

Disablist Britain

Barriers to independent living
for disabled people in 2006



Time to get equal

scope

About cerebral palsy.
For disabled people achieving equality.



DEMOS

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As ever though, all errors and omissions remain our own.

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Acronym Buster

DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DFG	Disability Facilities Grant
DfT	Department for Transport
DPO	Disabled Persons' Organisation
DRC	Disability Rights Commission
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
ODI	Office of Disability Issues
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
SEN	Special Educational Needs

Foreword

by Professor Colin Barnes

This report is the latest in a series documenting the extent of institutional discrimination experienced by people with perceived impairments (whether sensory, physical or intellectual) or long-term health conditions and viewed as 'disabled' in British society. Indeed, 2006 marks the 40th anniversary of the publication of one of the first books chronicling disabled people's experiences of discrimination in Britain, namely, *The Experience of Disability*, edited by the disabled writer and activist Paul Hunt. It is also 30 years since the celebrated redefinition of 'disability' by the hugely influential but short-lived Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in their *Fundamental Principles of Disability*.

For Paul Hunt, people with impairments pose a direct challenge to 'able-bodied' normality as they are viewed as 'unfortunate, useless, different, oppressed or sick'. For UPIAS 'disability' is the result of society's failure to accommodate the needs of people with impairment/s and thus effectively excludes them from mainstream economic and community life.

These initiatives, coupled with the development of the social model of disability by another disabled activist and writer, Mike Oliver, helped generate a vibrant disabled people's movement throughout the United Kingdom. Over the years the movement's activities have had a gradual but increasingly important impact on traditional 'disability' organisations, charities, politicians and policy makers. This is clearly evidenced by campaigns for and the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 and subsequent amendments, the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 and the establishment in 2000 of the Disability Rights Commission. See also the recent Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*.

Despite these developments, as this report clearly indicates, Britain's disabled population continues to encounter significant disadvantage in all areas of British society. This is because institutional discrimination against disabled people operates throughout the UK and is supported by history and culture. Historically disabled people have been viewed with a variety of emotions including suspicion, ridicule and pity. Our culture is replete with disablist language and imagery, which keeps traditional fears and prejudices alive. Most importantly, institutional discrimination is more than individual prejudice. It is evident in the policies and practices of all kinds of social organisations and systems that result in disabled people being denied the same treatment or access to goods and services as non-disabled people.

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative evidence, this report illustrates the extent of institutional discrimination in post-millennium Britain, notably, in the health and rehabilitation services, the education system, the labour market, welfare and benefit agencies, the built environment and the media. It is essential reading for all those involved in the struggle for a more equitable and just society.

Introduction

This report catalogues the ways in which British society discriminates against disabled people and prevents them from living the lives they want to lead. Unlike sexism or racism, you won't find the word 'disablism' in the dictionary. Yet it describes an all-too-real issue: discriminatory, oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others. 'Institutional disablism' describes a whole organisation's disablist attitudes, practice and culture.

The report follows two previous reports, *Disablism: how to tackle the last prejudice* (2004) and *Independent Living: the right to be equal citizens* (2005), and brings together data about disablism from a large number of sources in one place for the first time. It also draws on the stories of individual disabled people to show what the statistics mean in everyday terms for disabled people in the UK.

We start with an assessment of the right to life of disabled people at or before birth – an issue that, tellingly, wouldn't need to be included for other forms of discrimination at the beginning of the 21st century. We were inspired by Professor Colin Barnes 1991 book *Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination* and have used the same categories of discrimination in this report – education, employment, transport, leisure and housing. To these we've added a sixth category that we feel is important: what we've called the 'status' of disabled people. By this we mean the place of disabled people in the media, decision-making, democracy and British national life. We have also added social care to housing.

The aim of this report is to highlight and tackle disablism so that disabled people have the chance to live independent lives. Independent living is what non-disabled people do every day of their lives – it is equally the human right of disabled people to enjoy, but this fundamental right is denied to them living in a disablist society.

The report is divided into three sections:

- First, the foundations for independent living, including the right to life and disablism in education.
- Second, assessments of disablism in areas of everyday life: in employment, housing and social care, transport, leisure and democratic participation.
- And third, the report ends with ideas about how to measure disablism in the future so that action can be taken at the right level. It's our belief that although more national statistics are needed, giving people the tools to measure disablism in their own setting – be that school, the workplace or their community – is just as important.

The social model of disability

The social model of disability emphasises the economic, environmental and cultural barriers encountered by people with impairments. It is the opposite of a medical model of disability, which defines people by their impairment rather than society's inability to adapt to them. In the words of Colin Barnes, "From [the social model] perspective, people with designated impairments are disabled by society's failure to accommodate their individual and collective needs within the mainstream of economic and cultural life."

When viewed using the social model, the statistics in this report don't show us what's wrong with disabled people or what they can't do, rather they show what's wrong with society. They point to things that need to change – through policy, investment and changing attitudes – to conquer injustices that shouldn't exist in a civilised society.

First impressions count

What's the first thing that pops into your head when you meet a disabled person? You'd like to think it's the same kind of thing as when you meet a non-disabled person: that you (whether you're disabled or non-disabled) think of everybody in an even-handed way. But you're probably wrong.

A team based at Harvard University set up an online test to find out about our instantaneous prejudices. The Implicit Association Test was originally developed as a device for exploring the unconscious roots of thinking and feeling. They tried it across a number of diversity issues. The results of the test for race were popularised by Malcolm Gladwell's best-selling book *Blink*, and they also tried it to find out people's implicit associations about disabled people.

Of 12,087 tests completed by people between 30 April 2004 and 10 October 2005, 72% showed evidence of an implicit preference for non-disabled people over disabled people, while only 10% showed evidence for an implicit preference for disabled people, and 18% showed little to no preference. Some 27% of the sample showed a strong implicit preference for non-disabled people over disabled people.

Section 1 Foundations for Independent Living

Disablism and the Right to Life

From the very beginning of life, our society sees impairment and disability as facets of life to be avoided at all costs. Because of medical advances, we have grown less and less used to pain and suffering. We expect the medical profession to find a solution to any problem that we may have. Advances in the genetic sciences send out copious messages: that we can have impairment-free children; that it is quite all right to throw away embryos that have genes that may lead to disabling impairments; and that we will soon be able to alter genes so that all problems of impairment and faulty personality will be solved.

Allowing abortion of disabled babies on grounds of impairment engenders a culture where the lives of disabled people are less worthwhile than those of non-disabled people, making disabled people feel even less valued by society.

These attitudes, responses and behaviour are considered acceptable because they are directed at disabled people. This is the most acute form of disablism possible and there are a number of recent examples:

- Doctors made no attempt to help David Glass, a boy with hydrocephalus, until 50 minutes after his birth when he began to cry. Twelve years later, doctors tried to ensure a 'death with dignity' by injecting him with diamorphine when he had a chest infection. It is only thanks to his family's fight to keep him alive that the drip was removed and he was allowed to recover.
- A 'do not resuscitate' notice was recorded in the medical notes of a five-month old baby girl who was suffering from a chromosome abnormality, which caused her a diaphragmatic hernia and breathing problems. She contracted a throat infection and an emergency protection order was placed on her parents restricting visits. The hospital did not seek a judicial review before withdrawing treatment and the baby died.

