

Social Inclusion and Disability

Understanding the Government's Work, Health and Disability green paper, *Improving Lives*.

Richard Kramer – Deputy CEO and Director of Policy & Communications

Jasmine Basran – Policy Adviser, Welfare Benefits & Employment

Sense is a national charity that supports people who are deafblind, have sensory impairments or complex needs, to enjoy more independent lives.

We were founded in 1955 by a group of families affected by rubella. Over the years, we have developed specialist skills and knowledge in supporting people to communicate, express themselves and grow in independence.

We provide information and advice, offer a wide range of flexible services and campaign passionately for the rights of the people we support.

Our services are designed with the ethos of meeting the wishes and needs of individuals, and supporting them to be as independent as possible.

Our services include a range of housing options, resource centers, educational support, short breaks and arts, sports and wellbeing programmes.

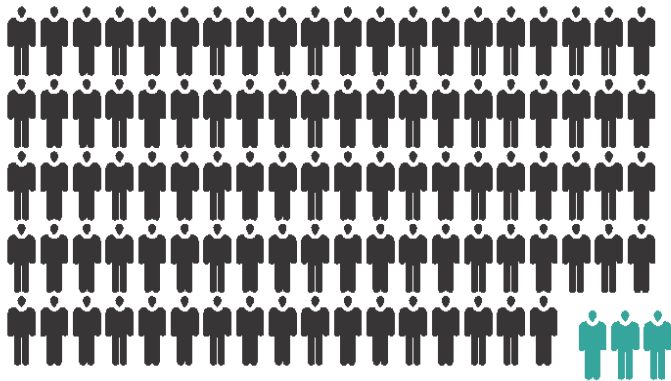
www.sense.org.uk



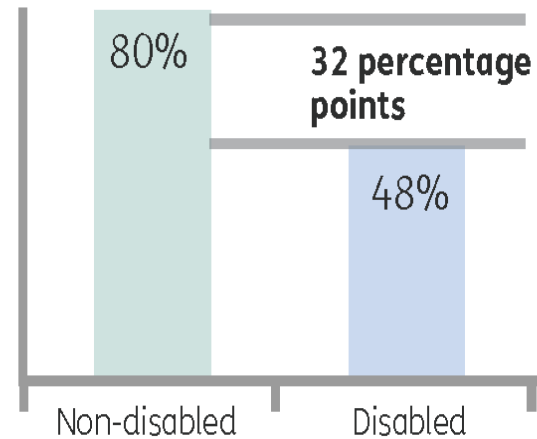
Why is the Government tackling disability employment?

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Only around 3 in 100 of all Employment and Support Allowance claimants leave the benefit each month.



The disability employment gap is too wide



Work as an outcome of health

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Evidence shows that appropriate work is good for our health

Good work



Good health

Worklessness



Poor health

Compared to non-disabled people, disabled people are less likely to enter employment so preventing them from leaving work is important

Between two quarters as many as 150,000 disabled people leave employment.



“Our vision is to create a society in which everyone has a chance to fulfil their potential, where all that matters is the talent someone has and how hard they are prepared to work. We are determined to remove the long-standing injustices and barriers that stop disabled people and people with health conditions from getting into work and getting on, preventing them from being whatever they want to be”.

- Improving Lives green paper



How will the Government address barriers to employment?

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- **Supporting people into work**
- **Assessment of benefits for people with health conditions**
- **Supporting employers to recruit with confidence and create healthy workplaces**
- **Supporting employment through health and high quality care for all**

Supporting people into work

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“Disabled people should access appropriate, personalised and integrated support...which focuses on what they can do, builds on their talents and addresses their individual needs”.

-Improving Lives green paper



- Jobcentre Plus is at the heart of employment support
- They will coordinate employment support services, local support services and voluntary sector services
- Work coaches will be expected to have a “Work and Health conversation” with ESA recipients
- Work coaches will also offer signposting to health services

Assessments of benefits for people with health conditions

- The Work Capability Assessment (WCA) decides the amount of financial support that an individual receives on ESA
- We have also seen this generally determines the amount of employment support an individual receives
- Those receiving higher financial support, and thus have higher support needs, tend to be deemed as unlikely to work
- However the WCA is essentially unfit for purpose to determine both financial and employment support
- The green paper proposed Jobcentre Plus carries out an employment assessment and the WCA is still used as a financial assessment

"[The WCA should] have more practical questions related to working, as there was a lot of very personal questions related questions about my ability to dress, wash and generally look after myself - which can be quite debilitating and negative. There were no questions specifically relating to employment".

Supporting employment through health and high quality care for all

- 20% of the working population are defined as disabled, and 80% of disabled people acquire a disability during their working lives
- The Government also wants the green paper to tackle back-to-work support for people who acquire a disability later on in life, or for those whose experience a worsening of their disability or health condition
- The suggestion is to achieve this through integrating health and employment



- This mean healthcare workers will be required to have conversations with patients about employment aspirations and support
- It will also mean integrating health and employment data to be used by healthcare workers and for benefit assessments

What is missing from the proposed support?



