

Written evidence submitted by Inclusion London

Inclusion London is a London-wide user-led organisation which promotes equality for London's Deaf and Disabled people and provides capacity-building support for over 70 Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) in London. Through these organisations, our reach extends to over 70,000 Disabled Londoners.

Recommendations

- It should be mandatory for employers to offer furlough to workers who have been told to shield, or who live with people who have been asked to shield.
- The HMRC should collect information pertaining to the ethnicity and disability of workers who have been furloughed.
- The £20 uplift to Universal Credit should be continued indefinitely, and it should be extended to recipients of legacy benefits.
- The benefit cap should be removed indefinitely to account for the long term economic effects of the pandemic on employment and poverty.
- Job creation programmes must explicitly take into account the needs of Disabled people in order to ensure that workplaces are inclusive.
- There must be enforcement mechanisms put in place to enforce Disabled workers rights in employment.
- Kickstart, and other employment programmes, should be available to all those claiming an employment related benefit, and not just Universal Credit.
- Ensure Access to Work funding is increased, including lifting any caps, so all eligible people can access their full entitlement. Access to Work needs to be an accessible, easy to use, quick, flexible system which is able to quickly respond to changing needs.
- Access to Work should be further streamlined, removing bureaucracy from the application, assessment and reassessment process so support can be quickly and consistently put in place.
- The Treasury must urgently address social care charging in the spending review, and at a minimum increase the basic minimum income guarantee level to account for the increasing costs of living.

Employment

Over the course of the pandemic, Disabled workers have been at the sharp end of job loss and redundancy. Citizens Advice research found that one in four (27%) of Disabled people were facing redundancy, with this figure rising to 37% for people whose impairment has a large impact on their day to day life. Furthermore, half of people in the shielding group were facing redundancy¹. Disabled people, even prior to the pandemic, experienced an employment gap of 28.4 percentage

¹ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/parents-carers-and-disabled-people-at-least-twice-as-likely-to-face-redundancy-warns-citizens-advice/>

points, with this percentage gap increasing for Disabled people of colour and Disabled women². Where Disabled people are employed, they are more likely to be on zero-hours contracts, with no job security and limited rights to sick pay and holidays³.

The furlough scheme could have been a lifeline for Disabled workers who faced greater risk of death or severe illness if they contracted Covid-19. However, because the scheme operated at the discretion of individual employers and it was not mandatory for furlough to be offered to shielders, many Disabled people found their requests for furlough were turned down⁴. This meant that Disabled workers who could not work from home had to choose between their lives and their livelihoods. Additionally, the late reviews and announcements that the furlough scheme would be extended led to employers saying they had had to lay off staff they otherwise could have kept on the furlough scheme⁵. Considering Disabled people are considerably more likely to work in low paid, zero-hours jobs, this is likely to have disproportionately affected Disabled workers. A survey by Turn2Us shows that two thirds of disabled people have had their employment affected by the coronavirus: 63% of disabled male workers and 67% of disabled female workers; compared to 43% and 50% of non-disabled workers respectively⁶.

HMRC did not collect information on the ethnicity or disability of workers that had been furloughed⁷. This was a great oversight considering the history of workplace discrimination of these workers, as well as considering that these two demographics were amongst those that had the highest deaths rates during the pandemic.

Social Security

The £20 uplift to Universal Credit was a lifeline to many people during the pandemic. The Trussell Trust found that 72% of people claiming Universal Credit reported the uplift made buying essentials such as food, clothing and toiletries easier than it was before⁸. Furthermore, they found that claimants were no longer having to choose between heating and eating, and that claimants were able to replace essential clothing items such as winter clothes and shoes where they would have had to skip meals to do that previously⁹.

However, this same uplift was not applied to people still claiming legacy benefits such as Employment Support Allowance and Job Seekers Allowance. This disproportionately affects Disabled people – 1.9 million Disabled people still claim legacy benefits¹⁰. Inclusion London's own research found that 37% of respondents to our survey about the effect of the lockdowns on them had

² <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/disability-pay-and-employment-gaps>

³ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/disability-pay-and-employment-gaps>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/disability-55019647>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-52135342>

⁶ <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/About-Us/Media-Centre/Press-releases-and-comments/Two-thirds-of-disabled-workers-affected-by-coronav>

⁷ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2021-03-08.164616.h&s=furlough+disabled+section%3Awrans#g164616.r0>

⁸ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2021/march/budget-2021-%E2%80%99Courageous%E2%80%9D-over-19-million-disabled-people-legacy-benefits-refused-%C2%A320>

experienced a worsening financial situation since the outbreak of the pandemic¹¹. Disabled people faced many increased costs during the pandemic, especially if they were having to shield or receive social care support. These costs included having to pay delivery charges and minimum spend for shopping deliveries if it was not safe for them to go to the shop, using taxis to attend appointments so they could avoid taking public transport, and paying for personal protective equipment for care workers that came into their homes¹². The Disability Benefits Consortium found that not extending the uplift to legacy benefit claimants had had incredibly damaging effects on Disabled claimants: two thirds had to go without essential items at some point in the pandemic, and 44% report being unable to meet financial commitments such as rent and bills¹³.

