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**Foundation for People
with Learning Disabilities**

The full text of this report is available at
www.eumap.org/reports/2005 and at
www.learningdisabilities.org.uk

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EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01, THURSDAY 20 OCTOBER 2005

People with Learning Disabilities in the UK still Excluded from Mainstream Education and Jobs

London and Budapest, 20 October 2005 – people with learning disabilities face limited mainstream education and employment opportunities, a new report finds.

The report, *Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities: Access to Education and Employment in the UK*, is released today in London, at an event at the Royal Society. Produced by the Open Society Institute in co-operation with the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, the report finds continuing inadequacies in the UK's mainstream education and employment systems.

UK legislation and policy sets out to include more children in mainstream schools, but there is a need for more resources and training. Hazel Morgan, Co-Director of the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities and one of the report's authors, says: "*Many local secondary schools and colleges here in the UK have inadequate resources, skills and experience to provide the level of support needed for students who have learning disabilities. We need more specialist teachers who can give them the support they need and there also needs to be greater flexibility in both teaching arrangements and the curriculum if children with learning disabilities are to be included.*"

The transition from school to employment is not an easy journey for young people with learning disabilities either. Many are not prepared for employment opportunities and leave school or college with no skills or experience, making it virtually impossible for them to find a job.

Despite a clear policy by the UK Government to provide new employment opportunities specifically for people with learning disabilities, the Valuing People Support Team estimates that only 11 per cent of people with learning disabilities in England are in paid employment.

Because of the lack of employment opportunities, most people with learning disabilities in the UK are "economically inactive". They rely on benefits, such as Income Support (IS) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA), as well as other non-disability specific benefits.

Dr. Stephen Beyer from the Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities and another of the report's authors, says: "*We know that there are around 800,000 people with learning disabilities who are of working age, yet few have a paid job and even that may be part time. Many people want to work but there are barriers to them achieving this. There is not enough appropriate support available for people with learning disabilities, Government schemes aren't fully geared towards helping them and the benefits system acts as a barrier.*"

While the social welfare system is supposed to help people make the transition from benefits to employment, the reality is much different for people with learning disabilities. The fear that any form of work may threaten their benefit status acts as a deterrent to finding a job and this is particularly the case for people in staffed accommodation who could potentially lose their Housing Benefit. The Government should consider ideas for a radical reform, including abandoning “incapacity” as an organising principle and replacing it with compensation for “disadvantage in the labour market”. This would remove inherent contradiction between any form of move to work and receiving protection offered by special benefit status.

The report released today covers the whole of the United Kingdom and is translated partially into Welsh. It includes recommendations to Government and policy makers to offer more appropriately resourced mainstream education and employment opportunities to people with learning disabilities. An easy read briefing of the report and a separate employment briefing are also available from www.learningdisabilities.org.uk

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Note to editors

This report has been written by the Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities at Cardiff University, Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research at the University of Glasgow, School of Nursing at the University of Ulster, the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment and the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities.

It is part of a series of 14 country reports monitoring “Access to Education and Employment for People with Intellectual Disabilities” throughout Europe. The reports were prepared by EUMAP, the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute, in cooperation with the Open Society Mental Health Initiative. All reports are available online at www.eumap.org. More information on the Open Society Institute is available at www.soros.org.

The UK report was developed in co-operation with the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. The Foundation promotes the rights, quality of life and opportunities of people with learning disabilities and their families. We do this by working with people with learning disabilities, their families and those who support them to:

- Do research and develop projects that promote social inclusion and citizenship
- Support local communities and services to include people with learning disabilities
- Make practical improvements in services for people with learning disabilities
- Spread knowledge and information.