

Summary version

Anything's Achievable with the Right Support: tackling the disability employment gap

March 2025

1. Background

1. Anything's Achievable is our report which is the result of an inquiry into the disability employment gap in Wales. This summary version has been produced to give you a flavour of the key findings and recommendations. For full details including how we gathered the evidence for this inquiry please refer to the full report. In this version you will find:

- a brief overview of some of the key themes that are covered in the report;
- a snapshot of selected quotes from the evidence we received;
- a list of all the conclusions and recommendations made by us to the Welsh Government.

Help and advice

If you are affected by any of the issues in this report, you can find more information including advice and support in this guide, collated by Senedd Research: <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/support-for-disabled-people-a-guide-for-constituents/>



Language

2. When we use the term “disabled” we generally mean the broad definition which includes a range conditions and impairments including sensory impairments, physical impairments that affect mobility, learning difficulties, mental distress, long-term/chronic illnesses, and neurodivergence.

What is the disability employment gap?

3. The Disability Employment Gap (DEG) is the percentage point difference of employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people. Between 2015-16 and 2023-24, the DEG in Wales has declined from 35.4 percentage points to 30.9 percentage points. The Welsh Government has an aim to eliminate the DEG entirely by 2035.

2. Key findings

Overall approach

4. Stakeholders told us that they were disappointed with the pace of change. We found that the Welsh Government’s approach to advancing disabled people’s rights has risked being overly bureaucratic and process driven. Despite the Government’s clear commitment to breaking down the barriers, progress has been too slow.

5. We want the Government to turn some of its laudable commitments into action. This should include publishing its Disability Rights Action Plan and by putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into law.



“there’s a sense of, ‘When are things going to change? When is my life as a disabled person going to get better?’”

– Rhian Davies
Disability Wales

See Recommendation 1 and Conclusion 2 for more.

Employers and the DEG

6. We found that disabled people still face multiple barriers despite a general shift to more flexible working. Employers hold the key to addressing many of these barriers, however, awareness of and compliance with the law remains variable.

"There have been a lot of misconceptions and stereotypes around what disability looks like. And that means that those with non-visible health issues fear that they won't be believed or they don't have the confidence to ask for reasonable adjustments."

- Isabel Linton
Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales

7. We heard that some are reluctant to disclose their impairment or disability to employers. We want to see reasonable adjustments offered more proactively from the get-go including at the recruitment stage.

8. It is also vital that the Welsh Government redouble efforts to promote guidance with employers. This should help to challenge some of the common misconceptions that exist about the cost of reasonable adjustments. We found that the average cost of a reasonable adjustment is only £75 per individual.

See Recommendation 2 and Conclusion 3 for more.

Disability Confident Scheme

9. We found issues with the UK-run Disability Confident Scheme that need to be addressed if its reputation is to be restored. This includes reforming the way it checks that employers are doing what they say they will do and raising the bar on what employers are expected to achieve.

See Recommendation 4 for more.

Supporting job opportunities

10. One of the clearest messages we received was that the public sector could do more to help close the employment gap. We are concerned that instead of blazing a trail, parts of the public sector are failing to recognise the importance of this agenda.

"Within the disabled community, capability isn't the issue. It's the lack of opportunity that's the biggest issue".

– Dan Biddle

Disability rights campaigner and entrepreneur

11. We want to see the Welsh Government require devolved public sector bodies to do more to help reach the aim of closing the Disability Employment Gap by 2035.

See Recommendation 5 for more.

"I feel strongly about Disability Confident...because it says that it's something that is voluntary. It should be mandatory with a quota and not a voluntary tick box."

**- Focus group contributor
Cardiff**

Transition from school to the world of work

12. We found that more needs to be done to support children and young people as they leave school or college and enter the workplace. We were extremely disappointed to hear that some children and young people are potentially missing out on work placements and other opportunities. Children and young people need better advice and support when it comes to leaving school or arranging work experience.

13. More flexibility in funding arrangements are also key so that anyone with additional learning needs does not miss out on opportunities to access government support or an apprenticeship. We hope that the Welsh Government will address these issues at the same time as implementing the vital

recommendations of the Children and Young People Committee's report on this topic.¹

See conclusions 7 and 8 for more.

"I've always said, 'With the right support, anything is achievable.' I've always had the motto that is 'A is not for autism, A is for achievement', and if public sector bodies, Welsh Government, and all employers could see this, there would be a massively better society for all to enjoy."

- Gerraint Jones-Griffiths
Engage to Change Ambassador

¹ Children, Young People and Education Committee, Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?, July 2024

3. List of conclusions and recommendations

Conclusion 1. We firmly believe that those who can, and want to work, should be able to obtain the support they need to access and retain good quality jobs.

