This study presents findings from a national interview survey of 2,000 disabled people of working age (men aged 16-64; women aged 16-59) who have a long-term disability or health problem, and those who have had such a disability, in line with the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

The survey, carried out by the Institute of Employment Studies in conjunction with NOP Social and Political, provides nationally representative information on disabled people’s participation in the workforce. It provides baseline data to assist in the monitoring of the impact of the employment provisions of the DDA, which came into force in December 1996.

**Key Findings**

- Unemployed disabled people generally have a positive outlook on getting work. They agree strongly that getting a job is important to them (64% agree strongly, and 29% agree with this statement) and that they will continue to look for a job.

- Adaptations can often play a role in keeping disabled people in work. Over a quarter of disabled people who left their job because of their disability say that adaptations would have enabled them to stay in work; but less than one in five of this group say they were offered such changes.

- One in six disabled people (16%) who are or have been economically active say that they have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in a work-related context.

- Just under half (47%) of economically inactive disabled people who see themselves as being able to work say that they would like a paid job.

- Disabled people in employment are more likely to work in manual and lower skilled occupations.

- Disabled people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts.

- At £196 per week, the average take home pay of disabled employees is lower than that of non-disabled employees (£212).
Nature and severity of disability

92% of people in the survey have a current disability, and only 8% have a previous disability (but not a current disability).

The commonest impairments are the arms or hands, legs or feet, or back or neck; chest or breathing problems, asthma, bronchitis etc; and heart, blood pressure or blood circulation problems.

When asked about how their disability affects day-to-day activities, nearly a half of disabled people (47%) say that it affects mobility; 39% their ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects; and 19% their manual dexterity. All types of effect are more common among economically inactive and the incidence increases with age.

Effects of disability on ability to work

Over a third of disabled people (37%) say their disability prevents them from doing any paid work. While nearly all disabled people who are economically active (including the unemployed) say that they could do at least some work, three quarters (73%) of economically inactive disabled people say that they are unable to work at all. This proportion increases with age and severity of disability.

Disabilities most likely to have a work-related impact are mental illness, learning difficulties, mobility disorders and visual impairments (the latter affecting the kind of work that can be done, rather than the amount).

Patterns of economic activity

46% of disabled people were in work.

- There is a strong increase with age in the rate of self-employment among disabled people (corresponding to the pattern among the non-disabled population).
- The rate of economic inactivity for disability-related reasons increases with age.

Disabled people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts (20% of economically active disabled people from ethnic minorities report themselves as unemployed and actively seeking work, compared with 8% of white disabled people), and less likely to be working as employees (55% and 70% respectively).

Disabled people in employment

Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to work in manual and low skilled occupations, and less likely to work in managerial, professional and high skilled occupations (11% of disabled people are in managerial occupations, compared with 15% of non-disabled people). More severely disabled people1 are particularly concentrated in lower level occupations.

Nearly a third (32%) of disabled employees have fewer than 20 people at their workplace, and 18% work in organisations with fewer than 20 employees. Small employers are as likely as large employers to employ people with a severe disability (16% of disabled employees in organisations with 2,000 or more employees have a ‘severity score’ of 4 or more, a very similar percentage to that found in the smallest organisations with fewer than 20 employees - 17%).

Hours and working patterns

Nearly three quarters of disabled people work full-time, a similar proportion to non-disabled people. Only 25% of disabled people working part-time say that they do so because of their disability, although people with more severe disabilities are slightly more likely to work part-time (19% of disabled part-timers have a ‘severity score’ of 4 or more, compared with 14% of full-timers).

Nearly two thirds (64%) of disabled people in work have no special working arrangements, and of those who do, the commonest is flexitime (15%). Most of those with flexible working arrangements (94%) say that the arrangements are not associated with their disability.

Work location and travel-to-work

One in five disabled people in work report some form of home or distance working, higher than the non-disabled working population. These forms of work are more common for women, and increase

1 The survey used a measure of ‘severity’ of disability, based on the severity scales developed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, for their national surveys of disabled people during the 1980s.
with age, although they do not vary with severity of disability.

**Unemployment and jobsearch among disabled people**

Unemployed disabled people undertake a wide range of activities in their search for work. The most common is visiting a Jobcentre (undertaken by 80%).

At the time of the survey 41% of unemployed disabled people had been out of work for less than six months, while 27% had been unemployed for two years or more.

Most unemployed disabled people take a broad view of the jobs they would be prepared to take. Less than one in five (17%) say they would take only a particular kind of job, with a further two in five (42%) saying that they would prefer a particular kind of job.

