



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Economy and Fair Work Committee

**Wednesday 8 February 2023**

**Session 6**



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**ECONOMY AND FAIR WORK COMMITTEE**

**4<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2023, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- \*Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)
- \*Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
- \*Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP)
- \*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
- \*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)
- \*Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)
- \*Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

- Susan Ferguson (Scottish Government)
- Lewis Hedge (Scottish Government)
- Richard Lochhead (Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Anne Peat

**LOCATION**

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)



## Scottish Parliament

### Economy and Fair Work Committee

Wednesday 8 February 2023

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:34]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Claire Baker):** Good morning, and welcome to the fourth meeting in 2023 of the Economy and Fair Work Committee. Our first item of business is a decision on taking item 3 in private. Are members content to take that item in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Disability Employment Gap

09:35

**The Convener:** Our next item of business is an evidence session on the disability employment gap. The committee agreed to undertake initial work in this area to identify and address the barriers for disabled people getting into employment. Although we are hearing from the minister today, our call for views remains open for another week, and we encourage people to contribute.

Last week, we heard from the Fraser of Allander Institute, along with Enable Scotland, on structural barriers that disabled people face in accessing employment. Since then, we have been to visit Dovetail Enterprises in Dundee with Enable, and, on Monday, we went to visit the National Autistic Society Scotland to find out about its work in assisting young people into employment.

I welcome Richard Lochhead, the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work. He is joined by Scottish Government officials Susan Ferguson, who is the interim deputy director for complex mental health care and dementia, and Lewis Hedge, who is deputy director for fair work and labour market strategy. As always, members and witnesses should keep their questions and answers short and concise. I invite the minister to make a brief opening statement.

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** Good morning, committee. Thank you for inviting me along today and for the opportunity to discuss the disability employment gap, the progress that is being made and the challenges that remain, which I am pleased to see the committee is investigating.

The latest statistics show that we are making progress. The disability employment gap has reduced by 6.2 percentage points to 31.2 per cent, compared with 37.4 per cent back in 2016. That reduction has been due to a larger rise in the employment rate of disabled people relative to the increase in the employment rate of non-disabled people. It means that we are currently on track to achieve our ambition to halve the gap to 18.7 per cent by 2038. However, I think that we are all aware that significant challenges remain, including creating a culture of change in workplaces where disabled people can, we hope, be welcomed for the benefits that they bring.

As you will no doubt know, the employment gap between disabled people and their non-disabled peers is not a new thing, and it certainly exists throughout the United Kingdom and Europe to a greater or lesser extent. It is clear that no

Government has found a very simple answer to the issue, but we know that taking an approach that meets the needs of each disabled person is key. That is why our devolved employability programmes use a person-centred approach to reduce or attempt to eliminate the barriers for disabled people. However, we need to do more to support people with learning disabilities, for example. Similarly, young disabled people need support to raise and meet their own aspirations through education and beyond.

Information is still emerging on the long-term impacts of the pandemic on the disability employment gap. It has added to the structural issues, but we are doing our best to mitigate that. For example, in relation to mental health, we have established a platform with information and guidance for employers, which I think we discussed the last time that I was before the committee.

Our commitment to at least halve the disability employment gap is an integral element of the Scottish Government's fair work agenda. We published a refreshed fair work action plan late last year, setting out how we will continue our progress towards making Scotland a leading fair work nation and, as part of that, halving the disability employment gap. We will continue to work with people with lived experience to refine and develop our employability programmes, and we will work with employers to support them to make the cultural change that we want to see in all of Scotland's workplaces.

**The Convener:** The committee is doing a short piece of work on the disability employment gap. One of the areas that we have identified is data and the information that is available. As you have recognised, progress has been made in closing the gap, which the committee very much welcomes. However, there is evidence, in particular from work that the Fraser of Allander Institute has done, to suggest that progress is concentrated in certain groups and certain types of disability, while other groups are even further away from the workplace than they were. In particular, that work looked at people with learning disabilities. Do you have an understanding of where progress has been made and where further progress needs to be made? Has the data that is needed to inform that understanding been adequately collected?

**Richard Lochhead:** The answer to your question is yes and no. We are aware that we are making progress in some areas, but, as the committee has highlighted and your witnesses have raised, there are data gaps. As part of our fair work action plan, we are looking at improving that in the coming years.

The biggest issue that I have come across when discussing the issue with officials over the past few months is the disaggregation of statistics to look at, for example, the breakdown of neurodivergence characteristics within disabilities. Members quite often raise issues in the Parliament about people with autism, for instance, and employment, and it is quite difficult to disaggregate the statistics. No doubt, part of that will be about how the information is collected by the labour force surveys and other surveys. We are committed to looking at that and improving the data. It has been identified as an issue.

**The Convener:** The commitment is quite long term. You are looking to halve the disability employment gap by 2038. Are there interim targets? Is there a pathway that has been set out, or does that depend on having the data? There have been successes, but do you know why we are having successes and where we need to focus policy? Are there interim targets, and is there a clear pathway towards meeting the 2038 target?

**Richard Lochhead:** It is quite a big question. I will try to keep my answer brief.

The overall target of halving the disability employment gap by 2038 was set in 2016, and we have set interim targets as part of that. We want to achieve an increase in disabled employment to 50 per cent by 2023 and to 60 per cent by 2030. Currently, 49.6 per cent of disabled people are employed, if we look at the 2021 figures. That suggests that we are doing well in the aim to get to the interim target of 50 per cent by 2023. We estimate that we have to improve disability employment by 1.1 percentage points each year and, at the moment, we are achieving 1.2 per cent a year. We are achieving our targets and we have those interim targets in place.

Why we are making progress, but what the remaining challenges are is a huge question. I note, briefly, that we have measures in place to work with employers to ensure, through the workplace equality fund and other means, that we support people to adapt and make it easier to employ disabled people. Hopefully, that is making a difference. There are various partnerships with the Government, disabled people's organisations and employers working together to break down some of the barriers, and we fund such initiatives, as well. Finally, the employability programmes, particularly fair start Scotland, clearly have a big emphasis on helping disabled people back into work. I think that you said that the committee has visited some organisations, as well.