On progress and the coherence of approach

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should ensure that expectations of disabled people are met by delivering on its stated policy agenda before the end of the Sixth Senedd. Laudable commitments need to be translated into tangible action including:

- Concluding the work of the Disability Rights Taskforce and any remaining work to develop and co-produce policy arising from the 'Locked Out' report at the earliest opportunity and no later than May 2025.
- Publishing the Disability Rights Action Plan which takes account of regional variations in the DEG and is inclusive of targets and a timeline for implementation as soon as possible and by May 2025 at the latest.
- Delivering its Programme for Government commitment by incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into Welsh law before Dissolution of the Sixth Senedd scheduled for April 2026.

If the Welsh Government were to reject any of the steps in this recommendation it should indicate in its response what alternative action, inclusive of timescales, it intends to take in mitigation and in pursuance of the stated aim.

Conclusion 2. The Welsh Government's list of ministerial portfolios should be updated to explicitly mention disability and disabled people's rights as an individual minister's responsibility.

On employers and adjustments

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should undertake a comprehensive review of current arrangements within Business Wales to ensure that their activities align with the overall goal of eliminating the disability employment gap by 2035. This includes reviewing current sources of guidance; how current guidance is promoted, and customer journey pathways to maximise the number of opportunities for raising awareness when employers

interact with business support services. The review should be undertaken at pace and completed by July 2025.

On attitudes and assumptions

Conclusion 3. We note that widespread misconceptions and negative attitudes persist in the workplace with regards, for example, to the costs associated with reasonable adjustments. These need to be challenged at every opportunity.

On Disability Employment Champions

Recommendation 3. In order to monitor the effectiveness of the Disability Employment Champions the Welsh Government should set targets for their work and report on these annually. The targets should provide a basis for continuous improvement and use quantifiable metrics including:

- the total number of engagements with external stakeholders;
- the total number of engagements that lead to permanent offers of employment;
- the number of engagements that lead to changes in recruitment and retention policies or processes.

We would expect this recommendation to be implemented quickly and no later than by July 2025.

Disability Confident

Conclusion 4. We conclude that reforms are needed if Disability Confident or a similar scheme is to gain the support and confidence of disabled people. These reforms must prioritise robust accreditation arrangements and deliver meaningful results for disabled employees.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government must seek urgent changes to the Disability Confident Scheme which address the concerns regarding the general effectiveness and levels of trust in the Scheme, particularly at Levels 1 and 2. The Welsh Government should, by the end of April 2025, set out in detail:

- what improvements it would like to see made to the Disability Confident Scheme (including its accreditation arrangements);

- how it intends to secure these changes and a timeline by which we can expect the improvements to be implemented.

Should the Welsh Government fail to secure the necessary changes to the Disability Confident Scheme within existing structures, then it should give full consideration to developing a new, ambitious Welsh kitemark which commands the respect of employers and employees in Wales. The Welsh Government should report back on progress with this recommendation by December 2025.

On a multi-sector approach

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should require devolved public sector bodies, where possible, to make a more substantial contribution to the aim of eliminating the Disability Employment Gap. This should include requiring them to:

- review their policies and practices to ensure alignment with the forthcoming Disability Action Plan;
- set a target to become Disability Confident Leaders within a specific timescale;
- include eliminating the disability employment gap as a formal objective in their well-being plans.

Where possible, this recommendation should be implemented within a specified and realistic timescale which we suggest would be by the end of 2025.

On the Access to Work scheme

Conclusion 5. The Welsh Government should raise concerns around the operation of the Access to Work scheme with counterparts in the UK Government at ministerial level at the next available opportunity and report back to this Committee on the outcomes of those discussions. We think it is reasonable to expect these conversations will have taken place before the end of April 2025.

On supported employment

Conclusion 6. We agree that future supported employment provision should build on the success of schemes such as the Engage to Change project and that specialist job coaching should be a priority for future provision.

On advice and support

Conclusion 7. The Welsh Government should clarify its expectation that all disabled pupils should be offered the opportunity to learn about work experience and employment options available.

On support for ALN

Conclusion 8. Inflexible funding arrangements are clearly coming into conflict with the needs of disabled children and young people, especially when they require longer than 2 years to complete their studies.

On eligibility criteria

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should address gaps and introduce greater flexibility into the eligibility criteria of key support programmes for disabled applicants. This includes ensuring disabled people are subject to a higher age limit than others within each cohort in the next iteration of the Jobs Growth Wales scheme. This will ensure that disabled young people are able to access support at the right time and at an appropriate pace.

On data and monitoring

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should ensure that the Disability Disparity Evidence Unit (DDEU) improves its engagement with the disability rights sector and report on the issues and data gaps it will work on by May 2025.

On the disability pay gap

Conclusion 9. We agree that serious consideration should be given to introducing mandatory disability pay gap reporting for large employers in Wales and look forward to the UK Government bringing forward concrete proposals in due course. In the meantime the Welsh Government should direct devolved public bodies to proactively publish reports on the disability pay gap in order to raise awareness of the barriers that disabled people face in the world of work.