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Economy and Fair Work Committee

Wednesday 8 May 2024

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Session 6

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ECONOMY AND FAIR WORK COMMITTEE
14th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)
*Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)
*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
*Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP)
*Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Heather Fisken (Inclusion Scotland)
Vikki Manson (Federation of Small Businesses Scotland)
Angela Matthews (Business Disability Forum)
Chirsty McFadyen (Fraser of Allander Institute)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Anne Peat

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Economy and Fair Work Committee

Wednesday 8 May 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Disability Employment Gap

The Convener (Claire Baker): Good morning, and welcome to the 14th meeting in 2024 of the Economy and Fair Work Committee. I have received apologies from Colin Smyth.

Our first item of business is the second evidence session of the committee's inquiry into the disability employment gap in Scotland. This morning, we will focus on employers and the support that they need in order to make workplaces and recruitment practices more inclusive.

I welcome Heather Fisken, who is the chief executive of Inclusion Scotland; Vikki Manson, who is deputy head of policy at the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland; Angela Matthews, who is the head of policy and research at the Business Disability Forum; and Chirsty McFadyen, who is the knowledge exchange associate at the Fraser of Allander Institute.

As always, it would be helpful if members and witnesses could keep their questions and answers as concise as possible.

I will come first to Chirsty McFadyen with a question that I will put in some form to all the witnesses this morning. Could you talk briefly about the barriers that disabled people face in accessing and retaining employment and about where progress has been made? We are interested in examples of where and how progress is being made. What works?

Chirsty McFadyen (Fraser of Allander Institute): People with disabilities face lots of barriers to getting into work. Our research at the Fraser of Allander Institute has focused particularly on people with learning disabilities, who have some of the worst employment outcomes out of all people who are disabled. I will focus on what we have found in relation to learning disabilities, but a lot of those barriers apply to wider groups of people with other disabilities as well.

One example is attitudes of employers who might be unaware of the capabilities of people with learning disabilities. Surveys have consistently found evidence of misplaced nervousness among employers in hiring disabled people, over fears about productivity or additional costs. However, we have also found in our research with employers that there is a fear of getting things wrong, and that sometimes it is easier not to hire people with learning disabilities than it is to risk causing further harm. That is where employers need extra support.

Another barrier could be low aspirations and expectations from family members and schools, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If, as children, people with learning disabilities and their parents are told that they will probably never work, they do not expect to work when they are adults, and that becomes something that fulfils itself. That conclusion was reached in a large-scale study that was conducted by the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities—SCLD—in which evidence around the destination of school leavers was cited, so there is clear evidence for that.

Application processes and job adverts might be inaccessible for many people with a learning disability or other disabilities. They might require support to process and understand information. Our research with people with learning disabilities supports that finding, and it has been specifically mentioned as a barrier by groups that represent people with learning disabilities.

Some evidence has emerged over anxiety or loss of reduction in benefit entitlements as a person moves into employment. We have also seen that that is a barrier with regard to families. Again, we come to that low expectation of employment. If someone is told again and again, from school age, that they will not be employed, and their parents are also in that situation—and might be in receipt of carers allowance—they have become used to the idea of that person with a learning disability not being independent. Again, that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Possibly one of the most prevalent barriers, specifically for people with learning disabilities, is a lack of support. To access the labour market, people with learning disabilities often need support that is unique to them. A lot of practical support can make a difference. For example, it could be help looking for and applying for jobs, assistance finding interview locations, and training for different employability skills. Once they are in work, people with learning disabilities might need a support worker or other support systems in place, but employers do not yet have the knowledge to enact that successfully.

When support is in place, someone with a learning disability can make a really productive contribution at work, and evidence suggests that hiring a person with a learning disability tends to mean hiring somebody reliable and loyal and with a work ethic. People with learning disabilities who want to work should be able to do so—that should be a right—so those barriers are really important.

We recently had discussions with employers who have previously hired people with learning disabilities. Among the barriers and challenges that we found is the fact that it is difficult for them to measure the number of people with learning disabilities who work for them. We found that, sometimes, grouping disabilities and a lack of disaggregation of disabilities makes it tricky for people to get the right support, and we found challenges with the access to work programme—again, that is about accessing the support that is required to support people. Both employers and employees have cited difficulties with that.

The Convener: Thank you. I come to Angela Matthews, who is here from the Business Disability Forum. Angela, in our papers it says that you recently carried out a survey with employers and employees. Will you talk us through that a bit and talk about the barriers and challenges that were found through that?

Angela Matthews (Business Disability Forum): The research that you are referring to is what was called the great big workplace adjustments survey. Similarly to what has just been said in relation to access to work, we find that adjustments processes are well meaning but not fit for purpose, and they take a long time. When it comes to getting support when it is needed, we find that time is of the essence for disabled people.

A lot of internal processes that employers have for making adjustments are usually written, as I said, in very well-meaning policy documents. Those processes are often reduced to a document that has not been user tested and that depends on a few assumptions, such as that a disabled employee has one—or perhaps two, at most—disabilities, that they will need one type of adjustment and that that adjustment will be provided or bought by one area of the business. However, we find that it is not like that at all. Employees in the survey had up to five or six different conditions. Depending on what they were, adjustments came from different areas of an organisation. Some adjustments included assistive tech, for example. Others included coaching. Others included flexible working requests as a reasonable adjustment.

We found that, for the different types of adjustments, different departments were signing them off. In addition, it was not always clear when an adjustment should be referred to the access to work programme or when access to work should be used by employers. For employees with disabilities, that meant that, generally, they were getting only one part of their adjustments package, for want of a better word, yet, if people do not have all their adjustments, they are not equipped to do their job. Up to 8 per cent of people were waiting for up to one or two years to get the adjustments that they needed, and, for all that time, they were expected to perform in a way that was healthy, enjoyable and productive, which was just not the case.

We found processes that had not been designed in one single process; instead, they had been added to along the way over a number of years. Workplace adjustments processes were iterative rather than well designed and holistic across the whole organisation. Ultimately, the disabled employee loses out, but so does the employer, because an unhappy and unhealthy disabled employee means a job that is not getting done. Everyone loses out.

The Convener: Thank you, Angela. I come to Vikki Manson, who is here from the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland. Vikki, is there anything additional that you would say about employers' experience? You represent small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland, and, in your written submission, you said that some 20 per cent of

> "small business owners are disabled or have a health condition"

and that SMEs are

> "more likely to employ disabled people than larger businesses".

Will you talk us through anything additional around barriers and about the reasons for the higher percentage of disabled people in SMEs than in larger businesses?

Vikki Manson (Federation of Small Businesses Scotland): Good morning. Actually, I was going to start by saying that our research has come from two different perspectives: first, from that of a small business owner employing disabled people but, secondly, from that of a disabled small business owner. We have looked at two different areas in that respect.

As for barriers, I go back to what Chirsty McFadyen said: they are mostly about the fear among small businesses of getting it wrong. At the very beginning of all this, with the recruitment and interview processes, many SMEs want to reach out and advertise positions to disabled people, but they do not know where to begin or where to find guidance. Looking at adjustments to interview processes can feel like a huge challenge to SME owners, but the fact is that they can be just simple little things such as providing the questions prior to an interview or arranging an interview for a specific time of day. The question, then, is: how do we communicate that to small business owners?

I know that it will come as no surprise to anybody to hear that small business owners do not have a lot of additional time. A small business survey that we conducted last year found that small business owners gave the equivalent of one working day per week to administrative tasks. I am sure that we will all fully appreciate that they are already under quite significant pressure and that it is a lot to ask them to find the additional time to look into how they would support disabled people through the recruitment and retention process. We therefore need to find some way of providing them with clear and concise guidance in that respect.

Another barrier is the cost of making adjustments. Obviously, small businesses have faced quite a lot of unprecedented challenges over the past four years, and there is perhaps a bit of fear with regard to the additional costs involved in adjustments and being able to access financial support to meet them. Those are, I would say, the main barriers.

As for small businesses employing a higher proportion of disabled people, with such businesses, there is more of what might be called a family environment. You are not lost in the sort of numbers that you get in a large business; everyone works together very closely, so you are able to build very close relationships; and things are, I suppose, a bit more informal. We have a little more data on that, which I can also provide to the committee.

I think that that wraps it up, convener.

The Convener: Thank you, Vikki.

I now turn to Heather Fisken from Inclusion Scotland. Heather, I would be interested in finding out whether you know of any additional barriers that have not yet been identified. I also note that, in previous work, the Fraser of Allander Institute has suggested that we are making quite good progress with certain disabilities, but not such good progress with those who have a learning disability or a neurodivergent condition. Do you want to comment on that, too?

Heather Fisken (Inclusion Scotland): Good morning, and thank you for having me here.

I want to start by saying that, as a pan-impairment organisation, Inclusion Scotland does not focus on specific impairments. Of course, our reason for taking that approach is the social model of disability and our belief that what disabled people have in common is that they are disadvantaged by the barriers being put up by society, physical environments et cetera.

I will try to avoid repeating the really worthwhile points that other people have already made, but if we are listing the barriers in this respect, I go back to the various processes involved, particularly the recruitment process. One of our recent findings has been the increasing use of artificial intelligence in recruitment processes, and the fact that we cannot say for certain whether bias has been built into them.

