

FABIAN POLICY REPORT

In partnership with

Scope

About disability

community  
For a better working world

# AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE

Ensuring disabled people play a key role in the changing world of work.  
Edited by Cameron Tait, with essays by Yvette Cooper MP, Neil Coyle MP,  
Seema Malhotra MP, Stephen Timms MP and many more

# Scope

About disability



**“When I was finally offered a job it felt amazing –**

**Everything I’ve done with Scope has definitely helped, and now I’ve hopefully got a job for life.” Harrison**

Scope exists to make this country a place where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else. Until then, we’ll be here. We provide support and information to a quarter of a million disabled people and their families every year. We raise awareness of the issues that matter.

**Many disabled adults still face huge barriers to employment and less than half are in work. Scope believes that all disabled people should have the support they need to find, stay and progress in work.**

Visit our website for further information

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# ABOUT



The Changing Work Centre was established by the Fabian Society and the trade union Community in February 2016 to explore progressive ideas for the modern world of work. Through in-house and commissioned research and events, the centre is looking at the changing world of work, attitudes towards it and how the left should respond. The centre is chaired by Yvette Cooper MP and supported by an advisory panel of experts and politicians.



Scope exists to make this country a place where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else. Until then, we'll be here. We provide support, information and advice to more than a quarter of a million disabled people and their families every year. We raise awareness of the issues that matter.

We have a long standing interest in understanding and breaking down the barriers disabled people face in finding and staying in work.

We are politically neutral and work with members of all political parties to achieve change.

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Like all publications of the Fabian Society, this report represents not the collective views of the Society, nor those of Scope, but only the views of the individual writers. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the labour movement.

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# Foreword



Yvette Cooper is Labour MP for Pontefract and Castleford and chair of the Changing Work Centre.

WHEN SIR LUDWIG Guttmann founded the Paralympic Games, he said he wanted us all to stop focusing on what people couldn't do, and focus on what they could. As we celebrate the phenomenal athleticism of our Paralympic athletes this month, it's clear that the world has come a long way since those first games. But we also know that from sport to employment, having a disability is still seen as a limitation rather than an opportunity.

Labour has always believed in the dignity of work; the pay cheque that keeps kids out of poverty; the promotion that helps people get on; the sense of purpose; the defeat of idleness, the lifeblood of communities where everyone knows they have responsibilities and a part to play.

Our trade union history and our values mean we have always fought against discrimination and injustice in the workplace and led the way in championing inclusion, equality and opportunities for all.

In government, we changed laws, targeted investment and worked with employers and unions to change workplaces. The number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in employment doubled. We left office with more women in work than ever before. We boosted the employment rate for disabled people, and legislated to make workplaces, buildings and public transport more accessible.

But we know that discrimination, prejudice and injustice persist - and too much talent is still wasted as a result.

When we launched the Changing Work Centre with the Fabians and Community

earlier this year, we set out our aim to put forward new progressive ideas on what the future of work means for workers and the labour movement.

These essays focus on how we make sure that future is fair and inclusive for all.

The stories in this collection look particularly at disability in the workplace - both at the continued injustice many disabled people in Britain face in getting a job, and also at the practical examples of truly inclusive workplaces that make the most of everyone's skills and talent.

Essays in this collection outline how areas of the economy that have traditionally performed well at removing barriers for disabled people to participate in work, such as manufacturing, the public sector and a variety of middle-tier jobs, are in decline.

Other essays from Seema Malhotra and Stephen Timms set a challenge to government and businesses to ensure that the new jobs of the future are not only just as inclusive as yesterday's jobs, but even more so.

New technology has the potential to make it easier than ever for people to connect and work flexibly, and for employers to remove barriers preventing people from accessing work. But big changes have the potential to create greater inequality and insecurity too.

Just as we have done before, it is Labour's job now to respond to these changes - to ensure new jobs and opportunities are accessible to all and to fight against new insecurities, exploitation and inequality.

As technology and the labour market change, there is a developing consensus

that the jobs of the future will require a creative workforce too. And as Toby Milton sets out in his essay, in order to boost our creativity, we need more diversity. How can we come up with the new ideas we need when everybody coming up with them has the same background, gender, race, ability or life experiences? In order to compete with the growing skills bases of China, India and other developing countries, our future workforce must be more diverse than it is today.

To build the creativity and diverse economy we will need, we must use all the talents our country has to offer. Achieving full employment will mean building the routes into work for those who've traditionally been shut out, it will require us to close the disability employment gap, as well as increasing the employment rate of women, of single parents, older people and ethnic minority communities. It will mean employers actively seeking out diversity and a government that creates the ladders up, as well as maximising the opportunities available.

The essays in this collection offer us hope for a more inclusive, more creative and diverse economy in future. At a time when inequality is rising and the Conservative government shows no sign of being able to meet the new challenges of technological and demographic change, it has never been so important for Labour and the Fabians to come together again to provide the progressive ideas, and for a Labour government which can put them into practice. **F**



## Barriers to work

Many disabled people face barriers getting in to, progressing in and staying in work. Removing these barriers requires a cross-government approach, writes **Mark Atkinson.**

**F**OR MANY DISABLED people, working is key to living independently.

Having a steady income is all the more important if you are disabled, given the extra costs of around £550 every month that come with managing a condition or impairment. But work is about much more than wages. Carving out a career and building skills, expertise and relationships along the way is often a hugely fulfilling experience.

Yet less than half of all disabled people are currently in work - 48 per cent of disabled people are in work compared to 80 per cent of non-disabled people. Whilst it's true that more disabled people are in work now than ever before, the substantial difference between the two rates - the disability employment gap - has barely shifted over the last ten years.

Today, disabled people still face a number of barriers getting in to work, staying at work and progressing in their careers.

At Scope, we campaign for the world to become a place where disabled people have the same opportunities as everybody else. Tackling barriers within employment is central to this. We're pleased to have worked with the Fabian Society on this series of essays, bringing together the experiences and expertise of disabled people, leaders in employment research, as well as key figures within the Labour Party committed

to ensuring the future world of work is as inclusive as it can be.

The Conservative government has made a welcome commitment to halve the disability employment gap by 2020, but the success of this hinges on cross-party collaboration.

It is essential that the Labour Party takes on a dual role in ensuring this objective is reached. On the one hand, Labour should support the initiative, adopting it as a shared goal, while on the other, it must hold the government to account, making sure measures introduced over the coming years will be sufficient to deliver the change disabled people want to see.

Beyond this, as Labour starts to explore the changing world of work, it is important that the changing world of work, it is important that the experiences and aspirations of the almost 13 million disabled people living in the UK are listened to and taken into account when developing policy now and in the future. The new Changing Work Centre established by the Fabian Society and Community presents an exciting opportunity to develop a plan for a future world of work built with disabled people at the centre. This should help shape a vision where opportunities to find and progress in work are open to everyone.

Disabled people face a range of barriers at all stages of their careers. At the root of this is insufficient support for working disabled people and outdated workplace culture. Eighty five per cent of disabled people feel employer attitudes haven't changed since 2012.

Tackling these barriers is no simple feat, but will be essential to making the future world of work inclusive of disabled people.

This calls for creative and lasting solutions to bridge the gap between policy and practice when it comes to recruiting, supporting and developing disabled people.

### Getting in to work

Until now, mainstream support in to work has not been successful with disabled people. Schemes like the Work Programme, which take a one-size-fits-all approach,

just don't deliver. Requiring people to take part in a programme or risk losing their out of work benefits has led to poor results for disabled people, with the programme seeing a success rate of 7 per cent.

By contrast, the specialist Work Choice scheme has had a much higher success rate, with 59 per cent of disabled people who started the programme in 2014/15 in work by June 2016. There are two key reasons for this - participation in Work Choice is voluntary, not mandated, and the programme is designed to offer specialist support disabled people might need to find and stay in work.

Disabled people should be able to get advice and support around employment both in and out of work. This should come from specialist organisations with staff who have an understanding of the full range of barriers disabled people face when looking for work. They should be able to choose if and when they participate in an employment support programme, without facing any risk to their financial support.

As Felix Labwo and Lauren Pitt illustrate in their contributions to this publication, many disabled people who disclose a condition or impairment in a job application simply aren't considered for roles.

In fact, 74 per cent of disabled people we surveyed felt they had lost out on a job opportunity because of their impairment. This just isn't fair. All too often, employers perceive disabled people as "risky hires".

All employers, from banks to hospitals, large firms to political parties, should recognise the huge potential that comes with opening up a workforce to the widest pool of talent available.

### Progressing in their careers

Disabled people face barriers once they're in work too, often missing out on opportunities to develop new skills and move up in their careers. The two most common forms of workplace discrimination disabled people face are being given fewer responsibilities and not being promoted. When these opportunities are afforded to their

non-disabled colleagues, a progression gap starts to emerge.

### Staying in work

Getting the right support and resources is essential for many disabled people to do their jobs. But too often, disabled people leave the workplace altogether following a change in their health when the right adjustments or support could have supported them to stay in their role.

