

Written evidence submitted by Leonard Cheshire Cymru (BSW0052)

About Leonard Cheshire in Wales

Leonard Cheshire is one of the UK's leading charities supporting disabled people. Led by people with experience of disability, we are at the heart of local life — opening doors to opportunity, choice and support in communities around the globe. At Leonard Cheshire, in Wales and throughout the UK, we support individuals to live, learn and work as independently as they choose, whatever their ability, in order to play our part in creating a fair and inclusive society

We are one of the UK's largest voluntary sector providers of services for disabled people. We have accommodation services, including supported living and registered care homes as well as social, education and leisure programmes, including day support, community outreach and respite support.

1. What are the key challenges for the benefits system in Wales and how do they differ from the other nations and regions of the UK?

Pre-pandemic, how effectively did the UK benefits system tackle poverty and socio-economic inequalities in Wales as compared to England and Scotland?

Across the UK, all too often disabled people have faced an uphill struggle to get the benefits they are entitled to, with little understanding shown about their day-to-day experiences.

Disabled people are far more likely to live in poverty, facing significant additional expenses to undertake daily activities.

Heading into the pandemic, disabled people also faced an employment gap compared to non-disabled people of 28.1%, and a pay gap of 15%, which equated to £3,000 less a year.¹

Three quarters of appeals on key benefit decisions are successful, but this only underlines how broken the system is. For many, the prospect of appealing after enduring a highly complex, confusing and seemingly punitive application process is just too daunting. Assessments can seem very intimidating and we hope the fluctuating nature of many conditions is handled more sensitively going forward.

There also needs to be greater support available for disabled people in employment. Disabled workers were disproportionately impacted by the economic fallout of the pandemic, facing reduced hours, furlough or loss of income in other ways. The decision by the UK Government not to increase Statutory Sick Pay following the consultation is a missed opportunity to support some of the lowest paid and economically vulnerable staff in the country.

¹ House of Commons Library. Disabled people in employment, (2021). TUC. Disability employment and pay gaps 2019: TUC proposals for legislative and workplace change, (2019)

The Access to Work programme can be a lifeline for disabled people. Being able to receive funding for support such as special equipment, adaptations, support worker services or transport to and from work can mean the difference between remaining in or moving into work and unemployment for many disabled people. However, just one in five (20%) disabled adults in the UK said they currently or have previously received Access to Work support. This decreased in Wales, with only 14 per cent of the disabled adults we surveyed reporting that they currently or previously received Access to Work support.

Similarly, across the UK only 37% of employers told us that Access to Work was among the schemes offered to employees to help manage their health at work (compared to 28% offering the programme to employees in 2020). Access to Work has been in place since 1994, yet disabled people receiving support from it and employers offering it to employees are still in the significant minority.

This is also reflected in UK figures around the limited extension of the programme over the past decade: 37,170 people received a payment from Access to Work in 2020/21, while in 2010/11 payments were made to 32,810 people.² There are further issues with the programme even among those who manage to receive any funding. 61% of disabled people who have received support from Access to Work said that it took over three months for their application to be processed and for 1 in 5 (20%) it took over six months. Such delays mean necessary equipment and support will not be in place from day one. Further investment in Access to Work and reforms of the scheme such as improving efficiency and personalisation of application processes, entitling disabled job-seekers to 'in principle' indicative award, and passporting awards between organisations, is needed to make that day one support a reality.

2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the type and amount of support needed by people in Wales?

Covid-19 is having a significant impact on the financial security and working status of disabled people across the UK. Seven in ten (69%) disabled people who were in employment before Covid-19 told us their work has been impacted by the pandemic, with disabled people in England most affected (70%). Across the UK:

- 1 in 4 disabled people were working reduced hours
- 1 in 5 disabled people had lost out on income
- 1 in 20 disabled people were no longer employed

In Wales, 54% of disabled people's work had been impacted.³

There are worrying signs of an employment crisis amongst disabled young people, with 89% of disabled young people reporting that their work has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. UK-wide statistics show that 55% of disabled young people believe that they

² Department for Work and Pensions, Access to Work statistics April 2007 – March 2021, Table 6: The number of people who received a payment for any Access to Work provision of each type, 2009/10 – 2020/21

³ Leonard Cheshire, *Still Locked Out: Breaking down barriers to disability inclusive employment*, November 2021, p. 2 [Accessed at: <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Still-Locked-Out.pdf>]

have a greater risk of redundancy because of judgements made by employers regarding their disability.⁴

3. How effectively has the UK benefits system responded to these needs, and what else should the UK Government do to deliver the right support in Wales?

The two major employment support schemes announced, Kickstart and Restart, though available to disabled people, have provided no scope for tailored support, and have no mechanisms to monitor in real time whether any disabled people are actually participating in them.⁵ The Department for Work and Pensions has committed to publish data on outcomes for disabled people in the programmes following final evaluation. However, persistent issues in how disability data is captured and stored in the Universal Credit system suggest it will not be possible to effectively measure whether the schemes delivered positive outcomes for disabled people.⁶

There is significant evidence that personalised, specialist employment support for disabled people is more effective at moving disabled people into work than mainstream programmes. We recommend that following the end of the Kickstart Scheme in March 2022, a successor programme is introduced, which is tailored to disabled young people out of work. This would help ensure disabled young people are included in the economic recovery and not left locked out of the labour market, at risk of long-term unemployment.

Not all disabled people are able to work, and the last 18 months has further shown how insufficient our current social safety net is in supporting those unable to work. The removal of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit coupled with the failure to extend this uplift to so-called legacy benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance means many disabled people are now left struggling to pay essential bills or afford essential items.⁷ The reduction of the Universal Credit taper rate from 63p to 55p will help disabled adults in work as they continue to earn. Disabled adults who are unable to work, however, including over 600,000 who are not expected to look for work because of their illness or disability, are left out from such support. This is why we are still calling for the £20 uplift to be retained and extended to legacy benefits as well as additional measures such as ending the five-week wait for Universal Credit.

4. What reforms are needed to the benefits system and should there be further devolution of powers?

⁴ Learning and Work Institute, Disability Employment: from pandemic to recovery (2021)

⁵ Written answer by Mims Davies MP (UIN 45251): <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-09-08/45250>

⁶ Work and Pensions Committee. Disability employment gap. Second Report of Session 2021–22, (2021)

⁷ Disability Benefits Consortium. Pandemic Poverty, (2021)

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a majority of disabled people in Wales would support further devolution of powers, due to a perception that the Welsh Government is more focussed on addressing barriers to disabled people's independent living.

However, Leonard Cheshire does not hold data on such attitudes, and counter-arguments could reasonably be made on the basis of consistency across the UK and the currently limited size of the Senedd potentially creating challenges in holding the Welsh Government to account in its use of powers.

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