

Work and Pensions Committee

Employment support for disabled people: Disability at Work: Government Response

First Special Report of Session 2026–27

HC 585

Work and Pensions Committee

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First Special Report

The Work and Pensions Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2024–26, [Employment support for disabled people: Disability at Work](#), (HC 1227) on 21 May 2026. The Government response was received on 31 July 2026, and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

This government is committed to ensuring disabled people have the opportunity and support to find good work and get on in that work, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances. We recognise that too many disabled people continue to face significant and persistent barriers in the workplace, including challenges relating to accessibility, employer awareness, and the provision of reasonable adjustments.

As part of our work to address these challenges, the government is expanding access to flexible working, taking action to improve access to assistive technology, and working with disabled people, employers, stakeholder organisations and trade bodies to improve the evidence base that informs policy making on inclusive recruitment and retention practices.

We share the Committee’s interest in strengthening workplace practices and support, and in ensuring that the right frameworks are in place to enable disabled people to thrive in work.

The government is strengthening assistance for employers by providing tailored guidance to support both the recruitment and retention of disabled people into and in the workplace. The Support with Employee Health and Disability (SEHD)¹ service helps employers meet their legal obligations in common workplace scenarios, including guidance on disclosure, conversations about health and disability, and the provision of reasonable

¹ Support with Employee Health and Disability (SEHD)

adjustments. Alongside this, the Disability Confident scheme promotes inclusive workplace cultures, and encourages employers to adopt more inclusive practices.

The Keep Britain Working Report² also addresses improving how employers can support the health and inclusion of their workforce. Our three-year Vanguard phase involves the government working with employers, providers, and local areas to test and refine new ways to help people stay in or return to work. Key elements include the development of both a Healthy Working Lifecycle and a Workplace Health Provision. The Workplace Health Intelligence Unit is being set up and will collect data that will help drive forward the adoption of what works to help disabled workers and workers with health conditions.

In his Report, Sir Charlie Mayfield highlighted fundamental problems with the fit note system and in May 2026, the government announced that it would reform the fit note, beginning with pilots across four Integrated Care Boards in England. The pilots will test a fundamentally different approach, exploring replacing the traditional GP-led fit note process with newly designed plans that provide better support to people who fall ill at work.

In addition, the government is addressing the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in recruitment, including disability inclusion, through existing guidance³ published in March 2024 and regulatory oversight, promoting fair and non-discriminatory use of AI in hiring. We are also strengthening our evidence base through the AI and the Future of Work Unit and the new AI Economics Institute.

Owing to their overlapping themes and subject matter, Recommendations 1 and 3 have been grouped together.

Recommendation 1 (Paragraph 33)

To improve disabled people's experiences of requesting reasonable adjustments, the government should strengthen the Equality Act 2010 by requiring employers to respond to requests for such adjustments in writing within two weeks. It should also provide in legislation that any written refusal must include the following:

- the employer's assessment of whether the person meets the legal definition of disabled;
- the employer's assessment of whether the person, if they consider them to be a disabled person, is at a substantial disadvantage;

2 Keep Britain Working: Final report - GOV.UK

3 [Responsible AI in Recruitment guide - GOV.UK](#)

- the employer's reasons, if they consider the disabled person to be at a substantial disadvantage, for concluding that the request is not reasonable; and
- what advice or guidance they sought in coming to their conclusions.

Recommendation 3 (Paragraph 36)

To ensure that no disabled person misses out on reasonable adjustments through a lack of awareness or confidence, the government should require employers to provide all new employees, whether they know them to be disabled or not, with information about the rights of disabled people at work, including the right to request reasonable adjustments, and of sources of support and advocacy. It should also run an extensive awareness-raising campaign across radio, social media and television. Finally, it should increase funding to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). If it cannot do this, it should explain how it thinks the EHRC can be expected to carry out its functions properly within its current budget.

