



# Locked out of the labour market

The impact of Covid-19  
on disabled adults in  
accessing good work –  
now and into the future

**Leonard  
Cheshire**



## About Leonard Cheshire

Leonard Cheshire supports individuals to live, learn and earn as independently as they choose, whatever their ability. Led by people with experience of disability, we are at the heart of local life – opening up opportunities, choice and support in communities around the globe.

We have significant expertise in working with disabled people in the UK and internationally to support them to overcome barriers to employment. In the last year alone, we supported over 32,000 disabled people to find employment globally through our programmes. This includes **Change 100**, which supports young disabled students and graduates to access the workplace by undertaking paid internships in top UK companies; **Change Works**, offering employability support to disabled adults in London; and **Changing Futures**, which offers employability training and paid work placements to adults with a disability or a long term condition in Wales.

## About the research

Savanta ComRes interviewed 1,171 working age disabled adults (18 – 65) in the UK between 17 and 30 September 2020. Data were weighted to be nationally representative of working age disabled adults in the UK by age, gender and region.

Savanta ComRes interviewed 502 UK line managers online with a responsibility for recruitment between 17 and 30 September 2020. Savanta ComRes also interviewed 503 UK line managers with a responsibility for recruitment between 29 June and 19 July 2018. Data were weighted in both instances to be nationally representative of employers by region, company size and sector. Where percentage increases between 2018 and 2020 are highlighted, these represent significant differences at 95% confidence levels using a two-tailed z test.

This research is referenced throughout this report and other evidence is also highlighted with links to the sources.

# Covid-19 and disabled people's employment

The Covid-19 pandemic has already had a disproportionate impact on every aspect of disabled people's lives.<sup>1</sup> Two thirds of people who have died from Covid-19 had an underlying health condition or disability and disabled people's quality of life in the pandemic has been severely impaired in recent months.<sup>2</sup> The end of the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme – set to take place on 31 October – is a critical juncture for disabled people, with a higher proportion placed on furlough than non-disabled people. As this financial support comes to an end, urgent action is needed to ensure that increasing numbers of disabled people are not locked out of work and facing poverty due to the lower levels of income replacement provided by the new Job Support Scheme.

Our new research and analysis – based on polling data provided by Savanta ComRes – shows that disabled people have carried the greatest burden in the pandemic. They will continue to carry the burden in the subsequent economic recession and their ability to access work, with knock-on effects on their financial security. The polling shows that Covid-19 has had an impact on the work of 71%

of disabled people who were employed in March 2020.<sup>3</sup> Some are experiencing an increased feeling of being at risk of redundancy, many are required to shield due to increased clinical risk, and the recession has prompted a squeezed job market for young disabled people in their first steps into work.<sup>4</sup> If we don't act now, disabled people will be lost from the labour market – now and into the future.

**Covid-19 has had an impact on the work of 71% of disabled people who were employed in March 2020**



Leonard Cheshire has been calling on the UK Government to develop a jobs recovery plan that embeds a commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 8 at its heart – that by 2030 disabled people should be able to be employed and paid equally to non-disabled people. This would enable a stronger economy to be built on the fairness and equality of a more inclusive workplace in the UK.<sup>5</sup> Despite disabled people being disproportionately affected by the jobs crisis caused by the pandemic, the UK’s national Plan for Jobs only mentions disability once. At Leonard Cheshire, we recently released our own “Plan for Jobs” for disabled people based on the experiences of our employment programmes advisers and what disabled people were telling us about the impact of the pandemic on their ability to access employment.<sup>6</sup> The UK Government must put in place a disability inclusive economic recovery that addresses the needs of disabled people now in the pandemic, while also tackling the long-term obstacles faced by disabled people in accessing the workplace.

As well as revealing the impact on individuals, our research also presents employers’ views and explores what progress has been made in making workplaces more inclusive of disabled people as we enter a period of severe economic instability. Despite some improvement in accessing flexible working and reasonable adjustments, we find that the jobs-shock prompted by the pandemic risks locking disabled people – at every stage of their working life – out of the workplace.

**1 in 5 employers are still hesitant to employ a disabled person**

**42% of employers told us they were discouraged from hiring disabled people due to concerns around supporting them properly during the pandemic**

Our polling shows that 1 in 5 employers are still hesitant to employ a disabled person. This stigma held by some employers is at risk of being exacerbated as a result of the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> 42% of employers told us they were discouraged from hiring disabled people due to concerns around supporting them properly during the pandemic. Given that nearly three quarters of disabled people who were employed in March have had their jobs affected by Covid-19, there are severe risks that disabled people will be cast from the workplace with no route to secure new employment. There are also worrying indications that negative preconceptions persist regarding disabled people’s ability to work. Of employers who told us they were less likely to employ a disabled person, 39% said this was due to the work being physical, manual or demanding.