The other thing to remember is that employees are whole people; we have lives. However, transport is still by and large inaccessible to many disabled people; there are all the issues associated with education, which I am sure that one of your colleague committees is looking at; and there are, as has been said, low aspirations and expectations with regard to family, education and so on.

There is also the issue of social care support. If people cannot find personal assistants, they will have to rely on somebody else to be there to get them up and get them to work on time. Moreover, they also have to rely on their workplaces actually allowing a PA; indeed, that sort of thing has happened in the Parliament. One of your colleagues brings their PA to the chamber with them, and an adjustment had to be made in the chamber to accommodate them. That is in the Parliament, where the will is good; you can just imagine how some employers drag their feet on this sort of thing.

I should point out that we are employers, too, so we understand some of the challenges that arise from bringing an additional person into the workplace as support. It can be seen as a barrier and as something potentially disruptive. Of course, these people are professional and know how to act in a professional workplace, so eventually people get used to the idea and think, “Actually, this is okay.”

There is also a lack of skills and confidence not just in people who are trying to get into employment but those who have perhaps lost employment because of a worsening long-term health condition or a sudden disability. However, employers, too, lack skills and confidence as well as the knowledge and awareness of where to go for support.

09:45

Moreover, we have to remember that people’s conditions fluctuate. They can be really good for a day, a week or a month, and then it stops being good for a while. An incredibly useful piece of research that we did a few years ago talks about fatigue, which is not, in itself, a disability—or an impairment, I should say—but something that can result from being disabled or having an impairment. If, in addition to that fatigue, there is pressure to perform at work, it can worsen the condition. It is just a matter of making these small adjustments and having that awareness; you cannot overload somebody who this might be happening to, and you have to recognise that, although they might sometimes be incredibly productive, at other times they might not be.

We have already touched on access to work issues, but I would just add that access to work—which I realise is a reserved issue—does not pay for software updates. Somebody might be successful with their claim and purchase their equipment, and the employer might have been able to integrate the equipment and software with the organisational systems—which is never easy in itself—but when a software update comes out, they are not eligible to have the update covered through access to work. People are just not aware of these smaller points at the outset.

Moreover, access to work does not cover repair. If something breaks down, that is it. For some people, some of their electric wheelchair costs are covered by access to work, some by social care and some, perhaps, by private funds. However, if the wheelchair breaks down, they have to chase the proportion that comes from access to work. The money is not automatically given, and they might be refused. As a result, they find themselves stuck at home without any means of mobility.

There is also a paucity of supplies. We might talk about British Sign Language interpreters or communication support such as the type that I am using today, but there is actually very little supply, so getting the access to work grant is only part of the equation. You need the supply there, too.

I have mentioned transport and social care, but there is also the issue of childcare. Parents of disabled children need accessible childcare, not childcare that is 50 miles away from their home and workplace.

Finally, why does this happen? Basically, it is discrimination. It might or might not be intentional—people might not even be aware that they are doing it—but what it boils down to is discrimination, and there is law that exists to deal with it.

The Convener: Thank you, Heather. Just before I bring in Brian Whittle, I want to raise an issue that was highlighted by last week’s panel that you might want to comment on. We are picking up that there is a significant pay gap for people with disabilities.

Moreover, what do you think the appropriate balance should be between voluntary and paid work? Do you feel that, as far as disabled people are concerned, there is not an expectation that their work would be paid? Is there instead an expectation that their work is voluntary? I do not know whether you want to comment on those two things.

Heather Fisken: I am sorry—was that question directed at me?

The Convener: Yes.

Heather Fisken: I beg your pardon.

First of all, I should say that we say “disabled people”, not “people with disabilities”. That is the language that we have managed to get the Scottish Government to agree to use, and it follows the social model. Every day is a school day, and I am happy to explain that.

On your question about the pay gap, the answer is yes. I understand that the fair work action plan will look to review the issue, but our concern is that any work done on the pay gap within the Scottish Government needs to be shared across all employers. I understood that we were going to talk about the employment gap, not the pay gap, so I might have to follow up with more detail about the pay gap after today, if that is okay.

The Convener: Yes—that is fine. Do you want to comment on the balance between voluntary and paid work, and whether there is a prevalence for disabled people to be expected to do voluntary rather than paid work?

Heather Fisken: There is an expectation from some people that that might be all that disabled people can do, but that is not the case at all. For example, one person with whom we have worked closely over the years has multiple degrees. She has done everything that she possibly could, such as internships and voluntary experience, to put herself at the front of the job market, but she still cannot get a permanent job. She once showed us a spreadsheet of all the jobs that she had applied for—which she was totally overqualified for—and she just could not get a job, even though she was relying on voluntary experience. Young people coming through the education system today can do the Duke of Edinburgh award and other such schemes, and it looks great on their CV, but those opportunities do not always exist for young disabled people. There is a role for voluntary work to play when people are entering employment, but it should never be seen as an alternative, because people need an income.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Good morning to the panel. I will start my questions by asking about the economic opportunity of closing the disability employment gap. Chirsty, has the Fraser of Allander Institute done any analysis of the impact on our economy of closing that gap?

Chirsty McFadyen: We have not done any explicit analysis of that, but we have been grappling with it a lot, because we often get asked what the business case is for hiring more disabled people. An idea goes around that people with disabilities almost have to be more worth it than a healthy person for it to be worth the hassle for employers to hire them, which we do not agree with at all. As I said before, our feeling is that work is a right, and that anyone who wants to—and can—work should be able to do so.

Disabled people are a huge untapped labour pool, which our society and economy would benefit from as a whole. If we were speaking about any other minority, there would be no question of whether they should be working. If they want to work, they should be able to work. For us, it is a bonus that enabling people who want to work is good for the economy.

We have seen that employers are scared of causing harm, and that it is easier for them not to hire people with disabilities than it is to risk making a mistake by trying it. However, we have spoken to employers who have hired people with learning disabilities, and they rave about their employees' abilities in their job and the positive impact that they have had on their teams. Several employers have said to us, "Why didn't we do this sooner?" They talked about how straightforward the process was compared with what they had in their heads. There is no business detriment to employing people with disabilities, and it is the right thing to do, so any benefits to the economy will be good.

Brian Whittle: I will come to Angela Matthews to widen that out a wee bit. Do employers understand the business case for employing more disabled people?

Angela Matthews: I think that they do, but it comes from a slightly different narrative. Generally, the narrative in the media is that there is a skills gap in the economy and that the skills that we need are more streamlined now. However, we see the opposite among our members. We see businesses that want a broader range of skills to future proof their business and make sure that they have equipped and agile workforces. They need a broader range of skills than ever before.

Many—although not all—of our employers come from a place of saying that they need as much difference as possible. We have tried hard to get our members to start from a place that is not about asking, "What is the business case for hiring disabled people?" We do not hear a narrative about the business case for hiring different races or for hiring an Irish woman, which is what I am. You just do not hear it about other protected characteristics. We try to start the narrative among our members from a different place, which is on a par with how they treat other protected groups.

However, as I said, we are seeing that employers are looking for a broader range of skills. Even senior managers are saying that, if we do not have the easiest, most fit-for-purpose and most inclusive attraction, application and recruitment processes, and if we are shutting out disabled people from those processes, we cannot be sure that we are choosing the best people for the job, because we are cutting off a huge number of candidates. We have seen the progression towards that kind of thinking, which is encouraging.

Do not get me wrong—not every employer is there, but there are employers who are trying things such as schemes and partnering with organisations that are trying to get more people with neurological conditions and learning disabilities into placements and then paid work. They are starting to think about where the skills gap is and saying that they need anyone and everyone to be available and wanting to work with them. We are seeing the narrative change a little bit there, which is encouraging, but, as I said, it is not happening everywhere just yet.

Brian Whittle: Heather Fisken, you talked about someone who had applied for so many jobs for which they were overqualified; that sounds a wee bit like prejudice, to be honest. Is enough being done to interact with businesses to make sure that they understand the business case for not excluding disabled people?

Heather Fisken: I would imagine that some of the other speakers here, such as the Federation of Small Businesses, spend a lot of time speaking to employers. We are a disabled people's organisation, so our mission is disabled people. The information that we have about employers, other than from being employers ourselves, comes from the employers who work with us through our we can work programme, which is an internship programme that is funded by the Scottish Government, and that is actually quite a small number.

Other than that, our focus is very much on disabled people themselves and not on employers, so I cannot speak for employers, but, from what we can pick up from employers, we know that the fear is that there is a lack of awareness—just to build on what has already been said. We are a disabled people's organisation, so our mission is disabled people.

Brian Whittle: That brings me nicely to ask Vikki Manson to speak from the FSB's perspective about how we get the message out there and how we encourage employers to consider disabled people in the same light as everybody else. What work needs to be done to ensure that there is inclusion and that the gap shrinks?

Vikki Manson: There are already some fantastic examples of employers who have supported disabled people into the workplace. In 2022, the Federation of Small Businesses commissioned a report called "Business Without

Barriers", which I would be happy to forward to you. It has a number of case studies of positive examples.

With many small businesses, it is about fear of the unknown. We speak about small businesses, but a small business can be a one-man band up to 200-odd employees, so there is a breadth of different types of businesses. A lot of our small businesses do not have a human resources department or specific people who can look at different kinds of practices and how they can implement them. It might be one person or two people who are doing it. How do we present the information and the benefits to them in an easy way and show them how easy the process can be and how small some of the changes are that need to be made to employ a disabled person. There is quite a lot of work still to be done to change the narrative and make small businesses see that it does not necessarily have to be that different from employing a non-disabled person.