Partially accept

The government agrees that employers should promote the positive health of their workforce and make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled employees can continue to participate. A consistent, effective support system is needed for employers and their employees in managing health and tackling barriers faced by disabled people and, in principle, accepts these recommendations.

Following the 2024 flexible working reforms, all employees have the right to request a flexible working arrangement from their first day in a job. Employers can only reject a flexible working request for one (or more) of eight possible business reasons set out in legislation, and they must consult with the employee before rejecting a request. Disability related flexible working requests are protected as reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

To build on this, we are making changes through the Employment Rights Act 2025 to make it more likely that flexible working requests are accepted. From 2027, employers will have to discuss challenges in accommodating requests with employees, consider alternative options and, if they cannot agree an arrangement, to explain their reasoning. We will also undertake a post-implementation review of the 2024 flexible working reforms within five years of the reforms taking effect.

To improve our understanding of why an employer may be reluctant to implement reasonable adjustments, the government's Open Innovation Team conducted research, commissioned by the Disability Unit⁴ (**Annex A: Reasonable adjustments: Building the evidence base**),* into how effectively disabled employees can access reasonable adjustments. It considers tribunal judgments and includes interviews with experts from unions, Disabled People's Organisations and businesses. Judges, Acas conciliators and legal experts were also interviewed as part of this work.

The research demonstrates that problems in the reasonable adjustment process are not the result of a gap in the law, or predominantly a consequence of employers ignoring or intentionally delaying the reasonable adjustment process, but rather a result of a gap in understanding. We found that most employers are well-intentioned but may have limited understanding or capacity to fulfil requests. For example, 48% of Acas conciliators surveyed reported that unclear processes for granting adjustments were "often" (29%) or "nearly always" (29%) a factor in disputes reaching Acas. In addition, more than half said employers "never" (8%) or "rarely" (46%) engage with the process due to concerns about "doing it wrong" (**Annex B: Annex Reasonable adjustments: Building the evidence base**).

We therefore believe that the issue of employer reluctance to implement reasonable adjustments is best addressed by improving understanding of the current duties under the Equality Act 2010, to ensure employees and employers are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

This research will inform this government's next steps in relation to reasonable adjustment policy. We are providing this evidence as an annex to this response. It will be published on GOV.UK in due course.

While we do not currently intend to implement a legal requirement for employers to provide information to all employees on the rights of disabled people at work, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is engaging with employers to help them better understand their obligations and how to support disabled people in the workplace.

As part of its wider employer offer, the digital SEHD service provides tailored guidance to help employers support disabled employees and employees with health conditions to remain in work. The service explains employers' legal obligations, including under the Equality Act 2010, in common workplace scenarios such as disclosure, conversations about health and

4 The Disability Unit sits in the Office for Equality and Opportunity (OEO). The OEO moved from the Cabinet Office to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of Machinery of Government Changes announced on 21 July 2026.

* [Provided to the Committee by the Department.](#)

disability, and consideration of reasonable adjustments. SEHD is available across Great Britain and can be accessed through trusted platforms including the Health and Safety Executive, Acas and the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (DBIST). DWP colleagues who work directly with employers are provided with information about SEHD so they can promote the service in their discussions.

DWP is also exploring how to build on this work to strengthen the wider health and disability digital offer for employers. This includes identifying opportunities to improve user experience, understanding, navigation and visibility, and to better meet the needs of different types of employers. This engagement, training and the provision of clear, practical advice on DWP services, programmes and good recruitment practice, helps employers better understand their responsibilities and encourages more accessible and inclusive recruitment and employment practices. This includes supporting initiatives such as Disability Confident, sharing good recruitment practice guidance, and encouraging the adoption of flexible and inclusive approaches that reduce barriers for disabled candidates, including at the application and selection stages and other approaches that make it easier for disabled people to request support and thrive in work.

The government regularly reviews resources to ensure the effective allocation of taxpayers' money within a fiscally challenging context, including reviewing the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) budget annually. In recent years the government has provided additional funding to the EHRC, beyond their allocation, to help with in-year pressures. As an independent Non-Departmental Public Body, it is for the EHRC to decide on how it allocates its budget. The EHRC continues to review and reprioritise its work.