The issues that we have identified in this report are part of a wider set of additional obstacles faced by disabled people in accessing the workplace – and good quality employment.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the pandemic, disabled people faced a disability employment gap of 28.1%<sup>9</sup> and a disability pay gap of 15%, working out to £1.65 per hour and £3,000 per year, on average.<sup>10</sup> Our 2018 research has previously shown how a disability or



changing condition can cause unstable and precarious employment: with 73% of disabled adults in the UK leaving work due to their health condition or disability.<sup>11</sup> Previous recessions have shown that disabled people are more likely to experience job losses and wage freezes in an economic downturn.<sup>12</sup> There is also substantial evidence that young people will experience a scarring effect on their future careers. Our research bears this pattern out, illustrating that there is a crisis in confidence among a lost generation of young disabled people regarding their future employment prospects, including wages that are up to 20% lower twenty years later than they would otherwise have been.<sup>13</sup>

Many disabled people are clinically highly vulnerable to the virus itself and many work in sectors hit hardest by economic restrictions e.g. retail and hospitality sectors.<sup>14</sup> The Government must now act

to ensure that disabled people – of every age – are not further disadvantaged by the pandemic, now and in the long-term. **We continue to call on the UK Government to put in place measures to support disabled people to find and retain high quality and sustainable work through a Plan for Jobs for disabled people with sufficient protections to ensure that employers are creating jobs that are inclusive of disabled people.**

**The UK Government should introduce a Jobs Guarantee for newly unemployed disabled people, including benefits recipients as well as first time job-seekers leaving education or training.** An entirely voluntary initiative, the Jobs Guarantee would offer six months of paid work and training at the Living Wage as a minimum – with full wrap-around support – and employers would be provided with a grant to cover salaries.

# The hidden impact of Covid-19 on disabled people and work

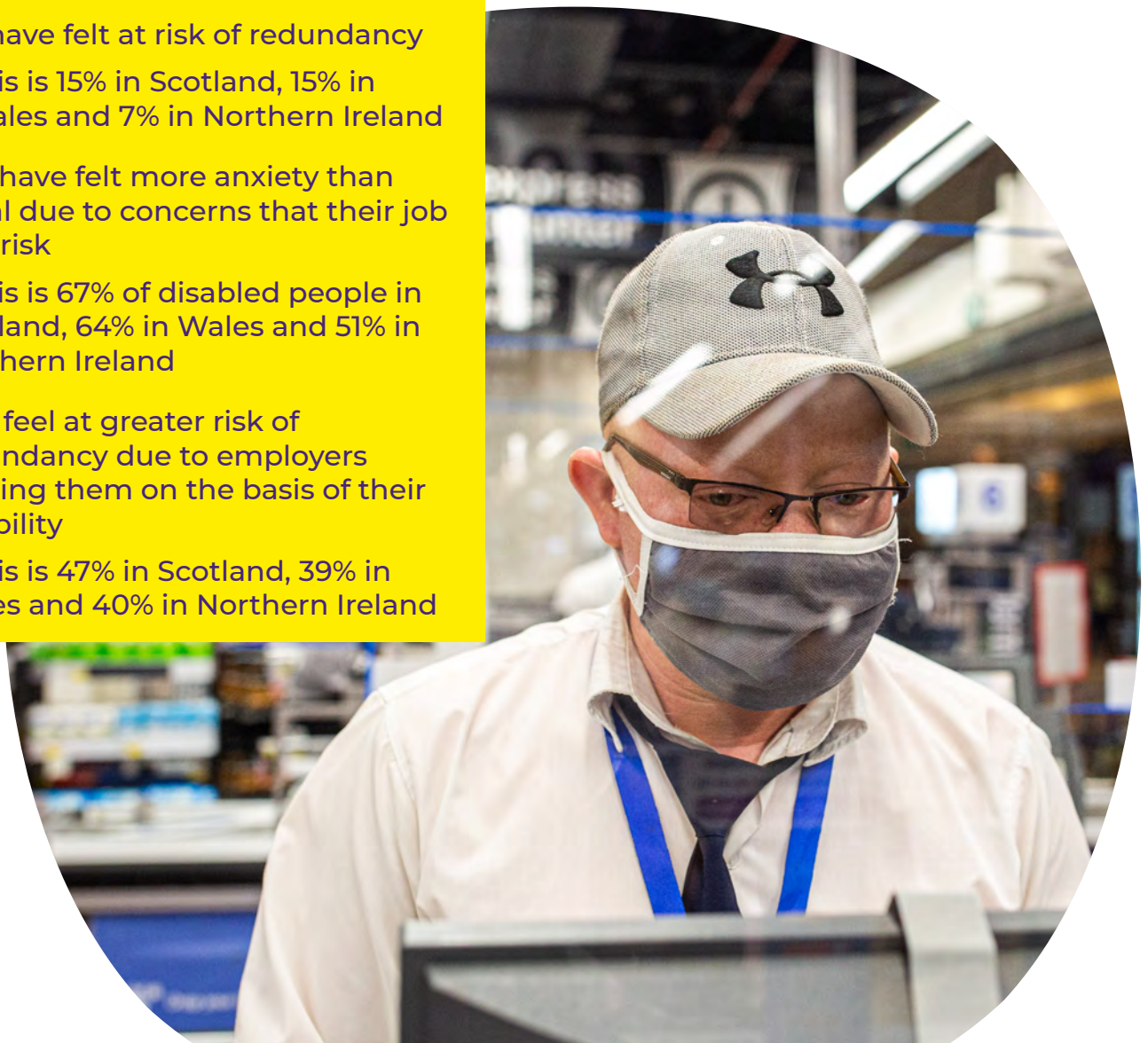
Our new research shows that disabled people currently face profound harms to their financial security and job prospects due to the pandemic. In the UK, 71% of disabled people who were employed in March 2020 have found that their work has been impacted by the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> In Scotland this increases to 82%, in Wales 69% and in Northern Ireland 58%.<sup>16</sup>

