



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Government
Social Research

Disability Confident Employer Renewal Research

Department for Work and Pensions In-House Research

Please note this research was carried out in early 2022 – so findings and statistics are from that period

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Summary

This research aimed to develop our understanding of why employers did not renew membership of the Disability Confident (DC) scheme, following a rise in non-renewals in preceding years. The research involved in-depth telephone interviews with employers who had recently left the scheme due to non-renewal.

Findings were considered alongside lessons from a wider review of the scheme (including a survey and workshops with stakeholders (see slide 6)), intended to identify possible changes to improve DC. The distinct contribution of this qualitative project was providing insight about the views and experiences of employers that left DC. Fieldwork that involved 36 in-depth interviews took place between February-April 2022.

The research found that most employers left the scheme unconsciously and were unaware of leaving (when first contacted to conduct an interview), but some employers were aware of leaving and had chosen not to renew.

- Unconscious leaving was driven by failure to receive, see or act on reminder emails, changes in personnel, time and resource constraints, and confusion about the renewal process.
- Conscious choices to leave stemmed from perceptions that DC was of minimal benefit or that it was unsuitable for the employer's circumstances (sometimes after a change such as downsizing or restructuring).

Beyond direct explanations for non-renewal, the research also highlighted that positive perceptions of the scheme's overall mission were accompanied by concerns among some employers about unfulfilled initial expectations (for example, in relation to job matching, monitoring and networking), an absence or drop off in ongoing communication, insufficient support and doubts about the impact of the scheme. At times, these factors contributed to disengagement from the scheme or feelings that DC membership was of limited value.

The research findings suggested that some of the issues identified could be addressed by improving the quality and consistency of DWP communication and support (including via jobcentres), both throughout DC membership and during the renewal process.

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1.Introduction

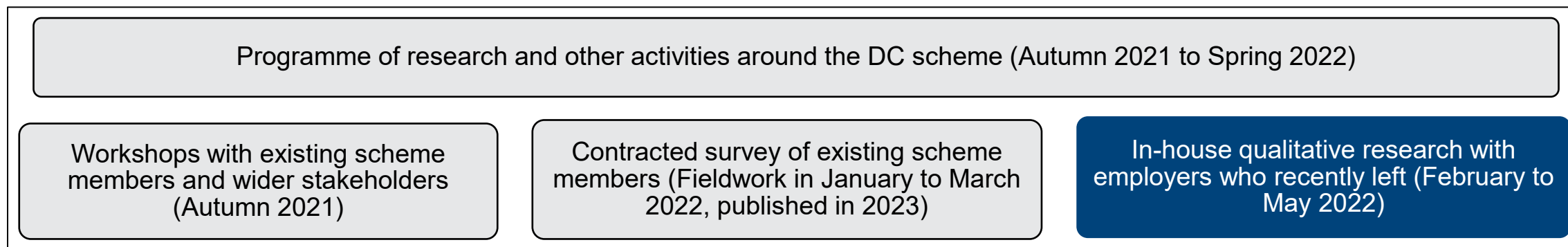
Policy Context

- The DC scheme launched in November 2016. It is a voluntary scheme for employers that provides support to attract, recruit, retain and develop disabled people.
- There are three levels of DC membership (Level 1 (L1) / Committed, Level 2 (L2) / Employer, Level 3 (L3) / Leader). Employers complete each level before progressing to the next. Employers join for three years, after which their membership expires unless they renew or progress to the next level. Scheme members receive a certificate and badge, at the level they have achieved, which recognises their activities and achievements.
- Guidance for employers regarding DC, including details of the commitments to which employers must sign-up for, as well as the activities and processes/assessments involved at each membership level, are provided on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)
- At the time this research was conducted the employment rate for disabled people was 28.4 percentage points lower than the employment rate for people without disabilities.¹ DC contributes towards DWP's responsibility to support disabled people and those with ill health into work.
- In January 2022, DC had roughly 19,000 members signed up. Over 2,000 members left between August and November 2021, due to non-renewal. This research examined why employers fail to renew.
- This qualitative project sat alongside a wider review of DC back in 2021 which was paused following a court ruling around the National Disability Strategy. Following initial completion of the research, the findings were reflected on internally. While they do not directly inform current DC reform proposals, they provide useful context and background to support wider thinking.

1.DWP (2021). The Employment of Disabled People 2021, Official Statistics Quarter 2. [The employment of disabled people 2021 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021)

Research purpose

- Existing knowledge and understanding, relating to why employers do not renew membership to the DC scheme, was limited.
- The 2022 DWP survey of DC scheme members found that four in five employers planned to either stay at the same level or move up a level at the next renewal date. This is similar to the proportion who planned to renew in the previous 2018 survey of DC members. Only two percent of employers did not intend to renew (roughly a fifth did not know whether they would renew).²
- The purpose of this research was to understand why employers do not renew membership of the Disability Confident (DC) scheme. The research consisted of telephone interviews with employers whose DC membership had recently lapsed.
- This qualitative project sat alongside a wider review of DC back in 2021. The wider review included a series of workshops with existing scheme members and interested stakeholders and the survey of existing scheme members mentioned above.



- The qualitative research aimed to provide an in-depth understanding based on directly engaging with employers who have left the scheme, whereas the other strands of research and related activity focused on the views and experiences of participants who were current scheme members or were closely engaged with the DC agenda.

2. DWP (2023). Findings from 2022 survey of Disability Confident scheme members. [Disability Confident: survey of participating employers, May 2022 - GOV.UK](#).

2. Research Aims and Methodology

Research Aims

- The overarching aim of the DC employer renewal research was to improve DWP knowledge of why employers do not renew their membership of the DC scheme, in the context of declining membership in the preceding period.
- The research also sought to explore a range of other issues related to the DC scheme, which are potentially relevant to explaining non-renewals. These included:
 - Employer expectations of the scheme when they first joined and how these compared with employer experience;
 - Employer awareness around leaving the scheme;
 - The effectiveness of DWP communications with scheme members;
 - The impact of the scheme on employer organisations.

Methodology

- The findings presented here draw upon 36 in-depth interviews with employer contacts. 35 telephone interviews were completed and one set of written responses provided (as an agreed alternative to an interview).
- The majority of interviews (28) were with Level 1 employers; Level 2 employers completed eight interviews. Level 3 employers were not sampled as the number of Level 3 employers leaving monthly is very low, increasing the difficulty of ensuring anonymity and affecting the added value of including them. A good spread of employer size bands, sectors, expiry dates (within the reference period) and regions/nations in Great Britain was achieved.
- Fieldwork occurred across February-April 2022 with contacts from organisations whose DC membership expired between November 2021 and January 2022.
- Quotes in this slide pack are from note-takers' notes and not from a verbatim transcription. Most interview notes were recorded in first-person though a minority were in third-person.
- In this slide pack, research participants are referred to as 'employer contacts'. This term was chosen because the sample consisted of named contacts registered with DWP as part of Disability Confident. During recruitment, researchers asked to interview the person responsible for the organisation's Disability Confident membership – whether this was the named contact or an alternative (e.g. if the named contact had left or was not the most suitable person).
- Contacts at large employers tended to be HR specialists, who sometimes displayed knowledge of the scheme or its predecessors, whereas contacts at smaller employers were frequently owners/senior managers.
- Please see the following annexes for further details on aspects of methodology:

[Annex 1: Research and Sample Design](#)

[Annex 2: Achieved Sample](#)

[Annex 6: Analytical Approach](#)

3.Key findings

Key Research Findings

The research found that reasons for non-renewal could be grouped into the high-level categories of conscious or unconscious, with most employers who participated in this study leaving unconsciously.

Low awareness of leaving: Many organisations were unaware that they had left DC, before they were contacted about the research. In these cases, renewal communications proved ineffective, with reminder emails unreceived, unseen or ignored. Communications failure (e.g. out-of-date contact details) and inattention to reminders led to employers leaving unintentionally and could imply low levels of engagement with the scheme more generally.