Recommendation 2 (Paragraph 34)

To provide a stronger evidence base for future policymaking, the government should commission more research into:

- **the impact of flexible working, particularly remote working, on productivity;**
- **the costs and benefits of giving disabled people the right to a certain amount of paid time off every year to attend disability related medical appointments; and**
- **the impact on disability inclusion of using AI during recruitment.**

Partially Accept

The government recognises that flexible working is good for workers, good for businesses, and good for the economy. Access to flexible working, including remote, home and hybrid working, can be particularly beneficial for supporting groups who face barriers to work. By making flexible working easier to access, we are making work more inclusive for certain groups such as parents, carers and disabled people, giving employers access to a wider talent pool and creating a more diverse workforce.

Led by DBIST, the government is committed to strengthening the UK's evidence base on remote, home and hybrid working. We recognise the importance of continuing to monitor the effects of changing ways of working over the coming years, through both research and data collection. Our primary focus is on assessing whether reforms to flexible working legislation are achieving their intended outcomes on awareness, accessibility and take-up, rather than collecting detailed data on remote and home working in isolation.

We recognise that data on the impacts of remote and home working varies significantly across sectors, occupations, regions and demographic groups. The post-implementation review of the 2024 flexible working reforms, alongside monitoring and evaluation of the Employment Rights Act 2025, will contribute to our understanding of how flexible working arrangements support labour market participation among groups who may face barriers to entering, remaining in or progressing in work.

The 'Make Work Pay: improving access to flexible working' consultation⁵ on new flexible working reforms is generating further evidence on employer and employee experiences of requesting and considering flexible working arrangements. The consultation closed on 30 April, and responses are currently being analysed with findings to be published in due course.

The impact assessment for Make Flexible Working the Default⁶ provided analytical evidence underpinning the 2024 flexible working reforms, highlighting potential benefits including improved recruitment, productivity and employee motivation. The assessment drew on consultation responses, external research and stakeholder engagement. For example, it cited a 2023 survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) which found that 38% of organisations reported increased productivity or efficiency from greater home or hybrid working, compared with 13% reporting a decline.

DBIST is also engaging with the Office for National Statistics to explore opportunities to strengthen the evidence base, including through future data collection and research. This includes working through a cross-

5 [Make Work Pay: improving access to flexible working - GOV.UK](#)

6 [Impact assessment: make flexible working the default](#)

government analytical network to identify evidence gaps and develop more robust and comprehensive data over time. Alongside other government departments, DBIST has engaged with academics at the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence, who are exploring options for developing linked employer–employee data in the UK. We will continue to explore opportunities to contribute to, and benefit from, this work.

Regarding the recommendation on the costs and benefits of giving disabled people the right to a certain amount of paid time off every year to attend disability related medical appointments, the government recognises the importance of strengthening the evidence base in the health and disability space.

Led by DWP, the government’s approach is guided by a broader strategic framework set out in our Evidence and Evaluation Strategy 2025,⁷ which emphasises the importance of prioritising evidence generation in line with departmental goals, identifying key evidence gaps, and ensuring analytical resources are deployed where they can have the greatest impact.

Through this strategy, DWP is committed to a systematic and coordinated approach to evidence, embedding robust evaluation and research across all areas of policy and delivery. This includes commissioning external research, using administrative and linked data, and engaging with academic and expert communities through mechanisms such as our Areas of Research Interest. Within this framework, issues relating to labour market participation, employer practice and disability inclusion, including those raised in the Committee’s recommendations, may be considered as part of our wider programme of work, particularly where they support our objectives to help people get into and progress in work, and to build a more inclusive society for disabled people.

On the impacts of AI in recruitment, most AI systems are already regulated at the point of use by our existing expert regulators including the EHRC and the Information Commissioner’s Office.

