Work and health in Wales

In spite of a growing number of households in Wales experiencing in-work poverty there remains strong evidence that being in regular, fairly paid employment is a critical factor to increasing prosperity and reducing poverty.

Many people face additional barriers to finding and remaining in work. These can include a lack of appropriate skills and qualifications, poor access to public transport and affordable childcare, or managing other caring responsibilities.

People of working age with disabilities or long-term health conditions are also much less likely to be in work than those without disabilities or health conditions.

This paper draws on evidence from across the Citizens Advice network in Wales and other sources. It highlights some of the many challenges this group face when looking for and trying to stay in work.

Wales: health and disability employment gap

The UK Government has committed to halving the disability employment gap within the next decade. In their new programme for government, ‘Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021’, the Welsh Government has similarly committed to ‘reshape employability support’, particularly for those furthest from the labour market, including disabled people.

In Wales just 43% of working-age people with a disability or long-term health condition are currently in employment, compared to 79% of non-disabled people who don't have a health condition - a health and disability employment gap of 36%. The equivalent UK gap is 32%.

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1 StatsWales ‘Summary of economic activity by area & disability status’ (year ending 30 June 2016)
In some areas of Wales the gap is even bigger:

- Neath Port Talbot: 50%
- RCT: 45%
- Merthyr Tydfil: 44%
- Bridgend: 43%
- Conwy: 44%

The size of the health and disability employment gap can also be dependent on other situations or circumstances. It is larger for people with a disability or health condition who have no or few qualifications, and for those with particular conditions, such as mental health problems or multiple impairments.

**Employment rates by type of impairment or health condition and type of qualification**

- Physical: 53%
- Mental: 37%
- University level: 71%
- No qualification: 20%

In Wales, disabled people are also almost 3 times more likely to leave their job in any given year.

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2 'Diverse disability', Richard Berthoud, ISER, University of Essex
People need more support from the benefits system and employers

Benefits system
Health and disability benefits are vital to give working-age people living with a disability or long term health condition a secure income and help to meet additional living costs.

In 2015 to 2016 local Citizens Advice in Wales helped over 22,600 people with either their Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claim. This included helping more than 6,700 people to challenge/appeal a PIP or ESA decision.

Dealing with uncertain or insufficient income caused by benefit problems and delays can make it much harder for people to concentrate on work or look for a job, especially when they are also managing a health condition.

Making sure people can get benefits reliably and quickly is a crucial first step in addressing the health and disability employment gap.

Employers
Employers also have a critical role to play by making sure they take a responsible attitude to employees. Our data suggests clients who are disabled or have a health condition encounter too much bad practice and discrimination by employers⁴.

Our data shows that people with a disability or health condition who seek help on an employment-related problem are more likely to require support on an issue relating to pay and entitlements or dismissal than people without a disability or health condition. Issues relating to sick leave, sick pay and unfair dismissal are more common amongst this group⁵.

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Proportion of clients with employment-related problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Clients with a disability or health condition</th>
<th>Clients without a disability or health condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay &amp; entitlements</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;Cs</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute resolution</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴ The figures quoted in both graphs are based on internal Citizens Advice data in Wales from 2015-16
⁵ Names have been changed in case study examples to protect anonymity
Previous research by Citizens Advice\textsuperscript{6} also identified significant issues that occur in the employment relationship for disabled people, particularly when employed by a small to medium enterprise (SME). These include:

- pre-employment health questions
- asking for and agreeing adjustments for interviews and working arrangements
- workplace and building accessibility
- lack of awareness of possible adjustments and overestimation of the expense and cost of adjustments
- whether or not to disclose particular conditions, especially invisible or stigmatised conditions
- being off sick.

Many employers, large and small, would benefit from having more information, guidance and support on how to better manage employees with health conditions, and design jobs for a more inclusive workplace.

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\textsuperscript{6} Solutions for equality and growth Citizens Advice, October 2015
The evidence from local Citizens Advice across Wales is supported by other UK-wide research which highlights how disabled employees experience all of the problems experienced by the rest of the workforce only more so.

Researchers concluded:

“One of the most important reasons why disabled employees do not remain or progress within employment is that they are subject to a range of negative experiences, many of which can be traced back to their employers, which make their situation particularly fraught. These experiences cover a wide range of employment rights issues and some other forms of ill-treatment.”

‘Closing Disability Gaps at Work: Deficits in Evidence and Variations in Experience’, Cardiff University (December 2016)
What's next?

As part of our work on income security, Citizens Advice is looking at how to improve the financial and practical support from the UK and Welsh Governments to help people with a disability or health condition who can work, to find a job and remain in employment.

Our data shows to achieve the latter new approaches are needed by employers as well as government. Attitudes of employers and wider society also need to change.

Much of this work will be used to inform our response to the UK Government consultation, ‘Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper’.

In Wales, Citizens Advice Cymru will be continuing to work in this area over the coming months. This includes using our evidence to help inform the implementation of the Welsh Government's new Employability Policy for Wales, which identifies disabled people as one group needing extra support.

For further information about our work in Wales please contact Lindsey Kearton, Policy Officer Wales Lindsey.Kearton@Citizensadvice.org.uk.

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