



**Reimagining the  
workplace: disability  
and inclusive  
employment**

**Leonard  
Cheshire**



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# About Leonard Cheshire

**We are Leonard Cheshire - supporting individuals to live, learn and work as independently as they choose, whatever their ability. 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.**

Leonard Cheshire is one of the UK's largest voluntary sector providers of services for disabled people. We work in local communities to provide people with opportunity, choice and support. We have accommodation services - including supported living and registered care homes; and social, education and leisure programmes - including day support, community outreach services and respite support.



# Introduction

7.5 million people of working age in the UK are disabled or have a long-term health condition. That is 1 in 5 of us. Despite this, just half of disabled people are employed (51.3 per cent), compared to 8 in 10 non-disabled people (81.4 per cent).<sup>1</sup> With little change in this figure in the last decade, it is clear that we need to think innovatively to reimagine work in a way that will enable us to react to a changed and changing workforce.

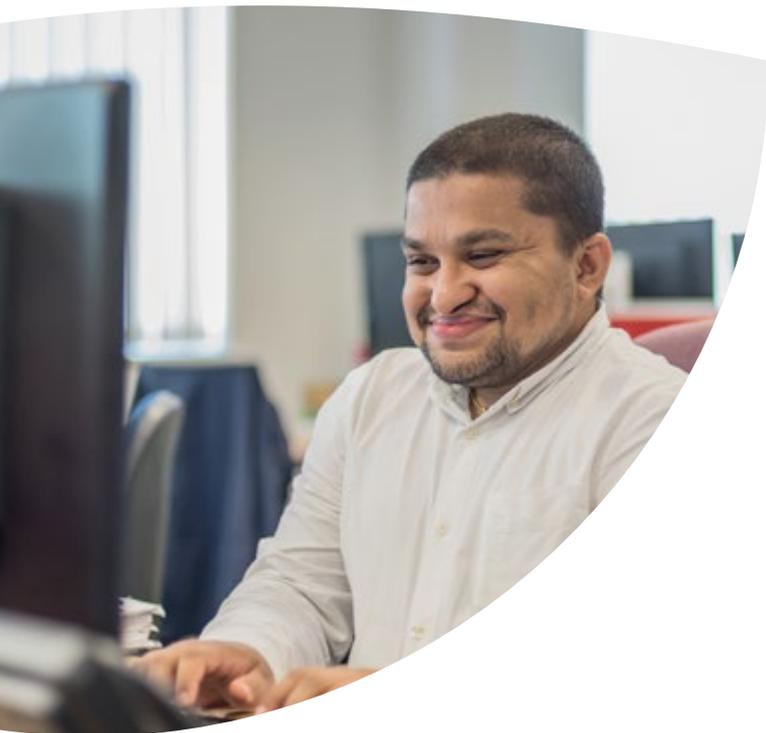
For many who have a disability, entering the labour market can be a daunting and disempowering process. Disabled people may encounter significant barriers when taking their first steps into a fulfilling career. Similarly, for many who acquire a disability during their working life, the development of an impairment or the onset of symptoms of a health condition will bring about a crisis point in the workplace, bringing their future into doubt.

Many employers recognise the benefits of adapting their workplace to be inclusive for both staff and business performance. There are signs that flexible ways of working are becoming increasingly normalised in certain sectors. This changing conception of the workplace can be seen in the expansion of co-working spaces and recent championing of a four-day working week as a way to enhance productivity.<sup>2</sup>

Disabled people must be part of this conversation. Employers need to be better prepared for the role they play in attracting, recruiting and retaining disabled people in their staff teams. A number of factors will decide whether they remain in work. These include whether the right support structures are in place, awareness amongst staff of what support they can expect from their employer and how confident they feel in accessing their entitlements as a disabled person. For many, these provisions will have a significant impact on their future working life and financial stability.

Changing and challenging public attitudes is also crucial to addressing the negative preconceptions of disabled people in the labour market. Disabled people often face a barrage of damaging stereotypes. Our research shows that there is an enduring expectation among employers and colleagues that they will not be able to do their job as well as a non-disabled person. This stigma is a major barrier to the aspirations, skills and talent of disabled people being fully realised.

This report examines the challenges and barriers facing disabled people throughout their working journey, as well as considering solutions to some of the key issues. Through our own research survey and interviews<sup>3</sup> we look at the impact on disabled people where they cannot access adequate support as well as what works in improving their employment prospects.





**1 in 5**  
**individuals**

of working age in the UK are disabled or have a long-term health condition.

**Just**  
**51.3%**

of disabled people are employed.

Leonard Cheshire presents new analysis of the high rate of disabled people falling out of the work due to their disability, particularly during the first six months of acquiring their condition.<sup>4</sup> This report considers how well current government initiatives are performing in supporting disabled people in work – including Access to Work – and what measures are currently needed that could make a difference to disabled people's experience of work.

In order to build a fully inclusive society where disabled people can live, learn and work independently with opportunity and choice, government and employers must play a central role in supporting disabled people at every stage of their working lives.