## Of disabled people who were employed in March:

- 24% in the UK have since worked reduced hours
  - This is 29% in Scotland, 25% in Wales, 24% in Northern Ireland
- 20% in the UK have since lost out on income
  - This is 25% in Scotland, 25% in Wales and 9% in Northern Ireland
- 11% have felt at risk of redundancy
  - This is 15% in Scotland, 15% in Wales and 7% in Northern Ireland
- 57% have felt more anxiety than usual due to concerns that their job is at risk
  - This is 67% of disabled people in Scotland, 64% in Wales and 51% in Northern Ireland
- 40% feel at greater risk of redundancy due to employers judging them on the basis of their disability
  - This is 47% in Scotland, 39% in Wales and 40% in Northern Ireland

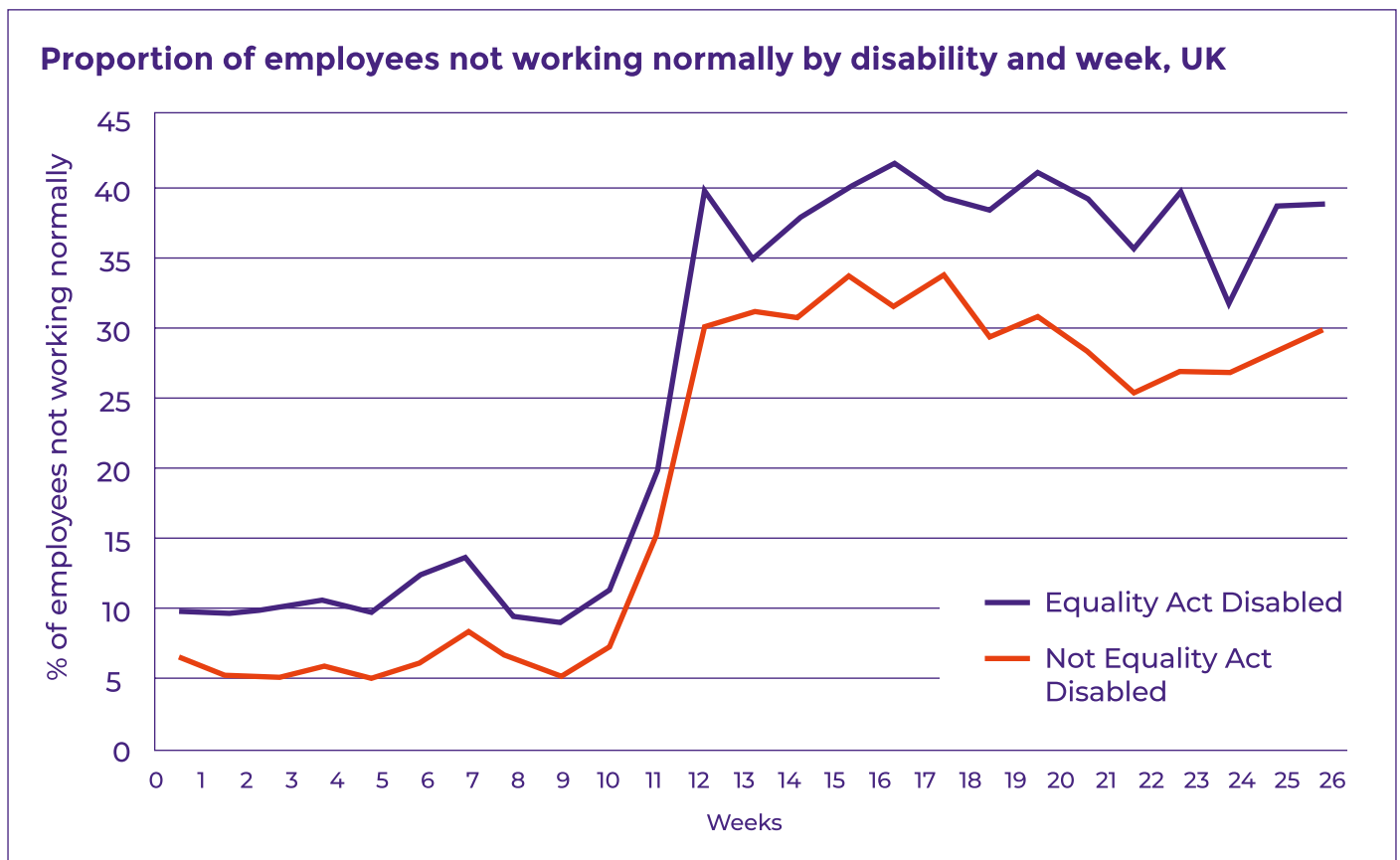
## The impact of furloughing:

- 74% of disabled people in the UK placed on furlough said that Government support through the scheme has helped to protect their job.
- However, of all working disabled people placed on furlough in the UK, 26% have not been able to return to work.



