

## Written evidence from Shaw Trust (DEG0181)

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Shaw Trust believes in the right of every person in the United Kingdom to live a decent and dignified life through good employment. We are a charity that seeks to improve life chances through employment for people who face social and economic challenges, or who may also be disabled or have complex needs.

### **2. Executive Summary and Recommendations**

2.1 The Covid pandemic is impacting disabled people's labour market opportunities disproportionately. While the number of disabled people in work was growing pre-pandemic, progress in reducing the disability employment gap remained slow. It is therefore vital that a holistic approach across government is taken to reduce and then eliminate the disability employment gap. The government's forthcoming cross-departmental disability strategy is an ideal opportunity to do this.

2.2 In this submission we make a number of recommendations including:

- Existing employment programmes for disabled people will need to develop and expand, and new provision may be needed to take account of the impact of Covid on disabled job seekers, particularly younger and older people with disabilities.
- DWP need to ensure current and future employment support programmes, such as the Work and Health Programme (WHP) and Intensive Personalised Employment Support Programme (IPES), have flexibility in-built, to ensure disabled people are getting the most appropriate and timely employment support in a Covid environment.
- A Disability Confident evaluation should be conducted, informed by performance statistics.
- The Equality Act provisions, should be strengthened and enforced and the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People should be adopted into domestic law.
- The forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund must include funding to support disabled people and initial pilots should be utilised to trial new approaches to supporting disabled people into employment.
- Dedicated high quality support is needed for ages post-16 SEND pathways, such as Apprenticeships, T Level and Traineeship frameworks. This can be achieved through ring fenced funding – such as a portion of the Apprenticeship Levy and/or Levy underspend being set aside for Apprenticeships for people with disabilities – particularly at the much needed Level 3 and below.

- Disabled young people need to receive inspirational, specialist careers advice from the age of fourteen, focused on their abilities and aspirations, rather on what they cannot do.

### **3. Disability Employment trends**

#### **Recent progress**

- 3.1 While progress in recent years in reducing the disability employment gap is most welcome - almost half of the growth in employment levels since 2013 has come from disabled people - progress is still too slow, given the scale of the challenge.
- 3.2 Research shows that disabled people have to work harder for job opportunities, are over-represented in precarious work and as well as facing barriers to entering work, disabled people also face challenges in staying in work. Disabled people are ten times more likely to leave work than a person without disabilities. They re-enter employment at one third the rate<sup>1</sup>. It should also be noted that disability employment rates vary significantly on disability type.

#### **Covid trends**

- 3.3 Labour market statistics suggest it is likely disability employment gap is widening further as a result of the pandemic. A key driver of this is the fact rising unemployment rates are being driven by very low flows into work (compared to normal times) rather than by high number of people being made unemployed (partly due to furlough) <sup>2</sup>. This suggests strongly that those groups with already-lower rates of employment pre-Covid, such as disabled people, are likely seeing a further increase in employment opportunity gaps.
- 3.4 Our WHP delivery experience during the pandemic adds evidence to the above (73% of People starting on the WHP are in the Disability group). We have seen cases where we have potential placements opportunities lined up for our programme participants which have been withdrawn with these employers preferring to take on newly unemployed jobseekers instead.
- 3.5 Research looking at the impact of the last recession on disabled people also shows that disabled people disproportionately experience the impact of recessions in regards to labour market opportunity<sup>3</sup>. This certainly appears to be the case during the current recession. For example, most layoffs in recent months have occurred among low-paying jobs, where disabled workers often find themselves (e.g. disabled workers fill 21% of vulnerable jobs in the retail sector, compared to 19% of the entire workforce)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://medium.com/@NP\\_OReilly/last-in-first-out-people-with-health-conditions-and-disabilities-in-a-crisis-economy-part-1-478b18b78445](https://medium.com/@NP_OReilly/last-in-first-out-people-with-health-conditions-and-disabilities-in-a-crisis-economy-part-1-478b18b78445)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/10/Jobs-jobs-jobs.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/research-areas/in-work-disability-gaps/all-in-it-together-the-impact-of-the-recession-on-disabled-people/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2020/05/21/an-unequal-labor-market-means-that-covid-19-has-been-especially-harmful-for->

