fact that the basic rate of ESA will be paid at the same rate as the long-term rate of Incapacity Benefit currently undermines the argument that claimants will be getting 'something for something'. There are other discrepancies, too.

Calculations made by Disability Alliance show that whilst the introduction of ESA may benefit many people financially in the short term, their long-term prospects are bleaker. In fact, only single people in the support group will be better-off in the long-term - and some of those will actually be worse off in the short-term. Everyone else loses, relative to IB, over time. I shan't explore the labyrinthine details, but these are the general facts. For most single people in the work-related activity group, after the first year, their income will be £1.85 per week lower than it would have been on IB.

For many couples in the work-related activity group, after the first year, their income will be £12.85 per week lower than it would have been on IB. For many couples in the support group their income will be £7.85 per week lower than it would have been on IB, for the entire duration of their claim. It's also worth pointing out that this includes couples who are claiming on the grounds of terminal illness.

I think it's time that these discrepancies were addressed and remedied. It seems strange that it should be couples who miss out the most - at a time when the government admits that it is failing to meet its challenging and laudable child poverty targets, that the welfare system seems to be driving some of the poorest families deeper into poverty.

Employment training and provision

It's not my role here to debate the political ins and outs of contracting out the provision of employment support for disabled people. My personal view is that in nearly all cases, excepting only those where highly specialist provision is required, Job Centre Plus does as good, if not better a job than any generalist employment provider could hope to. However, we are already seeing problems with the way that Pathways to Work is being rolled out across the country, in the way that contracts are written and subcontracts decided. Yes, Pathways has some excellent elements - return to work credit, condition management, tailored action plans, and we are seeing a more flexible attitude being adopted towards permitted work. All of these are good. However, none of them require the intervention of the private sector to make them work.

What concerns me more, though, is the ways in which placing support in the hands of the market will impact upon those people who face the greatest barriers to return to work. The impact, if you will, of economies of scale on the labour market. Put simply, it does not cost the same amount to get all disabled people work-ready. People with mild musculo-skeletal conditions, or living with stress, debilitating though these conditions are, will not require as much support as, say, a profoundly deaf person who only uses British Sign Language to communicate. It can take a significant investment in terms of time and money to get a BSL-user close enough to the labour market for them to stand a realistic chance of getting a job. The same will go for blind people with no light perception, people with severe mental health disorders, acute learning difficulties or combinations of multiple conditions and barriers.

Now, put yourself in the place of the private contractor. With payment by results, and the only valid result being the numbers of people into work, where are you going to expend your resources?

The answer is obvious. You concentrate your resources on those already close to the labour market, confident that they will require relatively little investment, and that a plentiful supply of new recruits for the new reserve army of labour is always available.

And it's not just about cost. At RNID, we invest in getting profoundly deaf people into work, and we know better than most that you can train someone, support them, skill them, lead them to the employer's door and ring the bell. But that doesn't mean the door will open, or the candidate be ushered inside. So again, it makes less sense to plunge resources into those furthest away from the labour market, as the labour market itself is least likely to engage with them. The system appears to disincentivize engaging with those people who need the most support, and instead reduces Pathways to Work to a simple unit / cost equation and the tawdry spectacle of spread-betting on the labour market.

Our fear is that the net result of this will see those people with the least chance of finding work being left on the margins of support - fulfilling their responsibilities, but without the realization of their rights. And for the majority, the longer they remain on benefits, the less money they will have compared to the IB system. It would appear as though reform will function to penalize some people on the basis that their employment service providers have failed them.

In conclusion, then, it seems to me that many of the promises that lay at the heart of the welfare reform programme have still yet to materialize. Instead of being supported off benefit and into work, Many people will be thrown off one benefit and onto another, with little help to find work as a consequence. Many people will actually be worse off under ESA than they would have been under the current arrangements. Many people will not receive the support and assistance they need to gain and retain paid work.

I leave you with the question then, as to how the government's stated aims can be met by these reforms. Whether the redrafting of the social contract between the state and the disabled individual strikes a fair balance between rights and responsibilities, or whether the government itself is failing in its own responsibilities to provide the very assistance, protection and care that it promised.

If you would like more information on the new Employment and Support Allowance a detailed guide can be obtained from Alan Weaver, the Chair of Suse at:
alan.weaver@moray.gov.uk

Barge your way to the front of the queue!



Many of you will know that Travel Options is a social enterprise travel agency based in Glasgow, and is part of the charity, Unity Enterprise. We provide a comprehensive business and leisure travel service with additional support available for disabled travellers. Since 1993, we have been servicing the travel needs of the private, voluntary and statutory sectors.



We provide training for people with disabilities and/or disadvantage. All profits generated through Travel Options services are fed back into our parent charity. This money helps us to continue supporting our client group.

Our services include:

Business travel

Worldwide Flights

Cruises

Tailor made holidays for disabled travellers

Package Holidays

Accommodation only bookings

UK Breaks

Car hire

Travel insurance

A new and interesting development is the introduction of barge hire for Forth and Clyde canal cruises or static use. The barges can be hired for individual or corporate use and The Unity, the largest of the three, is wheelchair accessible. Whether you are looking for an interesting day trip or an overnight stay, we have a barge to suit your needs.



For information on any of our products and services contact:-

Travel Options

46 Trongate, Glasgow, G1 5ES

Tel: 0141 559 5500 Fax: 0414 559 5529 Email: info@travel-optionsltd.co.uk

If you have any information you wish to have included in the next SUSE E-bulletin, please email it to: shona.davidson@fife.gov.uk