



Department
for Work &
Pensions

THE RT HON. SIR STEPHEN TIMMS MP
Minister for Social Security and Disability

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Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee
Senedd Cymru
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04 December 2024

Dear Jenny,

Equality and Social Justice Committee - Inquiry into the disability employment gap

Thank you for your letter of 15 October 2024 to the Secretary of State about your inquiry into the disability employment gap. I am replying as the Minister of State for Social Security and Disability, and I apologise for the delay in my response. As you may know, the Work and Pensions Select Committee conducted an inquiry on this topic when I was its chair, publishing its report in July 2021.

I was interested to hear about your inquiry and am delighted to provide you with the relevant information requested.

Disability Confident

Upon forming a Government in July 2024, we made clear our intention that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will shift from being a department for welfare to being a department for work. We have an ambitious agenda of reaching an 80 per cent employment rate and consider the Disability Confident scheme to be an important asset which can encourage employers to create disability-inclusive workplaces, thereby supporting disabled people to not only get into work but also to get on in work.

We recognise there are opportunities to make the Disability Confident scheme more robust, and my officials will work with employers and disabled people to realise the full potential of the scheme. There are currently over 19,000 members signed up to the scheme who, collectively, estimate over 12 million paid employees are working in their organisations. In 2022, the DWP conducted survey research which explored, from an employer perspective, the effect that signing up to the Disability Confident scheme has had on their recruitment and retention attitudes and practices towards disabled people.

Most members were planning on renewing their membership, with a quarter intending to move up a level and nearly three in five (57 per cent) planning to stay at the same level. Very few (2 per cent) did not intend to renew. Furthermore, the majority of employers (90 per cent) reported that they would recommend the Disability Confident scheme to another employer.

The UK Government and the DWP have responsibility for providing employment support in Wales. Disability Confident is a Great Britain-wide scheme and the development of a Welsh-based kitemark is not something we are considering. However, I would be happy for my officials to engage with officials from the Disability Rights Taskforce to discuss their findings in more detail.

The Plan to Make Work Pay sets out an ambitious agenda to ensure employment rights are fit for a modern economy, empower working people, and contribute to economic growth. The Employment Rights Bill is the first phase of delivering our plan to Make Work Pay, supporting employers, workers, and unions to get Britain moving forward. By introducing various measures including day one protection from Unfair Dismissal, increasing protection from sexual harassment in the workplace, addressing unscrupulous fire and rehire practices, strengthening Statutory Sick Pay, strengthening rights and requirements for collective redundancy, and ending exploitative zero hours contracts, the Employment Rights Bill will raise the bar for workers and provide a baseline of security in work.

The Impact Assessments for the Employment Rights Bill show that disabled workers are overrepresented in the low paid, insecure jobs that are targeted by the package and, as such, are among the groups expected to benefit the most from the package of reforms. For example, disabled workers are more likely to be in low paid jobs that are in scope of the reforms to Statutory Sick Pay, zero and low hours contracts, and unfair dismissal claims. Changes to make flexible working the default, unless it is not reasonably justifiable, can also support employment participation, as they enable a wider range of people, such as disabled people, to enter the labour market. Disabled workers are also more likely to be members of a union and so are expected to benefit from the Trade Union reforms, including strengthening workers' rights to trade union access, recognition, and representation.

Some measures will be also delivered through the Government's Equality (Race and Disability) Bill, such as extending pay gap reporting to include disability and ethnicity for employers with more than 250 staff and measures on equal pay, and extending equal pay rights to protect workers suffering discrimination on the basis of disability or race. The Government will begin consulting on this legislation shortly, which will include consulting with disabled people and their organisations alongside employers, with a draft Bill due to be published during this Parliamentary session for pre-legislative scrutiny. Further engagement will also take place prior to the making of secondary legislation implementing these reforms.

Role of DWP in supporting people into work

Thank you for bringing these concerns to our attention. We take feedback from our customers very seriously and are committed to improving the support we provide to disabled people seeking employment.

We acknowledge the feedback about the training, knowledge, and awareness of Jobcentre staff. The DWP is dedicated to ensuring that all staff are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to support disabled people effectively and sensitively.

The DWP has implemented several measures to ensure that staff are aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of disabled customers. This includes mandatory training programs that cover a wide range of disabilities and health conditions. These programs are designed

to enhance the understanding and empathy of our staff, enabling them to provide tailored support to each individual.

Jobcentre staff, including Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs), undergo comprehensive training that includes the following.

- **Disability Awareness Training**

This training covers various disabilities and health conditions, providing staff with the knowledge to support disabled customers effectively.

- **Customer Service Training**

This training is focused on improving communication skills and ensuring that staff can interact with service users in a respectful and supportive manner.

- **Specialised Training for DEAs**

DEAs receive additional training to equip them with the skills needed to provide direct support to disabled customers and those with long-term health conditions. DEAs also spend time supporting work coaches by providing knowledge and upskilling on how to support disabled customers and customers with long-term health conditions.

