

ECONOMY AND FAIR WORK COMMITTEE

**4th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
8 February 2023**

Disability Employment Gap

Note by the Clerk

Background

1. At its meeting on 14 December 2022, the Committee agreed to undertake preliminary scrutiny work around the disability employment gap.
2. “Disability employment gap” is the term used to refer to the difference in employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people. Statistics show that the disabled people in Scotland have a lower employment rate than non-disabled people.
3. The Committee held an initial evidence session on [25 January](#) to explore the structural barriers disabled people face in accessing the labour market.
4. On 30 January a small group of Committee members visited [a project run by ENABLE](#) to see the work being done to help people with additional support needs enter employment. A further visit to the National Autistic Society Scotland will take place on 6 February for members to learn about [their work in helping autistic people to enter employment](#).
5. The purpose of today’s evidence session is to hear from the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work on the work done by the Scottish Government in this area, and to hear the Minister’s response to points made in the previous evidence session.

Call for Views

6. The Committee has [launched a call for views](#) which will remain open until 16 February.
7. **Responses received so far to the call for views [can be accessed here](#).**
8. In addition to the responses received online, written responses were received from the following organisations and are included as an annexe to this paper—

- ENABLE Scotland
- National Autistic Society Scotland
- Social Enterprise Scotland

9. The Committee will come back to this topic later in the year and all views provided following this evidence session will be considered at that point.

Witnesses

10. The Committee will hear from—

- Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work;
- Susan Ferguson, Interim Deputy Director for Complex Mental Health Care; and
- Lewis Hedge, Deputy Director for Fair Work and Labour Market Strategy, Scottish Government.

**Economy and Fair Work Committee Clerks
3 February 2023**

Written submission received from ENABLE Scotland

About ENABLE Scotland and ENABLE Works

ENABLE Scotland was founded in 1954 by five sets of parents of children who had a learning disability who believed that their children had the same rights as everyone else to live the life they choose as an equal member of the community. 68 years later, this remains what ENABLE Scotland believes and fights for today. Discussions with our members (people who have a learning disability and family carers of people who have a learning disability) through ENABLE Scotland's Scottish Council have informed this response.

ENABLE Scotland is part of the ENABLE Group – one of the country's largest care charities, with income exceeding £50m in 2021/22, and delivering 2.5 million hours of social care and support each year to more than 1,000 people across 27 of Scotland's local authority areas.

Across the Group's three pillars, we deliver community projects and campaigns, employability and training, and human rights-driven self-directed social care and support for over 9,000 people throughout Scotland. ENABLE Scotland's charity is empowered by a 12,000 strong membership and supporter base, and provides direct support to over 2,500 individuals each year as follows:

Campaigns – collective advocacy to break down barriers to an equal society and full access to human rights for all people who have a learning disability.

Connects – access to high quality information, advice, and advocacy support for individuals and families about their rights to support.

Communities – community-based services which develop inclusive opportunities for all, including Local Area Coordination, 30 affiliated branches and 22 self- ACE groups.

Enable Works

ENABLE Works is one of the largest and most successful specialist employment support teams in Scotland. ENABLE Works delivers the following programmes:

Stepping Up - A transformational school-based programme enabling school leavers with additional support needs to successfully transition into employment, modern apprenticeships, further education or training.

Breaking Barriers – Opening up access to higher education and real work-life experience with major corporate employers for young people who have a learning disability. Delivered in partnership with Strathclyde Business School, Edinburgh Napier University, Scottish Power, STV and EY, and expanding further to new partner employers in 2023.

All In – Supported employment programmes for people with disabilities or long term health conditions, including training, soft skills-building, interview technique, work

placements, and – crucially – ongoing support once in employment to boost job retention.

Diversity and Inclusion – Support for employers to adjust workplace practices, including advice, guidance, disability awareness training, and support with interviews, onboarding, reasonable adjustments for accessibility and health and safety purposes, and mentoring for employees with disabilities.

Questions

What progress has been made since 2016 to reduce and remove barriers faced by disabled people to access Scotland’s labour market?