### Making adjustments

We know that increasing numbers of people are falling out of work due to illness or disability. While in some cases that may be the right route to take, it is vital that disabled people are given an opportunity to explore how they might best be supported to carry on working if their circumstances change. Only 42 per cent of people who receive the out of work benefit Employment and Support Allowance were offered an adjustment before they left their job in 2014.

Most employers do understand their legal obligation to offer workplace adjustments to disabled people - 96 per cent of employers have a workplace adjustment procedure in place. Yet, policy doesn't always translate into practice. Many employers continue to struggle to understand their role in supporting disabled employees.

To drive real change, we believe employers need industry-specific guidance on workplace adjustments. This should be targeted towards whole organisations, with line managers getting the training and resources they need to best support disabled members of their teams and enable them to perform to their full potential.

We know that many disabled people chose to work part-time to manage their health and wellbeing, with 13 per cent reporting that their decision to work reduced hours related to their impairment or condition. A further 26 per cent of disabled people in work would prefer to work shorter hours if they could. Scope's own research supports

this, with 48 per cent of disabled employees telling us modified hours were key to staying in work.

This was certainly true for Gill, who found out she needed dialysis just a month after starting her new job:

"I thought, 'it's all going to go wrong again now. I'm going to have to stop working.' I told my boss, and she was absolutely fine with it. She said, 'If you can do afternoon dialysis and come to work in the morning, that's fine'. Now, not every company would let me do that."

While all employees have a right to request flexible working, arrangements like Gill's between a disabled person and their employer are still startlingly rare.

Flexible working should be at the heart of ambitions to create inclusive workplaces. All types of flexible working, including flexitime, remote working and flexible approaches to sickness absence, should be built in to this drive to make the UK's workplaces fit for the future.

### Driving a cross-government approach

Changes to workplace culture and practices alone will not be sufficient to drive the societal change needed to make sure disabled people have the same opportunities at work as everyone else. Disabled people face a number of other barriers that can make working more difficult.

One of these is not getting the right social care. Many disabled people get support to live independently through a social care package. Scope research has found 79 per cent of disabled people who use social care feel it is important in enabling them to work or look for work. Among younger disabled people (aged 17–30) using social care, only 15 per cent were getting support with working, and only 13 per cent were getting support with looking for work.

Social care should be better aligned to disabled people's needs and aspirations

around living independently. This should factor in support they may need around looking for or staying at work.

Another barrier to work is getting the right financial support. Disabled people face extra costs amounting to an average of £550 per month as a result of their condition or impairment. Personal Independence Payments (PIP) play a vital role in supporting disabled people to overcome financial barriers to work. In a recent survey of people who receive PIP and its predecessor DLA, more than half said that PIP or DLA was important in helping them to work. Among those looking for work, 37 per cent said that these payments were important in helping them to do so.

For PIP to play a meaningful role in supporting disabled people to meet the extra costs they face both while looking for work and at work, it has to be protected from means-testing. And to secure this support within the future world of work, the level of PIP should grow in line with inflation.

Only through a truly cross-government approach can these wider barriers to work be overcome. Policy makers should consider each of the solutions set out here as single components within a wider whole. Whoever is able to take this whole-system approach to disability employment will be in the best position to drive meaningful and lasting change in the British workplace.

Labour has set itself a bold ambition of understanding and planning for a future world of work. It is positive to see the party exploring what changes might affect the UK labour market and considering what innovative practices could be developed in response.

For this project to have maximum impact, people who face barriers to participating in some or all of the labour market as it is must be at the centre of plans for change.

To drive real change in working opportunities for disabled people, Labour should look to re-think how employers are supported to set up and run their workplaces. **F**

Mark Atkinson is chief executive of Scope.



## The party of all workers

Labour must recommit to full employment and remove barriers to work affecting disabled people, writes **Neil Coyle**.

**L**ABOUR IS THE party of all workers. My own constituency has the third highest workforce in the financial sector and I'm proud of it. Unless Labour speaks for all workers we are creating an artificial barrier to our own electability. We are the party of full employment and that cannot be achieved without a strong focus on disabled people. The world of work has changed massively in the last two to three generations and in some ways is far more open to disabled people than ever before.

The rollout of provisions of the original Disability Discrimination Act has made some work and workplaces more accessible – especially once Labour's teeth were added to the initial legislation and a formal commission was introduced to police, strengthen and implement the legislation.

However, further work needs doing as the legislation and commission were undermined under the coalition government, with Brexit risking further weakening. It seems likely that discrimination on disability grounds will rise as a result of employment tribunal fees, for example. The same has already been shown for cases against gender discrimination sadly, with a huge reduction in cases after the coalition introduced fees. Cases against employers have dropped dramatically and discrimination – both

overt and inadvertent – is likely to rise as a result. Labour can only tackle this if we return to government and our manifesto last year included plans to address this issue specifically.

Changes to the most common forms of employment also allow more disabled people to participate in workplaces. The shift from industrial, manual labour to the growth in service and financial sector working increases opportunities for many more disabled people to play a more active part in mainstream workplaces. Any Labour government should look to work with employers to roll out good practice and ensure tax incentives are there to further diversify staff, as has been used previously with mixed results.

### The hyper-sanctions regime adopted by Iain Duncan Smith and the coalition government fast-tracked negative perceptions of 'welfare reform' and has caused huge mistrust between many disabled people and Jobcentre Plus

The transformation in how we work has also massively increased opportunities for many disabled people – through home working and advances in IT and accessibility software. There are now companies that specialise in opening up home working for disabled people specifically to help call centres cut costs in recruitment and retention (which is higher for non-disabled workers) as well as reduce the overall office space required. The DWP – and Labour in the longer term – should be working with progressive companies on initiatives like this that help businesses and increase working opportunities for people who could perhaps more easily work from home, including disabled people and carers.

Obligations to work should also not be overlooked in the changing policy and employment landscape. The pressure to work has also increased, under employment and support allowance changes initiated under Labour – although poor initial introduction and disastrous subsequent changes led to the programme very quickly being roundly condemned in the disability sector. The hyper-sanctions regime adopted by Iain Duncan Smith and the coalition government fast-tracked negative perceptions of 'welfare reform' and has caused huge mistrust between many disabled people and Jobcentre Plus (JCP). These changes force some people (who would meet the Equality Act definition of 'disabled people') to be more actively seeking employment or be in work or face, in some cases, utter destitution. They will need rapid review under any future Labour government. In the interim, the proposed 'work coaches' being implemented in JCPs have come with very weak detail when ministers and officials have represented the DWP at work and pensions select committee meetings. Their training and knowledge – in benefits issues and in disability awareness – is crucial to delivering for disabled people. Equally vital is re-bridging the trust gap that has widened since Labour left office.

Aside from the negatives mentioned above – and the need for caution in the face of further cuts and implementing further welfare and workplace policy changes – there was also a drop in the overall percentage of working age disabled people in work between 2010 and 2015. This should set alarm bells ringing in a government that committed in its 2015 manifesto to halving the disability employment gap.

There are areas where the government could fast track some changes to help try and meet their commitment.

The DWP is gearing up for what are billed to be significant changes to the work programme. Iain Duncan Smith's flagship scheme never got the results



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intended and arguably tore up some better projects and efforts that existed previously. The stats are known on initiatives like the future jobs fund for young people, but the lesser known working neighbourhood fund (WNF) also benefited disabled people. In my constituency, this scheme was used by local organisations from mental health charities right through to a local garden farm that provided a project specifically benefiting people with learning disabilities. They were able to engage in the WNF because of the commissioning process. The work programme with its national setting and prime contractor system inevitably prevented smaller scale, more successful localised projects being able to secure sufficient funding to provide similar results. Some of these, albeit, small schemes had success rates in the 80 - 90 per cent region. The work programme has never attained anywhere near that result. It also facilitated a 'lowest hanging fruit' operation by contractors that skewed access away from organisations that were previously able to provide the more personalised support that many disabled people require.

Any revisions to, or complete overhaul of, the work programme must take these setbacks into account if the government is serious about its manifesto commitment and about achieving better results. More of the same simply is not a solution.

Linked to central government schemes is the access to work initiative. This is a hardy perennial when it comes to trying to get more disabled people into work. It has long been an aspiration of the disability movement to get the scheme better known and delivered. It is believed to make a net contribution to government coffers – through reduced benefit payments and raising income tax and national insurance contributions. In 2011 the government accepted all the recommendations of the Sayce review for DWP which rightly included a focus on retention of disabled people in work. Retaining work following

the onset of illness or development of an impairment is crucial to ensure disabled people don't readily give up work before understanding the possible support available to manage the impact or other means of mitigating the impact. I believe retention could be improved through an obligation on employers to show full consideration for reasonable adjustments before accepting an employee's resignation on ill health grounds.

The Sayce review also recommended doubling the number of disabled people supported through the Access to Work scheme. This simply hasn't been delivered.