Unemployed disabled people generally have a positive outlook on getting work. They agree strongly that getting a job is important to them (64% agree strongly, and 29% agree with this statement) and that they will continue to look for a job (61% agree strongly, and 37% agree). They do not generally feel that it is not worth their while getting a job (37% disagree, and 47% disagree strongly) and that they are about to give up looking for a job (42% disagree, and 52% disagree strongly).

**Economic inactivity among disabled people**

Just under half (47%) of economically inactive disabled people who see themselves as being able to work say that they would like a paid job. Among the rest, long-term sickness or injury, and looking after the family or home are the most common reasons for not wanting work.

**Labour market histories of disabled people**

Most economically inactive disabled people (86%) who are able to work have been in paid work before. However, of these two in five have not worked for five years or more. Nearly all unemployed disabled people (93%) have worked before, but many (a quarter) have not worked for five years or more.

Among disabled people who have worked in the past (and are now either in a different job, or inactive/unemployed) the commonest reason for leaving their last job was redundancy (17%), followed by voluntary resignation (15%). Those who are currently economically inactive are more likely to have left their last job because of their disability, or for family/personal reasons.

Over a quarter of disabled people who left their job because of their disability say that adaptations (to the job, workplace or working arrangements) would have enabled them to stay in work; but less than one in five of this group say they were offered such changes.

**Education, qualifications and training**

Disabled people have lower overall levels of qualification than their non-disabled counterparts (figure 1). There is a tendency for those with more severe disabilities to be less well qualified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1</th>
<th>All Disabled People</th>
<th>Non-Disabled People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree or equivalent</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level or equivalent</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O level or equivalent</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualifications</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Employment of Disabled People: Assessing the extent of participation*

There is a strong association between qualification level, and whether a disabled person is economically active. Only 8% of economically inactive disabled people have a degree, compared with 24% of economically active disabled people; by contrast, 59% of inactive disabled people have no qualifications at all, compared with only 29% of economically active disabled people.

Only 10% had participated in job-related training in the 3 months prior to the survey, a lower proportion than among the overall population. This difference between disabled and non-disabled people applied irrespective of employment status. Among employees for example, 20% of disabled people have received training in the last 3 months, compared with 28% of non-disabled people. 54%
of disabled people not having received training say that their employer has never offered them training. In some cases this reflects the nature of their job, but in a minority of cases (22% of those never having been offered training), they report that non-disabled colleagues in similar jobs are offered training.

**Earnings, benefits and other sources of income**

At £196 per week, the average take home pay of disabled employees is lower than that of non-disabled employees (£212). Disabled men earn more than disabled women, which is partly due to the higher rate of part-time working among women, although the earnings difference between disabled and non-disabled employees is greater for men than for women.

Two thirds of working age disabled people receive some state benefits, but the proportion is much higher (89%) among economically inactive disabled people than among the economically active (45%).

**Disability equipment and adaptations**

Most disabled people (85%) do not require adaptations to get into or use facilities in a building. Of those who say they do, the most common adaptations required are lifts and handrails (mentioned by 9% in each case).

11% of disabled people able to work (including those not currently in work) require some form of special equipment, aids or adaptations in order to work; 12% say they require or would require flexible working arrangements of some sort; and one in five say that they need or would need to take regular breaks outside normal lunch or tea breaks as a result of their disability. Of disabled people in employment, requiring some form of support or assistance in the workplace, most (82%) say that their needs are fully met.

**Perceptions and experiences**

One in six disabled people (16%) who are or have been economically active say that they have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in a work-related context. Most of these report that they have been discriminated against by an employer (41%) and/or a potential employer (42%).

The most common forms of discrimination reported are:

- assumptions at an interview that a disabled job applicant would not be able to do the job as well as a non-disabled person;
- job interviews which focus on the disability, rather than the applicant’s ability to do the job;
- cases where a disabled person has been dismissed because of their disability.

Nevertheless, disabled people who are or have been in work, report being broadly content with their current/recent jobs, and the way they have been treated.

**About the study**

Screening interviews were conducted with a random sample of some 26,000 households, to obtain a representative national sample of disabled people. The main survey took place between July and October 1996, and interviewed 2,015 disabled people of working age (men aged 16-64, women aged 16-59) in the UK, of whom 1,440 were economically active.

**Further Information**

Further copies of this brief, RB69, can be obtained free of charge from DfEE Publications by telephoning 0845 6022260. Research Briefs can also be accessed at http://www.dfee.gov.uk/research/index.

Copies of the full report (Ref RR69) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfEE Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

Cheques should be made payable to “DfEE Priced Publications”.

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