

# Fulfilling Potential

**Building a deeper understanding of disability in the UK today**

## Summary



## **Acknowledgements**

This evidence base was compiled by Disability Analysis Division. Team members were Jacqui Hansbro, Priya Shah, Zoe Uren, Joanna Lone, Florin Cuciureanu, Gary Gifford and Nadia Sotiropoulou.

We are grateful for the all help and advice we received from our Analytical Advisory Group in drafting this evidence base. We are also grateful for the helpful comments received from colleagues in DWP and those in other government departments.

## Introduction

In *'Fulfilling Potential – Next Steps'* we said we would work with disabled people's organisations and academics to **publish a detailed analytical study** to inform public understanding of disability and the issues faced by disabled people. Our aim is to draw a picture of the population of disabled people in Great Britain, the demographics, how disability can develop and change over the life course, and the issues faced by disabled people.

The evidence base has built on the responses made to the 'Fulfilling Potential Discussion Document'. In addition we have:

- Synthesised a range of published research.
- Carried out secondary analysis of surveys including the Life Opportunities Survey (LOS), the Family Resources Survey (FRS) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS).
- Commissioned the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to carry out focus groups with disabled and non-disabled people and added questions to the monthly ONS Opinions Survey 2012.
- Worked in collaboration with an Analytical Advisory Group made up of academics and disabled people's organisations.
- Looked at international data to put the UK findings in context.

This document draws on data from a wide variety of sources, some are based on UK data, some are based on GB data and some are based on data from England only.

## **Disabled people make a huge contribution to our economy and society**

- More than three million disabled people have a job or work for themselves, many serving the community directly or in high profile roles.
- Over half of disabled people play an active role in civic society – for example as a local councillor or school governor or doing voluntary work.
- Well over a million disabled people are unpaid carers and around 180,000 disabled people are professional carers.
- Disabled people's spending power in the UK is estimated to be at least £80 billion a year.

## **Not all disabled people are in receipt of disability or health-related state benefits**

- Not all disabled people are in receipt of disability-related benefits. Around six million people are – much fewer than the eleven million people who are potentially covered by the Equality Act.
- Fewer than half of families with a disabled child receive health-related or disability benefits.
- The proportion of disabled people, and receipt of disability related benefits, varies a great deal across the UK. Among the Under 65s disability prevalence ranges from one in twenty adults in more affluent London boroughs to one in three in parts of Glasgow and the Welsh Valleys.

## **Disabled people want the same things from life as everyone else**

- Choice and independence are important to disabled people just as they are for non-disabled people. Good health and family life are key to quality of life.
- Three-quarters of disabled people feel they have choice and control in their lives, slightly less than the rest of the population.
- Although not always acknowledged, family and friends, not the state, are the main sources of help for disabled people with everyday activities.

- Disabled people in receipt of a personal budget feel that they have more choice and control although many disabled people experience difficulties managing a personal budget. Some people – especially those with mental health conditions – are less likely to be offered one.

## **Most people today have a positive attitude towards disability – a small minority do not**

- Fewer than one in five people now say they think of disabled people with ‘discomfort’ or ‘awkwardness’.
- Eight out of ten British people think the Paralympics had a positive effect on the way disabled people are viewed.
- But one hundred and eighty disability hate crimes are committed every day in this country.
- Fear and loss of confidence are the most common consequences of disability harassment.
- Prosecutions and convictions for disability hate crime fell in 2011/12 after rising three years in a row – only partly due to fewer referrals from the police.

## **Most of us will experience disability at some point in our life**

- Only a small minority of health conditions are hereditary or present at birth.
- We are increasingly likely to experience disability as we get older. Half of the Over-65s and two-thirds of the Over-85s are disabled.
- The number of disabled people over 65 is forecast to grow by 86 percent by 2026.
- Six million of us care for a friend or family member. This will become even more common in an ageing population.
- Nearly three quarters of people in the UK have friends or acquaintances who are disabled. One in ten colleagues at work is likely to be disabled, and two children in a class of thirty.