### **The shift from industrial, manual labour to the growth in service and financial sector working increases opportunities for many more disabled people to play a more active part in mainstream workplaces**

The government did commit in 2013, publicly and with an apparent additional £8m financial backing, to extend access to work to disabled people who secured work placements and internships. The DWP have been beyond reluctant to provide any information on how progress is being made or how money has been spent. This is very disappointing. It is suspected that one significant barrier is within the operating of access to work itself; a 'bureaucratic' barrier. Whatever the challenge has been in delivering this goal must be overcome.

One of the most significant barriers to employment disabled people still face is employers' attitudes and underlying discrimination. This is reinforced for young disabled people with limited work experience. Ensuring access to work can help tackle potentially empty CVs for young disabled people and would address this issue head on. It would also

boost disabled people's confidence and ensure any recruitment process is faced with the strength of direct and relevant employment experience. This will ensure any interview or application questions are answered more fully and with examples in work that might otherwise be impossible to provide – boosting chances of success and levelling the playing field.

The government has one further opportunity to meet that commitment to extending access to work as well as halve the disability employment gap: the apprenticeship programme. The government says it wants three million apprenticeships delivered within this parliament (the same timeframe as halving the disability employment gap). But the last work and pensions secretary appeared to roll back expectations in these critical areas, and the current incumbent is yet to be grilled on them. Marrying the two commitments and focusing on newly disabled people as well as younger disabled people would benefit all involved. Providing the skills to a disabled person – and the in-work experience that may otherwise doubly harm employment prospects in open recruitment – would be hugely beneficial. Coupling it with a genuine commitment to provide better advice on access to work to both disabled people seeking work and employers would also help. The proposed work coaches, overhaul of the failing work programme and apprenticeship levy and wider scheme could further boost the support and flexibility DWP offers disabled people and employers and help meet the welcome targets.

Labour must take up the mantle being gradually dropped or mislaid by the Tories and show an appetite in these areas – as well as how our policies will extend real opportunities for all people seeking work, especially disabled people and others experiencing the greatest barriers. **F**

Neil Coyle is Labour MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark.



## My early experiences of employment

**Felix Labwo** writes about his experience working with autism, and how the right support can help disabled people to thrive in the workplace.

**I** WAS WORKING FOR a firm in east London and unfortunately it didn't go according to plan. At that point I realised that my autism can't just be ignored.

Workplaces can be more autistic-friendly by being patient when it comes to communication, reinforcing boundaries regarding employee relations, and if there is an incident where the individual is anxious then it would be best to find out why. It's something that I shouldn't be ashamed of.

I would like employers to know that autism is not completely negative. It's important to acknowledge that autistic people have skills - such as being able to see a task right through to the end - and to see how those skills could best be utilised by a company.

### Improving attitudes towards disabled people

I discovered that two thirds of the public are still uncomfortable with disabled people, and that's very clear in terms of employment, in terms of social life, and so on. Despite the Disability Discrimination Act being put in place 20 years ago, it still doesn't feel like disabled people are given equal opportunities.

Some feel that employers are still discriminating. I read that 49 per cent of companies don't want to hire someone who has learning difficulties and that affected me because I'm part of that demographic. Disability is a broad spectrum. Just because someone has a certain disability, it doesn't automatically mean they can't do something.

I feel like there's a lack of diversity regarding the public image of disabled people. When people think of disabled people they usually think of somebody who's using a wheelchair.

Overall I still feel there's a long way to go in terms of improving attitudes. I think that awareness campaigns have an impact on employers and on the wider public.

### Getting specialist support is very beneficial

Some young people don't get the right support, and because of that they may find their young adult lives very troubling and challenging at times. At college there was very little help to find employment. I was referred to Scope by the council in Newham because they knew what had happened with my previous job. I needed support, and I feel like the support I got was really good. The session on how to disclose that you're disabled was really useful. In the past, I wouldn't have disclosed my diagnosis, but nowadays I do and those who I've worked with have seen my disability in a positive light.

## Disability is a broad spectrum. Just because someone has a certain disability, it doesn't automatically mean they can't do something

My confidence and communication is something that I've really had to work at. Employers are always looking for somebody who's good at communication and who's

confident. Because of the Scope programme my confidence went up. I learnt about what I need to do when communicating with companies. What helped was that it wasn't as formal as college or school. I liked the course leader's approach of giving us examples of what to do, what not to do, clarifying things if we didn't understand.

I had a mentor and we're still in contact. I still keep in touch with others from the programme too. It's been really good. It gave me a sense that, not only could I get a job with what they had taught me, but also the sense that I can now talk about disability in a positive way.

### Work placements and internships are a great way to get experience

The work I have found in recent years has been mostly down to organisations putting me in contact with different employers.

I was able to do a work placement as an office assistant at a specialist law firm in central London. From my first day there I knew that this was going to be a good experience. They gave me a task that they thought was going to take me more than a day to do, and it took me just a few hours.

I did a whole range of tasks. I was in marketing, HR, IT and the general office, so I got the chance to experience different areas as well as juggling different things. Looking at what I did on the work placement, I feel that I can work in the office.

In the last year I've done other placements and internships. During my time at a bank I made the transition from just doing training to actually being part of the team. I learnt people skills and attention to detail. The branch managers said that I was an expert when it came to using the machines because people used to struggle with them, but my being there made it easier for the customers and easier for my colleagues too.

I then did a work placement at a coffee shop which came about as a result of an event with different employers. My tasks were to serve customers at the



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till, clear tables, deal with deliveries and occasionally helping with closing. Team work and efficiency were key. It was a very good experience, and probably the most challenging work placement that I've been on.

I have just finished an internship at another law firm, supporting the executive assistant to the CEO. It was extended several times.

### **Thriving in the workplace**

Getting a job is just the first step. For somebody who has a certain condition to thrive in the workplace, they need support.

For the employer to be aware about the condition of a potential employee that potential candidate, who is disabled, needs to strike up the confidence to say: "This is my condition, this is why I need support."

Education is key so that employers know how to cater to a person's needs.

And the support I'm going to need isn't the same as for someone who has cerebral palsy, or muscular dystrophy; it's going to be different. People need to be educated about what cerebral palsy is, people need to be educated about what autism is, and how they can make adaptations.

Overall I still feel there's a long way to go in terms of improving attitudes. I think that awareness campaigns have an impact on employers and on the wider public.

### **Moving forward**

After finding out about employers not being confident about hiring people with learning difficulties, I'm going to put together a report on how employers can be inclusive. I plan on getting it

out there and sending it off to different employers.

I would advise disabled people seeking employment to highlight the positives that they can bring to the workplace. You can't compare yourself to everybody else. Can you imagine how bland and boring the world would be if everybody was the same? Everybody brings something new to the table. If I look back at the past 18 months, or even before that, it's a testament to how disability doesn't have to be a barrier to having a good life.

If you have a goal in mind and you keep going for that goal – the rest is history. **F**

Felix Labwo took part in a Scope pre-employment service and is passionate about improving employers' attitudes towards disability.

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# The inclusive growth we need

Creating an inclusive economy is not only the right moral choice, it is also a hallmark of a sustainable economy, writes **Seema Malhotra**.



Seema Malhotra is the Labour and Co-operative MP for Feltham and Heston

**I**N THE ELECTION last year, a parent stopped me at the school gate. He had a physical impairment, and had struggled to find work. Like any other parent, he wanted to provide for his family and give his children the best chance in life. “What are you doing for people with disabilities?” he asked. “Everything is being cut, all our support.”

Other local residents have also raised practical day-to-day issues that have stopped them from being able to get on with the practicalities of daily life. One issue that stands out is the difficulty residents who use a wheelchair experience getting onto a bus if the driver isn't sensitive to their needs or the ramp doesn't work properly. Things that most of us wouldn't even think about.

So before we even start down the road of how much it costs us as a nation, as well as how much stress and despair a non-inclusive society causes for disabled people and their families, these anecdotes show how far we are from a truly inclusive economy.

The case for an inclusive future of work is, foremost, a moral one. Persistent exclusion, unemployment and underemployment of a vast group of people is an affront to the world we aspire to: a social ethic that offers fair, engaging and empowering em-

ployment, in all professions, independent of individual fortune. The case for reducing the disability employment gap must start with that moral concern and centre on achieving those fairer outcomes.

But the moral case is doubly strong because it is also an economic one. There are other powerful echoes of moral concern in this volume. I want to add to that weight of concern the agreement of economic rationale, too.

The economic grounds for boosting disability employment are current, clear and strategic.

They are current, because with wages squeezed and public support cut, a boost to disability employment – still lagging far too far behind wider employment rates – would be a crucial driver of living standards for many.

The economic grounds are clear: the double fiscal advantage of higher tax / lower welfare is exceeded only by the personal significance of moving from being out of work into appropriate, sustained work.

And they are strategic, too – effectively tackling trends in disability employment could put us on the front-foot in dealing with a much wider set of changes in jobs, demography and public institutions.