10:00

I am the mum of a teenager who has three disabilities and I can already can see what adjustments will need to be made for her when she goes into the workplace. I am already thinking about how she might face prejudice because she will need additional time and so on for different tasks. I get it from that side; I completely appreciate and understand that.

It is about speaking to small businesses, working with them, providing the material, making the process as easy as possible and just putting the information out there that it does not need to be difficult and there is no need to overthink it or fear it. Fear is the biggest thing for a lot of small businesses. They do not want to do any harm and upset people.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Good morning to the panel; thank you for joining us this morning.

I will follow on from Brian Whittle's questions and come back to you, Vikki. You talked about the case studies in the report that the FSB published a couple of years ago. Do you get the sense that there is an appetite among your members to learn and to share information about what works, how easy it was and where the challenges were? You have all spoken about employers' uncertainties, fears and worry about the cost of employing disabled people. How can we overcome the barriers that might just be barriers of perception rather than reality?

Vikki Manson: We just need to speak to those small businesses that have already employed disabled people, use them as a sort of pillar to start with and allow them to expand that knowledge and speak about it. I would hope that that would encourage other small businesses to follow suit.

I spoke about the fear among small businesses and how they feel overwhelmed, and I do not think that they do not want to do it. A lot of it is about capacity and about them understanding how they can do it and seeing that they do not face a massive barrier and that the process is quite easy. It is about working with small businesses to promote the benefits of employing disabled people, showing them that it will not be so difficult for them to do it and giving them examples of some small changes that another small business has made to employ a disabled person.

Maggie Chapman: That was really helpful. Whose responsibility is it to do that engagement work with small businesses to make sure that they know that it is not as big and scary as they might think it is? Are the FSB, other business organisations and government at different levels joined up enough? Are we closing the loops and connecting each other in the right way in our approach to narrowing the disability employment gap?

Vikki Manson: There is definitely work to be done there. When we speak to our small business owners, there is definitely a lack of awareness. I spoke earlier about the access to work example and how there is support out there for them to employ disabled people, but a lot of them are not aware of that at all. The FSB and the Government can do a lot more work on that as well as working with other stakeholders.

Maggie Chapman: Thanks.

I have similar questions for Angela Matthews. In the Business Disability Forum, what do the people you engage with need to know to enable them to employ disabled people without those fears and concerns and barriers?

Angela Matthews: I am speaking about an audience that is almost the opposite of the FSB's, because a lot of our members are large. Some have tens of thousands of employees. That creates its own difficulties,

I entirely agree with what Vikki Manson said. Talking to disabled people and making changes should not be difficult, and we should not create a narrative that makes people and businesses overthink things. However, because of the nature of processes in large organisations, where a line manager might not know who the human resources director is or who procures occupational health services or the kit that their staff need, things become complicated. That causes difficulties on two levels.

You mentioned the issues of cost and perception, and there can be a double-edged sword in that regard, because the perception can be that doing what is required is going to be really expensive. However, the disability inclusion agenda has tackled that perception head on to such an extent that, when businesses come across an adjustment that will actually be costly, they do not make it, because they have been told that the adjustments should not cost anything. That is the danger of creating a narrative that adjustments should not cost a lot.

There is a perception that big businesses can afford everything. However, if you have 100 people in your directorate who are deaf and use BSL, you might think about getting full-time BSL interpreters for them, but current figures from our members show that employing a full-time BSL interpreter costs £10,000 more than the access to work cap, so you would be paying more than £100,000 on top of that for those employees.

All of us—policy advisers, policy makers, the Government, employers and charities—need to get better at understanding that some adjustments just cost money. As long as we have a narrative that adjustments should not cost much money, access to work will not be invested in in the way it needs to be. Further, we still have that support cap, which is directly hurting people who need the most support. We know that our members are having to decrease the hours of people with learning disabilities, people with complex neurological conditions and people who are profoundly deaf, because they employ many people with those conditions and access to work just does not cover the cost.

There needs to be a balanced perception of cost, and we also need to accept that adjustments cost money sometimes, and that is okay, because we have a fit-for-purpose access to work programme that can support businesses to employ people and keep those employees.

That is the situation with regard to people who are in work, but I would like to take a moment to talk about the situation for people who are looking for a job, which is different in different industries. For example, in some of the creative industries, such as the arts and media, it is usual to have short contracts or to do freelance work. Disabled freelancers have told us that, sometimes, they get assigned a contract on a Friday for a Monday start, which means that, depending on where the contract is and what that disabled person will be doing, their access to work support package might need to change over the weekend, and there is no time to do that. The system is just not designed for that kind of work.

We need to acknowledge that, although big businesses in particular are in an ideal position to influence what is done and to put in place amazing practice, they also need to meet their business need.

On access to work, many people who go for an interview with an employer say that they will apply to access to work to get an interpreter for their interview but access to work does not respond to their application before the interview date. That means that, if a medium-sized employer cannot foot the bill for that interpreter, they cannot make the reasonable adjustment and the interview is withdrawn. That is another unintentional way in which some businesses cannot cope with the cost, because access to work is not agile enough and is not resourced enough to be as agile as businesses now need.

Maggie Chapman: That is helpful. You raise an interesting point on the ambitions to halve the disability employment gap. Does the focus on the easy-to-win ambitions further marginalise from the labour market people with much more complex needs?

Angela Matthews: Absolutely—100 per cent.

Maggie Chapman: I turn to Heather Fisken. Following on from that, where do you see the gaps in the national plans and strategies for the ambition of halving the disability employment gap? Is there enough co-ordination? Are people talking to each other? Do we have the structures of the plans and strategies right, in your view?

Heather Fisken: I will start with the ambition itself. Disabled people do not feel that halving the disability employment gap is a great ambition. We agree that there should be no disability employment gap. I recognise that progress is being made, and the gap is narrowing, but we suspect that that narrowing is down to more people who are already in work becoming disabled and managing to stay in work, perhaps by going part time.

To return to the question, we think that the ambition should not be to halve the gap. We cannot imagine another protected characteristic having an employment programme that aims only to halve the employment gap between the people with that characteristic and the general working-age population.

So, yes, it is going in the right direction, but what happens in 2030, assuming we meet that target by 2030 or before—will it disappear? Will we progress to a quarter? There will always be some disabled people in this country with very profound multiple disabilities who will never work. There will also be some people who choose not to work because financially that is fine for them, but we do not know how many people that is. That is what we should be aiming for; finding out how many people that is and aim to reduce the gap to that.

That is where we should have started from, not from half.

On talking to each other, co-ordination and so on, we are involved in several advisory groups with the Scottish Government across numerous of those plans, including the fair work programme. There is a lot of interesting dialogue. There is an oversight group that brings together different sectors. We as a voluntary organisation, and as a charity, go to Government round tables and working groups, and it tends to be more people from the same sector, but we are now on a couple of groups that have multiple sectors around the table, which is useful.

Sometimes people say to us, “This is what we’ve done.” We believe in co-production, which goes back to some of the earlier conversation. We also believe that disabled people are the experts in their own lives and their own impairments, so they should be involved in the co-design of these programmes from the get-go. That should not just mean going to a meeting and ticking off suggested actions, or saying, “Actually, this isn’t strong enough or good enough,” or, “You need to include an action on this,” and then when the strategy or the plan comes out, it is nowhere to be seen.

We understand that the Scottish Government has a way of working and that there are other priorities and challenges, but disabled people—those in the workplace and those influencing policy and decision making—are the experts. We have to get much better at this in this country. We cannot call engagement co-production. It must be proper co-production and co-design, with people feeding in. People should also find out why things have not been taken on board; the Government should not just say, “Right, let’s go to publication. That’s it. It’s done now.” It should come back and say, “Okay, we can’t do that because of this. How about that?” We should keep revisiting things until we get somewhere.

I am sorry—could you repeat the question, please, so that I can check that I am answering it?

10:15

Maggie Chapman: That has been really helpful. One of the challenges is that, although really good work might be happening in different parts of government—from local government all the way through to the United Kingdom level—things might not be being joined up.

Heather Fisken: Yes. Employers also have to remember that disabled people are human beings and have a lot of expertise. However, people who are new to the job market or are re-entering employment after becoming disabled might not have the confidence or the knowledge, but it is not hard to work through that. There is so much advice—there are possibly too many sources of information and advice out there—some of which is very good, but there is so much that people do not know where to start. You go down a rabbit hole if you look for things on the internet.

Maggie Chapman: I have a similar question for Chirsty McFadyen. I very much take to heart Heather Fisken’s challenge, in that halving the disability employment gap is not ambitious enough. Where have you identified the gaps or the lack of co-ordination across the strategies and plans?

Chirsty McFadyen: In one of our reports in 2021, we said that there is very much a patchwork system of supported employment in Scotland. We found that programmes take a local approach and are commissioned by a variety of agencies. There is no national strategic model for delivering consistent employability support, particularly for people with learning disabilities, and there is a lack of available long-term funding options.

As we have talked about previously, the financial model that is often adopted for employability programmes can be detrimental to people with learning disabilities, because, when programmes are commissioned, part of the financial settlement might be dependent on successful placing of users into job vacancies. For example, if an organisation is being funded to provide a voluntary placement, some of the funding might be dependent on that person getting a full-time job at the end of their placement. That places a financial risk on businesses and other organisations—it is often charities that provide such placements. They can be really reliant on the funding and, if they do not have that guarantee, it can be really difficult for them to take part in supported employment initiatives in the first place.