- As of 2021, the Scottish Government estimated that the disability employment gap was 31.2% (Scotland’s labour market: People Places and Regions – Protected characteristics. Statistics from the annual population survey 2021). The disability employment gap has decreased by 1.4 percentage points since 2019.
- The disability employment rate gap in 2021 was lowest for those aged 16-24 and highest for those ages 35 to 49.
- In terms of people with learning disabilities of the 23,584 adults known to local authorities with learning disabilities, 4.1% are in employment (Fraser of Allander).
- ENABLE Works has had great success with supporting disabled people not only into employment but also to help disabled people gain invaluable skills that are extremely beneficial for employment and more. ENABLE Works is one of the largest and most successful employment support teams in Scotland.
- ENABLE Works supports 650 people into paid work each year.
 - **All In:** ENABLE Works “All In” model is a employment programme that consistently delivers high quality careers for disabled people across Scotland. It is currently delivered in 14 local authorities in Scotland and provides holistic, person centred support for people who have disabilities or long-term health conditions. It delivers 40% job outcomes, which is significantly higher than other supported employment programmes which deliver on average 25% job outcomes. All in delivers 3.5 jobs for the average cost of 1 job on traditional employability programmes.
 - **Stepping up:** Stepping Up is a comprehensive support programme for young people aged 14-19 which takes participants from an initial investigation of the world of work, through a process of discovery and planning for their future, to engagement with employers in real workplace settings. 98% of the young people on Stepping Up go into a positive destination, significantly higher than the national average but more importantly 30% of those young people go into paid employment, 10% go into a Modern Apprenticeship and the other 58% go onto vocationally focussed college and training.

- **Breaking Barriers:** We know very few school leavers with a learning disability go onto attend higher education institutions (10.4% of pupils with a learning disability compared with 48.7% of pupils without a learning disability). [Breaking Barriers](#) is a ground breaking partnership enabling young people who have learning disabilities to attend one of the leading business schools in the UK within a university campus, achieve an accredited qualification and gain real work experience with some of the largest employers in Scotland.

Stepping up and Breaking Barriers are examples of the successes of building on aspirations from an earlier age. This evidences that with the right support, from an earlier age, we are able to have a significant positive impact on the disability employment gap moving forward.

What are the remaining challenges, and why has progress been difficult?

- One of the main barriers for people with disabilities, in particular those with learning disabilities begins prior to entering the workforce or the search for employment. As we know few people with learning disabilities go onto further education and often do not leave school with many qualifications, data from the Summary Statistics for attainment and initial leavers destination, 2022 showed that in 2020/21 17.4% of pupils with a learning disability had no NQ qualifications at level 2 or better, compared with 0.9% of pupils without a learning disability.
- A lack of qualifications can be detrimental to the success of a young person with learning disabilities. Beyond qualifications, young people are not always being supported within higher education to think about employment and their future.
- For many young disabled people there is a postcode lottery of appropriate specialist support to transition into the world of work which cannot be performed by a teacher – for example accessible work placements and work experiences.
- Barriers to employment go beyond education, someone with a learning disability may face multiple barriers to employment. People with learning disabilities may have low aspirations as a result of not being supported to realise their potential as well as a lack of support from those around them. There is the issue of the perception of employers and the overall lack of understanding of what it means to have a learning disability.
- Employer knowledge and confidence is still a major barrier for disabled people looking to access the world of work. Employers need training and guidance on accessible recruitment practices and support to ensure they have a diverse workforce which better reflects the communities they serve.
- Access to work remains a significant barrier for people who require support when they are in the workplace. Clients often wait months for an assessment and the process can often be incredibly stressful.

- In-work support is a vital element of ensuring people can not only gain a job but sustain a job and thrive, however it is often unfunded and there is a lack of focus on the importance of In Work support in sustaining positive outcomes.
- COVID has further exacerbated the issue, and it potentially the cause for the rise in the employment gap from 2019 to 2020. However, COVID has also just reinforced and highlighted the current and existing issues that had yet to be rectified prior to the pandemic.
- Progress has been difficult in part due to the lack of support for young people in education to help them develop those goals and aspirations; COVID has impacted the employability landscape; lack of understanding on how to support people with learning disabilities from the employers end – programmes needed for both the employers support and the employee (again programmes through ENABLE Works provide this support and show that it is beneficial for both the employer and the employee).

What policy measures would you like to see to support disabled people and employers to increase participation rates in the labour market?

