



Shaping future support: The Health and Disability Green Paper (11.10.21)

Response on behalf of the Engage to Change Project

Why we are consulting

To provide an opportunity to test the following aspects of our support for disabled people and people with health conditions:

- Ways to provide more support to help meet the needs of disabled people and people with health conditions and allow them to more easily access and use benefits and services.
- Improve employment support for disabled people and people with health conditions, and how to encourage people to take up that support, where possible.
- Short-term improvements to our current services, such as improvements to assessments and decision making, to improve the experience of disabled people.
- Changes to future assessments and alternative approaches.
- Changes that could be made to the structure of the main benefits claimed by working-age disabled people and people with health conditions.

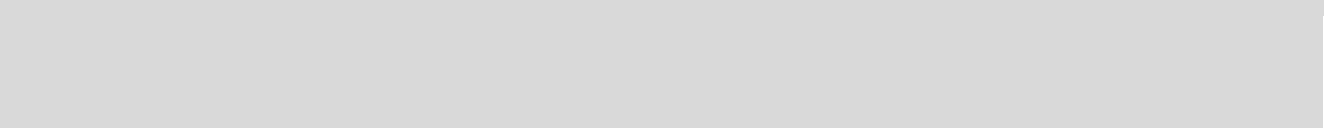
This is an aid to respond to the GP consultation. Please complete as many non-mandatory questions as you would like.

To complete this survey:

- Print a copy and write your answers, then post the survey to:

Health and Disability Green Paper, Department of Work and Pensions,
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA
- Alternatively, you can use the Word document and email your response as an attachment to: healthanddisability.consultation@dwp.gov.uk.

The response you provide to this consultation will be handled as anonymous. By submitting your response, you give us permission to analyse and include your response in our results.





ABOUT YOU

Response on behalf of the Engage to Change Project

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund in partnership with Welsh Government, the Engage to Change project is working across Wales to support young people aged 16-25 who have a learning difficulty, learning disability and/or autism to achieve their full potential. Using a person-centred approach, Engage to Change works closely with young people, their parents/carers and employers to:

- overcome barriers to employment
- develop transferable skills
- offer unpaid work experience
- provide paid supported employment
- find volunteering opportunities
- offer access to supported internships.

Project partners are:

Learning Disability Wales, a national charity representing the learning disability sector in Wales. Learning Disability Wales works with people with a learning disability and their families, Welsh Government, local authorities, disabled people's organisations and the voluntary sector to create a better Wales for all people with a learning disability. Learning Disability Wales is the lead partner for the Engage to Change project.

Other project partners are: two supported employment agencies, **Agoriad Cyf** and **Elite Supported Employment**; and the **National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH)** at Cardiff University, our evaluation partners.

More information on Engage to Change can be found on our website:

<http://www.engagetochange.org.uk/>

Contact: Grace Krause (Policy Officer, Learning Disability Wales)

Email: Grace.krause@ldw.org.uk



Chapter 1 Questions: Providing the Right Support

15. What more could we do to improve reasonable adjustments to make sure that our services are accessible to disabled people?

It is important that communications are accessible to everyone. We suggest making sure that every claimant has access to easy read communication.

17. Do you agree with the principles we have set out for advocacy support?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree Strongly disagree

Please tell us why below

We believe that the use of advocacy should be far more extensive than laid out here. We also feel the need to point out that advocacy alone is not a solution to the issues within the benefits system. In 2019 a UN report condemned the United Kingdom for violating its human rights obligations to disabled people through benefits cuts. They particularly mentioned benefits sanctions as contributing to extreme poverty. While advocacy can offer some amount of safeguard to human rights violations, what is needed is an actual commitment by the government not to continue violating disabled people's human rights.

18. How might we identify people who would benefit from advocacy?

Every person should be given access to advocacy, provided by independent advocates. The current plan sees advocacy as only important for people who do not have other support. It is the DWP's responsibility to respect people's rights and therefore to make sure people receive appropriate support and this responsibility should not be left up to other organisations and people to carry.



19. What kinds of support do you think people would want and expect from advocacy?

In your proposal you mention the purpose of advocacy as helping people navigate the benefits system. We would like to have an explicit acknowledgement in here about advocacy supporting people in challenging decisions. We know that many people are left in very significant financial hardship due to benefits sanctions. There is very significant anecdotal evidence that suggests that many sanctions are given unfairly, which means that people will be pushed into extreme poverty without warning and without a way to resolve the issue in a timely manner. Advocates should have an explicit function in supporting people to challenge unfair decisions.

Chapter 2 Questions: Improving Employment Support

21. What more could we do to further support employers to improve work opportunities for disabled people through Access to Work and Disability Confident?

We understand the DWP is currently reforming Access to Work. We believe that different and devolved systems in Wales need to be considered in order to enable people with a learning disability in Wales who want to work to get the support they need.

Only 5.6% of people with a learning disability in Wales are in paid employment but we know that many more people would like to work. There are a few pilot schemes being undertaken or planned in Wales to support disabled people to gain and maintain work. In terms of the employment of disabled people, we have gained some important successes in supported employment. The Engage to Change project has demonstrated that supported employment methodology is the best way to achieve good support for people with learning disabilities.