Reasons for unconscious leaving: Apart from issues relating to the success of reminders, unconscious leaving was driven by factors affecting employer focus on renewal and/or the scheme, including personnel changes and time/resource pressures (sometimes related to COVID-19). Some employers were unsure about how to renew.

Reasons for conscious leaving: Conscious decisions to leave tended to reflect either a feeling that the scheme made no difference to practices and/or outcomes or a perception that the scheme was unsuitable based on the employer's circumstances. No employers told us that they left because the scheme had a negative impact.

Key Research Findings

Although employers typically supported the scheme's purpose, the research identified some negative perceptions about experience of the scheme, especially relating to communication and support received.

Disparity between expectations and experience: Employers joined with a range of expectations about support and resources; autonomy versus monitoring; and networking opportunities. Some expected the scheme to offer additional benefits/support (such as receiving referrals of disabled job applicants). These expectations were often unrealistic and led to disappointment later. Other employers had not formed expectations prior to joining.

Insufficient communication and support: Some employers were concerned about a lack of ongoing communication and desired greater contact both for clarifying how the scheme works and receiving DWP support. In particular, some wanted more intensive support locally (e.g. a job matching service) from jobcentres.

Variation in impact: There is evidence of impact on attracting and recruiting staff with disabilities and/or organisational culture (but not retention) for some employers. Other employers reported no impact, in several cases because they met commitments prior to joining, but sometimes due to lack of support or practical obstacles.

4.Detailed findings

Employer Background

Recurring aspects of background, including employer connections to disability and changes in employer leads for the scheme, are important to highlight for understanding the interviewed employers in context.

- **Awareness of leaving:** Most employers were unaware that they left prior to the research, but some were aware. See [slide 26](#) for more detail.
- **Employer disability context:** Many employers contacts described their organisation as having a connection with disability. This included both organisations with disability as a subject-matter focus and those with a large number of disabled service users (e.g. in care or education). Some contacts also reported working with other employers on disability. It is of note that these employers' membership expired, despite their involvement with disability issues. This also raises the issue of maximising the relevance of DC to both employers focused and not focused on disability.
- **Handover of responsibility:** A proportion of employers contacts reported that they had taken over responsibility for the scheme from a predecessor or another colleague/department. In some instances, when the original contact had moved on, no new person was designated as responsible.
- **Impact of workload and role allocation:** Some contacts highlighted the impact on their workload from responsibilities in areas other than DC or disability issues. Some felt that their organisation was not making best use of their subject knowledge around disability/Diversity and &Inclusion (D&I).

(For additional points related to employer and contact background, please see Annex 3 and Annex 4 respectively.)

We work in the occupational health sector.
We are an organisation that supports people in the workplace with neurodiversity, people with dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD.
(L2, Small)

We work with employers, so we are working at this from two angles, as an employer and as we encourage other employers to become Disability Confident. (L2, Large)

...it is not just Disability Confident that is being under-utilised. My knowledge and skills, which I was hired for, is also not being utilised. (L1, Large)

Why Employers Joined Disability Confident– Summary

Employers discussed their motivations for joining DC in relation to advantages for their organisation and wider society. These included:

- Enhancing their reputation through recognition as a scheme member;
- Gaining credibility as an organisation already focused on disability;
- Growing employment opportunities for disabled people;
- Addressing inequality for under-represented groups;
- Creating an inclusive workforce and/or improving internal culture.

In addition to sharing these justifications, employers often mentioned that joining was prompted by factors such as contact with the local jobcentre, a competitor signing-up or an advocate of membership within their organisation.

Employers' reasons for joining reflect that expired members were highly positive about the goals of the scheme.

Why Employers Joined Disability Confident– Employer Rationales

Reasons for joining included benefits for the organisation and wider benefits for society. Some organisations joined because of their connection with disability issues.

Employer contacts provided a range of reasons for joining the scheme:

- **Reputational Gain:** many organisations valued recognition and benefit to their external reputation. Some employer contacts referenced, where applicable, that membership was useful in forming relationships or securing contracts with other organisations already on the scheme (especially in the public sector).
- **Alignment with Disability Focus:** where the focus of their organisation was on disability or disability-related issues, employer contacts frequently highlighted a feeling that they should be scheme members (e.g. to build credibility or to practise what they encouraged) due to the subject matter of their work.
- **Gains from an Inclusive Workforce:** some contacts explained that they wanted to build a more inclusive workforce or improve internal culture.
- **Societal Benefits**
 - **Expanding Employment Opportunities:** contacts emphasised a desire to improve access to jobs for disabled people and more widely.
 - **Advancing Equalities:** contacts felt that their organisation aimed to advance equality for under-represented groups generally and saw DC scheme membership as forming part of that.

If I am honest, it is about being able to highlight the fact that we are proactive around this. Being able to display the symbol. If I am honest, that is the main thing, to say we are recognised, recognised nationally. (L1, Large)

Also, because of the nature of the service users we work with, it is also about promoting equality across the board, when we are trying to get marginalised groups back into work and on the right track. (L1, Micro)

One, it was part of our business plan to create a more equal opportunities environment. Two, we wanted to get more people back into work. (L1, Micro)

Why Employers Joined Disability Confident– Prompts

Organisations were sometimes prompted to join externally (e.g. direct encouragement from DWP, or in response to a competitor signing-up) or internally (e.g. advocacy by the contact or a senior manager).

- **Prompted by jobcentres:** Several employer contacts reported that their organisation signed-up to the scheme after being prompted by local jobcentre staff promoting DC and responding positively to this outreach. This suggests that jobcentres are an effective channel for promoting the scheme. Some contacts noted that the organisation was already engaged with a jobcentre on other matters and then invited to join the scheme. See Slide 38 regarding the wider Jobcentre Plus (JCP) role.
- **Prompted by actions of competitors:** A small number of employer contacts referred to their competitors having joined the scheme as an incentive for their organisation to emulate this.
- **Prompted by an individual within the organisation:** The personal role of the contact themselves, or another member of staff, was perceived by some employer contacts to have been central. Where joining was seen as an individual-led initiative, the key individual sometimes had a professional or personal/family connection to disability or disability-related issues.
- **Prompted by pre-existing work and related relationships:** Pre-existing work by the organisation on improving disability employment and relationships with involved groups were also identified as relevant factors.

One of the Work Coaches at the jobcentre sent me through a link...I think that was a separate email inviting me. They were the champion in that jobcentre for disability, contacting partners. (L1, Micro)

Our director of wheelchair services [...] brought it to HR's attention. Some of our competitors were already signed-up. (L1, Large)

We were doing quite a lot of work with third sector organisations anyway. I employ disabled people anyway. I have a disabled brother and all my grandchildren are on the spectrum so it's very much a lived experience for me. (L1, Small)

Employer Expectations of Disability Confident – Summary

Employers' initial expectations of the scheme varied, and included:

- Direct support and resources from local JCP staff and from DWP nationally;
- A job matching service, whereby JCP would match disabled applicants to their vacancies;
- More monitoring, to ensure that scheme members were fulfilling their commitments;
- A local group/network to discuss issues and share best practice.

However, not all employers entered the scheme with developed expectations.

Where employers had initial expectations, their later experience was generally not felt to have matched these, particularly due to perceived low levels of contact and support by DWP. This contributed to disengagement from the scheme and dissatisfaction among employers (see slide 34), leading in cases to non-renewals (see slide 30).

Employer Expectations – Support and Resources

Employers had varied expectations of DWP support and resources when they initially joined the scheme. Some employers expected intensive support and in particular job matching.

Variations in expectations of support

- Employer expectations, about levels of DWP support and resource for scheme members, ranged from organisations who joined with the understanding that DWP would provide intensive support, to organisations which expected to receive no or little additional help. Some employer contacts were unsure about the level or type of support offered.
- Examples of support expected by different contacts included: general advice and guidance, tailored advice, regular communication (with some mentioning check-ins), and promotion of scheme members to applicants.
- Among the subset of employers whose contacts indicated that their organisation joined with no expectation of additional support or resources from DWP, contacts typically also felt that their organisations joined because they already fulfilled the DC scheme's commitments.

