

Written evidence from the Disability Rights UK (DEG0097)

Disability Rights UK (DR UK) is led by people with lived experience across the spectrum of disability and health conditions, including mental health conditions, learning disabilities, dementia and autism.

DR UK run a second-tier advice line where we assist their front-line advice workers with supportive information and advice.

We are a pan disability membership organisation led by disabled people seeking change. Our membership includes individual disabled people and organisations working on their behalf including disabled people led organisations. Among our membership are over three hundred organisations that give advice directly to disabled people, particularly in respect of benefit issues.

What progress has been made in closing the disability employment gap?

It should not be assumed that the disability employment gap is closing. The figures are based on the Labour Force Survey, which asks people to self-identify as having a disability. In addition, the statistics provide a pan-disability figure, masking some very large employment gaps for particular impairment groups.

RNIB research based on the registered blind population, reveals that only 1 in 10 blind people are in work. Data on people with learning disabilities shows that only 6% are in employment. We need data based on impairment groups.

What is the economic impact of low employment and high economic inactivity rates for disabled people?

The impact is that millions of disabled people live in poverty. JRF research shows that half of all people in poverty – seven million - are either disabled or live in a household with a disabled person. JRF recent research on destitution again shows that half are disabled people.

Disabled people experience in-work and out of work poverty. The benefits system does not provide an amount which enables people to meet the minimum costs of living. Analysis from the Trussell Trust shows

that many food bank customers are disabled people. It cannot be right for a society to set benefit rates at a level which forces the use of food banks. Indeed, DWP officials even refer people to food banks.

For many disabled people, living on benefit isn't a temporary measure, pending finding a job. It is a long term existence, either due to barriers to employment or because of inability to work. Yet government have slashed benefit rates for the long term unemployed, cutting Employment and Support Allowance by £30 per week in April 2017 and failing to meet the additional costs of disability within Universal Credit.

A recent report on pensions showed that disabled people only have 9% of the average pension pot, leaving people with no cushion for later years.

Are some disabled people at more risk of unemployment and economic inactivity?

Yes, many impairment groups have greater challenges in securing employment. Examples include people who have learning disabilities and people who are blind. There can also be societal barriers to disabled people securing work such as inadequate transport, lack of training and insufficient jobs.

What has been the impact of the pandemic on disabled people's employment rates?

For many disabled people the pandemic has had a catastrophic impact on jobs. Research by Citizens Advice showed that disabled people were hit disproportionately hard by reductions in hours and redundancies. Research by Leonard Cheshire found that 71% of disabled people interviewed had experienced a negative job impact.

Disabled young people have been particularly badly affected, as have older disabled people. The impact for disabled young people could be life-long.

The only silver lining during the pandemic has been the recognition by employers that people can productively work from home. If this trend continues, it will enable disabled people who struggle to travel or to work set hours, to work flexibly from home. This could particularly benefit disabled people with energy limiting conditions.

Where should lead responsibility for improving disabled people's employment rates sit?

Responsibility should sit within whichever department is responsible for supporting people into employment. There should be better links between DWP and DFE in terms of supporting disabled young people into training and work and better links between DWP and DHSC in terms of supporting people who acquire disabilities whilst in work, to remain in work.

Are current DWP employment programmes sufficient?

Over the years, DWP has significantly cut its support to disabled people seeking work, particularly those furthest away from the labour market. It has also preferred to recruit generic work coaches for job centres and to commission generic employment programmes. This strategy has left disabled people with the most severe impairments and the greatest need for specific support, in the "too difficult" group, often not receiving any meaningful support to secure work.

Are reasonable adjustments consistently applied?

UNISON research of its 200,000 disabled members has found that they face major challenges in obtaining reasonable adjustments. Employers' understanding of the employment provisions of the Equality Act is patchy and it is very difficult for employees to enforce reasonable adjustment provisions.

What could DWP do to support employers?

Through a digital information portal, it could dispel myths and make it easy for employers to find out about Access to Work and other forms of support.

Is the Disability Confident Scheme effective?

The Disability Confident Scheme needs to represent the gold standard in creating an inclusive working environment for disabled people. It should cover, leadership, culture, colleague engagement, HR policies, accessible premises and digital systems.

Organisations should have to provide annual data on the number of disabled people employed, satisfaction levels, and the disability pay gap. This mandatory data collection could be based on the NHS Workforce Disability Equality Standard.

What would you like to see in the government's Disability Strategy?

- Targeted employment schemes for supporting specific impairment groups into work, commissioned from disability organisations
- An extension of the Access to Work Scheme, to support people seeking work, with accessible equipment.
- Disability specific work coaches in every Job Centre
- Mandatory monitoring of disabled employees and the disability pay gap
- A Disability Confident Scheme based on employment outcomes
- A mechanism to enforce reasonable adjustments
- A legal right to flexible and home working

How should the government engage disabled people in formulating the Disability Strategy?

By creating opportunities to hear the views of disabled people through a wide range of communication channels. By having in depth interviews with people with complex disabilities, with the support of advocates. By consulting with disability organisations.

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