The combined force of moral concern and economic rationale makes disability

employment a cause for urgent focus. And it makes the government response all the more jarring: faced with a 30 per cent disability employment gap, the Conservative position so far is defined by cuts to ESA, the tragic failures of Work Capability Assessments and the clueless performance of the Work Programme for health-related welfare claimants. There is a pressing imperative now to tackle the issue head-on.

Employment of disabled workers – and, more widely, health-related employment – should be of concern to us all. We have all been affected by periods of sickness, either directly or in our concern and care for family members and friends. Too often, the debate on disability employment has taken a snapshot view, highlighting only a small proportion of concern. That is a mistake. 2014 research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies shows that a snapshot view may point to around 7.7 per cent of adults reported or registered as disabled at a single point in time. But over 18 waves of panel surveys, that figure rose dramatically to 26.8 per cent of adults experiencing disability at some point in time, indicating the dynamic nature of the issue. A longer term view shows the issue for what is an issue of national importance, but also of intensely personal relevance.



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In making the economic case for action, we must also think of not just one part, but the entire pathway to work from periods of sickness, from inactivity through to sustained employment and progression. We should start with care for those inactive with disability, affecting over 3.7 million people in Britain according to Office of National Statistics' 2016 statistics. And clearly, getting into a job is a major concern: the 48 per cent employment rate for those with a disability remains well below the overall employment rate. But on this debate especially, we must think beyond the point of job entry: for those returning to work after sickness, holding on to their job and feeling comfortable to productively contribute is a crucial step. The government's failure to grasp this, in its inclination to obsess with benefit off-flow alone, has been both personally devastating and economically

misguided. Our concern shouldn't stop at the point of employment. We must aim higher; aspiring for human flourishing as much as for job retention and progression.

Beyond taking a long view of the issue, we should take note of two further features of disability employment. First, that it uncovers a wider issue in our health system: a large shift towards mental and behavioural conditions in disability is a powerful reminder that we must do better with our mental health services. Around half of ESA claims are primarily for mental health conditions. But between the Work Programme and health services, the government failed millions over the last parliament and lessons must be learnt fast. Second, in policy and in the case for action, we must think both of the individuals affected by disability, and the care environment they are in: with more than a quarter of 50 to 69-year-old women

having provided informal care for someone in the past week, according to government figures from 2015, a positive focus on disability employment could improve the standard of living for millions of families.

Taken together, the economic case for action on disability employment can be summarised by the following four descriptions. A dynamic view that makes disability personal, not a snapshot abstraction. A focus on keeping and improving jobs, not an impersonal obsession with benefit off-flow alone. A reminder that health is as much mental as physical. And an empathetic sight of the opportunity: success on disability employment is success not just for those individuals, but advances for entire families and communities.

### **The current case for disability employment**

A focus on boosting employment is especially pertinent today. This is because the shortcomings of macroeconomic policy have put the entire burden of living standards maintenance on employment gains, not on rising wages and not on public support.

Put yourself in the shoes of a low-income working household. You have felt the acute pain of real earnings falling every single year for five years since 2009. In that time of need, instead of support, there has been a deeply regressive set of tax and benefit changes: you have lost the most as a proportion of your income due to changes introduced by the coalition. Squeezed between the government's productivity crunch and fiscal failure, the only source of respite for living standards has been the fact of employment.

Of course, this context was avoidable and remains tractable. Cutting benefits from those most in need and at a time of their greatest need was not just avoidable, but actively unjust. On that, too, moral concern is backed by economics: proposals to cut ESA work-related activity group

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support are especially bad examples of incentive design. Equally, failure to act on real wage and productivity stagnation has become the defining feature of Conservative macroeconomic handling.

But stuck amidst microeconomic failure on welfare incentives and a macroeconomic crunch on productivity, it is clear that a focus on boosting the employment rate is the right focus for the current context. And given recent gains, the focus must now turn to offering the best support to those out of work because of disability. The economic case is current: this is a moment where employment gains are an appropriate economic focus.

### The fiscal case

As well as being current, the economic case for disability employment is clear. On a narrow case, each person supported from being off work with a disability into appropriate work adds to household income, to public taxes and to clearly cashable welfare reductions. That triple fiscal advantage goes further still, beyond a simple welfare cash saving: real support that gets someone into work can also act positively on the road to health recovery, a positive public saving ripple effect. The fiscal case could not be clearer.

But the current failure to deliver on this case could also not be clearer. A regime of threatening assessments, low-level outcome-based funding and an impersonal, damaging rhetoric are not just the government's moral failures. They are, equally strongly, the government's fiscal failures. Where is the fiscal logic in underpaying on welfare-to-work support, from one hand, only to pay more in resultant welfare out of another?

Clear as this narrow fiscal case is, we can look to a wider economic case for boosting disability employment. And that is because effective support for disability employment can have a multiplier effect too, in reducing costs or need of informal and formal care for those able to and want-

ing to work, with reasonable adjustments and new technologies in the work place making it possible to do so.

Collectively, then, there is a clear and crucial economic logic behind a focus on disability employment. It is good for the individual, good for taxes, good for public purse savings, good for family incomes and, importantly, it is a good thing in itself to make our society one where work includes us all and contributes to shared prosperity.

### A strategic state

Finally, it is worth taking stock of the longer-term economic logic. Too often, and especially on welfare, we end up confining our political battles to the necessary but not sufficient areas of weekly income levels, savings and taxes. Our politics, and our state, must also be more visionary and more strategic. And from a strategic point of view, there is a compelling logic to boosting disability employment.

## As well as being current, the economic case for disability employment is clear

That is because an effective set of policy responses on disability employment would tackle the wider issues that will be central to our economy in the next decade. A visionary state that looks across people's working life cycle, helping at times of need, will be better placed to work in partnership with employers to promote flexible working and support for individuals in between periods of flexible work. A focus on empathetic, graduated return to work alongside care, with public services tuned to work effectively together to achieve this can yield lessons on effective support for all with support needs and be much more attuned to changing work patterns. An effective solution on sick pay and proper support for agency workers and those in self-employment holds vital lessons for

how a wider economy of flexible workers could best support certainty and stability. And, above all, in boosting disability employment, we can promote institutional relationships and cultural shifts between public, business and third sector that will be crucial to an effective future of work more widely. At a time when people no longer work with an employer for life, by starting with support for those experiencing disability, we can promote collective institutions of continuity: of training, of income assurance, of personal support, of care, of a culture of inclusion. We know that these institutional shifts are possible. Just look at the excellence in standards that the Paralympics now represent, showing what happens when institutions work over time to change our attitudes and shift our expectations.

The positive economic case for boosting disability employment is a strategic one. If we can stand up to our ambition on disability employment, we can place ourselves well to tackle the challenges of work more widely: of an ageing demography, of a changing, flexible work context driven by technology, of a more human, inclusive world of work, buttressed by collaboration across sectors.

There is, altogether, a robust economic case for boosting disability employment: a current case, a clear case and a strategic case. But of course, the strongest case for boosting disability employment remains a moral one. If we can create a more inclusive labour market, we will have made moral progress that in its train will bring economic benefits. And that moral progress driven by a vision of open, empathetic labour market institutions where people with disabilities in the workplace is seen as much more of a norm will also have long-term economic and social justice payoffs. Openness, collaboration, fairness, and inclusion are, after all, hallmarks of a good and confident society and represent the foundations for shared prosperity in the long run. **F**

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# Local approaches to inclusivity

The post-referendum landscape provides an opportunity for cities like Leeds to determine their own economic futures, writes **Judith Blake**, but in order for city-led growth to be sustainable, it must be inclusive.



Judith Blake is leader of Leeds City Council.

**T**HIS IS AN era of seismic change for the UK. After seven years of austerity we now face a massive shift in our relationship with our European neighbours. While this has created a great deal of uncertainty it also presents us with a new opportunity to redefine the way in which we deliver growth in cities like Leeds, where I am leader of the city council. Long-term sustainable growth can be achieved by enabling everyone in the city to have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

One of the issues brought into sharp focus by the recent referendum is that some people currently feel very remote from the benefits created by strengthening city economies. This is not a new phenomenon but post-referendum there may now be greater appetite at a central government level to support efforts to bridge the current gap.

We already know that a significant proportion of our population who are disabled or manage a health condition are not able to access much-needed employment opportunities. As a result many of those people are not sharing the rewards of our stronger economy. As we seek to redefine the nature of growth in Leeds we want to accelerate ongoing work to tackle this deep-rooted inequality.

Working more closely with both employers and local people to develop flexible solutions that respond to city-specific needs will help us do just that. It is vital that together we find ways to remove those barriers that still prevent a significant minority of people from accessing a growing number of employment and training opportunities. If we can achieve that we will do much more than simply boosting employment figures, we will make a tangible difference to persistent inequality and poverty.