Expectations of JCP-delivered job matching for scheme members

- Some employer contacts expected jobcentres to match their organisation with potential disabled employees as part of the scheme. These contacts tended to perceive joining the scheme as signing-up to receive referrals of jobseekers with disabilities from DWP, rather than the employer seeking guidance and support to more autonomously attract disabled staff.

I just thought that if we were employing somebody, if they had a disability, I could go back to the disability team to find out what was best to support that person. (L1, Micro)

We would have expected zero support. We just wanted to get on board with it, I think. (L1, Micro)

Initial expectations were that I would receive referrals from DWP for people to work for me and I'd be happy to take people on, but I've never had any referrals. Just expected referrals and that I could recommend people to other local employers as well. (L1, Micro)

Employer Expectations – Compliance and Monitoring

Several employers expected joining DC to require a demanding level of evidence and follow-up with scheme members to ensure compliance. Others perceived ease of joining as a positive.

- **Expectations of stringent threshold for joining and compliance checks/monitoring after joining:** Several employer contacts, generally at organisations in the large or medium employer size bands, expected that their own and other organisations would be required to meet a sufficiently stringent evidence threshold, showing how they would fulfil commitments, in order to join the scheme. For these employer contacts, the credibility of the scheme was important and was felt to require restricting membership to only those who are genuinely committed to fulfilling the criteria.
- Similarly, some employer contacts had initially expected their organisation to be subject to compliance checks or inspected by DWP or an external entity after joining the scheme at Level 1 or Level 2. Checking for compliance was anticipated to be an important element of membership.
- **Perceptions that membership was not difficult to achieve:** Other employer contacts had formed a view before joining the scheme that membership (particularly at Level 1) was relatively easy to attain. This influenced the decision of some organisations to join.
- This theme highlights tension between expectations of compliance and autonomy, with both represented among organisations which failed to renew. The contrast also suggests differing awareness and acceptance about the concept of DC as a journey with progression up the levels.

Everyone is time-conscious, but I was expecting it to be a little bit harder to join. I think it was like four questions and that was it. I was expecting more questions about how we were going to follow through on being Disability Confident. (L2, Medium)

I suppose I was thinking at some point we would be inspected, that someone would come out and have a look around, I possibly missed that email, it's been a rough ride. (L1, Micro)

Level 1 is quite easy to sign-up isn't it? We looked at what we had to sign-up for. The areas of responsibility or commitment, so I was like, 'We do all that, so let us just do it'. (L1, Large)

Employer Expectations – Networking

Employers expected the scheme to enable networking with other employers. A smaller number of employers also expected networking with third-sector organisations.

Expectations of networking opportunities with other DC members

- Employer organisations tended to expect the scheme to operate as a network or community committed to action on disability issues, with regular contact between scheme members. Some employer contacts expressed concern that contact with other employers was lacking. This suggests that improving engagement, to reduce further non-renewals, requires facilitating greater collaboration between employers as well as with DWP.
- While employers of all sizes supported networking as an element of the scheme, contacts from smaller employers particularly felt that they would benefit from engaging with other employers. This was related to a feeling that obtaining advice from other employers would provide additional reassurance, particularly where the organisation lacked prior expertise.

Expectations of networking opportunities with the third sector

- In addition to sharing experience and issues with other employers, links with disability charities/third-sector organisations were also mentioned by employer contacts. This was tied to expectations of greater compliance checking, with some contacts suggesting that it would be useful for charities to verify that employers were fulfilling commitments or promote employers that are verified to the wider public and potential applicants.

Yeah I think I thought there would be more in the way of networking with other employers and I think it would be useful to have a wider circle of people engaging with one another and networking, sharing problems or whatever. (L1, Small)

We were looking for advice and guidance, as we are a small organisation and so we are working on our own and what we know before, so it's good to link with other people. (L2, Small)

I was expecting some links to charities. Maybe for them to send some people across. If charities could have access to that information and maybe approach employers, as you signed-up for it. (L2, Medium)

Employer Expectations - No Prior Expectations

Some organisations joined without holding any expectations of what membership would involve or what support would be given, while several employer contacts were unaware of their employer's original expectations.

No prior expectations of the scheme

- Several employer contacts suggested that their organisation had no expectations of the scheme when they decided to become members. In some of these instances, contacts indicated that their organisation later failed to substantively engage with the scheme during its membership.
- Some employer contacts, when asked about their organisation's initial expectations, said that they did not have any, but then later in the interview mentioned expectations (e.g. networking opportunities) that were unmet.

Contact unaware of organisation's expectations

- Sometimes employer contacts felt that they did know their organisation's initial expectations (e.g. when they were not originally involved in joining).
- This points to a lack of memory within employers regarding their ambitions and plans for involvement in DC. Unawareness of expectations, as well as unawareness of membership (see [slide 26](#)), suggests that the scheme is not well-established within organisations, which means that engagement with membership is adversely affected if individuals leave or move role.

I didn't have [expectations] any as I wasn't sure what it was..... Erm... I'm honestly not sure what we've used it for, how we've been involved. (L1, Micro)

[Do you know what your initial expectations were when joining the scheme?]

No, I don't. I'd love to say that I did, but I don't. I'm sorry. (L1, Micro)

[What were your initial expectations when joining the scheme?] Not really sure...my predecessor set it up. To support staff maybe. (L1, Medium)

Comparing Employer Expectations and Experience

Among employers who held prior expectations of the scheme and compared these to their experience, expectations were often felt to be unmet. This related to a perceived lack of communication and support.

Disparity between expectation and experience of DC

- Where employer contacts directly compared their organisation's expectations and experience, many perceived that their expectations were unfulfilled. A minority felt that their expectations were either partly or fully met, with reasons being given including that their expectations of support were not particularly high or that they found the branding to be useful.

I suppose we did not get necessarily the support or the contact that I was expecting really, which is a shame. That would have been nice to have. (L2, Small)

Perceived lack of communications and support central to this disparity

- Criticisms of the experience relative to expectations centred around lack of ongoing communication and support, with an absence of job referrals, insufficient networking opportunities and ease of joining/remaining also raised by contacts who felt their expectations were unmet.

[Has the scheme met your expectations?]
60% yes. I get a lot of updates, the news updates, which is what I want. As an employer I did not want to be left behind. I wanted to give myself abreast of what was going in the community and in the world of disability. The other 40% which is to do with me being so busy. (L1, Medium)

Workload/time constraints also acted as a barrier to engagement

- Some employer contacts identified their own organisation's workload or time constraints as the main reason for failure to meet their initial expectations of the scheme.

Employer Expectations - Levels and Progression

Some employers who left had been interested in progressing to a higher level and highlighted reasons why this had not happened, both related to their internal situation and DWP's level of support and processes.

Aspirations to progress and barriers to progression

- Several Level 1 and Level 2 contacts told us that their organisation had aspired to progress to the next level, typically when initially joining but for some at a later stage. Reasons for failing to reach a higher level included:
 - COVID-19 pandemic (in diverting attention or pausing operations)
 - Lack of internal focus relative to other priorities
 - Immediate concern on satisfying commitments at existing level
 - Lack of information and support from DWP and/or other employers

Lack of understanding and concerns around progression process

- Uncertainty about how to progress, and a desire for DWP to do more to promote this, were reflected in answers, particularly from large employers.
- One Level 2 employer contact raised concerns about Level 3 assessment practicalities, including lack of a point of contact in details about assessing organisations and existing Level 3 employers charging for assessments.

Progression not expected or sought by some smaller employers

- Some contacts (all from micro employers) stated that their organisation did not expect to progress to the next level, either as it was not requested by DWP or as the level they had achieved was better suited to their situation.

We did originally yes. I think we wanted to move to the next one up. For various reasons we have not been able to do that, just because it is not something we massively focused on within our organisation. COVID came along. (L2, Small)

[Any expectations about support?] I think for me, it is just guidance about how to go from one stage to the next. We don't really need guidance about how to be Disability Confident, as we are doing that anyway. (L2, Large)

Then he said about there being different levels and some people have disabilities that are more complex. I said for us, as we need carers to support vulnerable people, maybe a Level 1. (L1, Micro)

Why Employers Left – Summary

Most employers in this study were unaware of their failure to renew prior to being contacted about the research, but some were aware. Non-renewals can be grouped into the categories of unconscious and conscious leaving:

- Unconscious leaving was more prevalent and driven foremost by failure to receive, see or act on renewal communications. Other factors which contributed for some employers included: changes in personnel leading to breaks in continuity; time and resource pressures; and uncertainty how to renew or belief in automatic renewals.
- Conscious leaving typically reflected either that the employer viewed the scheme to have been of little or no benefit or situations where the employer judged that membership was no longer appropriate for the circumstances of their organisation (e.g. following a reduction in size or an organisational re-structuring).

There was a general lack of employer awareness of the scheme and the renewal process, related to perceived lack of communication and support.

Why Employers Left – Awareness of Leaving

Most employers were unaware of their membership's expiry prior to the research, indicating that communication is key. Some employers did know before, often due to an email before or after membership expiry rather than prior planning.

- **Employers unaware of expiry:** A large number of employer contacts felt that their organisation was unaware that they had left DC, prior to being contacted about the research.
- **Related actions after expiry:** Some employer contacts unaware of their expiry reported that their organisation had been pursuing actions or displaying branding related to the scheme after the date of the expiry. This suggests that lack of understanding of scheme processes (without any desire to disengage from the DC agenda) may be a driver of expiries.
- **Employers aware of expiry:** Other employer contacts were aware beforehand that their organisation's membership had expired. These contacts often learned of the expiry as a result of a DWP email or other communication (e.g. notification from a local jobcentre) before or immediately after expiry, rather than due to planning without prompting.
- **Employers unaware/forgot that they were DC members:** A small subset of employer contacts felt that their organisation forgot that they were ever in DC. These contacts mentioned a drop-off in communication with DWP after initial contact with a jobcentre.

When I was contacted about this research, the gentleman I spoke to said our certificate had expired, which I didn't realise. (L2, Small)

I'm just in the process of writing our new Diversity & Inclusion strategy and having discussions around being a DC employer, what does it mean, and how does it work, and then I got your email around it being lapsed. I didn't know that. (L1, Large)

[Before we contacted you about this research, were you aware that your membership had expired?] I did receive an email that my membership was expiring. *[From DWP?]* Yes. This was the first time I was aware that the membership was expiring. (L1, Micro)

Why Employers Left – Unconscious Leaving

Reasons for unconscious non-renewals centred around not seeing reminders, changes in personnel and time/resource pressures. Some employers intended to renew but did not take action to complete this.

Membership commonly expired without deciding not to renew

- Most employers interviewed made no conscious decision to leave. Factors frequently mentioned as leading to unconscious failure to renew included:
 - Not receiving or seeing reminder emails or other communications advising that membership was expiring (discussed on next slide)
 - Changes in personnel or handovers in responsibility since first joining
 - Time and resource pressures generally
 - Time and resource pressures related to the COVID-19 pandemic

Employers sometimes learned that renewal was needed and planned to renew but failed to complete the required steps on time

- Employers were aware in some cases that expiry was pending and intended to renew, but failed to complete this due to delaying action on the tasks involved in renewal or practical circumstances.
- Practical obstacles to renewal included administrative staff failing to submit the renewal details as instructed and technical issues. One employer contact raised a specific concern about being prompted to contact an email address about renewal when visiting the DC website and the specified email then bouncing back.

The person, my PA, went on maternity leave and when she left in the handover, it was one of the things that was low on the priority list, as we thought we had more time, but we did not and it lagged. It is simply a human error, not a political statement. (L1, Medium)

Though I went through the application process, that was handed over. The member of staff I handed over to has left and the other member of staff who would have done that has also left the organisation. (L2, Small)

It was my intention not to let it expire but then the roof blew off in the storm and we got flooded. It took down our internet, phone lines, central heating, everything. I was without internet for some time. (L1, Small)

Why Employers Left – Reminder Effectiveness

Where reminders did not prompt renewal, this reflected either that the employer was unaware of the reminders or failed to act at time of receipt. Some employers favoured a different mode of communication.

- **Lack of awareness of email reminders:** Many employer contacts did not recall their organisation receiving any reminder emails. Some confirmed not receiving any or suggested adding reminder emails as an improvement. Potential explanations mentioned by contacts included inattention to emails on their part, or the emails going to a generic inbox or a previous contact's address. For a large proportion of these employers, lack of attention to reminders should be placed in the context of low awareness about the expiry process generally.
- **Reminders received but not acted upon:** Where employer contacts did acknowledge that their organisation may have received one or more reminder emails, they highlighted that they did not necessarily act on these immediately.
- **Preferences for alternative means of communication:** While employer contacts were often comfortable using email, some preferred reminders through a different channel, especially where initial emails resulted in no action. Contacts who suggested telephone felt that it was more likely to be noticed, given the volume of received emails. One said, '*There's other organisations that pester me with phone calls, and I think that would have been the route to make me re-join.*' (L1, Micro). A very small number suggested a postal reminder based on how they process physical mail.

To be perfectly honest, I am not [aware of reminder emails], but that does not mean that they were sent. It may be us who have not clocked them. (L2, Small)

Did possibly receive reminder emails about expired membership, but would have been a case of thinking 'I'll get back to it' and then didn't realise it had lapsed in January. (L1 Micro)

[Did you get any reminder emails?] I normally get emails, I don't delete them, so I would definitely have to go back through. I always click on them. Unless it goes to junk and I wouldn't realise. I think maybe if they made a phone call it would make a big difference. (L1, Micro)

Why Employers Left – Process Uncertainty

Some employers were unaware that membership could expire or assumed that their membership would renew automatically without action from them. There was also some uncertainty about how to renew.

Assumptions around automatic renewal

- Some employer contacts were unaware that scheme membership expired after 3 years and/or assumed that renewals would automatically occur without further action.
- In some instances where employers had renewed membership on a past occasion, their comments still revealed a lack of understanding regarding the process, e.g. suggesting it was automatic or expressing uncertainty about the interval between joining and renewal.

Lack of awareness of process linked to communication issues

- Uncertainty about the renewal process and the steps involved was sometimes associated with failure to receive reminder emails.
- Employers unsure about the renewal process tended to be micro.

No, I did not realise it had expired. I did not realise there was an expiry date on it. (L1, Micro)

I renewed membership ...it was an automatic thing...and at that point I didn't have a handle on it. (L1, Micro)

I don't remember getting emails reminding me it was running out and I am unsure if I have to apply to renew and how to do that. (L1, Micro)

Why Employers Left – Perceived Minimal Benefit

Where employer contacts explained that their organisation consciously chose not to continue as members, they sometimes pointed to lack of positive outcomes for disabled people and/or their organisation.

- **Lack of positive results /advantages to the organisation:** Some employers contacts felt that their organisation consciously did not renew membership of the scheme because they could not identify any positive effects that made membership worthwhile. Some emphasised the absence of evidence demonstrating relevant actions/achievements within the organisation as a result of joining. There was evidence of instances where an employer, supportive of remaining a member in principle, decided that renewing was not worth the effort relative to other priorities based on the scheme's observed effects/added benefits.
- **No evidence of leaving due to negative results:** Although some employer contacts highlighted the absence of positive results, none indicated that their organisation left due to negative impact of the scheme.

I couldn't see any history of actions that had been instigated by membership. No up to date equality policy, no up to date safeguarding policy. I think it could be a really useful thing for businesses who aren't as focused on equality as we are. I think a bi-annual inspection on site, would be a good thing. As it stands, I could [not] renew it with no valid evidence. (L1, Micro)

Not renewed, as don't know what we're getting for it. (L2, Large)

Why Employers Left – Circumstances and Suitability

Conscious decisions to leave frequently reflected that the employer now felt that their circumstances (sometimes following an organisational change) were unsuitable for remaining a member of the scheme.

- **Decisions to leave related to employer circumstances:** Employer contacts sometimes attributed conscious decisions to leave primarily to pre-existing circumstances or changes in circumstances affecting the suitability of the scheme for their organisation, in a subset of cases with the potential for the employer to rejoin later.
- The following are examples of specific circumstances, mentioned by contacts as leading to a decision that membership was unsuitable:
 - Reduction in staff numbers/hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Organisational re-structuring or mergers
 - Plans to later seek a higher level after completing prerequisite steps
 - Insufficient time or resources to take advantage of the benefits offered by the scheme (e.g. participating in workshops or events)
- **Not rejoining due to circumstances:** In some instances, an organisation was unaware of their membership expiring, but their contact felt that they would not want to rejoin due to their circumstances.

[Did you make a conscious decision to leave the scheme?] Yes. Only because of COVID ...circumstances...erm...we were full time but there's only three of us now part-time.
(L1, Micro)

Since moving to this job, we have had a merger [...] It has not been renewed because the other part of the organisation has got a working group because they want to go to become a Leader. (L1, Large)

[Do you think your organisation will renew its membership?] Not really, no. Almost certainly time is an issue. I see there were network meetings, but I wouldn't be able to attend those. (L1, Micro)

Employer Concerns – Summary

Employer concerns about the scheme fell into two main categories:

- Feelings that the scheme in general, and/or an emphasis on increasing disability employment, lacked relevance to their organisation as a whole or the type of staff that it needed, with factors cited including:
 - Size
 - Finance
 - Sector
- More commonly, concerns about lack of support, communication and scheme visibility during their membership

Concerns were expressed by employers who left both consciously and unconsciously.

Employer Concerns – Relevance

Some employers were concerned about the scheme's relevance to their organisation overall or the type of staff needed. Concerns most often related to size and resources, but also included sector and geography.

Employer contacts raised concerns about the relevance of the scheme to their organisation's needs. Concerns related to scheme relevance were voiced by employers who were both conscious and unconscious of leaving.

The most common concerns about relevance involved size and resources:

- **Size:** some contacts at smaller employers (particularly organisations that were not focused on disability or disability-related issues) felt that it was inherently difficult for them to achieve the goals of the scheme.
- **Finance:** some employer contacts (all from organisations in the small or medium size bands) specifically highlighted a lack of resources to participate successfully in the scheme relative to larger organisations.

Other factors were also mentioned as reducing the relevance of the scheme:

- **Sector:** some contacts felt that the nature of work in their sector (e.g. that it was physically demanding) was less suitable for some disabled people.
- **Fear of employing disabled people:** apart from concerns specific to particular sectors or roles, one contact was more generally apprehensive about employing disabled people.
- **Local labour market:** one contact felt that a strong local labour market made it difficult for them to increase the number of disabled employees.

We are a small business, so we cannot really afford, it is not just the money, it is about the time as well, to be involved in this kind of scheme. Because we do not have enough staff. We will never go for it because we do not have enough staff. (L1, Small)

It's quite scary to employ someone with a disability. (L1, Micro)

However, due to location [...] unemployment is low and travelling to the factory is a task that disabled people may be less able to do. (L1, Large)

Employer Concerns – Insufficient DWP Support

The research identified a lack of support from DWP as a common concern among employers who left.

- **Lack of continuing support and communication:** A prevalent view among employer contacts was that DWP support for their organisation, as part of the scheme, was lacking. Newsletters were often the only help mentioned (where contacts recalled receiving these). Some contacts felt that there was a drop-off in contact after they were initially contacted by a member of DWP staff (e.g. their local jobcentre) about signing-up.
- **Lack of visibility:** For some employer contacts, concern about a lack of support and communication related to a feeling that the scheme was insufficiently visible and placed the onus on them to proactively seek information.
- **Outcomes unrelated to support:** Some employer contacts felt that positive outcomes during membership resulted from their own knowledge and not the support or resources provided as part of scheme membership.

To be fair I expected a little more help but we never did see anyone, I believe our lady left the company and so we didn't see anyone from that point on. (L1, Micro)

I have to pay a lot of attention to the scheme where possible, as I haven't seen any conferences. It is not as visible as it should be far as I am concerned. (L1, Medium)

Erm... I don't know if there's been a lot of support. My knowledge of autism has allowed me to know what's necessary. I haven't really got that from anyone else. (L1, Small)

Jobcentre Communication and Engagement

Employers who regularly engaged with jobcentres about the scheme generally viewed this favourably. Some employers perceived referrals of applicants from jobcentres as the main benefit of the scheme.

Importance of engagement with DWP/JCP

- Some employer contacts reported recurring communication with their DWP contact via their local jobcentre, extending beyond initial discussions about the scheme. Where this was the case, contacts valued ongoing contact with the jobcentre as a source of practical support and reassurance.
- Negative feedback included concerns about establishing communication with individual jobcentres, experiencing a drop off in communication after initial contact and a lack of information/response regarding renewal.

Potential confusion between DC and other areas of DWP engagement

- In some instances, employers viewed their contact with jobcentres as the main way in which they could attract applicants with disabilities. Contacts may not have been distinguishing between links with jobcentres related to the scheme and engagement (including referrals) as part of a wider offer to employers, possibly creating misplaced expectations about the scheme.

People in local JCP... we work quite closely with them, they have offered us facilities for interviews so I know I have that support locally, which is very good to have. (L1, Micro)

I have been in conversation at the jobcentre about how we become a Leader, moving to stage three, and no one has pointed out that 'You are not even stage one' at the moment.' (L2, Large)

[How did you plan to fulfil the commitments that you accepted when joining?] We started to work more closely with our contact at JCP, more broadly. That was how we were going to introduce people registered as disabled into the organisation. (L2, Large)

Materials and Newsletters

Receiving and not receiving newsletters were both commonly reported. Newsletters were praised for providing useful updates, stories and notice of events, but also criticised for being too long and generic.

Both receiving and not receiving newsletters were reported by large proportions of employer contacts.

- **Not receiving newsletters:** A proportion of contacts stated they did not receive newsletters. Possible reasons for this identified by some contacts included newsletters not going to a working email or to the right person. Contacts not receiving newsletters tended to be generally less engaged.
- **Receiving but not reading newsletters:** Several contacts who received newsletters indicated that they read them infrequently or not at all, due to the volume of email received and other demands.
- **Positive reflections:** The newsletters were praised for providing: updates relevant to disability employment, legislation, and the scheme; interesting stories about experiences and practice at other employers; notice about upcoming conferences and events, webinars and awareness windows.
- **Negative reflections:** Some contacts felt that newsletters and linked content took too long to read. Other concerns included feelings that newsletter content was too generic (untailored to the type of employer) and that newsletters were an insufficient means of providing ongoing support.

Contacts did not typically refer to specific materials unrelated to newsletters (e.g. employer packs) and some stated that they were unaware of these.

[Did you find the newsletters useful?] Yes, did not necessarily read every one, I will be honest. But the ones that I read I thought were interesting and useful information. It is nice to get updates really and just see where the scheme is. (L2, Small)

Not received them and no one in my team has either. None of the rest of the team have received anything either. (L1, Large)

I do get regular newsletters to tell me what's happening but it's quite a busy newsletter. I'm trying to pull it up. It's not the kind of level of support that we get from the other charters. (L1, Large)

Scheme Impact – Summary

The research identified areas where the employer perceptions suggested that the scheme achieved impact:

- Many employer contacts referred to changes in recruitment practices which helped disabled applicants.
- Some employer contacts felt that they had become more confident about employing a disabled person.
- Employer contacts sometimes credited the scheme with a positive influence on their organisational culture, especially their awareness and understanding of disabilities and the importance of inclusive employment.

