



## 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 workplace<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>. We want to see a future where people with a learning disability who can work are receiving the right support, suitable to their needs, to find, access and stay in work, enabling them to fully exercise this right. We want employers to understand that people with a learning disability make a valuable contribution to the workplace, when supported properly, just like everyone else, and we ask that society – educators, families to government – sees people with a learning disability as 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 UK<sup>3</sup>. Out of those surveyed, 23% of working age adults (aged 18 to 64) with a learning disability told us that they have a paid job, compared to 53% of working age adults with any disability<sup>4</sup> and 76% of working age adults (aged 16-64) in the general population in the UK<sup>5</sup>. Breaking down the employment of people with a learning disability surveyed by the level of support they 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 working 16 hours a week or less.

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, with 55% of respondents in Mencap's survey, who reported that they are not working, saying that this was the case. For others, who have tried to gain work, we know that they come up against a range of barriers, including people not knowing how to access a job (23%), difficulties with filling in

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<sup>1</sup> UNCRPD, clause 27

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.](#)

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



application forms (22% of respondents cited this) and being worried about losing benefits (23%).

In addition, research has shown that people with a learning disability struggle with non-inclusive workplace cultures and employers' attitudes, low societal aspirations for their being part of the workforce as well as an entrenched skills and qualifications gap compared to non-disabled people<sup>6,7</sup>. Furthermore, access to training programmes and support options is often inconsistent<sup>8</sup> across the country, leaving many people with a learning disability who can and want to work unable to access the support they need to be able 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.

Most people with a learning disability as a result rely on the financial support that the benefit system provides to be able to survive. This will be the case for most, whether they work full-time, part-time or not at all. The benefit 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 because it is not possible to find the right job for them, there is not enough or 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 and good quality employment support and training options available for the full range of people with a learning disability who can and want to work, and adequate funding to support this. 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, including those without an EHC Plan or legacy statement, and that they are accessed by people with a learning disability across the country.

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<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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, ensure that employers follow the law in relation to reasonable adjustments and make 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 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.

Last reviewed: May 2020

Next review: November 2022