Hopefully, we are contributing to progress but, to be frank, we do not have all the answers. We do not know exactly why we are making progress, because we do not know what is working best and

what is not working. We know that it is all helping, but it is quite difficult to give a precise answer.

**The Convener:** I suppose I will now add to that difficulty. In the evidence session that we held with Enable Scotland and the Fraser of Allander Institute, they talked about an increase in the number of people with poor mental health—you mentioned Covid and long Covid being in there, as well—and how that was impacting on employment figures. Some of those people are already in work and are then classified as disabled. That might be contributing to the improvement in the number of people in work who have a disability. Do you want to comment on the impact of poor mental health? Has any work been undertaken to assess what impact trends in those areas are having on the overall figures? I think that Susan Ferguson works in that area.

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes, I will bring in Susan Ferguson in a second. As for the big picture, as I said in my opening remarks, some of the evidence about the impact of Covid on people with disabilities is still emerging. Our view at the moment is that there is no evidence that there has been a disproportionate impact of Covid on disabled people. There are various bits of evidence that show that there has been an impact, but we cannot say that it has been disproportionate; there is no overall evidence that the impact is greater on disabled people than it is on any other parts of the population, such as people with long-term sicknesses.

09:45

Scotland has an older population than the rest of the UK and, therefore, the percentage of disabled people in the working population is slightly higher. Those factors all influence where you are coming from with your question. I will bring in Susan Ferguson to speak about the impact of Covid, mental health issues and so on.

**Susan Ferguson (Scottish Government):** We recognise that there has been an impact from Covid on mental health in the broader population. I do not have the specific statistics that you are asking for, but, as you will know, there is a range of recovery work going on in relation to mental health. We published a transitional recovery plan for mental health in 2021, and we have been doing work on that. We have some actions in there on employability and mentally healthy workplaces for a range of people, including people who are disabled. We have been working quite a lot with employability colleagues on their fair work agenda, and we have been working with partners, employers and trade unions on improving employers' offer to people who are mentally unwell and on a whole-system approach to keep people

well and prevent them from getting ill in the first place.

**The Convener:** Is work being done to collect data and statistics? You have described how challenging it is and that some of it is not in place yet. The target that we are heading towards is numbers based, so we need to know the baselines to see what progress is being made. Is any work being done by the Scottish Government to collect and collate data in order to have a better understanding of what makes up the disability employment gap, where we are making progress and where more progress needs to be made?

**Richard Lochhead:** Going forward, a lot of the work will be focused on disaggregating the headline statistics to understand the impact on people with different disabilities, which we talked about earlier. The statistics show that there has been a steady increase in the number of people with disabilities who are in employment; it is an increase from 251,000 people in 2014 to 407,000 at the end of December 2021. Once the new statistics come out for the subsequent year, we might see an impact from Covid on the number of disabled people in employment. We will see whether we can identify any trends in the data and what the relationship with Covid is. We only have figures until the end of 2021, which begins to take Covid into account, but as more data about the labour market becomes available, we can really see whether there are any trends.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I will follow up on that, minister. You say that you have the targets and that you are making progress, but if I have picked it up right, you also say that you do not know why or how you are making progress. Is that accurate?

**Richard Lochhead:** I am saying that it is difficult to pick one particular factor that has led to the progress that we are making, because various things are happening. It is a complex area, as we have discussed before. There are many people with different types of disabilities, and there is a lot of crossover between long-term sickness and disabilities. The statistics are going in the right direction, with more people who have disabilities getting into work and the gap closing. We are making progress. However, we are doing lots of different things to address the issue, so it is difficult to say which factor is having the biggest impact.

**Graham Simpson:** It is brilliant that we are making progress. The Government is funding various schemes, and it seems to me that some of the schemes that you fund will do better than others. Would it not be a good idea to drill down into the data for individual schemes to see which ones are more successful than others and then to replicate the ones that work better?

**Richard Lochhead:** We evaluate fair start Scotland, which helps a lot of people with disabilities, and we evaluate the “no one left behind” strategy, which is delivered at local employment partnership level in each local authority. Those schemes are evaluated, but the issue is not just about schemes; it is about culture. It is about the fact, for instance, that we have labour shortages at the moment in Scotland. Employers are now being a lot more open minded about adapting and perhaps about encouraging people with disabilities to come into their workplaces. It is not just about funded schemes. They help the people whom we are targeting through the employability schemes, but there are lots of other factors involved. The culture is changing in Scotland. Many more employers are engaging and opening their minds to taking on disabled employees, but that is quite difficult to measure.

**The Convener:** We have heard a lot about the need for in-work support. It is good when someone is in employment, but it is important to provide that future support.

I bring in Michelle Thomson, to be followed by Colin Smyth.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I will continue on data, which we have started to discuss. I would like to understand a bit more about your specific plans. I fully accept that there is complexity in the types of disability that you are talking about. We have some data, but data is at the heart of getting an accurate picture. Could you give me a flavour of what is happening? You have said that you are looking at that, but what exactly are you looking at? By what dates do you plan to reach conclusions, recommend new data collectors and so on? Do you have any further information about that?

**Richard Lochhead:** There is work under way. It would probably take me a while to dig out the information now, but I am happy to follow up with the committee on the exact timetables. We are reviewing some of our plans—2024 comes to mind as a target date. However, we rely on people self-reporting disabilities—

**Michelle Thomson:** Yes—I was going to go on to that.

**Richard Lochhead:** In addition, I note that the Scottish Government does not collect all the data; a lot of the labour-market data is collected at United Kingdom level. We have given a commitment to look at what we can do in Scotland to improve the data. I know that Lewis Hedge will want to say something, because he is much closer than I am to that particular aspect.

**Lewis Hedge (Scottish Government):** With regard to specific commitments, the refreshed

“Fair Work Action Plan: Becoming a leading Fair Work Nation by 2025” document, which was published in December, includes a big commitment to a programme of collecting and evaluating data on fair work in the round. That analytical and evaluation work will run this year, with a commitment that we will have the plan in place later this year. As the minister pointed out, that is about looking at what else we can do that will sit alongside the existing official statistics. That is the big piece of work.

