



Locked out of the labour market

**The impact of Covid-19
on disabled adults in
accessing good work -
now and into the future**

Executive summary

**Leonard
Cheshire**



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The impact of Covid-19 on disabled adults in accessing good work – now and into the future

Leonard Cheshire supports individuals to live, learn and earn as independently as they choose, whatever their ability. Led by people with experience of disability, we are at the heart of local life – opening up opportunities, choice and support in communities around the globe. We have significant expertise in working with disabled people in the UK and internationally to support them to overcome barriers to employment. In the last year alone, we supported over 32,000 disabled people to find employment globally through our programmes. This includes Change 100, which supports young disabled students and graduates to access the workplace by undertaking paid internships in top UK companies; Change Works, offering employability support to disabled adults in London; and Changing Futures, which offers employability training and paid work placements to adults with a disability or a long term condition in Wales.

Leonard Cheshire is concerned that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the employment of disabled people. Anecdotal feedback from our employment advisors and the disabled people we support has indicated that many disabled people have become unemployed during the pandemic. This is why we launched our own ‘Plan for Jobs’ for disabled people calling for the UK government to focus on a disability inclusive recovery for disabled people in September 2020.¹ The end of the government’s Job Retention Scheme – set to take place on 31 October – is a critical juncture for disabled people, with a higher proportion placed on furlough than non-disabled people. As this financial support comes to an end, urgent action is needed to ensure that increasing numbers of disabled people are not locked out of work and facing poverty due to the lower levels of income replacement provided by the new Job Support Scheme.

In our new report, “Locked out of the labour market”,² we explore the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people’s experiences of employment. We present newly commissioned research from Savanta ComRes, surveying 1,171 working aged disabled adults and 502 employers across the UK.³ Our polling shows that Covid-19 has already affected the employment of disabled people in the UK. **71% of disabled people in the UK who were employed in March 2020 have found that their work has been impacted by the pandemic.**⁴ In Scotland this increases to 82%, in Wales 69% and in Northern Ireland 58% of working disabled people have been impacted.⁵



In particular, of the disabled people who were employed in March:

- 24% in the UK have since worked reduced hours
 - This is 29% in Scotland, 25% in Wales, 24% in Northern Ireland
- 20% in the UK have since lost out on income
 - This is 25% in Scotland, 25% in Wales and 9% in Northern Ireland
- 11% have felt at risk of redundancy
 - This is 15% in Scotland, 15% in Wales and 7% in Northern Ireland
- 57% have felt more anxiety than usual due to concerns that their job is at risk;
 - This is 67% of disabled people in Scotland, 64% in Wales and 51% in Northern Ireland
- 40% feel at greater risk of redundancy due to employers judging them on the basis of their disability
 - This is 47% in Scotland, 39% in Wales and 40% in Northern Ireland

The impact of furloughing:

- 74% of disabled people in the UK placed on furlough said that government support through the scheme has helped to protect their job.
- However, of all working disabled people placed on furlough in the UK, 26% have not been able to return to work.

With the end of the Job Retention Scheme at the end of October 2020, it is imperative that the UK government acts now to avoid a jobs crisis for disabled people. As the UK begins to recover and

rebuild from the pandemic, it is essential that disabled people are not left behind. The UK government must introduce a disability inclusive jobs plan that supports disabled people find and retain high quality and sustainable work.

Our research also exposes embedded prejudices that some employers have towards employing disabled people in the UK. The polling shows that **20% of employers in the UK told us that they were less likely to employ a disabled person** and only 21% of employers say their organisation has recruited a disabled person in their workforce in the past 18 months. The research also shows that Covid-19 has exacerbated the perceived barriers employers have towards employing a disabled person. **42% of employers said that a barrier in employing disabled people was not being able to support them properly during Covid-19**, and 40% of disabled people feeling at greater risk of redundancy due to employers judging them based on their condition or disability. The government needs to do more to support employers to uphold their legal responsibilities under the Equality Act throughout the pandemic.

Libby, 43, Hertfordshire

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“Losing my career meant that I lost who I was entirely. It was a loss financially, vocationally, and socially. I had worked so hard and everything disappeared overnight.”

Jude, 24, Hull

“I’m anxious about the way my disabilities will affect the way potential employers and co-workers treat me and I’m unsure of what my rights are in the workplace. After struggling to get the support I needed at university, I worry that I won’t be able to get the support I need from an employer either.”

A way forward

In just the past decade we have seen some progress in building more inclusive workplaces for disabled people. However, there are clear-cut signs that the Covid-19 recession is now playing out on pre-existing fault-lines that will have a devastating impact on the lives of disabled people. It doesn't have to be this way. In order to protect the livelihoods of disabled people and ensure that progress to close the disability employment gap is not lost, the UK government must introduce a disability inclusive jobs recovery plan. This would involve:

- **Continuing to offer access to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to people who are clinically vulnerable to Covid-19** and cannot work from home, to help them to remain employed and have their incomes protected through the pandemic.
- **Introducing a Jobs Guarantee for newly unemployed disabled people.** The UK government should offer access to a Jobs Guarantee for any disabled person unemployed for more than three months. An entirely voluntary initiative, the Jobs Guarantee would offer six months of paid work and training at the Living Wage as a minimum – with full wrap-around support - and employers would be provided with a grant to cover salaries.
- **Adjustment passports or 'purple passports'** should be introduced. Adjustment passports are records which identify the reasonable adjustments, modifications and equipment a disabled person has received in education and work. The passports should follow an individual between jobs and employers, with Access to Work funding and equipment also staying with each individual.
- **Introducing mandatory reporting** on employers' performance of building inclusive workplaces for disabled people. Large employers employing more than 250 people should be required to undertake mandatory reporting of how many disabled people they employ and reporting on their disability pay gap.
- **Introducing a day one right to reasonable adjustments, workplace modifications and flexible working** for disabled people. Disabled people should not have to wait for 26 weeks to request flexible working.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service



“In the recruitment of new staff, we are increasingly considering candidates working remotely and this has widened the talent pool of candidates. This moment should be a catalyst for change to improve employee engagement and ways of working. Across our organisation there is a new understanding of the opportunity we have to increase access for disabled people to the workplace by being more flexible to meet individuals' needs.”



References

1. Leonard Cheshire, Building a Disability Inclusive Recovery (September 2020).
2. Leonard Cheshire, Locked out of the labour market (October 2020).
3. Savanta ComRes interviewed 1,171 working age disabled adults (18 – 65) in the UK between 17 to 30 September 2020. Data were weighted to be nationally representative of working age disabled adults in the UK by age, gender and region. Savanta ComRes interviewed 502 UK line managers with a responsibility for recruitment online between 17 to 30 September 2020. Savanta Comres also interviewed 503 of UK line managers with a responsibility for recruitment between 29 June and 19 July 2018. Data were weighted in both instances to be nationally representative of employers by region, company size and sector. Where percentage increases 2018 and 2020 are highlighted, these represent significant differences.
4. This figure includes this figure includes furlough, redundancy or feeling at risk of, loss of income, reduced hours, temporary leave of sickness or absence and unemployment.
5. Figures for the devolved nations have base sizes of <100 and are therefore indicative only, but still show the scale of the issue.

Leonard Cheshire Disability is a registered charity no: 218186 (England & Wales) and no: SC005117 (Scotland), and a company limited by guarantee registered in England no: 552847. Registered office: 66 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL

