

Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP  
Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions  
Ministerial Correspondence Team  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London  
SW1H 9NA

Dear Liz,

15 October 2024

Congratulations on your appointment and I wish you all the very best in this important role.

## Inquiry into the disability employment gap

The Equality and Social Justice Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the disability employment gap. The inquiry will explore what progress has been made and what more could be done to reduce and remove barriers to employment faced by disabled people.

### Terms of reference

The full terms of reference for the inquiry are listed in the Annex. Whilst our primary focus is on devolved areas within the control of the Welsh Government, it has become increasingly apparent that our work would benefit greatly from the input of the Department for Work and Pensions. We would therefore welcome it if you could outline your thoughts on relevant points from the terms of reference (i.e. the third, fifth and sixth bullet points) and the specific issues highlighted below.

### Disability Confident

Professor Debbie Foster who authored the Locked Out report 2021 as well as the WG's Disability Rights Group suggests that *Disability Confident* has been "very tarnished by its association with the Department for Work and Pensions, because there's a lack of trust amongst disabled people with the Department."<sup>1</sup> Professor Foster suggests detaching an employers' scheme or kitemark from social security to another portfolio and/or the development of a Welsh-based kitemark as potential solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings, paragraph 21](#), 30 September 2024

- How would you respond to Professor Foster's concerns that the Disability Confident scheme is tarnished by its association with the DWP?
- What is your position on:
  - moving responsibility for Disability Confident to another portfolio; and
  - the development of a Welsh-based kitemark?
- What is the UK Government's position on future reform of the Disability Confident scheme?
- How will the proposed Employment Rights Bill address the needs of disabled people and help to reduce the disability employment gap?

### **Role of DWP in supporting people into work**

We have heard mixed reviews regarding the support offered to disabled people by the DWP and considerable concerns regarding the training, knowledge and awareness of Jobcentre staff. Feedback from participants with lived experience who took part in our engagement so far has been nearly all negative; several disabled people said that some Jobcentre advisers seem to lack the training required to appropriately and sensitively advise those looking to find work.

One focus group participant from Cardiff noted:

*"It's the thoughtlessness and lack of care in what they do. This came out for me when I was told by a member of the Jobcentre staff, you've got to go for a mandatory interview. You're going to lose your money if you don't go for this interview. I asked, 'What's the job for?'. They said driving for Stage Coach. I was sat there with a guide dog."<sup>2</sup>*

- How do you respond to concerns that Jobcentre staff lack awareness, knowledge and training needed to adequately support disabled people into work?
- How does the DWP ensure that staff are aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of disabled service users?
- What specific training is provided to Jobcentre staff and what is the take-up rate? How is the effectiveness of this training monitored?

### **Examples of best practice**

On the basis that nearly everyone should be able to benefit from the dignity of work, what consideration has been given to providing financial support or incentives to good employers who may be interested in taking on people with disabilities who have difficulty competing for posts on the open job market, e.g. people with cognitive abilities who could do certain jobs under supervision, to assist with the cost of supervising the disabled person's post. For example, in Spain organisations with a disabled workforce of 70-90% are exempt

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<sup>2</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Interim summary of engagement work](#)

from VAT, whilst those at 90% or above receive financial bonuses. Within the public sector, 5% of all jobs are reserved for disabled people.

- How will you ensure that the DWP's work in this area will be informed by evidence and best practice?
- What consideration have you given adopting international approaches for instance the support highlighted in Spain and exploring whether it would work in the UK?

We hope that you will be able respond positively to our request for information. Given the planned timescales for concluding the inquiry, we would appreciate a response at your earliest convenience and no later than by 13 November 2024.

With thanks and kind regards,



**Jenny Rathbone MS**

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Senedd Cymru

Welsh Parliament

## ANNEXE A

The Terms of Reference for the inquiry on Disability and the Employment Gap are as follows:

- What progress has been made to deliver the recommendations set out in the 'Locked Out' report and to reduce and remove barriers faced by disabled people who want to access Wales's labour market. Why progress to reduce the employment and pay disability gap has been so difficult to achieve.
- How the social model of disability is being used to underpin employment and recruitment practices, and what barriers continue to exist throughout society that impact on access to work (i.e. transport, attitudes).
- How effective Welsh Government actions (e.g. the network of Disability Employment Champions and apprenticeships) have been in reducing barriers to employment and reducing the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people, including the extent to which Welsh Government policies complement/ duplicate/ undermine those set by the UK Government.
- Whether disabled people are accessing apprenticeships and if any further support is needed to ensure a schemes are inclusive.
- What further policy measures are needed to support disabled people, young disabled people and employers to increase participation rates and what can be learned from elsewhere.
- What actions would support those who are currently unable to work to access voluntary opportunities (which could lead to future work opportunities).