The other thing is how we factor all that into design of programmes in the future. Fair start Scotland and the “no one left behind” approach have their own mechanisms for bringing in that level of understanding of the user experience and other aspects of the person-centred approach.

**Michelle Thomson:** You are simply highlighting what I believe, which is that the situation is complex. It would be useful for the committee, and certainly for me, to understand a bit more deeply what you are planning. It becomes complex when we start to think about cross-cutting issues, and we know that there are various data sources.

Leading on from that, I note that a number of programmes are in place and we want to measure their success through various data collectors, of which we have some. We could, for example, introduce conditionality for grants and so on. It would be useful to understand more about that.

You mentioned culture, which is a fair point. That is linked to self-identification, about which people may, for very good reasons, be reluctant. As part of those plans, do you have anything else that looks at how you might support businesses to develop a culture of awareness and a culture of data collectors that you would potentially be able to support? That would be conditional on whether they were getting grants. That is another question about depth.

**Richard Lochhead:** There are two questions there, which I will try to answer.

The first question is about the fair work agenda and conditionality. We are constantly evolving the fair work agenda in Scotland. That is crucial, because employers that sign up to the fair work agenda benefit through being more productive, retaining staff, finding it easier to recruit staff and becoming more profitable. That means that more people can get into work, which benefits individuals in terms of their wellbeing and self-esteem and is very good for the economy.

The current fair work agenda has some broad themes, one of which is flexibility. The fair work criteria for supporting businesses with public grants and contracts now include flexibility. We are urging employers to be much more flexible. That will, in turn, help disabled people to get into work.



The more flexible an employer is, the more attractive that makes them, and the easier it will be for disabled people to work for that organisation. That is where the fair work agenda plays a role.

There are many initiatives under way to help employers to adapt and, we hope, change their culture. For instance, a few weeks ago, I visited the Salvesen Mindroom Centre in Edinburgh, which is working on neurodivergence issues. I urge the committee to find out more about it, or to visit the centre. I met various big employers from the Edinburgh area that have effectively been changing their recruitment policies and taking on board how they can adapt to get people with various neurological conditions working for them. That was an interface between the organisation and employers; a lot of employers in the Edinburgh and Lothians area are engaged in that. It would be great to see that going national.

We also have the workplace equality fund, which funds very different projects across the country. The Salvesen Mindroom Centre is one of the projects that it funds—or rather, part funds, because a lot of the centre's funding comes from the Salvesen family. The workplace equality fund is about working with employers and helping them to adapt and learn about how they can be more accessible to disabled employees.

**Michelle Thomson:** One would expect the larger employers to have the resources, notwithstanding anything else, to be able to adapt. Nevertheless, around 99.3 per cent of our businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises. Have you given any specific consideration to how you might support them with guidance, beyond the broad principles of fair work?

**Richard Lochhead:** It is worth noting that all businesses are subject to fair work criteria, but that is proportionate. We know that it is more challenging for a small business than it is for a big business to get through some of the hoops, so there is a proportionate approach. The enterprise companies and others who apply the criteria will take that into account.

Just now, we are trying to raise awareness among all employers—small, medium and large—in Scotland, and to break down some of the cultural barriers. We know—I am sure that the committee has come across this—that many employers think, “This will be costly.” A small business owner might think, “I can't afford to adapt my workplace to take on a disabled employee.” There is a lot of awareness raising going on. Some of the projects that we fund are about raising awareness and working with all kinds of employers. There is a lot of work to be done.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** Good morning, minister. You talked about how you are close to reaching the target 50 per cent employment rate for disabled people. The figure specifically for people with autism is a pretty shocking—it is 16 per cent, compared with 73 per cent for the wider population. However, the committee is constantly being told by employers that they have real labour supply shortages. They are obviously missing out on a talented workforce.

Given that that priority group should be supported in order to tackle that low figure, why are organisations that work with young people with autism, for example, being plagued by considerable delays in funding? Many organisations were told that decisions on Government funding would be made by the end of December; they are now being told that decisions are delayed until well into the next financial year. That obviously makes it impossible for them to plan, and in some cases it is leading to their being under threat. They need to hand out redundancy notices to staff because they will not be notified of funding until beyond the current financial year. What has caused those delays, and what is their extent?

10:00

**Richard Lochhead:** Thank you for raising that issue with me—I will certainly investigate it. I cannot pretend that I have had such feedback so far; other ministers might have had such feedback in dealing with organisations within their own portfolios.

However, I am sure that the member is aware, as are others, of the volatile economic environment and the pressure on public finances that the Government has been experiencing over the past few months. The draft budget is before Parliament just now. It has not been as easy as we would have liked it to be to give many organisations across Scotland, in many sectors, the assurances that they want, because of the financial situation that the Scottish Government faces in relation to the budget. We all know the reasons behind that. We will do our best to give people as much notice as we can, so I am happy to investigate the organisations that the member has—

**Colin Smyth:** I can give you an example. I appreciate that it might relate to another portfolio, but I can quote one letter to a third sector organisation. It says:

“Thank you for your application to the Scottish Government's Children, Young People, Families and Adult Learning Third Sector Fund. We had planned to inform applicants of funding decisions by the end of 2022. Unfortunately, this will not happen. As a result, the funding

decisions will be shared in early 2023 with the intention of commencing in July 2023.”

That means that anybody who employs staff has to hand out notices, because they have been given a timescale of nine months to wait but need funding now to pay salaries. They face real uncertainty. I hope that you will investigate that, because the committee has had real difficulty in getting to the bottom of the issue. We are being told there are differing delays across the board, but nobody from the Government is telling us in detail why the delays are happening, how much funding in the budget has been delayed and what the impact is.

One issue that organisations have raised is about why we are not moving to multiyear funding. I know that there are challenges around that. We have the debate every year; we should be having it every three years, but we have it every year. Nevertheless, there must be a way for priority projects that deal with these issues to be given at least a minimum commitment of funding over more than one year, in order to avoid such issues.

We know that budgets vary, but the whole Government budget does not vary. The Government does not tell local government, “We are going to completely stop all your education funding.” However, that is perhaps not a good example to choose. The Government knows that there is a minimum baseline level that will be carried over each year. Why, for priority projects, do we not have a minimum level for more than one financial year, bearing in mind the knowledge that the overall figure might change?