- A baby born with brain damage was resuscitated and then after 20 minutes the parents were pressured into allowing the child to die without treatment. (They believed it was to save the lifetime costs of being a disabled person.) An autopsy revealed that his brain, heart and lung were healthy and medical intervention could have saved him.¹
- A baby born with Down's Syndrome was apparently rejected by his parents. The consultant paediatrician ordered he be fed no milk, just water and morphine (which suppresses breathing). The baby died at three days old. The doctor was charged and his defence was that the child was very ill. An AGPAR test used at all births to assess the 'vitality of a newborn baby' gave the baby a score of 9 out of 10. The doctor was acquitted on direction of the Judge.

[Above cases sourced from the Human Rights Violations Database, DAA, 2004.](#)

The fact that the right to life of disabled people is even in question shows the dominance of a medicalised view of disability and the difficulties faced in tackling disablism. It is not known how many disabled people never get the chance to lead independent lives because they are denied the right to live at all.

Early Years and Education

Disabled people are excluded at all stages of early years provision and the education system, reducing their opportunities and chance of living the lives they want to lead.

10 facts

- 1 Only 10% of childminders offer services for disabled children.²
- 2 In a survey of 3,000 families with a severely disabled child, 77% reported unmet needs for community equipment, to help with for example, eating, going to the toilet and sleeping.³
- 3 Almost 242,600 pupils across England had statements of SEN. The percentage of pupils with statements placed in mainstream primary, secondary and nursery schools was 60%.⁴
- 4 In English special schools 61% of pupils are not entered for any GCSE/GNVQs, compared to 4% of pupils in mainstream schools.⁵
- 5 Over half (54%) of disabled people have no qualifications at all, compared with 28% of non-disabled people.⁶
- 6 Two-thirds of parents of children with physical impairments experienced admission problems [to their parents' chosen school] 'often' or 'occasionally'.⁷
- 7 In 2001, only 10% of secondary schools were deemed fully accessible.⁸
- 8 Children with SEN statements are three times more likely to be permanently excluded from their school than other children.⁹
- 9 Although trainee teachers are expected to learn about the SEN code of practice, there is no mention of the National Curriculum Inclusion Statement or, crucially, the Disability Discrimination Act.¹⁰
- 10 60% of disabled young people who did not enter further or higher education said they believed they would not have got the support they needed.¹¹

Trends

Although there is broad acceptance of the philosophy of 'inclusion', it remains controversial in the education sector, and interpretation and practice vary widely. The Government's five-year strategy for the education system talks about "break(ing) down the divide between mainstream and special schools to create a unified system which meets the needs of all children". Alongside this, the government's SEN strategy document¹² *Removing Barriers to Achievement* talks about the central importance of local communities of learners, regardless of impairment, being enabled to "learn, play and develop together".

Neither of these represents a dogmatic adherence to mainstream inclusion for every pupil, but has at its heart a belief in the importance of some integration for both disabled and non-disabled learners. Segregated education is likely to lead to a life of segregated living – disabled children who are forced into segregated schools are more than likely to move into institutional living.

Yet the move towards the inclusion of children with additional levels of support into mainstream education has progressed very slowly, with only a gradual reduction in the special school population in the last decade. Numbers in England have fallen from around 130,000 in 1981 to 100,000 in 2001. In addition, "the special school population in England and Wales grows with each year group, with a leap around secondary education".¹³

In a recent survey for the *Times Educational Supplement*, almost two in three secondary heads and one in three primary heads questioned said some of their pupils should be in a special school. Among classroom teachers, three in 10 primary and more than half of secondary staff claimed they taught at least one pupil who they thought should be in a special school.¹⁴

The proportion of pupils placed in special schools (including referral units) has remained more or less the same since 1999. While some special schools have closed, new special schools have opened, sometimes as a result of amalgamations.¹⁵

These aggregate figures disguise a huge variation in local and regional provision for learners with impairments. At a regional level, the proportion of pupils with statements who attend special schools range from around 27% in the South West, to just over 38% in the North East. Locally, the discrepancy is even greater, with figures ranging from about 20% in Cumbria and Leicestershire, to around 50% in North Tyneside and Knowsley.¹⁶

University applications: Applications to UK universities from disabled people are low compared to the percentage of disabled people in the population. There are a number of factors behind this. First, the exclusion of disabled people earlier on in their learning careers so they don't have as high a level of qualifications as non-disabled people of the same age. Second, they are put off by the financial implications of further education and third, poor level of accessibility adjustments made for disabled people at universities.

Table 1

Numbers of university applicants who are disabled in selected years

Year	Number of disabled university applicants	Percentage of disabled university applicants
1996	17,864	4.3%
1998	19,120	4.3%
2000	15,508	4.0%
2004	21,059	5.1%

Source: UCAS Disability data
www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/ucasdata/disability/index.html

My Story**Laurence Clark**

“The curriculum my special school followed wasn’t always that challenging. I can remember spending days cutting up stuff with pinking shears – scissors which cut with a serrated edge. We were taught that we could take any crappy pictures from (magazines, old Christmas cards, you name it!) and by cutting four serrated edges we would produce something worthwhile! If I added up my entire life’s earnings I still couldn’t buy enough gifts to match the number of bloody Christmas gift tags I was forced to produce at school!

When I turned 16, I was forced to go to ‘social skills’ classes. The very idea of these classes was counter-productive, since an invitation implied that you were socially inept, and this distanced you from any social circles to which you may have belonged. This particular class was run by a permanently over-enthusiastic Occupational Therapist who made my skin crawl.

Most of the patronising sessions covered stuff like how to order a meal in a restaurant or plan a bus journey. Riveting stuff. However, others were more personal, such as the lesson on how to ask someone out on a date, where the OT made me chat her up in front of the whole group! This sort of perverse, twisted scenario could only make sense to an Occupational Therapist.

Special schools are constantly bombarded by visits from D-list celebrities, looking for free publicity. My education included talks from: Bernard Cribbins, Henry Cooper, Wendy Craig, Simon Mayo, Jimmy Savile, Matthew Kelly, Russ Abbott, Bella Emberg, Brian Cant and a couple of Doctor Whos.

If you have children, would you entrust their education to that lot?”

Unanswered questions:

For disabled children the pre-school period (0–5 years) is a particularly important but under-researched area. What policies and practices are working for inclusion in nurseries and playschools that lead to better inclusion in later education?

Little is known about the attitudes of teachers towards disabled children and how these affect the life-chances of the disabled children they teach. Mainstream school teachers in the UK are currently not required to have any disability equality training or training in the specific skills for working with children with particular impairments. Better data is needed about the role of teachers in perpetuating a system that discriminates against disabled children so that better training can be offered.

Section 2 Independent Living

As it stands, the world is not set up to enable disabled people the freedom to turn choices about their lives into action. This is true for decisions ranging from a career change to what you want to do on a Saturday night. In effect, this means that whilst non-disabled people can express a multi-faceted identity, constructed from all the characteristics and influences outlined above, disabled people can become defined by their impairment. Society enforces an impoverished understanding of the person on anyone with an impairment because of the barriers it erects to their expressing anything different.

Independent Living

“The term independent living refers to all disabled people having the same choice, control and freedom as any other citizen – at home, at work, and as members of the community. This does not necessarily mean disabled people ‘doing everything for themselves’, but it does mean that any practical assistance people need should be based on their own choices and aspirations. Independent living is not the name of a particular type of service but it should be the purpose of all services.”