On the previous point about easier adjustments being made and the harder ones being left behind, we have talked about that in relation to employment support programmes that are tied to employment outcomes. If an organisation is reliant on such funding, it might choose people who are more likely or guaranteed to get a job at the end of the programme, because that guarantees that it will get the rest of the funding at the end of the programme. We have found that that makes things really difficult.

On halving the disability employment gap, we did a report on the reasons why the gap has been closing. Our main finding was that, as Heather Fisken mentioned, the majority of the closing of the gap was due to a rise in the prevalence of disability—in other words, there has been a rise in the number of people already in jobs reporting that they are disabled—which means that, in the near future, we might get to the point at which everybody, or most people, with a disability has reported that they have one. Progress will then stop, so we will need to think about how we get unemployed disabled people into work. We have been focusing on that.

Earlier, physical disabilities were mentioned. Between 2014 and 2022, for people with musculoskeletal disabilities—things to do with your arms, legs, back and neck—there was an increase in employment without an increase in prevalence. However, for people with mental health conditions, employment went up, but so did prevalence. We think that that is tied to an increase in people reporting rather than anything else. Thought needs to be given to what the strategy is for getting unemployed disabled people into work, because we are not seeing in the data their numbers increase as much as they should be if we want to halve the gap.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): A couple of weeks ago, we had a round-table event where we had the opportunity to meet some young people with experience of using employability services. They were not very complimentary. I realise that that was a small snapshot, but nevertheless it was quite interesting to hear. Primarily, they were talking about schools and jobcentres. Do employability services in Scotland meet the needs of disabled people in accessing the labour market and staying in work? I ask Heather Fisken to come in on that.

Heather Fisken: As I said earlier, Inclusion Scotland is a disabled people's organisation that is made up of disabled people. We have user groups, project participants and disabled people who have been placed as interns through the we can work internship programme. We hear a lot about that. The starting point for this conversation—this response—is that, for several years now, we have tried to change the narrative from employability to employerability. The employability services and support services for disabled people and other groups focus on the deficit in that individual—what is wrong with them, why they are not working and what they are lacking—whereas we have tried to change the narrative to whether employers are fit to be good employers of disabled people. Are they ready? Are they capable? We call that employerability.

We have found there to be quite a lot of criticism of employability services. We know that two projects have a much higher success rate, and both of those are run by disabled people's organisations. That success is not in terms of whether people are still in the programme in three months' time but in terms of whether they are being placed in permanent employment following an internship, et cetera. The reason for that is that, as disabled people's organisations, we understand what the challenges are. We do not underplay the challenges for employers but focus on working together with them. We look at both sides of the equation.

The other thing is that we would not discount anyone because of whatever their impairments are, their background or the other factors that impact on their employment prospects. We will always say, "Yes, we will do this"; that is our focus.

We have found that some employability services tend to go for the low-hanging fruit. We have referred to that already—I think that Angela Matthews commented on it. Some people are easier to place and, if you like, cheaper to place. We will not do that; we will find a way through. However, it has not always been 100 per cent successful, because there are challenges. For example, some of our interns go to the Scottish Government, but the management in the directorates changes and things are not put in place. A large part of the issue is access to work.

Yes, employability services are funded, but the funding is short term, so good projects do not always get to continue. Also, the Scottish Government imposes fair work conditionality on organisations that it funds. That is a good thing, but does it go far enough? Does it ask organisations: are you going for those who are furthest from the job market? Are you getting people into work? Are you getting people into the sustained employment to which they aspire?

When we all come into working life, we have aspirations about what we want to be. We do not always get there, or it may take quite a lot of time to do so. Disabled people are no different. We know that disabled people are—this goes back to the pay gap—predominantly in low-paid, precarious and part-time work.

Colin Beattie: Do you engage at all with high schools, for example, which are fairly important at helping disabled people and so on, and at pointing them in the right direction and signposting them as to where to go? There seems to be a bit of a deficit there.

Heather Fisken: We would love to do that but, unfortunately, we do not have the funding to do everything that we would like to do. We do not just focus on employment; we also have work on politics and, basically, work right across life. The cost of living and the pandemic have been massive challenges over the past few years. We would definitely love to do something there, but we do not have the funding to do so at the moment. However, we are ambitious, and I hope that we will get there.

You are right that schools are very important. Years ago, I visited a school that I will not name. It was a school for people with what people say are special needs. That was a horrific experience. I was there to talk about independent living to older teenagers who were due to leave school that year. I talked to them about what independent living means and what it could mean for them, and I asked them about their ambitions and aspirations. I was cut across twice by the teacher, who said, "This isn't for them."

Angela Matthews: My insights on that question come from disabled graduates. We have been working with universities, and a recent piece of research that I have done has been on the transition from education to employment. An internship or an employability placement has sometimes been part of that.

Young disabled education leavers—whether they left further education or higher education—have told me about when they had gone on to disability-specific employability programmes. If the programme was headed by a disability charity, getting on to it was lovely—it was a nice experience. There was inclusive language, accessibility, and the application was good. However, when they got past the front shop of the disability charity, they found that the charity had partnered with other suppliers and partners that did not have accessible websites and talked about disability in a poor way. Some graduates and FE leavers whom I spoke to said that they left the programme because, when they had got through the initial application with the disability charity, the supplier was not inclusive or accessible. We have heard that quite a few times.

Another thing that we have been looking at recently and that we are working on at the moment is how equipped careers advisers in education settings are to have conversations with disabled learners and students about what they should consider when they are looking for a job or considering a career, or what their options are after they leave the education setting that they are currently in. Careers advisers have consistently told us that, in the organisation that they are in or when they became accredited with continuing professional development types of accreditation, speaking to or advising disabled people on their future plans was not part of their training at all.

We are working on that right now. We are doing interviews with careers advisers, who generally tell us that they do not know what to say to disabled students even when they ask questions such as, "Should I tell my employer about my disability?" We see that education settings are not always equipped to support disabled learners and students through the next steps beyond education.

Colin Beattie: I will take a slightly different angle. Maybe Chirsty McFadyen can respond first. There is always a problem with data. There is always a problem with getting information to back up whatever initiative is being considered. Is there enough understanding of the experience of disabled people in the labour market? Do we understand how much unmet need there is in the market? Are there any specific areas in which we lack data that would make a huge change to our understanding of where to put resources? I suppose that there are three questions in one, there.

10:30

Chirsty McFadyen: The first question was about whether we have enough data on people's experiences, and the short answer is no. The best data that we have that is nationally representative—or as close to that as it can be—is the annual population survey that is used in Scotland. However, that does not differentiate between learning difficulty and learning disability, which is a key issue. We have also found that there are difficulties in relation to employers understanding the difference between the two terms.

We are currently working on a project with an equality, diversity and inclusion consultant, who works with big businesses across the UK and is speaking to employers who have not yet hired people with learning disabilities. A representative of one of the very large employers said, "I'd be really interested to take part in this, but I should also speak as someone of experience because I have a learning disability." What they actually meant was that they had a learning difficulty—I think that it was either dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Those are the kind of things that we are talking about when we talk about learning difficulties; a learning disability is a different condition. Having those areas separated in data is important because people with conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia have very different outcomes to people with learning disabilities, such as Down's syndrome or fragile X syndrome. They have very different needs, but they are often aggregated in data.

With regard to specific data gaps, it would be really useful to separate those groups, because we have no idea, based on the data, how many people with learning disabilities are in work. People with learning disabilities often feel that they are invisible in policy because they are not looked at as an individual category in the data that we have.

Can you remind me what else you asked about?

Colin Beattie: It was about whether we have any understanding of the unmet needs. You have answered the question about specific data gaps.

Chirsty McFadyen: We do not have great data on unmet needs, particularly in relation to people with learning disabilities. We have anecdotal evidence from lots of qualitative research that lots of people with learning disabilities want to work and we have surveys from charities, but we have not captured those people in the nationally representative data. That makes it difficult to have evidence-based policy, because there is no evidence for us to draw on.

Colin Beattie: Vikki Manson, do you have a comment to make on those questions? If you want me to repeat the questions, I will do so.

Vikki Manson: That is okay—I think that I can remember them. With regard to data, I completely agree with Chirsty McFadyen that there is a definite lack of data. The Federation of Small Businesses has data from research that we have done and other private and third sector organisations do their own surveys and reports.

With regard to what we have done up to date, I have spoken about the two different reports that we have done. In 2022, we published the “Business Without Barriers” UK-wide report; we had really interesting data from that. One piece of data showed that around 51 per cent of small business employers had employed a disabled person or someone with a health condition in the past three years. However, as Chirsty said, that does not break it down to different types of disabilities—it is a generalisation. Work definitely needs to be done around that.

I also spoke about our Scotland-only big small business survey, as it was called, that we did last year. When we looked at the results, we found that a very small proportion of disabled people had responded to that survey. How do we widen that out and encourage more people to engage with that kind of work? We will probably think about that when we repeat the survey at the end of this year.

There is definitely a need to find more data and look at the definition of disability. Chirsty spoke about learning disability and learning difficulty, and there is also the mental health aspect. Some small business owners are a bit unsure about what that means and where mental health conditions sit, with regard to a disability, and what their obligations would be to a person with a mental health condition.