**Richard Lochhead:** I know that that has been an on-going debate for many years; many organisations in my constituency regularly make the same point to me.

I can only point to the enormous pressures on the Scottish budget. Our budget, unfortunately, does not vary as much as we would like it to, but the demands on it vary all the time. We see that there are huge demands on the Scottish budget just now, but there are, without the cake growing, only so many ways that we can cut the cake over and over. The demands on the Scottish Government’s budget are in the news every day of the week, for anyone to see. We would like to be in a position to give much more long-term certainty to organisations, but we are unable to do that until the Scottish budget has the same long-term certainty. We take the point on board—we know that the situation is not ideal, but it is a symptom of where we are, and the pressure on public finances.

**Colin Smyth:** The particular cases in which decisions have been delayed until the next financial year are not for the long-term—they are a

short-term challenge at the moment. It would be good for the committee to hear about the full extent of the problem for disabled people across portfolios—I appreciate that the matter cuts across portfolios—and on what action the Government is taking to tackle it, because it is causing a lot of uncertainty.

**Richard Lochhead:** I am happy to give a further update to the committee. I will speak to finance colleagues.

**Colin Smyth:** I raised a particular case in the chamber with you a few weeks ago.

**Richard Lochhead:** Of course. Projects such as the one that you mentioned are extremely important, but I make the point that every project and organisation that comes to us sees itself as a priority and as being very important. It is very difficult to strike the balance.

**Graham Simpson:** We have heard evidence that the journey into employment starts when people are at school; it can start very early. Do you accept that, if we do not identify youngsters who have learning difficulties at primary school and start to help them at that point, their life chances later will be diminished? If you do accept that, are you working with your colleagues in education to improve the situation?

We can see that the figures relating to people getting to the end of their school lives and possibly thinking about moving into employment or further education are quite stark. For instance, only 10.4 per cent of school leavers with learning difficulties go into higher education, compared with 48.7 per cent of school leavers without learning difficulties.

You can see the issues. If people leave school without decent qualifications, their chances of getting a job will be diminished, so we need to start early.

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes. It is fair to say that we agree with the sentiment of what you have said. That issue is getting a lot more recognition in Government and in general debates, particularly on issues that relate to young people and disabilities.

As members may know, the Government is now committed to the first national transitions to adulthood strategy. The strategy will address that very issue. My colleagues across Government are working together on that because, as Graham Simpson has said, it is about education and young people coming through school and into the workplace. Ms Haughey and Ms McKelvie, who are two of the ministers involved, will give evidence on that to the Education, Children and Young People Committee later this month. The Economy and Fair Work Committee might wish to liaise with them, as they will be giving evidence on

the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill. Members will be aware of that member's bill that is before Parliament.

The issue is on the Government's agenda. We are happy to work with committees and members who introduce members' bills, but we are committed to the first strategy.

**Graham Simpson:** Okay. That is interesting. I did not know about that strategy. That is possibly something that the committee should look at.

**Richard Lochhead:** When I write to the committee following my appearance today, I will be happy to incorporate that.

**Graham Simpson:** Has that strategy not been written yet, but is just being worked on?

**Richard Lochhead:** We have given a commitment to introduce the strategy in this parliamentary session. I think that work on it is imminent. As I said, my ministerial colleagues will give evidence to your colleagues on the Education, Children and Young People Committee on progress and will respond on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill.

**Graham Simpson:** Okay. That is very useful.

I will ask you one more question, which goes back to data. Do you have any idea how many disabled people are employed in your department?

**Richard Lochhead:** I have Scottish Government figures, but I do not have a breakdown. I am impressed by the latest Scottish Government figures. I think that I am right in saying that, through the Scottish Government's recruitment and retention action plan for disabled people, which was introduced a few years ago, we have increased the amount of disabled employees in the Scottish Government from 6.4 per cent in 2013 to 13.3 per cent in 2021. Therefore, the figure more than doubled in eight years.

Teams are set up in the Scottish Government to help to adapt workplaces so that they are accessible in order to help in recruitment of disabled people. A lot of good work is happening in the Scottish Government. I hope that that gives members some reassurance that we are trying to set an example.

**The Convener:** Those of us who visited the National Autistic Society in Scotland on Monday heard positive reports about the work that the Scottish Government has undertaken on employing people on the autism spectrum. The society was very favourable about the work that is being done. There was comment on whether, if that work could be learned from, that example

could be used to encourage other employers. That points towards the need for more joined-up and connected policy.

Earlier, the point was made that where something is working well, it needs to be recognised, spread throughout the country, and used as a good example. Maybe that is not happening enough. There are pockets of progress and pockets in which things are not progressing, and we do not know what is happening where. That goes back to the data question.

When we visited the National Autistic Society, a strong point was made about the need for specialist support for young people in schools. We might be looking at the issue from an education perspective, but the case was made that specialists are needed. Often, that requires third sector involvement in education. That support needs to be funded.

I understand that that issue is not in your portfolio, but it crosses over. If you are looking at bringing those young people into employment and making them productive members of society, they need specialist support, which is maybe not always available in schools. More focus on that is needed. That might be something that you could feed back.

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes. I will certainly do that.

**The Convener:** We will speak to the Education, Children and Young People Committee about the work that it is doing.

**Richard Lochhead:** It is worth mentioning—perhaps I should have mentioned this in response to Graham Simpson's point—that some trials are under way. We are working on an initiative with the Association for Real Change. Ten local authorities are currently being worked with, and some of the things that I spoke about with Graham Simpson are being trialled. As I said, we are committed to introducing a national strategy in this parliamentary session. The trial is designing and testing changes that would improve planning and delivery of support for young people who need additional support as they make the transition into young adult life. I would be happy to follow up with more information about that for the committee.

I think that that gives reassurance that those issues are on the agenda and that things are now, for the first time, being implemented and trialled. I would be happy to come back to the committee on what my education colleagues are doing.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Witnesses have raised the issue of the inconsistency of support services across the country. Specifically, they have said that their quality and range is a bit of a lottery.