Disability Rights Commission

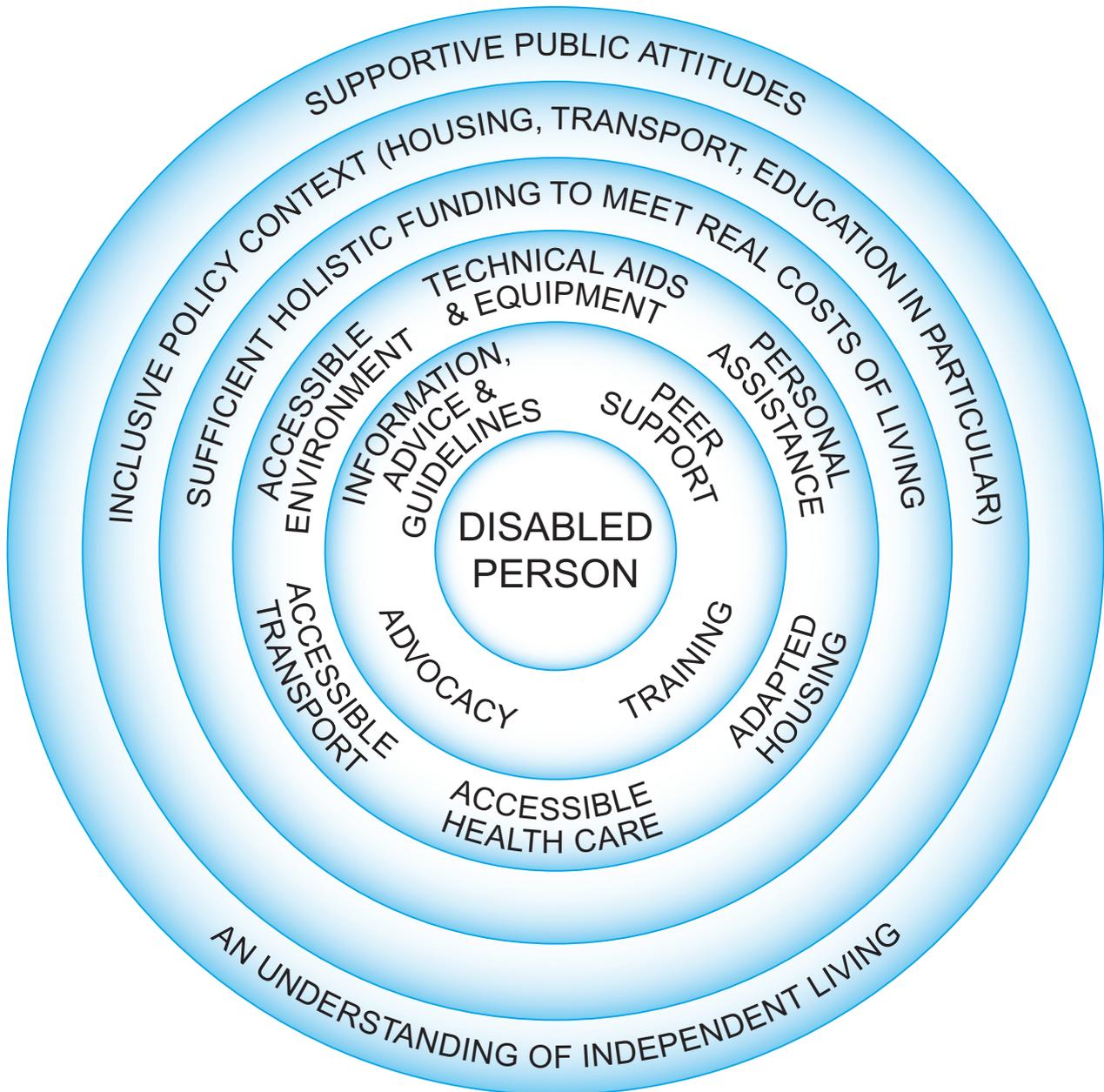
Policy Statement on Social Care and Independent Living, 2002

The aim of any policy relating to disabled people should be to support independent living. In order to do this:

- 1** Disabled people have to be empowered to:
 - realise they have a right to independent living
 - articulate what they want from their lives
 - identify what support they require to make this happen
 - obtain that support
 - manage and modify that support on an ongoing basis.
- 2** This requires suitably high-quality and diverse provision of support, including personal assistants and technical equipment, from a range of providers including private companies, local government and other agencies.
- 3** Disabled people require suitable funding to purchase this support.
- 4** A broader, supportive policy structure has to be in place at a national level, particularly in education, housing and transport.
- 5** Society more widely has to rid itself of the disablist attitudes that are themselves a barrier to independent living.

For all of this to happen, good information is needed by government to set priorities, by the institutions and service providers that should support independent living and by disabled people themselves. This section highlights how far there is to go in the areas of employment, housing and social care, transport, leisure and the status of disabled people before independent living becomes a widespread possibility for disabled people in Britain.

Figure 1 Model of a system that organises levels of support around the disabled person



Employment

Disabled people find it harder to get a job and if they do get one they are often paid less and face prejudice in the workplace.

10 facts

- 1 Some 47% of the working age disabled population is economically inactive (ie outside the labour force) compared to 15% of the non-disabled population.¹⁷
- 2 Employment rates vary greatly according to the type of impairment a person has. People with mental health problems have the lowest employment rates of all impairment categories, at only 21%. For people with learning difficulties, the employment rate is 26%.¹⁸
- 3 Disabled men who work at least 30 hours a week earn £1.10 less per hour than their non-disabled counterparts; the comparable figure for disabled women is 50p less per hour.¹⁹
- 4 Disabled people are more likely to live in poverty. Over a quarter (27%) of individuals in households with one or more disabled adult of working age have incomes below 60% of median income, compared with 20% of individuals with no disabled adults of working age.²⁰
- 5 Families with one or more disabled adult are at a 33% risk of falling into the bottom 20% of household disposable income. They have only a 7% chance of being in the top 20%.²¹
- 6 Mothers of disabled children are seven times less likely than mothers with non-disabled children to be able to get to work, mainly because of lack of inclusive childcare.²²
- 7 Only 30% of disabled lone parents are in employment, compared with 55% of non-disabled lone parents; a quarter of children living in poverty have long-term sick or disabled parents.²³

- 8 Around a third (30%) of disabled young people expect, by age 30, to be earning less than other people their age.²⁴
- 9 The average annual rate of disabled people making a transition into employment from economic inactivity is 4%. The equivalent figure for non-disabled people is six times higher.²⁵
- 10 A third (33%) of respondents to a DWP survey said that hiring a disabled person was a major risk for an employer and 47% said it would be difficult to “retain an employee who became disabled”.²⁶

Trends

There has been a gap between the unemployment rates for disabled and non-disabled people since records began. In the mid-1960s the general unemployment rate was well below 2% whilst among disabled people it was over 7%. Until the mid-1970s disabled workers were three times more likely to be out of work than their non-disabled counterparts. In the early 1980s the gap narrowed somewhat, not because unemployment among disabled people declined but because of the rise in unemployment generally. In 1982 it was estimated that the general unemployment rate was 12% and 16% for disabled workers.²⁷

Compared to other disadvantaged groups disabled people also come off badly. While employment rates have gradually improved since 1997, disabled people are still less likely to be in work than people from minority ethnic groups or lone parents.

