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Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Human Rights Treaties Division
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais Wilson- 52 rue des Paquis
CH-1201 Geneva

Dear Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,

The UK has a clear vision - to create a society that works for everyone, where all can participate fully. The UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention) guiding principles are integral to our approach, and we are committed to tackling the barriers faced by disabled people across all aspects of life.

The UK has achieved a great deal and has been at the forefront of developments in equality and disability rights. But we are clear that more needs to be done. We will continuously develop and deliver real and practical improvements to ensure disabled people have the same opportunities for inclusion as people who are not disabled.

I wanted to take this opportunity, alongside reporting to the Committee on the specific Concluding Observations it requested, to reflect on progress we have made since our periodic examination last year.

The following therefore highlights examples relating to housing, transport, health, employment, participation in society and international development. These examples reflect decisions in England and by the Scottish and Welsh Governments and Northern Ireland Executive about how best to support the needs of our particular populations with tailor-made services.

Equality and dialogue

We have a proud history of furthering the rights of disabled people. We introduced the world's first legislation recognising and giving rights to disabled people in 1970. The later Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is recognised as a model of effective anti-discrimination legislation and still applies in Northern Ireland. Since we ratified this Convention, we have continued to strengthen our disability and equalities legislative

framework with the Equality Act 2010. The Act mainstreams disability and equality across government through the Public Sector Equality Duty so that every department must consider disabled people when developing, delivering and monitoring legislation, policies and services. Northern Ireland has its own statutory duties on public authorities set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

On 21 May I announced the creation by the Prime Minister of a new Inter-Ministerial Group on Disability and Society to drive forward co-ordinated action across Government. The goal is to bring Departments together to jointly tackle barriers to disabled people's full participation and inclusion and drive through progress against the implementation of the Convention.

I am also committed to strengthening our engagement in England with disabled people and their representative groups through constructive dialogue and collaboration. We want to ensure that more disabled people can share their lived experience with policy makers to inform policy development.

Together with my ministerial colleagues in the Scottish and Welsh governments, as well as with Northern Ireland, we are determined to work together with and for disabled people across the whole of the UK.

Transport

Our goal is to create a transport system offering equal access to everyone by 2030. We are making sure that disabled people have the same access to transport as everyone else, and that they can travel easily, confidently and without extra cost.

In England we consulted on a draft Accessibility Action Plan last year and met with many disabled peoples' organisations and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee to understand their views, needs and experiences. In July this year, we published our Inclusive Transport Strategy which covers transport matters in England and those that are reserved at a UK level. The Strategy sets out our plans to make our transport system more inclusive and better for disabled people by improving awareness and enforcement of passenger rights; improving training of transport staff and ensuring disabled people are involved in the development of the training; and improving travel information about journeys and assistance both before and during the journey.

Across Great Britain we are also improving physical infrastructure through, for example, making up to £300m available for rail accessibility improvements over 2019-2024, £2m to increase significantly the numbers of Changing Places facilities at motorway service areas in England and £2m to ensuring audio visual equipment is installed on buses. This will build on changes we have already made. For example, since 2006 we have provided more than £500m to deliver accessible rail routes: around 200 stations have been made step free, and 75% of rail journeys are now through step-free stations, compared to only 50% in 2005. We also spend around £1bn each year on concessionary fares for older and disabled people using local bus services in England.

Northern Ireland has consulted on a draft Accessible Transport Strategy which sets out a vision for an inclusive and accessible transport network. It aims to improve the physical infrastructure, engage with disabled people and assist independent travel. In the absence of a devolved government in Northern Ireland, it remains subject to the review and approval of incoming Ministers.

Housing

A society in which all can participate fully has homes and buildings that everyone can access and use.

The Housing White Paper sets out a strategy in England to make sure the housing market works for all parts of our community, including disabled people. Offering a better choice of accommodation can of course help older and disabled people to live independently for longer.

