Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The transition from education to employment for young disabled people

Wednesday 8 November 2023

3 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Morris of Yardley (The Chair); Lord Bach; Baroness Bertin; Lord Carter of Coles; Lord Laming; Lord Porter of Spalding; Lord Prentis of Leeds; Lord Shipley; Baroness Stedman-Scott; Lord Willis of Knaresborough.

Evidence Session No. 2 Heard in Public Questions 17 – 28

Witnesses

I: Professor Kim Hoque, Co-founder, Disability@Work, and Vice-Dean, People and Culture, King's Business School; Dr Stella Chatzitheochari, Reader in Sociology, University of Warwick, and Principal Investigator, Educational Pathways and Work Outcomes of Disabled Young People in England Research Project; Dr Stephen Beyer, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Mental Health, University of Cardiff.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Kim Hoque, Dr Stella Chatzitheochari and Dr Stephen Beyer.

Q17 **The Chair:** Welcome to this public session of our new inquiry. First, I ask our witnesses to introduce themselves and say where they are from.

***Dr Stella Chatzitheochari*:** I am a reader in sociology at the University of Warwick.

***Professor Kim Hoque*:** I am professor of human resource management at King's Business School.

***Dr Stephen Beyer*:** I am a senior research fellow at the National Centre for Mental Health in Cardiff University.

Q18 **The Chair:** Thanks very much. I remind people that this session is being recorded and you will get the chance to look at the transcript and make any alterations to it before it is published.

The first question is a general one and is about the key barriers you think young disabled people face during the transition from education to employment, which is the key thing that we are looking at. Perhaps you could each give two of the barriers you think are most important for the committee to look at during our work.

***Dr Stella Chatzitheochari*:** Given my expertise, I will focus mostly on the domain of education. It is crucial to reiterate that this is a particularly disadvantaged group in education. A large proportion of disabled young people leave school with very poor educational qualifications. You may have seen figures from the Department for Education that focus on those with special educational needs, but we also have evidence from UK cohort studies on those who are not identified as having special educational needs but who have long-standing conditions and impairments.

Just to highlight the disparity, in research that we did a few years ago we found that 26% of those with SEND or with impairments and long-standing conditions achieved level 2 qualifications, as opposed to 67% of those with no known disabilities, so this is obviously a very important barrier to successful school-to-work transitions. We are speaking about a very disadvantaged population.

Secondly—and I raise this, partly because I know that my colleagues will focus more on the employment side of things—in order to understand inequalities in employment and employment outcomes, as well as school-to-work transitions, we need to look at the earlier experiences of disabled young people in education. We know from a lot of research that disabled young people tend to have negative school experiences. We have, for example, nationally representative data that they are more likely to experience school bullying, including physical and emotional bullying. We also know that they are often subject to instances of structural and institutional discrimination, such as not being provided with adequate SEND support or being denied school entry and so on.

Although these experiences certainly influence educational attainment, we need to keep in mind the evidence of their psychological, long-term effects on disabled young people, effects that follow them throughout employment and compromise self-efficacy and occupational aspirations. In our study following disabled young people, we are now focusing on young people of around 17 years of age, and we already see evidence of that for those who experience such structural discrimination.

I will leave it here. I have covered education, and if I have anything else to add, I will do so later.

***Professor Kim Hoque*:** There are a couple of things in particular that I would emphasise. First, a lot of the barriers that young disabled people face going into organisations are just the same as those faced by disabled people more broadly, so at what point do you differentiate between somebody who is a new entrant into the labour market and organisation and somebody who has been there a bit longer?

We know what a lot of those barriers are. Some research I have done over time has looked at the extent to which employers adopt the sorts of disability equality practices that you would expect a good disability employer to adopt. A lot of them say that they have a formal written disability equality statement—the figures are 60%, 70%, 80%, depending on public or private sector differences, for example. However, often the percentage figures for the sorts of practices that you would expect good disability employers to have that would underpin that—do they monitor their promotions by disability, do they monitor pay by disability, do they monitor recruitment processes, and do they conduct systematic assessments in relation to accessibility?—are in single digits.

So a lot of organisations will say that they are good disability equality employers, but when you look at the practices they have in place, a lot fewer of them have those. We refer to it as the empty shell phenomenon; a lot of disability equality practices in British workplaces are empty shells. This is Workplace Employment Relations Study data, which is nationally representative government data, so it is good-quality data that we are drawing these conclusions from.

More specifically, I would point to the Access to Work programme and its availability, particularly in the transition from education more broadly, particularly higher education, into the workplace. There is the issue of the transition from the Disabled Students' Allowance into Access to Work. We know from the latest figures that about 76,000 people are in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance, and the number of people who receive Access to Work support is close to 38,000. Inevitably, some people who have Disabled Students' Allowance will not get Access to Work support. That will be because they are getting assistive tech at university, but they are not necessarily going to get it in the workplace.

A broader problem with Access to Work is awareness of it. Research by the Centre for Social Justice a few years ago suggested that as few as 25% of HR personnel—key decision makers—know what it is, so awareness is a real problem there as well as among young people themselves. What can be done to raise the profile of the scheme so that people know the support that is available to them? That would go a long way to help.