Employment rates of disadvantaged groups (Great Britain):²⁸

Figure 2

Employment rate gaps: the difference between employment rates of disadvantaged groups and the overall rate (Great Britain):²⁹

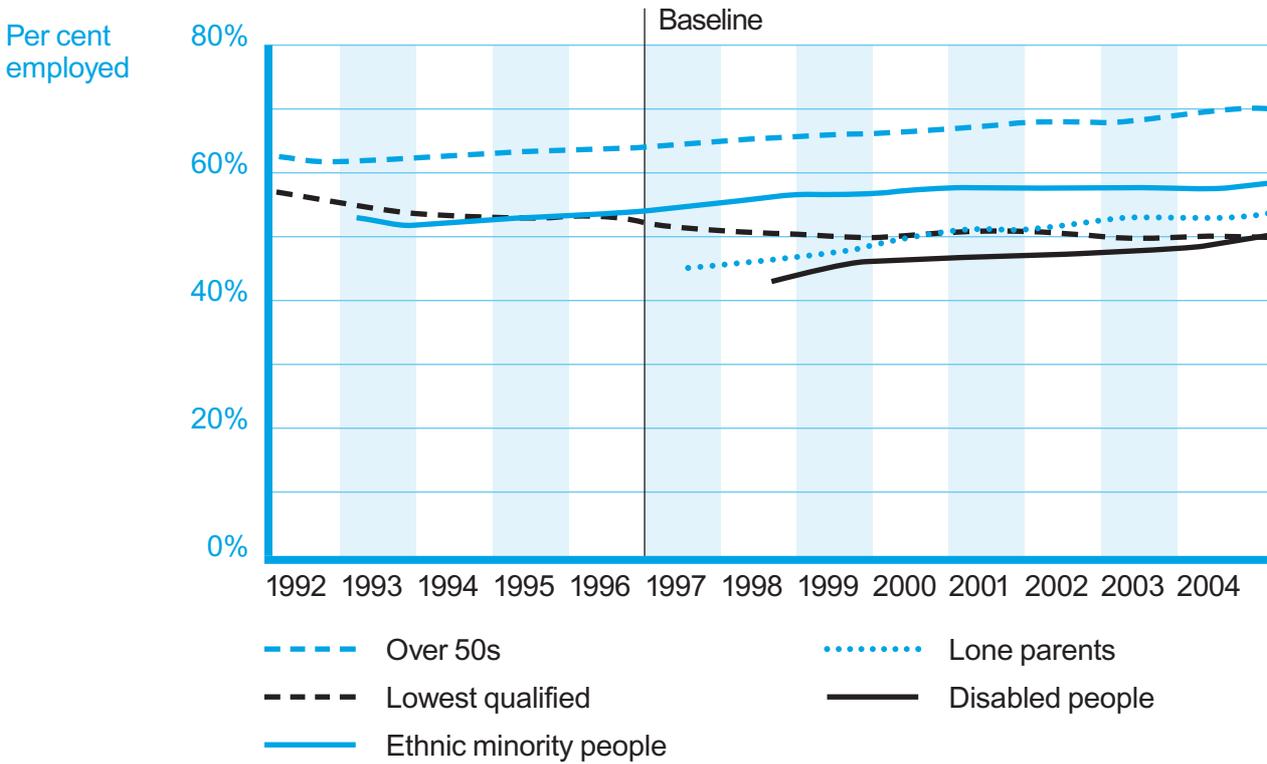
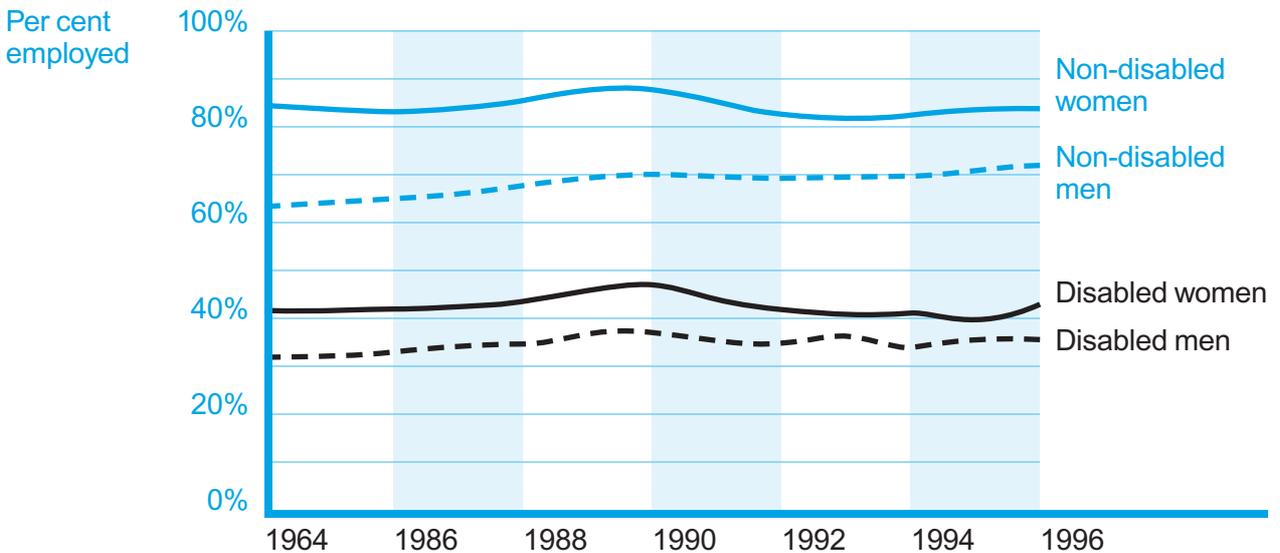


Figure 3

Employment rates of disabled and non-disabled men and women



Working age only. Work limited definition of disability.
 Source: author's calculations using Labour Force Survey and ONS adjustment.
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/060.asp>

Pay rate: There has been a slight narrowing of the pay gap between disabled people and non-disabled people over time. National Statistics report that disabled men who work 30 or more hours per week earn 88% of what non-disabled men earn. In 1985 Martin and White report this figure to be 84%. Women working 30+ hours per week earn 94% of what non-disabled women earn, while in 1985 they earned 91%.

Table 2 National average wage model compared with disabled person budget standards (excluding PA costs)

	Total income per week	Disabled person budget standard per week	Unmet costs per week
High–medium needs	£451	£533	– £82
Low–medium needs	£351	£345	+£6

Source: Disabled people's costs of living, 2004, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/054.asp>

Half of disabled adults have incomes below the threshold for 'poverty', after making an adjustment for extra costs. Even without the adjustment, two in five are found to be in poverty – an increase of one-sixth since 1985. Disabled people make up a substantial part of the trends towards greater inequality observed in society as a whole.³⁰

There is very poor recent data about the level of discrimination people feel in the workplace. The DDA places the onus on individuals to pursue cases and definitions of reasonableness are still unclear. However, there are several recent examples of employment discrimination cases, including:

- A man whose back injury led to dismissal by an engineering company. He argued that he could have returned to cover all but 5–10% of his former duties and that a reasonably adjusted work environment could quite easily have permitted him to remain an effective employee.