When disabled people are enabled to pursue their own career aspirations and live independently it makes a big difference for each individual. But harnessing their skills will also bring productivity and wider economic benefits – for employers<sup>5</sup> as well as to society more widely.<sup>6</sup>

# Conditions of employment

## Improving disabled people's access to the labour market

Currently 3.9 million disabled people of working age are in employment, with an employment rate of 51.3 per cent.<sup>7</sup> This compares with an employment rate for non-disabled people of 81.4 per cent. There has been progress, with the number of disabled people in employment increasing by 120,000 between July to September 2018 and the previous year.<sup>8</sup>

Yet disabled people still have a much higher unemployment rate than non-disabled people (9.3 per cent compared to 3.7 per cent respectively). The high rate of economic inactivity of disabled people also demonstrates the key challenges they face. Between April and June 2017, 3.3 million disabled people of working age were economically inactive; 44.4 per cent compared to a rate of 16.1 per cent for non-disabled people.<sup>9</sup>

The UK government's commitment to address the disability employment gap by achieving employment for one million more disabled people by 2027<sup>10</sup> amounts to a mere 100,000 per year. When the scale of the challenge is considered, achieving this rate of progress will still mean that hundreds of thousands of disabled people will remain locked out of the workplace for years to come. The disability employment gap has remained stubbornly consistent over the past ten years, raising serious questions of government initiatives and support programmes and how their success is measured.



The disability employment gap has remained stubbornly consistent over the past ten years.

For some disabled people, there may be a short time when they are unable to work due to the fluctuating circumstances of their condition or it may mean that their condition becomes more permanent and working is not an option. When this is the case, disabled people need to know they can rely on the state to provide a safety net and financial support during times of need.

For those who are able to work, the welfare system needs to support them to do so. Being able to access financial support through the welfare system that sufficiently accounts for the extra expense relating to disability<sup>11</sup> is central to enabling disabled people to live the lives they choose with dignity and independence.

The government's introduction of Work Capability Assessments marked a change of direction in the framing of disability benefits, emphasising the individual responsibility of disabled people to engage with work-related activity or seeking paid employment. There are serious questions with this approach given that over the past decade there has been no accompanying positive effect in the disability employment gap<sup>12</sup> or the disability pay gap.<sup>13</sup>

Research has shown that the introduction of a mandatory activity to prepare for employment while claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) by the government in its welfare reform programme is largely ineffective in facilitating people's entry into or progression within the paid labour market over time.<sup>14</sup>

There is a growing understanding that benefit sanctions are applied inconsistently and disproportionately impact disabled people.<sup>15</sup> There is also concerning evidence suggesting that financial sanctions force individuals to take up jobs that are lower paid, and more insecure and of poorer quality. This feeds a cycle of low attainment, embedding poverty and low economic activity in the long term.<sup>16</sup>

## Recommendation

The welfare system must enable disabled people to access the support that they are entitled to.<sup>17</sup>

- The government should review how the welfare system is facilitating disabled people to engage with the workplace. This requires an approach that evaluates how disabled people are able to access the financial support that they are entitled to.
- A full review of how the conditionality framework of disability benefits affects the quality of work that disabled people take up is needed. The alarming evidence that disabled people are being disproportionately affected by welfare sanctions needs to be urgently addressed and independent dispute resolution mechanisms must be available and fully accessible.

# Disability and financial insecurity

## What is “good work”?

“All work in the UK economy should be fair and decent with realistic scope for development and fulfilment.”

- Good work is based on the premise of fairness so that everyone, particularly those people on lower incomes, have routes to progress in work and are treated with respect and decency at work.
- Good work calls for a concerted approach that responds to the pace of change in the modern economy, and particularly in technology and the development of new business models.
- Good work and job satisfaction and the opportunity to progress recognises that the quality of people's work is a major factor in people's health and well-being and brings wider benefits to the economy and society as a whole.

Even when disabled people are in work, they are more likely to earn less than non-disabled workers. On average, disabled people earn 15 per cent less a year than non-disabled workers, equivalent to £1.50 less for every hour they work.<sup>18</sup> The Equality and Human Rights Commission has found that the likelihood that disabled people will be in low paid jobs has increased.<sup>19</sup>

As well as being more likely to earn less, disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to work part-time. 36 per cent of working age disabled people work part-time compared to 24.1 per cent of non-disabled people.<sup>20</sup>

Yet there are significant economic benefits to decreasing the disability pay gap; the Equality and Human Rights Commission indicates that raising the participation of disabled people could reduce the annual £100 billion cost of people being out of work.<sup>21</sup>

Lower earnings contribute to the hardship and deprivation that disabled people often face. Yet disabled people will face higher living costs due to their disability<sup>22</sup> and the link between being disabled and experiencing deprivation is only increasing. 4.3 million disabled people are currently living in poverty, accounting for 31 per cent of all people living in poverty.<sup>23</sup> Three quarters of households using food banks contain someone with a health condition and/or disability, with one third of households containing someone with a mental health issue.<sup>24</sup>

Disabled adults in working-age families are much more likely to be in poverty than those who are not disabled – 39 per cent compared with 18 per cent.<sup>25</sup> Over the last five years, the poverty rate for disabled adults has risen, whether they live in a working or a non-working family. For disabled adults in working families, the poverty rate rose from 18 per cent to 21 per cent between 2011/12 and 2016/17.<sup>26</sup>

**75%**

of households using food banks contain someone with a health condition and/or disability.

**4.3million**

disabled people are currently living in poverty.

On average, disabled people earn

**15%**

less a year than non-disabled workers.

**36%**

of working aged disabled people work part-time compared to 24.1 per cent of non-disabled people.

## Entrenched attitudes in the workplace

Leonard Cheshire's research<sup>27</sup> shows that, despite some progress in employers' attitudes in recent years, an understanding gap persists among employers when hiring staff. Employers told us that a disability would have an impact in their recruitment processes.