***Dr Stephen Beyer*:** It is important to say that my experience has been in developing and evaluating interventions to get people with learning disabilities or autism, developmental disabilities, into work.

We often say that people are individuals and that we should treat them as such, but these groups are where you really need to live that, because of the complexities of the issues they face. One issue is that if you can help people to gain relevant qualifications or skills, they will still find it very difficult to transition into meaningful employment afterwards; they cannot take what they learn in one environment to another. That is where we have often failed people, because we do not have the right sort of resources to help them with that transition.

One key barrier is the lack of work experience in schools for these groups, specifically work experience that is individually matched to the young person's aspirations, talents and needs, with the option of in-work support. There is certainly evidence that work experience while at school is one of the predictors of successful employment for this particular group when they leave school, particularly where there is job coach support to make that individual transition. It is really important.

We are missing a trick here, because the work experience in schools for people with disabilities generally, but particularly for these groups, has gone down over time. With career services resources at a premium, quite often we see them move out of the sphere of finding and organising placements and leaving the work of risk assessment, planning and support to schools that have neither the skills nor the resources to do it. So it is a downward rather than an upward trend at the moment.

Hopefully, I will be able to describe later what an individualised approach to these groups looks like, but even when you provide that, we still find that there is an increase in probability of employment for those who have had one or more previous work placements while at school. When you put the support in, there is the measurable benefit of that employment.

We have also been involved in studies where we have introduced job coaches into a school to work with people, and even though the goal was not to get employment, we still had outcomes of 20% or more going into employment straight from school. It is not a well-travelled path: most people are signposted towards college, and the employment outcome from college for these particular groups is pretty low.

The second key barrier is the difficulty people have getting the support they need to go into work afterwards, even if they go to college. Any qualifications they get at college do not seem enough to move them into employment. For me, job coach-supported employment as a model of support is not nationally available in anywhere like the numbers needed to cope with the demand, so we find people who basically go into a black hole. Even young people with, say, autism, who go through higher education and get a degree are still likely to be more than five years late in finding a job compared with their graduating peers. Often it is about that transition and the work that is done to find the right job with the right support to get that person an individual approach. We do not have enough of it. Hopefully, we will be able to say something later about how we might generate that.

Q19 **The Chair:** My follow-up question was going to be aligned to that. I take the point, Stephen, about treating everybody as an individual, and you made that very clear. Everybody is an individual, but in our work as a committee we need you to come up with something that affects the sector. Is that possible? Is the difference and diversity in the group of people we are looking at so great that it is difficult for any one system to meet their needs, or is it just that extra flexibility is demanded of those who are putting the system in place? Stella, do you want to have a go at that one? I can see you nodding.

***Dr Stella Chatzitheochari*:** I will not necessarily be able to focus on the system, but I certainly think it is a very heterogeneous group, and we need to treat it and understand it as such. We all speak about disabled young people, but we need to acknowledge that stigmatising attitudes vary by type of condition and impairment, and that there are different condition/impairment-specific barriers, so to speak. An autistic young person, for example, is likely to need a more complex set of accommodations in the workplace compared to somebody with a different condition or impairment.

I certainly do not have an answer on how you can tackle it, but acknowledging and considering heterogeneity and moving beyond a discussion of disabled young people as a homogenous group is key. We also need to take into account that disabled young people's circumstances and experience in employment are also influenced by their other ascriptive characteristics: their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender and so on. So it is very complex, and it is a long piece of work that needs to be done.

The Chair: Kim, you do not have to answer every question, but do you want to add to that?

Professor Kim Hoque: Yes. Steve, are you referring to individual placement and support-type schemes?

Dr Stephen Beyer: Yes.

Professor Kim Hoque: There is a lot to be said for those in many ways. These are schemes that have been particularly targeted at people with severe mental health conditions, and they provide a lot of wraparound care: the clinicians and, quite possibly, social workers will be involved, as well as job coaches—all the care that supports the individual as they attempt to break into the jobs market. The notion of work is very much seen as a health outcome, hence the heavy involvement of the medical profession, which sees real value in this in actually treating the patient.

The figures that I am aware of from Public Health England from 2019 suggest that 9% of people known to secondary mental health services are in employment, and the figure for people who go through these sorts of individual placements and support schemes is 30%. So there is evidence to suggest that they work, but they are relatively small-scale and arguably need to be scaled up. There is also an argument for applying them to other groups, such as people with learning disabilities. There is evidence to suggest that these individualised schemes, with significant support to the individual, can be very effective.

Dr Stephen Beyer: I can talk with some confidence on this. For the last five or six years, we have been working on a project in Wales called the Engage to Change project. This is exactly about getting 16 to 25 year-olds with learning disabilities or autism into paid work. Our outcome, even including Covid, was 34% of people going into employment, and for some bits of it it was 64%. So it works.

Going back to your question, there is a generalised approach that can suit most young people with disabilities. The key is finding that person a job that suits them, not fitting them into a job that exists. That implies that there is a knowledgeable skilled person in-between figuring out what this person has to offer, what their aspirations are, and what the job has to offer. That is the first stage.