- A local authority accountant with clinical depression was unfairly dismissed and discriminated against on grounds of disability.
- A man with diabetes who worked as a driller in an open cast mine. After three hypoglycaemic episodes he was told to take time off but, when he returned to work two days after, he found his position had been filled and that there was no work for him. He was then dismissed and alternative work was not discussed.³¹

Unanswered questions

A complex combination of factors comes together to compound the exclusion of disabled people from work, often stemming from disablism in other areas such as education or transport. It's often subtle adjustments that are really needed for sustainable employment – communication styles and practices, meeting/event management, flexibility of job descriptions, priority treatment as and when appropriate within policies and procedures.

The area we know least about is the impact of prejudice in excluding disabled people. More systematic study is required so that attitudes can be changed.

My Story

Linda Leone

“As a female head of technology in an all boys secondary school, I always knew what discrimination was. But what I experienced when I had to take time off for a knee operation (that left me with a permanent mobility impairment) was completely different. Whilst I was still recovering at home, it was assumed and decided that I would not return to my old job...

“When I came back to school, keen to take up my old job, all the headteacher offered me was some supply hours. Instead of being based in one place, in my department, I had to walk all around the school to get to lessons.

It felt like physical barriers kept being put up to persuade me to leave. They kept timetabling my classes on the first floor, despite the fact that everyone knew that I can't do stairs. I requested a stairlift on one of the two staircases. But they were rejected on grounds of expense and health and safety, despite the DDA's demands to make reasonable adjustments. One teacher training day took place downstairs – miracle! But coffee was served upstairs in the staffroom so I ended up sitting by myself until everyone else came back.

And the bullying wasn't all this subtle. The head kept taking me aside and telling me I was committing 'professional suicide' in staying at the school. At prize giving, all the teachers used to sit together on the balcony. Only parents and students sat in the body of the hall but the lift to the balcony required a key to use it. No-one would help me find it – 'sit where you damn well like but shut up' was the attitude. So I ended up sitting downstairs while everyone else sat on the balcony.

I ended up talking to the unions about it, but they didn't understand the DDA and didn't know where to go for help. Eventually, I went to specialist solicitors in disability law who said I had a better chance of winning the case than losing it. But I was going to have to foot the bill, which I just couldn't afford. And even if I won, I'd have had to go back to my old job. So I ended up signing a 'compromise agreement' that gave me two months pay in return for not coming back to the school. It felt like I had no choice but to give in.”

Housing and Social Care

There is a chronic lack of accessible housing in the UK and disabled people often have little choice about how and where they live.

10 facts

- 1 It's estimated that 1.4 million disabled people require specially adapted accommodation. Of these 620,000 (44%) live in the social rented sector.³²
- 2 Nearly a quarter of disabled people who need adapted accommodation don't have it.³³
- 3 The number of adults under 65 in care homes in England increased by 10% between 2001 and 2005. This increase is reflected in all categories: learning difficulties, physical and sensory disability and mental health.³⁴
- 4 Among families who have been assessed as needing to make a contribution to the costs of an adaptation, one in three had been unable to meet these costs and the adaptation had not been carried out.³⁵
- 5 In a study investigating the community care charging policies of local authorities, a fictional character could be charged between £11.97 and £103 a week depending on which local authority was calculating the charge.³⁶
- 6 In England, 24,500 adults received direct payments in 2004/05. This compares with around 1.7 million receiving services following a community care assessment.³⁷
- 7 If disabled people living in residential care decide to work, they are only allowed to keep £20 per week as the rest of their income must be directed towards the cost of home fees.³⁸
- 8 Even if individuals are eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant the waiting times are often unacceptably long. A recent 'Best Value Review' in the Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham highlighted that people often had to wait over two years for the most basic of adaptations.

- 9 Forty per cent of disabled people in a recent survey felt that their housing situation made them unnecessarily dependent on other people.³⁹
- 10 In the latest published estimate, councils were paying for 267,200 people to live in residential care (this does not include those, mainly older people, who are funding themselves).⁴⁰

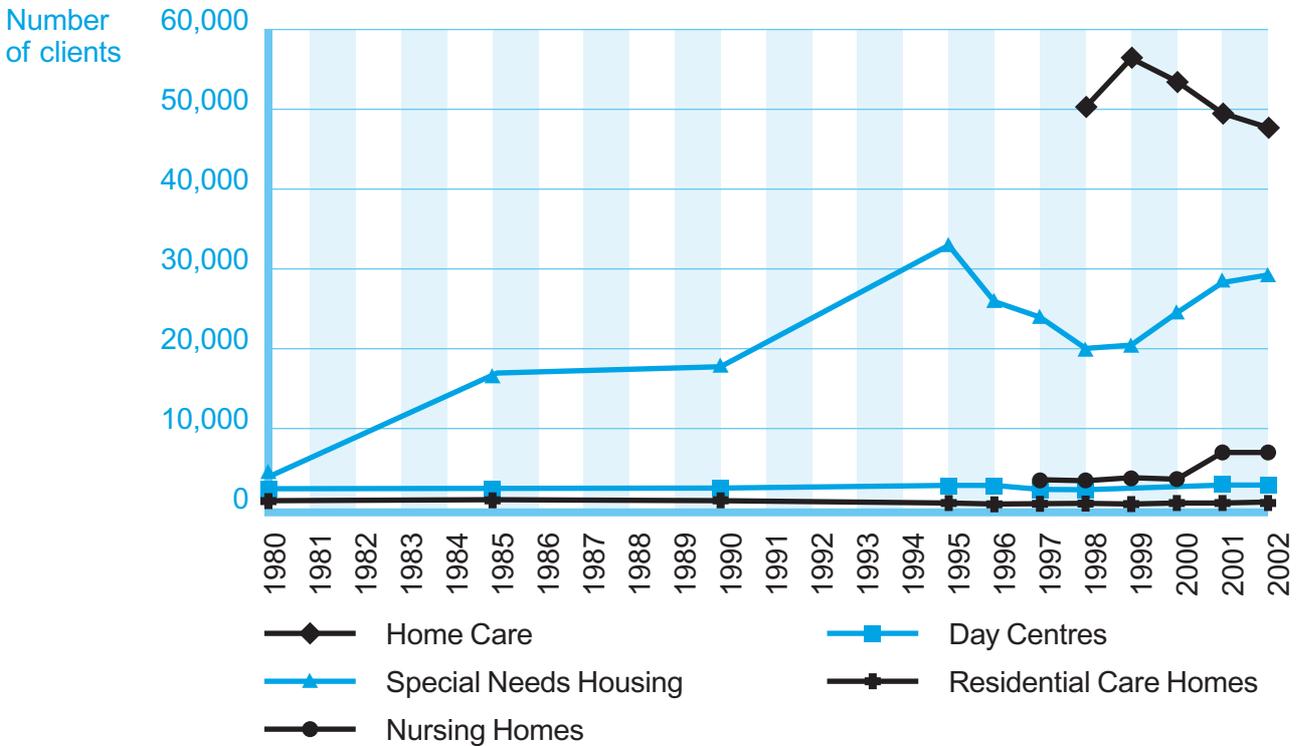
Trends

Between 1997 and 2003 there was a 44% increase in the number of homeless households in priority need because a household member had a physical impairment, and a 77% increase in the number of households where the priority need is someone with a mental health condition.⁴¹

One of the most important continuing trends is a lack of reliable data and information about the availability of accessible housing (or lack of it). Recent research, conducted by John Grooms⁴² housing association, estimates that there is a shortfall of 300,000 wheelchair accessible homes. The demand for accessible housing, and this shortfall, is likely to increase over time as a result of both the ageing population and government commitment to 'Independent Living' as an orienting principle for disability policy. A key pillar of their campaign, and something that the disability movement has long campaigned for, is a national register of accessible housing.

