

# Improving lives: the work, health and disability Green Paper

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## About this consultation

Employment rates amongst disabled people reveal one of the most significant inequalities in the UK today: less than half (48%) of disabled people are in employment compared to 80% of the non-disabled population, among those under State Pension age. This consultation looks at how the Government commitment to halve this gap can be achieved, including the role of employers, the unemployment support system, and occupational health.

## Key points and recommendations

- While good quality work is likely to be beneficial for your health, there is a proliferation of poor quality work within the modern labour market. This needs to be urgently addressed.
- There is a significant overlap between disability and age, as people are more likely to acquire disabilities as they get older.
- Work Coaches are likely to find it difficult to assess the full range of support needed by each individual benefit claimant. They should be trained to have a detailed understanding of the barriers faced by a range of groups.
- Employers have an important role in promoting this agenda. The Government should consider whether any lessons can be learned from the Fuller Working Lives agenda, which has boosted employer engagement in supporting older workers.
- The Work Programme has failed to deliver satisfactory outcomes for both older and disabled participants – the Work and Health Programme should do more to address these barriers, including by incentivising providers to help disadvantaged groups more effectively.
- As people with a disability get older, they become increasingly less likely to move back into employment, making it clear that age is an additional barrier to finding work. It is therefore important that the Government strategy for helping disability includes measures to tackle age-related barriers to work.
- This should include earlier referral to the Work and Health Programme for people aged over 55, regardless of their health status.
- The Government should extend the right to request flexible working into a system of 'flexible by default'. This would allow people to assume they could work flexibly unless their employer could prove that it does not match the existing business reasons. We believe this would fundamentally change the perception of working flexibly. This would also include abolishing the 26 week waiting period to make a request, so jobseekers can ask for flexible working at the point of recruitment, and will benefit many disabled jobseekers.

## 1. Introduction

Age UK is pleased that the Government has published the Green Paper, and fully supports the ambition to halve the disability employment gap. This is a multi-faceted agenda, and different approaches are needed that tackle different issues and help people in different circumstances. For example, promoting behavioural change among employers to mitigate the impact of discrimination might require different responses depending on the context – the employer's sector, location, nature of the workforce and the individual's circumstances are all relevant factors. There is no blanket solution, but we believe different parts of government (and indeed different areas of the DWP and DH) can come together with employers, the welfare-to-work industry, occupational health providers, and the third sector to bring about positive change.

We broadly agree with the idea that 'good' work – for example a job that does not damage your health; is secure; well-paid; allows the application of knowledge and skills; and is fulfilling – could in itself be a positive health outcome. However, there appears to be a proliferation in the current labour market of work that is not 'good', as widely documented by the rise of exploitative zero-hours contracts (this, of course is just one example). Therefore, to use work as a means of improving health outcomes is not sufficient without also developing minimum standards to ensure that the jobs disabled people take, and ideally all work, is of good quality. Hopefully the Review into Modern Employment Practices being conducted by Matthew Taylor will progress this issue.

Regardless of the Taylor Review, job quality is likely to become more topical and so it is vital that action is taken to follow up on his recommendations and ensure that people with a disability are able to find good quality work.

Age UK is a member of the Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC), and we support the response submitted by the DBC. In this brief submission we focus on unemployment support, simply because this is where we have the most relevant expertise – we agree that there are many other relevant issues that need addressing, but we feel the DBC and other member organisations are best placed to suggest solutions. We have avoided duplicating its response.

## 2. Consultation questions

### Chapter 2: Supporting people into work - Building work coach capability

***How do we ensure that Jobcentres can support the provision of the right personal support at the right time for individuals?***

***What specialist tools or support should we provide to work coaches to help them work with disabled people and people with health conditions?***

Many claimants with a disability receive Jobseekers Allowance. Where claimants have been appropriately assessed as able to work, they should be entitled to a full assessment of their support needs – including training/skills, health support, and anything else that may be relevant for helping people back to work. This should happen as soon as possible in a benefits claim.

Work Coaches need a detailed understanding of the range of barriers presented, as well as those that are hidden, in order to provide the most effective support. It is essential that all Work Coaches are trained to understand these barriers, how they might affect jobseekers' lives, and also their job search. These include not just barriers relating to disability, but also related issues such as age discrimination. Conversely, it is important Work Coaches do not stereotype and that clients are addressed as individuals.

