

Social Justice Research Programme

Disability and Employment in Scotland: A Review of the Evidence Base

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Access to and sustainability of employment for disadvantaged groups is a key concern of the Scottish Executive. This research was commissioned to collate the current evidence base in relation to disabled people's access to and participation within the labour market (including self-employment) and to identify gaps in current research in order to inform future research on the subject.

Main Findings

- Up to a fifth of the population of Scotland are affected by disability.
- Despite economic growth and general improvements in the health of the population the number of people claiming disability related benefits continues to increase while the employment rate of disabled people remains low with employment and equality legislation having only a modest impact on overall employment rates.
- The incidence of disability, the employment rate of disabled people and the level of incapacity benefits receipt varies across Scotland with the Glasgow area having the highest incidence of disability, the lowest levels of employment of disabled people and the highest levels of incapacity benefit receipt.
- Disabled people are far less likely to have qualifications than people without disabilities and this clearly has a negative impact on their employment outcomes.
- When they are in employment disabled people are far more likely to be employed in low level occupations and are therefore likely to have lower incomes than people without disabilities.
- Although the majority of economically inactive people in Scotland have a limiting long term illness, social justice and economic development policies have only recently begun to focus on this group.
- Many different organisations are involved in providing employment services in Scotland resulting in some duplication of effort and disjunctions between the policies of Jobcentre Plus and the Scottish Executive.
- Programmes aimed at disabled people rarely succeed in placing more than a fifth of participants in work but there is debate over the best way to measure programme outcomes particularly considering the extensive range of barriers which disabled people face.
- The debate about whether policies for disabled people should be mainstreamed or impairment specific has not been resolved and there is some evidence that access to mainstream employment services may be restricted for disabled people.

Research Aims

The central aims of the review were:

- to identify and discuss the evidence that is available through research and statistical data sources on the employment position of disabled people;
- to highlight, where evidence is available, the role played by policy interventions to facilitate and promote the labour market participation by disabled people; and
- to identify gaps in the current research base.

Background

Access to and sustainability of employment for disadvantaged groups is a key concern of the Scottish Executive. While employment is a policy area reserved to Westminster, responsibility for tackling barriers to employment for disabled people is shared between the Scottish and UK Governments. The review therefore considered disability and employment in both a UK and Scottish context.

Disability and Employment: the UK Context

There is major concern about the growing number of people claiming incapacity benefits and the fact that the employment rate of disabled people has not greatly increased in a period of economic growth and stability and improved general health of the population. In Scotland the employment rate of disabled people is particularly low. Programmes to improve the employment rates of disabled people and measures to boost the civil rights of disabled people appear to have had only modest impact.

Disability and Employment in Scotland: a review of the data

Up to a fifth of the Scottish population are disabled with particularly high rates in Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire. Disabled people are less likely to have qualifications and are more likely to be employed in lower level occupations. 11% of the Scottish population are in receipt of disability related benefits with higher rates in some areas in the West of Scotland.

Disability and Employment: the Scottish Context

Although the majority of people who are economically inactive in Scotland have a limiting long-term illness, social justice and economic development policies have only recently begun to focus on this group. Although policies have been successful in reducing levels of economic activity amongst some claimant groups (e.g. lone parents), this has not been true of incapacity benefit claimants.

UK and Scottish Programmes and Initiatives

The field of employment development in Scotland has become quite crowded leading to some duplication of effort and there have been disjunctions between the employment policies of Jobcentre Plus and the Scottish Executive. Debates continue about the best way of measuring employment outcomes for disabled people.

Experiences of Specific Groups: Impairment-specific versus Mainstream Provision

Debates about whether services should be impairment specific or mainstreamed continue. There is evidence to suggest that access to mainstream services may be restricted for disabled people.

Research Gaps

Gaps in the current research base were identified in the following areas:

- There is a lack of Scottish data in relation to Jobcentre Plus programme evaluations and evaluations of the effects of legislative developments such as the Disability Discrimination Act and National Minimum Wage
- There is a lack of information on 'what works' in terms of successful employment policies for disabled people and more work needs to be done to develop outcome measures for employment programmes for disabled people
- More research on the impact of key differences in disabled people's experiences of employment and employment services in relation to nature of impairment,

age, gender, ethnicity, social class and locality would be useful

- There is a need for more research which focuses on disabled people's own experiences of employment and employment services
- There is a need for more research which focuses on employers' perspectives
- More research needs to be carried out to increase our understanding of disabled children and young people's experiences in school and their destinations on leaving school and to enable us to explain the wide discrepancy in qualifications between people with and without a disability
- Longitudinal research which tracks the career development of disabled graduates would be useful
- More research needs to be carried out to determine the complex nature of the various barriers to work for disabled people which may not necessarily be connected with their state of health
- The spatial dimension of disability and its interaction with employment, income and poverty requires further analysis.

Implications

There are implications from the findings of the review for the Scottish Executive and its agencies as well as for the UK Government and its agencies. These implications are outlined in the full report along with implications for employers and for disabled people themselves.

Research Methods

The research review included a literature review and statistical analysis. A range of published and unpublished literature was gathered using searches of social science databases and university catalogues and evaluations, reports and information on ongoing work was requested from a range of organisations and academics and discussions were held with key policy makers, practitioners and researchers in employment. The Scottish Executive supplied Census data, Labour Force Survey data and information on benefits receipt for the statistical analysis.

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