

## Written evidence submitted by Leonard Cheshire

### 1. Introduction

1.1 Leonard Cheshire is one of the UK's leading charities supporting disabled people. We support individuals to live, learn and work as independently as they choose, whatever their ability and to play our part in creating a fair and inclusive society. Led by people with experience of disability, we are at the heart of local life — providing opportunity, choice and support in the communities we work in. This includes providing social care through supporting living and registered care homes - caring for nearly 3,000 disabled people at 120 Leonard Cheshire services - and supporting disabled people with educational and employment opportunities. This response has been informed by this experience as well as an online survey asking disabled people and their carers about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic with over 1,100 responses.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 Key recommendations

- The government must establish targeted support programmes to enable disabled people to re-engage with the workplace into the medium and long-term following labour market disruption due to Covid-19. Services that help disabled people access the jobs market should be significantly increased so that those who are most likely to be locked out of the labour market do not experience increased hardship.
- It is essential that the government develop a jobs strategy that will promote job creation for disabled people, reducing the costs and barriers to investment by employers in the jobs needed for the future.
- We have been calling for flexible working to be introduced as a day one right and the rapid action taken by employers in accommodating working from home in response to the Coronavirus outbreak is welcome. This should set a precedent to enable disabled people – and all employees who would benefit - to work from home as a flexible adaptation.
- The government should put in place support, guidance and information resources for employers to extend flexible working provisions in the long term, as well as support to create jobs that are flexible by design.
- Young disabled people are likely to face long-term effects to their job prospects due to the impact of Covid-19. Investment from government is needed to prepare for a period of long-term unemployment and support is needed to ensure that disabled young people will have the opportunity of an education place, apprenticeship or job.
- Improvements to Statutory Sick Pay should be made permanent, it should be increased to Jobseeker's Allowance and eligibility should be extended to lower paid workers.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Cheshire's online survey asking disabled people and their carers about their experience of the Coronavirus ran from 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020 until 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020 and had 1,154 respondents.

## 2. An inclusive economy post Covid-19

2.1 Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the disability employment gap was 28.6 per cent.<sup>2</sup> 4.2m disabled people were in employment (out of a total of 7.9m disabled people), 300,000 disabled people were unemployed<sup>3</sup> and 3.4m disabled people were economically inactive (ie. not in work and not looking for work).<sup>4</sup> Leonard Cheshire's research shows that disabled people are often in a precarious position when in employment, often due to lack of support, job design and workplace culture. 73 per cent of disabled adults in the UK said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability.<sup>5</sup> Our research shows that 24% of employers already say they would be less likely to employ someone with a disability and that 66% of employers view the costs of workplace adjustments as a barrier to employing a disabled person.<sup>6</sup>

2.2 We welcome the steps taken by the government related to disruption in the labour market caused by the coronavirus. With rising levels of unemployment and a collapse in job vacancies, it is clear that Covid-19 has triggered a period of economic recession bringing severe impact on individuals into the long-term. Claimant unemployment – all of those who are unemployed and claiming social security benefits – has risen by 1.6 million to 2.8 million between April and June 2020. As the highest level since 1993 and 1.2 million higher than the last recession, it is estimated that claimant unemployment will be around 3.1 million in June – potentially beating the previous highest ever level set in 1986.<sup>7</sup>

2.3. Rising levels of unemployment has been accompanied by a collapse in job vacancies – from around 800,000 before the crisis to just 320,000 in the single-month estimate for May. This means that there are now 8.5 unemployed people competing for every job opening, compared with 1.5 before this crisis began. There are indications that where you live has a key determination on your job prospects, with much more severe implications expected for those in many ex-industrial, inner city and coastal areas.<sup>8</sup>

2.4 We know that disabled people are likely to disproportionately experience the negative labour market effects of a severe economic downturn and may be more likely to be employed in jobs, occupations, industries and workplaces that are most affected by the expected economic recession. We are concerned that they may be

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<sup>2</sup> [House of Commons Library Briefing, People with disabilities in employment](#), (January 2020 for the period July – September 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, A08: Labour market status of disabled people, (for period July – September 2019).

<sup>4</sup> We do not know why these people are economically inactive; some may choose not to work, some may be unable to work.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Cheshire, [Reimagining the workplace: disability and inclusive employment](#) (February 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Institute for Employment Studies, Labour Market Statistics, June 2020: IES analysis (June 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Institute for Employment Studies, [Weekly vacancy analysis: Vacancy trends in week-ending 24 May 2020](#) (May 2020).

more at risk of unequal treatment from employers during a downturn as the incentive for employers to introduce and develop inclusive workplaces (such as making reasonable adjustments accessible) may drop. Targeted attention and sufficient financial resource must be made available to address these issues, with renewed commitment from government on long-term targets such as closing the disability employment gap.