Of those who report being less likely to employ a disabled person,

**60%**

say they would be concerned they would struggle to do the job.

**24%**

of employers say they would be less likely to employ someone with a disability.<sup>28</sup>

**66%**

of employers say the costs of workplace adjustments are a barrier to employing a disabled person, up from 60 per cent who said this was a barrier in 2017.<sup>29</sup>

**38%**

(almost two in five) employers said that ensuring the application process is accessible to people of all disabilities is a barrier to employing them.

Yet there are some positive findings, indicating that progress is being made in changing employers' attitudes:

- The proportion of employers who say they would be more likely to employ someone with a disability has risen, from 11 per cent in 2017 to 20 per cent in 2018.
- The proportion of employers who report having recruited at least one disabled person in the past 18 months has risen to 79 per cent in 2018 from 69 per cent in 2017.

## Adapting workplaces to build a stronger, more resilient workforce

83 per cent of disabled people acquire their disabilities while they are in work. Approximately 300,000 people a year fall out of work due to health conditions.<sup>30</sup>

With 40 per cent of the working age population predicted to have a long-term health condition by 2030,<sup>31</sup> this is a critical moment to address what “good work” means for a large section of the population. Our research shows that working more flexibly is a central element of retaining disabled people in the labour market who would otherwise be forced to leave their job due to their disability.<sup>32</sup>

Advertising roles as flexible as standard also plays a part in making recruitment more inclusive to disabled people. Other key provisions that enable disabled people to participate in the labour market are access to reasonable adjustments and assistive technology (AT) that supports them to carry out their job.

## Equal access to technological advances for disabled people

Addressing the digital skills gap among disabled people and access to innovative technology is also a central part of building inclusive workplaces. Better awareness of AT among employers and disabled people is also needed, including its potential in enhancing disabled people’s capacity to work and live independently.

AT is often necessary for disabled people to use the internet. Most recruitment processes take place online, yet 22 per cent of disabled people have never used the internet.<sup>33</sup> A lack of training and the cost of equipment are barriers to adopting technology that could enhance disabled people’s lives.

There is a growing awareness of the potential that AT provides in enabling disabled people to be independent in all aspects of their lives. The cost of a mainstream laptop or smart phone is out of reach for many, yet these ‘universal’ forms of AT are becoming increasingly essential tools to access the job market.<sup>34</sup>

## Recommendation

The government has demonstrated its commitment to responding to the challenges posed by an ageing society in the Industrial Strategy and the Ageing Challenge, adapting workplaces to enable people to continue to engage with the workplace.<sup>35</sup> This opportunity to develop technological solutions to an ageing population should also be harnessed for the benefit of disabled people and shared more widely.

- If an individual changes employers, they should be able to automatically transfer equipment to their new employer as standard.
- Personal Independence Payments (PIP) should be opened up so that disabled people can lease or buy AT, on the same principle as is currently used for claimants to lease cars.<sup>36</sup>
- AT training should be made a core component of Access to Work. The government should lead by example as an employer itself and directly incorporate AT in the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund.

# The changing demands of a modern workforce

Any period of involuntary separation of individuals from the labour market will have a significant impact on future labour market outcomes.<sup>37</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>38</sup>

Despite some indication of increased flexible working being an effective solution to retaining skills and attracting staff in recruitment, only 11 per cent of jobs are advertised as being flexible. With 87 per cent of the general population wanting to work flexibly<sup>39</sup> it is clear that employers need to catch up in establishing working practices, as standard, that respond to this demand. Furthermore, there is a strong business case for flexible working, with implications for lower absence rates<sup>40</sup> as well as enabling employees to manage disability, long-term health conditions<sup>41</sup> and caring responsibilities.<sup>42</sup>

**11%**

of jobs are advertised as being flexible.

**87%**

of the general population want to work flexibly.

## Recommendation

Flexible working is central to the challenges of today's workplace. It has benefits for the individual and the employer where it is fully integrated in working practices, implications for job satisfaction, retention of skills and savings in addressing workplace absenteeism.

In order to apply for flexible working a disabled person will currently need to be working continuously for their employer for over 26 weeks.

- We are calling for the introduction of the right to request flexible working in addition to any reasonable adjustment as part of induction period, rather than having a lengthy delay before accessing the support needed to stay in work.
- The government's recent returnships initiatives<sup>43</sup> are to be welcomed. So far, these programmes have had a primary focus on parents and carers.<sup>44</sup> This approach must be extended to engage with disabled people, as well as other groups who fall out of work and face challenges in returning to the workplace.
- There must be a focus on early intervention of disabled people when they are at risk of falling out of work. Return-to-work programmes are more likely to be successful when they are engaged with early on.

## Evaluating employers' progress

Recent progress in gender pay gap reporting demonstrates how mandatory corporate reporting make employers accountable. Previous attempts to measure the gender pay gap through voluntary reporting mechanisms have had limited success. Despite 280 employers signing up to the coalition government's "Think, act, report", a campaign to highlight a company's commitment to gender equality in the workplace, only five businesses went on to publish their data as a result of the scheme. The introduction of mandatory reporting, conversely, has involved over 10,000 employers reporting their gender pay gap.<sup>45</sup>

**Mandatory reporting should be extended to all protected equality groups.**

## Recommendation

There has been recent progress in requiring companies to make public the number of women and BAME people in their workforce, including producing equal pay reports.<sup>46</sup> The government's introduction of a voluntary framework for reporting on disability, mental health and well-being for larger employers is a positive step.