Additionally, the APPG on Poverty heard in an evidence session regarding the £20 uplift that whilst the uplift had helped many people meet essential costs, there were other policies that in other cases negated the uplift. This included the benefit cap. Only 77% of Christians Against Poverty clients who received the uplift saw an actual increase in their income¹⁴. Whilst there was a nine-month grace period on the benefit cap for people who applied for Universal Credit in March 2020, the number of people who hit the cap rose from 80,000 to 170,000. Considering the long term economic impact of the pandemic and levels of unemployment expected to rise, there is an urgent need to review the benefit cap policy¹⁵.

“Building back better”

In the “Build Back Better – Our Plan for Growth” document, there is a clear focus on job production and reskilling¹⁶. Whilst we support this, we are concerned that there is no mention in the document, and little mention elsewhere of ensuring that this retraining and the jobs produced will be inclusive of Disabled people. As described above, there are major barriers with Disabled people accessing employment, there is a substantial disability pay gap and Disabled people are amongst those most likely to have lost jobs and income during the pandemic^{17,18}. This presents a clear need and opportunity for the government to ensure that their job creation programmes are inclusive and that there are enforcement and regulatory mechanisms to ensure that Disabled people’s rights in the workplace are protected.

With regard to existing employment schemes, a number of issues have already been identified with Kickstart and Disabled young people’s ability to access it. For example, the scheme has to be

¹¹ <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FINAL-Locked-Down-and-Abandoned-report-PDF.pdf>

¹² <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/financial-impact-covid-19-disabled-people-and-carers>

¹³ <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2021/february/pandemic-poverty-new-dbc-research-report-shows-why-%C2%A320-week-uc-uplift-must-be>

¹⁴ <http://www.appgpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/APPG-on-Poverty-20-uplift-report-FINAL.docx.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.appgpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/APPG-on-Poverty-20-uplift-report-FINAL.docx.pdf>

¹⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/968403/PfG_Final_Web_Accessible_Version.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/disability-pay-and-employment-gaps>

¹⁸ <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/About-Us/Media-Centre/Press-releases-and-comments/Two-thirds-of-disabled-workers-affected-by-coronav>

accessed via Universal Credit, however, many Disabled people will still be claiming legacy benefits¹⁹. The scheme should be opened up to all of those claiming a form of unemployment benefit, rather than pressuring legacy claimants to migrate.

Furthermore, whilst Access to Work is available for Disabled people applying for jobs under the Kickstart programme, there are many documented issues with Access to Work. This includes the bureaucracy of the system which meant that only 15% of people found Access to Work easy to use or apply for²⁰. This bureaucratic system, as well as the administrative faults with Access to Work, meant that many Disabled workers experienced delays in their assessments and needed to dispute their needs with Access to Work staff, resulting in them being unable to do parts of their job, or having to delay starting work altogether²¹. Additionally, the introduction of a cap on the amount that a user of Access to Work can claim was introduced in 2015, and later loosened (though not scrapped) in 2018, with users only being able to be awarded £57,200. The cap is currently at £60,700²². The result of this has particularly detrimentally affected Deaf BSL users and Disabled people with complex needs, with Deaf and Disabled organisations and activists pointing out how the cap was discriminatory and stopped Deaf and Disabled people being able to remain in and progress their careers²³.

Disabled people also experience barriers to participation in their communities that must be tackled if the government truly wants to “build back better” and level up the country. One of these major barriers is the social care system, and in particular, social care charging. The amount that Disabled people must be allowed to retain after being charged for their support is called the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG), which is set each year by government. These figures, however, have not increased for years, despite the increased cost of living.

The basic MIG is age-dependent, with working-age disabled people having a much lower basic rate - £72.40 (18-24 years) and £91.40 (25 - below pension credit age) per week - than people who have attained pension credit age, who are able to keep £189²⁴. These charges are driving Disabled people into poverty, and so many are having to turn down the social care that they are entitled to²⁵. As well as the effect on their independent living in general, it would also have a dire effect on their ability to participate in the building back better and levelling up that the government is trying to achieve. The treasury must urgently address social care charging in the spending review.

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¹⁹ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2021-03-08b.501.5&s=kickstart+disabled#g502.5>

²⁰ https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Barriers-to-Work_InclusionLondon_Oct-2017-1.pdf

²¹ https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Barriers-to-Work_InclusionLondon_Oct-2017-1.pdf

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-factsheet/access-to-work-factsheet-for-customers>

²³ <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/access-to-work-cap-announcement-does-not-go-far-enough/>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-charging-for-local-authorities-2021-to-2022/social-care-charging-for-care-and-support-local-authority-circular-lacdhsc20211>

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3I2MqwxHui8>