- More supported employment programmes building on established models of success:
 - ENABLE Works provides supported employment across Scotland. In 2021/22 the All In programme supported 1,965 people with an employment rate of 40% and the cost per job outcome being £2,333.
 - All In delivers 3.5 jobs for the average cost of 1 job on traditional employability programmes.
 - In 2021/22 ENABLE Works was active in 28 local authorities and supported 4,400 people.
- There is an opportunity with the Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity Bill to ensure that rights of people with learning disabilities rights are enshrined within law with measures to ensure these rights are safeguarded and promoted. We hope this will challenge and address barriers people with learning disabilities face in society, including barriers to employment.
- The Transitions Bill provides an opportunity to better support young people with learning disabilities in their transition from school into employment or further education.
- In 2023, the Institute of Directors established an Independent Commission chaired by Lord Shinkwin to explore how equality, diversity and inclusion in workplaces can be promoted, with the Chief Executive of ENABLE Theresa Shearer contributing to this initiative as member of the Commission. The Commission report '[The Future of Business: harnessing diverse talent for success](#)' makes a series of recommendations to governments and employers to bring about the most favourable conditions for businesses and directors to flourish, with specific reference to gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

ENABLE believes adoption of these policies can also help address the disability employment gap as well as increasing wider diversity in workplaces. While a number of the recommendations are focused on UK Government responsibilities, for example making the right to request flexible working a day one employment right and introducing mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting and disability workforce reporting for employers with 250 or more staff, the report also brings forward practical recommendations the Scottish Government could take forward or encourage businesses in Scotland to adopt including:

- Encourage employers to publish, either as part of their accounts or on their website, details of their inclusion strategy with specific requirements and objectives, along with an annual report on progress.
- Support development and promotion of best practice to establish a culture that promotes increased levels of voluntary self-identification by employees and best practice in analysis and reporting of data to promote greater inclusion.
- Support small and medium-sized enterprises on the best use of data to inform ED&I strategies, for example through the provision of guidance and training on the most useful types of data to collect and data collection, best practice in engaging with employees to encourage self-identification, and translating data into action plans.
- Ensure that all future government economic and industrial strategies include consideration of the importance of fostering a diverse and fair economy with an effective workforce fit for the future, to drive future economic success.

What has been the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people's experience of the labour market?

- A survey conducted by the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities in 2019 found that 64% of respondents had seen changes in the support that they received.
- The social and economic impact of Covid-19 was felt by many across the UK. The pandemic highlighted existing inequalities within the labour force as it exasperated them.
- Covid saw a reduction in support programmes, where possible some moved onto virtual working.
- The third sector plays a crucial role in supporting people with learning disabilities, but as the Fraser of Allander Institute suggests emerging evidence shows that in the wake of the pandemic third sector organisations faced severe funding restrictions.
- Fraser of Allander highlighted that people with learning disabilities in work are disproportionately employed in the sectors that have seen the biggest decline in hours, such as hospitality.

- According to the Office for National Statistics, outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020, 26.5% of people with 'severe or specific learning difficulties' were in employment, in comparison to an average of 53.6% for disabled people.

Appendix: ENABLE Works supporting employees to progress

Dylan's story

Dylan is autistic and has a visual impairment, and first engaged with ENABLE's Stepping Up transitions programme at his school in Airdrie. After leaving school, Dylan applied unsuccessfully for a number of administrative jobs.

ENABLE Works had a vacancy for an administrative role which, knowing Dylan's talents and personality, they thought he would be a good fit for. They designed a skills-based assessment interview, testing his ability with word processing, emails, and databases, rather than asking formal questions in an interview setting.

Dylan's application was successful, and to support him to succeed in the role ENABLE Works:

- Had a dedicated job coach work with Dylan.
- Helped Dylan apply for an Access to Work grant so he could get a taxi from his home and back.
- Ensured all Dylan's tasks were systematically broken down and listed for him, so he could learn the role and recognise which tasks he was struggling with.
- Supplied Dylan with a larger screen and allocated tasks that allowed him to take regular breaks from the computer.
- "Job carved" the role – removed certain parts of the job description he struggled with and might have typically been expected to do. These tasks were allocated to a colleague, with Dylan taking responsibility for some of that colleague's tasks in exchange.
- Gave him headphones to help him avoid distractions in the noisy reception area
- Allocated Dylan a quiet space to rest during lunchtime, as being in a busy office initially had the effect of 'sensory overload'.
- Dylan asked for opportunities for training and continuous professional development and was enrolled into an Enhanced Modern Apprenticeship in Business Administration, which allowed him to use his work to evidence application of learning and was not limited to traditional classroom learning and examination assessments.