## Our freedom to deliver the extent of change we need in Leeds is still constrained by national legislation

The government must reflect on the way in which cities in particular can be freed to boost productivity and increase job creation. In Leeds our approach is to focus our efforts on building a strong economy within a compassionate city. Enabling those furthest from the job market to access good quality employment and training opportunities has been a central part of that agenda from the outset. However, our freedom to deliver the extent of change we need in Leeds is still constrained by national legislation.

This is also an appropriate time to reflect more broadly on the way in which we support disabled people to access work. The Work Programme and Work Choice Programme are both coming to an end in 2017, to be replaced by the single Work and Health Programme. In addition there is increased uncertainty over the future provision of a range of programmes which currently rely heavily on European funding.

While I welcomed the establishment of the work and health unit in 2015, there are undoubtedly still concerns about wider reforms which will include seeing everyone brought together into a single work programme. Not least that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) risks creating a machine so unwieldy that it simply cannot achieve the flexibility or responsiveness required to make an effective difference to the numbers of people still facing barriers to work. What is more there is a danger that the large supply chains inherent in a system this size will lose the specialist services that play such an important role in supporting disabled people.

The last six years have been unprecedented in terms of reductions in public sector funding. As local government has been hit with some of the most severe budget reductions of any public sector organisations, difficult decisions have to be

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made about the shape of service provision. There's no doubt that increased financial constraint is a major influencing factor in many public service reforms. However, in this case it is unquestionably in everyone's interest – including the national economic interest – to ensure that people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential by accessing work. I therefore hope that the move to a single Work and Health Programme is not one purely dictated by finance.

In my view city leaders must respond to the changes from the DWP in three ways. Firstly, we must demonstrate best practice locally to ensure we are at the forefront of efforts to drive this agenda forward. That's where we will have our biggest tangible impact.

Secondly, while we continue to work within the reimits of government frameworks we must ensure that those systems empower commissioners to deliver flexibility and responsiveness based on evidence of local need.

Thirdly, we must do all we can to ensure that the DWP changes do not inadvertently limit the breadth of aspiration of those currently facing barriers to work. Supporting those furthest from the job market is not a simple task and there is some concern that a drive to achieve performance targets with the DWP could see greater resource dedicated to 'easy wins' with those already closer to the job market. We must therefore use our influence to press the case for a continuation of specialist support services to ensure that we do reach those who really need that expertise.

Ensuring people can access newly created job opportunities in urban areas that are increasing in strength and confidence must be a priority for all major cities. If we want to establish a more inclusive labour market we must actively look beyond our headline economic achievements.

Leeds is a case in point. In recent years we have boosted our economy, strengthened links with local employers

and attracted inward investment. We can confidently talk about jobs being created and the number of people claiming Job Seeker's Allowance has fallen by almost 25 per cent.

However, despite these successes, the number of people claiming Employment Support Allowance or incapacity benefit has remained stubbornly high. We have around 32,000 people claiming health-related out-of-work benefits and almost half of those have mental health issues.

In Leeds we believe that the most effective way to address this challenge is through locally derived solutions. Persistently high numbers of people relying on health-related out-of-work benefits is a challenge unique to urban areas. We believe that those urban areas, if given the freedom to do so, could drive change much more rapidly in their own localities.

When it comes to increasing access to work and training opportunities we already have the local knowledge and the relationships that can help us to direct support where it is needed. We can make connections with those best placed to give people with disabilities access to essential work-based opportunities.

### **By far the biggest challenge in terms of numbers is supporting those suffering from mental health-related concerns**

This process should start with young people. For Leeds this has particular priority as we pursue our wider ambition to become a truly child-friendly city. Currently our complex needs team is working closely with Leeds City College, Swarthmore, and our special inclusion learning centres to pilot 'supported internships.' Young disabled people are spending their final year of study in a variety of workplaces gaining vital skills and experience to help equip them to

secure future employment. After this academic year we hope we will have the evidence we need to enable the programme to become a standard part of the city's post-16 offer to young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The aim of the project is for young people to prove they can perform in a real job in a real workplace. Given the very different ambitions and aspirations of the young people involved it is not surprising that their placements are in a diverse range of industries including carpentry, agriculture, IT, retail, childcare, theatre and museums. All of these students are supported in their placements by job coaches who ensure we best match young people and placements, that support is available for both the employer and young person and that reasonable adjustments can be quickly identified and implemented.

Through this programme we want the young people to be able to go on to secure permanent employment. Of course the scheme also benefits employers – not least because they are able to bring new skills into their workforce and extend the pool of high quality talent available to them.

To make all of this possible we need strong relationships with local employers. Those employers are equal partners in our supported internships and are absolutely critical to their success. Our work to support adults with disabilities to access employment and training also relies heavily on our relationships with partners.

For example, in July our Adult Social Care team worked in conjunction with public, third and private sector partners to host the city's first 'Hidden Talents' job fair for both young people and older graduates with autism.

This was the first specialist autism job fair held in Leeds and around 200 people came through the door. Employers represented ranged from big national employers to small local agencies.





© Marcus Clarke

The outcomes have been extremely positive for all concerned. Although it is too early to determine specific job outcomes we do know good leads into work were established. A number of employers are exploring options for supported internship schemes and others are now actively talking to their HR teams about how they can make reasonable adjustments for people with autism when interviewing job applicants. Having seen how well the event worked the DWP is looking at the inclusion of subsequent autism job fairs under their schedule as part of their commitment to the disability confident agenda.

Of course events like this target a relatively specific group of individuals. That is why we are working with employers to create a new project intended to more broadly support older people with disabilities into employment. We are using our partnership arrangements and our power as a major commissioner of services to develop new employment opportunities, for example, by using the Social Value Act to include requirements in service specifications and

contract terms, and by supporting the development of social enterprises which employ disabled people.

We are improving our links to employers to ensure that information about support services and employment events is accessible to more people. As a major city employer, the council is improving its own recruitment, retention and support for disabled people.

By far the biggest challenge in terms of numbers is supporting those suffering from mental health-related concerns. More than half of the 32,000 people in Leeds claiming ESA or IB fall into this category. We are therefore funding specialist mental health employment support and job retention services, which have been recognised by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health as a virtual 'centre of excellence'.

Developing an inclusive labour market in Leeds will take time. We have a huge challenge ahead of us. However, the potential rewards of achieving this ambition would be exceptionally rich for the individuals involved, employers and the city

as a whole. We have the chance to ensure more people living in Leeds can share the benefits of a strong economy, while at the same time reducing poverty and persistent inequality. Employers can access a wider pool of talent and develop a workforce that is more representative of the communities they serve.

As a city we are determined to continue to act to do all we can to respond to local need. However, I urge central government to listen more closely to the voice of cities as ministers consider how best to progress this issue – and others – at a national level. With government inevitably focused on the UK's response to Brexit, now would seem a very appropriate time for those in Westminster to step back from their ongoing role in delivering local services. Instead, they should empower cities like ours to better determine our own economic futures – an inclusive labour market will be an essential part of enabling us to fulfil our economic potential. If cities throughout the UK could do that the whole nation would benefit. **F**



## Breaking down the barriers

Too often Britain's employers display a lack of knowledge and understanding about disability, writes **Beverley Bambrough**, but trade unions and disability organisations need to work together to challenge perceptions.

**T**HERE IS NO single solution that will solve all of the challenges disabled individuals face but there are plenty of policy levers that can and must be pulled at the same time if we are to break down

the barriers between disabled people and sustainable employment.

Barriers can be social, economic and political and the effects of some recent legislative changes, particularly around benefits for disabled people, make entering the workplace more difficult and remaining in sustainable employment extremely challenging.

To address these challenges we need action on flexible working, skills, benefits and public attitudes. We should aim to empower disabled people to make their own choices and ensure the employer base is fully educated and aware of both responsibilities and opportunities from employing more disabled people.

There is a steep hill to climb. Disabled people are far less likely to be in employment. In March 2013 the UK employment rate among working age disabled people was 49 per cent compared to 82 per cent of non-disabled people, showing just how high the barriers to employment can be.

Although disability can affect anyone - with almost one in five working age adults being disabled - public attitudes remain a major barrier. Scope and Opinium research from 2013 revealed that many people believed that having a disability would mean they would be less productive than non-disabled people. Set against these preconceptions, disabled people face barriers in the workplace before they even arrive there.

Public opinions around disabilities will not be changed overnight, but we can make progress towards the sea change we need by changing the ways in which disabled people tend to be portrayed in the media. When we look back at the Paralympics in 2012 the media played a key part in supporting the event and it was evident that the public both supported and enjoyed experiencing the success of the Paralympic athletes. This raised awareness of disability issues and the positive role models on show created a more diverse presentation of disabilities in the wider media.

There are many economic barriers that individuals face within employment. The Equality Act 2010 seeks to provide protections to ensure that employers make 'reasonable adjustments' to support employees to access or remain in work. However, all too often in our experience, what appears a simple adjustment can become a stumbling block. This stems from a lack of understanding on the employer's part with many decision makers in organisations having little or no understanding or previous contact with a disabled person.

