

Employment

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 to these results, presented in boxes 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 barriers to and enablers of employment for adults, aged 16 and over.

Employment status

Working-age(3) adults with rights under the disability provisions of the Equality Act (EA)(4) were less likely to be in work than non-disabled adults of working age. As shown in Table 1, 49 per cent of working age EA disabled adults were in work, compared with 76 per cent of non-disabled adults of working age.

The findings are similar when looking at employment status by impairment status(4).

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 Old working age definition (males 16 to 64 and females 16 to 59).

4 Please refer to the Introduction of the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11, for the definitions of Equality Act disability status and impairment status.

Table 1: Employment status by EA disability status, 2009/11

Employment status	Percentage of non-disabled adults	Percentage of EA disabled adults
Full-time - self employed	7	5
Full-time - employee	51	30
Part-time(5)	18	14
Workless - retired from paid work	2	4
Workless – unemployed(6)	6	7
Workless - sick or disabled	1	29
Workless - other inactive	15	11

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

Barriers to employment for economically inactive(7) adults

For adults with impairment, reasons related to a health condition, illness or impairment and a disability were given most often in relation to why they were limited in the type or amount of paid work that they could do (70 per cent and 41 per cent respectively).

A common barrier to work for economically inactive adults was family responsibilities, which was reported as a barrier by 22 per cent of adults with impairment. This was higher among adults without impairment (69 per cent). Anxiety and lack of confidence was identified as a barrier by 19 per cent of adults with impairment compared with three per cent of adults without impairment.

Participants in the qualitative research showed how perceptions of employer attitudes to disabled people can create a barrier to employment. For example, some adults with impairment reported that their employers were unwilling to provide equipment and assistance. One adult with impairment explained that, because her impairment was not immediately apparent, her colleagues did not believe she required any assistance. Other adults with impairment were unwilling to disclose their impairment when applying for a new job, as they feared they would not be offered the position, and then found it difficult to request assistance after they started.

“I wrote on my applications that I had ..., so I think maybe employers thought, oh, he’s going to have a hard time, so maybe I didn’t get as many interviews as I could have if I hadn’t mentioned it.”

5 Part-time work includes both employee and self-employed; see the Glossary of the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11, for more information.

6 Unemployed uses the International Labour Organisation definition of unemployment; see the Glossary of the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11 for more information.

7 See the Glossary of the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11, for the definition of economically inactive.

Barriers to employment for unemployed(8) adults seeking work

39 per cent of all unemployed adults seeking work were limited in the type or amount of paid work they could do. 58 per cent of adults with impairment who were unemployed and seeking work were limited in this way compared with 31 per cent of adults without impairment who were unemployed and seeking work.

The most common barrier to work was lack of job opportunities, reported by 43 per cent of adults with impairment and 40 per cent adults without impairment. The second most common barrier for adults with impairment was difficulty with transport (29 per cent).

A number of adults with impairment in the qualitative research expressed concern that they lacked the skills employers were looking for. This in turn affected their confidence about gaining future employment.

“Who's going to take on a 55-year-old person who's got no qualifications and is ... disabled? Nobody, I've just been discarded now.”

Enablers of employment for economically inactive adults(7)

Respondents who were not working were asked what factors, if any, would enable them to work. We refer to these as ‘enablers’.

The most common enabler for adults with impairment was modified hours or days or reduced work hours (25 per cent), This was also the most common enabler for adults without impairment (30 per cent). Building modification was the second most common enabler identified by 15 per cent adults with impairment.

Enablers of employment for unemployed(8) adults seeking work

Respondents who were not working were asked what factors, if any, would enable them to work. We refer to these as ‘enablers’.

The most common enabler that would improve employment opportunities for adults with impairment was modified hours or days or reduced work hours (36 per cent). This was also the most common enabler for adults without impairment (45 per cent). Tax credits was the second most common enabler

8 The definition of unemployed is not consistent with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition as availability to start working in two weeks after interview is not checked. For more information regarding the ILO definition see the Glossary of the Life Opportunities Survey Wave one report, 2009/11

identified by 19 per cent of adults with impairment and 15 per cent of adults without impairment.

The benefits of flexible working in enabling employment are shown by the qualitative research. One adult with impairment has a long commute to her office. Her employer agreed that she can work from home a few days a week. When she goes into the office she comes in later, leaves earlier, and makes up the hours at home. Without these adaptations to her work routine she feels she would find it very difficult to undertake full-time employment.

“When I ... have been traveling long distances I need a day to be able to work at home, just to regenerate that energy and [my workplace] has been brilliant about trying to help with that time.”

Other enablers identified by unemployed adults with impairment included tax credits (19 per cent), modified duties (14 per cent) and changes to work area or work equipment (10 per cent).

The qualitative research shows how public transport can act as both a barrier to and an enabler of employment. One adult with impairment used to take the train to work, but could not hear announcements about platform alterations which were rarely shown on information displays. She watched other passengers who she knew travelled on the same train to find out what platform she should be on, but often missed her train completely. She therefore decided to get the bus, which has a visual display giving the destination and the name of each stop, which makes it much easier for her to get to work.