Colin Beattie: Angela Matthews, you nodded your head a lot while Chirsty McFadyen was speaking, so I will bring you in. It is clear that there is a lack of data on the individual needs of disabled people and on the different types of disabilities. How do you break down a condition such as autism, which has a huge spectrum? How do you decide which segments to push together to provide meaningful data?

Angela Matthews: That is a really important question, which speaks directly to the fact that someone’s condition is not the reason why they are not in work. It comes back to Heather Fisken’s point about seeing disabled people as whole people—which, of course, they are. Therefore, every aspect of their life determines whether they are ready to work or in a place to work, as is the case with non-disabled people.

That is important in relation to the type of data that we collect. At the moment, it is not just that there is a lack of data; in the UK, we think about the data that we need in entirely the wrong way. That applies to your question about autism, for example. I am autistic, and I am a director of policy and research. I do not face the barriers to work that are faced by someone with autism and a complex learning disability who has never worked. I do not have much in common with people with autism who also have other conditions, which means that we need data that focuses on barriers.

Please hear me when I say that the condition or the impairment is important, but it is not the most important thing. We need data that tells us why someone is not in work. I do not believe that the reason will be someone’s autism. It will be that, for example, they do not have a carer coming in each morning to get them ready for work, or their domestic situation might mean that they do not have access to the internet. They might not have connectivity in relation to either wi-fi or transport. After becoming disabled, they might not have had access to fit-for-purpose rehabilitation to make them ready for work.

Data on barriers is one of the elements that we need to consider. I am aware that I say this as a researcher, but, years ago—it might have been in 2012—the Equality and Human Rights Commission commissioned a brilliant report called “Barriers to employment and unfair treatment at work: a quantitative analysis of disabled people’s experiences”. It was one of the most important and insightful studies that there had been. I am a researcher, so I love data and big research projects, but one-off research is very expensive and dates very quickly.

We need a more strategic approach to collecting fit-for-purpose data, which should be, predominantly, by barrier. The approach needs to be longitudinal and specific to an individual. That will enable us to track what enables people to get into work, why people leave work, what happens while they are out of work and what gets them to the point at which they can go back into work.

We need more intuitive, longitudinal and specific data. When I asked a group of disabled people how they felt about the Government having named data about them, they said, “If it’s going to get me what I need, 100 per cent—do it tomorrow.” There is some resistance in respect of people thinking, "I don't want the Government to have named data about me", but if we had a methodology that was not a one-off, that was longitudinal and which was strategically embedded into a whole UK employment strategy, it would give us the data when we needed it and on an on-going basis. It would allow a minister or policy maker to go in at any time and get data about who was in work and what got them there—and, equally, who was out of work and why. At the moment, we do not have the "why"; all we have is some questionably credible data on impairments with regard to who is in work and who is out of work. Frankly, such data does not give us the policy solutions that we need to solve or narrow the disability employment gap.

Colin Beattie: Finally, Heather, do you want to comment on this?

Heather Fisken: We definitely have data gaps. One of the biggest gaps arises from the reliance on statistics. They are very important if you are painting by numbers, but they do not give you any colour or tone, and we believe that lived experience information is crucial in making those numbers more meaningful. I am not saying that they are not meaningful or useful, but they are just part of the picture.

In reducing the employment gap, we also need to recognise that it should not be a case of having just any job for the sake of having a job. The issue is what those jobs are. As I mentioned, a lot of disabled people work in part-time and precarious roles that might not be their choice of employment. Let us face it: for a lot of us—particularly those of us in this room, I imagine—our employment is part of how we identify ourselves. It is something that we are proud of. Everybody is entitled to that, if that is the path that they choose to go down.

Something that I would like to be done, specifically in Scotland, is good monitoring of and research on the applicability of the fair work conditionality for all the people who are funded by the Scottish Government or who are in public service. That was a really important thing that was added to the fair work programme, and it would be good to see how that conditionality is playing out.

There needs to be more on multiple characteristics and the intersectional barriers that people are facing. There are some that you can look at with disabled women and disabled men when you track the employment gap, but I think that we have to go wider than that and look at rural and island communities, people with caring responsibilities, parents and so on.

The issue of definitions has, I think, already been mentioned. In preparing to come here, I spotted that one of the definitions related to whether an impairment was having a little or a lot of impact on daily activities. I am not saying that people who experience a little impact are not worthy of our consideration, but that does not fall within the definition of disability, which is about something that has a "substantial" impact on "day-to-day activities". There is a slight niggling worry in the back of my head that these statistics on impairments that have a little impact are being reflected and used to reduce the disability employment gap. I hope that that is not the case.

There must also be some opportunity to look at the bad news stories. I know that we all want to be positive all of the time, but sometimes you find the truth, get ideas and see the way forward by looking at the bad news, whether that means looking at the calls on the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service from both employers and employees, or looking at tribunals, particularly employment tribunals, in relation to disability discrimination cases. Sometimes we see a pattern emerging or information that can be used.

I totally agree with the point about longitudinal research, particularly on employability services. As I mentioned earlier, are people in a job for three months, six months or a year, or are they positioned in permanent employment and likely to stay there? There also has to be research not just on disabled people who are going through employability services but employers, too. What did they do? Why did they do it? Did it work? What did they do if it did not work? There will be lessons to learn there, too. As I said at the top of the evidence session, this is about not just disabled people, but employers and employerability, so we need to look at what employers are doing, too.

It is also important that research—and this could well be the case—does not just focus on people who are members of employers organisations. If you are an employer and you are already a member of a chamber of commerce or a federation or whatever, then quite possibly you are thinking about all this positively; you are thinking, "What can I do?" We need to get to the probable majority that are not thinking about it, or who are too scared to do something, or just have not got around to it, or are worried about costs. All those reasons are legitimate, but we also need to look at the smaller employers and the ones who might not be thinking positively about their obligations and the benefits for themselves and society.

10:45

Finally, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation did research some time ago—in 2010—for a report called "Getting in, staying in and getting on", which looked at the return to the Exchequer for every £1 spent on access to work. The figures are probably well out of date now, so I will not repeat them, but it would be worth looking at that as a way of bolstering why disabled people’s employment is so important to society, but also because, basically, disabled people have the right not to be discriminated against in work. That is slightly off the point about the data. Sorry.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Good morning. Are employers doing enough to make recruitment processes and workplaces more inclusive for disabled people? I will go to Angela Matthews first.

Angela Matthews: Yes and no. As I said earlier, our members are mainly large organisations. We find that the people who are doing the recruiting are not buying the systems they recruit with and that is the major challenge. Our advice service gets a lot of frustrated calls from HR advisers, recruiting managers and line managers saying that their recruitment system is inaccessible and they have a candidate who cannot get through it. They were not involved in the purchasing of that system, but they have to deal with it. We hear from a lot of people who are—to use a figurative phrase—on the front line, who know that the system is not working, but they have to use it.

The other part to that in a large organisation is that it costs a lot to change things. For example, when someone buys a recruitment portal, that can sometimes mean a two, five or 10-year contract with a recruitment partner. It can be difficult to get out of that contract, depending on the wording, and it is expensive for an organisation that wants to exit it because disability inclusion in their organisation has advanced quite a lot, but their suppliers are doing nothing about it. We often see that the employer has advanced a bit more than the suppliers that they are using, which causes a mismatch, and candidates see that.

For example, they get a warm and inclusive tone from the employer who asks them to let them know whether they can do anything to change the interview process. Then they go for their assessment day and they cannot get into the building, or there are flashing lights, the environment is not neuro-inclusive and they are not given breaks often enough, because the process is outsourced, and done by someone different.

We are trying hard to get employers to think about their whole organisation. For an employer to do enough, they need to think about how their information technology, comms, the supply chain and procurement and marketing enable the candidate even before they get to recruitment and HR. How are they giving every single candidate an amazing experience? As I alluded to, all those things are bought in isolation from each other at different times, and for the most part, they do not fit together. The contract is still going on and they were bought at a time when the employer, and sometimes even the law, were in a different place. For the most part, a lot of our members know that it is not working, but contracts are holding them back from doing anything about it.

Are employers doing enough? Perhaps not always, but they know that they need to do more. However, there is a difference between them knowing that they need to do more and the people who want to do more in the organisation being mobilised and having the influence to change what is done.

Chirsty McFadyen: I agree with Angela Matthews. One of the employers we spoke to in our recent research was the Scottish Assembly, which is a group of people with learning disabilities and autism who meet weekly to discuss politics and policy. It is a small business that employs people with learning disabilities and other additional support needs. On accessibility, it told us that it has the expertise to create EasyRead documents, accessible application forms and so on, but, as Angela Matthews said, on some vacancy websites, it is impossible to upload images. That is an example of the basic issues that cause problems. For example, some sites will not allow people to upload their own PDF, which is accessible.

We also found that, sometimes, employers do not know what they do not know. That goes back to what Vikki Manson said about needing case studies and examples from employers for use in guidance, which would be helpful for employers in general. In our research, we have seen great examples of good practice, such as guaranteed interviews; less formal interviews; working interviews, which involve someone being supervised as they try out a job to see how they get on; EasyRead application forms; video or phone applications; and supported employment. We have seen lots of great simple things that can be done, but it is important that businesses are made aware of what can be done to make the process accessible for people. Some employers are not aware of what they could do, which again adds to the fear that we talked about. Better guidance would help with that.