However, there were also findings suggesting a lack of impact or failing to demonstrate impact, including:

- Employer contacts were frequently unsure about improvements in outcomes even where practices had changed.
- Only a very small number of employer contacts discussed impact relating to existing employees and retention.
- A proportion of employer contacts felt there was no impact from the scheme. This included employers who had pursued improvements before joining, but also those who failed to take any actions or felt support was lacking.

Scheme Impact – Attracting and Recruiting Staff

Employers generally perceived that the scheme improved their approach to attracting and recruiting staff. Employer impressions about the impact on numbers of applicants and employees were more mixed.

Impact on recruitment outcomes

- Employer contacts were frequently positive about the scheme and its impact. However, they were sometimes unsure about the level of change in attracting/recruiting staff or to what extent it resulted from the scheme, particularly when they were discussing the overall impact on numbers (as opposed to specific measures that they had chosen to implement).
- A small number of employer contacts felt that disabled people had been encouraged to apply to them due to DC branding. Other positive effects from the branding were unrelated to the application process, but included external reputational gain and, for a care provider, increased referrals of service users with disabilities from local authorities.

Impact on employer's recruitment approach

- A larger number of employer contacts discussed the impact of the scheme on their confidence, approach and processes in recruiting disabled people. Specific changes included advertising targeted at potential applicants with disabilities and offering reasonable adjustments.
- Some employer contacts expressly stated that their organisation was more likely to hire employees with disabilities as a consequence of the scheme. Membership was felt to be reassuring, particularly by smaller employers.

I don't know if the Disability Confident stamp has made a difference. I would like to think that it is one of the things that has helped attract people to our organisation. (L2, Small)

The DC scheme gives us the confidence when taking on disabled people. Always have a meeting before taking people on, what the person needs, what we can do for them and it is always good to mention that we are part of the DC scheme. (L1, Micro)

I would say that it made me more likely.....more confident that I could employ someone with a disability because support is available. (L1 Micro)

Scheme Impact – Existing Workforce and Culture

There was little evidence of impact on retention of employees with disabilities. However, employers frequently praised the impact on organisational culture and in particular understanding of disability.

Impact on retention of employees with disabilities

- When asked, very few employer contacts described impact on retention as a result of the DC scheme. One contact mentioned changes intended to aid retention, including working from home, implemented since joining the scheme, but it was not clear if this stemmed from the scheme.

Impact on organisational culture and understanding of disability

- Several employer contacts felt that that organisational culture became more inclusive as a consequence of scheme membership and actions (e.g. holding awareness events, use of logo in email signatures) to promote the scheme. Contacts discussed both the effect of cultural change within the organisation and improvements in their image with their customers.
- In characterising internal cultural change, the emphasis of employer contacts was on improved understanding and awareness of the importance of including disabled people. Some contacts related this to how they engaged with their service users as well as their employees.
- One contact felt that awareness of disability may have improved, from a low starting point, after the organisation initially joined, but their perception was that that progress then halted. Failing to build on initial positive effects aligns with wider evidence of employer disengagement after first joining.

The most positive impact for us was when we held the awareness day and got a few of our staff to come in and talk about the difference that our act of seeking individuals with disabilities had made. (L1, Small)

I think it has also allowed us to give assurance to our staff that they're not forgotten and ignored and we do have aspirations to get better and it has given us a framework as well and goals to work towards. (L1, Large)

I think when the organisation first joined there may have been some raised awareness [...] When I joined I couldn't see any particular evidence of that continuing. (L1, Micro)

Scheme Impact – Lack of Impact

Some employers perceived low impact, including employers who met scheme aims without support (before joining), those who had not taken appropriate actions, and those who felt a lack of support limited impact.

- A proportion of employer contacts perceived that there was no impact on their organisation from the scheme. Some of these contacts also explained that their organisation consciously chose to leave due to lack of benefit from the scheme, whereas other contacts indicated leaving was not planned and/or that they intended to rejoin in spite of the lack of impact. Explanations for lack of impact from scheme membership included:
 - **Already completed steps and motivated by recognition:** Some contacts stated there was no impact because they were taking actions of their own initiative and/or that their motivation for signing-up was obtaining recognition for steps that they were already doing.
 - **Not taking appropriate actions:** Other employer contacts indicated that they were not actually undertaking relevant recruitment and retention practices (e.g. that they did not identify disabled applicants meeting the minimum criteria in selecting interviews).
 - **No support/contact:** Some employer contacts indicated that the absence of impact was related to lack of follow-up after first joining.
- Some contacts had implemented actions as a result of the scheme but did not perceive impact on the number of applications from disabled people.

We have carried on with our own practices. Disability Confident is more of a certificate that we have got. It is based in our office, most of our staff are out on site. We do our own practices, not because Disability Confident says anything. (L2, Medium)

We do not ask for any information on disabilities. It is whether they will be right for the role if they are shortlisted. In all honesty, it has not brought anything concrete to our practice. (L1, Medium)

I would like to say yes, but I think no in regards to people who are declaring [they] have got a disability. We are not seeing those numbers coming through. (L1, Large)

Scheme Impact – Obstacles to Impact

Factors which employers mentioned as hindering impact included the nature of an employer organisation (such as little changeover in staff), but also low understanding of the scheme.

Employer contacts referred to a number of obstacles which limited related actions that they pursued or reduced the impact of the scheme:

- **Minimal staff turnover:** Some contacts at micro and small employers indicated that the rarity of vacancies in existing positions prevented from changing their workforce to include more employees with disabilities.
- **Lack of understanding of the scheme:** Particularly where employers were asked to join by a jobcentre, rather than on their own initiative, some contacts felt that they did not understand how to use their membership.
- **Lack of time:** Apart from time required to understand and remain engaged with the scheme, some employer contacts highlighted that they had limited time to meet the needs of disabled employees and applicants.
- **Insufficient resources:** Some employer contacts identified limitations finance, personnel and/or facilities as reducing the impact of the scheme within their organisation.
- **COVID-19 pandemic:** For some organisations, the pandemic led to a pause in operations or recruitment, or created significant additional tasks, which contacts identified as an obstacle to fulfilling their original plans.

It didn't increase [number of disabled employees] as our changeover of staff hasn't been high; we haven't changed staff numbers for a long time. (L2, Small)

[Have there been any obstacles to impact?] just having the time to look at what this [DC] really meant and how we can promote it. Need to think about why we have got this branding, what do we want to do with it. (L2, Large)

Time constraints is a big one. It does take time....depends on the person's needs, but it can take longer to get them integrated, settled and coming to work on a regular basis. All that takes time and effort. (L1, Small)

Improvements – Summary

The main areas for improvement identified in responses from employer contacts were:

- Improved provision of training, advice and funding, with additional training and guidance to focus on how they can provide support to disabled applicants and employees
- Greater opportunities for networking and workshops, primarily with other employers but also charities
- A greater proactive effort by DWP to communicate with employers, both as part of ongoing contact in scheme membership and to ensure renewal communications reach the right person.

A wider range of additional suggestions (e.g. job matching, increased monitoring) were also received.

Some suggested improvements (e.g. in relation to networking or jobcentre contact) indicate that the experiences of employers are varied. Gains may be possible if existing practices in some areas are replicated across the country.

Improvements – Training, Advice and Funding

One area where several employers wished to see greater support was training and guidance on disability employment issues. A small number of employers also raised funding/resources for scheme members.

Additional training, advice and guidance

- Some employer contacts wanted training and additional advice/guidance for scheme members on how they can support applicants and employees with disabilities. This suggestion helps explain what some employer contacts meant about DWP support lacking, and points to how that concern could be addressed.

Funding

- Providing funding for scheme members, for instance to run their own training or hire additional staff to work with disabled employees, was proposed or enquired about by a small number of employer contacts.

Lack of understanding about existing support and resources

- A lack of understanding about support, materials and resources already potentially available was displayed by some employer contacts in discussing potential improvements. This underlines the importance of general communication about what the scheme involves, including explaining what types of support or resources are not offered.

