

Disability within the Northern Ireland Labour Market

DfC Professional Services Unit

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1. Executive Summary

This research project was commissioned to assist the Department for Communities (DfC) to further understand the experience of and issues faced by people with disabilities in achieving their employment goals. It sought to strengthen the evidence base on employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland to inform the development of the Disability Employment Strategy.

The research project focused on providing evidence on employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland. It explored disparities in the employment outcomes between disabled and non-disabled people, barriers and constraints that prevent people with disabilities from achieving their employment goals and potential interventions to address the issues. The research also took stock of the employment impacts of COVID-19 for people with disabilities and the need for targeted interventions in response.

1.1 Employment Outcomes

The research compared outcomes for disabled and non-disabled people in Northern Ireland across a range of indicators. The key gaps are:

- **Prevalence of Disability:** NI has the second highest rate of disability across the UK countries but a lower proportion of 16-24 year olds are disabled compared to other UK countries.
- **Economic Inactivity:** the economic inactivity rate for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland is 17.2 percentage points above that of people with disabilities in the UK. The corresponding gap for non-disabled people is 1.9 percentage points.
- **Employment:** the employment rate for people with disabilities (38.1%) is 14 Percentage points below the rate for non-disabled people (80.3%). The disability employment rate:
 - Is smallest for 16-24 age group – this is driven by the lower employment rate for non-disabled 16-24 year olds.
 - Narrows as qualification level increases.
- **Employment rates for people with disabilities varied by impairment** with those with depression, anxiety, severe or specific learning problems or nervous disorders experiencing the lowest employment rate at 31.2%.
- **Occupation:** people with disabilities are more likely to be employed in elementary occupations, caring, leisure and other service occupations or sales and customer services occupations

- Earnings: in 2021 the average weekly earnings of people with disabilities were £103 lower than the earnings of non-disabled people. The corresponding earnings gap for the UK was £122.
- Work Quality:
 - Disabled people reported lower satisfaction scores across a range of work quality metrics including career progression, involvement in decision making, job satisfaction and meaningful work.
 - The under-employment¹ rate is higher for people with disabilities than non-disabled people and disparities in NI are wider than in the UK.
 - A higher proportion of disabled than non-disabled people experienced flexibility at work.

1.2 Barriers and Challenges

The research team engaged with key stakeholders including people with disabilities, employers and organisations who provide support to people with disabilities to identify the key barriers in gaining, staying and progressing in employment, the impact of Covid and potential interventions. The following issues were identified:

- Gaining work: knowledge and awareness of support, attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities and employers, the recruitment process, skills and experience of people with disabilities, the benefit system and issues with accessibility.
- Staying and progressing in work: level of support provided, fear of disclosure, skills, confidence, ongoing health issues and the benefit system.
- Interventions: education and raising awareness around available support and adjustments needed, provision of ongoing support to employers, greater emphasis on career advice for young people and training and support for employers and people with disabilities.

¹ Under-employment refers to those who are employees but would like to work more hours either in their current job, a supplementary job, or in a new job.

1.3 Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all of society since early 2020. The research team engaged with key stakeholders to understand the specific impacts that this has had for people with disabilities in the labour market within Northern Ireland. The most common negative impacts included increase in mental health issues, decrease in number of work experience positions for people with disabilities, and concern around increased competition for jobs in a competitive labour market. There were however some positive impacts as a result of a societal shift in attitudes towards working arrangements. Most notably the shift in employer attitudes and their willingness to now embrace flexible working arrangements which provides increased opportunities for people with disabilities. The reduced transport requirement of home working meant that many roles were not as physically demanding and provided greater scope to manage certain conditions. The option to now access medical supports / 'attend' appointments virtually has also helped reduce the disruption of working patterns for people with disabilities.

1.4 Interventions

As well as the identification of the barriers and challenges faced by people with disabilities, the research team were also keen to identify with key stakeholders some potential interventions that would help to address these issues. It was encouraging that there was a correlation between the interventions identified as part of the wider literature review and those interventions that were suggested by key stakeholders in NI. Examples of the interventions that were suggested included offering increased flexible / home-working positions, increased education and awareness within the workplace, changes to the traditional recruitment process allowing for greater flexibility for people with disabilities and also offering greater employment and individual supports. The importance of information and awareness raising was emphasised and the benefits of having positive role models in high profile roles was noted. Other interventions suggested from key stakeholders included greater flexibility with the assessment and tapering off of benefit entitlement for people with disabilities seeking to move into the labour market. At present some people with disabilities are afraid to leave the 'safety net' of benefits for a temporary job or one which they are unsure that they can sustain long-term. The importance of emphasising the social benefits of people with disabilities within the workforce was also noted and it was suggested that this should be increasingly supported via public sector procurement and inclusion of social clauses.

2 Acknowledgments

The DfC Professional Services Unit (PSU) Research Team would like to extend thanks to the following individuals and organisations who contributed to the collation of quantitative and qualitative data to inform this research report:

- A special thanks goes to those people with disabilities who shared their experiences in one-to-one interviews and workshops;
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- Martin Walker – Active Ageing and Disability Policy Branch (DfC); and
- Patricia Maguire – Customer Insight and Continuous Improvement branch (DfC).

3 Introduction

Article 27 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; including the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.²

In line with Article 27, the Department for Communities (DfC) is committed to supporting people with disabilities to overcome barriers and achieve their employment goals. Work is progressing on an Executive Disability Strategy which will aim to tackle the inequalities and obstacles that affect the everyday lives of people with disabilities. Alongside this, DfC is developing a Disability Employment Strategy that will align with and deliver upon the Executive Disability Strategy.