Secondly, you have to work with an employer to take on all the issues that employers are concerned with in taking on a young person with these kinds of complex disabilities. Generally speaking, we have found that employers are wonderful, as long as you are able to give individual advice about this person. They want to know, "How can I cope with them? What are my reasonable adjustments?"

Thirdly, it is about having the ability to go into the workplace and teach that person or to work out whether they have different sorts of disabilities. It is about identifying accommodations for that person alongside others in the workplace, rather than relying on the employer to figure it out. Finally, it is about having some long-term support so that, as the workplace and the person change, you can come in, assist with those changes and help with career development.

That works for the most disabled people—I would argue that some people I work with are in that category—but it also works for people who have a variety of cross-sectional disabilities with other issues and who can come back from that; perhaps somebody is cognitively okay and does not need anybody to teach them the job with skill but needs some emotional support outside. That system can cope with that. We tend to see cherry-picking, where providers put people with learning disabilities and autism on to the "too hard" pile and work with a more generic model that is more about advice, guidance and skill development and does not cater for that hard interface with the employer where you have to support the employer as well.

Q20 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** Thank you. My question is for Stella in particular and takes you back to the beginning of your introduction to really look at the school situation. Other members of the panel may want to respond, too. I declare an interest here, having been head of two mainstream comprehensive schools, the first of which responded to Baroness Warnock's 1978 report about integrating children with special needs, particularly physical needs, into mainstream education. We are talking about 40 years later now, and it seems that little has changed.

The Warnock report was about trying to get children who had mostly physical disabilities out of special schools and into mainstream in order to access the same facilities and opportunities that mainstream children had. During my time, I found a very mixed response to that from parents and schools. Do you see a significant difference between youngsters with special needs who are in special schools and children with registered special needs who are in mainstream? Does one set do better than the other? If so, should we be looking at that barrier in our report?

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari: Yes. Certainly, several of my colleagues whose research also focuses on special schools would agree with you. It is a very important topic. We need to look at different outcomes.

I specialise more in mainstream settings, but I can report from my most recent study that we see that young people who experience structural discrimination in mainstream settings prior to GCSEs move to specialist settings and have a more positive experience. They feel more integrated and that more support is available to them, and they do not feel as "othered", if you will, as they do in mainstream schools.

Such a comparison would also need to distinguish between different types of conditions and impairments, because certain conditions and impairments are more stigmatised in mainstream settings. From our research, autistic young people seem to be experiencing a lot more barriers than, say, dyslexic young people or those with physical disabilities where support is more often in place; these conditions and impairments are more normalised in school settings. So I certainly think that is another thing to ask. I do not have any data on different outcomes to cite right now, but I can look into that and come back with some information.

The Chair: If colleagues did have any information on that comparison that would be useful to us, that would be great. Thanks very much.

Q21 **Lord Carter of Coles:** Good afternoon. My questions are about access. However, just before getting to those, I wonder if you could help me. In reading the material we were sent I got a sense that it is legislation not backed up by much governance. Who is responsible for overseeing these things happening? Where does it sit? Perhaps, Stella, we should keep the usual line going, or are you not an expert on this?

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari: I am not an expert on this matter, and I think my colleagues are better suited to answering this.

Professor Kim Hoque: On the employment side, it is the EHRC that is responsible for this. In the past, the forerunner body to the EHRC, the Disability Rights Commission, would take test cases. A lot less of that sort of activity has gone on in recent times. We are looking largely at an individual enforcement model in many ways. "Individual people taking a case in instances where they feel that their rights have been infringed", would be the best way to summarise where we are right now.

Lord Carter of Coles: Not to dwell on it for too long, but would you favour returning to some better enforcement?

Professor Kim Hoque: Yes, enforcement with regard to the labour market is important. If people have rights that are not being upheld and they are not getting the access to justice they should be getting, then, yes, absolutely. Looking at the funding so that the EHRC can take these sorts of test cases is important.

Dr Stephen Beyer: I agree with everything that Kim said. We are seeing a trend of more people being disadvantaged in the workplace in particular, and not having the wherewithal, or sometimes even union support, to be able to take cases forward. That is particularly true in my area of concern where people might be less independent in understanding what they should be getting. Things like the operation of zero-hours contracts, those kinds of flexibilities, are causing all sorts of challenges to people with disabilities, and I believe that we need more enforcement rather than just information and encouragement.

Q22 **Lord Carter of Coles:** Thank you. Moving on to the question of access, how far do you think young disabled people have access to the right information and support at the critical moment when they are transitioning?

Dr Stephen Beyer: From our experience, and from the research we have done, no, they do not. That is not necessarily criticising Careers Wales or the careers service in England, which have a very difficult job to do in trying to signpost those individuals to appropriate next steps, so they tend to default to college as a next step. The educationalists are okay with that, because that is a really good outcome for them, but you are not seeing a concentration on employment as the ultimate outcome.

When we talk to families, they will say that they are completely baffled by the level and layers of services and people involved in this area. When you get to Wales, it maxes out, if you like, because we have the DWP running schemes, local authorities paying for their own schemes, the Welsh Government paying for schemes that operate in some areas and not in others, different overlapping eligibility criteria. It is a real minefield for anyone to figure out. If I want to go down an employment route, how the hell do I do it?

