

People with a learning disability have a right to access paid work on an equal basis to everyone else. They have the right to be treated fairly and to not be discriminated against in the workplace (1).

Mencap wants people with a learning disability to have the opportunity to experience the benefits that paid employment can bring, including an increased income, improved wellbeing and greater confidence (2). We know that many people with a learning disability want to work, be paid, to have a choice about their work and feel valued. We want to see a future where people with a learning disability who can work receive the right support to find, access and stay in employment, enabling them to fully exercise this right.

We want employers to understand that people with a learning disability can be valuable employees and should be supported properly. Mencap wants people with a learning disability to be able to access paid jobs, suitable to their skills, and to be paid at the same rate as everyone else.

## **The current situation**

Mencap ran The Big Learning Disability Survey to find out about the everyday lives of adult with a learning disability in the UK in 2022 (3). Out of those surveyed, 26.7% of working age adults said they have a paid job. This figure is markedly low compared to the 53.7% employment rate of working age adults with any disability, and the 82.7% for non-disabled people in 2023 (4).

In 2022, we commissioned the National Development Team for Inclusion to research what people with a learning disability want from employment and the barriers some people face moving into work. We found that 86% of people with a learning disability who do not have a paid job would like to have one (5).

There are many reasons why people with a learning disability are struggling to get a job. Many people with a learning disability have tried to gain work, and come up against a range of barriers, including difficulties finding inclusive roles locally,

inaccessible recruitment processes such as challenges filling in application forms, and limited support within their organisation. Additionally, access to training programmes and support options is often inconsistent across the country (6). This leaves many people with a learning disability who are willing and able to work unable to access the support they need to do so. For others, work may be difficult due to the nature of their disability and health issues.

As a result, most people with a learning disability rely on the financial support that the benefits system provides to survive. This will be the case for most, whether they work full-time, part-time or not at all. Benefit conditionality dictates how much work some people with a learning disability are permitted to do without losing their benefit entitlement - our research found that 45% of people with a learning disability not in work identified the benefits system as a barrier preventing them from working.

## What we want

To bring about our vision, Mencap calls on the government to address the barriers that people with a learning disability still face in accessing paid employment. In doing so, the government must ensure that the health and wellbeing of disabled people is central to any efforts to improve employment outcomes.

This also means recognising that for some people with a learning disability paid employment will not be the right outcome at that time. This could be because it is not possible to find the right job for them, there is not the right support or training available for them effectively to get a job, or it is not advisable for them to work because of their health or finances.

We want the government to:

- Ensure that every area in the UK has sufficient, good quality employment support and training options available for the full range of people with a learning disability who are willing and able to work. Such support must be tailored to individual needs, available to those furthest away from the labour market, and pursue measurable employment outcomes; this support should be available across the UK.
- Ensure that employment training programmes, including apprenticeships and supported internships, are fully accessible to people with a learning disability, including those without an EHC Plan.

- Continue to promote inclusion in the workplace and positive employer attitudes towards people with a learning disability. This includes ensuring that employers follow the law in relation to reasonable adjustments and making workplaces more accessible, strengthening the law where necessary.
- Create a benefits system that recognises the needs of the individual as well as the external barriers to people with a learning disability accessing employment and support them financially to live well, whether they are working part-time, full-time or not at all. To do this, the government needs to urgently review the adequacy of benefits, and end the conditionality and sanctioning regime which imposes barriers to employment through the setting of unrealistic conditions and a lack of support.
- Ensure that schools have adequately funded programmes available to them to provide learners with the opportunity to experience the workplace with individualised support and to develop their aspirations to be employed in the future.

## Sources

1. [UNCRPD, clause 27.](#)
2. [Emerson, et al \(2014\), Perceptions of neighbourhood quality, social and civic participation and the self-rated health of British adults with intellectual disability: cross sectional study. BMC Public Health, 14\(1\), 1252 ; Lindstrom, Hirano & Thomas, 2018 Career development for individuals with disabilities: examining issues of equity, access and opportunity. In Research Handbook of Diversity and Careers \(P161-176\). Edward Elgar Publishing.](#)
3. [Mencap-ran survey with 1,972 adults \(aged 18+\) with a learning disability in the UK.](#)
4. [House of Commons Library \(2023\), Disabled people in employment.](#)
5. [Mencap and NDTi \(2022\), Work and learning disability research.](#)

6. **Mencap (2019), Access All Areas Report.**

This statement was first published: 19/01/2024.