Disabled people must be consulted more about decisions affecting their employment. From a union perspective, on the surface it appears easy; in reality quite often entrenched views can be difficult to break down and cause untold distress and anxiety for the disabled worker.

A lack of knowledge and understanding about disability issues places barriers in the way of good employment decisions. All too often we see occupational health reports



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intended to provide support for employees used as a mechanism to commence capability procedures, erecting another barrier to the continued employment of disabled workers.

Community works with many supported employment businesses, where the majority of their workforce are disabled people. For these employers, who have worked so closely with disabled employees, they see providing support and adjustments as important investments in retaining valuable, skilled staff. There are examples of good practice outside of supported employment and the workforce diversity agenda, pursued by an increasing number of employers. These will open up more opportunities for disabled workers. Nevertheless, there is much further to go.

Approaches to sickness or disability leave can also impact on disabled workers. There are examples where organisational policy works well but we frequently find ourselves having to deploy legal arguments to support an individual in the workplace. A flexible approach to working patterns and locations can assist in some cases and may enable the individual to develop a work pattern that allows continuation of employment. Increasing the awareness of both managers and disabled workers as to what support is available to the employer is key in achieving access to meaningful employment for disabled people.

Trade unions have a vital role in raising awareness of these issues with employers and supporting their disabled members. But it's not just inside the workplace where we have a role to play. We need to influence those setting policy or developing regulations, ensuring that disability issues are high on the agenda of government.

However, policies are one mechanism to support disabled members but they are at times a reactionary tool. There needs to be more pro-active responses to support both employers and disabled people.

We need employers, disability organisations, the education system and trade unions to work together to develop understanding and awareness amongst employers and the next generation of managers.

Disabled people need to be provided with the support to live and work independently alongside and equal to non-disabled people. This support could be with undertaking application processes, navigating the benefit system, or getting through or appealing the all too feared Personal Independence Payments (PIP) assessments.

Two of the most common enablers for working adults with impairments are flexible working and tax credits, with the most common barriers lack of job opportunities and difficulty with transport. These policy areas are spread across government departments, yet the way they impact on disabled people's lives and work have a cumulative and too often detrimental impact. Although there have been efforts to undertake cross-departmental work on issues affecting disabled people, the pace of change is slow.

### **Public opinions around disabilities will not be changed overnight, but we can make progress towards the sea change we need by changing the ways in which disabled people tend to be portrayed in the media**

In the case of transport, accessible transport is vital in enabling disabled workers to get to their workplaces. While technology improvements and changes in attitudes to home-working may overcome some of the employment challenges for some disabled people, accessible transport is an issue that needs to be addressed. Transport has been a major campaigning priority for our disabled members for many years.

Yet some developments in transport policy are taking us backwards, such as the move towards fewer staff on platforms which makes traveling more difficult for many disabled people. Government schemes such as Access to Work have tried to address some of the mobility issues and many of our members have benefitted, yet there is always a fear that funding for the policy will disappear.

There is a multitude of legislation and policy from pre-employment to the benefits system all intended to protect and support disabled people. The reality of low employment levels for disabled people reveals that current approaches aren't working. Meanwhile, technological changes in the workplace are creating both opportunities and threats to employment, not just for disabled workers. How we react to these changes is crucial and it's important that the voices of disabled workers are strongly heard in these debates around technology and work.

It is fair to say that during the last 20 years unions and disabled people's organisations have been at the forefront of enabling change through lobbying and presenting a collective voice.

Although many milestones have been achieved there is still a long way to go. Unions need to lead from the front, be proactive in challenging inequality, and work closely with organisations to develop workplace and government policies that increase sustainable employment for disabled workers.

If we can change perceptions, improve education and awareness and challenge policies that place a greater burden on disabled people's lives, then we will continue to break down barriers for disabled people. That way we will both create more opportunities for more people in our diverse society and create a more inclusive and productive world of work. **F**

Beverley Bambrough is education and equalities director at Community



## Diversity and creativity in innovative organisations

We can only be creative if we are diverse, writes **Toby Mildon**, and new technology is making it easier than ever for employers to break down barriers at work.

### An individual approach

If we are to achieve a more inclusive working future, we need to break down barriers at work for everybody. Too often when employers consider action to support disabled people, or others in lower participation groups, they go for 'one size fits all' solutions. Instead, we need to embed processes and attitudes that encourage employers and managers to work with their staff to identify the barriers and together identify the right solutions.

There are groups that face more barriers than most in the workplace. Disabled people tend to be right at the top of this list. But disabled people are not one homogenous group. A new ramp or a hearing loop, while useful for those with mobility or hearing impairments, will not remove barriers for an employee who has autism, for example. So disabled people have the most to gain from a management approach that looks to work with all individuals to remove barriers to work.

New technologies make it easier than ever for employers to adopt more inclusive practices. The increasing availability and affordability of software to interrupt bias allows employers to address entrenched

attitudes and processes and challenge unconscious biases. Innovative employers are making full use of the new technologies available to increase diversity.

### The importance of diversity

As the world of work changes, there is a pressing need for people and organisations to be creative. Economists and futurists looking at the future of work, such as Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, frequently refer to the need for creative skills at a time when technology and automated systems are replacing routine tasks. The individuals and organisations that will thrive in the new economy, they say, will be those that are able to embrace creativity.

**Our vision is to be the most creative organisation in the world. We think the best way to become more creative is to increase the number of different ideas colliding together. And the best way of doing that is to make sure there is more diversity amongst the people generating those ideas**

At the BBC, we are taking the creativity challenge seriously. Our vision is to be the most creative organisation in the world. We think the best way to become more creative is to increase the number of different ideas colliding together. And the best way of doing that is to make sure there is more diversity amongst the people generating those ideas. If someone was excluded from our workplace, because of their disability, race, gender, age or other characteristic, we would be reducing our ability to come up with new ideas and remain relevant to our audience.

Research clearly shows that inclusive organisations outperform non-inclusive

organisations. Businesses with diverse workforces tend to be more profitable, more relevant and better at problem-solving. And so given the benefits provided by an inclusive approach, why would organisations want to cut off whole groups of potential talent by not making their workplaces accessible?

### How innovative employers break down barriers

I have identified four steps that innovative employers take to break down barriers at work to increase diversity and creativity at work.

#### 1. Making diversity central to the organisation

Diversity can't just be a bolt-on. It needs to be hardwired into an organisation. Too often diversity and inclusion practices are seen as an optional extra, or as something the HR team must deal with alone. In fact, the most innovative organisations recognise that an inclusive approach to employment needs to come right from the top.

At the BBC, our commitment to diversity and inclusion is a priority for the director general. Tony Hall launched our ambitious strategy earlier this year, calling for the BBC to lead the industry in diversity and inclusion. Support from the top can help to change attitudes, and puts diversity at the heart of the organisation's mission – something that everybody should be working towards at all times.

#### 2. 'Think global, act local'

Not all barriers to work can be found on a big checklist. Of course employers need to make sure they get the basics right. For example, all workplaces should be physically accessible, and flexible working practices should be made available to all employees and highlighted to potential candidates. But the best employers are able to work with their staff to identify new and personal barriers quickly and to address them as they come up.

A useful way of thinking about inclusivity is to ‘think global, act local’. This phrase was popularised by the environmental movement as a way of acknowledging that a large number of people making small changes locally can lead to global change. But it is also useful from an inclusivity perspective. We can only remove barriers at a national or even global level by understanding the barriers and needs of every individual in our workplaces.

To do that properly, organisations need to establish strategies not only to get the basics right, but also to deal with more complex needs and barriers. Managers need to have the training, confidence and tools to be able to ask individuals a simple question: “What do you need to be your best self at work?”

### 3. Challenging unconscious bias

Too often people think creating an inclusive workplace is purely physical. But as important as it is, it isn’t all about building ramps and adapting spaces. Some of the biggest barriers can be attitudinal. Unconscious bias is a systemic barrier that runs through workplaces all over the country. Managers can be only too happy to hire in their own image and to drift towards comfort zones of familiarity. For disabled people, or those with protected characteristics, this can put up a major barrier to employment at workplaces where unconscious bias goes unchallenged.

The trouble with unconscious bias is that it happens naturally – we’re hardwired to seek out threats and without the right training and support, we can often misinterpret difference as a threat. But this sort of thinking is fatal for diversity and inclusion. So we need to confront and interrupt unconscious bias, particularly at times of high pressure such as hiring new employees, or during redundancy procedures.

Thankfully, new technology makes it much easier to interrupt bias. Online tools like Textio and Gap Jumpers allow

organisations to adjust their recruitment processes to maximise diversity by widening their talent pool. The BBC has recently piloted a no-CV recruitment process by shortlisting candidates objectively with an anonymous skills-based task. This “blind auditioning” process isn’t a new idea. Back in the 1930s, judges asked musicians to audition behind a screen to redress the gender imbalance in orchestras. But now we have a technological bias pattern interrupter fit for the 21st century. As a result, there has been a three-fold increase in the number of people from ethnic minorities selected for interview.