- Mandatory reporting should be extended to all protected equality groups to fully evaluate outcomes of employers' commitments to making workplaces fully inclusive and fair.



# Preparing for work

**Embedded recruitment practices and attitudes among employers mean that disabled people often face increased barriers to the application process when seeking work. Disabled people have to apply for 60 per cent more jobs than non-disabled people before securing employment. Half of applications from disabled people result in an interview, compared with 69 per cent for non-disabled applicants.<sup>47</sup>**

Disabled people face additional barriers when seeking work. More than a third (37 per cent) of disabled people report that they don't feel confident about securing a job and believe employers won't hire them because of their impairment or condition. Two in five unemployed disabled people who are looking for a job don't feel confident about their chances of finding one in the next six months. More than a quarter (27 per cent) of those believe they are less likely to be hired than a non-disabled candidate.<sup>48</sup>

The barriers faced by disabled people in accessing the workplace begins early, with a lack of attainment among young disabled people.<sup>49</sup> At the age of 26, disabled people are four times more likely to be out of work or not in education compared to non-disabled people. Low expectations play a role, as well as a lack of opportunity when preparing for the workplace and a lack of opportunities in careers guidance and skills development.

**17%**

of disabled adults who have applied for a job in the past five years say that the employer had withdrawn their job offer as a result of their disability.<sup>50</sup>

**30%**

of disabled adults who applied for a job in the past five years said they felt like the employer hadn't taken them seriously as a candidate because they were disabled.<sup>51</sup>

Our research shows that disabled people often feel a lack of confidence that they will be treated fairly in the recruitment process.

It is concerning that some disabled people feel they will be treated unfairly by an employer or a prospective employer and this requires further attention. These issues feed into the fear of disclosing their disability to their employer that many people feel.<sup>52</sup> For many, this lack of confidence and low level of expectation on behalf of employers will have a detrimental effect on career prospects. This stigma - and sometimes even hostility - from employers is compounded by a lack of awareness among disabled people of their employment rights. Only 49 per cent are aware of disability workplace safeguards.<sup>53</sup>

“

There was no way of explaining that to potential employers on the application forms. I ticked no to ‘do you have a disability’ and then yes to ‘do you have medical conditions’, and there was about 10 things on that list. It was really daunting handing this in to the employer. I was always surprised when I got an interview.

**Beci**

”

“

I’ve basically given up. I’d get so far and then I get really stressed. I feel really empowered and activist-y, loads of ideas. But when I walk out of the door, it feels like your soul’s been taken away from you. All that time preparing for someone to just say no. Just to make sure I don’t repeat myself I really have to prepare. Make sure my message is clear. Why should we be left out?

**Leigh**

”

## What works?

The government must provide leadership in changing working culture and attitudes towards disabled people as they prepare to enter the workplace. The lack of tailored career guidance that meets the needs of young disabled people is reflective of low levels of expectation held by teachers and others. Avenues that are parallel to paid employment – such as volunteering programmes and apprenticeships – offer a space to build skills and confidence.

Tailored programmes can address the barriers that can prevent young disabled people from getting a job or volunteering. Leonard Cheshire runs a range of programmes to provide support for young disabled people.<sup>54</sup>



Leonard Cheshire's Change 100 programme brings together the UK's top employers and talented disabled students and graduates to offer three months of paid work experience. Since its launch in 2014, Change 100 has partnered with over 130 leading employers across the UK to host interns including Barclays, the BBC, Skanska, Lloyds and Taylor Wimpey.

The impact of positive work experience on young disabled people can be particularly striking. Participants in the programme highlight the value of the opportunity to learn about the way their disability affects employment and the reasonable adjustments they need to succeed. It presents an opportunity to learn about the support that is available, such as Access to Work, as well as gaining confidence in navigating conversations with employers. Employers also receive support tailored to their needs so they feel confident in their ability to support the participant to succeed.

- 70% of the participating young disabled people are in or have secured employment (15 per cent returned to education, with six per cent seeking work).
- 100% of Change 100 students who took part said their experience on the programme had improved their confidence in the workplace.
- 92% said that it helped them better understand their disability in the context of work.
- 84% of employers who took part said participating had made them think about how inclusive their recruitment is.
- 82% said their Change 100 participants identified or prompted them to identify new ways of working.

## Can Do

Through the Can Do programme, Leonard Cheshire works closely with young disabled people aged 10–35 to build their confidence through bespoke volunteering projects designed to match their unique skills and capabilities. 90 per cent of participants reported to have learnt new skills which will help them in the future.

## Change Now

Leonard Cheshire's Change Now programme provides young disabled people aged 11–25 who are in mainstream and specialist education settings with access to a 1, 2 or 10 day work experience placement. We provide employers with training and support to ensure that the placements are fully accessible to the participating young people.

“

Volunteering with Can Do has been one of the best things I have done. I was given the opportunity I needed and it has really grown my confidence. Without Can Do I don't think I would have had the courage to start setting up my own business. I really feel like I can do whatever I want to because of it.

”



# Enabling disabled people to assert their rights in the workplace

## What works?

Asserting rights and entitlements in the workplace as a disabled person can be a fraught process, particularly when adaptations are being sought from a hostile or unreceptive employer. Particular language skills, a high level of confidence and knowledge of the system are often required.

Disability Rights UK's "right to participate" toolkit demonstrates how rights-based resources can operate in various settings.<sup>55</sup> The knowledge-gap regarding what financial support individuals are entitled to through the welfare system could also be addressed in this way. As an acquired disability or health condition is developing, the lack of awareness of welfare entitlements can contribute to the highly precarious financial security experienced by many disabled people.