We published a revised National Planning Policy Framework in July 2018 for England. We expect local planning authorities to have planning policies which identify the type of homes needed for disabled people as well as other groups, and which use the Government's optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing. We will publish further guidance in the autumn on local authority decision-making and housing provision for disabled people.

We are scoping a review of building regulations covering access and use of buildings in England when building works are undertaken (Part M of the Building Regulations 2010). This will cover existing baseline standards related to different types of buildings, Changing Places Toilets and conversions.

We are also committed to boosting the provision of supported housing in England where accommodation is provided alongside care, support or supervision to help people live as independently as possible in the community. From 2011, we have delivered 32,000 units of supported housing for disabled, vulnerable and older people. We are also helping disabled people to live independently and safely through the provision of home adaptations.

Once commenced, the remaining parts of Section 36 of the Equality Act 2010 will require landlords in England and Wales to permit adjustments to common parts of shared residential premises when requested and where it is reasonable to do so.

Health

The Government is committed to providing the highest quality health and care service in the world, built on the guiding principles of the NHS; that access to health care is based on need and not the ability to pay, and that services are comprehensive and available to all.

In the past, people with mental health conditions too often experienced unfair discrimination and poor treatment. And we know that children with mental health conditions face unequal chances in their lives, particularly when these continue into

adulthood. So we are committed to giving mental health equal status as physical health.

We are already seeing welcome changes in attitudes to mental health. We are also investing more than ever in mental health services, making an additional £1.4bn available to transform mental health services for children and young people in England from 2015/16 to 2019/20.

To build on this, our Green Paper on children and young people's mental health looks across health and education to improve the provision of and access to mental health services in England. The consultation received over 2,700 responses and we recently published our response setting out next steps. We will be creating new Mental Health Support Teams to deliver interventions for children and young people with mild to moderate mental health needs in or close to schools and colleges. We also committed to incentivising all schools and colleges to identify and train a senior designated lead for mental health, as well as piloting a four week waiting time standard.

People with a learning disability, mental health conditions, or autism often have worse health than the population as a whole. We want to reduce this health gap and support them to live full, healthy and independent lives.

For example, to deliver our adult Autism Strategy in England we are working with representatives from autism and carers organisations, self-advocates, professionals and government departments. We are driving up performance on diagnosis nationally and improving mental health services data. We collected data on autism on diagnosis and post-diagnostic outcomes for the first time from 1st April 2018. We are developing a Skills and Competency Framework for staff working with autistic people and a toolkit and best practice guidance for commissioners. We are also making key services, such as transport, for example, more accessible and encouraging initiatives to raise awareness of autism, for example 'Autism Friends'.

In October last year we published our Health Charter for Social Care Providers which identifies standards for care staff on meeting the health needs of people with learning disabilities in England. In April 2018, NHS England issued a call for all healthcare providers to commit to the STOMP pledge. The Stopping Over-Medication of People with Learning Disabilities' (STOMP) pledge was launched in 2016 to stop the over-prescribing of psychotropic medicine to people with a learning disability and is supported by a coalition of professional bodies such as the Royal Colleges of Nursing, Psychiatrists and General Practitioners.

Employment

Our employment policies and support are proving effective – the number of disabled people in work in the UK increased by almost 600,000 in 4 years to reach around 3.5 million in 2017. But we want to go even further, and are committed to seeing one million more disabled people in work by 2027.

In November 2017 we published 'Improving Lives: the Future of Work, Health and Disability', which sets out actions we're taking in the welfare system, the workplace

and health services to realise this commitment. We are investing around £1bn to build the evidence about what works to support disabled people and those with health conditions to get into and stay in work.

For example, we are spending up to £500m in the new Work and Health Programme, which we expect to help around 275,000 people over five years, with the majority (around 220,000) being disabled people. Our investment of £330m in our Personal Support Package for people on the Universal Credit/Employment and Support Allowance health journey is delivering a range of new interventions and initiatives providing support tailored to the individual needs of claimants. We are also recruiting 300 additional Disability Employment Advisers, and introducing 200 new Community Partners to bring more specialist advice and support into the Jobcentre; and more than doubling the number of Employment Advisers in NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services, providing support to adults with depression and a range of anxiety disorders through integrated employment advice and psychological treatment.