He passed in 2019.

Dylan has now progressed to take on additional responsibilities in supporting the ENABLE Works team to train employers, including visiting businesses to talk to their employees about employing someone with autism or a disability.

As Dylan has developed into his role, many of the supports and adaptations put in place are no longer required as his knowledge, aptitude, and confidence have grown, and he was named ENABLE's Young Employee of the Year in 2019.

ENABLE Scotland
20 January 2023

Written submission received from the National Autistic Society Scotland

About Autism

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while there are certain difficulties that every autistic person shares, the condition affects them in different ways. Some autistic people can live relatively independent lives, while others will need a lifetime of specialist support. More than one in 100 people in the UK are autistic.

About Us

The National Autistic Society Scotland is a leading charity for autistic people in Scotland and their families. There are around 56,000 autistic people in Scotland, both children and adults, plus an estimated 225,000 family members and carers. We provide local specialist help, information and care across Scotland to autistic children, young people, adults and their families. We offer a wide range of personalised quality support at home and in the community, both in groups and one-to-one. The National Autistic Society Scotland has delivered employability support to autistic people for over 20 years, as well as providing support to employers.

The Employment Gap for Autistic People

We know that most autistic people want to work but find it difficult to enter employment because of stigma, discrimination and a lack of understanding and awareness of autism in workplaces. It is estimated that the employment rate for autistic people in Scotland is as low as 16%, compared to 50% for disabled people and 73% for the general population.¹

While full-time work won't be right for everyone on the autism spectrum, many autistic people feel under-employed. Others feel they are in low-skilled work and employers don't see their abilities. They see their autism. They see a problem. Meanwhile, employers have told us that they are worried about getting things wrong for autistic employees and that they don't know where to go for advice. Our report on the autism employment gap across the UK found that 60% of employers would worry about getting support wrong, and 60% didn't know where to go to get advice about employing autistic individuals.²

Moreover, autistic young people can find the journey from school to adult life challenging. This is unsurprising given that many autistic children and young people are excluded from education. We undertook research alongside Children in Scotland and Scottish Autism, which found that 34% of autistic children had experienced unlawful exclusion within the previous two years and 28% had been

¹ Scottish Government, [Learning/Intellectual Disability and Autism Towards Transformation](#), March 2021

² The National Autistic Society, [Too Much Information in the Workplace](#), 2016

placed on a part-time timetable. This clearly undermines autistic young people's chances of successfully transitioning to adulthood and into employment.³

We know that autistic young people may require support to increase their chance of a successful transition into further or higher education, training or employment. Yet many of the parents and young people who contact our transition support helpline tell us that they were not involved in transition planning, do not know how to get support from an education/training provider or employer, and face difficulties when trying to access support where it is available.

The Scottish Strategy for Autism included a strategic outcome on employment for autistic people:

“Autistic people are able to participate in all aspects of community and society by successfully transitioning from school into meaningful educational or employment opportunities.”⁴

It specifically committed to evaluating the Supported Employment Framework for Scotland in terms of its impact on the employment of autistic people. While the Strategy resulted in some positive work, including funding six projects to increase understanding of autism which reached 60 employers, barriers to employment for autistic people remain.⁵

The Cross-Party Group on Autism reviewed the impact of the Scottish Strategy for Autism and found that support to enter employment was still lacking. Contributors to the review highlighted challenges with recruitment processes, but also a lack of in-work support when employment was achieved. Similarly, the review found limited progress in improving transitions for autistic people leaving education. Over half of autistic people and family carers who took part in the review did not feel that there was sufficient support transitioning from childhood to adulthood.⁶

Moving Forward+ with CashBack

Moving Forward+ with CashBack is delivered by the National Autistic Society Scotland's Prospects service, which has been supporting autistic jobseekers to prepare for, secure and sustain employment since 1999. With only 22% of autistic adults in employment across the UK, and the autistic employment rate potentially as low as 16% in Scotland, Prospects' experience and expertise is needed more than ever.^{7 8}