2.5 Any period of involuntary separation of individuals from the labour market will have a significant impact on future labour market outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Longer periods of absence from the workplace will lock disabled people into a cycle of low economic inactivity. When a disabled person falls out of work for an extended period of time, they are more likely to struggle to return to the workplace and are twice as likely to remain unemployed when compared to non-disabled people.<sup>10</sup> We are concerned that without targeted intervention from the government to address these issues there is a high risk of unintended consequences. This includes the potential for the link between poverty and disability becoming further entrenched and the obstacles that disabled people currently face in accessing employment becoming further exacerbated. There is a risk that employers' perceptions that disabled people are less able to carry out a job as well as someone who isn't disabled, or that recruiting or retaining a disabled person is expensive, will increase as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

2.6 Measures taken by the government at this stage will be crucial in determining employers' attitudes to recruiting disabled people and people living with health conditions into the future, particularly in the aftermath of the labour market disruption caused by coronavirus. Given the impact of previous recessions on disabled people – and young disabled people in particular - it is clear that disabled people face the risk of a jobs crisis. Existing government programmes such as the Work and Health Programme will not be enough to address this; disabled people will need bespoke support which focuses on creating new jobs as well as guidance for employers on how to make jobs flexible and accessible. Emerging from the pandemic, the government should deliver a jobs strategy promoting job creation for disabled people and ensuring that the costs and barriers to investment by employers are overcome in order to provide the jobs needed for the future. Young people who have repeated and/or long-term spells of unemployment are much more likely to be out of work later in life, to be in poor quality work and have lower earnings.<sup>11</sup> Investment from government is needed to ensure that disabled young people with additional needs are identified and directed to a training place, employment support, wage-supported job or apprenticeship. A key feature of a disability jobs strategy must be investment to address the digital skills gap that many disabled people face, with 22 per cent never having used the internet.<sup>12</sup> Better awareness of Assistive Technology among employers and disabled people is also needed, including its transformative potential to enhance disabled people's capacity to work and live independently. The disability

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<sup>9</sup> As outlined in *Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Work Practices* (2017)

<sup>10</sup> Taylor Review, citing [ONS People in employment on a zero-hours contract](#) (March 2017).

<sup>11</sup> See Joyce, R. and Xu, X. (2020) 'Sector lockdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?' Institute for Fiscal Studies Briefing Note, 6 April 2020

<sup>12</sup> ONS 2017 Office for National Statistics, *Internet users in the UK: 2017* (May 2017).

jobs strategy should also include measures that support employers in developing remote working and digital platforms for their staff that are fully accessible for disabled people.

2.7 Throughout the course of the coronavirus crisis, disabled people have faced considerable impact to their day-to-day living. Many are at increased risk of contracting the virus and experiencing severe effects due to their condition and many have faced increased isolation due to shielding. Estimates show that 55% of disabled people have self-isolated because of Covid-19 compared to 37% of non-disabled people.<sup>13</sup> Nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of disabled adults report that coronavirus has negatively affected their well-being.<sup>14</sup>

2.8 There have been significant obstacles faced by disabled people in accessing their rights during the pandemic. We have been concerned by reports of disabled people being unable to access social care entitlements and the worrying impact that this may have on their ability to live independently in the long-term. 55% of disabled people in receipt of social care responding to our survey on the impact of Covid-19 reported a change to the social care support they receive. Our research shows that 25% of disabled people are either concerned about accessing essential shopping during the pandemic or have experienced difficulties in sourcing food.<sup>15</sup>

2.9 On average, disabled people face additional costs of £583 a month due to their disability.<sup>16</sup> The welfare system does not currently account for these additional costs, with many disabled people who claim benefits unable to cover basic living expenses. Leonard Cheshire has been calling for legacy benefits such as Employment Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) to receive the same £20 uplift that Universal Credit has received during the pandemic. Respondents to our survey on the impact of Covid-19 who are in receipt of PIP cited examples of their daily living costs soaring, due to the need to buy Personal Protective Equipment for themselves and their carers. Some individuals reported needing to buy additional specialist equipment, as services like physiotherapy are temporarily not available. Given that disabled people are more likely to be affected by the coronavirus crisis, the government should assess what additional financial support is needed to cover any additional costs incurred. Improvements to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), introduced during the pandemic, should be made permanent so that disabled people, including people with mental health problems, can remain in work and thrive in their job. SSP should be increased to Jobseeker's Allowance and eligibility should be extended to lower paid workers to break the link between disability and financial insecurity.

"I lost my job the week before lockdown and I had to wait eight weeks before I had any help with Universal Credit. Now I have no savings as I had to pay all

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<sup>13</sup> ONS 2020 Dataset, Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain: 27 March 2020 to 6 April 2020 (inclusive).

