

@BRIEF

For Members of the Scottish Parliament

UNISON
Scotland

UNISON Year of Disabled Workers 2022

Members Business

Members Business on Thursday 15th December 2022 is a debate sponsored by Pam Duncan Glancy about the UNISON's 'Year of the Disabled Worker' Campaign 2022. This short briefing outlines some of the main themes of the campaign and the challenges still facing disabled workers.

UNISON's Year of Disabled Workers has been a year-long campaign across the UK to improve the working lives of disabled people. The campaign concept was developed in Scotland and was rolled out as a national campaign by UNISON, supported by the wider trade union movement. MSP Pam Duncan-Glancy helped launch the Scottish campaign and has been a strong supporter since.

Disabled people continue to face disadvantage, evidenced in the education, employment and pay gaps that persist in Scotland and the wider UK. In Scotland, the employment gap had reduced by a mere 4.8% to 31.0% in September 2022, from 35.8% in 2016, and the pay gap *worsened* rising from a baseline of 13.8% in 2016, to 18.5% in April 2022.

Disabled people are less likely to be in employment, education, or training. They are more likely to have low – or no – qualifications at Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework Level 4 or above, and less likely to have a degree or equivalent qualification. They're more likely to work part-time or to be unemployed and face additional barriers to work depending on the nature of the disability. Disabled people are less likely to work in higher managerial positions and less likely to work in a professional occupation.

Nationally, UNISON has placed a strong focus on disability training, and a range of [disability-related](#) guidance documents, model policies, and templates have been provided to use when developing workplace policies. For members, there are over 600 accredited courses available through UNISON's Skills Academy.

Similarly, training has been a key focus of work in Scotland, with course development and supplemented through a series of webinars and face-to-face training on topics including confidence building, neurodiversity and communication passports, Access to Work, and emerging Covid-19 case law. This work will continue into 2023.

More could be done by Government at both Scottish and UK level.

The most recent UK government has yet to appoint to its role of Minister for Disabled People, who would be its *fifth* postholder in six years. A Framework on the Reporting on Disability, Mental Health and Wellbeing requiring participating employers to publish disability employment statistics has been produced. However this is a voluntary scheme targeted only at large

employers. Currently representing 0.0014% (or 7,655) of all UK private sector business. A Disability Confident Scheme, has been introduced, but again is voluntary and targeted towards large employers. This scheme has failed to generate either significant interest or commitment to workplace equality for disabled people. Only 0.3% of the UK's 5.5 million employers participate, and only 219 have committed to Level 3 of the Scheme -the only level offering any form of independent scrutiny.

Nationally, UNISON's political campaigning has focused on the [Disability Employment Charter](#). The Charter was launched at a UK Parliamentary event in August, setting out what action the UK government needs to take to address persisting workplace inequalities. It proposes measures that any good employer should already have in place, and that if actioned would significantly impact on the employment gap. Every signatory adds to its strength. UNISON Scotland will be pressing for Scotland's employers to sign up to the Disability Employment Charter as we move into 2023 and seeking the support of all political parties for the Charter's asks.

In 2016 the Scottish Government promised a programme of change to deliver "a real transformation in the lives and experiences of disabled people". A commitment was made to at least half the employment gap from 2016 levels, by 2035, and with a significant focus on improving employment and training opportunities to future generations.

The Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill is integral to achieving that to prevent future generations falling into system cracks preventing them transitioning from school into education, training or work opportunity on an equal footing to their non-disabled peers.

There concerns that efforts to support disabled young people need to be stepped up if the target is to be achieved. More focus is also needed to support disabled people *currently* in work. The reporting Framework and the Disability Confident Scheme both lack the teeth needed to hold employers to account due to their voluntary nature and a perceived lack of real scrutiny and accountability, falling significantly short of being measured 'successful'.

The experience of disabled workers has failed to improve despite the Equality Act 2010 legislation, the legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments, and despite these voluntary initiatives.

If it matters, its counted and collecting and publishing data is a first step to addressing the issue. To be genuinely inclusive employers need to measure what they do, and reporting on disability employment can help them do this. Unsurprisingly, disability statistics showing the gaps between recruitment, retention, and progression is largely unknown across the UK.

Urging business to improve has shown to be ineffective. Experience has evidenced a need for a statutory basis to reporting. Further, with the prevalence of disability in the UK is as high as one in five people even medium size employers should be able to reasonably demonstrate efforts to close the gaps.

UNISON Scotland will be calling for mandatory disability reporting and exploration of the merit in establishing an accredited Scottish equivalent to the Disability Confident Scheme.

Separately, we await the Scottish Government's promised review of the Adult Disability Benefit in 2023. There are clear advantages to Scotland from assuming responsibility for social security, which has gone a long way to addressing controversy that has plagued PIP. We are

hoping there will be a change to eligibility criteria including the 50m rule that is disadvantaging those migrating from Disability Living Allowance compared to those migrating from PIP.

For further information, please contact Stephen Low s.low2@unison.co.uk

Bargaining Campaigns Team