

12 December 2024

The Disability Employment Gap and the education system

The Equality and Social Justice Committee is preparing a report on our inquiry into the disability employment gap. An important theme has been the role of schools and FE colleges as well as employers in shaping the aspirations and expectations of disabled students in relation to transitioning from education to the world of work and future job prospects.

We received evidence that emphasised the need to ensure equitable access to work placement opportunities and the need to work with employers to achieve this.¹ We were also troubled to hear that disabled students can often miss out on placement opportunities or are pigeon-holed into a narrow range of sectors that are able to accommodate any necessary adjustments.²

In terms of expectations, Gerraint Jones-Griffiths, who is an Engage to Change Ambassador for Learning Disability Wales, told us that when he has asked disabled young people 'What would you like to do when you're older?' the response has been "every time, they always say, 'I don't know. We've never been asked,' and that's even now."³

¹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, Record of Proceedings, 14 October, paragraphs 134 – 139, 212 – 213

² Equality and Social Justice Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 October, paragraphs 58 – 60, Written evidence, DE15 – Down's Syndrome Association; [DE08 – Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales \(EYST Wales\)](#)

³ Equality and Social Justice Committee, Record of Proceedings, 14 October, paragraph 242

In terms of access to work placements, Arthur Beechy, Chief Executive Officer of Agoriad Cyf a charity which offers supported employment opportunities in north Wales told us:

*"I always remember a horror story, whereby the children in a school, which will remain nameless, all had placements to go out, bar a young disabled girl, because it was too much trouble to get her one, and she's the only one left in school of her year, and everybody else is out. There's something wrong there."*⁴

We note that some of these issues may be scrutinised during the forthcoming Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Routes into post-16 education and training. Furthermore we recognise the anecdotal nature of these contributions, however, we would be interested to hear your views on these matters relating to your portfolio:

1. Please set out your response to these concerns regarding expectations and access to placements in general in addition to the specific questions detailed below.
2. Your assessment of how the Careers Wales work experience scheme for learners in year 10 and 11 is able to support disabled learners? What data you can share with us regarding the proportion of those learners who are disabled? ?
3. More broadly, your assessment of how the "Careers and work related experiences" (CWRE) part of the Curriculum for Wales and associated statutory guidance is supporting disabled learners.
4. The extent to which schools and other education settings are working with employers and third party organisations to provide high-quality enrichment experiences for learners, in line with Welsh Government's statutory guidance. What data can you share with us?
5. How is the Welsh Government ensuring that disabled learners have the flexibility and support they need to access further education? What your expectations are of how FE, HE and their careers departments support disabled learners onwards into internships and apprenticeships? And how are you engaging with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning in this regard.
6. What are the implications, if any, of relatively new Additional Learning Needs legislation and guidance on careers advice and support for disabled young people?
7. Any other information you want to draw to our attention as to how the Welsh Government is supporting learners in their transition from school-age to the world of work for disabled people?

⁴ Equality and Social Justice Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 October, paragraph 329

8. How are you engaging with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to ensure that young people have as wide a range as possible of options post-16? For example, we have heard concerns of a “cliff-edge” faced by disabled people in accessing certain age-restricted placements and schemes e.g. Jobs Growth Wales? What consideration has been given to widening access to disabled people of all ages?

As the Committee is in the process of preparing its draft report, I would be grateful for a response at your earliest convenience and ideally no later than 10 January 2025.

I am copying this letter to the Chairs of the Children, Young People and Education Committee; and the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Rathbone

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament