

News story: Government sets out plan to see more disabled people in work

The government will help to get more disabled people into work in the next decade, the Prime Minister said today, as a new strategy is launched to break down employment barriers.

Working with industry, government will be taking further steps to help disabled people and people with health conditions get into work, and remain and progress in their roles.

These include new measures such as widening 'fit note' certification and providing dedicated training for work coaches to support people with mental health conditions.

The UK has near record high employment levels with over 32 million people in work, including 600,000 more disabled people in the last four years alone.

The Prime Minister said:

The path a person takes in life and in work should not be dictated by their disability or health condition. Everyone deserves the chance to find a job that's right for them.

I am committed to tackling the injustices facing disabled people who want to work, so that everyone can go as far as their talents will take them.

We recognise the hugely positive impact that working can have on people's health and wellbeing, which is why we are determined to break down the barriers to employment facing disabled people.

This strategy sets out how government, employers and the health service will work together to get more disabled people into employment, and help shift the attitude of business and society to disability.

This is part of building a country that is fit for the future and creating a fairer society, one that will make sure everyone can reach their potential.

The strategy, called 'Improving Lives: the Future of Work, Health and Disability', builds on last year's Work, Health and Disability Green Paper, which called for a comprehensive change to the UK's approach to disability employment.

It sets out the steps government will take to transform disability employment over the next decade and progress so far as we build a country fit for the

future. This includes:

1. Extending fit note certification beyond GPs to a wider group of healthcare professionals, including physiotherapists, psychiatrists and senior nurses, to better identify health conditions and treatments to help workers go back into their jobs faster. Fit notes are designed to help patients develop a return to work plan tailored to their individual needs.
2. Conducting large-scale employment research pilots in West Midlands and Sheffield which will include over 11,000 people. This research will gather evidence to help improve services for those with health conditions, supporting them get into and stay in work, and helping make sure services are accessible and inclusive for all.
3. 2,000 work coaches have received training since 2015 to help them work with benefit claimants with mental health conditions. The government is committed to building on this with the introduction of an enhanced training offer developed with a national mental health charity.
4. £39 million investment to more than double the number of employment advisors in an existing NHS programme treating people with depression and anxiety disorders.
5. Responding in full to the 40 recommendations of the Stevenson/Farmer Review of mental health and employers – including reforming Statutory Sick Pay, improving advice and support for employers and encouraging transparency. The government is also encouraging other employers to take forward these recommendations.
6. Over 5,000 companies have signed up to the Disability Confident scheme to promote disability inclusion and government is encouraging more companies to sign up.
7. Appointing an Expert Working Group on Occupational Health to champion, shape and drive a programme of work to take an in-depth look at the sector.

Work and Pensions Secretary David Gauke said:

Everyone should be able to go as far as their talents can take them, but for too long disabled people and people with health conditions have been held back from getting on in work.

Today we've set out an ambitious 10-year strategy to end this

injustice once and for all. By bringing employers, the welfare system and health services together we're taking significant steps to ensure everyone can reach their potential.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Mental ill health can affect anyone, from any walk of life at any time. For too long society has dictated that people with physical and mental health issues or a disability are a burden. Ensuring that more people with disabilities or long-term health conditions can get into and stay in work would not only enhance their lives, but actually enrich our economy too.

This strategy will help shape the future for hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities and mental health issues as we continue to tackle the stigma that so many people face when trying to get into and progress in work.

Sarah Kaiser, Fujitsu's Diversity and Inclusion lead, said:

It is fantastic to see the Government is committing to seeing more disabled people enter the workplace. Fujitsu has significantly benefited from being Disability Confident, giving us access to untapped pools of talent and enabling us to increase our retention of employees with disabilities.

We have also worked with our employees with disabilities to ensure our products and services become even more accessible, benefitting our customers too. This is not just the right thing for employees, but also significantly helps the employer.

Creating an environment where employees feel comfortable to be completely themselves and tell us if they have a disability allows us to put in place the right adjustments to properly enable them to do their work, whilst providing a working environment that emphasises support. This not only results in increased employee satisfaction but also performance, realising value for the organisation too.