Clearly, developing an understanding of an individual takes time and we understand there have been models developed exploring how to deliver support in the most effective way. However, a typical Work Coach has a large case load and operates under significant pressure, making it unlikely that this approach is scalable. To supplement these programmes, we would like to see investment in training advisers who are specialist in particular areas, for example who are expert in barriers relating to the jobseeker's age.

### Chapter 4: Supporting employers to recruit with confidence and create healthy workplaces - Embedding good practices and supportive cultures

***What are the key barriers preventing employers of all sizes and sectors recruiting and retaining the talent of disabled people and people with health conditions?***

There is clearly a substantial role for employers in promoting this agenda and making it a reality. There is a strong business case for employing people with disabilities – particularly compelling when coupled with schemes such as Access to Work which can cover the costs of making reasonable adjustments – and we do not have any specific evidence that can build on this.

However, we believe that there are several lessons that can be learned from the Fuller Working Lives programme run by the DWP. This has been successful at engaging businesses in improving workplace policy and practice for their older workers, as well as raising the profile of the issue. While we are aware that the Disability Confident scheme achieves some of the same positive outcomes, we believe there is scope for looking closely at the Fuller Working Lives and where it can add further value.

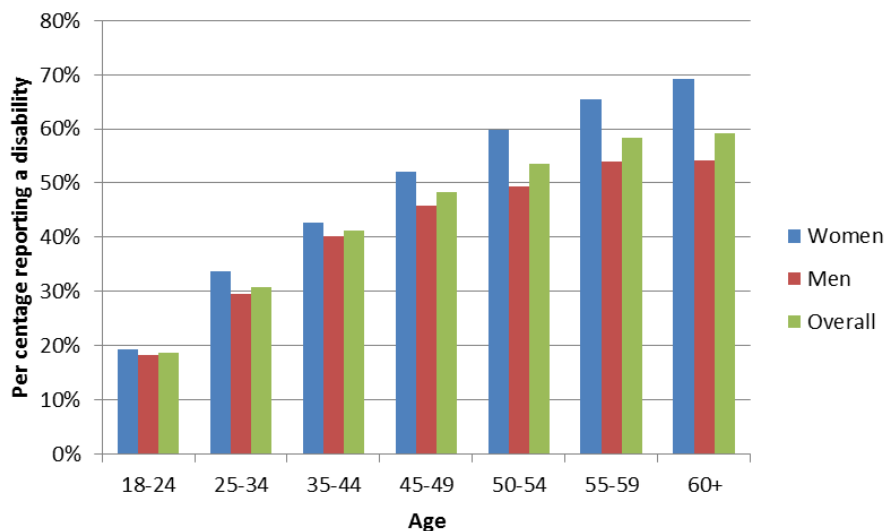
## Moving into work

### ***How can existing government support be reformed to better support the recruitment and retention of disabled people and people with health conditions?***

There is a significant overlap between disability and age, as people are more likely to acquire disabilities as they get older.

In November 2016 we published an evaluation of outcomes for older participants on the Work Programme, available on our website, finding that successful job outcomes decline with age.<sup>1</sup> There is also a significant cross-over with disability – overall, about 36.4 per cent of Work Programme participants report having a disability. However this rises to over half of those aged over 50, and nearly 60 per cent of those aged 60+, and is particularly prevalent among women.

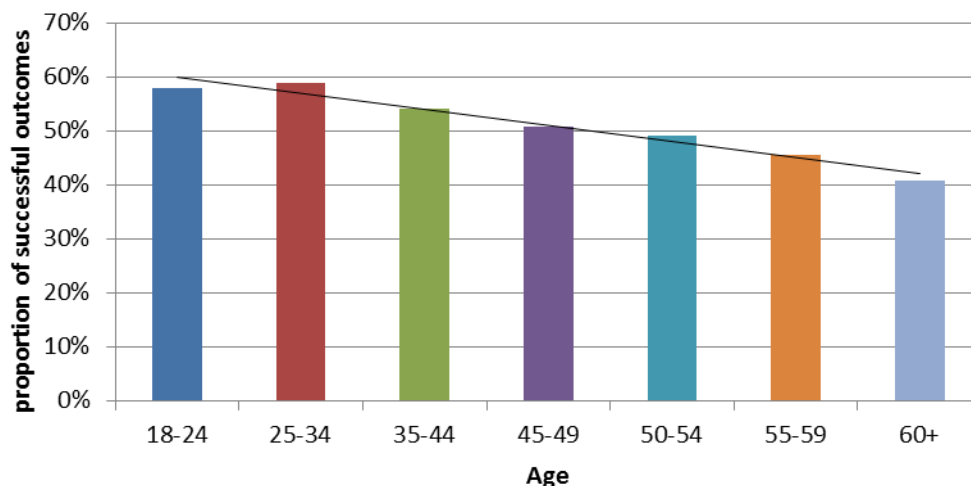
*Figure 1 – reported disabilities among Work Programme participants*