Heather Fisken: As well as the practical changes, culture change is really important. However, the only people who can answer your question are disabled people themselves, and, perhaps, their colleagues. Nobody wants to work in a culture where people feel that the fact that they are seen as getting something extra, an extra break or more time spent on them, can have negative implications or fallout for them, such as harassment.

It is important that employers never stop looking at whether they can be more inclusive, because they can always get better. One of the things that has struck me during today's discussion is that some of the changes that were made during the pandemic have started to fall away. For years, disabled people asked whether they could work from home and were told that that was not possible, but, when the pandemic came along, everybody was working from home and it was found that that was doable—it worked, and it was wonderful. However, there is now a move back to having people in a workspace, and not everybody is being allowed to continue working from home. Some people might leave that job, but no other disabled person is going to apply for that job if the condition is that they must work in the workspace, even though the business says that it is willing to make a reasonable adjustment in some circumstances.

Another important issue is the fact that some disabled people are still self-shielding, and are doing that without the support that was available during the pandemic, so they really need jobs that they can do at home in a safe setting.

On the issue of technology, we have referred to application processes and so on, but there is an issue with an overreliance on that. There is a suggestion—a kind of belief—that technology and artificial intelligence are correct, but we do not know whether that is always the case. More often than not, an application form will ask you to give a telephone number, and you cannot save the form unless you enter a telephone number. However, as a deaf person, I do not want people calling me—you would be astonished how many people do that. That is just one personal example.

As I said, the only people who can tell you whether employers are doing enough to make workplaces inclusive are the people who work for those employers. It is therefore important that those employers get into the practice of reflecting on that with their employees. However, the issue is more than just inclusion; it is about the whole culture. If employees see disabled people being portrayed on the news, or elsewhere on television, as shirkers or fraudsters, or as people to be pitied, they will bring that culture into the workplace with them. That is probably moving slightly away from the conversation, but it is an important point. Once people become aware of that, they can start facing up to it and addressing it.

Vikki Manson: I will add a couple of little points. We have been discussing employers and recruitment processes, and I want to highlight the differences between smaller and larger employers. Their recruitment processes will be completely different, as will the platforms on which they advertise positions. Small business owners' knowledge about making recruitment processes more accessible to disabled people will be completely different, too, because they do not have the resources or specific staff to implement such policies. It is important to understand those differences and how various employers would approach such matters and be educated in them.

Secondly, speaking to disabled business owners and small business owners, as well as to disabled people who are already in the workplace, would be really helpful in order to understand what is going well, or not so well, and how recruitment processes have gone. As I mentioned earlier, case studies are probably one of the most valuable sources that we can use to understand the issues.

Evelyn Tweed: Moving on, a couple of you have mentioned providing guidance and support to businesses, but what else needs to be done? How can we support businesses to get this right?

Angela Matthews: Access to work, which I have mentioned, needs to be much more agile and to account for a wide range of business practices and occupations. It also really needs to speed up. As I said earlier, disabled people are losing out on interviews and on getting jobs because businesses need to get on with recruitment. They cannot wait for months to see whether a disabled candidate will get access to work, so their job offer will be withdrawn and someone else—usually a non-disabled person—will be offered it instead. Of course, there is more that employers can do.

Many other policy settings relate to employment, too. For example, we have mentioned transport and social care. The one that affects our members most is the healthcare setting. Many disabled people are off work at the moment because they are on waiting lists for surgeries or on-going therapies; they might have been on such a list since before the pandemic. We get a lot of calls from employers saying, "We are not sure how to make this better. Is it right that we should pay a medical bill to get that person back to work?"

Many people become disabled just because that's life. However, it has happened to some during the pandemic, or for many other different reasons—and sometimes disability just happens. However, since the pandemic, the difficulty has been people having to remain on waiting lists for access to counselling, other mental health therapies or physiotherapy. Access to occupational therapy, which can be pivotal to getting someone back to or into work, is just not there right now.

Employers cite the public health setting as one of the greatest barriers to getting disabled employees—some of whom have been off sick for more than a year—back to work, or as the main reason for their losing employees who are not ready to come back to work any time soon, all because they are waiting for national health service treatment. The impact that the public health setting has on the employment of disabled people, people with health conditions and people who have become disabled cannot be overestimated.

11:00

Evelyn Tweed: Heather, you mentioned rural areas. Are there specific challenges in rural areas?

Heather Fisken: Yes. That very much builds on what Angela Matthews has just said. It is even harder to get healthcare appointments in some rural areas, and even in suburban areas, given the moves to big centralised hospitals, such as the one in Larbert, for people who are having to travel distances when transport is inaccessible or difficult to access.

In rural areas, particularly in coastal and island areas, there is a reliance on the tourism industry, which is, of course, precarious and short term, and there may not be a correlation between the jobs that are available in those areas and the education, training and housing that are available, including for disabled people. This is another conversation, but disabled people have great issues with housing. People who want to move to take up employment somewhere else face big and real challenges in finding accessible accommodation or accommodation that they can adapt—there are challenges going through the adaptations process as well. As you know well, housing in rural areas, particularly affordable housing, is in short supply.

There is a whole pile of things in relation to rural areas. I will leave it there, otherwise I will talk all day about the issues in rural areas. However, it is an important point. I would add that people become disabled. It is not a case of people becoming disabled and then moving to rural areas just to make their lives more difficult. They are born there or they become disabled, or it may just be the place where they can afford or choose to live.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I have a couple of specific questions that I would like to put to the panel on issues that have already been talked about more generally. One issue is on reasonable adjustments and the second is on access to work. I will start with Angela Matthews, who has talked about those already.

First, we know that there is a right to reasonable adjustments, but what are the barriers to employees requesting and accessing reasonable adjustments?

Secondly, you have already said quite a lot about access to work. Specifically, what needs to be done for access to work to improve and to meet the needs of disabled people in the workplace?

I will start with Angela, then others can come in, if they want to.

Angela Matthews: What are the barriers to employees requesting adjustments? A couple of things are going on there. At BDF, we believe that the reasonable adjustments law, or duty, in the Equality Act 2010 is quite balanced. By that I mean that, when it is used well and in a way that is understood, it balances the need of the employee with that of the employer. I am aware that I say that as a legal person.

However, we see that there is a massive lack of understanding by employers of what “reasonable” means in different contexts. A disabled employee or, quite often, an employee who is becoming disabled, will ask for an adjustment—or what they call a reasonable adjustment. Sometimes, the employer will need to say that they cannot do that but can do something else.

The reasonableness element is for the employer to determine, not the employee. What we find is really misunderstood is that the employee can ask for a reasonable adjustment, but the employee’s understanding of “reasonable” is not entirely accurate, and that is not their place. With regard to how that comes across to an employee, my adjustments research showed that the key thing that gets in the way of a good relationship between a disabled employee and their manager happens when a disabled employee requests a reasonable adjustment. The employer—it might be an HR advisor or a line manager—says, “Let me consider that. I’ll see what I can do.” Sometimes the response is “Yes, great—everything’s fine”, but if the response is, “Actually, I can’t do this but I can do that”, what the employee hears is “No” and thinks that their request has been refused or denied. However, actually, the law entirely allows for an employer not to grant the specifics of the request but to grant the request to remove the barrier.

That misunderstanding between the employee and the employer with regard to the law causes a lot of tension. The barrier is that an employee is engaging with a legal duty of the employer and it is not for the disabled employee to understand all that, yet that is the process that they have to engage with.

On the employer side, a lot of the time when an employee requests a reasonable adjustment, the employer thinks, “Oh my goodness. Law. Legal. Risk. This must be a formal conversation. There’s a process for this. Let me get that form off the intranet. Where’s the policy? Have I done my training?” They go into defence mode, and employees really pick up on that, and wonder whether they are asking the wrong thing, whether they should have asked it, and whether they are asking the wrong person. Then, everyone is anxious and nervous. We find that during requests the anxiety of the employee feeds off the anxiety of the employer, then there is just a ball of miscommunication and anxiety and it takes time to get out of that.

There should not be any barriers to an employee making a request. The barrier comes about when the line manager does not know what to do or—as happens for the most part—the organisation has not equipped the line manager to know what to do, to know whether that is a request that can be handled internally, as I said previously, or to know when it is appropriate to contact the access to work scheme.

With regard to access to work and what to do about it, the first thing is that we need to remove the support cap because it is impacting on the people who need the most costly adjustments. A lot of people in our member organisations have access to work awards of £4,000 to £6,000; they are nowhere near the cap, but someone who needs an adjustment that exceeds the cap cannot have it. The individual support cap is not working. It does not make sense any more because some people are massively beneath it and some people go over it. Therefore, it is not clear how the support cap works with regard to how access to work is budgeted for.

The second thing that we would like to see is employers being involved in access to work claims. At the moment, the process is entirely employee led. We get why that is the case; it is to give the employee a say and to give them autonomy in and ownership over how they work and their adjustments. However, that does not always work. Depending on the employee's condition, they might need help with the application. Other times when it does not work include when the employee goes off sick. We would love it if, when an employee goes off sick, the line manager could take over so that adjustments are put in place for when the employee comes back to work, or to help them to get back to work.