Moving Forward+ is funded by the Scottish Government's CashBack for Communities initiative. The programme provides a flexible, person centred pathway to employment

³ Children in Scotland, National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism, [Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved](#), 2018

⁴ The Scottish Government, [The Scottish Strategy for Autism](#), 2011

⁵ Scottish Government, [Scottish Strategy for Autism](#), 2021

⁶ Cross-Party Group on Autism, [The Accountability Gap](#), 2020

⁷ ONS, [Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020](#), 2021

⁸ Scottish Government, [Learning/Intellectual Disability and Autism Towards Transformation](#), March 2021

and other positive activity for autistic young people. In keeping with CashBack priorities, the programme targets autistic young people from communities that fall within the 20% most deprived on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The Moving Forward+ project has two elements: one focussing on autistic young people aged 12-15 who are not attending school (YPNE); and the other on 16–24- year-old autistic young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The success of the programme is evident in the outcomes for participants. Sixty-two percent and 60% of Moving Forward+ participants moved on to positive destinations during 2017-18 and 2018-19, respectively. Since March 2020, 45% of participants have enjoyed similar success, despite the significant limitations placed on the project due to the pandemic.

“Their USP is their person-centred approach. It really is tailored to each young person; you can see that from the feedback I get. No-one else does it.” (Referrer, External Evaluation, June 2022)

“It’s very person-centred because it is very specific. There’s not the same investment in more ‘challenging’ individuals from other providers or such hands on, wrap around and longitudinal support... just CV and job search for 12 months then out the door with no outcomes really.” (Referrer, External Evaluation, June 2022)

Support is tailored to each young person’s needs and can include one to one coaching, group work, work placements and additional support from volunteer mentors, or a combination of all those interventions. Timescales for support are flexible and dependant on each young person’s needs. While most young people will receive support for around twelve months, some require less and others will be supported for longer.

Initially, support involves helping individuals to better understand their autism, exploring their strengths, and develop suitable strategies to help them become more resilient. Young people are then supported to work towards their preferred goals. For some, goals may be employment, training, voluntary work or higher/further education. For others, goals may be related to travelling independently or contributing positively to their communities. Autistic young people who participate are also supported to access social security and other funding to enable independent living.

“I think I’m a lot more sociable and active since participating in Moving Forward+ with CashBack. I definitely am open to trying new things and looking forward to what’s next.” (Participant, Annual Report, June 2022)

“It’s definitely been useful, it’s helped me to accept my autism more. We talked it through and I understand it better. It’s good to have someone to talk to if I feel bad and I think it’s helped my confidence.” (Participant, External Evaluation, June 2022)

Support to young people aged 12-15 who are not engaging in education is a relatively new element of the project, which only began in October 2020. Within focus groups, surveys and external evaluations for our NEET programme,

participants repeatedly fed back that school had been a traumatic experience, so much so that many had stopped attending. They reported that support from Moving Forward+ would have been very helpful at that stage of their lives. In response, we lowered the age range of the project to provide an intervention for autistic young people from Glasgow who have stopped attending school – this became our YPNE programme.

Having disengaged with education and living within some of the city's most disadvantaged areas, these young people are particularly isolated and extremely vulnerable. Many have complex challenges and are in crisis. Despite these challenges, there has already been some significant success. In the 18 months since we started, 38% of young people have already improved their attendance at school because of the support they have received. In addition to improved wellbeing, re-engaging with education helps these young people improve their prospects of future employment. The innovative approaches used were highlighted at the Autism-Europe International Congress in October 2022.

“Moving Forward+ with CashBack has completely transformed [my son] for the better. My son has become more mature, he’s so calm and his anxieties have eased tremendously. Just knowing he has an outlook each week, a purpose, something he can engage in and feel comfortable, has made him all the more confident within himself.” (Parent, Annual Report, June 2022)

“I am feeling positive that I will get a job in the future. I now recognise that when a problem arises it is not the end of the world. I feel I am beginning to develop skills that would make me more employable.” (Participant, External Evaluation, June 2022)

A Commissioner for Autistic People and People with a Learning Disability

Many autistic people are excluded from opportunities, including employment opportunities, and cannot participate fully in their communities because they don't get the support to which they are entitled as equal citizens. While there are pockets of good practice and innovative approaches, like our Moving Forward+ programme, there is clearly a gap between the services and support that people have a right to and what they actually receive.

