Department for Work & Pensions

Disability Confident Scheme

Strengthening Confidence in Disability Confident

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Why Reform is needed

Disability Confident has helped thousands of employers demonstrate their commitment to recruiting, retaining and developing disabled people over the past decade. However, through our research and stakeholder engagement a consistent message emerged: confidence in the scheme depends on confidence in what membership represents.

Disabled people, employers and stakeholders told us they wanted:

- clearer expectations of members
- stronger assurance that commitments are being met
- greater transparency about member performance and progress
- a stronger role for employee voice
- greater visibility of whether the scheme is delivering meaningful improvements

The reforms have been designed to respond directly to these issues while maintaining a scheme that remains accessible and proportionate for employers of different sizes and sectors.

Ultimately, confidence in Disability Confident matters because disabled people, job applicants, employers and stakeholders should be able to understand what scheme membership represents and have confidence that

participating employers are taking meaningful action to support disability inclusion.

Understanding Disability Confident

Disability Confident is a voluntary scheme that supports employers to improve disability inclusion in their workplace.

The scheme is designed to help employers build their capability and confidence, recognise progress and share good practice.

What Disability Confident is:

- A framework for improving disability inclusion.
- A way for employers to demonstrate commitment and progress.
- A source of practical guidance, support and good practice.
- A scheme that encourages continuous and sustained improvement.

What Disability Confident is not:

- A legal compliance or enforcement regime.
- A guarantee that every disabled person’s experience will be the same.
- A replacement for employers’ responsibilities under equality legislation.

- A one-off award that employers can achieve and never revisit.

The reforms strengthen confidence in the scheme through clearer expectations, stronger assurance, greater transparency and stronger focus on employee experience.

What we Heard, What we're Changing

We have engaged with employers, disabled people, stakeholders and experts to understand what works well in Disability Confident and where improvements could be made. Through evaluation activity, stakeholder engagement and testing of potential reforms, a number of consistent themes emerged.

The reforms presented in this pack have been shaped by that evidence. The table below highlights some of the key messages we heard and how these views have informed the next phase of Disability Confident.

What we heard	What we're changing
Disabled people wanted greater confidence in what Disability Confident membership represents.	Introducing clearer expectations at every level, stronger verification and greater transparency.
Employees wanted more opportunities to share their experiences and see employers act on feedback.	Embedding employee voice more strongly throughout the scheme and encouraging approaches such as anonymous feedback mechanisms.

What we heard	What we're changing
Stakeholders wanted stronger accountability and evidence of progress.	Introducing Progress Statements and Annual Performance Reports to help demonstrate action and improvement over time.
Employers wanted clearer guidance and practical examples.	Developing revised criteria, guidance and support materials to help employers understand what good practice looks like.
Smaller employers wanted flexibility and proportionate requirements.	Ensuring expectations remain scalable and can be met in different ways depending on the size and nature of the organisation.
Employers broadly supported stronger assurance, provided it remained practical and proportionate.	Introducing enhanced verification that strengthens credibility while avoiding unnecessary administrative burdens.
Employees highlighted the importance of line managers and day-to-date workplace experiences.	Increasing focus on areas such as adjustments, retention, progression, wellbeing and supportive workplace conversations.
Stakeholders wanted Disability Confident to encourage continual improvement rather than become a one-off commitment.	Introducing a clearer progression journey and time-limited Level 1 membership.

How the reforms strengthen Disability Confident

Taken together, the reforms introduce stronger progression expectations, greater transparency, enhanced assurance arrangements and a stronger emphasis on employee voice.

These changes are intended to strengthen confidence in Disability Confident while continuing to support organisations at different stages of their disability inclusion journey.

Time-Limited Level 1 Membership

Under the reformed scheme, Level 1 becomes a supported entry point rather than a permanent destination.

Employers will normally have up to two years to progress from Level 1 to Level 2. This replaces the current approach, where organisations can remain indefinitely at the entry level.

The change creates a clearer expectation that participation should lead to development and progression over time, while recognising that employers may need time and support to build confidence, knowledge and capability.

Employers will have access to guidance, tools and practical support throughout their Level 1 membership. Employers that choose not to progress beyond Level 1 will leave the scheme at the end of their membership period and will be provided with information and resources to support their ongoing disability inclusion journey outside the scheme.

Greater Transparency

Stakeholders consistently told us that transparency plays an important role in building confidence and trust.

The reformed scheme therefore introduces greater transparency at employer, verification and scheme level.