- 3.6 Recent polling by Leonard Cheshire shows the Covid impacted on the work of 71% of disabled people who were employed in March 2020. Some are experiencing an increased feeling of being at risk of redundancy, many are required to shield due to increased clinical risk, and the recession has prompted a squeezed job market for young disabled people in their first steps into work<sup>5</sup>. 42% of employers were discouraged from hiring disabled job applicants due to concerns around supporting them properly during the pandemic<sup>6</sup>.
- 3.7 Citizens Advice research has found that people with health conditions are two and a half times more likely to have fallen behind on their bills during the first lockdown. It was even worse for people shielding. They are four times more likely to be struggling<sup>7</sup>. Research from the TUC finds that for every hour worked disabled workers earn £2.10 less than the average non-disabled person. The pay gap for disabled workers has widened, to £3,800 per year<sup>8</sup>.
- 3.8 To surmise, we very concerned that disabled people already out of the labour market pre-Covid could, and are, finding themselves pushed even further from the job market, by competing for fewer vacancies with newly unemployed people, with more recent skills and experience, pushing some further into the realms of long term unemployment. Without increased support and intervention, the disability employment gap will widen.

#### **Fourth industrial revolution**

- 3.9 The pandemic has led to the closure of offices and the move to remote working for many, utilising video conferencing technology in particular. This shift is likely to be a lasting legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic's impact with hybrid working become even more mainstream. Many of jobs that survive and thrive after the pandemic might be computer and technology based, with remote work and communication over the internet here to stay (a fifth of work can be done remotely)<sup>9</sup>.
- 3.10 Even before the pandemic, many of the disabled people Shaw Trust supports were being profoundly impacted by the long term labour market changes brought about by the fourth industrial revolution, including the expansion of the IT sector, and digitisation of the workplace. Research shows that 25% of disabled adults have never used the internet compared to 6% of non-disabled adults<sup>10</sup>. On IPES we found 27% of our programme participants

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[vulnerable-groups-including-people-with-disabilities/](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Locked-out-of-labour-market.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Locked-out-of-labour-market.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Work%20Publications/An%20unequal%20crisis%20-%20final%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Work%20Publications/An%20unequal%20crisis%20-%20final%20(1).pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/disabled-workers-earning-fifth-less-non-disabled-peers-tuc-analysis-reveals>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/events/coronanomics-challenges-from-the-unequal-impact-on-the-labour-market/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2019>

had no access to ICT at all (including no smartphone) and 8% only had access through a mobile phone.

3.11 However, harnessed correctly, the increase in IT jobs, broader digitalisation of the workplace and increased remote working, can create new opportunities for disabled workers. This is particularly the case for people with caring responsibilities and disabled people who struggle to use inaccessible infrastructure and public spaces, and people with health conditions - to find flexible home based work. The increase in homeworking has been positive for some disabled people. However, it is also important to acknowledge the unique challenges disabled people forced to work from home may be experiencing<sup>11</sup>. Organisations and government planning return to work strategies must consider what is best for the individual, and ensure that lessons from Covid-19 on digital accessibility are learnt.

3.12 There is also growing evidence about disabled people responding quickly and proactively as entrepreneurs to find digital solutions for the growing demand for a new way of working. Many disabled people who are entrepreneurs and/or self-employed find that this way of working provides the flexibility they need to manage their conditions compared to mainstream workplaces<sup>12</sup>. However, we must better understand whether disabled people are becoming self-employed for positive reasons rather than being pushed into self-employment due to lack of opportunities in the traditional labour market.

#### **4. Employment support for disabled people**

##### **External employment support**

4.1 It is vital that a holistic approach across government is taken to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the disability employment gap. The government's forthcoming cross departmental disability strategy is an ideal opportunity to do this. The strategy needs to join up action on all potential barriers to employment – e.g. transport, accessibility and Assistive Technology, social care for working age disabled people, housing and benefits.

4.2 Existing employment programmes for disabled people will need to develop and expand, and new provision may be needed to take account of this effect. The government should also ring fence funding for future employment support programmes for groups hardest hit by Covid-19 and furthest from the labour market; particularly disabled people, and especially younger and older jobseekers with disabilities.

4.3 As well as scarring unemployed young people's employment and pay prospects for years, the Covid-19 labour market impact will lead to significant

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/blog/remote-working-and-disabled-employees-how-pandemic-brought-long-standing-issue-forefront>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ipse.co.uk/resource/making-self-employment-work-for-disabled-people.html>

redundancies for older workers<sup>13</sup>. Research shows that disability rises with age<sup>14</sup> and older workers who lose their jobs are far more likely to slip into long-term worklessness<sup>15</sup>. With an ageing population, the forthcoming disability strategy should consider what additional support older disabled workers and jobseekers are able to access, such a KickStart equivalent programme for older workers to re/up-skill.

