



Welsh Government Evidence Paper for the Equality and Social Justice Committee's Inquiry into the Disability Employment and Pay Gap

25 November 2024

This paper provides evidence on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, and the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership. The paper's structure aligns with the Committee's terms of reference for its inquiry.

Annex A provides an overview of Welsh Government groups supporting disabled people's employment.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper provides evidence on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, and the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership. The paper's structure aligns with the Committee's terms of reference for its inquiry.
- 1.2 Annex A provides an overview of Welsh Government groups supporting disabled people's employment

2. Overview of the Employment and Pay Gap

2.1 The Wellbeing of Wales Report 2024¹ shows that:

- a. For the year ending 31 March 2024, the employment rate among disabled people aged 16 to 64 in Wales was 51.0% whilst the rate for people who are not disabled was 81.9%. The employment rate gap for disabled people in 2023-24, of 30.9 percentage points, has reduced from 35.4 percentage points in 2015-16.
- b. The pay difference between disabled and non-disabled people in Wales was £1.75 (12.2%) in 2023. This means that disabled people in Wales earned, on average, £1.75 less per hour than non-disabled people. The pay difference has widened by £0.43 (2.5 percentage points) compared to the previous year. Since 2019, the value of the disability pay difference has seen a very slight decrease (of £0.01), however due to higher hourly wages for both disabled and non-disabled employees as a percentage the pay difference decreased by 2.9 percentage points.

¹ [Wellbeing of Wales: 2024 | GOV.WALES](#)

3. Progress following the Locked Out Report

- 3.1 The Programme for Government is clear on our objective to close the employment gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population, and our National Milestones sets the long-term target to eliminate the pay gap for gender, disability and ethnicity by 2050.
- 3.2 In 2021, the then First Minister established the Disability Rights Taskforce. The taskforce unites individuals with lived experience, Welsh Government policy leaders, and representative organisations to address the issues and barriers which impact the lives of many disabled people, and which were identified in the Locked-Out Report.
- 3.3 The Taskforce is jointly Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, and Professor Debbie Foster who was the author of the Locked-Out report.
- 3.4 The Taskforce has embraced the principles of co-design and has engaged and worked with more than 350 external stakeholders and 200 policy leads and has been supported by the Welsh Government's Disability Disparity Evidence Unit and the Disabled Peoples Employment Champions.
- 3.5 The Taskforce has established a series of working groups focussed on specific themes. The work of the Employment and Income working group is of particular relevance to the Committee's inquiry. This working group has examined various issues related to eliminating barriers that hinder the participation, retention, and advancement of disabled individuals in the workplace.
- 3.6 We expect the recommendations of the taskforce will inform a cross-Government action plan which we anticipate publishing for consultation in Spring 2025.

4. Embedding the Social Model of Disability

- 4.1 The Welsh Government uses the social model of disability. This manifests itself in our actions as an employer, in the way in which we develop policy, and our approach to delivery. This means we focus on what people can do and achieve if societal barriers are removed, rather than on what they cannot do due to their impairments.
- 4.2 The Welsh Government retains its Disability Confident Leader status, and as an employer we make reasonable adjustments in our recruitment processes and working environment. Our approach to adjustments has been recognised with a CIPD Wales Award.
- 4.3 Currently, 6.4% of the Welsh Government workforce have declared that they are disabled people. This figure has steadily increased since 2015, when disabled people made up 4.4% of the workforce.
- 4.4 In internal recruitment, by 2026 our aim is to promote disabled staff at a level which exceeds their organisational population share, to address current under-representation at all levels of the organisation. Since 2021, we have achieved this aim, with an average rate of 5.9% over the past 3 years.
- 4.5 In our external recruitment efforts, we aim to have 20% of our new hires to be disabled people by 2026. By 2030, we plan to increase this to 30% to significantly address the underrepresentation of disabled people in the Welsh Government.
- 4.6 Despite the shortcomings of the medical model, the challenge we face is that it continues to persist in some other parts of our society, including among some employers. A wider shift to the social model is still needed and the social model of disability also underpins the work of our Disabled Peoples Employment Champions and our engagement with employers.

5. Addressing the barriers faced by disabled people, improving participation and closing the employment and pay gap.

Disabled Peoples Employment Champions

5.1 The Welsh Government employs five Disabled Peoples Employment Champions (DPECs) as permanent members of staff. All of the DPECs bring lived experience and an in-depth and practical understating of the social model of disability, and their work is both internal and external facing.

5.2 Internally, the DPECs contribute lived experience and knowledge to influence the development of policy and the Welsh Government's approach as an employer. Externally, the DPECs engage with employers, employer representative organisations and trade unions. This work is reflected in five strategic objectives:

- Strategic Objective 1: To engage with employers, employer representative organisations and trade unions, with the aim of promoting the recruitment and retention of disabled people, raising awareness of the Social Model of Disability, and improving disabled people's experience of work and career prospects.
- Strategic Objective 2: To build relationships with Government and non-Government delivery partners and support services with the aim of improving delivery and maximising positive impacts on disabled people in Wales.
- Strategic Objective 3: To inform delivery of the Employability and Skills Plan, with the aim of ensuring our employability and skills programmes and services deliver for disabled people.
- Strategic Objective 4: To work with the Disability Rights Taskforce and relevant Welsh Government colleagues to contribute lived experience and knowledge to influence the development of wider Welsh Government policy which impacts on disabled people's employment.
- Strategic Objective 5: To contribute to relevant corporate work with the aim of improving the Welsh Government's practices as an employer.