Professor Kim Hoque: There are two elements of access. One is access to the Disabled Students' Allowance, which is at the front end. The better disabled people perform in education, the more likely they are to be able to access work. Figures from the Department for Education suggest that 40% of disabled students know about the Disabled Students' Allowance before starting their course, which means that an awful lot of disabled people just do not know that it exists before they go into higher education. So there is clearly something to be done on messaging and increasing people's awareness of the Disabled Students' Allowance.

It is exactly the same with Access to Work. It has always struck me that, when people are leaving school or university, there should be certain inflexion points at which Access to Work is brought to their attention. Simply put, there may be people who are not disabled and who do not need access to it right now, because most people are not born with their disability. Most people acquire their disability later in life. By the time you get to the 60 to 64 year-olds category, around a third of people identify as disabled. People might not need that Access to Work provision when they leave university at 21 or 22 years old, but if they are aware of it, they can say at maybe 30, 40 or 50, when it becomes relevant, "Aha, I

seem to recall that there's some form of government support here". There is a lot to be said for increasing general public awareness of these schemes.

We could also look to supported internships for increasing awareness. There are some excellent supported internship schemes out there. I work very closely with the DFN Charitable Foundation. DFN Project SEARCH is a provider of supported internships and gets some excellent outcomes for young autistic people who go into them. They have employment rates of about 60% in often full-time jobs paid at the national living wage or slightly above. So they do very well. I am not sure that awareness of these schemes is particularly great among educational providers, and these sorts of opportunities should be more widely advertised.

***Dr Stella Chatzitheochari*:** I agree with everything that has been said, and I would like to add a couple of points. In our most recent study, we spoke to autistic, dyslexic, and physically disabled young people, and we sought to understand their lived experiences in school settings. We asked extensively about career guidance and whether they use these services. They all reported attending a session or two, but they do not necessarily find it particularly helpful. There have been concerns about the quality of these career guidance services. There are instances of young people being told that they can only follow certain pathways because of their disability.

Stigma is pervasive—you can see it everywhere—as is prejudice. One issue that is very commonly raised by our study members, especially autistic young people, is that they would prefer a more person-centred approach, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach whereby autistic young people are understood to be able to do certain things in life. Autism is a condition that is characterised by great heterogeneity; people can be very different in what they want to do and can do.

There is certainly a lack of clarity among parents, as well as young people, about when they can ask for help and what type of help they can ask for, as well as all the schemes that were mentioned. It is important to note that, precisely because there is this lack of knowledge, parents at more socioeconomic advantage tend to fill in the gaps in the system and find out about the schemes, disability employment grants and so on. There are working-class young people and their families who cannot access this information, which widens the gap. This is why it is really important to make sure that information is out there, and that everyone can benefit from it.

Lord Carter of Coles: We hear that the offer is fragmented. Do you want to say a word about the processes by which joining it up, getting it into some sort of coherent pattern and making that information available happens? We picked up somewhere that there are delays, big backlogs, in getting grants. Did I understand that correctly?

Dr Stephen Beyer: Certainly, that is what we have seen. We have seen people with learning disabilities go into supported internship schemes.

Those schemes have been in Wales for only five years, whereas they have been in England for much longer. There we have seen some delays in the award of Access to Work, which is one of the two funding streams. Part of it comes through the colleges from DfE, and the other part is for job coaching, which comes through Access to Work and sometimes takes a while to come through. I do not want to be too hard on them, because I know that Access to Work has been working really hard to overcome the difficulties, but historically it has been a real problem. There are cases where young people are being offered individual work and need Access to Work to pay for some support. There have been delays and eligibility concerns.

In Wales, we are a few years behind on the ALN—additional learning needs—legal reforms, so they are out of sync in how they evidence people with an eligible disability, compared to England. There have been some real problems trying to get the right eligibility criteria. There are definitely delays in the system.

Another issue is apprenticeships. We have done some good work in England and Wales to increase people's access to apprenticeships in order to be more inclusive, but, again, it can take an inordinate amount of time for a training provider to accept that somebody is eligible and to agree the particular apprenticeship that they will go on, by which time the young person and their family have given up and walked away, or it is too late in a funding stream to get the work done. That is a particular problem for us in Wales right now. It is not joined up.

Professor Kim Hoque: I was going to make a similar point about apprenticeships. The problem with apprenticeships is the significant fall in apprenticeship numbers since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017. That has affected disabled people as it has affected everybody else. Again, this partly comes down to employer awareness of what is out there. For some pupils with special educational needs—Stephen, please correct me if I am wrong, as you know more about this than me—adjustments can be made to their English and maths qualifications, but a lot of employers are possibly not aware of that. There is financial support available for apprentices with learning disabilities, and there are bursaries available. I remember during my time on the Centre for Social Justice Disability Commission gathering evidence suggesting that an awful lot of employers are not aware that that support is available. It is about increasing that support and then working out how it works and how to access it before you can even start applying it to an individual case.