## **Disability is an extremely diverse experience and means different things to each of us**

- A very large number of people with a health condition or impairment – over 11 million – are protected from discrimination by equality law.
- A quarter of those people describe themselves as disabled.
- At different times of life some impairments are more likely than others.
- Many health conditions fluctuate. Up to one in three people with a health condition or impairment say it is not present a year later and around one in twelve acquire an impairment during the course of a year.
- Some people are more likely to experience disability than others. For example people above State Pension age, people with low or no qualifications, people on low incomes.

## **Those with mental health conditions experience disadvantage across a range of life areas**

- Among the Under-65s mental health conditions are nearly as widespread as all physical conditions put together.
- As many as 18 percent of the population have what is termed a ‘common mental health disorder’.
- Four in ten people starting to claim Employment and Support Allowance have a mental health condition or a behavioural impairment.
- If you have a mental health condition you are more likely to report problems accessing health services. There is a very high chance you will not be active in the labour market. You have only a one in eight chance of being in work and you will be more likely to experience social isolation.
- People say they feel less comfortable interacting with someone with a mental health condition, than a physical one.

## **Barriers are reducing in some areas**

- Pupils with Special Educational Needs without a statement are closing the gap in educational attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- Using a relative measure, disabled people are now less likely to be living in poverty than in the mid-2000s.

- The number of disabled people aged 19 without a level 3 qualification has reduced and the gap between disabled and non-disabled people is closing.
- Difficulty accessing transport has reduced by a fifth since 2005; difficulty accessing goods and services has fallen by a quarter.
- The gap between disabled people's employment rate and the rest of the population has closed by nearly a third.
- Public attitudes towards disabled people in the UK and across Europe have improved since the mid 2000s – though this varies by impairment.

## **The cost of some forms of transport can be a problem for disabled people**

- Disabled people in the UK are nearly a third less likely to have transport problems than the European average.
- Working-age disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to report that the cost of travel – especially cars and taxis, and inter-city trains and coaches, stops them using them as much as they would like.
- But fewer disabled people – less than one in ten – say the cost or frequency of local buses means they use them less than they would like.
- And cost is much less of a barrier to using transport for retired disabled people.

## **Public services are not yet accessible to all**

- Moving around public buildings is a barrier for some disabled people, particularly those with chronic health conditions or long-term pain.
- A third of disabled people have difficulty accessing pension and benefit services – especially over the telephone.
- Disabled people are more likely to experience barriers to accessing health care.
- Sixty percent of disabled people can access the Internet at home – much less than the 86 percent of non-disabled people who can. Access varies – it is only 40 percent among disabled women aged over 64.

## **Disabled children face barriers but participate in some activities as much as non-disabled children**

- Only three in every hundred disabled people were born with their impairment or health condition. By the late teens 7 percent of young people have an impairment or health condition.
- Parents of a disabled child are more likely to separate. A disabled child is more likely to have a disabled brother or sister. Parents of disabled children report their children face barriers not only to education, but also to taking part in leisure or play.
- Academic research suggests labelling children can have positive effects (for example triggering extra support) and negative effects (for example lowering expectations). Young disabled people are more likely to experience bullying.
- Disabled children are as likely as other children to visit a library or museum at least once a year, but less likely to take part in sport.

## **Inequality still exists for disabled people**

- A family in which someone is disabled is a third more likely to be living in poverty.
- People with an impairment have on average fewer social contacts.
- Disabled people are more likely to face barriers to education and training.
- Disabled workers earn eight percent less on average.
- Making ends meet – paying usual expenses each month – is more likely to be a problem for households in which there is a disabled person.
- Disabled people, especially the young, are more likely to be the victims of crime, and have less faith in the criminal justice system.

## **Moving from education into work is harder for disabled people**

- Although less likely to make it to university, around 40,000 disabled people graduate each year. Sixty percent have found work within six months – nearly as many as non-disabled students.