That is particularly true in remote and rural areas, where it seems that there is a limited number of service providers, and that there is poor transport and poor digital connectivity in some places. The Scottish Government has the “no one left behind” model. How can the Scottish Government ensure that minimum service levels are offered while retaining some flexibility?

**Richard Lochhead:** We carried out a review of supported employment, which reported last year. We are working through the recommendations. I would want to double-check which recommendations might link to your question, because a lot of issues along those lines, which we have given a commitment to take forward, were identified.

On the “no one left behind” approach, I take your point about needing a single standard across the country and there being a postcode lottery. Obviously, if the committee has more to say about that in its inquiry, I will certainly want to hear it.

The “no one left behind” approach is about person-centred support so that, locally, people can have help that is bespoke for their needs. The case worker who helps them will deal with transport and other issues. We are trying to take a person-centred approach so that, if a person has transport challenges in a rural area or elsewhere, they will get advice and help with that as part of their support package.

We are trying to address the issue through taking a person-centred approach to help people. That could be about help with childcare or transport. The approach has been developed over the past couple of years, and we are hoping to build on it.

**Colin Beattie:** Do you have any comparative data on provision of services in more rural and remote areas and in urban areas?

**Richard Lochhead:** I expect that the Scottish Government has such data. I will happily come back to the committee on that. I will find out whether we have that information. I am sure that it must exist at national level.

**Colin Beattie:** That would be interesting. Obviously, we are very anxious that people in Scotland’s rural areas are not left behind. The inconsistency and logistical difficulties in providing the support that is needed seem to be problems not just in this matter, but in many services.

10:15

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes. You are absolutely right that the issues affect our rural communities. We have a forum—I am trying to remember its name—for disabled people and people with mobility issues that advises on transport policy

and works with transport colleagues. There is an “access to work” theme, as well. I do not have the name of that forum in front of me but, I give members the assurance that it exists. I will happily send details of the forum to the committee. I am sure that it has its own workstreams and issues that it is looking at.

**Colin Beattie:** I have mentioned the obvious comparison between rural areas and urban areas. However, it is reported that there is inconsistency in support across the country, including among urban areas. Do you have any data on that, so that we can compare support in places such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, where, obviously, there are greater concentrations of people who want to use the services?

**Richard Lochhead:** I do not have exactly such information. As I have said, we have moved towards the “no one left behind” approach over the past two or three years at a decentralised local level in order to allow local employment partnerships to come up with bespoke solutions for their areas. Many of the projects that are funded locally are for disabled people and other people who are far from the labour market. The approach is very localised.

There is, of course, a platform that brings all the “no one left behind” partnerships together to discuss common issues. I hope that, discrepancies and postcode lotteries are identified at the national level. However, I do not have any direct data that compare different areas that I can give to the committee.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Just before I start, I note—I do not mean to sound unfair—that you have come to a committee meeting on the disability employment gap but you cannot tell us the number of disabled people who work in your department and you think that there is data on rural areas and wider afield but you do not have that information to hand. I would have thought that that information would be fairly standard in trying understand the picture across Scotland, and that you would be able to provide it. It would certainly be helpful to get whatever information you have. Others have mentioned data: I wonder whether that shows that we are not getting full data. How can we look at the problems if we do not have that information?

I will following on from what was said about there being a postcode lottery. You represent a seat in the Highlands and Islands and I represent the region. It is harder to deliver services in rural areas and it is harder to access services in rural areas. The issue goes wider than just the services themselves; it involves transport, connectivity and information technology, as others have said. How do you liaise with others—such as the transport minister or those who are responsible for digital—

to ensure that the work that you have responsibility for is deliverable through others' areas of responsibility?

**Richard Lochhead:** The plans and policies that we have in the Government are signed up to by all the relevant policy areas. The transport question is a wider question that affects disabled people and other parts of the population. As I have said, there are specific forums that include people who have mobility issues, and their views are fed into transport policy. There is collective government: all policies are reflected through all areas of the Government.

I gave you the Scottish Government statistics. I do not have a breakdown of the number of disabled people working for individual Government departments—if it exists, I will send it to the committee—but I thought that the question was about the Scottish Government's track record and, therefore, I gave an answer that I thought was a good and credible one on that issue, so I think that you are being slightly unfair when you ask whether I have brought a breakdown of every policy section in the Scottish Government. However, if that exists, I will—

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I might be wrong, but I think that Mr Simpson's question was about your department. I can check. It would certainly be helpful to get that breakdown.

**Richard Lochhead:** If it exists, I will send it to the committee.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** If it does not exist, do you think it should exist? Should you know the number of disabled people in your department, given that it is your responsibility?

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes—although the Scottish Government civil service has its plan, which I referred to, and I gave you the Scottish Government statistics. I am not the permanent secretary and I am not in the civil service, but I am delighted with the progress that the permanent secretary is making.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** You are the minister, so I would have thought that you might have that information, but I will move on.

We know from the budget that there was a £53 million cut to employability funding. Several issues have been raised about the short timescales to access funding. What impact, given the cut, do you think that will have on the sector and the schemes that have been delivered, and on the wider issue of the employability gap?

**Richard Lochhead:** There is currently just under £70 million for employability support in the draft budget that is before Parliament. The £53.06 million that was initially budgeted for and then removed was not a cut to existing services; the

money was to fund additional work that we wanted to undertake. However, that work will not happen now, because the money has been removed due to budget pressures facing the Government and the cost of living crisis.

The budget will go through Parliament, so the funding will be there for the employability schemes. There were plans for additional work on tackling child poverty and on other ways in which we could play a role in employability schemes and so on, but those things will not happen to the same extent due to budget having been removed.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** So, it was a simple question of budget, rather than a lack of uptake of potential funding?

**Richard Lochhead:** No—it was solely a budget decision. As I said before, additional money was going to come into the portfolio; it is now not coming, as opposed to existing budgets being cut.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I will go back to the point that Colin Smyth made. You suggested that you would look into individual cases that were mentioned because you are not aware of them. However, surely you are aware that the sector has raised issues about the length of funding parcels, because they are looking for funder for longer than a year. What on-going discussions are you having with the sector on that?