## Change Works

Leonard Cheshire's London-based **Change Works** programme offers specialised employment support, assessing individual's needs and delivering tailored workshops. In 2018 Leonard Cheshire supported 58 individuals to access development workshops. Support is provided in CV writing, interview techniques, health and well-being, managing your disability at work, rights and responsibilities in the work place, mock interviews and mentoring.

- 87% of clients said their Change Works experience has helped them understand that their disability isn't a barrier to getting a job and helped them to be more confident discussing their disability with an employer.
- 93% of clients believe their Change Works experience has increased their chances of getting a job.



“

I've gained a lot of confidence, for example in getting along with people and applying for jobs. Getting the opportunity to volunteer increased my confidence in dealing with people.

**Change Works participant**

”

“

I feel like I don't see my disability as a barrier anymore.

**Change Works participant**

”

# Falling out of work

“

I had a brilliant education and now I can't do anything. Losing my career was the single worst thing about becoming disabled. I could accept the loss of mobility and everything else, but the loss of being able to do the job that I wanted to do and love was the most devastating thing. It's the worst thing that's ever happened to me. I know how much I have to offer.

**Libby**

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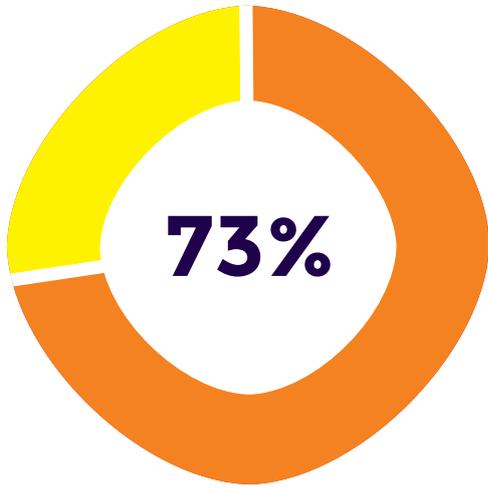
When I was younger I had very little trouble with finding work, I had many jobs at college/uni and post-uni. But after my condition got worse, I did take a big confidence knock. I was unemployed for about a year. I had no idea I was disabled, and instead thought I had lots of different smaller things – IBS, migraines, arthritis.

**Beci**

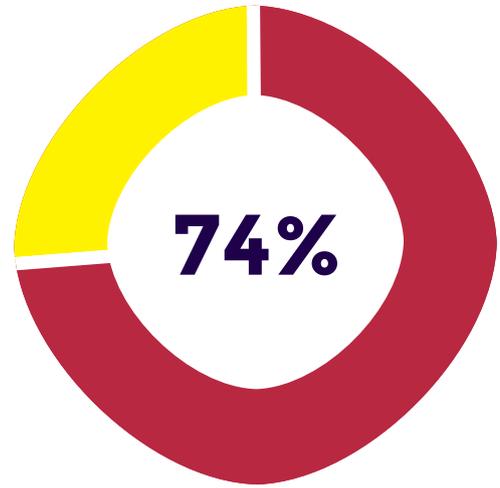
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A change in a disabled person's condition or the early stages of acquiring a disability will often threaten their work future and financial security, as well as the retention of valuable skills for the employer. The majority of disabled people over State Pension age report that they acquired their impairment after the age of 50.<sup>56</sup> Acquiring a disability is likely to bring about a key stage of transition. Yet without the right understanding from employers and access to resources, disabled people face a high level of job insecurity. Our research found that:

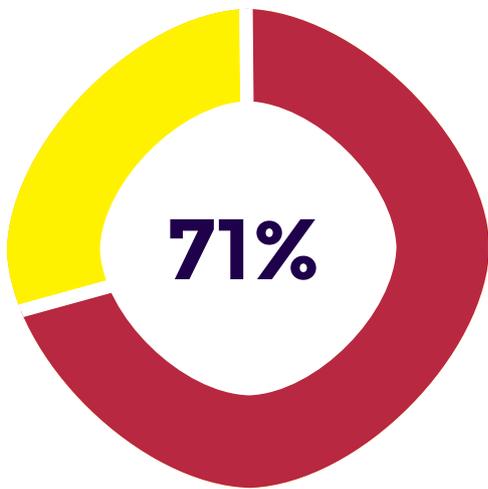
- Over seven in ten (73 per cent) disabled adults in the **UK** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability. Of these, 26 per cent say they spent six months or less in work after developing their health condition or disability.
- Over seven in ten (71 per cent) disabled adults in **Scotland** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability. Of these, 25 per cent say they spent six months or less in work after developing their health condition or disability.
- Almost seven in ten (69 per cent) disabled adults in **Wales** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability. Of these, 31 per cent say they spent six months or less in work after developing their health condition or disability.
- Over seven in ten (74 per cent) disabled adults in **Northern Ireland** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability. Of these, 24 per cent say they spent six months or less in work after developing their health condition or disability.
- Over seven in ten (74 per cent) disabled adults in **England** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability. Of these, 26 per cent say they spent six months or less in work after developing their health condition or disability.



