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CHARITY WELCOMES DAVID BLUNKETT'S KEY APPOINTMENT

CAMPAIGNING national charity Shaw Trust is looking forward to working with newly appointed Work and Pensions Secretary David Blunkett to help liberate millions stuck in the benefits' trap.

The UK's largest provider of employment services for disabled and disadvantaged people welcomed Mr Blunkett to his new role, and immediately offered its expertise to redress the imbalance which means that just 49% of disabled people are likely to be in work, compared to 80% of non disabled would-be workers*.

"We welcome the appointment of such a senior and highly experienced minister to such an important role," said Shaw Trust MD Ian Charlesworth.

"Mr Blunkett's appointment signals the import the government places on the DWP challenges. We were also pleased to note that the Labour Party election manifesto committed to working with expert voluntary and private sector organisations like Shaw Trust to meet these challenges."

As the Prime Minister announced his appointment, David Blunkett promised wide-ranging benefit reforms, but said the DWP would engage in as wide a consultation as possible. "I will therefore not be making immediate substantial policy announcements until I have had the opportunity to listen, take advice and to reflect on the challenges that face us," he said. "Nothing, however, is off limits in terms of the radical appraisal of the reform agenda."

Shaw Trust had urged former DWP Secretary Alan Johnson to ensure the success of plans to build upon the Pathways to Work programme, by letting the experts run it. Now the Trust is hoping that David Blunkett will take up their challenge to open the doors to millions of people who want to work now.

"The government has launched many welcome initiatives, like Pathways to Work and Job Broking, but these are just scratching the surface of the problem," adds Ian Charlesworth, whose organisation is out performing government targets in all areas.

"We need a cohesive effort to provide a welfare to work breakthrough and there is no doubt that Shaw Trust and other voluntary and private sector organisations are best placed to deliver services which they are already expert in."

Shaw Trust maintains that it is not enough to offer people the opportunity to work, they also need support to grasp it, whether that means brushing up on interview skills or considering a new career path. Then employers need to be made aware of the huge skill potential of people with disabilities, and support to access it.

Finally, we need to support the rising number of people who develop a disability whilst in work to retain their job. The number of working age people reporting a disability has shot up from 6.9 million in summer 2003 to 7.1 million in summer 2004*.

"Mr Blunkett is facing an enormous challenge, but we are eager to help," says Ian Charlesworth.

"Organisations like Shaw Trust are achieving life-changing results for people every day, but we are frustrated by current government programme limits."

* Figures from UK's Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey, summer 2004.