Guidance has been published on GOV.UK setting out good practice on procuring and deploying AI systems for human resources and recruitment.⁸ This guidance highlights the good practice mechanisms that can be used to mitigate the risk of unfair bias or discrimination against job applicants based on disability, age, socio-economic status or religion.

Recognising that AI will affect jobs and the workplace, the government launched the AI and the Future of Work Unit earlier this year. The Unit researches and monitors the economic and labour market impacts of AI,

7 [DWP Evidence and Evaluation Strategy 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

8 [Responsible AI in Recruitment guidance](#)

with the aim of informing cross-government policy advice and helping to ensure that AI delivers positive outcomes for the economy, jobs and workers. Its work includes research into how the effects of AI are distributed across income groups, demographics and regions. While the Unit has not yet published research on disability employment, future research may consider disability employment as part of broader analysis of AI's impacts on different groups within the UK labour market.

To further strengthen the government's capability to assess these impacts and inform relevant policy, the AI Economics Institute was launched on 8 June. The Institute incorporates the Future of Work Unit and has a broader focus on the economics of AI.

Recommendation 4 (Paragraph 35)

We also recommend that the government provide an update on its plans to improve disabled people's access to assistive technology, including the proposal to establish an Assistive and Accessible Technology Centre.

Accept

This government recognises the transformative potential of assistive technology. We want to ensure the best technology is coming to market, empowering disabled people to succeed in work and education, participate in the cultural life of the nation and flourish as individuals.

Across government we are seeking ways to leverage technology to ensure the UK is accessible to disabled people. This includes:

- Assistive technology lending libraries for schools being piloted as part of our reform of special education in England,
- Our Digital Inclusion Action Plan⁹ which identified disabled people as one of the five broad demographic groups who are more likely to be digitally excluded and,
- Partnering with Microsoft to upskill Jobcentre staff so they can better support disabled jobseekers.

Our next step is to build our understanding and identify the most pressing issues around assistive technology, making sure that it is more readily available and used by disabled people. We are harnessing the talent and experience of disabled people, alongside engineers and specialists, as a community of experts that we can draw on for insight across the spectrum of assistive technology. The Disability Unit will build on this work by launching a call for evidence later this year.

Following the call for evidence, the Disability Unit will set out plans for addressing the issues identified, including considering what form a potential centre for assistive and accessible technologies might take.

Finally, we recognise that many disabled people are unaware of what support is available, how to get the most from assistive devices, or how to use them with confidence. We are continuing to explore ways to address these challenges.

We have already launched, and continue to develop, a digital resource 'Using assistive and accessible technology (ATech)',¹⁰ which provides clear, accessible information on assistive technology. Our long-term aim is that resource will support disabled people, employers, and other stakeholders by offering clear information on the range and application of assistive technologies, including functionality within consumer products. The Disability Unit are working with stakeholders to iteratively improve the site and expand the scope of topics it covers.

Recommendation 5 (Paragraph 48)

We urge the Vanguard Taskforce, and ultimately the government, to clarify the nature of the Workplace Health Provision (WHP) by the end of the year and to include within its scope at least some element of occupational health for small employers. The Vanguards should also explore how the Healthy Working Lifecycle and WHP could be used to increase access to, and take up of, disability inclusion training among employers and line managers.

Accept

It is our intention to set out the nature of Workplace Health Provision (WHP) by the end of the year. We are working with Vanguard organisations to define the scope of WHP and how it can support employers to create healthier and more inclusive workplaces, helping disabled people and those with health conditions to stay in and thrive at work. Occupational health can play an important role in reducing barriers and supporting healthier workplaces when used effectively. We are therefore exploring how the WHP framework can enable employers to access effective occupational health support, with the accessibility of support for smaller employers a particular focus of this work.

Through the Vanguard phase, we are exploring how best to create inclusive and healthy workplaces. This includes examining the role of training in supporting better outcomes for employers, employees and line managers.