**Richard Lochhead:** I have discussions through the employability work. As for Colin Smyth's examples, I am not aware that I have been directly contacted by any of those organisations. Of course, this is all part of the general concern that has been expressed by many organisations in the third sector in particular, which I referred to before. Of course, we are aware of the issue.

There are financial and budget decisions that I am unable to fix because that is above my pay grade in the Government.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Are you aware of representations from the sector that there is a need for longer-term funding?

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes. It is a point that is made regularly—I am not denying that. Ever since I have been an MSP—going back to 1999—the third sector and others have regularly made the point that they would prefer long-term certainty through provision of three-year budgets or whatever. However, because of how the financial settlement is set up for the Scottish Parliament, it is not easy to deliver that.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** I have a couple of quick questions, because much of what I was going to ask about has been covered.

There are 125,000 people of working age who are disabled and have qualifications at degree level, but disabled people who have a degree are less likely to be employed than non-disabled people. Cerebral Palsy Scotland has suggested that there is a need for an online hub, so that people can find out information and support on employing a disabled person. Is that something that already exists, or is it something that the Government would consider?

**Richard Lochhead:** I am not aware that such provision exists at the moment. Lewis Hedge might be able to say something about that.

**Lewis Hedge:** I can give a slightly general answer. I am not aware that there is such a data point. This relates to the convener's point about promulgating good practice. You will see that one of the actions in the fair work action plan is on gathering employers' existing good practice, what we learn in the Scottish Government as an employer, and output from what we fund through the workplace equality fund—public social partnerships and so on—and bringing it all together in one place as a package of information support for employers. We are very active on that, at the moment.

There is a lot of good work already out there. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development already has its own resources, as do others, so there is a question about exactly what gap we are trying to fill. There is an issue about bringing all that together.

**Gordon MacDonald:** You mentioned that, over the past eight years, the Scottish Government has doubled the number of disabled people that it employs. However, when Enable Scotland gave evidence to the committee two weeks ago, it said:

“At times, we find it most challenging to work with the public sector.”—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee*, 25 January 2023; c 28.]

What is your perception? We have the public sector, the private sector and the third sector. Do we have any data that highlights the proportion of disabled people who are employed in each sector?

**Richard Lochhead:** I would certainly revert to the public social partnerships, which we fund. They bring together the private sector, the public sector, the Government and disabled people's organisations. I would revert to them to see whether there is a breakdown of their work and the statistics that you are looking for.

I hope that the public sector is an exemplar, and will be disappointed if there is part of the public sector in Scotland that is not accessible to disabled employees. You have taken evidence and I await your report. If the issue is identified as a problem, we will take that very seriously.

On the wider point that was made earlier about disabled people who have qualifications, we are always open to new ideas about how to address that. It is, of course, symptomatic of the wider disability employment gap and how we need to change the culture in Scotland and in our workplaces.

**The Convener:** Before I bring in Maggie Chapman, I will just say that what Enable Scotland described in its evidence about the private and public sectors was that there is more flexibility in the private sector. We heard that it was easier for it to make connections with the private sector. It runs things such as academies, where it takes in maybe 10 clients who spent a week at a workplace and would then go through the formal application process. Enable found that the public sector does not have the same degree of flexibility and responsiveness as the private sector. It is not that the public sector is reluctant to employ people; the issue is that in the private sector the lead-in time is better and the relationship building is easier. That gives a bit more background to what we have just been discussing.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** Good morning. Thank you for being here and for what you have already told us. I want to focus on two areas: I will drill down into progress on participation rates in the labour market, and the action plan and targets.

On participation rates, we have heard already this morning that there has been progress, but we cannot necessarily pinpoint what has been successful, or why it has been successful in certain places. I will pick up on a couple of things.

First, what do you need to know in order to identify what is and is not working, and are you confident that we have a plan to get that information? There are the raw numbers, but Michelle Thomson talked about the culture; there is something other than just the numbers.

I have a couple of other questions that might relate to Colin Smyth's and Jamie Halcro Johnston's points about there being a postcode lottery. The participation figure is a nationwide figure. Are you sure that it is not masking further inequality, either in geographic areas or in sectors? Since the call for views, we have had a response from NHS Tayside's disability employment network that says that the gap seems to be widening again after initial progress. Can you drill down into that a bit more so that we understand the sectoral and geographical variations, and the intersectional issues, such as whether older disabled people are more disadvantaged than younger disabled people, for instance? Can you say a bit more about those matters?

10:30

**Richard Lochhead:** Your questions sum up the complexity of the issue that we are discussing today; there is no easy answer to some of them. I will address your first question first, then come to the second one.

The first question was about where the best interventions are and what makes the biggest difference. My point earlier about not being able to identify specific reasons why we are making progress was about the combination of practical support for people and changing culture, particularly in workplaces. The latter is quite difficult to measure, but we want it to happen and it is beginning to happen. The extent to which progress is due to practical support or due to culture changing is difficult to measure. That is the point that I am trying to make.

Since you have asked the question, I will say that I think that the biggest obstacle is culture change in workplaces. If we can open the minds of all employers in Scotland to the fact that there are steps that they can take to tap into the massive talent pool that we have in this country, in the disabled population who are not in work, that will clearly help to address these inequalities. We must focus on culture change. There are some positive signs—especially, as we have said before, in some big employers. I think that the convener just said that some of the feedback that the committee has had is that the private sector is now doing much more to be adaptable and flexible. Culture change is the biggest area.

As to how we identify disparity across the country in our interventions, including the “no one left behind” strategy, every partnership at the local level should be looking at the local labour market and coming up with projects and initiatives and funding workstreams to address that. “No one left behind” is a relatively new approach, so we must understand why some areas are performing better than others and we must identify gaps.

**Maggie Chapman:** I suppose that that links to the point about progress on the action plan and the targets. You have identified very clearly that we are on course, at the moment. Do you sense that we will continue with that linear progress, or is there a possibility that it will either speed up or hit a plateau? What is the assessment of the rate of progress over the next 15 years?

