

An update on the Disability Employment Charter, and new evidence on Disability Confident, working from home, and organisational performance

Professor Kim Hoque, King's Business School and Disability@Work
kim.hoque@kcl.ac.uk



The

Disability Employment Charter

180 ORGANISATIONS WORKING TOGETHER

www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org

Disability  Work

- the Charter outlines 9 areas of policy on which the government should focus to address disability employment disadvantage (mandatory reporting, Access to Work and Disability Confident reform, leveraging procurement, rights to facility time for equality reps etc.)
- the founder members: Disability@Work, Disability Rights UK, Leonard Cheshire, Scope, the DFN Charitable Foundation, the Shaw Trust Foundation, UNISON, and University of Warwick
- launched October 2021 (with 37 signatories)
- now has 180+ signatories: charities including Mencap, Mind, Sense, RNIB, RNID, National Autistic Society; labour movement (e.g. Unite, UCU, Trades Union Congress); corporates (e.g. PageGroup, McDonald's, Schroders, CMS Law, Blenheim Chalcot, the Clear Company, Publicis Groupe, Herbert Smith Freehills, the Post Office); other leading organisations (e.g. British Paralympic Association, Institute for Employment Studies, British Medical Association ... and NADSN)
- our aim: to demonstrate to government the extent to which there is appetite for substantive change, and consensus regarding what this change should comprise ... with a view to encouraging the government to adopt the charter's proposals

What have we achieved?

- *Positive reception from all the main political parties (e.g. the Charter received a mention in the government's recently launched Disability Action Plan, and its review of Disability Confident), but Labour in particular:*
 - UNISON reception in Parliament in December 2023. Vicky Foxcroft MP (shadow disability minister) announced that Labour will:
 - introduce mandatory employment and pay gap reporting
 - reform Access to Work
 - introduce rights to time off for union equality reps
 - two-week deadline for employers to respond to reasonable adjustment requests
 - National Policy Forum document refers to several of the Charter's other key asks (leveraging government procurement to achieve social value, enhancement of sick pay)

If Labour win the general election, it looks increasingly likely that the Disability Employment Charter will play a key role in framing Labour's disability employment policy

Next steps for the Charter

- continue to build relationship with Labour
- relationships with other political parties
- new Parliamentary Liaison Group on supported internships and disability employment
- alignment with other organisations (CBI, IoD, CIPD etc.) on key issues e.g. mandatory reporting
- continue to seek new signatories



- the government's main scheme to encourage employers to improve their disability employment outcomes and ultimately employ more disabled people/ improve their experiences of work
- employers make commitments regarding how they will treat disabled applicants and employees, and they are expected to implement certain activities (e.g. internships, work experience/ trials, apprenticeships, job shadowing, provide employment opportunities). Three levels: committed, employer, leader
- DWP estimate that 11 million people work in Disability Confident organisations
- BUT: there is a lack of research regarding whether Disability Confident really achieves better employment outcomes for disabled people

Our data/ analysis, see: [Hoque, K. & Bacon N. \(2023\) *Does the government's Disability Confident scheme improve disability employment outcomes?* Disability@Work research brief](#)

- responses from 127,890 UK employees (of whom 5,676 (4.4%) are disabled) in the WorkL employee experience database (the world's largest database on employee happiness and engagement)
- we match DWP data on Disability Confident into the WorkL data thus enabling us to identify the Disability Confident status of the organisation in which each respondent is employed
- 50,614 (39.6%) respondents are in Disability Confident organisations
- both bivariate and multivariate (probit/ OLS) analysis, involving controls for the respondents': industry group; occupation; role (management/non-management); age; job tenure; ethnicity; gender; and sexual orientation

Do Disability Confident organisations employ disabled people in proportionately greater numbers?

Percentage of the workforce disabled by Disability Confident status

	All %	Public sector %	Private sector %
Non-Disability Confident	4.3	4.5	4.2
Disability Confident Level 1	4.5	4.9	4.2
Disability Confident Level 2	4.7	4.8	4.7
Disability Confident Level 3	5.2	6.5	4.2

N = 127,890 (public sector, 44,068; private sector, 83,822)

Significant differences relative to non-Disability Confident organisations once controls are added in a multivariate analysis are marked in red

Disability Confident and disabled people's experience of work

We find:

- overall, disabled employees report poorer job discretion, fairness perceptions, job-related mental health, and job satisfaction than non-disabled employees
- disabled employees in Disability Confident organisations *do not* report better job discretion, fairness perceptions, job-related mental health or job satisfaction than disabled employees in non-Disability Confident organisations
- regarding disability gaps in these outcomes, these are *no smaller* in Disability Confident organisations (at any Level) than in non-Disability Confident organisations
- the findings remain qualitatively the same in both the public and private sectors

Hiring practices in Disability Confident organisations

- analysis of the DWP Jobcentre plus 'Find a Job' database (129.5k jobs) in April 2024: 22,800 of these jobs (17.7%) are with DC employers.
- just 4.5% of jobs advertised by Disability Confident employers say that a guaranteed interview is offered
- just 12% make an explicit statement about offering reasonable adjustments.
- regarding accessibility within the hiring process:
 - 0.6% of jobs advertised by Disability Confident organisations mention the availability of information in alternative formats
 - 1.2% offer large print formats
 - 0.75% offer information in braille
 - 0.43% offer information in an easy read format

What are the implications of these findings?