# The impact of the end of the Job Retention Scheme

The coronavirus pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the employment of disabled people. Our analysis shows that disabled people in the UK have been much more likely to have been placed on furlough and working reduced hours in comparison with non-disabled, with 22% of disabled people employed in March placed on furlough and 24% experiencing reduced hours. This supports analysis from March – June 2020 by the Institute for Employment Studies that finds 40% of disabled employees were either furloughed or had their hours reduced, compared with only 30% of non-disabled employees.<sup>17</sup>



Data Source: Analysis of the Labour Force Survey by the Institute of Employment Studies

It is all too clear that when the Job Retention Scheme comes to an end on 31 October, removing this safety net will disproportionately affect disabled people. Across the UK, the highest proportion of those affected seem to be in the older age brackets (39% of those aged 45 – 54 and 33% aged 55-65 versus only 7% aged 18-24).<sup>18</sup> Given that 38% of disabled people report that being placed on furlough has in fact protected their job, the UK Government must again intervene and act to retain and further develop these important gains.<sup>19</sup>

Not all jobs can be conducted at home, and not all jobs – particularly public facing roles – can be made clinically safe for some disabled people who are extremely clinically vulnerable to Covid-19. Although the Government has replaced the furlough scheme with the Job Support Scheme, this intervention involves fewer protections for employees and more scope for employers to opt to make those staff members redundant by determining that those jobs are no longer “viable”.<sup>20</sup> Even where employers opt for the new Job Support Scheme, the lower levels

of income replacement involved raises serious concerns that this will contribute to the financial insecurity already faced by disabled people in the recent months of the pandemic. We are concerned about what it means to be a “viable job” – instead of alleviating pressures on employers, the Job Support Scheme may add to the uncertainty in certain sectors. Setting these interests up in competition could end up squeezing equality duties – and subsequently disabled people themselves – out of the workplace. Given

that being disabled already puts you at higher risk of living in poverty,<sup>21</sup> and that those eligible will only receive two thirds of their income on the Job Support Scheme, we are concerned that this approach could be financially devastating for disabled people. It is critical that the Government puts immediate measures in place so that these individuals remain employed during this period of uncertainty and have their incomes protected throughout the pandemic.<sup>22</sup>

## Protecting a “lost generation” of disabled young people

**There is a growing understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on young people’s access to employment, with indications that 1 million young people will be unemployed as the furlough scheme comes to an end on 31 October.<sup>23</sup> Young disabled people, facing multiple disadvantage, risk being a “lost generation” due to the impact of Covid-19 on the labour market and their participation in work, training and economic participation. Young disabled people, who are either more at risk of unemployment or emerging into the labour market for the first time, must be protected from absorbing the deepest shocks from the Covid-19 recession, both now and well into the future. However, our research shows how disabled young people are now set to bear the greatest impact on their current and future employment prospects.**

The UK Government must learn from the impact of previous recessions on young people. Prolonged spells of unemployment are known to cause long-lasting ‘scars’ on an individual’s future earnings,<sup>24</sup> employment prospects and health and wellbeing.<sup>25</sup> For young people who experience unemployment, the impact is increasingly acute; wages can be up to 20% lower twenty years later than they would otherwise have been.<sup>26</sup> There are also clear costs to the economy. It is estimated that the long-term cost to the public finances of non-participation in education or employment was between £10 billion and £30 billion in 2009.<sup>27</sup> The risks of falling out of work for an extended period are even greater for disabled

people of all ages. They are more likely to struggle to return to the workplace and are twice as likely to remain unemployed when compared to non-disabled people.<sup>28</sup> Yet we know that lifting people out of continuous unemployment – even for short periods – offsets the long-term risk. Swift and direct action is needed from the UK Government to invest in young disabled people’s skills development, employment support and work experience.



## Future career ambitions: a crisis of confidence among young disabled people

- 42% of all working age disabled people in the UK feel that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on their future career ambitions; this was 44% for young people aged 18-24.
- 48% of all working age disabled people felt that the pandemic has had a negative effect on their future earning potential. For people aged 18 – 24, this increased to 54%.
- 45% of all working age disabled people told us that the pandemic had a negative effect on their ability to work, including one in seven who say it has been very negative (14%). For young disabled people, this increases to 71%.
- 71% of all disabled people who were employed in March told us that their work had been impacted by the coronavirus, however young disabled people aged 18-24 are likely to feel the effects even more with 84% reporting an impact on their employment.

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I've just finished university and I've been actively seeking work. I'm clinically high risk. I didn't leave my house for four months at the beginning of the pandemic and I'm now faced with the choice of getting sick or having no income.

Without the certainty that flexible working will continue into the future, it's harder for me. A lot of the jobs I apply for require starting at a rigid time, but my disability means I can't do that and so I end up getting passed over. Now that we know what is possible with flexible and remote working in coronavirus, we have to make sure that employers keep those benefits in place for their staff to level the playing field for disabled people permanently.

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Emma, 23, Birmingham



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**I'm anxious about the way my disabilities will affect the way potential employers and co-workers treat me and I'm unsure of what my rights are in the workplace. After struggling to get the support I needed at university, I worry that I won't be able to get the support I need from an employer either. When my application is unsuccessful, there's always part of me that thinks my disabilities might be at least part of the reason that I didn't get the job.**

**The Government and employers should promote schemes that truly value disabled people and their contributions. Disabled people should be viewed as people who can bring unique perspectives, skills and experiences to the workforce, rather than being seen as inferior to non-disabled employees.**

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**Jude, 24, Hull**



# Older disabled people: on the brink and worried about their futures

There are already indications that the pandemic has had severe effects on the employment of older people. Many have had to face changing expectations for the future and have been forced to take earlier retirement than planned, as well as experiencing an impact on individuals' health. There are also concerns regarding how older people are currently supported to weather unemployment shocks and periods of financial instability.<sup>29</sup> Our research illustrates that older disabled people are worried about not being able to re-train or find a new job if they face redundancy due to the impact of the pandemic. **40% of all disabled people felt at greater risk of redundancy due to employers' attitudes towards their disability.**

It is clear that people are worried about what the future holds for their employment and this is particularly true of older disabled people.

