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Opportunity for all: Launching an essay collection on disability, health and employment, September 2017

The publication of this collection of essays is both welcome and timely. Despite the hiatus of a General Election, the Health and Work Unit has stuck to its original timetable of publishing a response to the Health and Work Green Paper consultation and the next steps.

In forming my views on what should happen I have relied heavily on the advice of many people - some of which are authors of these papers - they have great experience of these issues and many years of working on this agenda.

When I took office I said that I would not be producing any strategies or policy papers, we have had many of those. What was needed was practical, effective action on a wide range of issues. In politics it tends to be the manifestos that receive the attention, delivery of those commitments is less interesting to political commentators, especially so in this area where reform can take decades. The plan we will produce to get a million more disabled people into work will span 10 years, but delivery must start now. That will require more than edicts from Whitehall. We need to ensure we are enabling the right things to happen in our town halls, businesses and our communities. We need to focus on the what, but also the how.

How do we enable the different parts of the jigsaw to come together at a local level, and to create sustainable services and support with the reach required? How do we ensure that the personalised support can adapt to fit every circumstance and is delivered in a way which makes sense to a

person and the unique psychological journey they are on? How do we get a local economy, its LEP, its local Authority, its health bodies and businesses to create the interventions and opportunities needed? Alongside the work that the Health and Work Unit has undertaken in the last year, the Office for Disability Issues has been expanding its reach and influence, into consumer issues, business partnerships, social care and social investment. We've needed to. Quality employment support and healthcare are vital, but without education and independent living support, without business recognising the impact on its bottom line, without a focus on the unmet need, we won't deliver the cultural change and the societal impetus or the means for disabled people to achieve their ambitions.

It will not be easy but we have some advantage over other challenges in Governments' in-tray. There is unprecedented focus in Whitehall on this agenda, I know from the cross-government roundtables we held post consultation. There is so much good will and I have spoken to many amazing people across the UK, who have managed to cut through red tape and create ventures that do deliver. There are clear factors in their success.

No area of social investment offers just immediate and direct return, through the workforce and their ability to contribute to the economy and fabric of their community. The untapped talent of disabled people is a massive opportunity, as well as the scandal of the stifling of so much ambition and creativity. And the increasing understanding that our nation will never reach its full potential unless every one of its citizens reaches theirs.

Our task is possible, so let's make that happen.

Above the welcome specific proposals in these essays, it is the optimism and drive to deliver I welcome most. We can, we must, we will.

**Penny Mordaunt MP**  
Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work