In addition, DfC is aware that the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy has exacerbated some of the pre-existing inequalities in society. The Department is keen to understand the challenges and opportunities the current situation brings so that it can put in place appropriate interventions to support equality for people with disabilities through employment.

This research project has been commissioned to assist the Department to further understand the experience of and issues faced by people with disabilities in achieving their employment goals. It will seek to strengthen the evidence base on employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland and inform the development of the Disability Employment Strategy.

3.1 Objectives

The research project focused on providing evidence on employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland. It explored disparities in the employment outcomes between disabled and non-disabled people, barriers and constraints that prevent people with disabilities from achieving their employment goals and potential interventions to address the issues. The research also took stock of the employment impacts of COVID-19 for people with disabilities and the need for targeted interventions in response.

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

In particular, the research project aimed to address the following questions:

- Employment outcomes – How do employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland compare to those for non-disabled people? What are the gaps and where are they widest? How have the gaps changed over time? How do disparities in NI compare with other UK countries?
- Barriers and challenges – What are the key barriers and challenges to people with disabilities gaining, staying and progressing in employment?
- Employment impacts of COVID-19 – What are the employment impacts of COVID-19 for people with disabilities in terms of outcomes, barriers and opportunities?
- Need for Intervention – What interventions might be needed to support and enable people with disabilities to overcome barriers and gain, stay and progress in employment?

3.2 Approach

This research project was undertaken by DfC Professional Services Unit (PSU) in collaboration with DfC Work & Wellbeing Division and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The research consisted of the following:

- Literature and policy review: examining barriers to employment for people with disabilities and interventions adopted elsewhere;
- Quantitative analysis: comparing labour market outcomes for disabled and non-disabled people over time across a range of indicators with breakdowns where possible by age, sex, impairment, location, sector, occupation, and qualification level; and
- Qualitative analysis – exploring the key challenges and barriers to employment for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland.

4 Literature and Policy Review

4.1 Introduction

The literature and policy review sets out what is known from existing literature and evidence about the key barriers to employment for people with disabilities. It also explores evidence on policy interventions that have successfully supported people with disabilities to gain, stay and progress in work.

4.2 What are the key barriers to people with disabilities gaining, staying and progressing in employment?

- Impairment Factors
- Educational Attainment
- Discrimination, Stigma and Social Attitudes
- Access and Accessibility
- Recruitment Practices
- Access to Transport and Support

Impairment Factors

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) express that health or disability was a frequently reported limitation in terms of work. Their analysis of the Life Opportunities Survey, Wave One, 2009-2011, shows that just over one third of people with disabilities in work (36%) and two-thirds of unemployed people with disabilities (66%) said they were limited in the amount or type of work that they do or could do.

In particular, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) indicate that people with mental health conditions and learning disabilities are considerably more disadvantaged than other impairment groups, in terms of employment rate, type of work and level of unemployment. The House of Commons Library (Powell) (2021) reports that in the UK from April 2018 to March 2019, less than a fifth of people with learning difficulties as their main health condition were in employment. Likewise, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland [ECNI] (2018) proclaim that among people with disabilities, people with mental health issues and/or a learning disability are less likely to be employed than people with hidden, progressive, physical and/or sensory disabilities. The National Autistic Society [NAS] (2016) state that a survey they carried out in 2007 indicated that just 15% of autistic people were in full-time paid work and in 2016, the figure was just 16%. They report that a similar number were in part-time employment, giving an overall employment rate of 32% which is much lower than the

employment rate for non-disabled people (approximately 80%) and for people with disabilities as a whole (approximately 47%). They explain that while full-time work isn't right for everyone on the autism spectrum, in their 2016 survey, four in 10 of those working part-time felt under-employed and others felt they were in low-skilled work and that employers didn't recognise their abilities.

Moreover, Trades Union Congress [TUC] (2015) point to research that indicates that workplace disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities varies noticeably by the type or severity of the impairment(s), with mental illness being identified as an impairment with some of the least favourable employment outcomes.

Educational Attainment

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) assert that people with disabilities tend to have lower level qualifications than non-disabled people and that there is a direct statistical relationship between employment rate and educational attainment. Powell (2021) reports that in the UK from April 2018 to March 2019, the disability employment gap is widest for those with no qualifications; ranging from a 15 percentage points gap for those with degree or equivalent to a 41 percentage points gap for those with no qualifications.

Furthermore, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) highlight figures from the Life Opportunities Survey, Wave One, 2009-2011, that show lower levels of qualifications are most pronounced among people with impairments acquired at an early age and that pupils with special educational needs achieve far fewer qualifications than those without and are likely to face a particular disadvantage in gaining employment.

ECNI (2018) indicate that gaps in educational attainment may partially account for the large employment gap between people with and without disabilities. However, they explain that research has identified that even when the qualifications of people with and without disabilities is taken into account, people with disabilities were still found to be more likely to be lacking but wanting work, and when working are more likely to be lower paid than those without disabilities.

In addition, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) highlight that the transition from full-time education is more difficult for people with disabilities, especially young men. They report that in the UK in 2012, for people aged 16 to 24, the employment gap was considerably smaller and got wider with age, which they think suggests that non-disabled people are more successful in making the transition from full-time education to work than people with disabilities. Moreover, Eurofound (2021) state that having a disability is synonymous with structural or educational disadvantage and discrimination. They explain that access to

mainstream education is an issue in many countries, especially for those with severe disabilities acquired early in life. They report that across the EU in 2018, high numbers of young people with disabilities were early leavers from education and training (20.3% compared with 9.8% of pupils without disabilities). They also found that the education and vocational training offered often does not meet the needs of people with disabilities, nor are they necessarily relevant or market oriented.