### 4. Flexibility is key

Flexible working is now commonplace in many workplaces, partly thanks to the right to request flexible working, but also due to modernising working practice. More and more employers are recognising that flexible working practices can allow their employees to flourish.

## With technology and greater connectivity making remote working a possibility for more and more organisations, many employers are creating more flexible working spaces

As well as flexibility on working hours, innovative employers are also increasingly redesigning their physical spaces. With technology and greater connectivity making remote working a possibility for more and more organisations, many employers are creating more flexible working spaces. This creates greater accessibility, but also reflects changing attitudes at work in which people tend to value flexibility more highly.

Again, new technology means adjustments are easier to identify and

make. For example, Clear Company provides an interface for employers to ask all employees to request adjustments in a mainstreamed way – this might be changes to working hours, physical adjustments to the working space or new software or equipment.

### Into the future

Following my four steps will help employers to unlock diversity and creativity in their workplaces. Those employers that fail to address the physical and attitudinal barriers in their workplaces will increasingly find it difficult to fill skills gaps as their talent pool remains shallow. And while the increasing use of technology at work increases the need for flexibility, new online platforms are also putting pressure on employers to be inclusive.

Online tools like Glassdoor are giving employees more information than ever about potential employers. The website lets current and former employees rate and write about their employers for the world to see. It means that those organisations that are genuinely inclusive will be easy for potential employees to find. And of course it also means that non-inclusive employers can be flagged up. With the rise of social media, employers that fail to address barriers reported by their employees are running a serious reputational risk.

In this new world of work, it is more important than ever that employers open themselves up to the full array of talent in the labour market. Innovative organisations recognise that they need to be flexible and accessible, and that they need to support everybody that works for them so that they can realise their full potential. The organisations that will thrive in the future world of work will be those that can embrace diversity, and therefore unleash creativity. **F**

Toby Mildon is diversity and inclusion manager at the BBC



## Moving into work

**Lauren Pitt** writes about her experiences looking for work, and outlines her plan for making work more inclusive and accessible for disabled people.

I AM 23 AND in the summer of 2006 I began to lose my sight to a rare genetic eye disease called Leber's hereditary optic neuropathy, or LHON for short. This progressive sight loss eventually led to me being registered blind. I am a braille reader, a screen reader user and a very proud guide dog owner. Sight loss has not stopped me achieving all that I want. However, other people's attitudes can often prove a greater impediment than sight loss itself.

I graduated last year with a 2:1 degree in theology and began a long and difficult job hunt. I was under the illusion that with a good degree, a strong CV due to all of the volunteering that I'd done, and a lot of determination, I would find a job with minimal difficulties. This couldn't have been further from the truth.

### Looking for jobs

I made the decision to disclose the fact that I was blind on almost all of my applications and on my CV. My impairment is nothing to be ashamed of, and I wanted to be honest and open from the start. I applied for over 250 jobs in a variety of roles but I received no response from about half of them. I had some interviews but I did not get any further despite them giving me positive feedback and saying that they hoped I found a job soon.

Many of the people told me I was inspirational, but that was not what I wanted

to hear. I wanted to be looked at like any other person who had applied for that job. I am almost certain that employers underestimated what I could do because they knew I was blind. In interviews I often spent most of my time explaining that I could do the job just as well as anyone else who had applied although I was blind.

I was unemployed for eight months and I remember feeling pretty useless. The unfortunate statistic is that two thirds of people with a visual impairment are unemployed. I was determined not to be.

### Changing tack

Towards the end of my job hunt I was very honest, I outlined that I was registered blind and this would bring complications that might not come with other applicants, but on the flip side I came with many unique advantages; I am a quick and efficient worker, adaptable, resilient and I want to achieve so therefore will give all that I can to succeed.

With this approach to job hunting, interview panels seemed to look at me differently. I believe it made potential employers see I was a confident, outgoing and determined young woman who would do all I could to achieve and not let my disability define me.

I believe this is the case for many disabled people who are searching for jobs. We just need the chance to prove ourselves. However the public perception of disabled people can disable us far more than our actual disabilities.

### Moving in to work

When I applied for my current job, their email inviting me to interview was extremely positive, asking how they could help make the interview best for me, if my guide dog would need any water and what they were to be like around her.

They invited me for a taster session so I could see how they worked and for them to see how I worked. The team was lovely and I immediately felt like I fitted in. I heard

from the company the same day offering me a job and I was delighted to accept! It is a varied job and I am really enjoying what I am doing. They have never had a disabled employee before but they asked me what I needed and supported me from the beginning.

### Getting support through Access to Work

Access to Work has helped with my transportation and getting me the equipment I need to do my job. On my first day, I had an assessment to understand what I needed and then we were given the go-ahead to order the equipment.

This included screen reading software, a braille labelling system and a splitter box which means I can simultaneously listen to my screen reader and the telephone. Having this equipment will ensure I can do my job as well as my sighted colleagues and that my sight loss doesn't mean I am at a disadvantage.

Access to Work is a really good scheme but the process is slow and has too many stages to it. It would be far better if it didn't take so long to sort out because, for the first month at work, I was unable to do my job and had to sit with other people to listen to what they were doing. This was, at times, frustrating. I just wanted to be able to get on with my work.

My employer was very supportive and fully participated throughout all of the Access to Work stages. Now I have everything that I need, I am settling in with my team and getting to grips with the work that I need to do.

### Making employment inclusive and accessible

I am very glad to have found employment, and am keen to use my experiences to help others. I have thought a lot about how finding employment can be more accessible, how access to work can be improved and how to help disabled people in the work place.



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Firstly, the Access to Work process needs to start sooner, ideally before the recipient starts work. It would also be useful for disabled people looking for work to have more guidance, perhaps from an experienced mentor.

It would be great if there were more internships around for disabled people, providing much needed experience and demonstrating to employers that there is a vast section of the population that is chronically underemployed, but manifestly employable.

Application forms could be more accessible. Simply including headings on an application form can help someone who uses a screen reader immensely.

Using an easy to read font can help people who are partially sighted, dyslexic or have a learning disability. Allowing people to submit their applications in other ways, such as through audio or video applications could also be beneficial.

We need to raise awareness to show disabled people in work can work, and the sheer variety of jobs they do. I want to do everything I could do when I had my sight. I accept I may have to change the way I do things but I have not found many things that I could not adapt to my visual impairment. People think it is extraordinary but it's not. It should be the most ordinary thing.

Working is a normal part of life and many disabled individuals are perfectly able to participate in everyday activities with the right assistance.

I'm so glad that I found a job where I am valued. My dream is that this is a reality for many more disabled people, and that more and more employers recognise our abilities instead of focusing on the problems that we sometimes face.

Our disability does not, and must not, define us. **F**

Lauren Pitt is a graduate and recently began her first job as an administrator for a social enterprise

# Boosting disability employment

The Conservative government is in danger of failing to deliver on their target of halving the disability employment gap by 2020, writes **Stephen Timms**, as he sets out a package of measures to boost the employment prospects of disabled people.



Rt Hon. Stephen Timms is Labour MP for East Ham

**I**N 1998 I was appointed a minister, and took on responsibility for disability benefits at the department for social security. The department was piloting the new deal for disabled people. We knew that the vast majority of people who were out of work on health grounds said they would like to have a job. For the first time, government was committing seriously to new ideas to help disabled people into work. Much of it was experimental. But, as the new deal developed, up until its abolition by the coalition in 2010, there was steady progress in reducing the disability employment gap - that is, the difference between the

employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people.

The new deal was scrapped and, in 2011, the coalition introduced its work programme which dealt with all jobseekers, whether available for work and claiming jobseekers allowance (JSA) or out of work on health grounds and claiming employment and support allowance (ESA). Providers were paid more for placing an ESA claimant into work.

In some respects, the work programme built sensibly on the new deal. For JSA claimants, it achieved outcomes comparable to the new deal at a lower cost.

But it failed ESA claimants. The House of Commons Library's graph of the disability employment gap has discontinuities, reflecting statistical definition changes, but makes clear that progress in reducing the disability employment gap halted in 2010.

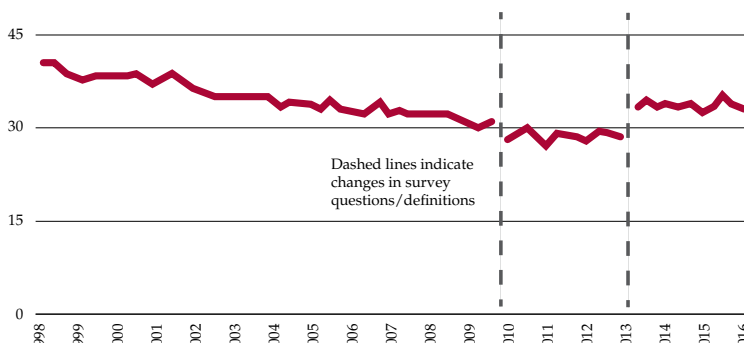
The House of Commons Library analysed work programme job outcome data from the Department for Work and Pensions. Its findings show how much worse ESA claimants fared than other jobseekers (see Figure 2 opposite).