- But the gap in employment outcomes widens in subsequent years.
- And graduate employment rates are much lower for wheelchair users.
- Disabled young people are twice as likely to be NEET (not in education, employment or training).
- Disabled people (including people who gained an impairment later in life, after they left full-time education) are more likely not to have any academic qualifications. If you are disabled and have no qualifications there is only a one in six chance of you being in work.

### **Many disabled people have successful jobs and careers**

- Over 300,000 disabled people are in management roles.
- Around 100,000 self-employed disabled people provide jobs by employing at least one other person.
- Only five percent of disabled people over the age of 25 have never worked.
- Nearly a third of disabled people say their condition does not limit the type or amount of work they can do.
- One in five employed people with an impairment say modified hours has helped them at work.
- However disabled people are especially under-represented in senior management, the professions, construction trades, engineering and IT, the arts and media, food, and hospitality.
- One in five people with an impairment say they have been given fewer responsibilities at work than they would like due to their disability.

### **Many disabled people are not participating in the labour market, though 30 percent of economically inactive disabled people say they would like to work**

- If disabled people's employment rate matched that of the rest of the population, an extra two million disabled people would be working.
- In the UK 3.7 million disabled people under 65 are not in a job, yet only one in nine is actively looking for work, and the majority say they do not want to work.

- There is only a one in a hundred chance of an economically inactive disabled person moving into work over a three month period.
- As a result half of the workless households in this country contain a disabled person.
- Employment rates for disabled people in some parts of the country – especially in big cities and former industrial areas – are below twenty percent.

## **Young and older disabled people's experiences at work are not alike**

- People who acquire an impairment later in life are now much more likely to stay in work than in the past. Although disabled people's employment rates remain much lower than average, half a million more disabled Over-50s are in work now than ten years ago.
- In contrast employment rates for young disabled people are falling, in line with their non-disabled counterparts.
- Once young people finish their full-time education, the employment rate gap starts to widen quickly – from 28 percentage points at age 23 to 36 percentage points at age 24.
- Young disabled people are five times as likely as older disabled workers to say they have been refused a job or an interview because of their disability.
- Although there are now more disabled apprentices, disabled young people are still under-represented.

## Conclusions and next steps

A wide range of outcome measures show improvement from their baseline (usually 2005). There have been significant improvements in educational attainment, in the employment rate and a reduction in the employment rate gap. There have also been improvements in other factors contributing to quality of life, for example in access to transport and access to goods and services. Attitudes towards disabled people have also been improving in some cases.

Even so, disabled people can still face significant barriers to fulfilling their potential and playing a full part in society. Analysis of new information from the Life Opportunities Survey and other data sources is providing an improved basis for understanding the barriers faced by disabled people and suggesting options for action.

*Fulfilling Potential – The Discussions So Far* set out a wide-ranging programme of action that Government is undertaking to ensure disabled people can realise their aspirations, addressing the issues highlighted by disabled people themselves.

*Fulfilling Potential – Next Steps* built on this by outlining further public service reforms and plans for a new disability action alliance to identify and implement national and local action to remove and overcome barriers.

Later in 2013 a further action plan and outcome framework will be published, drawing on the analysis in this document, including actions from the alliance and steps to ensure a strong legacy for disabled people from the Olympics and Paralympics.

The evidence base will also be further developed, including:

- further analysis of barriers and choice and control;
- using future waves of the Life Opportunities Survey to further analyse the fluctuating nature of the disabled population including onset and offset of impairment;
- looking in depth at attitudes and perceptions; and
- exploring lessons from international comparisons.

This will be used to inform future strategy, policy and delivery action.

This publication is available online in a range of formats at  
[www.odi.gov.uk/fulfilling-potential](http://www.odi.gov.uk/fulfilling-potential)

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**Telephone:** 020 7340 4000

**ISBN:** 978-1-78153-244-7

Produced by the Department for Work and Pensions, February 2013

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