Discrimination, Stigma and Attitudes

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) note that the analysis of the Fair Treatment at Work Survey 2008 shows that people with disabilities were much more likely than non-disabled people to say they had experienced some form of unfair treatment, discrimination, bullying or harassment at work in the previous two years (27% compared with 17%) and were also more likely to say that they had experienced other incidents in the previous two years “in a negative way” involving work colleagues, clients or customers. The researchers point to other surveys that reinforce these results; British Social Attitudes Survey 2006 shows that 63% of working respondents agreed with the statement that “the main problem faced by people with disabilities at work is other people’s prejudice, not their own lack of ability”, 18% said that their colleagues would mind a lot or a little “if a suitably qualified person with a disability or long-term illness were appointed as their boss”, and 19% said that most people at work would feel very or fairly comfortable “if somebody referred to people with disabilities in a negative way in front of their colleagues”.

ECNI (2018) assert that people with disabilities are more likely to experience prejudice in employment than those without disabilities, particularly those with mental health issues. They note that disability-related discrimination complaints regarding employment to the Equality Commission’s Discrimination Advice Team represent the highest number of enquiries and that various research reports have estimated that between 20% and 50% of people with a disability feel that they faced discrimination in employment. Furthermore, Biggs et al. (2010, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020), point to evidence that employers have a significant concern around the recruitment of people with existing or previous mental health conditions, including a lack of trust and concerns about an inability to use initiative and deal with the public. Similarly, NAS (2016), found that 34% of employers said that they thought an autistic person would be unlikely to fit into their team, and 28% said that an autistic person would be unlikely to be a team player. Roughly half of their respondents with autism and experience in the workplace reported bullying or harassment (48%) or other discrimination or unfair treatment (51%) due to their autism. NAS (2016) express that this can result in autistic people being left with lower confidence, leading to long-term unemployment, greater dependency or mental ill health.

ECNI (2018) elaborate that research has revealed that employer prejudicial attitudes and a lack of awareness among employers can be key barriers to people with disabilities

progressing in employment. For example, people with hearing loss in employment have reported that they felt they were not given equal opportunity to development and promotion opportunities in their career and people with disabilities in the public sector have reported being passed over for development and promotion opportunities and being unfairly assessed in terms of their performance. ECNI (2018), however, does report that attitudes in Northern Ireland toward those with a disability have become more positive, with lower proportions of respondents in 2016 compared to 2008 and 2011 indicating that they would mind 'a little' or 'a lot' having someone with mental ill-health, learning or physical disability as a work colleague.

Furthermore, Eurofound (2021) report that a special Eurobarometer on discrimination in the EU in 2019 showed that 52% of Europeans with disabilities felt discriminated against in the previous 12 months. They express that due to fear of discrimination, people's choice regarding the disclosure of their disability might be affected as disability disclosure can negatively affect their chances of being called for an interview and can be linked to isolation and rejection. Eurofound (2021) explain that this may result in people with disabilities refraining from requesting reasonable adjustments, which may result in absenteeism (frequent absence from work) and presenteeism (working despite being sick). They explain this can be made even worse by the biased perceptions of people with disabilities, for instance, fearing and anticipating a level of stigmatisation that is higher than the level of stigmatisation that they actually suffer. Eurofound (2021) state that people with disabilities exposed to stigma, discrimination and adverse societal attitudes can manifest itself in their daily lives as ableism (a cultural and systemic preference in society for a set of physical, cognitive and sensory abilities, and the consideration of people with differing abilities as impaired) and disablism (prejudices and negative attitudes that result in social exclusion and the oppression of people with disabilities).

Access and Accessibility

ECNI (2018) state that people with disabilities may face additional barriers to employment, such as access to transport and the accessibility of the physical environment. For example, they cite that Disability Action and The Detail found major shortfalls in disability access in Northern Ireland in tourist, cultural and sporting venues. An accessibility audit of seven towns across Northern Ireland by the Inclusive Mobility Transport Committee highlighted a persistence of a number of unnecessary physical barriers, and, the people with disabilities' Voices NI report noted that although improvements have been made to public transport, there is still more work to be done before people with disabilities can travel routinely by bus or train.

In addition, TUC (2015), Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) and Eurofound (2021) report that public transport systems are not fully accessible, which hinder people with disabilities access

to workplaces. Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013a) found that around a quarter of people with disabilities said that they are limited in the work they could do due to difficulty with transport. They noted that people with vision impairment were more likely to report physical barriers such as difficulty with transport, difficulty getting into buildings, difficulty using facilities, and lack of special aids or equipment and that people with learning impairment were more likely to have difficulty with transport due to anxiety and a lack of confidence.

Eurofound (2021) note that transport difficulties affect rural areas more intensively and is still not being adequately addressed by the use of alternative and adequate forms of work such as teleworking, even in the light of COVID-19.

Recruitment Practices

Bennett et al. (2016, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) identified key barriers for people with disabilities in recruitment, including, online channels, complicated application forms, lengthy and complex job descriptions, and jobs not being advertised with flexible or job-sharing options. López and Keenan (2014, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) found similar experiences among adults with autism, culminating in difficulties in, and a lack of support with, interviews and application processes.

Hudson and Runge (2020) cite various researches that demonstrate that disability discrimination starts from recruitment. For example, Rolfe et al. (2009, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) who through qualitative research, found that people with disabilities reported disability discrimination in recruitment as soon as the employer knew that they were disabled; Winterbotham et al. (2015, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) and Findlay et al. (2013, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) who found evidence that both employers and recruitment agencies filter out applications on the basis of physical capability and mobility; Metcalf and Meadows (2010, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) who found that a third of all responding employers take disability or health into consideration during the recruitment process; Adams et al. (2013, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) who through a combination of 1,008 survey responses from recent applicants, 400 employers and 10 in-depth interviews with recruitment consultants, found widespread use of pre-employment health questions during the recruitment process, despite this being prohibited under Section 60 of the Equality Act 2010; and, MacRae and Laverty (2006, cited in Hudson and Runge, 2020) who compared outcomes for fictionalised CVs at 120 private sector employers in Scotland and found that non-disabled applicants were invited to twice as many interviews as disabled applicants.