- **Disabled jobseekers and employment advisers (including JobCentre Plus):** should not assume that Disability Confident organisations are any more likely than non-Disability Confident organisations to hire and retain disabled people, or provide them with a better experience of work
- **Employers:** should be wary of applying for Disability Confident given that if certification is found over time to offer little or no guarantee of better disability employment outcomes (as our research suggests) the scheme may become discredited, which in turn may lead to charges of hypocrisy or diversity-washing
- **Government:** has sought to increase the number of employers with Disability Confident certification, with the number having grown to about 19,000
 - a false impression of progress
 - the risk is that government will use this growth in the number of Disability Confident organisations as an excuse to side-step calls for more interventionist or legislative approaches

Where next for Disability Confident?

- is it a brand worth preserving? Only if it is given ‘teeth’
- several leading bodies (e.g. Centre for Social Justice, Work and Pensions Committee) have argued that the Disability Confident certification criteria should be reformed so that Level 2 and 3 certification becomes dependent on whether the organisation meets ***minimum thresholds regarding the percentage of their workforce that is disabled***
- this will help ensure that Disability Confident provides a meaningful labour market signal to disabled people

Our findings underline the importance of this reform

Working from home and the benefits regime

- Government has used the growth in working from home to justify a tougher benefits regime. Is this justified?
- Our new research (April 2024) using the DWP Find a Job service website (129.5k jobs) shows:
 - 0.51% of jobs are advertised as fully remote
 - 2.75% of jobs are advertised as hybrid remote
- Even if there were a significant growth in WFH, would this necessarily benefit disabled people? ([Hoque, K. and Bacon, N \(2022\) Working from Home and Disabled People's employment outcomes, British Journal of Industrial Relations, 60\(1\): 32-56](#)):
 - WFH tends to be in mgt./ professional jobs, which disabled people are less likely to do
 - WFH improves job-related outcomes (satisfaction, work-related wellbeing etc.) for both disabled and non-disabled people: competition for jobs is thus likely to be higher, hence even if disabled people apply for these jobs there is no guarantee they will get them
- Calls into question the government's justification for tougher sanctions

New evidence on disability employment and organisational performance outcomes

- Does employing disabled people in greater numbers reduce productivity and financial performance, and raise absence rates etc.?
- Or: does it boost performance by allowing organisations to address skills gaps, labour shortages, mirroring customer base etc.?
- Looking at private sector workplaces in the government's nationally-representative WERS data, we explore:
 - *Productivity, financial performance, and quality of product or service*: Management respondents are asked to rate these outcomes relative to other workplaces in the same industry on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = 'a lot below average' and 5 = 'a lot better than average'.
 - *Labour turnover*: Calculated by dividing the number of resignations at the workplace over the last 12 months by the total number of employees 12 months ago.
 - *Absence rate*: The proportion of working days lost through employee sickness or absence in the last 12 months.
- Multivariate analysis controlling for: organisation size, log of workplace size, high-performance work practice adoption, single independent workplace, Standard Industrial Classification major group, national ownership, workplace age, standard statistical region, union recognition, workforce demographics

Relationship between percentage of workforce disabled and organisational performance in SMEs and large firms

Percentage workforce disabled	Productivity ^{1,2}	Financial performance ¹	Quality of product or service ¹	Absence rate %	Labour turnover %
<i>SMEs</i>					
Low (1%)	3.64	3.54	4.08	4.38	12.17
Average (8%)	3.69	3.61	4.11	4.20	10.00
High (15%)	3.75	3.69	4.14	4.04	8.17
<i>Large firms</i>					
Low (1%)	3.73	3.58	4.10	4.09	10.66
Average (8%)	3.70	3.61	4.11	4.30	10.50
High (15%)	3.65	3.64	4.12	4.52	10.33
<i>N</i>	<i>759</i>	<i>768</i>	<i>794</i>	<i>717</i>	<i>779</i>

¹ Scale of 1-5 where, compared with other workplaces in the same industry, 1 = a lot below average, and 5 = a lot better than average.

Green: weakly positively associated with percentage of the workforce disabled in SMEs (at the 10% significance level).

Red: percentage of workforce disabled is positively associated with the outcome in question (at the 5% significance level)

What do we make of the findings?

- no evidence that the employment of disabled people is associated with negative performance outcomes in British private sector workplaces
 - to the contrary, in SMEs, productivity is marginally higher, financial performance is better, and labour turnover is lower in workplaces employing disabled people in proportionately higher numbers.
 - in large firms, none of the performance outcomes are any poorer in workplaces employing disabled people in proportionately higher numbers. Hence, any concerns managers might have that employing proportionately more disabled people might damage organisational performance appear misplaced.
- Government, employers' organisations, disability campaigners, trade unions and supported employment providers might use these findings in their efforts to persuade employers to hire and retain disabled people in proportionately greater numbers. Our findings suggest that doing so would not be associated with any negative performance implications
- see: [Hoque, K. & Bacon, N. \(2024\) *The employment of disabled people and organisational performance outcomes*. Disability@Work research brief](#)