Recommendation 6 (Paragraph 52)

10 [Using assistive and accessible technology \(ATech\) - GOV.UK](#)

We recommend that encouraging employers to make their workplaces more accessible for disabled people, beyond improving access to reasonable adjustments, be made an explicit aim of the Healthy Working Lifecycle (HWL) and Workplace Health Provision (WHP). The Vanguard should explore how the HWL and WHP could be used to encourage employers in all sectors and of all sizes to adopt the sorts of practices that disabled people value the most, particularly flexible working and inclusive recruitment practices. The government should also set out its intentions for monitoring the performance of the WHP. This should include its impact on the rates at which disabled people move into and fall out of work.

Partially Accept

The Disability Confident scheme already aims to support employers to go further in employing and retaining disabled people, including by embedding inclusive practices beyond reasonable adjustments. In practice, this means creating working environments and cultures where disabled people feel valued and supported, with leadership commitment, open conversations about support needs, and proactive steps to remove barriers. The Disability Confident Line Manager Guide¹¹ signposts employers to practical guidance and examples of inclusive recruitment such as the Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative video, ‘Disability Confident recruitment – creating inclusive recruitment resources’.¹²

We recognise the Committee’s report raises important criticisms of the Disability Confident scheme and reflects wider concerns about whether it has always driven meaningful change. However, we disagree with the conclusion that reforming the scheme will not make a difference. A strengthened and better-evidenced scheme can play an important role in supporting more disabled people into work by encouraging employers to adopt more inclusive workplace practices, identified in the report as a key opportunity for improving employment outcomes for disabled people.

The Keep Britain Working Vanguard Phase is also working with volunteer employers, providers and regions through a three-year Vanguard Phase to test and refine approaches that support employers to create more inclusive, healthier workplaces which help disabled people and people with health conditions to stay and thrive in work. We are reshaping how government works with employers to improve work, health and inclusion outcomes.

11 [Employing disabled people: Disability Confident and CIPD manager’s guide - GOV.UK](#)

12 [Disability Confident recruitment – creating inclusive recruitment resources](#)

This work includes developing effective, inclusive recruitment, stay in work and return to work practices through both the Healthy Working Lifecycle and WHP, and building the evidence needed to spread good practice so that disabled workers receive the support they need to remain in employment successfully.

We will also be exploring the support that employers need to deliver good practice in the development of WHP, underpinning the standard with practical work, health and inclusion support and advice. As part of defining the scope and services offered by the WHP market, we will be setting out how we will monitor and assure performance in the market. Defining and collecting better data on outcomes and performance will be key.

While flexible working is not a specific focus of the Keep Britain Working Review, the Vanguard Phase may consider it as part of wider evidence on effective stay-in-work and return-to-work practices.

In addition, as part of the development of an improved employer service in the Jobs and Careers Service, occupational psychologists have been embedded into the programme to co-design and develop an inclusive recruitment toolkit. Recognising how our customers can experience different barriers to entering the labour market, this toolkit will aim to support and enable small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to access best practice and support when it comes to recruitment, including hiring and onboarding. This is particularly important for increasing access to and awareness of inclusive recruitment for SMEs, where there may not be capacity in smaller business to do so without support. This is currently in a test and trial phase, as we understand how this works in the new employer service. We currently do not have a set launch date for this service.

Recommendation 7 (Paragraph 59)

We recommend that the government explore alternatives to asking small business owners to pay for the WHP, at least until the costs and benefits have started to be clearly defined. Among these alternatives, it should include the possibility of asking larger employers to pay slightly more, for example taking a supply chain approach. To inform future funding decisions, it should also undertake a full cost-benefit assessment of the WHP as compared to other disability employment interventions.

Partially Accept

Through the Keep Britain Working Vanguard Phase we will explore different options to fund Workplace Health Provision, including supply chains, and work with Local Areas to test ideas and opportunities with their SME networks. We are in an early stage of this exploration and will share next steps in due course.