**Richard Lochhead:** Our fair work action plan includes an aspiration that Scotland will become a leading fair work nation by 2025 and contains a lot of measures to push that forward. As I said previously, we now have labour shortages in Scotland, but we also have talent pools of people who could be working. Now is the time for employers to be more open minded, adaptable

and flexible and for the Government to play as big a role as possible. It is important that we speed things up.

**Maggie Chapman:** You have talked about the importance of culture change. I think that there is a balance to be struck between supporting people at different stages of their lives and supporting and encouraging culture change among employers. Do you see a challenge in respect of the person-centred support that the policies and plans are based on and broader structural and systemic matters? This might relate to the joined-upness that we need in the data, and to how we think about enhanced inclusion for everyone. Where do you see the balance being between focusing on support for the individual and making structural changes, whether in making sure that there is inclusive transport in rural areas, or whatever? How do we get that balance right and how do we get joined-upness across the Government? That is not only your responsibility; it connects to so many other areas.

**Richard Lochhead:** As I said in my previous answer, there is a responsibility across the Government to support the fair work agenda, whether in respect of transport, childcare or education. It is the job of all those areas to support the fair work agenda.

Your question is good, but the person-centred approach must identify barriers in the local context then work with local partners to knock down those barriers. We all represent areas of Scotland; our local employment partnerships should be delivering person-centred approaches, as fair start Scotland, which is a national initiative, does. They should be identifying barriers and working with partners to knock them down. The benefit of a person-centred approach is that it identifies the individual’s barriers and works with local partners to knock them down.

**The Convener:** I will soon bring in Fiona Hyslop.

You referred to the fair work action plan. There are only two references to people with learning disabilities in that plan. Maggie Chapman asked about our being at risk of reaching a plateau in progress. The Fraser of Allander Institute report to which I referred earlier indicates that people with learning disabilities remain those who are furthest away from the workforce. There is not enough progress being made in that respect. If we do not make progress in that area we risk not meeting the target. Does the Scottish Government agree with that analysis, and is there a clear focus on people with learning disabilities being a group whom we need to concentrate on if we are to meet the target?

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes, absolutely. There are some projects under way. I have mentioned the Salvesen Mindroom Centre and other relatively new projects that are looking at the issues.

Of course, the fair work action plan is about the employment gap that faces racial minorities, the disability employment gap, the gender employment gap, the gender pay gap and so on. The disability employment gap is a big part of it, but the plan applies much more widely than just to disabilities.

In 2021, the Scottish Government adopted the "Learning/Intellectual Disability and Autism Towards Transformation" plan. Various recommendations from that have been taken forward. All those things are being joined up and there are specific actions being taken within the employment sphere. I want to assure you that the issues are being addressed. I am happy to include that in my response to the committee.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** You talk about an all-Government approach and you will be aware that the Government is planning to introduce a learning disability, autism and neurodiversity bill that will also include a proposal for a national commissioner, which the National Autistic Society in Scotland is very keen on. What engagement have you had with the relevant minister on development of that bill? Do you see it as an opportunity and vehicle to improve legislation on employability of people with disabilities?

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes. You have highlighted the forthcoming bill; my officials will be engaging on that in relation to the employment sphere. Although it will not be a bill that is just about employment, we will certainly engage on it. Engagement has begun already, but things are at quite an early stage. Susan Ferguson will come in to elaborate on her involvement.

**Susan Ferguson:** We have been working very closely at official level on the bill and will continue to do so. Between May and July 2022 we undertook scoping work with a range of people and organisations, including people with lived experience. I think that there were 30 events with 18 organisations involved. We will consult on the bill in the second half of 2023 and are setting up mechanisms to engage with policy colleagues who deal with various issues across the Scottish Government, people with lived experience, practitioners and stakeholders. We are putting that in place to inform development of the consultation that will take place later this year.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Can you share any early employability themes that you have identified to date, following the work from last year?

**Susan Ferguson:** I cannot, at this point. I can find out whether anything specific has been identified and respond to you separately.

**Fiona Hyslop:** We would be very interested in that.

Pam Duncan-Glancy's Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill is making its way through Parliament. What engagement have you or your officials had on that, minister, in trying to influence the bill, and what employability themes will you support within that bill?

**Richard Lochhead:** That work is being led by the education and equalities ministers and we are keeping a watching brief on it. I have not had direct involvement with the bill as a minister, but the work is at quite an early stage; we are waiting for feedback from the other ministers. The bill will indirectly impact on employability issues, so we will look at that closely.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will move on to cross-cutting work. You said that there is an all-Government approach and that your role in ensuring that all ministers are actively looking at employability is important. The developing the young workforce initiative is very effective in bringing different groups together, led by the private sector. What progress has been made to ensure that employability for young people with disabilities is embedded in activity in developing the young workforce? Are there good examples of, or feedback on, how that is improving?

**Richard Lochhead:** The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, Jamie Hepburn, has answered questions on that in Parliament in the past few weeks. I refer the committee to his answers; he laid out how that is being addressed and is leading on it. There is a lot in his answers to Parliament about the interaction between supporting young people with disabilities and developing the young workforce and the skills agenda.

**Fiona Hyslop:** We will certainly look at that.

I will pick up on the points that Graham Simpson raised. We were struck by the evidence that we have heard that young people's expectations can be set really early. That applies to all young people, but particularly to young people with disabilities. You have referred to culture. The culture among those who work in early years and primary education and the connection with parents are really important. What interventions can take place to ensure that everyone knows young people's capabilities for the future and that they just have to be given support? It is about having a culture of expectation that young people with disabilities can do things, that the world is there for



them and that they will be able to take part in employment. Are we doing enough in that area?

**Richard Lochhead:** The answer is probably no. A lot of new work is under way, which we referred to in answer to earlier questions, to support this agenda in schools and, in particular, on the transition of young people from school to young adulthood. It is now recognised that we have to do a lot more.

It is exciting that new policies and plans will be developed in the coming months and years to address some of the issues. No doubt, there is a lot more we could do in schools to promote equalities and to support disabled people to be prepared for employment.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Finally, like the convener, I was struck by comments that the public sector is perhaps falling behind the private sector in how prepared organisations are to support people into employment. The default assumption might be that things would be the other way round, but that is the steer that we are getting. You referred to the permanent secretary. Clearly, as the leader of the civil service, he is in a strong position to ensure that the issue is addressed. Will you take that up with him? Will you have that discussion with him, not just about his leadership of the civil service but about the fact that there is a leadership role for the permanent secretary across the public sector?