Our health-led trials in Sheffield City Region and the West Midlands Combined Authority, build on the internationally-recognised Individual Placement and Support (IPS) approach to provide employment support in a health setting for people with mild-to-moderate mental and physical health conditions. We are also supporting Greater Manchester and the Scottish Government with early intervention initiatives that make it easier and quicker for people to access the right support through a needs assessment, and rapid access to interventions such as occupational health support, mental health and musculoskeletal treatment, and job brokerage. And our £4.2m Challenge Fund is testing new or promising approaches to help people experiencing mental health or musculoskeletal issues stay in work.

We have also introduced a new Tech Fund in Access to Work, which offers employers significant savings on the cost of assistive technology. And we're continuing to build our engagement with employers through Disability Confident, which gives employers the tools to confidently recruit, retain and develop disabled employees, and now has over 7,000 employers signed up.

We are delivering the recommendations of the Maynard Taskforce to improve access to apprenticeships in England for disabled people, including people with a learning disability. We have set a measure of success for a 20 per cent increase in the proportion of starts by disabled people by 2020, up from a baseline of 9.9 per cent in 2015/16 to 11.9 per cent by 2020. We have introduced legislation which allows the minimum English and maths requirements for apprenticeships to be adjusted for a defined group of people with a learning difficulty or disability to entry level 3. This change will allow more people to benefit from the opportunities available through apprenticeships and work. And British Sign Language (BSL) is now an alternative to English Functional Skills for those who have BSL as their first language.

We are developing new communications and guidance products to demonstrate to disabled people, including people with a learning disability that apprenticeships are an option for them and to support and encourage employers to employ apprentices with

a disability. This includes a 'routes into employment factsheet' on the Preparing for Adulthood website. We are working with local sectoral and area partners to increase starts for apprentices with a disability, including people with a learning disability.

The activity of the UK Government is complemented by measures from the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive to encourage disabled people into work or to stay in work.

The Scottish Government will publish a cross-Government Disability Employment Action Plan in autumn 2018. Its Health and Work Support is a two year pilot in Fife and Dundee starting in 2018, to trial new solutions to improve employment outcomes for disabled people and people with health conditions, particularly those who are struggling to stay at work or recently unemployed.

The Scottish Government is committed to driving improvements in inclusive growth including apprenticeship uptake for priority groups and is seeing positive change. In December 2016 the Scottish Government announced enhanced contribution rates providing young disabled people and those with experience of care with the highest level of Modern Apprenticeship funding up to the age of 29. The numbers of Modern Apprentice starts who self-identify as disabled has improved year-on-year since the start of the action plan, in line with the Scottish Government's ambitions.

The Welsh Government's Employability Plan, published March 2018, focuses on: individualised employment support, the responsibility of employers to support staff, closing skills gaps and preparing for a radically changing labour market. The Plan commits to increasing the number of employers who create inclusive and supportive workplaces for disabled people.

The Welsh Government is taking action to remove potential barriers to the participation of disabled people in apprenticeships through new and improved marketing, an online Equality and Diversity toolkit to help apprenticeship providers assess and provide support for disabled apprentices, and setting up an Inclusive Apprenticeships Working group with disability organisations to devise an Apprenticeships Disability Action Plan which will concentrate on practical actions to remove barriers for disabled people in accessing the apprenticeship programme.

Northern Ireland will support 17,600 people through employability programmes including programmes for disabled people and people with health conditions. These programmes include Steps to Success, Workable NI, Condition Management programme, Access to Work and the European Social Fund. These programmes are designed to help unemployed and economically inactive people to find work and to remain in employment.

Participation in society

We believe that our public offices, from the UK Parliament to local government, should reflect the diversity of the UK population but currently the number of disabled people in elected offices is too low.

