

Written evidence from Glasgow Disability Alliance (DEG0006)

Introduction

Glasgow Disability Alliance is a disabled persons' organisation with over 5000 members across Greater Glasgow. We provide free accessible learning, coaching and events for disabled people and we offer employability support. The largest disabled peoples' organisation in the United Kingdom we empower disabled people to work in partnership with policy and decision makers to co-design solutions to the barriers and inequalities faced by disabled people.

GDA contributed to the expert advisory group that helped the Scottish Government to produce its Fairer Scotland for Disabled People Employment Action Plan which aims to halve the disability employment gap in Scotland.

<https://gda.scot/>

Progress so far and impact

- *What progress has been made, especially since 2015, on closing the disability employment gap? How has this progress been made?*

ONS data shows that the disability employment gap has reduced between 2013 and 2019 but that the gap is still around 30% and that the disability employment gap has persisted for so long suggests that it is misleading to talk in terms of progress. Further it is difficult to attribute any reduction in the gap to specific actions which have been taken by the UK government.

- *What is the economic impact of low employment and high economic inactivity rates for disabled people? Are some disabled people (for example, young disabled people or people with different health conditions) more at risk of unemployment or economic activity than others?*

ONS and the Disability Unit has data on the economic impact of the inactivity rates for disabled people and there is data available on the particular barriers faced by specific groups of disabled people (those with learning disability, those with mental health issues, young disabled people etc.) It is important to consider not just the economic impact of the disability employment gap- it is important too to consider the waste of potential and talent and of course, the negative impact on health and wellbeing.

- *What has been the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on disabled peoples' employment rates?*

Data for the period of July – September 2020 for Scotland shows that the employment rate of disabled people has declined in the last year and the disability employment gap has widened. Similar data will be available at a UK level. In our view, it is important to ensure that any economic recovery planning has to prioritise

addressing the predicted increase in the disability employment gap resulting from the post-Covid economic recession.

Providing support

- *Where should lead responsibility for improving disabled peoples' employment rates sit (for example, DWP; Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Health and Social Care)?*

Lead responsibility should sit with the Disability Unit but it is imperative that all UK government departments and policy areas commit to cross-departmental collaborative working on reducing the disability employment gap.

- *What international evidence is there on "what works" in supporting disabled people into, and in work, and how applicable is this to the UK?*

No answer.

- *What is the right balance between in and out of work support, and is DWP getting the balance right? What more should the Department look to provide?*

In our view in work support is vital to ensure that disabled people can sustain employment and can progress but it is not necessary that the DWP lead on the coordination or provision of in work support. Access to Work is of course a key element of in work support but the responsibility for providing in work support must be shared by employers and employability support providers.

The feedback from our members is that the DWP should provide more practical support to those who are out of work and in particular needs to provide more assistance to help disabled job seekers identify employment opportunities with employers who are committed to inclusive recruitment and to having a diverse workforce. Disabled job seekers need good quality (fair work) employment opportunities that they can apply to and the DWP could have a greater role in engaging with local employers to promote the business benefits of a diverse workforce.

Most importantly, GDA members feel strongly that DWP staff (who are focusing upon the management of benefit claims and claimant commitments) are not necessarily the most appropriate individuals to offer employability support to disabled people. This is often better provided by organisations that have the skills, experiences and resources to offer a truly accessible and inclusive employability support service e.g. DPO's, Third Sector organisations.

- *How can DWP better support employers to take on and retain disabled employees, and to help them progress in work?*

Other than promoting the Access to Work programme and making it easier for employers and employees to obtain support through the programme we do not feel that the DWP is best - placed to lead on the support of employers. It is not sufficiently resourced or skilled to provide employer support. In our view, employers should be encouraged to engage with disabled people led organisations to undertake disability equality training and to develop inclusive recruitment and retention practices that are informed by the lived experience of disabled people themselves. The DWP could direct employers to sources of information, support and examples of best practice e.g., EHRC employer guides.

- How effective is the *Disability Confident* scheme?

In our view, this scheme has been discredited and is not robust. Employers can readily identify themselves as disability confident without having to make measurable and effective improvements in their recruitment and selection processes such that they are inclusive and actually take positive action to recruit and retain disabled people.

- *What improvements should DWP make to the support it offers to unemployed disabled people via Jobcentre Plus?*

As stated previously the DWP should provide more support to connect disabled job seekers to local employment opportunities with inclusive employers who are committed to best practice in the recruitment and retention of disabled people. It should improve its mechanisms for engaging with those employability support providers who can offer an accessible and bespoke service to disabled job seekers and refer claimants to these organisations. The DWP should commit to improving the skills and knowledge of its staff through disability equality training delivered by disabled people led organisations and impairment specific third sector organisations e.g. mental health awareness training for staff.

- *The coronavirus pandemic continues to make it difficult to offer in-person support. What evidence is there of “best practice” in supporting disabled people remotely—either in or out of work?*
 - *How can DWP put this into practice in services such as Access to Work and the Work and Health Programme?*

Glasgow Disability Alliance is the largest disabled people led organisation in the UK and we have successfully engaged with and supported thousands of disabled people during the pandemic whilst working remotely and by providing online and telephone support and developing new programmes of support. We would be happy to share our experience and insights.

Enforcement and next steps

- *Are “reasonable adjustments” for disabled people consistently applied? How might enforcement be improved?*

The experience of our members (and that of other disabled people led organisations) suggests that there are significant challenges faced by disabled employees who are seeking to negotiate the provision of workplace support and reasonable adjustments. Whilst it is important to address the need for employers to access training, support and advice on how best to provide reasonable adjustments the issue of enforcement is critical. Enforcement would be improved if those experiencing discrimination and challenging a failure to have reasonable adjustments provided were better able to access practical support, mediation and representation including free legal representation.

- *What would you hope to see in the Government's National Strategy for Disabled People?*

Synergy with the 96 actions detailed in A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People Delivery Plan especially in regard to those actions agreed on decent incomes and fairer working lives.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-disabled-people-delivery-plan-2021-united-nations-convention/>

- *How should DWP look to engage disabled people and the organisations that represent them in formulating the Strategy?*

Disabled People Led organisations such as GDA would be happy to facilitate engagement between the DWP and our members and to advise on how such engagement can be resourced, undertaken online and solution focused.

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