Furthermore, Vabulas (2021) notes that employers may inadvertently create barriers for disabled job seekers in the recruitment process, including, jobs being advertised on an inaccessible website, application documents and online application systems not being compatible with assistive technologies, and, the use of AI-powered recruitment tools that are biased against disabled applicants. They state that this can result in disabled job seekers having a limited range of job roles to apply for, not being able to demonstrate their true ability, and being forced to 'out' themselves as disabled to request adjustments and complete the recruitment process, which ultimately might lead to them not receiving a job offer. Likewise, Eurofound (2021) report that one of the key barriers for people with disabilities to gaining employment is recruitment processes such as, non-encouraging hiring practices and instruments, in terms of both physical accessibility and non-inclusive messages; preconceptions related to the (lack of) competence, work experience and personal characteristics required to perform certain tasks; and, employers' perceptions of the difficulties of assessing the abilities and potential of candidates with a disability.

4.3 What policy interventions have successfully supported people with disabilities to gain, remain and progress in work?

- Employment & Individual Support
- Workplace Adaptations and Adjustments
- Training and Upskilling
- Financial Incentives
- Vocational Rehabilitation & Sickness Management
- Information & Awareness Raising
- Job Carving and Crafting
- Sheltered Employment
- Career Counselling and Guidance
- Social Enterprises & Public Procurement
- Legislation

Employment & Individual Support

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) declare that supported employment schemes help people with disabilities, particularly those with more severe impairments or health conditions, to gain and keep paid jobs that are available in the open labour market. OECD (2011, cited in Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2013b) state that based on the evidence of a large number of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) conducted in the US, which reported employment rates among participants of 30-40% compared with 10-12% for other approaches, that there is 'unequivocal' evidence of the effectiveness of supported employment in helping people with disabilities gain and retain work.

Likewise, Eurofound (2021) found that personalised and integrated support that combines various activities such as job coaching, skills enhancement, awareness-raising, matching services, workplace adaptations and assistance, and support for the transition from sheltered employment and education to the open labour market, as a way to provide tailored responses to the diversity of people with disabilities and the complexity of their needs. They elaborate that the effectiveness of support can be strengthened through a combination of responses, ensuring a good balance between personalised support and integrated support to meet general and particular needs. Moreover, Eurofound (2021) report that policies which give autonomy to people with disabilities to select the most suitable types of support and accommodation (for instance, by providing them with a personal budget) can support the efficiency of resource allocation and the effectiveness of service provision.

However, Eurofound (2021) express that the effectiveness of personalised and integrated support is dependent on flexible adjustment of services, integrated delivery through collaboration across fields, a multi-stakeholder approach involving different administrative levels and the availability of specially trained staff. Weaknesses mainly related to difficulties in the delivery of complex measures and inefficiencies in stakeholder cooperation. Furthermore, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) profess that supported employment schemes have been found not to offer large-scale solutions as they are generally targeted at very small numbers of specific groups of people and are highly resource-intensive.

Workplace Adaptations and Adjustments

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) state that policies designed to make workplaces more flexible and accommodating, have been shown to have some positive impacts, in terms of increasing entry into employment and reducing multiple absences. This includes some limited evidence from Canada, Sweden and the UK that showed, flexible work schedules/modified work were associated with increases in length of employment; light duties and reduced hours were associated with the likelihood of returning to work after time off and a reduction in multiple absences; and, the chance to adjust work to reflect state of health after a long period of absence increased the likelihood of return to work. Furthermore, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) report that respondents to the Life Opportunities Survey who had a disability, mentioned modified or reduced work hours as the main element that would help them at work.

Similarly, Eurofound (2021) profess that reasonable adjustments and assistance can help ensure that the right conditions are established for people with disabilities to work. Eurofound (2021) declare that workplace adaptations can be either material (provision of work aids, assistants and workplace adjustments) or immaterial (working time adjustment and remote working) and range from one-off support to integrated approaches. They elaborate that workplace adaptations have been found to have positive impacts on job quality, work sustainability, career prospects, performance and employee independence.

However, Eurofound (2021) has also found that one-off adaptations may be insufficient and Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) report that employers may sometimes wrongly associate 'reasonable adjustments' with costly adaptations to the workplace. In addition, House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (HCWPC) (2021) states that Access to Work, which is a government scheme in UK that provides practical advice and support to people with disabilities and their employers to help them overcome work-related obstacles resulting from disability, although a vital source of support, has been dogged by a bureaucratic, cumbersome and time-consuming application process.

Training and Upskilling

Eurofound (2021) report that employment-related interventions are more effective if they focus on both skills (upskilling, reskilling) and work tasks/job requirements. They state that supporting the skills of people with disabilities (through formal education, vocational training and work placements) is instrumental to labour market inclusion, especially when provided as part of integrated interventions. These typically consist of internships and vocational programmes, the establishment of specialised training centres, personalised training pathways, and support in the transition from education into employment. Furthermore, Eurofound (2021) found that on-the-job training and work exposure opportunities, mentoring, job coaching and personal assistance providing support to both employees with disabilities and employers can be effective in raising awareness, increasing familiarisation, reducing stereotypes and better preparing both employees and employers.

However, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) profess that workplace training appears to be more successful than general training programmes prior to work, with limited evidence of the effectiveness of vocational training or voluntary work. Greve (2009, cited in Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2013b) states that the overall effectiveness of vocational training programmes for people with disabilities across the European Union has been limited, and Rinaldi et al. (2008, cited in Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2013b) proclaim that no evidence has been found that pre-vocational training was more effective in terms of moving people with severe mental health conditions into employment than standard care.

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) conclude that studies have found that, services geared to the workplace are more successful than those focused on training, workplace training is more successful than general educational programmes, and, many successful projects for young people with disabilities have taken the approach of training clients for specific jobs rather than offering more generic training courses.

Financial Incentives

Eurofound (2021) found that well-designed financial incentives for employees and employers can be effective in supporting work entry, especially if combined with high-quality complementary services with a longer-term perspective. Financial incentives mainly consist of wage subsidies, cost coverage and rebates for social security contributions, and typically focus on enabling skills development, compensation for lower productivity, and retention. Eurofound (2021) explain that financial incentives for employers enables an employer to hire an employee with disabilities at a lower cost and provides time and opportunity to assess their suitability, which can eliminate barriers related to stereotypes and uncertainty about workplace abilities. Furthermore, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) state that financial incentives, including wage subsidies, have shown evidence of positive impacts, although limited by risks of deadweight and restriction to low paid/low skill jobs. However, evidence shows that deadweight risk could be reduced through strict targeted subsidies.

Eurofound (2021) highlight the importance of the amount of support in the effectiveness of financial incentives, and note that even in successful cases, limited evidence is available on the long-term sustainability of employment outcomes. Moreover, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) report that evidence of the effectiveness of incentives for people with disabilities to enter employment was limited, however, some positive impacts were found for in-work payment schemes and work trials allowing claimants to retain their eligibility for benefit.

Vocational Rehabilitation & Sickness Management

Eurofound (2021) found that vocational rehabilitation that includes health management and employment orientation can prevent workers with disabilities, or those who develop a disability while at work, from losing their job. They explain that vocational rehabilitation can cover guidance, accommodation, support from specialised staff and the provision of certificates, and is often combined with elements from subsidised and supported employment. Eurofound (2021) proclaim these interventions allow for a thorough follow-up of the beneficiaries and yield positive returns on investments and results, especially when activated at an early stage, which leads to better employability, decision-making and emotional well-being and a reduction in the number of employees unable to work because of health impairments. OECD (2011, cited in Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2013b) stress that early intervention is important for cases of sickness absence at risk of becoming long-term, and in particular for mental health conditions.

In addition, Eurofound (2021) report that rehabilitation strategies focused on health management and medical rehabilitation, have also shown positive employment effects, reduce work-limiting effects and improve fitness to work. Furthermore, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) report that increasing the responsibilities of employers to monitor sickness absence and to implement return-to-work plans shortly after individuals go off sick, has been shown to lead to a reduction of individuals flowing onto disability benefits.

Information and Awareness Raising

Eurofound (2021) report that information and awareness-raising measures help to reduce information- and discrimination-related barriers to the employment of people with disabilities and support a more inclusive organisational culture. This is beneficial as Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) assert that inclusive work culture has been found to be important for the integration of people with disabilities into the workplace. Eurofound (2021) state that awareness raising actions can help address key barriers to employment including stereotypes and preconceptions, and the limited sustainability of the employment outcomes. They elaborate that raising employer's awareness not only ensures stronger engagement with regard to hiring people with disabilities, but also helps sick-listed people back into work and supports reintegration of those who have been out of work because of an impairment. Eurofound (2021) express that one example of an awareness raising measure is the Croatian

annual prize for the best employer of people with disabilities, stating that with its high visibility in the mass media, it contributed to improved knowledge among the public and employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. In addition, Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) cite that a small scale review of Disability Disclosure literature recommended disability awareness training for employers and employees, especially around non-visible disabilities such as psychiatric disorders.

Job Carving and Crafting

Scoppetta, Davern and Geyer (2019) in a report for the European Commission state that job carving and job crafting can be effective strategies to overcome the challenges of labour market (re)integration of people such as those with disabilities who face barriers and to sustain employment by creating meaningful and productive jobs. Scoppetta, Davern and Geyer (2019) define job carving as the practice of rearranging work tasks within a company to create tailor-made employment opportunities and job crafting as the practice of employees designing their tasks and work processes themselves. Though similar, job carving is a top-down process driven by management, job crafting is a bottom-up process driven by employees. However, both show clear economic benefits for the companies as they enhance productivity and increase the health of workers and their job satisfaction (Tims et al., 2013, cited in Scoppetta, Davern and Geyer, 2019). In addition, HCWPC (2021) report that some people with disabilities they heard from spoke highly of job carving and that The Equality and Human Rights Commission has identified job carving as a method which could improve people with disabilities' employment outcomes.

Sheltered Employment

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) report that sheltered employment is common in a number of countries including Germany and France and that it provides a bridge to open market employment for those with more severe impairments facing extreme barriers to work. Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) profess that studies of the efficacy of sheltered employment have found that rates of transition to the open labour market are typically low, with various sources reporting that sheltered work schemes 'do not provide a route to open employment'. However, evidence also suggests that more could be done on such programmes by way of skill development and other steps to aid such movement.

Career Counselling and Guidance

Eurofound (2021) report that career counselling and guidance can be used to make people with disabilities more aware of their own abilities and available support as well as help them avoid exploitation in the labour market. Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) profess that more successful employment programmes often include a supporting/trusting adviser relationship. In addition, career counselling and guidance can be used to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment, with Eurofound (2021) reporting that policies providing

opportunities related to entrepreneurship and self-employment can create new jobs and reduce dependence on disability benefits.