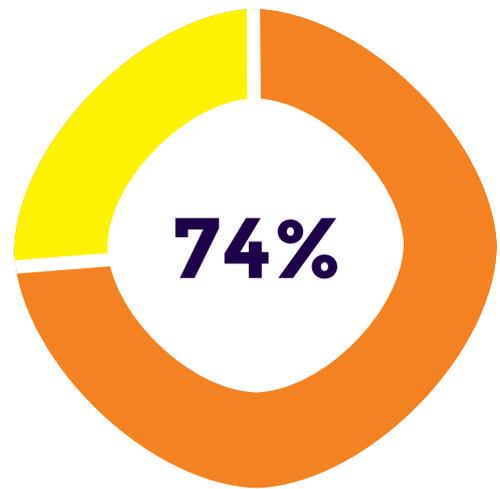
Over seven in ten disabled adults in the **UK** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability.



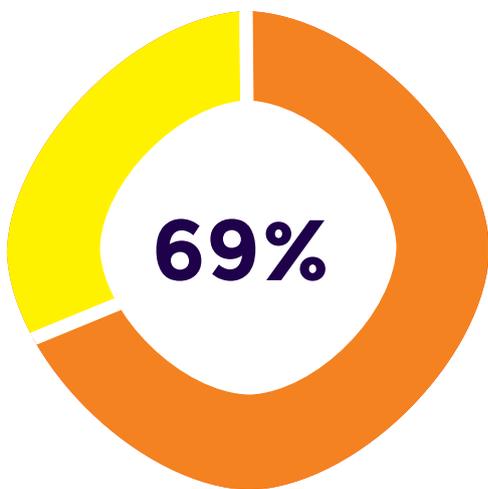
Over seven in ten disabled adults in **England** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability.



Over seven in ten disabled adults in **Scotland** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability.



Over seven in ten disabled adults in **Northern Ireland** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability.



Almost seven in ten disabled adults in **Wales** said they have stopped working due to their health condition or disability.

“

I am really proud of what I've done in my career. Before my accident and I took the last job, I had been really in demand and had a lot of requests for work... Employers are absolutely wasting talent. You [employees] have to be physically so rigid to fit into the boxes.

**Libby**

”

# How are government programmes performing?

## Disability Confident

Disability Confident<sup>57</sup> was introduced in 2013, to play a leading role in changing attitudes for the better, with a view to changing behaviour and cultures in organisations, own businesses, networks and communities.

The scheme helps employers:

- Draw from the widest possible pool of talent.
- Secure high quality staff who are skilled, loyal and hard working.
- Improve employee morale and commitment by demonstrating that you treat all employees fairly.

It also helps customers and other businesses identify those employers who are committed to equality in the workplace.

As of November 2018, over 9,000 employers have signed up to the Disability Confident programme.

Changing attitudes and culture is an important component of ensuring organisations are disability confident. But equally, there needs to be a requirement for employers engaging in Disability Confident to report on job outcomes of the commitments they have made as part of the accreditation. More information is needed to assess whether the programme leads to changes in business practices that increase the recruitment and retention of disabled people.

This would help strengthen the scheme and ensure that it acts as a recognised quality standard for people seeking jobs with disabled-friendly employers.

There are international examples of governments showing leadership in establishing disability employment resources for employers that offer ongoing tailored support.<sup>58</sup> The Australian government's disability support initiative, Job Access, brings together a telephone advice line for disabled people and employers as well as the key government support programmes, including a complaints service.



## Recommendation

Disability Confident should be developed to include a process of external validation and assessment to measure how employers are performing in attracting disabled people in recruitment and retention in terms of job outcomes as a result of the accreditation.

- Disability Confident should act as an 'umbrella' or 'one-stop-shop' scheme bringing together all of the key government support offers for employers, including Fit to Work<sup>59</sup> and Access to Work, into one cohesive package.

# Access to Work

Access to Work offers provisions to support disabled people to work by funding adjustments (technology, travel, support) that go beyond what might be considered 'reasonable' for the employer to fund; and by providing direct advice and assessment.

There are concerns that, in spite of many disabled people finding Access to Work support to be highly valued, there are many disabled people who require support and find it inaccessible.

In recent years, there has been no significant extension of the programme: 33,860 people received a payment from Access to Work in 2017/18, while in 2010/11 payments were made to 32,810 people.<sup>60</sup> This marginal increase over a decade can be seen in government spending related to Access to Work (In 2017/18, £107.1 million was spent on the programme compared to £119.7 million in 2010/11).<sup>61</sup>

There have been issues with the level of awareness of the support available among disabled people and employers. Our research demonstrates that although this is improving among employers, levels of engagement among disabled people is still relatively low.

**Only 23% of disabled adults in the UK who are currently or previously working say they currently or have previously received Access to Work support.**

In interviews conducted by Leonard Cheshire, disabled people spoke about being reluctant to raise extra support needs or workplace adaptations so that they would not be seen as less capable. Disabled people also reported experiencing lengthy processes in the approval of their Access to Work applications, opening up the possibility that the jobs they have secured are put at risk.

**69% of disabled people who currently or have previously received Access to Work support reported waiting more than 3 months for their application to be approved.**

In addition, employers are becoming more open to involving disabled people in the workplace, with 79 per cent reporting having hired a disabled person in the last 18 months. Yet, it is clear that a more thorough understanding of disability, and the business case for retaining staff members regardless of their condition, is much needed.

Employers still consider that hiring a disabled person will mean additional costs for the business. This remains one of the primary deterrents to employing a disabled person in their staff. This perception persists even among the majority of employers, whether they employ disabled people or not.<sup>62</sup>

It is also disappointing to see that, despite some positive indications among employers, the perception endures that a disabled person won't be able to perform in a job to the same level as a non-disabled person.