The final thing—I promise that I will then stop talking—is that we would like to see an agreement-in-principle type of policy, whereby, when a disabled person goes to an interview, they will already have had a conversation with access to work along the lines of, "This is what I'd like to do. These are the types of jobs I'm going for. These are the types of adjustments I might need." Access to work can give an agreement in principle and say that an assessment has already been done and that if the person goes into the type of work that they have told them about, it is agreed in principle that they will get an award. That would make the process much quicker. When the person gets the job, they would call access to work on day 1 to say that they are in post and the support can be provided straight away. We tested that with disabled employees, employers and even jobcentres, and they all said that they feel that that would work well.

Those are my top three changes that we would like to see being made to the access to work scheme. Thanks for listening. I know that that was a lot of words.

Murdo Fraser: Thank you very much, Angela. It was very helpful to have that spelled out in detail, because the committee is looking for solutions that we can recommend.

I will go to Vikki Manson next. We have heard a lot about reasonable adjustments, about what might be done and what the barriers are. I am interested in hearing the FSB's perspective on that.

Vikki Manson: As Angela Matthews said, there is a fear that a reasonable adjustment means a big change and a lot of cost when, in reality, such adjustments might be very small. Again, this might be an area in which small businesses excel a little bit more than larger businesses do. When a disabled person is in employment in a small business, they are probably working day to day with the person who will make the adjustments. They will have formed a relationship on a more informal basis. Some small businesses might find it easier to do. The "Business Without Barriers" survey that we did in 2022 contained the statistics that 91 per cent of small business employers already offered flexible working and 97 per cent of those employed a disabled person. That is quite a strong piece of data that shows that that is already happening in small businesses.

For others who might be struggling with reasonable adjustments—again, it is a legal term and people might not fully understand what it means—we need to ask about how we can simplify things and how we can make making changes a bit easier for employers to understand. We also need to ensure that employees are not frightened to ask the questions and to have that conversation.

Murdo Fraser: Okay. Thanks very much. Chirsty, do you want to come in?

Chirsty McFadyen: I can speak a little bit about five of the employers that we spoke to that have experience of hiring people with learning disabilities. Five of the seven employers that we spoke to had used access to work and had waited months for support to arrive for some, or all, of the employees. We saw that once employers had had their first experience of applying, they understood how long it could take, so they pivoted to putting support in place before someone started. That helps to reduce waiting times, but it can still take months. We have had people waiting nine months for accessible technology. As Angela Matthews said earlier, that leaves them unable to do their job to its full extent. That is a business cost, at the end of the day. It is detrimental not just for the person, but for the employer.

Of more concern is that we heard from some employers that applying to the access to work scheme is a difficult and upsetting experience for them and their workers. As Angela said, the default process for access to work support is that the employee applies for it by themselves, but employees can give their employer permission to speak on their behalf. That happens quite a lot at The Usual Place in Dumfries, which is a cafe that provides training placements to get young people into work and then tries to move them on to full-time employment. It also hires people with learning disabilities and other additional support needs.

Murdo Fraser: I should say that we met people from The Usual Place two weeks ago.

Chirsty McFadyen: That is perfect. The Usual Place staff mentioned a couple of people with whom it had worked who had had quite traumatic experiences in applying for access to work money. As part of the process, the person needs to go over their disability and everything that is difficult for them. Reliving that, especially for a person with a learning disability, can be quite difficult. They compared it to applications in systems such as personal independence payment assessments and jobseekers allowance, in which they feel that they are being tested. That is partly why we have the adult disability payment now, in Scotland. We wanted to make the process less daunting, less like a test and more accessible. It seems as though there are such issues with access to work.

People said that when someone has any kind of mental health, anxiety or executive-function issue, it can be really difficult to keep up. They said that they would wait weeks and weeks to hear back about access to work claims, then access to work staff would say, “We need information in two days or we’re cancelling your claim”.

11:15

As Angela Matthews said, if people are off sick, that makes things really difficult. If people do shift work or work only part time, they might not be in work until the next week. That means that the employer will need to try to contact them when they are off, which is also not easy to do. That creates stress for employees and makes them less likely to want to continue in their jobs, and it also puts a lot of stress and a lot of extra administration work on employers.

As Vikki Manson said earlier, that can involve a real time stretch, particularly for small business owners, so I can see that a small business owner might be reluctant to take part in the process. It creates more barriers, which could be detrimental to people getting work.

Murdo Fraser: Does Heather Fisken want to comment on those issues?

Heather Fisken: I will comment just briefly. The reasonable adjustment question is really important, because we know from experience that employers are terrified of the word “reasonable”. What does that word mean? It is indecipherable. However, the answer is that adjustments are bespoke. It is about having conversations and having the right attitude and a culture in which they say, “Okay, come in, and let’s have a chat.” I think that somebody referred to the fact that people are scared to bring up the issue. People might be masking their impairment or they might have not declared it. Maybe they do not want to declare it because of fear. There is a lot of work to be done on organisational culture. That is not to say that there are not some good examples out there.

On access to work, Inclusion Scotland has just taken on the convener role on the Scottish access to work stakeholder forum, and we have had some engagement with our members on that. First and foremost, the biggest issues with access to work are how confusing and time consuming it is and delays in payments that mean that someone who is waiting for equipment simply cannot start their job or internship. We know people who have lost out because they have had to wait for so long. However, they have no recourse because access to work payments are a benefit. That is not right.

There is a lot of frustration with access to work among employees. Some people have said, “Oh, yeah—I’ve got a really good person I speak to. They’re very helpful and they listen to me.” Other people have said, “I’ve been shipped from left to right and north to south. I’ve no idea what’s happening, and I have to repeat myself all the time.” It should be borne in mind that we, as disabled people, have a lot of officialdom to deal with, and we have to repeat ourselves a lot to a lot of people, just to be put into a lot of files and forgotten about. Therefore, we have to repeat our experience every time.

There are lengthy waits for money to come through. I do not think that employers recognise that. When someone has to wait for an invoice to come in from a supplier, put it through the finance system then send it back, there can be more administration and a bigger burden.

The system cannot be open to fraud. Disabled people do not want fraud, which takes money away from disabled people who need financial support of some sort. However, we are quite often branded as fraudsters ourselves. That is a stressor.

It should be borne in mind that disabled people who use personal assistants employ those people—they are employers. I know people who have had to pay PAs out of their own pockets, and we have been told by a group that we have spoken to that people have had to pay out of their own pockets or risk losing their PA employees, who are incredibly hard to come by. People have to work up a relationship with PAs because they are in their house doing domestic and sometimes intimate hygiene roles for and with them. People do not want to lose those people just because they do not have money from access to work to pay them. People are therefore dipping into their own overstretched bank accounts and finances to pay.

Murdo Fraser: Thank you very much. That is really helpful.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Good morning. I will not keep you too long, because I know that you have been grilled for quite some time this morning.

I want to concentrate on some points that have already been made. Chirsty McFadyen talked about what is in the minds of folks in terms of employers, and Angela Matthews talked about perceptions.

How do we change folks' minds and employers' minds? How do we get rid of the perceptions that exist around employing disabled people? What should we do in order to get the voices of lived experience in all that, so that people—employers or employees—can give their positive experiences about work?

Since I mentioned you first, Chirsty, maybe you would like to answer first.

Chirsty McFadyen: I will defer to one of the employers in the report, from which I will read a quotation. I do not know whether you have spoken to DFN Project Search, which is a work placement programme for people with learning disabilities.

Kevin Stewart: I have been talking about Project Search for quite some time, and we know quite a bit about it, so you do not need to go into depth, but the quote would be useful.

Chirsty McFadyen: That is perfect. I put that question to Carmel McKeogh, who is the director of operations at Project Search, and she said:

> "So I think the biggest thing that we find is that people, because there's so few people with learning disabilities or autism or both in work, are not exposed to them as colleagues. So for the most part it's a lack of confidence and lack of knowledge about how to support people with learning disabilities in a work setting that makes it difficult for people. I've rarely met people who are mean about it. People do not say 'I feel like we just don't want to work with them, they're not for us'. I've rarely met anybody that is like that. I've met a lot of people that are a bit scared and unsure and they say things like 'We've never employed anyone with a learning disability, we don't know what that's going to be like. What happens if they have a meltdown? What happens if a customer doesn't like dealing with them? What happens if…?' We see that most of all that what stops employers from engaging is fear—because they've not seen people with learning disabilities in their workplace and they don't know what they look like, how they will behave and what they are capable of.
>
> For a lot of people their exposure to people with a learning disability or autism is on the TV and so what they've seen is more stereotypical. People will say things to me such as, oh, we've seen the guy with Down's Syndrome on Coronation Street in the cafe and so they think that is what all people with downs syndrome want to do. They have seen people with autism who wear ear defenders and so they think everyone with autism can only get a job in a quiet workplace. Because there are so few people with a learning disability or autism in workplaces people naturally have a limited frame of reference. And even sometimes when employers know people personally, they often don't see them from an employment angle. So they can't imagine their niece or their nephew or their son or their daughter in work because they don't know anybody like them that is in work to form a reference point for them. Yet the DFN Project SEARCH data shows that young autistic people and young people with a learning disability move into a vast array of jobs across a range of employers, from engineer to pharmacy assistant, from porter to warehouse associate, just like everyone else they have a wide range of ambitions, drive, capability and talent."

What Carmel highlighted well was that there is not enough visibility of different types of disabilities in work, and increasing that visibility can be incredibly powerful in changing perceptions.