Social Enterprises and Public Procurement

Eurofound (2021) profess that social enterprises can promote transitions to the open labour market for people with disabilities through activities involving work integration, personal social services, local development of disadvantaged areas, and actions in other thematic fields such as environment, sports and science. Eurofound (2021) note that public funds are key for sustaining work integration services and that assessments stress the relevance of social enterprises and their contribution to the labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups. However, Eurofound (2021) also highlight that no universal methodology exists to estimate the cost–benefit ratio or the social return on investment of social enterprises and that social enterprises have a limited uptake and reach, especially in the case of people with severe disabilities.

Moreover, Eurofound (2021) reports that some evidence suggests that public authorities can support the employment of people in a vulnerable position by incorporating social and employment criteria in public procurement processes. Dean (2013, cited in Eurofound, 2021) states that public authorities could do this through, partnerships with suppliers such as social enterprises; clauses in contracts that oblige commercial suppliers to achieve social goals; requirements for suppliers to employ local jobseekers who are in disadvantaged situations; and, requirements for large suppliers to subcontract part of their work to social benefit providers.

Legislation

Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) proclaim that legislation to promote the employment of disabled individuals, including anti-discrimination legislation and quotas for the employment of people with disabilities, has been shown to be necessary but insufficient, by itself, to close the employment gap. Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) found that across the studies included in their review, there was no strong evidence of positive effects on employment rates for people covered by the Disability Discrimination Act in the UK as well as mixed results in the US, in terms of employment outcomes for people with disabilities resulting from anti-discrimination legislation. Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b) explain that some evidence suggests that if employers anticipate additional costs and stringent employment protection requirements, then recruitment of certain groups of people with disabilities may be hindered.

Likewise, Eurofound (2021) report that although measures such as national and regional legal instruments (for example, anti-discrimination legislation), plans and frameworks and more specific interventions of a legal nature such as collective agreements and measures to protect people with disabilities against the risk of dismissal, are crucial in creating a context that is inclusive. Evidence shows that this is not sufficient per se to guarantee effectiveness. Barr et al. (2019, cited in Eurofound, 2021) explain that complementary strategies and actions are important to ensure compliance, awareness among employers and employees, and the coverage of the whole population.

Eurofound (2021) report that evidence from quota systems, although common and helpful in ensuring diversity in the workplace, evidence suggests that their effectiveness is limited, leading to small employment gains which may be partly due to substitution effect. They explain that due to their mandatory nature they can result in non-compliance, and the use of quotas may raise the risk of employers 'cherry picking' disabled jobseekers who can be more easily mobilised towards the labour market, leaving those who are most in need of support behind.

5 Employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Quantitative Analysis)

5.1 Overview

- Approximately a fifth of the working age population has a disability. This varies by age and sex; disability prevalence was highest for those aged 50-64 (approximately a third) and higher for females than males. The higher prevalence in the 50-64 was notable when compared to the UK and constituent countries
- In 2020 the disability employment rate gap was 42.2 percentage points (pps), compared to 27.9pps for the whole of the UK. Since 2014, the disability employment gap has consistently been higher in Northern Ireland than the rest of the UK
- The employment rate for those aged 16-24 with a disability in NI was similar to the UK while large differences were seen in the employment rate of people with a disability in NI and the UK for those aged 25 – 64
- The employment rate of people in NI with a disability was consistently below the employment rate of people with a disability in the UK regardless of main disability condition
- Whilst NI is on a par with the UK average employment rate, and in some cases exceeds it for non-disabled employees, there is a noticeable drop in employment rate for ‘degree level or above’ and ‘below degree level employees’ in NI below the UK rates for people with disabilities
- People with a disability are over-represented in low skilled occupations and under-represented in high skilled occupations in NI
- Employees with a disability were more likely to work part-time, report lower opportunities for career progression and receive lower earnings in NI

5.2 Data Sources

All data (unless otherwise stated) within this section are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and have been provided by the ELMS NISRA Team. The LFS is a sample survey which provides estimates of population values. The LFS is designed for producing labour market estimates and not demographic estimates³. Therefore, whilst estimates have been provided as part of the request for disability by age, LGD and sex (as an example), these are not official estimates of disability. Alternative sources on disability prevalence would strengthen the research however they do not exist.

5.3 Definition of 'Disability'

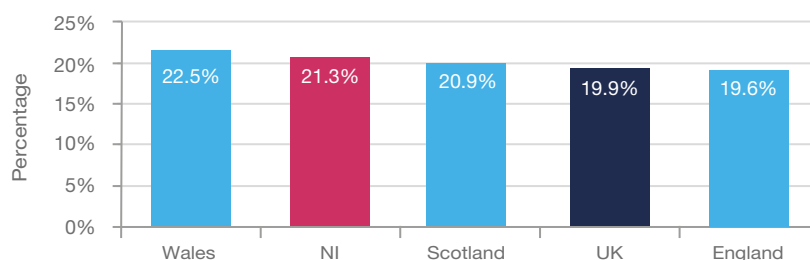
The Government Statistical Service harmonised definition for people with disabilities (as used for LFS analysis in this report) are those who have a long-term physical or mental health condition (lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more) that affects their ability to carry out day to day activities.

5.4 Disability

5.4.1 Prevalence of Disability across the UK (2020)

Northern Ireland had the second highest rate (21.3%) of disability for people aged 16 to 64 across the four UK countries in 2020. Only Wales (22.5%) had a higher rate of disability. England had the lowest rate (19.6%) and the UK average was 19.9%.