Lord Porter of Spalding: Going back to the quality of careers advice, can we get comparative data anywhere on disabled and non-disabled access to work through careers advice? We have seen a lot of anecdotal evidence that careers advice in other areas is patchy, at best, across the country, and there are a number of non-disabled groups that will find disadvantage in the availability of good careers advice.

Dr Stephen Beyer: I agree that it is patchy. My main experience is in Wales, but I do not think it is any different in England. You have people in

the careers service who have been there for a long time, who are experts and know the range of young people with disabilities who they are going to get. They can give good-quality advice, and they know where the schemes are. There are other areas where it is not the same. It is very much down to individual advisers how good the scheme is, and it should not be. There should be much more consistency.

It is easy to bash careers services generally, because they are at an inflexion point. They are crucial, and they have a big job to do. They probably reduce their resources over time in terms of what they can do. But I am sure there are things that they can do such as informing themselves and in the quality of what they are able to advise about, and raising their aspirations for the young people they are advising.

Q23 **Baroness Bertin:** I want to come back to the theme of lack of awareness and the not great communication about what schemes are available. Is the sector using technology to its best effect? Is there a way in which it could all be brought together in a central hub? Perhaps this is a government thing. I do not know, but I put that question to you.

Professor Kim Hoque: That is entirely correct. There are more than likely ways in which this could be done more imaginatively. The big disability initiative that I am currently involved in is the Disability Employment Charter. One of the charter's calls is to have a one-stop-shop advice and guidance service for disabled people and employers, and for other interested parties for that matter, whether education providers or whatever. Pooling that together in one place where people know how to find it and where it is easily accessible—there are all sorts of ways in which it can be accessed electronically—is an important part of the solution, absolutely.

Baroness Bertin: How difficult would that be to do? It strikes me that it is not an enormous leap for some bright people to pool it together and do it.

Professor Kim Hoque: I agree. A lot of it comes down to the political will to a make it happen, possibly a decision by the department that would lead on it. Should it be DWP, for example, that leads on it? Should it be the DfE if it is to do with the transfer from education into work? Should the Cabinet Office be involved, or the Cabinet Office Disability Unit? Once that decision has been made, I do not see that it would necessarily be that difficult to start pooling this together.

Q24 **Lord Shipley:** We have had a very helpful description of the problems, including words like "baffled" and "minefield" when it comes to how people navigate the area. Can you point us towards a place or sector of excellence, or to groups of young people who have excellent support? I noted that Disability Rights UK has argued that young people experience a postcode lottery when it comes to support. I am not clear whether it is a postcode lottery, because that implies that it is geographical. Is it the groups of young people, or the institution they happen to be in, when the institution down the road is operating in a different way? Can you define

excellence? That is what I am trying to get at.

Professor Kim Hoque: The postcode lottery side of things I will not comment on so much, but there are pockets of excellence, some of which we have touched on. I talked earlier about individual placement and support schemes and the fact that they seem to work. There is evidence to suggest that they work, and they could be scaled up. I also mentioned the DFN Project SEARCH initiative, which does a fantastic job in working with young people with autism and providing impressive learning and employment outcomes for them. I know it was successful in securing £3 million in the Spring Budget to extend supported internship provision.

There are problems, because there are a lot of supported internship providers out there, but I do not think there are any national standards for what a supported internship should look like. We know that some supported internship providers get employment outcomes for their graduates from their programmes from between 0% and 25%. They may be working with more difficult groups of people than DFN Project SEARCH is. All the same, it probably partly comes down to the fact that they are delivering services that might not be meeting what we would consider to be excellence. There is a lot to be said for developing some sort of national standard for what a supported internship looks like, and ensuring that the only people successful in getting government funds for these things should be people who meet minimum quality criteria.

Dr Stephen Beyer: I agree. There is good practice out there, particularly on the support delivery side, as Kim suggested. We are seeing some innovation in the areas of co-ordination and advice giving. North Wales, for example, has just developed a cross-north Wales strategy to develop supported employment for people with learning disabilities. They are focusing on posts that can be the signpost—these are slightly older than Careers Wales referrals—that families can go to, and they are a referral point on to all the other schemes in the area. That is being hosted in social services and is directed at more disabled individuals in that population. There has been some good thinking about how they work to spread the word around social workers and others who are in contact with those families to make them aware of what is available and what the pathways are.

So yes, there are more good examples on the provision side than the organisation side, but certainly there are examples of good practice that we could point you towards.

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari: I will focus my answer on education. It is very difficult to point you to excellence, but I can say that there are a few factors that seem to matter and seem to improve disabled young people's experiences.

One factor is the presence of staff who have received specialised training on disability and have more knowledge of different conditions; we know this matters. From young people's accounts and lived experiences, they

seem to have a better experience when there is more knowledge surrounding their conditions.

The second factor is obviously resources surrounding SEND support, which make a big difference to the school's ability to cater to the needs of the disabled young person. We have several young people whose parents need to pay for support themselves because it is not available in their school: there are things like that happening that should be addressed.

Then there is the ethos of the school, which is very hard to pin down, but there are schools that are more welcoming and more inclusive compared to others. Of course, this issue is interlinked with the things I have just noted. Although I cannot generalise, I would pinpoint the SEND specialist colleges post 16 as the type of school that seems to be associated with more positive experiences in our study. This is partly because disabled young people experience a more welcoming environment compared to mainstream, so that is another point to take into account.

Q25 **Lord Prentis of Leeds:** One thing that concerns me—it is more than disabled children leaving the world of education and moving into the wider world where they may go into work—is that the means of helping people has normally rested if not on social workers, who have very big jobs, but on careers officers. There have been major changes in the careers service, and many people complain that now it is all online they do not see anybody to talk to. The careers officers themselves may not be trained in the needs of disabled people. If someone is taking that step from the world of education, which has generally been quite good, and going into that wider world, is the careers service really up to the job?

The Chair: We know that it is new, so we will take that into account, but in terms of training and how it might progress, do you believe that the careers service is up to the job?

Dr Stephen Beyer: If you did not have it, you could, in a sense, have to invent it. Where else would it lie? We have knowledge that can help in the job that it does. The officers need to have training. They need to know much more about the demands of different disabilities that young people have. It is crucial that they take part in the transition planning arrangements that are enshrined in the additional learning needs legislation and good practice guides.

Even if there is a centralised system of websites and information, it is not enough just to signpost with that, because the families of people with additional needs also have anxieties about travel to work and all kinds of detailed arrangements that are much more important to people in their decision-making. It is a necessary service, but it is not yet up to scratch for what we need for this group.

The Chair: Kim, do you want to add anything?

Professor Kim Hoque: I defer to Steve.

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari: I agree.

Q26 **Baroness Stedman-Scott:** Good afternoon. I would like to talk to you about employers, because they are the ones that create jobs. I would love you to be able to tell us whether they get the right support to understand the needs of the individuals. Do they get the support to know where to go for funding or to adapt premises or anything like that? More importantly, once they have taken somebody into their workforce, does all that support stop? I know the answer to this question, but should we be giving more support as the person is integrated into the workplace in order to prevent problems arising, them falling out of employment and you having to start again?

Professor Kim Hoque: That is a great question. Obviously, the Government's main form of support to employers is Disability Confident to encourage them to engage with the disability employment agenda more broadly.

There is a slight love-hate relationship with Disability Confident. The sorts of things that Disability Confident advises employers to do—focus on occupational health provision and on making sure that the recruitment process is accessible to ensure that they are properly on top of providing people with the adjustments they need—all sound great. The big worry is whether employers are actually doing it, because, as we know, it is not monitored particularly. There is not a great deal of independent verification of whether they are doing the things they should be doing.

My research focuses on Two Ticks rather than on Disability Confident, but we think that if Two Ticks did not work, Disability Confident is unlikely to work. Again, this draws on the Government's Workplace Employment Relations Study, which suggests that they are no more likely to employ disabled people proportionately than non-accredited employers are. They are not even more likely to have the sorts of policies and practices in place that you would expect a good disability employer to have. When you look at disabled people's experiences and perceptions at work of fairness, contentment, job satisfaction, well-being and so on, the gaps between disabled and non-disabled people are no smaller in accredited than in non-accredited workplaces.

We are starting some work using Lord Price's WorkL data, which will enable us to do the same analysis in relation to Disability Confident. I have talked about this with Tom, and it will probably be available in the next three or four weeks. I am happy to make that research available to the committee when it is ready, but as a bit of a sneak preview, the work we have done so far suggests that a lot of the problems that I have identified with Two Ticks also hold for Disability Confident.

So, on the surface, there is the advice and guidance, because when you look through what Disability Confident is about, it does make an awful lot of sense. If employers actually did the sorts of things they are being asked to do by DWP to get accreditation, the world would be a better place. The problem is that they are more than likely not doing them; hence we are not seeing the sorts of employment outcomes that we would want.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: I was going to come to Disability Confident, so thank you for pre-empting that. We talk about work coaches—this is my opinion; please challenge it—being the panacea for every issue related to getting people into work. With mental health, you have people who have left the labour market who cannot get back into work. There are people who do not believe that their life will ever be any better. Work coaches have such a big group to work with that there are just not enough of them. There are certainly not enough of them to understand the challenges that you are talking to us about today.

Are you aware of any programme where people have employed their own work coaches and have had much better results, not being reliant on the government ones? Dr Beyer, if the answer is yes, maybe or no, I wonder if you have ever heard of Think Forward.

Dr Stephen Beyer: Think Forward? Yes.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: It is a brilliant system and one that should be looked at more, not least because—you will get the message that I am obsessed by this—it has found the money from somewhere else and, as much as I love the Government, it was not hampered by government and was able to just get on and deliver. I wonder whether we have to get to the point where we think outside the box about how we get the resources into these organisations to do the job properly.

Dr Stephen Beyer: Yes. It is an intriguing question, because people like me always come with a begging bowl and say that we need more money. There is always a need for more money, and sometimes there is a legitimate call for money to be used better and that we should stop doing certain things that do not work.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: That is true.