While health is considered as an determinant of employment, education and the transition from education to employment for young disabled people is largely ignored



Access to Work is notably missing. This is a particular life line for employees and employers with sensory impairments when it works well



The green paper does not take into account the impact of employment on housing and benefits such as universal credit

How did we respond to the green paper?

- Held a consultation event with five other sensory loss charities and people with sensory loss to discuss the proposals
- Sent out an online survey to people who are sensory impaired or have complex needs and their carers
- Attended a Young Disabled Peoples Forum at the Department for Work and Pensions
- Drew on the research conducted for our report on employment for people who are deafblind, *Realising Aspirations for All*
- Spoke to employees across Sense that had experiences of supporting people in work or looking for work, including Sense College

Sense's response to the proposals

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With the correct support and type of work, we acknowledge employment can be beneficial for disabled people. It is an opportunity to develop skills, talents, confidence and contribute meaningfully.

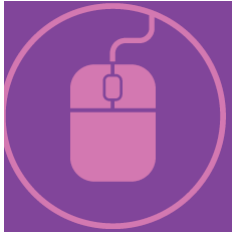


Emma works at Sense's Woodside Family Centre

- She initially joined as a volunteer when she struggled to find work after studying childcare
- At Woodside she has built confidence and expanded the work she is involved in.
- Her work is flexible and supported in a safe environment

"I love it! At Woodside you muck in; working with children, on the play schemes and IT. I also fundraise and collect cheques. I really adore it."

However, there are concerns that...



The narrative of the green paper and overall direction fails to recognise that unsuitable work can lead to negative health outcomes. Employment must be personalised, flexible and responsive to individual needs.



There is a lack of protection for the most vulnerable disabled people. Proposals to extend conditionality to those in the Support group of ESA are inappropriate and worrying.



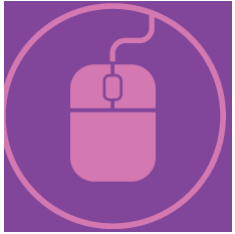
Traditional employment is seen as the main way disabled people can contribute to society and develop skills and confidence. This is unsuitable for some disabled people.

Sense's Café 55



- Café 55 is a café run by Sense that is open to the public. It offers training experience in a safe and supportive environment for disabled people, including those with complex needs.
 - Employees have a range of disabilities and the café also takes on students from local specialist schools for work experience. Some disabled employees have also been long-term unemployed.
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- The focus is to create a flexible and comfortable environment that allows disabled people to learn skills, have new experiences and build confidence.
 - It acts as a stepping stone for some to go on to further employment in areas they wish to.
 - It also allows for social participation and personal development for those where further employment may not necessarily be the right route for them.

Additionally...



The green paper falls short of offering a sustainable, comprehensive and personalised system of support for all disabled people. There is an over reliance on the success of Jobcentre Plus to deliver support.



Specialist training and knowledge of disabilities are lacking in Jobcentre Plus. Training alone will not resolve the issues in the context of an under resourced system that does not actively promote a disability-friendly culture through understanding and awareness.



These issues are found in Jobcentre Plus and employment support programmes

Gary's experience of employment support

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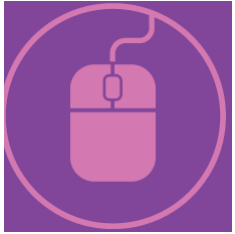
- After losing his job, Gary claimed ESA and was referred to the Work Programme to access employment support
- *“No one asked me what I wanted to do and what I could do. They quickly dismissed my aspirations to find an administrator job and told me to concentrate on customer service roles, such as a call handler at a call centre. It did not register with them that I had a hearing impairment”.*
- *“I had to come in and apply for jobs and they assigned a person to help me do this as I could not see the screen and they didn't want to adapt it for me. ”.*

“I felt like a number, not a human being they were trying to help”



- *“The lady just quickly read the jobs to me and sometimes applied without even letting me know. I later found out that she had a target to meet before lunchtime”.*

Finally...



The green paper does not go far enough on key initiatives. The suggestions to improve current assessments for benefits shies away from overhauling the WCA to be fit for purpose. Thus they avoid resolving systemic issues.



There is too much focus on the employability of disabled people and not enough on what employers can do to provide meaningful employment opportunities for disabled people.



The integration of employment and health does not take into account the current pressures of the healthcare system and there are concerns over the feasibility and confidentiality issues for integrating data.

What happens next?

- The Government will review the evidence submitted for the consultation
- Some initiatives are already underway – such as consulting on criteria to stop ESA reassessments and setting up business ‘champions’
- It is thought there will be a White paper in the Summer with more concrete proposals to take forward

Thank you for listening