We need more supported employment and job coaching resources in Wales to assist people with these more complex disabilities to fulfil their potential to become employed, and to create a “level playing field” for them in the more competitive labour market post-Covid. The roll-out by the DWP of funding for a greater number of “Local Supported Employment” schemes into Wales would assist in this. Deepening co-ordination between DWP and Welsh Government in their funded schemes to ensure that adequate levels of this form of provision are available will help both WG and DWP fulfil their shared objectives of helping more disabled people into employment.

We also recommend a number of further actions to improve work opportunities through Access to Work/Disability Confident:

- Make the application processes more accessible and easier, with alternatives to everything being online. Current arrangements disadvantage people with learning disabilities who find it difficult to work with these systems.
- Streamline the processes for approving applications around third-party consent.



- Embed third-party consent in the processes when working with specialist supported employment agencies.
- Provide employers with Simple Guides on the ATW processes and available support streams.
- Provide guidance in easy read format to make these opportunities easier to engage with.
- Make guidance clear on any cost implications for the employer at the start of the process, especially in relation to the impact that the number of employees has on funding awards.
- Increase opportunities to bring in specialist guidance from supported employment agencies or JCP during the referral process for those going into employment.
- Intervention and support to the employer from the JCP Disability Employment Advisor when a person starts work and may require assistance or adaptations.
- Funding to support with aids, adaptations and assistive technology prior to commencing paid work. A lack of access to equipment to support work experience creates a barrier to disabled people gaining work experience to assist in securing paid opportunities. This also means that employers do not understand the importance of providing equipment when looking at offering paid work to a disabled person.

There are resources available that discuss what Engage to Change partners have learned about how to best support disabled people into work and the project's recommendations for the future:

Dr Steve Beyer, 2020: Engage to Change briefing: What policy changes are required to provide people with a learning disability or ASD equal access to the labour market in Wales? Available online: http://www.engagetochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/National-Job-Coach-Briefing-6July20-V6_final.pdf

Dr Steve Beyer, 2021: Engage to Change briefing: Jobs for people with a learning disability or autism - The role of the NHS. Available online: http://www.engagetochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Engage-to-Change-The-role-of-the-NHS-Jan21_final_eng2.pdf

Further policy information from the Engage to Change project and Learning Disability Wales can be found on our policy page: <https://www.ldw.org.uk/project/policy/>

However, it is important to point out that people deserve to live dignified lives out of poverty when they are not in paid employment too. We urge you to study closely the research and recommendations by the Bevan Foundation on the Welsh benefits system.

Steffan Evans, 2021: The case for a Welsh Benefits System. Bevan Foundation. Available online: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/views/case-for-welsh-benefits-system/>



23. What further support or information would help work coaches to have more effective conversations with disabled people and people with health conditions?

We have several recommendations as to how to help work coaches have more effective conversations with disabled people. We suggest there be more openness about the criteria and process for the Work Capability Assessment. We believe that opportunities for specialist providers to assist and support disabled people through the WCA should be encouraged. People with learning disabilities are disadvantaged in this process because of their cognitive problems and, with some simple specialist support, can provide more accurate responses.

There should be more Disability Awareness Training for work coaches and Disability Employment Advisors should be reintroduced. In meetings, more time should be allocated to the conversations about assessing the support needs of disabled people, particularly to meet the needs of people with a learning disability.

Disabled people should not have to always need to access the internet to get support. The assumption that people can use the internet effectively, or have ICT skills and access to equipment, is incorrect and there should be flexibility, funding and support with developing the skills and resources to do this. Finally, all guidance should be available in an easy read format.

25. How can we make the most of the knowledge and expertise of local organisations to support disabled people and people with health conditions into employment?

In order to encourage joint working between establishments and sharing of good practice, we encourage the DWP to initiate, for example, quarterly meetings with all providers in an area to promote linking in with other organisations through the local authorities, to promote the benefits of co-location and to make the referral process easier between organisations providing support and to open routeways for signposting opportunities.

26. What more could we do to work with other organisations and services, local authorities, health systems and the devolved administrations to provide employment support in health settings and join up local support?

We believe that multi-agency meetings within local authorities would benefit joint working opportunities. We suggest establishing group websites offering information detailing what all providers can offer and how they can work together. Detailed signposting routeways and information should be made available on how people can access more than one service at a time. Partnership working with Community Health Hubs could provide useful platforms for exchanging information with Health Boards and Trusts. A JCP database for work coaches could provide the details of all local services available. A good example of how these databases could work is the ERSA ASKSETH database.



Wales has areas of deprivation and pockets of people trapped in poverty due to the lack of decently paying jobs. The benefits system does not always offer appropriate support in areas where unemployment is high and where there are limited job opportunities. The benefits system fails to support those individuals who are unable to travel to areas where there are opportunities or are unable to afford travel. The geography of Wales makes it difficult to access opportunities due to these barriers. Where opportunities are concentrated in more urban areas the opportunities are thus unevenly distributed and significant parts of the Welsh population are excluded. The benefits system would be much improved in Wales by recognising this to support individuals in rural areas to access job opportunities.