- **Trauma Informed Training**

The DWP has a dedicated Trauma Informed Approaches integration team, which is focussed on embedding the six core pillars of the approach: safety; trustworthiness; choice; empowerment; collaboration; and intersectional considerations. In line with this, we are co-producing a suite of learning products with colleagues, customers, and external partners to empower our colleagues in applying a trauma-informed lens to every interaction.

- **Launch of The Customer Additional Needs (CAN) Framework**

This incorporates and brings together the operational requirements to ensure the correct networks and processes are in place to support delivery whilst considering complex needs, barriers, health, disabilities, and promotes our trauma-informed approach.

Implementation of the CAN Framework is providing all districts with a structured assurance process that reviews, refreshes, and reinvigorates the approach to supporting all customers.

The overriding principles of the CAN Framework are:

- each customer approaches us with specific individual needs;
- we have a responsibility to identify a customer's individual needs and barriers; and
- our service supports customers who experience barriers to build financial resilience and move into/progress within work by providing and arranging additional support.

Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) in every site, including 'Health SPOCs' ensure that every member of staff's awareness is regularly refreshed so that they continue to build confidence and capability in:

- identifying needs and barriers;
- using the tools, team, and support network to provide additional support; and

- using strong partnership relationships to signpost or refer to expert and/or specialist support within the community.

Disability Awareness and Customer Service Training are mandatory for all Jobcentre staff, with the additional Specialised Training for DEAs being mandatory for colleagues entering that role. The effectiveness of the training is monitored through regular assessments and feedback from both staff and customers. We continuously review and update our training programs to ensure they meet the evolving needs of our customers.

The DWP is committed to providing the best possible support for all our customers, including the most vulnerable in society. This includes those who have a health condition or disability.

Where customers are required to undertake work-related requirements, they should be tailored and agreed according to the customer's capability and personal circumstances, making them realistic and achievable. Work Coaches can limit the number of hours a customer is required to be available for work, search for work, and undertake other work-related requirements to reflect the customer's caring responsibilities, health condition, or wider circumstances.

To help people into work, our core Jobcentre offer provides a range of options, including face-to-face time with Work Coaches and targeted employment support. In addition, there is also specific support targeted towards job seekers with disabilities or health issues, such as Additional Work Coach Time, DEAs, and Work Psychologists.

COMPLAINTS OPTION 1

The specific incident mentioned in your feedback is not in line with our policies and standards. We would be keen to engage further with the individual involved to understand their experience better and take appropriate action to prevent such occurrences in the future. Therefore, please feel free to write back to me with further details about the complaint and the person who wishes to raise it such as their name, address, National Insurance number.

The DWP remains committed to supporting disabled people into work and ensuring that our staff are well-equipped to provide the necessary support. We appreciate your feedback and will continue to work towards improving our services.

Examples of best practice

HM Treasury officials have provided the following information. Should you wish for further details then I know that my Ministerial colleagues in the Treasury will be happy to help should you care to reach out to them direct enclosing a copy of my response.

VAT is a broad-based tax on consumption, and the 20 per cent standard rate applies to most goods and services. Exceptions to the standard rate have always been limited and balanced against affordability considerations.

The UK already provides a comprehensive set of reliefs as compared with other countries, including VAT relief on goods and services for disabled people such as adapted motor vehicles, low vision aids, building works such as ramps, among many others. The last EU statistics to include the UK, which were published in 2021, suggested the Government forgoes more potential VAT revenue due to reliefs such as zero-rates than all 27 EU countries except two. VAT reliefs also add to administrative costs and increase the

complexity of the VAT system, and changes to VAT are often not the best way to produce targeted behavioural change.

Terms of Reference 3, 5 and 6

The DWP have not undertaken an evaluation of the Welsh Government's policies on getting disabled people into work. I understand the Welsh Government's Disabled Peoples Employment Champions (DPECs) are a proactive Team who engage with key stakeholders, including external engagement Teams across DWP Wales, to champion the disability agenda via the Strategic Objectives within their Work Plan. I and Officials within the DWP would welcome working with the Welsh Government on understanding how best to work together to get people back into work.

The Government recognises that many people find health conditions and disabilities, including mental ill health a barrier to employment, which is especially true for young people. The DWP Youth Offer supports 16–24-year-olds on UC, including those with health conditions and disabilities. Through support from work coaches, including in Youth Hubs and from Youth Employability Coaches (YEC), we are providing targeted interventions to help young people gain new skills, build confidence, and move into work.

DWP's Youth Offer is important in providing young people with tailored support to start, stay and succeed in work. Young people with health conditions and disabilities can benefit from more flexible support from Youth Employability Coaches, and Youth Hubs, who work with local partners to provide or signpost to appropriate support.

Young people with health conditions and disabilities participating in DWP's Youth Offer will be supported by work coaches who work closely with Disability Employment Advisors (DEA's) and can signpost to local partners for appropriate support. The Youth Offer also provides support to address a wide range of other risk factors that could be associated with mental ill health such as homelessness, loneliness, debt and financial security as well as helping young people into employment. The DWP supports young people achieve financial security by delivering support to start, stay and succeed in work which will in turn support young people's mental health.

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Timms', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Minister of State for Social Security and Disability