

Employment

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 not be discriminated against in the workplace¹.

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 confidence². We want to see a future where people with a learning disability who can work are receiving the right support to find, access and stay in work.

We want employers to understand that people with a learning disability make a valuable contribution to the workplace when they are supported properly, just like everyone else. We want society, including educators, families and government, to see people with a learning disability as potential future apprentices and employees.

Employment can range from full-time work to working a few hours per week. 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.

Current situation

In 2019, Mencap ran the Big Learning Disability Survey to find out about the everyday lives of adults with a learning disability in the UK³. Out of those surveyed, 23% of working age adults with a learning disability told us that they have a paid job. This figure is markedly low compared to 53% of working age adults with any disability⁴ and 76% of working age adults in the general population in the UK⁵.

Breaking down the results of the survey by the level of support people with a learning disability need, we know that:

1. 32% of those with the lowest support needs have a paid job.
2. 9% of those with medium support needs have a paid job.
3. Fewer than 5% of those with the highest support needs have a paid job.

Most people with a learning disability responding to our survey who have a paid job said they work part-time, with 62% of those people working 16 hours a week or less.

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 a survey with 1625 adults (aged 18+) with a learning disability in the UK. Responses were collected between January and July 2019 using a paper-based questionnaire and an online questionnaire hosted on Survey Monkey.

⁴ This refers to all people with a long-term health problem or disability in accordance with the core definition in the 2010 Equality Act. From: *ONS (2019) A08: Labour market status of disabled people. Dataset. Aug 2019*.

⁵ ONS (2019) *Labour market overview, UK: September 2019. Statistical Bulletin*. Available online.

There are many reasons why people with a learning disability are struggling to get a job. For some, work may be difficult due to the nature of their disability and health issues. 55% of respondents in Mencap's survey who reported that they are not working, said that this was the case.

For other people with a learning disability who have tried to gain work, we know that they come up against a range of barriers, including not knowing how to access a job (23%), difficulties with filling in application forms (22%) and being worried about losing their benefits (23%).

In addition, research has shown that people with a learning disability struggle with:

- non-inclusive workplace cultures
- negative employer attitudes
- low societal aspirations for their being part of the workforce
- an entrenched skills and qualifications gap compared to non-disabled people^{6,7}.

Furthermore, access to training programmes and support options is often inconsistent⁸ across the country. 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. Where people with a learning disability do work, they often enter the labour market in jobs that are paid at minimum wage.

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. The benefits system is therefore a crucial element in the debate about employment for people with a learning disability.

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. There must also be adequate funding to support this in every area of the UK. Such support must be tailored to individual needs, available to those furthest away from the labour market, and pursue measurable employment outcomes.
- ensure that employment training programmes, including apprenticeships, are fully accessible to people with a learning disability. This must include those without an EHC Plan or legacy statement, and the training programmes must be accessed by people with a learning disability across the country.

⁶ Barrows, M., Billehus, J., Briton, J., Cohen-Hall, A., Huerena, G., LeBlanc, & Topper, N. (2016). *The truth comes from us: Supporting workers with developmental disabilities*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion. Retrieved from

⁷ Ellenkamp, J. J., Brouwers, E. P., Embregts, P. J., Joosen, M. C., & van Weeghel, J. (2016). *Work environment-related factors in obtaining and maintaining work in a competitive employment setting for employees with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review*. *Journal of occupational rehabilitation*, 26(1), 56-69.

McTier, A., Macdougall, L., McGregor, A., Hirst, A., & Rinne, S. (2016). *Mapping the employability landscape for people with learning disabilities in Scotland*.

⁸ Mencap submitted FOI requests to councils in England regarding spending on employment support services (between May and July 2017) and on eligibility criteria for support services (between November 2017 and January 2018). The FOI responses suggested that there is much variation in both spending and eligibility criteria for people with a learning disability across councils in England.

- 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 supports them financially to live well, whether they are working part-time, full-time or not at all. To do this, government must improve the disability offer under Universal Credit, broadening access to a disabled person's work allowance and restoring the Limited Capability for Work element. We also want to see a review of the Work Capability Assessment and an end to the sanctioning and conditionality regime, which raises barriers to employment through the setting of unrealistic conditions and a lack of support.
- ensure that schools have available to them adequately funded programmes to provide learners with the opportunity to experience the workplace with individualised support, and to develop their aspirations for being employed in the future.

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