**54% of all disabled adults employed pre-pandemic are not confident about being able to get a new job if they were to become unemployed, however this increases to 68% of those aged 55-65.**

**Half (50%) of all disabled adults employed pre-pandemic are not confident about being able to retrain if they became unemployed, however this rises to 62% for those aged 55-65.**

Introducing our Jobs Guarantee for newly unemployed disabled people in the pandemic would help to address this uncertainty and financial insecurity facing older disabled workers. A comprehensive support package would provide confidence in the future for older people and enable them to develop skills and adapt while retaining the valuable knowledge and expertise that they have developed in the course of their working lives. This would benefit employers and the wider economy as a whole.

Investment in specialist disability employment and training programmes is needed – particularly for older jobseekers. These services are vital for many disabled people in accessing and retaining a job. Through its Plan for Jobs the UK Government pledged to double the number of Work Coaches in Jobcentres and invest further in traineeships and Apprenticeships. Although this investment is welcome, Work Coaches are not specialists in supporting disabled people into work. Further investment in new, targeted programmes as well as existing disability employment support programmes such as Intensive Personalised Employment Support (IPES)<sup>30</sup> is needed – particularly for older jobseekers. Increasing the number of Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres, offering essential tailored support, would make a real difference to the older disabled people who feel that redundancy now may leave them locked out of employment permanently. As many Jobcentres are still closed due to the pandemic, access to support from a Disability Employment Adviser should be offered by phone or online if in-person support is not available.

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I became disabled as an adult at 34 years old. Until that moment I had a great career. It was central to who I was. I worked in TV production for 8 years before moving into the charity sector. After my accident I soon realised I was not capable of doing that job any longer, as my pain and significant mobility challenges meant I needed a flexible schedule. Losing my career meant that I lost who I was entirely. It was a loss financially, vocationally, and socially. I had worked so hard and everything disappeared overnight.



We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revolutionise the workplace and include disabled people. The reality is that the more diverse your employees the better and stronger your organisation will be; the voices of disabled people and the contribution we can make must not be left by the wayside.

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Libby, 43, Hertfordshire

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“When people talk about the current Covid-recession, no one says anything about disabled people who work – and so many of us do work! – and the impact of the recession on us. I fear that disabled people will fall out of work in this recession just because an employer considers them to be inconvenient. Employers should instead be stepping up to their responsibilities and investing in people at this time of insecurity, with incentives from Government. It is extreme short-term thinking making people redundant at this time. A lot of older people may have to change retirement plans if they’re made redundant and are unable to find a new job. A retraining scheme for older people, backed by a serious commitment from Government is needed.”

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Kathy, 60, Ipswich

# We are calling on the UK Government to:

## 1. Introduce a Jobs Guarantee for newly unemployed disabled people with specialist disability employment support.

The UK Government's pledge to invest £1.2 billion in doubling the number of Work Coaches in Jobcentres and invest further in traineeships and Apprenticeships is welcome.<sup>31</sup> However, this must be matched with investment in tailored support that will enable disabled people to seek, secure and retain employment.

- Increase the number of Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentres (in person, by phone and online), greater investment in existing disability employment programmes like IPES – particularly for older job-seekers.
- Recommit to the Maynard Commission's reforms to improve the disability inclusivity of Apprenticeships.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Continue to offer access to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to people who are clinically vulnerable to Covid-19 following the examples of what has worked in other countries.

Our research shows that this is a pivotal moment for disabled people who need ongoing support that will protect their jobs and their income as the pandemic continues. Almost three quarters (74%) of disabled people placed on furlough said that Government support through the scheme has helped to protect their job. The lower level of income replacement and emphasis on “viability” criteria of the new Job Support Scheme will jeopardise the successes of furlough and risk more disabled people falling into poverty. The UK Government must follow the example of other countries such as Germany which has extended their equivalent to furlough until 2022 for individuals whose working hours have reduced.



### **3. Improve Kickstart, so that it is better tailored to disabled young people.**

We have been calling for the Kickstart scheme – and participating employers – to be evaluated. This would ensure that meaningful skills, training and – most importantly – job outcomes for young disabled people are being delivered.

- Kickstart employers and participants should make an agreement about the training and skills development that will take place at the outset of the placement.
- Having created truly additional roles to meet the Kickstart criteria, and where there has been genuine skills development and training, it is reasonable for these roles to continue beyond the period of the placement.
- Fast-track Access to Work support from day one of the Kickstart placement. Having the right equipment, transport, and support in place from day one of an individual's employment is crucial for disabled people to succeed at work.
- Recipients of Education, Health and Care plans and people claiming Employment Support Allowance should have access to the scheme.
- Kickstart should be joined up to Supported Internships.