Currently, national policy priorities conflict. A national commitment to increasing the overall supply of social housing means that local authorities are encouraged to have a very 'quick turnaround' of their existing stock. In many cases, this has clashed directly with ODPM's aim to "bring all social housing into decent condition... and increase the proportion of private housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups"⁴³. Where those vulnerable groups are disabled people, the opposite has sometimes been true, with local authorities removing existing adaptations from social housing to make it 'available' to the community again as quickly as possible.⁴⁴

Figure 4 Balance of Care for Physically Disabled People, 1980–2002⁴⁵



Source: SEHD Community Care Statistics

Unanswered questions

At a time when the Government is exploring options for affordable housing it needs reliable data about the implications of any policy decisions for disabled people, until now excluded from the housing market. More information is needed about the financial circumstances and attitudes to financial planning and assets of disabled people.

My Story**Beverly**

“I had mental health issues before I became homeless, but the stress of being on the streets certainly made it worse.

I was trying to bring up two children and pay the bills – eventually it just got too much. I tried to approach the housing authority and even voluntary groups about my depression and other things, but no one would listen. Instead, the housing authority went straight to eviction when I couldn't pay the £1,300 to keep the flat. As far as I could tell, they were totally money-oriented. It was survival of the fittest.

So I was evicted and things started to get worse. It was like being hit by a financial tsunami. On the streets, I lost out on the benefits that were keeping me going. My children had to keep going to social services because they were on the streets with me. So they missed out on their studies – and their Education Maintenance Allowance money – and I stopped getting Child Tax Credit because they weren't in my full-time care. Although I was still looking after them.

Eventually, I went to Equalities for help. They supported me through it and helped me to get grounded again. Now I work there as an advocate and I see every day that my situation was not unusual. My local housing authority just doesn't recognise mental health as an issue. It doesn't qualify you for support in the same way as refugees for example.”

Transport

Be it trains, planes or automobiles disabled people still face massive challenges to getting around.

10 facts

- 1 Disabled people travel a third less often than other people.⁴⁶
- 2 Over a third of disabled people who do travel experience difficulties, the most common being getting on or off trains or buses.⁴⁷
- 3 The national average for accessibility of buses is only around 30%.⁴⁸
- 4 Of disabled people who use public transport, over half (56%) have to resort to using costly taxis for easier access.⁴⁹
- 5 Nearly two-thirds (60%) of households containing a disabled person do not have access to a private car, compared to 27% of the general population.⁵⁰
- 6 More than one in five spaces reserved for disabled drivers are abused by non-disabled motorists.⁵¹
- 7 In terms of convenience and ease of use, taxis and minicabs are rated the most highly, with rail services the worst.⁵²
- 8 Eight in ten disabled people never use light rail, tram or Underground services. Three-quarters never use ferry services and two-thirds do not fly.⁵³
- 9 Bus drivers are rated as the most unhelpful public transport employees by disabled people, with 20% of respondents saying that they are unhelpful, compared with 13% for train station staff, 6% for both on train staff and taxi drivers, and just 2% for airline stewards.⁵⁴

10 Nearly half (41%) of disabled people in England and Wales say they experience difficulty with travelling. A quarter (25%) experience difficulty travelling to and from the doctor or hospital, 23% have experienced problems visiting friends or relatives and 18% visiting leisure facilities. Some 23% of disabled workers say they find travelling to and from their place of work difficult.⁵⁵

Trends

The overall trend in accessibility of public transport is positive, although massive barriers remain. Disabled people in England and Wales travel a third less often than the general public. Disabled people are less likely to drive a car or to have one in the household, but nonetheless the most common mode of transport for disabled people is a car driven by someone else (67% of disabled people). While disabled people drive 47% less often than non-disabled people, they use taxis/minicabs 67% more frequently and buses 20% more frequently.⁵⁶

Table 3

Monthly use of transport modes by disabled people and public – Percentage using mode at least monthly (2001/02)

	Disabled people	General public
Car driver	20%	64%
Car passenger	67%	69%
Taxi/minicab	40%	36%
Local bus	43%	41%
Long distance bus/coach	3%	15%
Local rail	8%	15%
Long distance rail	2%	0%

Source: Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee: *Attitudes of disabled people to public transport: Research study, 2002*

Table 4 Household car access for disabled people and the general public – Percentage of households (2001/02)

Number of cars	Disabled people	General public
No car	60%	27%
One car	32%	44%
Two cars	5%	22%
Three or more cars	2%	5%

Source: Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee:
Attitudes of disabled people to public transport: Research study, 2002

Most of the London Underground network was built at a time when access for all was not seen as an issue. Consequently only 40 stations are accessible without stairs or escalators, of which 11 are on the newly-opened section of the Jubilee Line and many do not meet current standards. By 2010, it is planned to make 25% of Tube stations step-free, rising to 50% by 2015.

All buses in London were made wheelchair-accessible by the end of 2005, making it the largest wheelchair-accessible network in the world. By the end of 2005 all London bus drivers should have completed BTEC level disability equality training, making them fully aware of the needs of disabled people and fully trained in using the wheelchair ramps.

A recent research study for Leonard Cheshire found that 23% of respondents that were actively seeking employment have had to turn down a job offer and a further 23% a job interview, because of inaccessible transport. Almost half (48%) said that inaccessible transport had restricted their choice of jobs, rising to 62% of wheelchair users and 86% of those with a visual impairment. The study also found that 20% of respondents found it difficult or impossible to get the healthcare they needed, and that one in seven respondents (one in five of those without access to a car) were unable to collect prescriptions as a result of inaccessible transport.

Fifty per cent (67% without access to a car) of those who did not see their family or friends as often as they would like stated that this was because of inaccessible transport. Respondents had missed special events including weddings and funerals, and 27% (43% without a car) said that inaccessible transport had restricted their leisure pursuits.⁵⁷

The DWP *Disabled for Life* research found that the difficulties most commonly mentioned by disabled people in Great Britain were getting to and from bus stops or stations (22%) or on and off buses and trains (24%).⁵⁸

Table 5 Difficulties experienced by disabled people

Type of difficulty	Percentage
Getting to rail/bus station/stop	13%
Getting into rail/bus station	10%
Getting on/off bus or train	24%
Travelling by taxi	8%
Changing modes of transport	8%
Getting from bus stop/train station	9%
Getting information about accessible transport	6%
Booking tickets	4%
Ensuring assistance is available	5%
Other difficulties	2%
Same as non-disabled people	7%
No difficulties	57%

Source: Department for Work and Pensions: *Disabled for life? attitudes towards, and experiences of, disability in Britain*, Grewal et al., 2002, www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/173summ.asp

Unanswered questions

More information is needed about the true costs of mobility for disabled people. The mobility component of Disability Living Allowance is not enough to pay for many disabled people's travel needs. The value of the allowance compared to petrol prices has gone down dramatically and it will only cover one return taxi ride of any distance. If people convert the mobility component into leasing a car they still have to pay a down payment and then have nothing left for running costs or adaptations to vehicle. It is the same if they use the allowance to buy an electric wheelchair (which are very difficult to get through the wheelchair service).