That is why over the next 12 months we will, with others, undertake a programme of work to help political parties to best support their disabled candidates and to consider how independent disabled candidates can also be supported. While that work is under way, we will provide up to £250,000 to support disabled candidates for local elections in England in the forthcoming year.

The UK Government is determined to tackle barriers that disabled people face when taking part in sport and physical activity. Disabled people are a key audience within the UK Government's 'Sporting Future: a new Strategy for an Active Nation' and Sport England's 'Towards an Active Nation' strategy. We want disabled people to realise their potential to get involved in sport - both as spectators and as participants.

In the last year Sport England has made a number of investments including over £3m going into 8 national disability sports organisations. Additionally, more than 70 individual projects have received investment, supporting disabled people's participation in sport alongside their families, and to increase the number of disabled people volunteering in sport. In November 2017, we unveiled plans for a pioneering cross-sector scheme to give disabled people and those with long-term health conditions better access to physical activity opportunities across the leisure sector.

The Department for Communities in Northern Ireland and Sport NI developed the Active Living: No Limits Action Plan to improve health and wellbeing for disabled people in Northern Ireland through participation in sport and active recreation, investing up to £1.1m to establish 11 multi-sports facilities for disabled people in each of the Council areas and providing specialist equipment for these venues.

sportscotland has invested to increase disabled people's participation in sport in Scotland. For example, their £12m investment in the redeveloped National Sports Training Centre Inverclyde is the first building of its kind in the UK, providing an inclusive residential sports training centre for disabled sport users.

In November 2017 the Scottish Government published its British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan, as set out in the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. It covers all public bodies with a national focus that are directly answerable to Scottish Ministers. The plan sets out Scotland's ambition to be the best place for BSL users to live, work and visit. It is framed around ten long-term goals covering early years and education; training and work; health; culture and the arts; transport; justice and democracy.

The Scottish Government has committed £3.3m over three years (2018/19 – 2020/21) to the next round of the Volunteering Support Fund, which aims to increase the diversity of the volunteer pool, especially people who may experience barriers to volunteering, including disabled people. Since 2016 over 900 disabled volunteers have benefitted from the Fund.

International development

We are determined to improve the lives of disabled people not just in the UK, but around the world.

The recent Global Disability Summit the UK Government hosted with the International Disability Alliance and the Government of Kenya, brought together governments, multilateral organisations, civil society and businesses to tackle a number of important issues; the root causes of stigma and discrimination; to work towards inclusive education and employment for all; and to harness the power of technology, innovation and assistive devices for people with disabilities across the world.

The 'Charter for Change' sets out a global ambition on disability inclusion in international development and humanitarian response. Over 320 governments and organisations signed up to the Charter to take action on the vision set out in the Convention. This resulted in ambitious commitments from over 170 countries and organisations all over the world to take action to improve the lives of disabled people. The UK government launched 'AT Scale', a global partnership for assistive technology with an ambitious aim to reach half a billion more people globally with essential assistive technology by 2030. We will be co-chairing the Global Action for Disability Network, a partnership for donors, agencies and private sector organisations and foundations working on disability inclusion in international development and humanitarian action. We also launched the Inclusive Education Initiative to support developing countries to realise the promise of truly inclusive schools, teaching and learning.

We launched a new Global Data Portal bringing together and identifying gaps in global disability data, and our sign up to the Inclusive Data Charter to support the quality, quantity, financing and availability of inclusive and disaggregated data. We launched the disability inclusive development programme, to test innovative approaches to disability inclusion in developing countries, and take promising interventions to scale to deliver positive outcomes for disabled people. We committed to publishing a new Disability Framework later in 2018 setting out how we will put disability at the heart of our international development work.

We have achieved much, but there is always more we can do. Disabled people still face barriers to full inclusion, and we will continue to break these down, working with the public, private and third sectors until everyone - whether they are disabled or non-disabled - can participate in their community and achieve their aspirations. I look forward to working with the Committee to continue to demonstrate the UK's commitment to progressively realising the Convention and creating a society that works for everyone.

*Yours sincerely,
Sarah Newton*

Sarah Newton MP

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work