Recommendation 8 (Paragraph 65)

Financial incentives for small employers to engage with the proposals in Keep Britain Working and hire more disabled people should be among the first concrete proposals coming out of the Vanguards. In its response to our report, we ask the government to give a firm commitment to testing and implementing such incentives as soon as possible, and that their development be informed, where appropriate, by evidence of what has worked in comparable economies such as Denmark’s approach to encouraging employers to engage with disability employment.

Partially Accept

Incentives will play a key part in driving uptake of Keep Britain Working Proposals. Our work this year will focus on what needs to change to drive better outcomes, drafting a Healthy Working Lifecycle standard with the British Standards Institute by the end of 2026. We will then consider how to incentivise and drive uptake over 2027, working closely with employers.

Sir Charlie Mayfield worked with Danish officials through the Keep Britain Working Review Phase to learn about the model of supporting disabled workers in Denmark and we will continue to build evidence from countries that are seeing positive trends of supporting disabled employees to get good work, get on in that work, and to return to work.

Recommendation 9 (Paragraph 70)

We recommend that the government legislate as part of the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill to require businesses with more than 250 employees to report on the number of disabled people they employ. Alongside a commitment to legislate, the government should set out its assessment of how consistently employers are defining disability where they already do report. If needs be, it should then set out its plans for providing guidance to employers on the definition of disability.

Accept

The government published its response to the public consultation ‘Equality (Race and Disability) Bill: mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting’¹³ on 25 March 2026. This set out our continued commitment to

13 [Equality \(Race and Disability\) Bill: mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting](#)

introducing mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting, alongside indicative clauses to illustrate how the primary legislation may work. Legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The proposed approach will require employers with 250 or more employees to report their ethnicity and disability pay gaps. It will also require large employers to report the overall composition of their workforce by ethnicity and disability, report the proportion of employees who have declared their ethnicity and disability data, and take actions to advance ethnicity and disability equality, including addressing any pay gaps identified.

In the consultation, views were sought on the definition of disability, including a proposal to use the definition contained in the Equality Act 2010, for disability pay gap reporting. While a range of views were expressed both for and against this definition, there was overall support for its use to promote a consistent understanding of disability among employers and to improve the comparability of pay gap data. As part of our policy development, the Office for Equality and Opportunity (OEO) are engaging with a range of employers and other stakeholders to understand how the definition of disability is currently applied to voluntary disability pay gap reporting. This work will shape forthcoming guidance to support employers to implement the new requirements.

Recommendation 10 (Paragraph 75)

We recommend that the WHP capitalise on the existing support available from third sector organisations by providing a single point of entry to that support for employers and employees.

Partially Accept

We agree that many third sector organisations are doing excellent work with employers and disabled people, helping disabled people to stay and thrive in work. The work of the Keep Britain Working Vanguard Phase will explore how we can simplify the Workplace Health Provision framework for employers, and ensure the services are accessible and easily navigable.

Recommendation 11 (Paragraph 77)

In the light of evidence set out throughout our report, we recommend that the Workplace Health Intelligence Unit seek to gather data on:

- **the impact of adjustment passports on disabled people's access to, and experiencing of requesting, reasonable adjustments;**

- **what adjustments work for different groups of disabled people in different sectors, along with the level of access disabled people have to different types of flexibility as compared to non-disabled people, within different sectors;**
- **the availability of, and employer attitudes to, hybrid and remote working; and**
- **a cost-benefit analysis of employing disabled people, especially for small businesses.**

Partially Accept

The Workplace Health Intelligence Unit (WHIU) is being set up and will collect data that shows what works to help disabled workers and workers with health conditions. It will focus more on the value of investing in inclusive practices and practices that support work and health rather than the case for employing disabled people. We are examining what data most effectively enables this, and we will consider including the types of data set out by the committee in this recommendation, but we are not able to elaborate further at this time. Whichever data sets are used in the WHIU, our overall goal will remain to provide practical recommendations using this data to help employers to employ disabled people and people with health conditions.