

2 February 2005

## **Incapacity Benefit Reform - Disability Rights Commission response.**

Reforms to incapacity benefit announced today were welcomed by the Disability Rights Commission.

DRC Chairman Bert Massie said that changes to automatic increases to IB being linked to take up of employment and training opportunities, must coincide with the nationwide roll out of the Government's successful Pathways to Work scheme.

Speaking today after the announcement Mr Massie said:

"Disabled people on Incapacity Benefit are living in poverty. The DRC welcomes the Government's announcement today that those who are able to, and want to, will be supported into work. The changes introduced today will mean that disabled people will be able to make a positive contribution.

"But for these measures to work, high quality support will be needed from assessment of those deemed able to work, right through to finding and maintaining opportunities to work."

Mr Massie continued:

"It is important that people on Incapacity Benefit who cannot do paid work are not penalised financially or made to feel guilty. I hope also that the incendiary debate over last few months - which has done nothing to encourage disabled people into work and everything to make the most vulnerable members of our society extremely worried about possessing pretty paltry sums- can now end and that we can now have a grown up conversation about the measures needed to help those that can, get back into work.

Pointing to the responsibility of employers to ensure disabled people are not excluded from work opportunities, Mr Massie said:

' Let's not forget that as long as employers continue to show disabled people the door rather than work to keep them in a job, we will still have an uphill battle to ensure that disabled people are genuinely able to participate fully in society. Over one third of calls to the DRC were about employers refusing to make adjustments that could keep disabled people in work. There must be more efforts to give employers advice and guidance on how this can be done.'