I just feel the Government could put in money. Money for two or three reasons. The first is for training. I can give you an example of employing someone with autism. They may need some sort of support. Sometimes you may need to employ someone without autism to support them to be in that job. (L1, Medium)

[Is there anything more that could have been done to keep you on the scheme?] Yes. I think that practical support, guidance, and coaching would be really useful. (L1, Large)

I don't know if you come out or do any workshops...I don't know much about what you do to be honest. Is there funding? (L1, Micro)

Improvements – Networking and Workshops

Employers suggested networking with fellow employers and, in some cases, charities as a potential improvement. Different employers had contrasting experiences of existing networking opportunities.

Networking and workshops with other employers

- In line with the finding that an initial employer expectation of the scheme was that it would facilitate networking with other employers, increased opportunities for networking featured as a suggestion for improvement.
- Employer contacts typically indicated interest in learning from good practice in other organisations, but some contacts also suggested that they wanted to share their insights and own examples of good practice in networking settings established as part of the scheme.
- Jobcentre-hosted workshops was one of the formats which employer contacts suggested would be useful for networking with other employers.

Networking with third-sector organisations

- Some employer contacts also advocated connections with charities with an interest in disability issues, with an emphasis not only on sharing knowledge but also promoting employers and confirming their compliance.

Variation in existing experiences of networking opportunities

- The data suggests variation in the extent to which employer contacts felt that their organisations could currently access networking opportunities as part of the scheme.

...I think it would be useful to have workshops at the jobcentre, to go along and meet other employers and hopefully inspire one another. And then you can pass on experience as well, so it widens the scope for people to understand why we're doing this and the benefits. (L1, Small)

I would have liked to have had some links into charities, highlighting us an employer of choice. (L2, Large)

Improvements – Proactive Communication / Check-Ins

One improvement suggested was a greater DWP effort to initiate and maintain communication with employers. Some contacts proposed that this should involve regular check-ins, possibly by telephone.

Greater ongoing communication and regular check-ins

- Several employer contacts recommended establishing regular check-ins at set intervals between DWP and each employer regarding their experience and activities as a member of the scheme. This might help address the feelings identified among some employers about a lack of contact/support and ensure that members remain engaged after they initially join.
- A related suggested improvement from some employer contacts was conducting check-ins and/or other communication by telephone.

Attempting different contact routes when a first attempt at contact (e.g. with a reminder email) is unsuccessful

- Specific suggestions were also made about resolving cases where emails do not reach the right person. One contact suggested that, where an email bounces back, a proactive effort should be made to contact the appropriate person at the organisation through other routes.
- Another contact recommended allowing organisations to name a secondary contact alongside the principal contact when signing-up/renewing to the scheme.

I think I expected to receive check-ins, about how we would go about, what we would do, what we were doing. Maybe contact us, maybe six-monthly or yearly. That was the kind of thing that we were thinking of. (L2, Small)

If I was to get a call like you are doing now, that would be good. For me to know, just as you are doing now, you are speaking, at the moment, but I didn't get that. I didn't know how it works. (L1, Micro)

If it [a reminder email] has gone to someone who moved on, it should have bounced back. It is a little frustrating that it has bounced back, but no one has come up with, 'Who else can we contact?' (L2, Large)

Wider Suggested Improvements

Beyond the main areas for improvement identified, smaller numbers of employer contacts also suggested other changes which would have made a difference to their experience of the scheme.

Beyond improvements under the headings explored in the previous slides, additional recommendations were also put forward in the interviews:

- **Extending aspects of Level 3 offer to Level 2 employers aspiring to Level 3:** Extending additional meetings intended for Level 3 employers to those Level 2 employers aspiring to Level 3 status;
- **Job matching:** Referring or matching applicants with disabilities to scheme members, a suggestion which reflected how some employer contacts either expected the scheme to work prior to joining or believed that it did already work during their membership;
- **Greater promotion of scheme members:** More generally, recognising and promoting members of the scheme to a greater extent, in particular highlighting them to job applicants;
- **Greater monitoring:** Increasing monitoring and compliance checks, potentially involving either disability charities or disabled people in assessing employers to confirm that they are meeting commitments.

Very keen to take on people with physical and mental health problems and receive referrals from the scheme. (L1, Micro)

I don't know how it is done and how they promote companies that are Disability Confident. I am not sure of the process, but I feel somewhere along the lines, something hasn't gone well. (L1, Micro)

Maybe a panel of people nationally, who do not necessarily check every employer, who do spot checks. (L2, Large)

Employer Sub-Group Differences

Responses were similar across sub-groups, but some patterns can be identified. Level 1 employers were typically less interested and less ambitious about the scheme. Micro employers expected greater support.

DC Level Reached

- Level 2 employers generally were less aware (before being contacted about the research) that they left the scheme and tended not to recall receiving reminders about expiry, compared to Level 1. Level 2 employers also overwhelmingly specified intent to renew. This may indicate that inattentiveness drove Level 2 non-renewals or just reflect low sample size.
- Greater emphasis was placed on increasing networking with other employers and compliance monitoring in Level 2 employer feedback.
- The view that the scheme had no impact was more evident among Level 1 employers. Conversely, the view that recruitment practices had improved was most consistently expressed by Level 2 employers.

Employer Size Band

- Larger employers generally placed greater weight on reputational gain.
- Micro employers more frequently expected substantial support.

[Were you aware that your membership had expired?] No I wasn't; I didn't even realise that. I'm hoping it didn't pass me by in the email as I'm usually on top of it. (L2, Small)

[Were you aware you had left before we contacted you?] Yes. It lagged. As I explained earlier, in a world of COVID, this simply was just put down to a lower priority. (L1, Medium)

There has not been any support to deliver something. It has all been on us as an employer. That is potentially rightly so. (L2, Large)

Maybe I could have had help.....and I suppose... we're using lots of templates and things.... And we have a tiny staff. (L1, Micro)

5. Conclusion

Conclusion

Most employers left unconsciously, but some also decided not to renew. Perceptions leading to employer disengagement included that expectations were unfulfilled and that support/communication was lacking.

- Many employers left DC without making a conscious decision to allow their membership to expire. This can be explained by employers not receiving or responding to reminder emails, as well as by time and resources pressures, particularly related to the pandemic, and low understanding of the renewal process.
- However, there was still a proportion of employers in the study who consciously chose to leave, typically because they did not feel membership made a difference for their organisation or as they had concerns about the scheme's suitability for their circumstances.
- In addition, among employers generally (including some which intend to renew) enthusiasm for the scheme in principle is coupled with feelings about their experience of the scheme not fulfilling their expectations (e.g. in relation to the level of support that they would receive), lack of contact and the scheme's impact on outcomes.
- Some employers perceived that they were receiving significant support from local jobcentres already as part of the scheme, including features such as a job matching service that are not in the scheme's advertised offer. Other employers raised concerns about minimal or no ongoing communication with DWP or their local jobcentre beyond first joining.