### **4. In this time of financial crisis for many, with increased insecurity at work and many seeking new employment, it is even more important that the benefits system works better as a safety net to stop people falling into poverty.**

- Disability benefits must be reassessed to meet the additional costs of disability.<sup>33</sup> The welfare system does not currently account for these additional costs, with many disabled people who claim benefits unable to cover basic living expenses. The £20 uplift to Universal Credit must be retained and extended to Employment Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) given the increased costs faced by disabled people in the pandemic.<sup>34</sup>
- The 5-week wait for a new Universal Credit (UC) claim must be eradicated due to the evidence that it causes increased financial hardship for claimants.<sup>35</sup> The UK Government must make all UC advances for disabled people non-repayable grants during the duration of the pandemic. All debt repayment deductions from UC should be suspended to ease financial hardship for the duration of the current crisis.
- Work conditionality and benefits sanctions must be suspended for the duration of the pandemic. The Department for Work and Pensions suspended work conditionality and sanctions in the first three months but has since reinstated the need for disabled people to demonstrate that they are actively seeking work. Many disabled people still face safety restrictions in order to protect their health in the pandemic and their prospects continue to be affected by a significantly contracted job market. Our new research shows that these substantial barriers faced by disabled people in accessing work persist. The UK Government's decision to reinstate sanctions and work conditionality should be immediately reversed.

# Employers' attitudes: exposing embedded prejudices

**20% of employers in the UK told us that they were less likely to employ a disabled person and only 21% of employers say their organisation has recruited a disabled person in their workforce in the past 18 months.**

Whereas in 2018, 49% of employers told us that they employed a disabled person in their staff, this has decreased to 33% of employers in 2020. Our research illustrates how negative employers' attitudes towards disabled people has been exacerbated by Covid-19 with 40% of disabled people feeling at greater risk of redundancy due to employers judging them based on their condition or disability. Worryingly in our research, some employers displayed ingrained prejudice in their attitudes to disabled people in the workplace. 20% of employers said that they were less likely to employ someone with a disability with several of these employers (39%) saying that this was due to the physical, manual or demanding work. Of those less likely, 22% also said that this would depend on the type of disability or how severe it is. We are very concerned about these indications of discriminatory practices. The UK Government must take urgent action to ensure that employers are meeting their legal responsibilities under the Equality Act and treating everyone equally irrespective of disability.

As well as being more likely to face redundancy, we are concerned that disabled people are also set to face increased barriers in securing new employment due to the attitudes of employers, when compared with non-disabled people. As the pandemic continues, the UK Government must do more to support employers to recruit disabled people. **It is extremely concerning that 42% of employers said that a barrier in employing disabled people was not being able to support them properly during Covid-19.**

## **Other barriers include:**

**The practicalities of making workplace adjustments (56% of employers).**

**The cost of making workplace adjustments (54% of employers).**

**Ensuring the application process is accessible to people of all disabilities (38% of employers).**



There are signs, however, of some improvement in the early months of the pandemic of access widening to flexible working among some employers. 43% of disabled people employed pre-pandemic say that they have benefitted from being able to work more flexibly. 47% of employers now say they offer working from home and 42% are offering flexible working hours. The rapid action taken by employers in accommodating working from home in response to the Covid-19 outbreak is positive. However, these improvements to working culture need to be retained and developed for the future, setting a precedent to enable disabled

people – and all employees who would benefit – to work from home as a flexible adaptation. Currently, an employee is required to have been working for an employer for 26 weeks in a new role before being able to request flexible working arrangements. This should be changed to a day 1 right, as standard. Disabled people should be supported to succeed in their job role and reasonable adjustments put in place to make sure that their job is not put at risk e.g. improved access to Assistive Technology, workplace modifications and flexible working such as tailored working hours.



## An opportunity for progress

We know that some employers have responded to the challenge in making their workplaces inclusive of disabled people and have seized the opportunity provided by the pandemic to further develop the support they offer their staff. Leonard Cheshire's Change 100 programme and Training and Consultancy team supports employers in making their workplaces more inclusive of disabled people's needs. Employers we support told us about the changes that they were able to introduce to better support their disabled employees - in the pandemic and into the future.

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We included the specific needs of employees with disabilities at the earliest stages of the pandemic. We found remote on-boarding to be a great leveller for everyone - once set up with the correct equipment and environment many physical barriers or encumbrances just melted away.

In the recruitment of new staff, we are increasingly considering candidates working remotely and this has widened the talent pool of candidates. This moment should be a catalyst for change to improve employee engagement and ways of working. Across our organisation there is a new understanding of the opportunity we have to increase access for disabled people to the workplace by being more flexible to meet individuals' needs.

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Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service



# We are calling on the UK Government to:

## 1. Put in place improved support for employers in the recruitment and retention of disabled people.

It is clear that employers do not feel confident that they are able to support disabled staff members' needs and there has been little shift in the abiding fallacy among employers that employing disabled people costs more due to providing reasonable adjustments. We are concerned that many employers continue to remain unaware of their responsibilities and are subsequently unaccountable to their legal obligations to provide reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act. The UK Government must better communicate the economic case for inclusive workplaces but also improve understanding of equality legislation provisions. The Government should invest in Access to Work with promotion to employers so that awareness and participation increases. Our previous research showed that only 23% of disabled adults in the UK (currently or previously working) say they have ever received Access to Work support. This figure drops to just 14% in Scotland and Wales, and as low as 10% in Northern Ireland.<sup>36</sup> A proactive marketing campaign should be undertaken, particularly in the devolved nations, to ensure that disabled people and employers are aware of the support available through Access to Work to fund the reasonable adjustments which many disabled people need.

## 2. Adjustment passports or 'purple passports' should be introduced.

Adjustment passports are records which identify the reasonable adjustments, modifications and equipment a disabled person has received in education and work. They can act as an important tool in communication between line managers and disabled staff members. They can improve and embed identification and support for disabled people and provide help for line managers. Joined up workplace adjustments is something that the Canadian Government has introduced through its accessibility strategy for public services in Canada.<sup>37</sup> Companies such as BT and the UK Civil Service use adjustment passports to support their disabled employees' internal career progression. The UK Government should also consider how to join up support between education and employment. Access to Work support and equipment should stay with an individual when they change jobs in order to prevent disabled people being without the support they need to succeed in work.