4.4 The forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund can play a vital role in supporting disabled people into work. Shaw Trust has supported more than 70,000 disabled people and people with multiple and complex needs to gain new skills, improve their wellbeing and find work through European Social Funding over the past few years.

4.5 With Covid-19 having disproportional impacts on disabled people, it is essential that the government use the forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support disabled people with skills and employability provision. In particular, we advocate that some of the recently announced UKSPF pilots should be used to trial new approaches to supporting disabled people into work. For example, a pilot that further incentivises employers to take on disabled people would be worthwhile trialling. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with the Committee further.

### **Role of JCP and work coaches**

4.6 The DWP is recruiting 13,500 new Work Coaches<sup>16</sup>. This increase is welcome and necessary, but will take time, especially when combined with the training required. In particular, it will be vital to ensure that these new Work Coaches are trained to understand the external provision available for disabled people. We have concerns that too often disabled people receive generic support at JCP, rather than specialist interventions that can quickly address any specific barriers to work, which might not be immediately obvious to non-specialist work coaches. Timely, including early and/or extended, intervention with appropriate support, can be crucial to improving employment prospects for disabled people<sup>17</sup>.

4.7 Employment support programmes, such as the WHP and IPES, should have flexibility in built, to ensure disabled people are getting the most appropriate and timely employment support at all times. This may involve, for example, funding for more intensive interventions to reflect the fact that some disabled people may have been pushed further from the labour market by the increase in newly unemployed people.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/05/Young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/equality-and-human-rights/rb\\_may16\\_cpa\\_rapid\\_review\\_diversity\\_in\\_older\\_age\\_disability.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/equality-and-human-rights/rb_may16_cpa_rapid_review_diversity_in_older_age_disability.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/a-mid-life-employment-crisis/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/coffey-reveals-dwp-hiring-plans-as-part-of-coronavirus-response>

<sup>17</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/266512/wp120.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266512/wp120.pdf)

4.8 JCP has a vital role to play in ensuring all employment support programmes work, as they are often the primary source of referrals. Too often, referrals are made onto the wrong programmes, meaning that the participant is not getting the most appropriate support (with significant variation regionally). To prevent this, JCP Work Coaches need to receive better training on the provision available but providers should also have the flexibility to move people onto more appropriate programmes.

4.9 In the first phase of the pandemic, DWP agreed a contract variation to enable self-referrals by job seekers onto the WHP and IPES, allowing more disabled people to access employment support, and ease pressure on Jobcentre Plus during the pandemic. Anecdotally, we have found that self-referrals via community organisations are on-the-whole more motivated to engage with our programmes. Building-in an on-going self-referral level, especially in regions where JCP are struggling with referral volumes and appropriateness would be beneficial.

## **5. Disability Confident**

5.1 While Disability Confident is an important step forward in encouraging more employers to take on disabled employees, an evaluation of the scheme's efficacy should be conducted, informed by performance statistics, as previously recommended by the Work and Pensions Committee in the last parliament. It is important to ensure that the scheme is not simply 'a tick box scheme' for employers to sign up to but a scheme that has a real impact on the number of disabled people employed.

5.2 Consideration should be given to developing much closer working arrangements between DWP, JCP and regional providers in relation to securing Disability Confident accreditation for more employers. We have found the number of employers awaiting support to become a Disability Confident is significant, with too few resources available to deliver the support needed across the UK.

## **6. Assistive Technology**

6.1 Many disabled people require Assistive Technology (AT) to make digital technologies accessible. Shaw Trust very much supports the Work and Pensions Committee's call in the last parliament for the government to capitalise on Assistive Technology to close the disability employment gap and address the country's productivity problem.

6.2 The government's previous commitment to develop a 'one stop shop' information portal for Disability Confident provides an opportunity to provide resources on Assistive Technology, and to raise employer and employee awareness of its benefits.

6.3 Shaw Trust was pleased to see the DWP commit to setting up an employer information resource as part of its Improving Lives strategy, and this should be taken forward in the government's disability strategy. It should increase employer AT awareness and Access to Work to support disabled workers, and also reasonable adjustment duties under the Equality Act. DWP should develop a competence framework for AT practitioners, and other relevant professionals, to quality assure AT advice and assessment delivered through Access to Work, Personalised Independence Payments and other government schemes.

6.4 AT has a vital role to play in supporting disabled people, and people with health conditions to find, stay and progress in work, as a key element of reasonable workplace adjustments. This is especially the case as technology and working practices change and our labour market shifts. At the moment employer awareness of AT is too low.