**33% of employers told us that they would be concerned that a disabled person would struggle to do the job.**

# Disabled people's experience of Access to Work

Our research shows a disparity between the proportion of disabled people who have received Access to Work support, particularly when comparing Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Of disabled adults in the UK, almost one in four (23 per cent) currently or previously working say they have received Access to Work support.

The proportion of those who have received Access to Work in Scotland (14%), Wales (14%) and Northern Ireland (10%) is significantly lower than in England (25%).

- Of disabled adults in the **UK**, almost one in four (23 per cent) currently or previously working say they currently or have previously received Access to Work support.
- Of those who say they currently or have previously received Access to Work support, almost seven in 10 (69 per cent) reported waiting more than three months for their application to be approved.
- When compared to **England**, a significantly lower proportion of disabled adults in **Northern Ireland** (10 per cent compared to 25 per cent in **England**) working/previously working say they currently or have previously received Access to Work support. The proportion of disabled adults who have received Access to Work in **Scotland** and **Wales** (both 14 per cent) is also significantly lower than those who said they received it in **England**.



# Access to reasonable adjustments

There has been some welcome progress when it comes to accessing reasonable adjustments. This includes flexible working and breaks in the working day to accommodate needs associated with a disability or health condition. However, just one in five (20 per cent) disabled adults in the UK who have applied for a job in the past five years said employers had explained the workplace adjustments that could be made to support their disability (e.g. flexible working hours, assistive technology).<sup>63</sup>

## In the UK, of disabled adults who:

- Requested flexible working hours, encouragingly, four in five (80 per cent) say their employer made this adjustment.<sup>64</sup>
- Requested breaks during the working day, almost one in four (24 per cent) say their employer did not make this adjustment.<sup>65</sup>
- Asked to work from home, just under one in five (18 per cent) say their employer did not make this adjustment for them.<sup>66</sup>

“

I have an inconsistent disability – my epilepsy is unpredictable. It will be fine for months and then I will have a stress period where my epilepsy is uncontrollable. But if the stress levels are better that affects my epilepsy. It all needs to be controlled, the whole package – job, nurses, lifestyle. People need support with consistently maintaining progress as they go along. At some point someone will dip. Disability will never go away so the person needs to be supported.

**Leigh**

”

“

It varied as to whether I felt I could ask for adjustments. Some employers actively encouraged flexible working and had a culture of encouraging people to mention any problems. Others made it clear they wouldn't allow any flexible working adjustments and so I didn't pursue it... Flexible working should be available from day one in a job, rather than once you've worked for an employer for a certain time. That's bonkers, you have the problem from day one, it doesn't just suddenly start three to six months down the line!

**Phil**

”

“

I got support from my employer and it was not helpful. The direct line manager is supportive because they see you every day so they want to help the person. But it's the systems in place that are inadequate. The line managers need to have the power to make reasonable assessments just during the day. It should be down to the individual manager rather than having to go through a system and up the chain.

**Vinny**

”

“

HR departments are well versed but I've never been interviewed by HR, it's always by the manager. And the manager's not going to have any knowledge about Access to Work unless they have a specific interest in it, and they are not going to aware of what is doable. It is not highlighted in the recruitment process.

**Libby**

”

## Awareness of support available to employers

Awareness of Access to Work has increased, going from 41 per cent of employers stating they were aware of the scheme in 2017 to 59 per cent in 2018. Awareness of Disability Confident accreditation has also increased, going from 20 per cent of employers stating they were aware of the scheme in 2017 to 29 per cent in 2018.

Employers told us that their decision to employ someone with a declared disability would be affected by the following reasons:

- 33% are concerned that they would struggle do the job
- 22% believe it would be an additional cost to the organisation
- 19% have concerns they would be off work more often than those without a disability
- 18% believe they may not be as productive as non-disabled employees
- 15% have concerns about honestly evaluating their performance
- 11% have concerns they will be mistreated by other employees (compared to 8 per cent in 2017)
- 10% of managers and supervisors don't know how to support disabled people
- 6% believe they won't fit in with the organisation



Our research shows that some employers are taking positive steps to adapt working practices to accommodate disabled people in the workplace.

Over half (56%) of employers said they currently offer part-time working hours at their organisation. Other benefits employers say they offer include:

- Flexible working hours (eg different start times, shorter hours) (53 per cent)
- Time off work to attend disability-related medical appointments/ treatment (50 per cent)
- Flexible role duties that take into account the disability (eg no late nights, long-distance travel or physically intensive work) (38 per cent)

- Breaks during the working day (37 per cent)
- Working from home (36 per cent)
- Time off work due to the impact of a disability (34 per cent)
- Adapted office furniture (eg a specialist chair or adapted desk) (31 per cent)
- Specialist IT equipment (30 per cent)
- Work trials in place of/alongside formal interviews (30 per cent)
- Physical adjustments to the building (21 per cent)

## Recommendation

Our research demonstrates the need to extend the current reach of the Access to Work programme with greater levels of inclusion and participation of disabled people in the scheme. The disparity between the proportion of disabled people who have received Access to Work support, particularly when comparing Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is striking.

- This requires further exploration by Department of Work and Pensions to explain why this is the case, with due consideration given to levels of spending involved in the scheme in all parts of the UK.
- Our research also indicates that disabled people are often experiencing delays in receiving the Access to Work support that they are entitled to. This needs to be urgently addressed as job offers may be jeopardised where delays in setting up support prevent the taking up of a new post.