My Story

Matt Richards

“I was thinking of using the London Underground, so I rang up and asked if I'd be okay. They said I could get down to the platform (because there was a lift) but there would be no way to get onto the train. I thought to myself how crazy to spend all that money on putting in lifts and so on but not to be able to get onto the train. What would you want to do down there? Just look at the platform?”

It's put me off public transport I have to admit. I end up using taxis although there are often problems with those too. It's such a problem to get the ramp working that drivers often go straight by you when they see the wheelchair. I remember waiting for one on Waterloo Bridge after going to the theatre and not one taxi would stop. They just think it will be less hassle to take non-disabled people.”

Leisure

Disabled people are excluded from the leisure activities that enrich all of our lives, from more active pursuits such as sports, travel, shopping and nights out, down to some of the most basic of activities that take place in the home.

10 facts

- 1 Four out of five pubs, clubs, restaurants and other leisure venues do not provide proper access for disabled people.⁵⁹
- 2 Over two-thirds (67%) of young disabled people felt unable to join in with most of the leisure activities their friends did.⁶⁰
- 3 Only two out of the eight big UK leisure groups have access for disabled people in all their gyms.⁶¹
- 4 In October 2004, the month the DDA Part III duties came into force, only 39% of leisure venues had a useable accessible toilet.⁶²
- 5 Some 68% of families with disabled children said they didn't use leisure facilities because they were made to feel uncomfortable.⁶³
- 6 Young disabled people spend on average only 3.4 hours a week doing sport compared to all young people who spend, on average, 7.5 hours a week on sport.⁶⁴
- 7 Only 17% of public buildings in London are accessible enough to comply with the mobility standards of the Building Regulations.⁶⁵
- 8 Half (50%) of sports clubs state that the reason there were no disabled people within the club was that "disabled people do not play our sport".⁶⁶
- 9 Most websites (81%) fail to satisfy level 1 (the most basic) Web Accessibility Initiative criteria.⁶⁷

- 10** A recent assessment of 200 domestic appliances revealed that hardly any can be unreservedly recommended for disabled people, meaning that many of the products we use to enhance our home lives may be inaccessible to those with various impairments.⁶⁸

Trends

Since 1 October 2004 venues such as pubs, restaurants, swimming pools and cinemas have, by law, to make reasonable physical adjustments to ensure disabled people are no longer excluded. On 1 October 2004, a Scope campaign, Free 2 Pee, saw over a thousand participants fill in surveys on the accessibility of the toilet facilities at leisure venues nationwide. A report of the results shows that although 84% of venues surveyed showed a positive attitude towards disabled customers, only 19% were fully accessible in terms of toilets, level access and room to move around. Cinemas were the best performers at 55%, with restaurants recording a poor 9%. Worryingly, interviews revealed that some owners prefer the risk of prosecution to the cost of adapting their venue. Disabled people are often seen as a negligible proportion of the target market, resulting in a lack of consideration for their right to participate in the leisure activities.

Although adaptations to buildings form an important part of disabled access to leisure pursuits, there are a range of physical barriers, both in public and private spaces, not covered by the above legislation. Due to past experience and perceived problems, public transport is seen as being particularly difficult to negotiate⁶⁹. Furthermore, despite campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of disabled parking spaces, abuse of disabled bays has not reduced in recent years.

It is not just in leisure activities that involve travel where disabled people face discrimination. Many popular pursuits in the home are still inaccessible. For example, newspapers and many magazines are not produced in Braille, and household appliances are often designed with only the needs of the young and non-disabled in mind. However, technology is increasingly allowing disabled people to participate in more leisure activities. For example, websites are increasingly becoming available in speech format, and text messaging from mobile phones has opened up a popular new form of communication for people with hearing difficulties.

My Story

John McGann

“I went into an off-licence in my local area for a few cans of beer. But because I stumbled into the shop the shopkeeper wouldn't serve me. I'd been into the shop before but on this occasion he refused, and when I refused to leave, he physically threw me out of the shop.

Then they called the police thinking that I was drunk but when they arrived they wouldn't take the case any further. The Police could see that I hadn't been drinking.

It made me feel inferior. It made me feel unequal. I mean, obviously I'm entitled to buy beer. It's just one example of behaviour that I'm sure goes on up and down the country every day.”

Status

Disabled people enjoy considerably lower status in British society than their non-disabled peers. Overall disabled people are more likely to be victims of hate crime and 'mercy killings', less likely to be on television or in public life and more likely to be excluded from the democratic process and community activities.

10 facts

- 1** In two 2005 court cases the judge ruled that the killing of a disabled person should be considered 'mercy killings' and not murder. The defendant in both cases received a non-custodial sentence.
- 2** A resuscitation audit in two hospitals found that correct documentation of Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) status existed for only 23% of patients and for only 10% of those identified as 'Not for CPR'.⁷⁰
- 3** By age 26 young disabled people were three times more likely than non-disabled peers to agree that "Whatever I do has no real effect on what happens to me."⁷¹
- 4** Of the total number of Ministerial appointments to boards of public bodies in 2004, only 3.5% were disabled people (Cabinet Office comes lowest with 0.9%).⁷²
- 5** Over two-thirds (68%) of polling stations at the 2005 General Election were inaccessible to disabled people.⁷³
- 6** Only 1.1% of people working in broadcasting are disabled – well below the national average for other sectors.
- 7** In 2001, 13.1% of local councillors in England and Wales were disabled people.⁷⁴
- 8** During an eight-week monitoring period national newspapers used the following words to describe disabled people: 'freak' 10 times; 'cripple' 20 times; 'moron' once; 'handicap' 34 times; 'psychos' twice and 'sufferer' 45 times.⁷⁵

- 9 Research on the provision of mental health services showed that two-thirds of respondents had encountered local opposition to siting mental health services in their area.⁷⁶
- 10 Eight per cent of disabled Londoners suffered a violent attack in 2001/2 compared to 4% of non-disabled Londoners. Disabled people are also twice as likely to be a victim of burglary as non-disabled people.⁷⁷

Trends

Public appointments and the civil service: Ministerial appointments by Departments to boards of public bodies have increased slowly since records began in 2002 but have still only reached 3.5%.⁷⁸

The culture of the Civil Service: Most disabled civil service staff are at the grade level of AA or EO, which means that they perform administrative functions. Only 1.7% of staff at the Senior Civil Service level are disabled.⁷⁹

Voting and democracy: In May 1997, 94% polling stations presented two or more problems for the disabled people trying to reach the ballot box. The Polls Apart 3 survey, launched by Scope, said that 2001 elections saw a definite improvement, but still out of 1,842 polling stations surveyed in 474 constituencies, 69% were inaccessible.⁸⁰ In the May 2005 election Scope found that 68% of polling stations were inaccessible.

Table 6

Accessibility of polling stations at general elections

1997	2001	2005
94%	69%	68%

Source: Polls Apart 4, Scope, 2005.

In July 2002, British Council for the Disabled People research asked disabled people if they have ever voiced their disagreement with something the government or council has done. Over a third have said “Nothing, as the complaint would not make a difference anyway”, 10% have said that they have written a letter of complaint, while only 7% have asked their MP to complain. Out of the 226 respondents, 77% agreed that the views of the disabled people are not heard enough at the national level, while 59% of those, insisted that disabled people should represent themselves in elections and local councils.⁸¹

Hate crimes: Research carried out by the Disability Rights Commission in Scotland found that hate crimes are a worryingly frequent occurrence for disabled people. Out of the 129 respondents with an impairment or illness, 47% had been victims of hate crime. The most common form of attack was verbal abuse, which affected 79% of those who had been frightened or attacked.