Figure 5.1 – Percentage of People with Disabilities by Country (Age: 16-64) (Year: 2020)

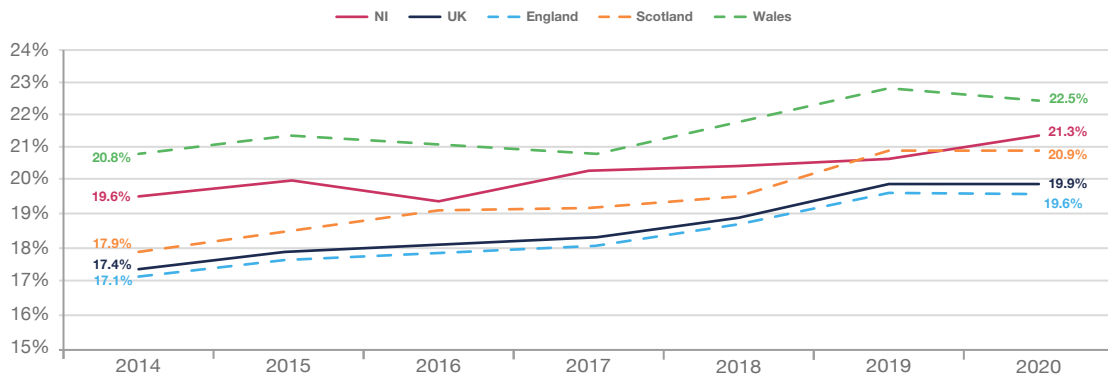


³ The LFS is a sample survey and where there are higher levels of disaggregation, the estimates are based on smaller numbers which can result in less precise estimates. This is particularly the case for NI data, where data has been broken down for disabled and non-disabled people, then further disaggregated by additional breakdowns such as impairment, LGD and qualifications.

5.4.2 Prevalence of Disability across the UK (2020)

As Figure 5.2 shows, the proportion of people with disabilities in the 16-64 age group has grown across all UK countries since 2014.

Figure 5.2 – Percentage of people with disabilities by year and country (Age: 16-64)



Although some year-on-year variability is apparent, the proportion of people with a disability has increased in each of the 4 countries between 2014 and 2020. The table below shows the percentage point growth in the proportion of people with a disability in the period 2014 – 2020 across the different countries.

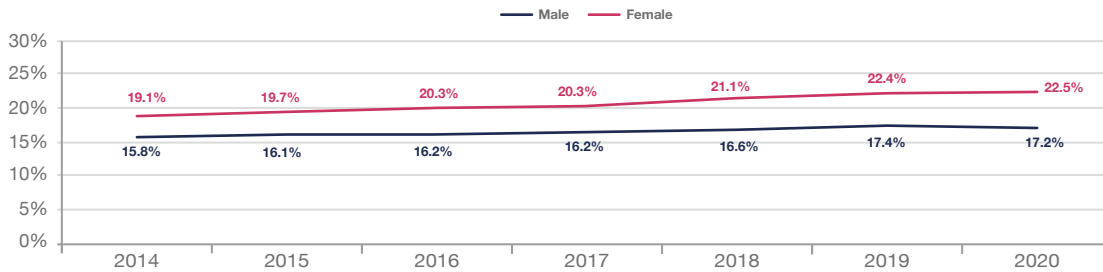
Country	Percentage Point Increase (2014-2020)
Scotland	3.0
England	2.4
Northern Ireland	1.7
Wales	1.7

Figure 5.2 also shows that with the exception of NI and Scotland interchanging briefly in 2019, generally the relative rankings in terms of percentage of people with disabilities within the 16-64 year old population has been consistent since 2014

5.4.3 Prevalence of Disability - Sex

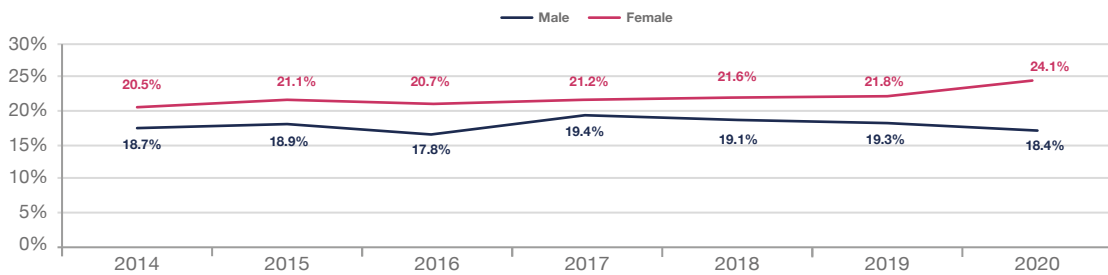
When looking at variances by Sex (Male and Female) in Figure 5.3 there is a consistently higher proportion of people with disabilities who are female across the UK.

Figure 5.3 – Percentage of people with disabilities in the UK by year and sex (Age: 16-64)



For NI specifically when looking at working age 16-64 there is a consistently higher percentage of the female population classified as disabled as shown in Figure 5.4 below. The average percentage point gap over the period was 2.8 however, it should be noted that the largest gap was 5.7 percentage points in 2020.

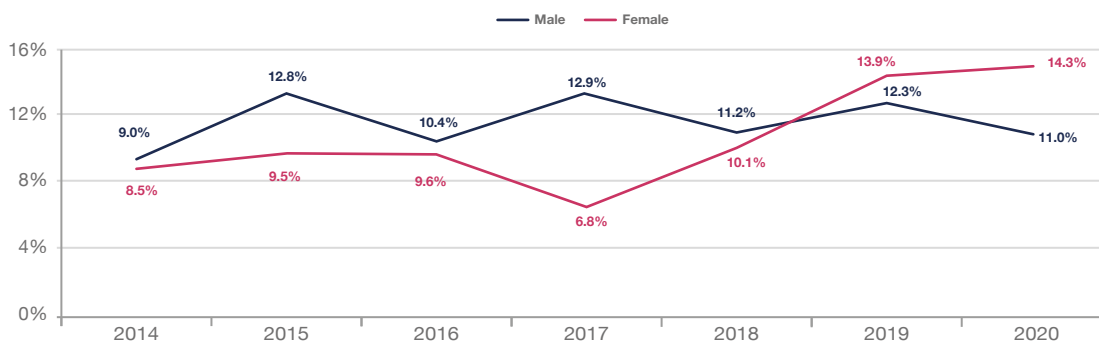
Figure 5.4 – Percentage of people with disabilities in NI by year and sex (Age: 16-64)



The estimates for those aged 16-24 years has greater variability, but suggests the trend of consistently higher rate of disability for females does not hold in this age group.