Dr Stephen Beyer: I agree that we have to look more widely at whether other resources can be brought to bear. You will have judged that I am obsessed by supported employment and job coaches rather than work coaches. Work coaches are a good idea, but they have a limited palette that they can operate with. Often, where you need real intervention with an employer or a young person with disability going into work, they cannot do it because of the reasons you suggested, and because of the limits to their role. With our experience in Wales with the Engage to Change project, the employer has been as much of a client of the job coach as the person with a learning disability.

I think employers get a bad press. It is terribly hard to write generic policies and then suddenly jump into the real, hard practicalities of getting this person into this job. Quite often, they say, "I'm open, but I can't find anybody. Where do I find a person? Jobcentre Plus is not coming up with a list of people". So a job coach will come to you and say, "Let me look at your job. We'll find somebody who matches that job. We'll come in, train that person to your standards, and assist your staff with whatever residual elements of support or supervision they may

want. I'll discuss your concerns with you about risk assessment, health and safety, union issues". They will deal with all the things that are not necessarily answered by generic advice on policy. What risk does this person offer? Usually none. You can then have a follow-on service so that the person fades away, the person is left in the job, the employer gets on with it, and there is somebody to call if there are remaining issues.

There is the referral to Access to Work, which is technically complex. We can help you to do that, and we can tell you that it is there to help to fund it. I know that it works for the more complex guys who may have a learning disability in autism, and for people with complex sensory loss, because I have seen it work with them as well. You may not need all that for people who can handle some themselves and just need a little assistance.

There is a need for that intermediary role. We know of research on employers that suggests that it is that individual approach that works—not, "Will you employ somebody", but, "Will you employ this person?" That changes their attitude and they become advocates after their first experience of employing somebody. They will quite often say, "We have a 90% response rate. We'll employ people like this again". That is what changes that openness and wish to do it.

We do not find open discrimination very commonly. It does happen, but not often. It is more fear and lack of information. It is about how you get that information to somebody in a way that is palatable and allows them to have the confidence to make the decision that is important.

The Chair: You are increasing the chance of success all the time.

Dr Stephen Beyer: Absolutely.

Baroness Bertin: Stephen, something just occurred to me about what you said regarding employers playing a large part and not being the bad guys; they are trying to do their best as well. It made me think about the private-public marry-up and that, if the private and public sectors work together, they can achieve great things. Do recruitment agencies get involved? That is private money-making, if you like, but perhaps in a good way. Could recruitment agencies help headhunting firms? Forgive me, I should know, but do they have a role?

Professor Kim Hoque: It is a good question. I have never really thought about it before, but there is no reason why they could not have a role, given that some organisations such as Manpower are employing enormous numbers of staff. Something to look at is what exactly their provision is and what support they offer young disabled people coming to them. I really do not know. It is a very good point.

Baroness Bertin: Sometimes we look at this as being charitable and the right thing to do, but in some cases it is damn good economics. We know that the disabled pound is billions and billions of pounds, so it is in the best interests of lots of people, and it should be seen as not just a good

thing for society, which it is, but a good thing for the economy.

Professor Kim Hoque: I completely agree with that view. This is about addressing labour market skill shortages, retention issues, keeping people in organisations with valuable skills and not having them falling out of employment. That is absolutely front and centre of the arguments that a lot of people in the disability employment field will make. It is good for the disabled person, but if you are really going to recruit employers to this mission and agenda, it is a case of saying, "This is not just about ticking a CSR or an ESG box".

It is interesting that you mentioned the recruitment industry. The former CEO of PageGroup, Steve Ingham, once said to me, "If ever a client comes to me and complains about not being able to fill their skills-shortage post, and they're not doing everything they can to recruit from the pool of disabled people out there, I have absolutely no sympathy for them". That is entirely how it should be.

Q27 **Lord Laming:** We are right at the beginning of this inquiry, so it is very good of you to share your expertise with us at this point. The discussion has been most helpful, thank you. Following on from the points that have just been made, prior to coming to give evidence today had you contemplated a couple of points where you thought, "I hope the committee will get a grip of, and make some recommendations to address, this particular issue"? Are there any key points that you would like to leave with us today that we can turn our minds to?

Dr Stella Chatzitheochari: My colleagues will speak more about the employment side of things and provide some key points about that, as well as about enforcing rights, which is very important, but I am not an expert on that, so I will not talk about that.

I would like to make two interrelated points with regards to disabled young people. In order to facilitate successful school-to-work transitions, the committee would need to tackle structural and institutional discrimination at all levels, including education. I do not think that just focusing on the employer side would help a substantial proportion of disabled young people who are diagnosed early in life and go through an educational system with a lot of problems and potentially negative experiences, leaving with poor educational attainment.

If you look at data with trajectories of disabled young people from school onwards, you see that a substantial proportion becomes NEET early in life. From 16 to 19, you have a chunk of people who are out of the labour market. This means that interventions need to start early on, and it is not just about the employer. These are mostly working-class young people, and this reinforces my point about resources being mobilised early on to help them with career guidance or by improving the provision in mainstream schools to help them to progress better.

When focusing on the employer side, my concern is that the inquiry may focus on sectors and occupations that are more tailored to those who

have a university degree. Given the type of qualifications this population as a whole tends to achieve, it would be good to pay a lot of attention to occupations where people enter with vocational qualifications, or with no degrees or skills at all. Otherwise, you would be helping those who are more socio-economically disadvantaged, rather than the whole group of disabled young people.