Worryingly, 59% of those questioned in the Disability Rights Commission sample were “not at all confident” or “not very confident” that they could get any help to stop hate crime against them. This corresponds with the fact that only 41% of those attacked told the police about the incident, and one in ten told no-one about the attack. Focus groups from the same research showed that people were concerned about the attitude of the police and about their ability to deal with the problem of hate crimes.⁸²

The Disability Capital 2003 survey has numerous examples of subtle and non-aggressive degrading treatment of disabled people, including patronising and pitying them, pointing and whispering in the street, assuming they are of a low intellectual ability and passing them over for jobs. Numerous case studies feature disabled people complaining of others changing their attitudes towards them once it becomes evident that they are disabled, by treating them as though they are their disability, not a person.

My Story**Steven Pritchard**

“I wanted to go to the polling station early because I had a meeting to go to and I’d just been listening to Radio 4 where they said that 60% of polling stations were inaccessible.

I got in the car with the kids and when we pulled up I asked my daughter to just go and look to see whether it was going to be okay. She came back shaking her head. Sure enough there were four or five steep steps up to the polling station. It was an Air Training Corps centre and I thought what does this make disabled kids feel about going there at all?

I ended up being lifted into the polling station and as that was happening one of the returning officers said ‘We weren’t expecting your sort here today’. It got even worse though.

When I leaned on the booth to make my vote it collapsed. They said they didn’t screw them together because it might damage the wood. I just couldn’t believe it.

Once again it highlighted for me just how far we’ve got to go. You think you’re getting somewhere and then something like this happens. There’s no point in finger pointing, you have to be pragmatic and realise it’s such a long process getting people to understand. Like I always say: education, education, education.”

Unanswered questions

Are attitudes to disabled people changing? Should more be done in schools in a similar way to racism or sexism?

Section 3 Conclusion

Measurement with meaning

In order to manage something you need to be able to measure it. The exercise of compiling this report has made it obvious to us that there is a dire shortfall of available information about the discrimination experienced by disabled people in the UK, especially over time and in comparison with other groups that feel discrimination.

The Department for Work and Pensions has acknowledged this and decided that there is a need to build up a long-term robust statistical data set about disability issues. It has commissioned the National Centre for Social Research to recommend a framework for a national survey to compare the lives and needs of disabled people versus their non-disabled fellow citizens. This is a welcome step and will be vital for the new Office for Disability Issues and Commission on Equality and Human Rights to take on board.

It is important to recognise that statistics can't be treated in isolation. Documents like the Strategy Unit's *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* recognise the interdependence of different policy strands, like transport and employment and the need for equality for disabled people within each one. But often the actions and language of individual departments undermine this commitment. For example the ODPM's overriding objective to increase social housing supply can lead to adaptations being removed – despite a commitment to increasing the supply of appropriate housing for disabled people. In social care, there is often a gap between national commitments and local provision. So although people may receive a direct payment, a paucity of local services can mean that the quality of their support remains unchanged.

Many more examples exist of discrimination in one sphere of life compounding discrimination felt in others. The total impact of the statistics we present here is more than the sum of the parts. So whilst disability discrimination penetrates every part of everyday life (as earlier chapters have shown) national policy often seems only to touch the surface. And in failing to recognise where discrimination interlocks, it can often make life harder for disabled people.

But national statistics aren't enough. The most useful information is available to the people who can make a difference at the point where it is most relevant. This means that more and better information needs to be available to all levels of Government and to individual organisations so that they can reflect on disablism in their own settings. Gathering information about disability issues and the barriers to independent living should become a routine part of almost every Government or corporate research exercise (see box on principles for measuring disablism). For example:

- Local authorities – as part of their new duty to promote equality of disabled people – need to think about the information that they will need to gather in order to know whether they are making progress and involve disabled people from the start.
- Schools should do their own regular disablism audits, run by disabled students, as part of the Citizenship curriculum.
- Sports clubs should support disabled fans who want to measure disablism, improve accessibility and challenge disablist attitudes.

Disablism has blighted British society for too long. We need to acknowledge that inequality is injustice and needs to be challenged. The next step is to create and spread a culture of not waiting for things to be changed nationally but recognising what is wrong at a local (or even individual) level, measuring it and then doing something about it.

Principles for measuring disablism

- 1** The most important thing about measuring disablism is that disabled people should take the lead role in the design of information-gathering exercises.
- 2** Disablism is dynamic and changes over time. So the process should aim for continual improvement and adaptation to the needs of disabled people.
- 3** All information gathered should be made public and communicated in the clearest possible fashion to facilitate accountability.
- 4** Measuring should fit into an ongoing process:
 - Ask – what are the priorities of disabled people? What do they feel needs to change?
 - Measure – gather information about disablism as disabled people feel it
 - Plan – what could be done to tackle the problem?
 - Do – enact the plan
 - Evaluate – what change did the action make?
 - Have another go

Three final words: Evidence! Evidence! Evidence!

Disablism runs wild in our society because the evidence illustrating how disabled people are treated is rarely publicised or collated.

And yet this evidence is vital. It was not until Colin Barnes' book 'Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination' gave statistical evidence of the nature of discrimination that government realised that action had to be taken. It was the evidence of the abuse of human rights of disabled people worldwide through their individual testimonies that ensured that work would progress on the UN Convention to promote the rights and dignity of disabled persons. And it was the evidence from 440 disabled people at the European Parliament in December 1993 that started the promotion of disabled Europeans as people with equal rights and freedoms.

Evidence is hidden. Official figures are rarely given on how disabled people are treated, what services they are denied and the depth of poverty to which they are subjected. The only figures that consecutive governments promulgate are those in relation to unemployment – the reason that they are seen as worthwhile discussing is because getting people into employment is viewed as an economic positive for society as a whole. This is despite employment for disabled people being dependent on access to independent living, housing, education, transport and all other areas of life.

Over 20 years ago, Perez de Cuellar, then Secretary General of the UN, called disability ‘the silent emergency’. Today, in the 21st Century, it is still both silent and an emergency. Evidence on the extent and reality of discrimination is never seen in comparison to other groups. Government produces regular reports on the numbers of people living in poverty – in bad housing, without housing, who are sexually abused, who are denied appropriate health care. They disaggregate these figures to show how people from black and minority ethnic communities, women and children are particularly affected – but failure to disaggregate on the grounds of disability ensures that the true story is never told.

This is why we are delighted to provide these final words to ‘Disablist Britain’. Building on both the ‘Disablism’ report and on our more recent report on ‘Independent Living’, as part of the Time to Get Equal campaign, this report details the still very real barriers facing disabled people in living the same lives as everyone else. In order for disabled people to make the changes needed to achieve equality, we first need to understand what changes are required. ‘Disablist Britain’ should leave no one in any doubt what changes are needed, and why.

Rachel Hurst, Disability Awareness in Action
Tony Manwaring, Chief Executive, Scope

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Time to get equal

Scope's Time to Get Equal campaign, launched in 2004, has three main aims:

- To raise awareness of the problems and barriers faced by disabled people in their everyday lives
- To demand an improvement in the attitudes and actions that disabled people experience
- To build a mass movement of disabled and non-disabled people campaigning and working for equality