That is why we are campaigning for a commissioner that can protect and promote the rights of autistic people and people with a learning disability. Our joint report with Scottish Autism – Closing the Accountability Gap – found that 96% of autistic people, family carers and professionals that responded to our survey support the concept of a commissioner.⁹

Despite having been announced in the 2021 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government has said that the consultation on the Bill will not begin until the second.

⁹ National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism, [Closing the Accountability Gap](#), January 2023

half of 2023. This is, of course, disappointing and concerning not least because the longer this legislation is delayed, the more people miss out on much needed support.

People are already waiting too long for diagnosis and social care support, and too long for their rights to be upheld in education and employment. We urge the Scottish Government to rethink this delay and bring the Bill forward sooner rather than later.

Further Information

National Autistic Society welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Economy and Fair Work Committee on the employment gap for autistic people and our work to support autistic young people onto positive pathways. We would be happy to provide oral evidence to the Committee.

**National Autistic Society Scotland
January 2023**

Written submission received from Social Enterprise Scotland

Social Enterprise Scotland is the national intermediary organisation for social enterprise in Scotland. As a membership-led organisation, we represent, promote and champion the work of social enterprises, with a commitment to reflect the views of our members.

We warmly welcome the Economy and Fair Work Committee's call for views on the Disability Employment Gap. Social enterprises work across most sectors in Scotland, and many are set up to create pathways to work and real jobs for people with disabilities, taking an asset-based approach to supporting people to fulfil their potential. With their expertise in supporting people furthest from the labour market, they have a key role to play in addressing the Disability Employment Gap. As the 2016-2026 Social Enterprise Strategy recognises, the sector has 'found ways to successfully reintegrate people with...disabilities into the labour market' and highlighting the ability of social enterprise to 'unlock the full potential of people furthest from the labour market'.

We recently held a session to gather views from members on what more can be done to ensure disabled people can access employment. The following information seeks to answer the four questions asked in the Call for Views whilst promoting the role that social enterprise has in supporting the Scottish Government's ambition to addressing the barriers that people with disabilities face in accessing employment.

What progress has been made to reduce and remove barriers faced by disabled people to access Scotland's labour market?

There have been some areas of progress that have been noted by members. Inclusive recruitment is a key pillar in tackling disability employment and members have reported seeing more Disability Confident employers that take more interest in and implement inclusive recruitment practices. Buildings, particularly newer buildings are also becoming more accessible to people living with disabilities.

It's also worth noting that COVID-19 made home working and flexible working a real possibility which is seen as a real positive in terms of reducing barriers to the labour market for some people.

We would like to highlight the role that the [APT programme](#) has played in designing and delivering services that will improve and advance the prospects of disabled people who are looking to enter or sustain paid work.

What are the remaining challenges, and why has progress been difficult?

There is a perception that some people with disabilities do not want to or cannot work, or that disabled people can't fulfil a role as well as a non-disabled person. It's these perceptions and mindsets that challenge better employment access for disabled people and there needs to be more done to tackle this and raise awareness.

Progress has been difficult because society as it stands isn't designed to accommodate people with disabilities. Society doesn't look at what a person can do based on their ability, but instead looks at someone's disability. This acts as a barrier

to disabled people being able to participate in society and the workplace on an equal basis. To make progress a significant culture change is required to shift how the labour of disabled people is valued the same as a non-disabled person.

There are issues with communication that act as barriers to disabled people getting into employment. We need to make sure that communication is accessible to everyone. For example, some people prefer verbal communication whereas some prefer written, which means all forms of communication must consistently be provided so that disabled people aren't further excluded.

There's a lack of awareness, understanding and knowledge of specific disability needs and conditions which in turn means there's a lack of structure and support for those needs. More education is required across the range of disabilities, with a further understanding that not all disabilities are visible.

What policy measures would you like to see to support disabled people and employers to increase participation rates?