The government's invitation to tender for the work programme, published in 2010, said that, if there was no programme at all, 5 per cent of new ESA claimants would be expected to find a job within twelve months. For most of its life, as the graph shows, the work programme didn't even manage this! As some pointed out, the work programme was worse than doing nothing.

The National Council of Voluntary Organisations blog commented on the work programme in July that "it has largely failed those with more complex needs or barriers to employment. For many charities, it has provided an abject lesson in how not to outsource public services, particularly for vulnerable people."

Conservative ministers seem to have grasped that their failure to maintain

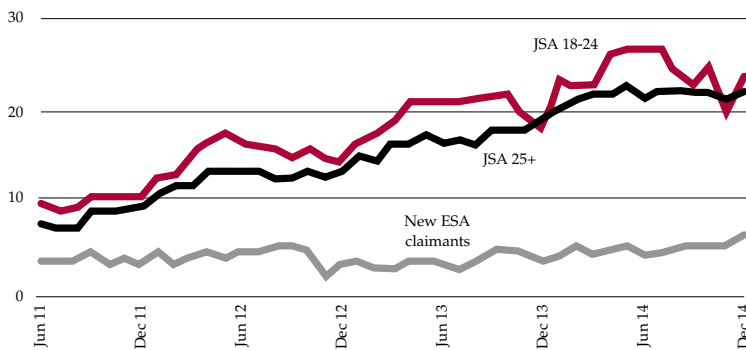
**FIGURE 1**  
Disability employment gap, UK, 1998 to 2016 (% points, not seasonally adjusted)



Source: House of Commons Library



**FIGURE 2**  
**Percentage of people referred to Work Programme who had achieved a job outcome 12 months later, by month of referral (selected payment groups)**



Source: House of Commons Library from DWP, Work Programme, Official Statistics to December 2015

Labour’s progress in reducing the disability employment gap was unacceptable. Their 2015 general election manifesto adopted the target – proposed by Scope in 2014 – of halving the disability employment gap by 2020. Achieving that would mean that, by 2020, the disability employment gap would be less than if progress had continued after 2010 at the rate being achieved before 2010.

It’s a welcome commitment, but there is little sign yet of measures that might deliver so ambitious an aim. The invitation to tender for the work and health programme is expected to be published before the end of 2016. It will be keenly scrutinised to see whether the programme meets the challenge of delivering the target.

I set out below steps which I believe are needed to resume progress on reducing the disability employment gap.

### Separate provision for people claiming ESA

In the run-up to the 2015 election, Labour proposed a new approach to employment support for disabled people. Labour’s manifesto committed to “a specialist support programme to ensure that disabled people who can work get more tailored help.” I believe that Labour was right to conclude that trying to support JSA and

ESA claimants in the same programme has failed. Evidence from Australia – which has often informed the policy debate in the UK – suggests that programmes which focus purely on disabled people do better for disabled people than those which try and support everyone.

Ministers in the new Conservative government elected in 2015 seem to have accepted this conclusion. Their response, however, has been to withdraw outsourced support from most JSA claimants, who will be supported mainly by Jobcentre Plus. For them, the previously outsourced provision is being taken back in house. The successor to the work programme, the ‘work and health programme’, will be focused largely on ESA claimants. The work and health programme is expected to cost over 80 per cent less than the work programme.

The access to work scheme, which funds workplace adaptations for disabled people, has been run down since 2010. It needs to be expanded.

### A localised approach

We also need a much more localised approach. Partly because of huge regional contracts, the work programme has squeezed out really good, local organisations with specialist expertise.

Its replacement should be contracted at city region / local economic partnership / combined authority level. And, progressively, commissioning should be carried out locally too. Provision should reflect the local labour market. Local authorities, colleges, local employers and the NHS should be round the table. That kind of integration is feasible in a city region. It isn’t feasible in Whitehall.

Integration with the health service is particularly important. One example illustrates why. So-called IPS programmes – integrated placement and support – are very effective in supporting people with mental health problems back in to employment. As far as I know, no work programme provider has been able to offer IPS treatment. The only provision has been through the NHS. The NHS locally is needed round the table.

### Benefit reform

Changes need to be made to the benefit system too. I was the minister responsible when employment and support allowance was introduced in 2008. The work capability assessment (WCA) was the main gateway to the benefit. The coalition made two significant changes when it was elected in 2010. First, it scrapped the ‘work focused health related assessment’, a key element which was designed to provide – alongside the WCA – information about types of work which a claimant could realistically expect to take on. The assessment process – quite contrary to Labour’s intention – became purely about benefit entitlement.

And, second, it decided – in the hope of taking significant numbers off benefit – to push all existing claimants of incapacity benefit (the predecessor to employment and support allowance) through a work capability assessment, without providing adequate resources for the additional work. The system quickly became overwhelmed. Atos, which delivered it, became a byword for poor practice and eventually resigned from the contract. The government’s plan failed. There has been no significant fall in

the number of claimants of incapacity benefit / employment and support allowance.

In two years time, we will have had ten years experience of employment and support allowance. It will be time for a thorough review of the benefit, and in particular to consider whether major changes should be made to the work capability assessment.

Contributory ESA is paid – irrespective of other household income – to claimants who have paid sufficient recent national insurance contributions (ie been in recent paid work). The coalition introduced a time limit of twelve months on receipt of contributory ESA; after that, only means tested ESA is payable, and that is reduced where a household has other income. That means that – after a lifetime of work – someone who is out of work on health grounds who has a spouse with a very modest income will be entitled to no benefit support at all after twelve months. This is very harsh, and penalises work. Contributory ESA should be payable for at least two years.

### Direct support for employment

Labour's 2015 election manifesto proposed that for JSA claimants there should be "a guaranteed, paid job for all young people who have been out of work for one year, and for all those over 25 years old and out of work for two years". The proposal was inspired by the success of the job guarantee offered to young people in Labour's future jobs fund, which succeeded in reducing youth unemployment in the teeth of the 2008-9 recession. A six-month wage subsidy was provided as an incentive to employers, to make sure that sufficient jobs were available for the target group.

A similar initiative could help increase the number of jobs available to ESA claimants. An incoming government should explore this possibility, piloting and testing out a variety of approaches.

Taken together these programmes and initiatives would constitute a major boost to the employment prospects of disabled people. **F**

## CASE STUDIES: TWO LOCAL AUTHORITY DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

### Working Well, Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester's Working Well project is for people claiming ESA who, after two years on the work programme, remain unemployed. That is, in fact, the vast majority of ESA claimants who start on the work programme. Working Well, supported by DWP and Treasury, has been commissioned by the Greater Manchester combined local authorities from two providers, with each authority area covered by one of them.

Working Well has worked with some 5000 people claiming ESA who have left the work programme since early 2014. It is on track to achieve its target, that at least 15 per cent would achieve job outcomes – sustained for at least twelve months – over five years. The project board is chaired by one of the local authority chief executives, and includes Jobcentre Plus, NHS England, the local drug and alcohol team, the mental health trust, Greater Manchester Housing, Manchester College and the Adult Education Service.

The two providers have different approaches. I attended a Working Well meeting where I saw them co-operating well – learning from each other. One of the weaknesses of the work programme has been competition negating partnership. With Working Well, there is, in each area, only one provider. That helps with integration with the other services whose co-operation is needed.

### Workplace, London Borough of Newham

The Workplace initiative of Newham Council, serving my constituency, is probably Britain's largest job-broking initiative run by a local authority. It placed 4000 Newham residents in jobs last year. The gap between Newham's

employment rate and the London average has fallen from 14 percentage points to six since Workplace was launched in 2007.

Workplace is much more hands on than a DWP jobcentre. Staff build strong relationships with employers, getting to know their needs well, to ensure that candidates proposed for vacancies are appropriate to the employer's requirements. Jobseekers are supported through applications, rather than just being sent away with instructions to complete a target number of application forms per week.

Workplace set up a disability employment team in 2014, focusing initially on people with learning disabilities, and drawing on adult social care funding. 114 adult social care clients have been supported into work in two years, and 70 per cent remain in employment. The team will be doubled in size by the end of 2016 – up to eight supported employment officers, plus a team leader – to take on broader mental health problems more effectively.

Workplace's approach is normally to have some advisers who work with jobseekers and others who work with employers. It brings them together to work out which clients to advise to apply for which jobs. It has found that this approach does not work well for disability employment, and that members of the team need to work closely both with clients and employers, to identify potential opportunities for specific individuals. of national prescription continues. This includes the financial and regulatory regime and – from a patient's perspective – national rights, enshrined in the NHS constitution, including the right to NICE approved treatments when recommended by a clinician.