Annexes

Annex 1: Research and Sample Design

- Qualitative interviews, with employers who had left DC, were selected to provide direct evidence about why they left and their views and experiences of the scheme. This approach was chosen to obtain richer data than can be gained via a DC employers survey.
- Telephone interviews were judged able to provide the data quality needed for this project and were also more suitable for busy employers. However, this could have limited accessibility for some potential participants.
- Fieldwork was in office hours, aligned with most employers' availability. This may have excluded some contacts only available outside of standard office hours.
- Interviews were semi-structured, using a Topic Guide to support conversations. Each interview had an interviewer and a note-taker, enabling interviewers to focus on managing the conversation and note-takers to produce extensive notes.
- One drawback of qualitative interviews was that some employers may be reluctant to participate or engage frankly about their reasons for leaving the DC scheme. Employers who intentionally leave the scheme (e.g. because they reject it in principle) may not wish to share this with DWP or may perceive a risk to share this publicly. Standard assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality were provided during recruitment and when obtaining agreement to participate. This risk was also considered when analysing the research.
- 1,500 employers whose DC membership expired due to non-renewal from 8 November 2021 to 31 January 2022 were sampled, using contact details (work email address and telephone number) for each employer's named contact as part of the scheme.
- 1,500 employers' contact details were requested based on the response rate from a similar study. The aim was to secure 30 to 40 interviews. The length of the reference period was based on obtaining a sampling frame with a sufficient number of employers and was selected to be as recent as possible, subject to ensuring there was a sufficient period after expiries, prior to contacting employers, to avoid contacting any employers who immediately renewed following expiry.
- Contacts were recruited by email or telephone call to participate in a pre-booked telephone interview (one interview went ahead during recruitment call due to the employer's preference). Recruitment emails were tailored to the size of the employer. 500 emails were sent in 3 waves, with a reminder email sent a week following the initial email.
- In recruitment calls and emails, researchers asked to interview the person responsible for the organisation's DC membership whether this was the previous named contact or an alternative nominated by the employer (e.g. where the named contact had left the organisation or less suitable than the alternative to discuss the reasons for joining/leaving and the impact of the scheme).

Annex 2: Achieved Sample – Overview

Researchers focused recruitment activity on sub-groups of interest. Securing a range of interviews which allowed the identification of qualitative insights across DC levels and employer size bands.

- Achieved interviews with sufficient numbers of employers from DC Levels 1 and 2, and from different employer size bands, to provide qualitative insights about sub-group differences. Undertaking targeted recruitment activity helped to ensure sufficient coverage (particularly with Level 2 employers).
- There were considerable imbalances in the sampling frame (e.g. only 83 Level 2 employers), and the sampling frame comprised the total population of employers who had failed to renew in the reference period.
- Recruitment activity was focused on sub-groups of interest with only low numbers of employers in the sampling frame, especially Level 2 employers. As a result, a sufficient spread of interviews from Level 1 and Level 2 and from the different size bands was achieved.
- The sample also included a good spread of sectors, expiry date ranges (across the reference period) and geographies.

	Achieved Sample	Sampling Frame
<i>DC Level Reached</i>		
Level 1 / Committed	28	1417
Level 2 / Employer	8	83
<i>Employer Size Band</i>		
Micro / 1 to 9 Employees	14	649
Small / 10 to 49 Employees	6	479
Medium / 50 to 249 Employees	7	216
Large / 250+ Employees	9	156

Annex 3: Employer Background

Disabled people primarily involved as volunteers and not as staff in some organisations

- A subset of employer contacts explained that disabled people were primarily involved in their organisation as volunteers and not employees. Some of these contacts linked volunteering opportunities to progression into future employment with their own or another organisation.

Recently taken on 3 new volunteers classed as disabled, one profoundly deaf, another volunteer with special needs trying to boost their workplace confidence. (L1, Micro)

Variation in previous renewal histories

- Some employer contacts advised that their organisation had renewed scheme membership in the past. These contacts did not express dissatisfaction regarding their previous renewal.
- Other contacts reported that they had not previously renewed or that they were unsure of the organisation's previous renewal status.

No, the last time we had membership was the first time we signed up to being a Disability Confident employer. (L1, Large)

Annex 4: Contact Background

Contacts sometimes unfamiliar with all or parts of an organisation's history of scheme membership

- Where employer contacts had taken over, they tended to be less familiar with the history of their organisation's membership. On the other hand, contacts originally involved in joining sometimes advised that they had not held continuing responsibility during scheme membership.

This is something new to us, it was [previous DC lead] who always dealt with this, but he has retired. [*When did you get involved with Disability Confident?*] To be honest, I don't know, he just decided he was retiring one day and we just stepped up. (L2, Medium)

Differences in contact roles and discussions/plans regarding allocation of responsibility for the scheme

- Employer contacts ranged from persons who held overall responsibility for their organisation (e.g. as an owner, director or general manager), to contacts working in functional roles (HR; equality, diversity and inclusion; disability) of varying seniority.
- Some contacts at larger organisations talked about plans or ongoing steps to move responsibility for DC from a general HR post holder to a more specialised role or network.

No. Our Head of HR left and we are in a transition period. They are looking at reshaping HR in terms of what that will look like. Disability Confident wasn't passed to anyone. (L2, Large)

Annex 5: Insights from Fieldwork Tracker

While undertaking recruitment emails and telephone calls, the fieldwork tracker was used to gather information relevant to:

- Employers' awareness of the DC scheme;
- Where employers declined to participate, their reasons for refusal.

These details relate to the future intentions of these employers (e.g. to rejoin the scheme) and the status of registered contacts and employers (e.g. where the organisation has closed down or the contact has left).

Twenty-nine employers requested and were emailed information regarding how to rejoin DC. Researchers provided a link to the membership form, a link to renewal guidance and a contact email to raise any queries.

Annex 5: Insights from Fieldwork Tracker – DC Awareness

- The fieldwork tracking process included categorising employers based on their awareness of leaving DC prior to the research, including whether they had already renewed scheme membership. This was done for both interviewed employers and for other employers who indicated this when invited to participate.
- This research was not designed as a survey or to provide any form of statistical data. Nonetheless, the data on employer awareness is helpful in conveying that a high proportion of employers who responded left the scheme without being aware they had done so.
- Among employers who stated they had already renewed, some claimed to have done so much earlier. In one case, it was established that a submitted referral was not linked to the prior registration due to details not matching. Such instances may inflate the number of expiries, though could not explain the recent rise in non-renewals, at the time of the research.

	Interviewed Employers	Other Responding Employers with relevant data	All Responding Employers with relevant data
Unaware that they left DC	23	5	28
Aware that they left DC	9	3	12
Unaware that they were in DC	3	4	7
Already renewed DC membership	1	8	9
Total	36	20	56

Annex 5: Insights from Fieldwork Tracker – Reasons for Refusal

- Aggregating data from emails and telephone calls, the table shows the reasons why employers or contacts declined an interview. It does not include data for employers who provided a holding response or failed to provide a further response without refusing.
- The most common reasons for refusal both involved situations where the contact had left the employer, either where the contact declined or the employer advised there was no suitable interviewee due to the responsible person having left the organisation.
- Other reasons for declining an interview included an intention to renew (though employers who decided to renew only after being contacted about the research were invited to participate if they wished).
- In some instances, employers had closed down or merged into another organisation.

Reason for refusal	Count
Contact declines as they have left employer	14
Declined to participate - no suitable interviewee (responsible person left)	11
Declined to participate - contact currently unavailable	11
Declined to participate - plans to renew	10
Declined to participate - has renewed already	8
Employer has closed down	7
Declined to participate - unspecified	5
Declined to participate - not aware in DC	4
Declined to participate - part of separately-registered group membership	4
Declined to participate - too busy	3
Declined to participate - other	1

Annex 6: Analytical Approach

- Analysis codes were initially generated after carefully reviewing the interview notes midway through fieldwork. Codes were identified when needed to represent data which was relevant to the research aims. The codes generated were then organised into a coding specification and discussed by the research team. Feedback was also considered from fieldworkers about key messages they had identified from the interviews.
- Analysts coded segments of the interview notes in NVivo, using the code names and descriptions established in the framework. Once all interview notes were coded, analysts reviewed the data classified under a miscellaneous code and decided how to allocate this content.
- Further work was undertaken to revise and develop themes and categories based on the data coding.
- Quality Assurance of the populated analysis framework had two stages:
 - Internal review by the project team involved checking all content coded under each node to confirm it matched the description, identifying where a segment was more appropriately coded differently or did not require coding.
 - Following changes to the coding, review of the data analysis was undertaken independently by a researcher outside the project team, focusing on the structure of the analysis framework. Modifications were then made, such as developing themes to organise nodes showing positive effects and no effect from the scheme.
- NVivo software for qualitative data analysis allowed queries to cross-reference between codes, as well as between codes and employer attributes. This was useful in identifying patterns and sub-group differences.