For a start, policy measures need to be made from a perspective that doesn't see disabled people as one homogenous group, with everyone having the same requirements. There is huge diversity within the disabled community and some groups are impacted disproportionately more than others. For example, the employment rate for people with learning disabilities is estimated at 7%. All policy measures should therefore be made with an intersectional approach, with the understanding that people with multiple protected equality characteristics are likely to experience even more barriers to the labour market. This could be helped with better education on the wide range of disabilities.

Employability support needs to be there as and when it is required by the individual, prescriptive, time-limited programmes do not always take a sufficiently person-centred approach. Additionally, whilst the focus has been on providing support for disabled people to get into work, there needs to be more importance and resources put onto supporting disabled people, and those who become disabled to remain in work too.

Looking at the disability employment gap needs to also consider the pay gap within that to ensure parity of labour. For a 35 hour week, a disabled person earns £3,822 a year less than a non-disabled employee or for every £1 a non-disabled employee earns, a disabled employee earns £0.83. On top of that disabled women earn 36% less than non-disabled men. In order to bridge that gap, the labour of disabled people needs to be valued in the same way, not seen as less than.

Members felt that there was a big disconnect between the skills taught and what employers actually need. So despite there currently being high levels of employment and an opportunity to employ disabled people, the skills and training on offer don't match those required. The skills gap has got to be better identified, to see what skills are lacking so that skills development and training can match that. Training and education often also focuses on hard or technical skills but there needs to be equal recognition and focus for soft skills development. The education system must be stronger and more relevant to what people and employers really need.

The importance of meaningful involvement of disabled people in all stages of policy and decision making cannot be overemphasised. There needs to be wide-ranging involvement of disabled people in all areas of employment. There needs to be people with lived experience involved in the design of employability programmes and that needs to be more regular and tangible in the delivery of those programmes, ensuring policy is translated as intended in practice.

There are often misconceptions that adjustments required to support a disabled person in employment can be costly to business, acting as another barrier to employment. Policy makers could do more to showcase concrete examples of that not being the case, and how capable and valued disabled employees can be.

What has been the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people's experience of the labour market?

As we know the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that many jobs can now be done remotely, or with a hybrid way of working. A lot of training and support has now also now moved online. This blended model of working makes employment more accessible for many disabled people. Again, this won't benefit all disabled people as some will face increased barriers from potential home working jobs as people in areas of poor Wi-Fi or those who can't afford digital services/data will be disadvantaged.

Conclusion

The need to bridge the disability employment gap is greater than ever and so further real tangible efforts need to be made to address this. Social enterprises across Scotland already tackle social, health and economic inequalities. They are often specifically set up to create training, work experience and jobs for people with disabilities. They provide workplaces that are supportive and understanding, where the mental health and wellbeing of all employees is paramount, but particularly for those who require certain adjustments in the workplace. Social enterprises focus on what a person can do, not what they can't do and this allows people with disabilities to be nurtured and supported to reach their potential.

Social enterprises often act as a stepping stone for some people, providing a springboard to build skills, confidence and resilience to then move onto 'mainstream' employment. There are real lessons that can be learned from them on how to support people with disabilities. There is potential for social enterprises to work with wider employers to increase their inclusion and diversity in the workplace and to encourage the employment of disabled people, through increasing employers' knowledge, understanding and confidence in this area. We would be happy to provide examples of where partnerships between social enterprises and the private sector has resulted in outstanding outcomes for both disabled people and employers.

Social enterprises are often developed from, and are invested in, their communities. So more often than not, there are relationships and trust built with those communities meaning social enterprises can more easily engage people who are seen as 'harder to reach'. They have knowledge of the local landscape and employment and so know what skills are required and opportunities there are with local employers. It's this knowledge and understanding that the Scottish Government should seek to

learn from when addressing the employment gap and social enterprise could have a real role in helping them do this.

We need to recognise, value, facilitate opportunities for and reward the breadth of the disabled community in the same way that we do the non-disabled community. This means paying people the same and paying people fairly.

Social Enterprise Scotland would be happy to provide any further commentary or evidence if helpful. Please contact [Jayne Chappell](#) (Membership Manager) or [Georgie Price](#) (Policy Officer). Thank you for the opportunity to provide views on the Disability Employment gap.

Social Enterprise Scotland
February 2023