## **7. Disability rights**

7.1 The drive to reduce the Disability Employment Gap, and support disabled people to progress in work, needs to be underpinned by strong rights for disabled workers.

7.2 Research by Unison in 2019 found that 67% of respondents had some or all of their requests for adjustments refused. Shaw Trust's 2018 report on employer attitudes to mental health at work, 'Mental health at work; Still the last taboo'<sup>18</sup> showed the stigma associated with mental health in the workplace has grown significantly since 2009 (when we conducted our previous survey). The report showed that there has been a 17% decline in the number of employers who would be flexible in offering adjustments or accommodations to employees with mental health conditions since 2009. This is despite the 2010 Equality Act requirement for employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled employees and those with health conditions.

7.3 Shaw Trust is therefore calling for Equality Act provisions, and enforcement to be strengthened. We would like to see the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People to be adopted in domestic law following the end of the Brexit transition period, to ensure that disabled workers rights are better protected during and after the pandemic.

## **8. Joining up education, careers, learning and skills with employment support**

8.1 Shaw Trust's 'child to career' approach – our provision ranges from school to adult education – shows the importance of government using its cross departmental disability strategy to join up education, learning and skills and

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<sup>18</sup> Shaw Trust (2018) "Mental health at Work: Still the last taboo": [https://www.shaw-trust.org.uk/ShawTrustMediaLibraries/ShawTrust/ShawTrust/Documents/Shaw-Trust-Mental-Health-at-Work-Report-2018-full\\_1.pdf](https://www.shaw-trust.org.uk/ShawTrustMediaLibraries/ShawTrust/ShawTrust/Documents/Shaw-Trust-Mental-Health-at-Work-Report-2018-full_1.pdf)

employability support to bridge the gaps between education, careers, traineeships, apprenticeships, and employment support for disabled people.

- 8.2 Skills and employment programmes and funding streams should be streamlined and marshalled together, with on and off ramps to learning and training, at any stage of people's work and career journeys. There needs to be flexibility and join up between DWP and DfE programmes, to facilitate the move between employment support and learning throughout working lives.
- 8.3 Learners with special educational needs and disabilities, often experience very poor qualification outcomes. The proportion of 16-24 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is higher for those with disabilities (29%) than those without (9%). 15.7% of young people with SEND attained Level 2 in English and Maths by age 19, compared to 80% of those with no identified SEND. Pupils with SEND are four times less likely to be in Higher Education. Without good opportunities for SEND learners, we cannot hope to create the pipeline of skilled disabled people, who are able to contribute to the economy and their communities and lead independent, fulfilled lives.
- 8.4 Disabled young people need to receive inspirational, specialist careers advice from the age of fourteen, focused on their abilities and aspirations, rather on what they cannot do. Young people with an Education Health and Care plan have access to a supported internship, but government needs to ensure that both careers guidance and work experience are providing equal opportunities to disabled young people to transition successfully from education into employment. Careers advice also needs to be fully joined up with education grants and Access to Work to create a level playing field for SEND students.
- 8.5 Ring fenced funding, flexibility and holistic support - dedicated, high quality support is needed for post 16 SEND pathways, such as Apprenticeships, T Level and Traineeship frameworks. This can be achieved through ring fenced funding – such as a portion of the Apprenticeship Levy and/or Levy underspend being used for Apprenticeships for people with disabilities – particularly at the much needed Level 3 and below. Level 2 and 3 qualifications are key to helping people move into different sectors, something which will be even more crucial as we rebuild the economy from the impacts of Covid-19.
- 8.6 Flexibility is also needed in entry requirements and course design – such as English and Maths requirements, as recommended by the Maynard Review into apprenticeships - while also recognising the quality of skills attained on the apprenticeship. Disabled students also need tailored, holistic support and Assistive Technology to address specific learning, health, well-being and accessibility barriers.

8.7 Government at all levels should also do more to promote Additional Learning Support Funding that is available, alongside Access to Work, to support the additional needs and adjustments for SEND learners. This could also help to increase provision of courses for SEND learners.

8.8 Young people look set to be one of the groups hardest hit by the economic consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic, particularly those with SEND, with all types of entry-level roles reduced this year. Providing work experience opportunities and supported internships for young people with SEND will become all the more important, drawing on educational funding, to then secure them meaningful employment. A potential international best practice example is Australia's DES- ESS scheme which works with local schools to recruit disabled people onto employment programmes before they leave school.

***January 21***