For example, The Usual Place does micro awareness raising, which is training for employers about inclusivity, diversity and equality and hiring people with disabilities, and people with additional support needs do those presentations. Immediately, those employers see someone with a learning disability or autism standing up in front of a group of people and providing a great presentation and training. Already, their minds are changed about what the abilities of people with disabilities could be.

It comes down to that sort of awareness raising and showing more of what people can do, because there are many good examples out there, but a lot of employers are not aware of them. The EHRC provides legal guidance, and it would be useful to have more concrete examples of what people are able to do in the workplace, because that is not seen.

Kevin Stewart: Angela, do you want to comment on how we get rid of those perceptions?

Angela Matthews: From my perspective, it is worth looking at how the perceptions are created.

We mentioned guidance before, but we hear quite a lot from employers about guidance fatigue, because there is guidance from everywhere.

The central place for the recently revised information for employers about recruiting disabled people is gov.uk. Once you have read all of that, you get to the links, some of which are to documents that are hundreds of pages long. As our colleague—whose name I have forgotten again; I am sorry—has just mentioned, that is the case with the EHRC's guidance. No line manager has time to read that.

Some of our employers tell us that the very fact that reams and reams of guidance are provided implies that it is a difficult area and that they need to know a lot before they speak to or employ disabled people. It also creates the perception that, if they do not have time to read all that guidance, they are not equipped to employ a disabled person, so they will leave that for another strategy for another year. Alternatively, they might decide to pass that over to their corporate social responsibility colleague or their environmental, social and governance colleague. That is another trend that we are seeing, whereby employers are saying, "I can't do disability this year in my inclusion strategy. You'll find employment initiatives for disabled people in CSR or ESG instead."

The fact that we are creating such perceptions really matters. The amount of guidance is one aspect. The other thing that employers say is that they would like things to be made easier when the law changes, for example, in relation to web accessibility guidance or new flexible working rights. They want to hear directly from the Government about that—they want to get a message in their inbox that says, "This is changing. You need to do these three things." What they need to do should be set out clearly and simply.

Ultimately, what will change employers' minds? We need to make the process easier and we need to not make it out to be something difficult. When I speak to policy leads in other membership organisations or chartered bodies, I find that the guidance fatigue that I have mentioned is leading to a lot of line managers, HR folk and equality, diversity and inclusion professionals opting for peer-learning networks. Those involve people getting together and saying, "I've got this situation," which they then all talk about together.

A lot of our members are saying that they want opportunities. I think that I can say this. What came out in one of our recent membership surveys is that our members do not want more guidance and information; they want more opportunities to talk to other professionals who are doing similar jobs about case loads so that they can problem solve one another's situations. We are seeing more of that, which our members say makes things easier.

Kevin Stewart: Thank you. Vikki, the last time that I was out with one of your FSB colleagues in my patch in Aberdeen, one of the businesses that we went to was the Bread Maker, which has an immense reputation. It employs a lot of disabled people, and people know that, which I think is very good for the business. The fact that the Bread Maker is such a good employer, along with the quality of its products, attracts a lot of folk.

How does the FSB highlight the major advantages that employing disabled people can bring?

Vikki Manson: The "Business Without Barriers" report that we commissioned back in 2022, which was all about disability employment, had a particular focus on the perspective of disabled business owners. There is a lot of value in understanding that they have the lived experience of that and they can make the necessary adjustments. Through that work, we found that there were a lot of examples of disabled business owners who had created their business and who then went on to employ a number of disabled people with different disabilities. I think that we can learn a lot from that.

I think that it was Angela Matthews who spoke about the need to showcase those good examples and to get them out there in order to help other business owners to understand the positives and how easy the process can be. It is really important for them to realise that it is not something to be fearful of. I do not think that such information is widely available at the moment. I always come back to the point that small businesses do not have the capacity to do such research. They do not have the numbers of people in their business to allow them to designate people to do one specific role.

11:30

On the regulation side of things, small businesses are dealing with so many different changes relating to net zero and other areas. Angela Matthews was spot on when she said that they just want to know the three changes that they need to make to their business; they do not want to read through reams of different policies. They want things to be to the point so that they know exactly what operational changes they need to implement.

We should definitely showcase the small businesses that are already really good at employing disabled people, and speaking to disabled business owners will give fantastic insight into how to change perceptions.

Kevin Stewart: Heather Fisken, are the voices of lived experience extremely important in helping to eradicate some of those perceptions?

Heather Fisken: Yes. Obviously, the first voice is that of the disabled candidate, applicant or employee in the workplace. There should be a culture in which people feel comfortable declaring and having conversations with their managers or employers.

I have already talked about co-production. That does not just happen; you have to work up to it by building people's capacity. For example, people might not previously have been involved in creating policy or guidance, so there needs to be some capacity building with disabled people who get involved. Some organisations are very good at that kind of thing, but some are not. You also need to be able to pay for that. For example, if we had booked a webinar for one and a half hours this morning but we had continued for an extra half hour, the communication support people might have had to leave to go to another assignment. We have to be really careful about those kinds of things.

The voices of lived experience add to statistical information but they come across loud and clear in saying that disabled people are not a homogeneous group. They are not all the same. There are different impairments. That has been borne out this morning, with the University of Strathclyde talking about people with learning disabilities. Hearing from people with lived experience is so important because it brings colour to the issues and shows the reality. If you look only at employment figures, you do not take account of other issues such as housing, transport, access to healthcare and social care, somebody's history and how much gatekeeping there is in a family. All those points have been made this morning.

Hearing from people with lived experience is really important, and I am really pleased that Inclusion Scotland is here to share our evidence with you. The issues that I mentioned in response to the previous question about access to work came from the group that fed into the access to work stakeholder forum. There were things mentioned that I had not heard before, and I thought that I had heard it all before, so that just goes to show that you never have.

Kevin Stewart: My final question basically requires a yes or no answer—I think that I can guess which one it will be. There has been a lot of talk about the difficulties with the access to work system. It sounds as though it is very clunky and bureaucratic and that it does not take into account individuals' needs. Do those who are involved in the access to work system need to listen to the voices of lived experience—whether they be employees or employers—in order to shape a more personalised system that would work much better for all? What do you think—yes or no?

Vikki Manson: Yes.

Angela Matthews: Yes.

Chirsty McFadyen: Yes.

Heather Fisken: I cannot give you a yes or a no. They are already listening a little bit, but they need to hear what is said.

Kevin Stewart: That is pretty loud and clear on that front. I thank you all for your time this morning.

The Convener: My final question is linked to Kevin Stewart's question on the access to work scheme, about which we have had quite a lot of discussion this morning. Is access to work the main support mechanism for disabled people who wish to access employment, or is it not suitable for people for whom employment would not be their primary source of support? When the committee went on external visits, access to work did not seem to be the main model. I am not sure whether that was because such support is difficult to access or because it is not the right mechanism for some people. Chirsty McFadyen, would you like to comment?

Chirsty McFadyen: I would say that access to work is not the right mechanism for some people, or it might not be appropriate for some disabilities. In such cases it might be much better to have flexible working arrangements, for example, but those would not be paid for by the access to work programme; they would just be discussed with employers.

Therefore the programme is probably more tied to physical disabilities or those that require the person to have a support worker. Where it perhaps falls down is in relation to mental health conditions, and, in particular, on reasonable adjustments, where the position is a lot more complicated. We have spoken a little about the definition of disability, which can change almost from day to day for people with such conditions. If they are asked whether they are being substantially impacted, the answer might be that it depends. For example, if someone is medicated, that means they are not classed as disabled but they still have a condition that might need some form of adjustment at work.

Therefore the access to work programme is good for forms of support that require financial backing but there is perhaps more work to do on those that do not.

The Convener: To go back to questions on data, is it not the case that we cannot tell from it how many people do or do not need such support?

Chirsty McFadyen: Completely. As Angela Matthews said earlier—I am sorry for initially forgetting her name because I could not see it on the screen—we do not have data on barriers, which means that we do not know what is preventing people from working.

Another of our findings from speaking to employers was that, although many of them might know roughly how many of their employees have disabilities, that information is not disaggregated. We explored whether a short-term solution might be for employers to record the type of support that is provided to employees. That might feed into tackling barriers, because they could ask people that question rather than asking them to specify their disability. In an ideal world, everyone would be able to say what their disability is and not have a fear of stigmatisation or of being stereotyped or discriminated against, but we are not yet at that point. In the meantime, it might be more useful to look at barriers and at what support is being provided.

However, as the convener said, we do not know about unmet need. At the end of the day, whether data is collected nationally, obtained through surveys that are done by the third sector, or collected by employers, it is given voluntarily. Not everyone will feel comfortable or safe in letting people know about their disability, so wider culture change is required, too.

The Convener: This will definitely be the final question. At last week's meeting, we heard from local authorities that they record disability data in a framework database that the Scottish Government has established. I cannot remember the name of it right now, but do you know whether employers also feed into that?

Chirsty McFadyen: I am not sure what data you are—

The Convener: Perhaps we could follow up on that point.

Chirsty McFadyen: I would be happy to do so.

The Convener: I will have to look back at the papers for last week's meeting, but we will follow that up. I thank you all for being generous with your time this morning.

That brings us to the end of our public session, and I move the meeting into private session.

11:38

Meeting continued in private until 11:53.

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