



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Economy and Fair Work Committee

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Dear Neil

On behalf of the Committee may I extend my congratulations on your appointment. We look forward to working with you.

[‘A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People’](#) was published in 2018, setting out the steps to be taken to, at least, halve the disability employment gap from the baseline figure of 37.4 per cent in 2016. The target was to increase the employment rate of disabled people to 50% by this year (2023), and to 60% by 2030 – acknowledged as an integral part of the Government’s fair work agenda.

The Scottish Government published progress reports in March 2020 and 2021. The Committee notes that the disability employment gap has reduced over the last decade. The latest data showed that the gap was 31.6% as of March 2022. No year 3 progress report was published.

The Fair Work action plan, refreshed in December, commits the Scottish Government to publishing an evidence plan and accompanying measurement framework later this year. The refreshed plan referred to an Oversight Group, to be chaired by the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work. The Committee would be grateful for confirmation of who will now chair that Group and when the first annual report can be expected.

In October 2021, the Fraser of Allander Institute published a report on labour market participation for those with learning disabilities. Some of the report’s findings were concerning including that current data was not fit for purpose and should be not used unless appropriately caveated. The report highlighted the importance of having a robust baseline of the available support to monitor changes. It called on the Scottish Government to carry out an audit of the current employability support schemes on offer in each part of Scotland for people with learning disabilities and the routes for people to access them to ensure a shared understanding of availability and good practice.

Against that background, the Committee undertook some initial work to consider Scotland's disability employment gap, barriers to reducing it and action needed to address the barriers.

We visited Enable / Dovetail Enterprises in Dundee and saw first-hand the support provided there to help people into employment or training. We then visited the National Autistic Society in Glasgow to find out about the Moving Forward programme. It was designed to offer holistic and long-lasting support to help young people with autism into employment. We were encouraged with what we saw and are keen to ensure that meaningful support and opportunities are made available to all disabled people across Scotland.

To assist our deliberations, we sought written views. Responses [can be found here](#). In summary, it was acknowledged that the disability employment gap had reduced but there was a lack of clarity on exactly what had driven the reduction. This was partly a reflection of the limited available data, inhibiting policy evaluation. Progress was inconsistent across different groups of the disabled workforce and across different geographical regions. Accessibility, reliability, consistency and cost of transport, the cost of support and childcare and employers' attitudes to disabilities were all highlighted as barriers. Policy measures sought included more employment support programmes, use of legislative opportunities within the proposed Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity Bill to ensure the rights of people with learning disabilities are enshrined in law and, within the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill, to ensure young people with learning disabilities are better supported into the workplace or education. Respondents noted that the pandemic had presented new opportunities for people with disabilities through more flexible ways of working but had also led to a reduction in the number of work support programmes.

We held two evidence sessions, first with the Fraser of Allander Institute and Enable Scotland and then the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work. The Minister provided further helpful information in [his letter of 9 March](#).

I referred to the Committee's work as initial work. We intend to come back to this work later this year. It was agreed that I would write to you now to highlight some issues in relation to which it would be helpful to have further information and assurances now:

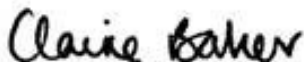
- Some data collection is good but there is a lack of granularity, meaning there is no breakdown between physical and mental disabilities and, for example it is not known how many people with learning disabilities are looking for work. Granular data is important as progress to address the disability employment gap has been uneven. Will this be addressed by the work referred to by the Minister at point 12 in his letter of 9 March? What work is the Scottish Government doing to better identify groups being left behind and to target support?
- The Committee was told that, in general, employers find it easier to make adaptations to support someone with a physical disability, but it can be more

complicated for someone with learning disabilities, sight or hearing loss. What support, with costs or otherwise, does the Scottish Government provide to business and are there plans to do more?

- 20% of people with learning disabilities leave school without qualifications. The Committee heard there can be a culture of negativity and lack of aspiration. The Minister referred to the Scottish Government's commitment to introducing a national transitions to adulthood strategy. When can this be expected?
- There was felt to be a "postcode lottery" for support across Scotland, with challenges in rural or remote areas and a lack of opportunities for placements, poorer transport links and connectivity. What action is the Scottish Government taking to address these wider issues?
- Witnesses suggested that funding decisions for employability services have been considerably delayed in recent years. The lack of funding certainty has meant that service providers are having to make difficult decisions about staffing levels which limits their ability to deliver vital services and affects the continuity of service for those who rely on this support. Does the Scottish Government acknowledge these delays in making funding allocations, and are actions underway to address these in this and future years?
- It is unclear why there was so much unallocated funding in the employability budget at the time of last year's emergency budget review. The Committee is keen to understand the reasons for this and would welcome an explanation.

I look forward to receiving a response by Wednesday 17 May 2023.

Kind regards



Claire Baker MSP
Convener