During the pandemic, there has been an additional top up to Universal Credit (UC) payments that will end in October. This will have negative effects on many people who will struggle to make ends meet without this additional income.

One of the contributions of supported employment agencies within the Engage to Change project in Wales has been to provide direct assistance to those entering employment to manage the UC process of transition to employment. This can mean dealing with additional communications issues and is not always available from other DWP sources.

In line with the above, there are certain geographical and economic factors that mean the landscape in Wales is different and therefore needs a more bespoke approach as one size does **not** fit all. During Covid, lockdowns and restrictions have not always been synchronised with England so therefore decisions made by central government are not timely for Welsh claimants. We have recently fed into potential future provisions for undertaking assessments for sickness and disability benefits PIP and UC (Work Capability Assessment) to ensure they are more user friendly. Access to Work is a point of contention due to differences in the processes of Statements of Special Educational Need and educational needs that are not uniform across the UK. This has led to numerous problems in claiming this funding.

We do not feel there is much joined-up communication at the moment and this causes problems. One such problem was the Access to Work payments for supported internships where there was no regard for the difference in educational statementing in Wales.

Again, we would like to draw attention to the need for more supported employment and job coaching resources in Wales to assist people with these more complex disabilities to fulfil their potential to become employed, and to create a “level playing field” for them in the more competitive labour market, post-Covid.

28. Would you be happy to access employment support digitally? Please tell us why/why not.

Many disabled people cannot access digital resources for a variety of reasons including lack of digital skills, accessibility issues, lack of suitable IT equipment or due to finances. In some parts of Wales there is the added issue of poor or no internet access. For others, blended working can be effective for resources and



some disabled people prefer digital communication. Delivering training can be very successful digitally, however, most support interventions are better in person. Improved funding is required to assist with the provision of resources. There is a lack of equipment and access to Wi-Fi, so many people are excluded. There is also a lack of understanding around online safety, leaving people vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Many young people do not have the skills to enable them to work digitally without support or even at all. The importance of a supported employment adviser here is essential.

In work job coaching support is not viable or practical digitally. Many disabled people require this specialist in person support that simply cannot be replaced digitally.

The reliance on call centres does at times disadvantage people with a learning disability who have limited access to assistance. Prior to Covid, the differences for people living in an area being rolled over into UC and those living in non-UC areas led to a reluctance among some people with a learning disability and their families to enter paid employment in the latter areas because of the potential loss of any existing premium payments. This undermined the goals of both the Engage to Change project and the goals of the government to help more people move from benefits into employment.

Chapter 3 Questions: Improving our Current Services

Chapter 4 Questions: Re-thinking Assessments to Support Better Outcomes

Chapter 5 Questions: Exploring Ways to Improve the Design of the Benefit System

47. Universal Credit (UC) has many features, such as the work allowance and taper, that aim to make it easier for people to move into work. How can we ensure that disabled people and people with health conditions are aware of these features, and encourage people to try out work on UC?

We believe disabled people should get better information about the WCA process and support to complete the form, particularly for people with a learning disability. There should be clearer information on how this enhances earnings as an in-work benefit, similar to the old tax credits, as well as improved budgeting advice.

There should be guarantees that levels of benefits will be maintained. Changes of circumstance often see a loss of premiums received under legacy benefits. “Better off in work” consultations should also be completed at job centres to make sure people are fully informed about what is the best course of action for them.

48. How could the current structure of benefits be changed to overcome people’s financial concerns about moving towards employment?



Work coaches should be better trained on these issues to support disabled people into work. There should be protection for those with disability premiums related to high support needs and more significant barriers to work. There should also be incentives for career progression to encourage people to increase their working hours. There should be guarantees of a return to existing benefits levels within the first 12 months of employment, so there is less risk financially when undertaking employment and losing benefits entitlement.

49. How could the current structure of benefits be improved so people can better manage changes in benefit entitlement?

The DWP should ensure there are no gaps between payments when migrating over to another benefit. We also suggest the re-introduction of any legacy benefit premium lost under the UC system, the reintroduction of the 12-month linking rule for those disabled people moving into work and coming off benefits, and the introduction of a 6-12 month incentive for undertaking paid work, similar to that used historically when coming off Incapacity Benefit. All of these would help disabled people to have more confidence to move into paid work from welfare benefits.

Conclusion

Thank you for completing the consultation. The response you have provided to this consultation will be handled as anonymous.

As we build back better from the coronavirus pandemic, it is more important than ever that the benefit system supports people when they need it most. By consulting on Government's ambitious plans for change, this Green Paper has sought to start a conversation that puts disabled people and people with health conditions at its centre.

We know that working in partnership with the people who are directly affected by our decisions is crucial if we are to deliver better outcomes. We will continue to listen to disabled people and people with health conditions, to improve how we work in future, so that we can continue to make changes that will improve people's lives.

To submit your response please post the survey to the following address:

Health and Disability Green Paper
Department of Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

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