### **3. Promote Access to Work.**

Greater investment in Access to Work is needed, with increased promotion to employers so that awareness and participation increases. In the current economic climate, Access to Work applications should be fast-tracked so that disabled people's ability to take up a job offer or stay in work isn't jeopardised by a failure to provide timely support that they are entitled to. This fast-track service should apply to disabled people entering work through Kickstart and our proposed Jobs Guarantee.

Our research reveals that employers preconceived notions on cost and practicalities of workplace adjustments continue to be a deterrent in the recruitment of disabled people. Attitudes need to change, and the Government should show leadership in improving understanding amongst employers.

### **4. Introduce mandatory reporting for large employers on their performance in employing disabled people.**

To ensure that progress is being made towards reducing the disability employment gap, and to encourage employers to remain committed to disability inclusion, large employers employing more than 250 people should be required to undertake mandatory reporting of how many disabled people they employ. The UK Government should also build on the success of gender pay gap reporting and mandate large employers to report on their disability pay gap. In this recession it is even more important that equality standards are maintained and developed with better data collection to monitor performance and subsequent sector-specific remedial action, tailored to an employer's needs.

### **5. Enforce labour market standards.**

Plans to establish a single labour market enforcement agency should finally be taken forward so that disabled workers are aware of their rights and can access them easily.<sup>38</sup> This could help address the main obstacles to justice faced by people who encounter a problem at work: not knowing where to go, thinking the process would be too difficult or time-consuming, and thinking that no one could help.<sup>39</sup> The responsibility for enforcing workers' rights should not lie solely with individuals taking lengthy legal cases forward. Employers must be made accountable to their responsibilities while being confident that they will be supported to comply. This enforcement agency is even more important as cuts to legal aid and funding for law centres has meant that some disabled people struggle to access free and impartial legal advice. As our research shows, disabled people are at risk of facing higher levels of disadvantage and discrimination at work during the Covid-19 recession. It is essential that they are fully able to seek justice against unfair practices from employers.

Under the Equality Act, the UK Government is required to consider the equality of opportunity in its actions. The approach taken by the Government in measures introduced in the Coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent economic downturn should be subject to an equality impact assessment to ensure that the specific needs of disabled people – along with those of other groups with protected characteristics – are being addressed. This will ensure that vital support measures and additional Government investment is reaching the people who need it most. For disabled people, this is increasingly critical given the evidence that they have already been bearing the brunt of the pandemic in every part of their lives and the findings laid out in this report that this is only set to continue in their access to the workplace.



## A way forward

**In recent years we have seen some progress in building more inclusive workplaces for disabled people. However, there are clear-cut signs that the Covid-19 recession is now playing out on pre-existing fault-lines that will have a devastating impact on the lives of disabled people. With the interim measures of the Job Retention Scheme coming to an end and replaced by lower levels support provisions, we are deeply concerned that disabled people will bear the brunt in a drop in living standards and increased poverty levels.**

The UK Government must introduce a disability inclusive Plan for Jobs which supports more disabled people to find sustainable and meaningful work, retain employment, and create new jobs in the future which are disability inclusive. This will help to create a more equal society and enable disabled people to access the same career opportunities regardless of their disability. But it will also provide tangible economic benefits for employers in accessing a wider talent pool and higher revenues. Employers, however, clearly need guidance and direction from Government about how to go about enacting these changes and disabled people must be protected as a priority where their rights are infringed at work.

**Disabled people are also consumers and the 'Purple Pound' is currently estimated to be worth £249 billion to the UK**

**economy.**<sup>40</sup> Increasing the participation of disabled people in an inclusive economy – and strengthening earning and spending potential – would offer a valuable opportunity for economic growth.

Our research shows that disabled people are facing deep anxiety and worry about how the recession is impacting their livelihoods now, with the far-reaching consequences for many. Our Plan for Jobs is a blueprint for Government action to create a disability inclusive economy that will future-proof disabled people's access to the workplace beyond this period of labour market shock. The UK Government must act now to take advantage of this opportunity for change, so that disabled people are not further left behind by the pandemic and locked out of the workplace into the future.