5.3 This work complements that of the Business Wales Disabled Peoples Employment Advisers who undertake a similar role focussing on business start-ups and small to medium size enterprises (SMEs).

Business Wales

- 5.4 Specialist support to improve practices is available from Disabled Peoples Employment Advisers who work across Wales and provide tailored support according to client need on a one-to-one basis or at staff meetings. Advice includes inclusive recruitment, financial support, staff retention and accreditation. The advisors also help individuals to overcome barriers to starting a business or becoming self-employed.
- 5.5 Business Wales promotes self-employment and employment opportunities for disabled people through events, newsletters and social media channels, as well as Business Wales advisory support. This includes a range of information and guidance on the Business Wales website on supporting disabled people within the workforce².
- 5.6 Business Wales has developed an online module developed to help employers increase their knowledge and understanding of the social model of disability. In addition, to support disabled entrepreneurs, Business Wales and Disability Wales has produced a good practice guide³ which provides information and practical advice.

Employability and Skills

5.7 The social model of disability is integral to all our employability programmes, and this means:

- Flexible Work Arrangements: Providers encourage employers to offer flexible work hours, remote work options, and job-sharing opportunities to accommodate various disabilities.
- Accessible Recruitment Processes: Providers work with employers to ensure that recruitment procedures are adapted to ensure accessibility.
- Workplace Adjustments: Modifications such as ergonomic workstations, assistive technologies, and tailored training programs are implemented to support disabled employees.

5.8 We have mainstreamed the Supported Employment Job Coach model into Jobs Growth Wales Plus (JGW+). The proportion of starts on the programme by learners who self-identified as disabled or having a learning difficulty, learning disability or autism was 23.8% between April 2023 and March 2024. To improve access, we have removed the requirement for young people to attend the programme for a minimum number of hours.

² [Disabled People's Employment | Business Wales Skills Gateway](#)

³ [The Good Practice Guide – Supporting Disabled Entrepreneurs in Wales | Business Wales](#)

5.9 All Careers Wales and Working Wales Careers Advisers have undertaken training on the social model of disability. In addition to their core services, for young disabled people, Careers Wales:

- Provide advice on Access to Work and reasonable adjustments
- Make referrals to organisations offering supported employment if this is the most appropriate option.
- Support the Individual Development Plan (IDP) process, advocating on behalf of a young person and making parents aware of opportunities.
- Provide a dedicated section on their website, 'My Future', for disabled young people.

6. Access to Apprenticeships

- 6.1 Our Inclusive Apprenticeships – Disability Action Plan aims to remove barriers and create a supportive environment for disabled people to engage in apprenticeships. This includes providing additional support during and ensuring reasonable adjustments are made.
- 6.2 The Employer Incentive Scheme encourages employers to recruit disabled people by providing a financial incentive and in-work support and Supported Shared Apprenticeships provides additional support to disabled apprentices.
- 6.3 Latest figures show that, by the second quarter of the 2023/24 academic year, over 11% of the 4,515 apprenticeship starts were by learners who self-identify as being disabled or having a learning difficulty, learning disability or autism. This compares to 6% in 2016/17 (when figures on disabled apprenticeships were first observed), 8% in 2020/21, 10% in 2021/22 and 12% in 2022/23.

7. Voluntary Opportunities

- 7.1 Whilst we recognise volunteering can provide new skills and experiences, our work is focussed on improving disabled people's participation, progression, and overall experience in paid work, which is fair, safe and secure.

8. Annex A: Overview of Welsh Government groups supporting disabled people's employment

Disability Equality Forum

The Disability Equality Forum was established in 2012 and is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip. Membership includes individuals and organisations who are actively working towards achieving full equality for disabled people. The Forum meets three times per year.

Its key purpose is to enable members to provide feedback and advice to the Welsh Government on issues affecting the lives of disabled people in Wales and provides an opportunity for Welsh Government to consult with Forum members regarding new and emerging plans and policy proposals. The Forum also helps to ensure that Welsh Government and public bodies within Wales work within the principles and practices of the Social Model of Disability and works to remove ableism.

Disability Rights Taskforce

The Disability Rights Taskforce was established in 2021 in response to the *'Locked Out: liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond Covid-19'* report. It was co-chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip and Professor Debbie Foster of Cardiff University. The final meeting of the Taskforce was held in June 2024.

Membership included individuals with lived experience, Disabled People's Organisations, representative organisations and Welsh Government policy leaders.

Its purpose was to bring members together to address the issues and barriers which impact the lives of many disabled people, and which were identified in the Locked-Out Report. It provided strategic oversight of ten working groups, each led by disabled people, namely:

Embedding and Understanding of the Social Model of Disability (across Wales)	Access to Services (including Communications and Technology)
Independent Living: Health	Independent Living: Social Care
Employment and Income	Travel
Children and Young People	Affordable and Accessible Housing
Access to Justice	Well-being

Disabled People's Employment Working Group

The Disabled People's Employment Working Group (DPEWG) was established in 2018 to foster engagement and dialogue between the Welsh Government, Disabled People's Organisations, and other key partners, including the Department for Work and Pensions and Careers Wales. Its goal is to improve access to employment and employment outcomes for disabled people.

It meets on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the Disabled People's Employment Champions.