<sup>14</sup> [Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#) covering the period 27 March 2020 to 13 April 2020 on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on disabled people in Great Britain.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Cheshire's survey on Covid-19 and the impact on disabled people and carers.

<sup>16</sup> Scope, Disability Price Tag, 2019.

bills in full until money came through and the money that I now receive through Universal Credit does not cover my living costs.”<sup>17</sup>

### 3. The government’s Job Protection Scheme

3.1 The government strongly advised that people with serious underlying health conditions, putting them at very high risk of severe illness from Covid-19, should rigorously follow shielding measures in order to keep themselves safe. The introduction of the furlough scheme was a welcome step to enable disabled people who were shielding and unable to carry out their duties remotely to remain connected to their job and their employer. Our survey on the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people and their carers shows that without the government’s vital intervention to provide support for salaries that many more families would be facing catastrophic income shocks. However, all too often, disabled people have reported that their employer refused provisions such as flexible working or access to the job protection scheme. We also heard repeatedly from unpaid carers providing care for an individual shielding due to their condition who had not been recognised and whose jobs were not protected.

- “My son was in high risk list and I had to give up my job as I could not be furloughed.”
- “My employer will not furlough staff. I am stressed, I am caring for two children alone and working to support others via my community-based role. I feel that my employer is backing me into a corner and have had to speak to my relatives this weekend to ask them to help if I need to walk away from my job.”<sup>18</sup>

3.2 For those who have been furloughed, many are concerned about the threat of redundancy given job insecurity and the wider labour market upheaval due to the pandemic. As restrictions are lifted, disabled people who had been shielding report concerns for their own safety when required to return to the office and ensuring that sufficient protections are put in place regarding public transport as well as their workplace. Despite government guidance stating that furloughing provision applies to people with caring responsibilities, our survey results show that many unpaid carers could not access this entitlement when requests were made to employers. Family carers told us about the financial shock on household finances of choosing to stop working to care for at-risk family members in isolation, particularly where the unpaid carer had been the sole earner. Some carers responding to our survey told us about the worry and stress of balancing their caring responsibilities with insecure financial survival once the Job Retention Scheme ends and they are required to return to work.

- “How will I be able to return while my son is still at home and with no support coming in?”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Leonard Cheshire’s survey on Covid-19 and the impact on disabled people and carers.

<sup>18</sup> Leonard Cheshire’s survey on Covid-19 and the impact on disabled people and carers.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard Cheshire’s survey on Covid-19 and the impact on disabled people and carers.

3.3 Many disabled people told us about the welcome reassurance that they had experienced from shielding entitlements and access to the furlough scheme. However, there were cases of some line managers who continued to pressurise people to go into work despite official guidance.

- “I work in education but am in the shielding category. Although on the surface they were saying everything correctly in terms of protecting me, I was still hassled by my line manager to continue going into work. Based on past experiences, I am concerned that if schools return before my shielding is lifted that I will be penalised.”<sup>20</sup>

#### **4. Flexible working and the coronavirus**

4.1 The coronavirus crisis has resulted in an unprecedented shift to working flexibly, including working at home, due to the government’s measures to restrict individuals’ movement in preventing the spread of the disease. Access to flexible working – including home-working, staggered or compressed working hours - often determines whether a disabled person is able to continue working, particularly at the onset of a disability or health condition. This is an important opportunity to reconsider access to flexible working as standard across the labour market into the long term. We have seen employers take rapid action to accommodate flexible working in response to the coronavirus outbreak. This should set a precedent to enable disabled people – and all employees who would benefit - to work flexibly.

“I am grateful for the ability to work flexibly - it is a right that disabled people have been fighting to have for a long time. Although it does seem a little that adaptations have been made that could have been there all along to support disabled workers.”<sup>21</sup>

4.2 The widespread move to working from home in the pandemic and the rapid adaptations in working cultures and steps taken by employers to facilitate remote working is to be welcomed. We have been calling for flexible working to be introduced as a day one right. It is essential that these initial steps are developed to enable structural change in long-term job design should so that disabled people – and all employees who would benefit – are able work from home as standard. It is also important that employers are supported to make home working more inclusive of disability, e.g. digital conferencing platforms that are inaccessible to audio-visual impairments.

4.3 Eligibility for flexible working should also be extended to those with long-term conditions and it should be made more accessible for unpaid carers. Increased awareness is needed among employers of the business benefits to providing flexible working. The government should put in place support, guidance and information resources for employers to extend flexible working provisions in the long term that is tailored to their business setting and needs.

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<sup>20</sup> Leonard Cheshire’s survey on Covid-19 and the impact on disabled people and carers.

<sup>21</sup> Leonard Cheshire’s survey on Covid-19 and the impact on disabled people and carers.