

## Written evidence from Leeds Autism AIM (DEG0145)

### 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?

From the Autism Act 10 years on report it is clear that in 2019, prior to Covid which will have had further impact, little to no impact has been made on the employment rate of Autistic people and understanding from employers and government bodies is still far too low.

<https://pearsfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/APPGA-Autism-Act-Inquiry-Report.pdf>

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?

Autistic people, according to the above report, are often seen as too difficult to employ. Whereas a wheelchair user might just need a ramp and a different desk, it is often though that neurodivergent people will need too many adaptations and too much managing for it to worth employing them.

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

Many disabled service users are reporting that their jobs, being in low income brackets, service or retail industries etc, have closed or made redundancies and they are struggling to get a new job as a) there are not many available, b) they may not be able to attend face to face interviews as required due to underlying health conditions and c) they may not have access to or know how to use remote working technology.

### 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)?

DWP and Health and Social Care by providing funding to on the group organisations who work directly with disabled people to provide employment skills, Individual Placement and Support plans and to help arrange their access needs.

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

[https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage?fbclid=IwAR1NzJw6UlaSIRURPb9ht2s6zpxRkF\\_gcjiV-qtTJaNQvUtPKH9wGQiq884](https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage?fbclid=IwAR1NzJw6UlaSIRURPb9ht2s6zpxRkF_gcjiV-qtTJaNQvUtPKH9wGQiq884)

Evidence shows neurodivergent people are a positive force in employment.

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?

No the balance is not right. Needs more support for people in work to maintain that employment and challenge unfair dismissals and discrimination in the workplace.

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

How effective is the Disability Confident scheme?

It is not very effective. People get marked as Disability Confident but then there are not checks to ensure the right behaviour is still being implemented. More support and guidance to employers on how to remain Disability Confident is needed.

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

Ensure meetings are in an accessible format (eg, easy read documents where needed, recap of points for those with memory loss, consider sensory needs for neurodivergent people). Consider peoples disability when setting job hunting targets; people with autism may find it harder to fill in job applications so it will take longer and reduce the amount of jobs they can apply for. Ensure jobs suitable to the persons needs and abilities are being pushed for rather than asking them to apply for anything and everything even when it would not be suitable.

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?

Enforcement and next steps

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

A central service that disabled people can call when they start a job (or are in a job and something changes) that works like Access to Work but more effective. Instead of lots of forms etc, visiting employees at work and supporting both the employee and the employer to consider what needs there are, what they can put in place immediately and deciding on future plans then and there.

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

Support for Disability Employment hubs where people can go to get support about their issues. Community Partners where local charities are linked to do consistent work under one umbrella. Funded projects for local organisations to do work and feedback to larger organisations what the findings are and what actions need implementing nationally.

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

Funding to employ disabled people to research, run discussion groups and share knowledge rather than expecting it for free. Disabled people are often asked to consult without any real oversight of the process or the results and often in inaccessible ways, employing disabled people would overcome these barriers.

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