

Accessibility of public services

Key facts from the Life Opportunities Survey - Wave one results, 2009/11(1)

The Life Opportunities Survey (LOS) is a large-scale longitudinal survey of disability in Great Britain. Results from the full first wave of the survey were published on the 8th December 2011 and the information below presents some of the key findings from this report. The report and the key findings below update the interim findings that were published in December 2010 based on the first half of wave one interviews.

In addition, presented in the box are some of the previously published findings from the qualitative research that was commissioned to complement the statistics provided by the LOS(2).

The information below explores the experiences of adults, aged 16 and over, when accessing public services. The range of public services covered includes benefits and pensions services; health services; tax services; justice services; social services; and culture, sports and leisure services.

Experience of accessing public services

When all public services are considered together, 36 per cent of adults with impairment(3) experienced difficulty accessing public services compared with 24 per cent of adults without impairment.

As seen in Table 1, the public services where the highest proportion of adults with impairment reported experiencing at least some difficulty accessing were benefits and pensions services (34 per cent). 24 per cent of adults without impairment also experienced difficulty accessing these services.

1 http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/los/index.php?page=los_wor

2 <http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/disability-statistics-and-research/life-opportunities-survey.php>

3 Please refer to the Introduction of the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11, for the definition of impairment status.

Table 1: Adults with at least some difficulty accessing public services by impairment status, 2009/11

Public services	Percentage of adults without impairment	Percentage of adults with impairment
Health services	18	27
Justice services	16	23
Benefits and pensions services	24	34
Culture, sports and leisure services	5	15
Tax services	23	30
Social services	27	29

Source: Life Opportunities Survey Wave One Results, 2009/11

Barriers to accessing benefits and pensions services

Many of the most common barriers to accessing benefits and pensions services were identified fairly equally by adults with and without impairment, including:

- difficulty contacting by phone (63 per cent and 65 per cent respectively)
- unhelpful or inexperienced staff (46 per cent of both adults with and without impairment)
- lack of accessible information (25 per cent and 24 per cent respectively).

Adults with impairment also identified anxiety or lack of confidence and difficulty with transport as barriers to accessing the benefits and pensions services (11 per cent and 8 per cent respectively).

The qualitative research demonstrated how some of the above barriers interact to reduce the accessibility of public services for adults with impairment. For example, one adult with impairment said he did not know what to do when he entered a Jobcentre Plus, was reluctant to ask for help as he did not want to draw attention to his impairment, and so had left without using the service.

“What organisations do I contact? I don't know. I went to the dole office last week, I didn't know what to do.”

He felt the system was too complicated for someone with his type of impairment, and that he needed more help to access services.