At Level 2, employers will be expected to complete an annual Progress Statement:

- activities undertaken during the previous year
- progress made
- priorities and ambitions for the year ahead.

At Level 3, Independent Verifiers will complete a Verification Report as each new organisation reaches Champion status. Employers will be expected to meet any requirements relating to Progress Statements or Verification Reports in accordance with scheme guidance.

At scheme level, Government will publish an annual Disability Confident Scheme Performance Report providing information on overall scheme performance, participation and progress.

Greater transparency will help employers share good practice and learn from one another, while giving disabled employees and the wider public greater confidence in what Disability Confident membership represents. At the higher levels of the scheme, greater visibility of employers' action, progress and challenges

will demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement and strengthen trust in the scheme.

The intention is not to create unnecessary reporting burdens, but to provide greater visibility of action being taken and encourage a more open conversation about progress, challenges and continuous improvement.

Strengthening Employee Voice

Disabled people have a vital role in shaping workplace inclusion.

The reformed scheme places greater emphasis on listening to, understanding and responding to the experiences of disabled employees and, where possible, disabled job applicants.

Employers will be encouraged to gather proportionate feedback, reflect on lived experience and use those insights to inform future improvement activity.

To support this, the reformed scheme introduces ways for an employer to gather insights from employees, including anonymous feedback approaches. These approaches provide employers with an opportunity to better understand the experiences of disabled employees and help ensure that improvement activity is informed by lived experience rather than by assumptions about their experience.

Embedding employee voice more consistently helps ensure that disability inclusion is guided not only by policies and processes, but also by the experiences of

the people those policies and processes are intended to support.

Enhanced Independent Verification at Level 3

Level 3 remains the highest level of Disability Confident membership and is intended to recognise organisations demonstrating leadership in disability inclusion.

To strengthen confidence in what Level 3 membership represents, enhanced independent verification arrangements are being introduced.

These include:

- more structured scoring and assessment frameworks
- clearer and more consistent evidence requirements
- greater use of employee insight, including pulse surveys and employee engagement activity
- strengthened quality assurance arrangements for the verifier community

Verifiers will participate in calibration activities and community roundtables, supporting consistency of decision-making and providing opportunities to share learning and good practice.

These changes are intended to improve the consistency, robustness and independence of verification decisions, providing greater confidence that organisations recognised at Level 3 are demonstrating the behaviours,

leadership and commitment associated with Champion status.

Implementation will be supported through a phased transition period, ensuring that existing members and verifiers have time, guidance and support to prepare for the revised framework.

Quotas, Targets and Compliance

Some stakeholders have rightly challenged whether stronger assurance should involve mandatory targets or quotas.

The reforms take a different approach.

Disability Confident is designed to support employers to build confidence, remove barriers and make sustained improvements in the recruitment, retention and progression of disabled people. It aims to encourage meaningful action across employers of difference sizes, sectors and levels of experience. The purpose therefore is to support and encourage improvement rather than act as a regulatory or enforcement framework.

The reforms focus on strengthening expectations, increasing transparency and bolstering assurance and accountability across the employer journey and within the scheme itself.

We will continue to monitor the impact of the reforms, gather evidence and listen to stakeholder feedback as the scheme evolves.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability

Building confidence in Disability Confident requires more than changes to the scheme itself.

We will continue to monitor participation, gather evidence and evaluate the impact of the reforms over time.

Monitoring activity will draw on a range of evidence sources, including:

- membership data,
- progression rates between levels,
- verification outcomes
- employer feedback
- employee feedback
- wider stakeholder insight

This information will be used to assess whether the reforms are delivering the intended objectives including increased confidence, credibility, transparency and positive employer action.

To support public accountability, Government will also publish an annual Disability Confident Scheme Performance Report. The report will provide greater visibility of scheme performance, emerging findings and progress over time, helping employers, stakeholders and disabled people understand how the scheme is evolving and where further improvements may be required.

Monitoring and evaluation are therefore not simply measures of success. They are important tools for learning, transparency and continuous improvement.

Continuous and Sustained Improvement

Disability Confident itself should be subject to the same principle that underpins the reformed scheme: continuous and sustained improvement.

The reforms outlined in this document represent a significant strengthening of the scheme however, improving employment outcomes for disabled people cannot be addressed through a single intervention.

We will continue to gather evidence, evaluate the impact of the reforms and listen to employers, disabled people and stakeholders as implementation progresses. Insights gained through monitoring, evaluation and stakeholder engagement will help the scheme to continue to evolve, improve and support better outcomes over time.