Professor Kim Hoque: I am so glad you asked that question. I really wanted to make the point that what is good for disabled people overall in the labour market will also be good for young disabled people. If we have good disability employment policies as a nation, that will be good for young disabled people and old disabled people alike.

I would like to bring the committee's attention to the Disability Employment Charter, which I mentioned earlier. As I said, this is one of the key things that I have been involved in of late. I set it up alongside Scope, Disability Rights UK, Leonard Cheshire, the Shaw Trust, the DFN Charitable Foundation, UNISON, and the University of Warwick. It outlines a package of policies in nine key areas, some which we have talked about. It also touches on things like mandatory reporting, Access to Work, Disability Confident, and how you can leverage government procurement to improve outcomes for disabled people.

We set this up to demonstrate the fact that there is real consensus out there on what people are calling for, and there is real appetite for change. We now have 150 organisations signed up to this, including all the country's national charities such as Mind, Mencap, Sense, RNIB and RNID, as well as a growing number of corporates such as McDonald's, Schroders, PageGroup and Herbert Smith Freehills. The Trades Union Congress also signed quite recently.

I want to make everybody aware of this, because it sends a really strong message that there are some good ideas out there regarding what can be done to improve the country's disability employment policies. There is a lot of consensus on exactly what those policies should be, and there is real appetite for change. We would not have had all those organisations sign up to the charter if that was not the case.

I would strongly urge the committee to look at the charter and the sorts of things it calls for, and to build that into your deliberations and recommendations.

Dr Stephen Beyer: I would be really happy if you were able to find a way to resource individualised work experience at school, so that schools can help young people to explore this. The knock-ons are enormous in terms of family understanding and Careers Wales being able to understand what this young person is about and what they can do.

We have talked about supporting internships and about Project SEARCH. Largely, in this country, it has been done with college leavers, but in America, where it was born, it is done with schools as well. I would like to see young people in their last year of school having the option of

spending a lot of that time with an employer such that, at the end of school, they graduate not only with qualifications but with a job. For some people, that would be the best outcome.

Secondly, I would like to see better commissioning. Nationally, we have had so many different schemes. I am hopeful about the new Universal Support scheme that has been launched by DWP. On paper at least, and in rhetoric, it tries to tackle some of the things that we have been talking about: increased flexibility and some ability to provide support and employment for those who need it most. I would like to see whether that ultimately has the right shape and delivers what we need for people.

With respect, it is not a matter of private sector or public sector being better. We need proper commissioning that commissions what works and incentivises organisations to deal with the most difficult as well as the least difficult, and which helps them and pushes them to do what works, not what they think might work. So we want more evidence-based practice and more evidence-based commissioning. If you could help with that, it would be a tremendous boon to the sector.

Q28 **Lord Prentis of Leeds:** Work experience is really important. Many disabled people may not get the best chance of experiencing work while they are still in education, and that needs to develop far more than perhaps it has in the past. I have a very simple question that I should know the answer to but have forgotten. I remember employers being required to have a quota, a registered number, of disabled people, but that has gone by the board. I have not heard that mentioned for a number of years. Why did it go by the board?

Professor Kim Hoque: That went with the DDA in 1995, so it has been out for quite a while now. Before then, if I recall correctly, it was the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 that first introduced it. We knew that we would have servicemen coming back from the war and that they would need jobs. It was never enforced. I cannot remember the exact figures, but no more than about 14 cases were ever brought using that legislation.[1] There was a general sense that it was not fit for purpose.

There are broader concerns about quotas more widely and that, generally speaking, disabled people want to feel that they got their job on the basis of their merits, rather than because there is a quota system in place. Hence, the Disability Employment Charter does not mention quotas; it is not something we particularly promote.

Having said that, if all the Disability Employment Charter's policies were introduced and did not particularly work—there is no guarantee that they would—there is no reason why we might not look again at quota-based systems and be a lot more directive about how many people should be

[1] Professor Hoque later clarified that "ten prosecutions were brought during the Act's 50 years with none after 1975."

employed. At the moment, though, that is not being talked about particularly.

Lord Prentis of Leeds: It could be done as best practice, rather than an instruction.

Dr Stephen Beyer: It does raise the carrot and stick idea, and I would much rather see more measured incentives for employers to step forward. In Engage to Change, we were able to offer six months of a wage for up to 100%, and the employer and the young person could get to know each other and see whether it worked out. We found that it raised our employment rate by probably 16%, but only where you tapered it. So you paid 100% in the first month, and it went down until, in the last month, the employer was paying the rate with confidence. We have not really explored those kinds of incentives rather than sticks, and we could do more in that area to help to level the playing field a little, with all the other incentives there are for other groups.

The Chair: That has been an excellent session and I have found it fascinating. You have given us a lot of facts and information. It has certainly broadened my knowledge, but you have really helped to scope out what we will be able to look at. I am sure we will want to return to you at some point by phone or email, et cetera, and I hope you will also feel able to give us any information, or just keep an eye on what we are doing and help or advise where possible. I am grateful for your time. It has been excellent.