## Contact

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# References

1. Leonard Cheshire held a survey examining the experiences of disabled people and their carers of Covid-19, showing that 55% of disabled people in receipt of social care experienced a change in the care, 55% of disabled people reported an impact on their wellbeing and 18% of disabled people reported difficulties in accessing food. The survey ran from March 2020 to June 2020 and had 1,150 respondents.
2. ONS (June 2020), Covid-19 related deaths by disability status in England and Wales.
3. This includes findings reporting those placed on furlough, loss of income, risk of redundancy, reduced working hours, temporary leave, unemployment or sickness.
4. Citizens Advice (2020), An unequal crisis. Citizens Advice's research shows that 1 in 6 people are currently at risk of redundancy, rising to 1 in 4 for disabled people and 1 in 2 for individuals with a long-term condition.
5. The Sustainable Development Goals are a blueprint from the United Nations to achieve a more sustainable future, by outlining how to tackle key challenges like climate change, poverty and inequality. More details can be found here: [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/)
6. Leonard Cheshire, Building a Disability Inclusive Recovery (September 2020).
7. 20% of employers said that a declared disability would make them less likely to employ someone.
8. Good work is based on the premise of fairness so that everyone, particularly those people on lower incomes, have routes to progress in work and are treated with respect and decency at work. For further info see Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017).
9. Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Bulletin, Table A08 (April – June) 2020.
10. This is in line with 2019 reporting. For more info see TUC's Disability Pay Gap Day. [www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/disability-employment-and-pay-gaps-2019](http://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/disability-employment-and-pay-gaps-2019)
11. Leonard Cheshire, Reimagining the workplace: disability and inclusive employment (February 2019).
12. Jones et al (2020), Briefing Note: Disability and the Economic Cycle – Implications for a Covid-19 recession.
13. This and other long-lasting effects are explored later in the report. See Coles, B., Godfrey, C., Keung, A., Parrott, S. and Bradshaw, J. (2010) Estimating the lifetime cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, University of York.
14. For example, disabled workers are around 17% more likely to work in retail occupations than non-disabled workers, Office for National Statistics, The employment of disabled people 2019.

15. This figure includes this figure includes furlough, redundancy or feeling at risk of, loss of income, reduced hours, temporary leave of sickness or absence and unemployment.
16. Figures for the devolved nations have base sizes of <100 and are therefore indicative only, but still show the scale of the issue.
17. Institute for Employment Studies' analysis of Labour Force Surveys, Jan-June 2020.
18. Base sizes mean this is indicative only.
19. 38% of disabled people placed on furlough report that it protected their job. 74% of all disabled people that we surveyed felt that furlough had helped to protect their job i.e. including those who were furloughed and those who were not.
20. The new Job Support Scheme (JSS) announced on 25 September, is due to replace the current furlough scheme which comes to an end on 31 October. Workers at firms told to shut because of national or local restrictions due to coronavirus will receive at least 67% of their pay from the Government, compared with 80% under the Job Retention Scheme.
21. In 2017/18, 31% of the 13 million people with disabilities in the UK lived in poverty – around 4 million people. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK Poverty 2019 – 2020.
22. The UK Job Support Scheme can only be used for employees who work at least 33% of their usual hours. The Government may increase this percentage from 1 February 2021 (three months into the scheme). The requirement for staff to work at least 33% of their usual hours means that employers who do not have enough work for them to do (perhaps because of local lockdowns) won't be able to use the scheme and may be pushed into making redundancies even if their jobs could be viable in the longer-term.
23. Alliance for Youth Employment, Youth report: A million reasons to act (October 2020).
24. Arulampalam, W., Gregg , P. and Gregory, M. (2001) 'Unemployment Scarring', *The Economics Journal*, Volume 111 Issue 475.
25. Norström, F., Virtanen, P., Hammarström, A. et al. (2014) 'How does unemployment affect self- assessed health? A systematic review focusing on subgroup effects', *BMC Public Health* 14, 1310; Paul, K. and Moser, K. (2009) 'Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses', *Journal of Vocational Behavior* Volume 74, Issue 3.
26. Coles, B., Godfrey, C., Keung, A., Parrott, S. and Bradshaw, J. (2010) Estimating the lifetime cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, University of York.
27. Learning and Work Institute, Dealing with the Labour Market Impacts of the Covid-19 Recession (April 2020).
28. Good Work: the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017).
29. This is the case for both disabled and non-disabled older people. See Institute for Fiscal Studies, The coronavirus pandemic and older workers (September 2020).

30. Intensive Personalised Employment Support (IPES) is a DWP commissioned employment programme offering one to one employment support for people for disabled people.
31. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Economic Update of 8th July 2020. [parliament.uk/commons/2020-07-08/debates/BE9ECA8F-A74C-4431-88C7](https://parliament.uk/commons/2020-07-08/debates/BE9ECA8F-A74C-4431-88C7)
32. Maynard Review on Apprenticeships (2016). [www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-recommendations](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-recommendations)
33. On average disabled people face additional costs of £583 due to their disability. See Scope, Disability Price Tag (2019).
34. Respondents to our survey on the impact of Covid-19 who are in receipt of PIP cited examples of their daily living costs soaring due to the need to buy Personal Protective Equipment for themselves and their carers. Other additional costs included new specialist equipment as services like physiotherapy are temporarily not available.
35. See Work and Pensions Committee inquiry on Universal Credit and the wait for a first payment at: [committees.parliament.uk/work/135/universal-credit-the-wait-for-a-first-payment/publications/](https://committees.parliament.uk/work/135/universal-credit-the-wait-for-a-first-payment/publications/)
36. Reimagining the workplace: disability and inclusive employment (2019).
37. Government of Canada (2019) Nothing about us without us: An accessibility strategy for the public services of Canada DWP (2020).
38. Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017).
39. Citizen's Advice conducted research in 2019 that showed that 29% of respondents had not heard of any of the agencies, 32% said they didn't take action because they thought the process would be 'too confusing or complex', 45% of workers who had chosen not to take their problem forward said that this was because they did not think that that 'anyone would be able to help'. Source: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Consumer%20publications/Enforcement%20Briefing%20-%20Final%20\(3\).pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Consumer%20publications/Enforcement%20Briefing%20-%20Final%20(3).pdf)
40. The Purple Pound, Facts and Figures infographic. Can be accessed at: [wearepurple.org.uk/the-purple-pound-infographic/](https://wearepurple.org.uk/the-purple-pound-infographic/)

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