**Richard Lochhead:** Absolutely. I, too, was struck by the comment that that has been identified as an issue. The benefit of having a committee inquiry is that it can take evidence and flag up issues to Parliament and ministers. I will definitely take away that message from today and investigate the matter. I also await the committee's recommendations.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** I have a couple of final questions. Written submissions from Enable Scotland and Social Enterprise Scotland have said that the focus has been on providing support to get disabled people into work but that that maybe does not recognise the importance of in-work support and the need to ensure that it is sufficiently funded to enable people to retain employment.

Enable Scotland has pretty good figures on retention, but that has been achieved through one-to-one support from workers who are not overloaded by their case load and who can provide the level of support that people need. Is it recognised as an important part of the strategy to increase employability and decrease the gap that the issue is about not just getting people into jobs—although that will have an impact on the gap—but is also about retention and keeping people in employment?

We heard yesterday about career progression. It is not just about getting people into employment; it is also about the ambition and aspirations that can be achieved through that. Is that recognised as an important part of what we need to do?

10:45

**Richard Lochhead:** In answering that, I have to refer to the fact that many of the issues are reserved to the UK Government. The access to work scheme is probably the most obvious source of funding for employers, and it is quite substantial funding—I would have to check the figure, but I think that more than £60,000 can be made available to adapt workplaces to allow access to work for disabled people. That is a UK Government responsibility; it is not the Scottish Government's.

That scheme has a very important role, and I understand that one of the issues with it is simply to do with raising awareness among employers that the support is available from the UK Government. Maybe the Scottish Government could play a bigger role in raising awareness. That funding is not our responsibility, so we cannot take responsibility for it per se, but your point is valid. We want employers to know that assistance is there and that it is substantial.

The answer to your question is that support is available and that it is a UK Government scheme. We have funded specific projects on working with employers, but the financial support for individual cases is through the access to work scheme.

On the culture in workplaces, your point about career progression is important. Again, that is a cultural issue for employers and it could take us into reserved areas. There are on-going debates about mandatory reporting of figures on disabled employees. I do not know whether that would include figures on managerial positions and so on, but there is a debate about mandatory reporting for employers, which is a reserved issue. UK ministers are looking at a number of issues just now. I know that a House of Commons committee in 2021 carried out a similar inquiry to this one on the disability employment gap. I do not know whether the committee has seen that.

**The Convener:** We have heard about the access to work programme which, as you say, is quite well funded. We have heard about difficulties with delays and with the application process, so we will follow that up.

However, my question was not just about that type of support; it was also about the support that we give in Scotland to the third sector and other organisations. Those organisations have talked about the importance of continuity of services. An organisation that has helped someone to gain

confidence to apply for a job and has got them through that is often the organisation that is best placed to provide in-work support.

Funds will sometimes be drawn down from the access to work scheme, but at other times that is funded by the Scottish Government or by local authorities. We heard positive feedback about Dundee and Edinburgh councils, which have decided to give some security of funding to organisations to continue that work. That goes back to the postcode lottery question, because it is not happening everywhere.

The access to work programme is important, and people should have more information about it and be able to access it; it should have a higher profile. However, that aside, does the Scottish Government recognise that there is a job to do to support people once they are in employment to secure their employment, and to ensure that organisations are funded to provide that? Do you see that being part of the strategy?

**Richard Lochhead:** Yes. I am happy to take that point away. If that is what organisations have raised with you, we will certainly take that on board. I am happy to discuss that with such organisations. I meet them quite regularly and I make visits around the country, so I know that good stuff is happening. However, clearly if there are issues, I am happy to find out more about them.

**Lewis Hedge:** On the devolved element, in fair start Scotland, as well as the 12 or 18 months of support for the individual progressing towards work there is up to 12 months of in-work support for the individual and the employer. I am happy to provide more information on what that is and how it looks, but we provide that for the first year.

**The Convener:** That is helpful.

**Richard Lochhead:** Like the committee, I have visited fair start Scotland projects and offices around the country. I was at the opening of the new office in Ayr a month or so ago, and I met disabled people whose lives have been turned around by getting work through fair start Scotland. I am sure that you have heard similar stories. It is humbling and heart-warming to hear how people's lives have been transformed by getting into work. A lot of good stuff is happening but, as I said, if there are gaps, we want to know about them.

**The Convener:** We met clients in Dundee, and it was great to hear about their experiences of support and how it had changed their lives. However, in Dundee, we also discussed unmet need. Although the organisation there works with quite a lot of people, it still recognises that there is huge unmet need out there among people who are not accessing services and not getting into employment. There is untapped potential and

opportunity in our workforce. We want the Government to ensure that the target is reached, that more investment is put in and that that group is supported.

My final question is on the Social Enterprise Scotland report that referred to the pay gap. As well as the disability employment gap, there is a pay gap—for every £1 that a non-disabled employee earns, a disabled employee earns 83p. There is a gap of almost £4,000 between the yearly salaries. Does that come under the Government's fair work agenda? Has it been looked at? How do we address the pay gap for disabled people?

**Richard Lochhead:** We are aware of that, and it is part of our thinking in the fair work agenda. Under devolved responsibilities, we are very limited in what we can do on the disability pay gap, but we want to look at ways of involving the fair work agenda. I think that the House of Commons committee that I mentioned looked at the issue, as well. It did not press for mandatory reporting on pay, because it felt that that might disadvantage disabled people in getting on to the first rung of the ladder or getting into the workplace to start with. I am sure that there are a lot of debates on that.

All that I can say is that the issue is part of our fair work thinking and that it is, again, a complex issue to address. We can only address that through fair work and influencing people and employers; we do not have legislative power over the issue.

**The Convener:** That brings us to the end of the evidence session. I thank the minister and the officials for the evidence that we have heard this morning. We now move into private session.

10:52

*Meeting continued in private until 11:31.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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