

Remove barriers to disabled people gaining and retaining employment

Top Line

Disabled people offer a wealth of talent, experience and perspective to the workforce, but many disabled people still face significant barriers accessing employment. As a result, there remains a significant gap between the employment rate of disabled people and that of the rest of the population. The Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated that remote working is entirely possible in a variety of sectors, potentially removing another society-imposed barrier to the inclusion of disabled people in the workforce.

Key Asks

We are calling for all political parties to commit to:

- update the existing Disability Confident Scheme to include a process of external validation¹ and assessment of job outcomes;
- require that Disability Confident Leaders demonstrate that they employ a reasonable percentage of people who self-identify as disabled;
- require all organisations with over 250 employees to annually publish anonymised data on the number of self-identified disabled people working for them;
- work with the UK Government to make the ability to request flexible working an employee's right from 'day one';²
- increase awareness of Access to Work;³
- adopt an ambitious target to close the disability employment gap;⁴
- make it a condition of public funding that recipient organisations demonstrate a commitment to being a disability confident employer, with at least 10% of their workforce self-identified as disabled;

Stats

- In 2018, just half of disabled people were employed (51.3 per cent), compared to 8 out of 10 non-disabled people (81.4 per cent).⁵

¹ Based upon interviews and engagement with an organisation's employees

² Currently this right (provided for by the Employment Rights Act 1996, amended by the Children and Families Act 2014) is provided only for employees who have worked for an organisation 26 week requirement is. Making a 'day 1' right would reflect that flexible working provisions (such as compressed or staggered hours, and working from home) makes a real difference to a disabled person's ability to stay in work.

³ Access to Work is a UK scheme which funds adjustments (technology, travel, support) that go beyond what might be considered 'reasonable' for an employer to fund; and provides direct advice and assessment. Only 14% of disabled adults in Wales reported to Leonard Cheshire that they currently or previously receive Access to Work support, compared to 25% of disabled adults in England.

⁴ An implementation plan must be a central part of this target so that government employment support programmes are evaluated according to the job outcomes they secure to bring meaningful and long-lasting change for disabled people.

⁵ Office for National Statistics, A08: Labour market status of disabled people, released 13 November 2018 for July – September 2018.

- 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.⁶
- 24% of employers told us that they would be less likely to employ someone with a disability. Of those employers who reported being less likely to employ a disabled person, 60% say they would be concerned they would struggle to do the job.⁷ 66% of employers told us that the costs of workplace adjustments were a barrier to employing a disabled person.⁸
- Only 14% of disabled adults in Wales reported to Leonard Cheshire that they currently or previously receive Access to Work support, compared to 25% of disabled adults in England.⁹

Context

Disabled people offer a wealth of talent, experience and perspectives to the workforce, helping both support themselves and contribute to wider economic growth. Over recent decades huge progress has been made towards their inclusion in the workplace, and more disabled people are in work now than ever before.

However, Leonard Cheshire's research 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 on their recruitment processes.¹⁰

Despite having skills, experience and a will to work, many disabled people still face significant barriers accessing employment. As a result, there remains a significant gap between the employment rate of disabled people and that of the rest of the population.

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 interviews conducted by Leonard Cheshire,¹¹ 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. Only 14% of disabled adults in Wales reported to Leonard Cheshire that they currently or previously receive Access to Work support, compared to 25% of disabled adults in England.¹²

Background information

The UK-wide Disability Confident scheme 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 is intended to help 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 employers treat all employees fairly.

⁶ TUC, Disability employment and pay gaps (May 2018).

⁷ Leonard Cheshire/ComRes 2018 Line manager survey.

⁸ This was an opinion expressed by both those who employed disabled people and those who did not.

⁹ Leonard Cheshire, Reimagining the workplace: disability and inclusive employment, 2019.

¹⁰ Leonard Cheshire/ComRes 2018 Line manager survey.

¹¹ Leonard Cheshire, Reimagining the workplace: disability and inclusive employment, 2019.

¹² Leonard Cheshire, Reimagining the workplace: disability and inclusive employment, 2019.

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 across the UK had 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.

Going forward, 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.