- Continuous support for employers so that they have ongoing access to information is needed so they can confidently recruit disabled people and respond to the needs of staff who acquire disabilities or health conditions while in post.
- The Department for Work and Pensions should support an employer's hub - a 'one-stop-shop' offering meaningful, tailored support and information for employers in the process of recruiting and retaining disabled people.

# Conclusions and a way forward

## Reimagining workplaces that are inclusive of disabled people

Making our workplaces fair and inclusive for disabled people and enabling individuals to realise their aspirations and live independently will bring benefits for individuals, employers and society more widely. Innovative and ambitious thinking is needed to break the link between social and financial deprivation and having or acquiring a disability.

Disabled people should be able to expect the same opportunities for career progression as non-disabled people. Government leadership is needed so that policies and technological advances are harnessed for the benefit of disabled people. Current government support programmes should be meaningfully assessed to ensure that they are delivering positive employment outcomes for disabled people. Effective evaluation is required to assess how these programmes are working in eradicating the disability employment gap and the disability pay gap.

There are positive indications that some employers are developing an understanding of the benefits offered by recruiting and retaining disabled people. However, it is clear that there remains an enduring stigma around disability in the workplace. Employers are deterred from hiring disabled people by the perception of higher costs and that a disabled person will not be able to perform in a role as well as a non-disabled person. Yet we know this is not the case; it makes good business sense to have a more inclusive workforce.

Our research shows that the onset of a disability or health condition in the workplace is likely to bring about a crisis point and

jeopardises future working life. The labour market, workplace culture and employer practices must allow for more flexible conceptions of work. There needs to be a better understanding of the reasonable adjustments that are available so that people can remain in work or return to work despite developing a health condition or disability.

Financial support that disabled people are entitled to must be accessible. The welfare system needs to have the mechanisms that identify those who require extra support. The sanctions system requires urgent review to make sure that it is not harmful to disabled people and does not push them further into cycles of poverty.

The government should lead by example in introducing mandatory corporate reporting that requires companies to publish how many disabled people are in their workforce and their progress on closing the disability pay gap. A cultural step-change is urgently needed so that employers are more accountable in their workplace practices and so that disabled people can expect to be treated fairly at work as standard.

A better understanding of what works in preparing disabled people to enter the workplace is needed and what alternative pathways into work can offer. Improved awareness of the rights that disabled people have in the workplace – and the ability to assert these rights with confidence – is central to the individual career aspirations of disabled people and building fair and inclusive workplaces.

Disabled people should be able to expect the same opportunities for career progression as non-disabled people.

## The change that we are calling for:

### Report:

- Mandatory public reporting of the number of employees who are disabled – and of the disability pay gap – should be introduced for businesses with over 250 employees.

### Review:

- Disability Confident should be developed to include a process of external validation and assessment of job outcomes.
- A review of the welfare conditionality framework of disability benefits and how it affects the quality of work that disabled people take up is needed.
- Dispute resolution mechanisms must be made available and fully accessible.
- Access to Assistive Technology (AT) should be extended via PIP. Automatic transfer between employers when a disabled person changes jobs should be standard practice.

### Resource:

- The right to request flexible working – as well as access to any reasonable adjustments – should be introduced during the induction period so that a disabled person's ability to stay in work is not put at risk.
- The government should introduce Returnships programmes that are tailored towards disabled people, as early intervention mechanisms.
- Disability Confident should act as an 'umbrella' scheme, bringing together all of the key government support offers for employers.
- Delays in receiving Access to Work support need to be urgently addressed by Department for Work and Pensions.
- Assistive Technology training should be made a core component of Access to Work.
- Assistive Technology should be directly incorporated in the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund.



### **About the research**

ComRes interviewed online 1,647 disabled adults in the UK, aged between 18 and 65, from 29 June to 26 July 2018. Data were weighted by age, gender and region to be nationally representative of disabled adults of working age in the UK.

In 2017, ComRes interviewed online 1,609 disabled adults in the UK, aged between 18 and 65 (15 June to 10 July 2017). Data were weighted by age, gender and region to be nationally representative of disabled adults of working age in the UK.

The employment section data refers to the 1,599 disabled adults surveyed in England, Scotland and Wales in 2016, and does not include Northern Ireland.

### **Line managers survey:**

ComRes interviewed 503 UK line managers responsible for or involved in the recruitment process, from 29 June – 19 July 2018. Data were nationally representative by UK region, sector type (public, private and non-sector), and by the number of employees in the organisation.

Last year, ComRes conducted the same research among 504 UK line managers responsible for or involved in the recruitment process, from 15 – 29 June 2017. Data were nationally representative by UK region, sector type (public, private and non-sector), and by the number of employees in the organisation.

### **Interviews with disabled people**

Between 1 December 2018 – 20 January 2019, Leonard Cheshire conducted in-depth telephone interviews with seven disabled people of working age about their experiences of employment.

For further information on any aspect of this report, please email [campaigns@leonardcheshire.org](mailto:campaigns@leonardcheshire.org)

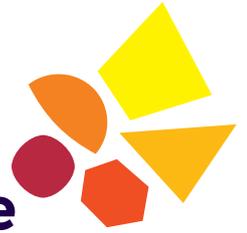
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- 50 This survey was conducted in 2018, data tables can be found at: **[www.comresglobal.com/our-work/poll-archive/](http://www.comresglobal.com/our-work/poll-archive/)** Q11c You said that you've applied for a new job in the last five years. During this time, which if any of the following did you experience as a result of your disability? The employer withdrew their job offer. Table 55.
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