While disabilities create barriers for individuals and undoubtedly make it harder to return to work, age is an aggravating factor. Figure 2 shows disabled participants' successful outcomes as a proportion of non-disabled peoples' outcomes, within each age group. This

allows us to see the additional impact that age has for people with a disability, which is significant.

Figure 2 - disabled participants' job outcomes as a proportion of non-disabled, by age group



If the Government is serious about tackling the disability employment gap, then supporting older jobseekers through the Work and Health Programme is an integral part of the agenda. Also, older people are less likely to identify as being disabled, instead believing that their deteriorating health is an inevitable consequence of ageing.<sup>ii</sup> This could be for varying reasons, but suggests that more effort is needed to persuade individuals to identify as disabled, and to dispel some negative myths around disability.

It is also worth noting that the benefit Work Programme participants claim is not always an accurate indicator of their health. Providers report that people on Jobseekers Allowance are sometimes in poorer health than those claiming Employment and Support Allowance, in spite of 'officially' being regarded as healthier. As the government rolls out the Work and Health Programme proper incentives should be in place for providers to place participants in work – a payment based on benefits alone will not suffice. We believe that being aged 55+ is a good proxy for needing more bespoke, specialist support. In particular we would like to see people aged 55+ moved on to the Work and Health Programme after six months, rather than having to wait for two years – by which time the scarring effect of unemployment will be very difficult to counteract.

Further analysis on the Work Programme, including on disability and ill health, is in the Age UK 'Lessons for the work and health programme' report.

## ***Flexible working***

Age UK has long argued for improved access to flexible working. This is a very important means of enabling people to get back to and remain in work. Our 2012 report, 'A means to many ends' identified managing a health condition or disability as one of the main reasons that older workers might need to work flexibly, alongside having caring responsibilities and transitioning to retirement.<sup>iii</sup>

However, it also identified the difficulty for many people, particularly lower skilled workers (which consists of a disproportionately high number of women) of accessing suitable flexible options.

We believe that a system of 'flexible by default' should be introduced. This would go beyond the right to request flexible working, and allow everyone to assume they could work flexibly until the employer could justify otherwise. Such an approach would change how flexible working is perceived, without increasing the burden on employers, and extend the opportunity for disabled workers and job applicants to negotiate some form of flexibility. This approach was endorsed by the Women and Equalities Select Committee in 2016.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Age UK (2016), Helping 50+ jobseekers back to work: lessons for the Work and Health Programme. Available at [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Policy/communities-and-inclusion/Work%20and%20Health%20Programme%20policy%20report%20\(Nov%202016\).pdf?dtrk=true](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Policy/communities-and-inclusion/Work%20and%20Health%20Programme%20policy%20report%20(Nov%202016).pdf?dtrk=true)

<sup>ii</sup> Molloy D, Knight T, Woodfield K, (2003), Diversity in disability Exploring the interactions between disability, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality, DWP Research Report no.188

<sup>iii</sup> Age UK (2012), A means to many ends: older workers' experiences of flexible working [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/PageFiles/12808/A%20means%20to%20many%20ends%20-%20older%20workers'%20experiences%20of%20flexible%20working%20\(Sept%202012\).pdf?dtrk=true](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/PageFiles/12808/A%20means%20to%20many%20ends%20-%20older%20workers'%20experiences%20of%20flexible%20working%20(Sept%202012).pdf?dtrk=true)

<sup>iv</sup> Women and Equalities Committee (2016), Gender pay gap: 2<sup>nd</sup> report of session 2015-16 <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/584/584.pdf>