It should be noted that the percentage of the population aged 16-24 with a disability is noticeably lower (Male: 11.0% and Female: 14.3%) compared to the working age totals (Male: 18.4% and Female: 24.1%)

Figure 5.5 – Percentage of people with disabilities in NI by year and sex (Age: 16-24)

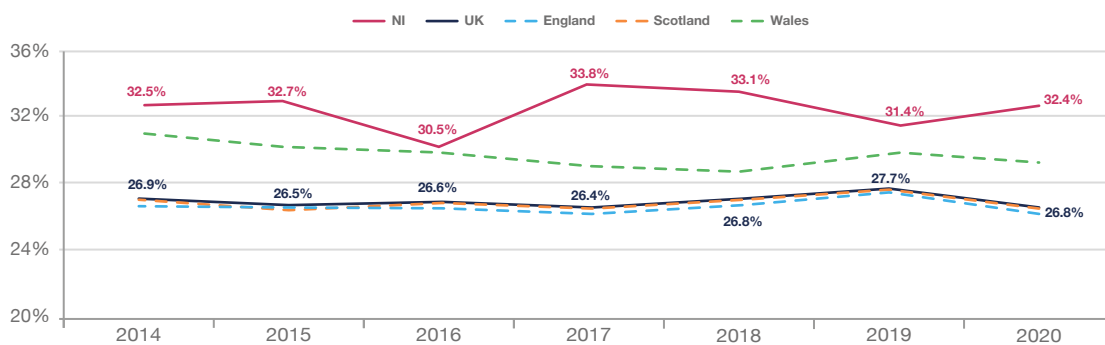


5.4.4 Age

Figure 5.2 previously highlighted the prevalence of disability across the entire working age population (16-64 years) and showed that NI was usually ranked second behind Wales when compared with other UK countries. Figures 5.6 - 5.8 below highlight the variances across specific age groups.

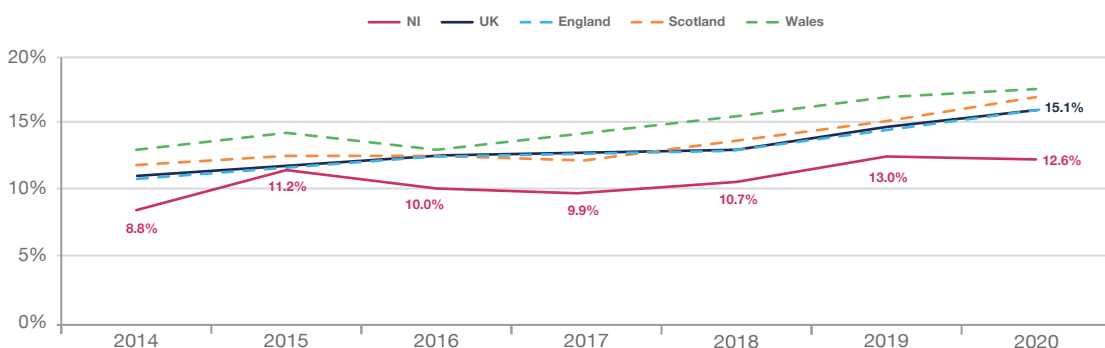
As can be seen in Figure 5.6, NI has consistently had the highest percentage of population classified as having a disability for the 50-64 age group. Across the period 2014–2020, NI was on average 5.5 percentage points higher than the UK average for this age group.

Figure 5.6 – Percentage of people with disabilities by year and country (Age: 50-64 years)



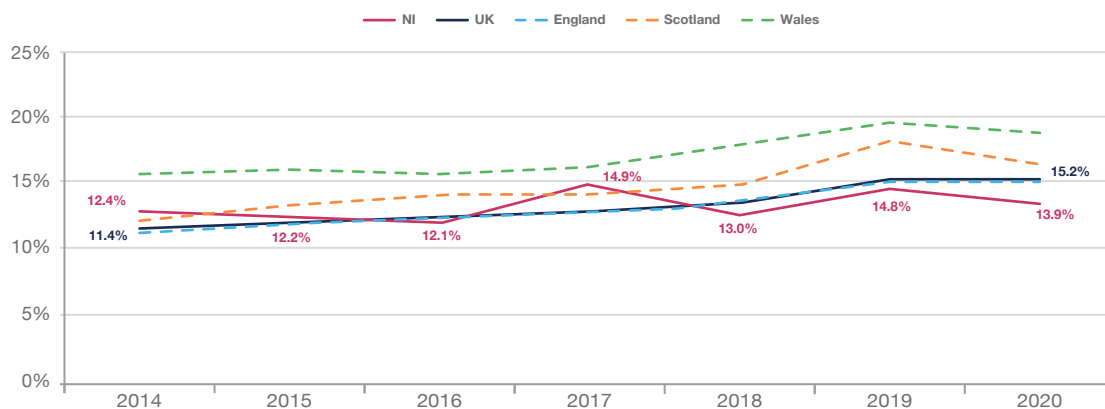
When looking at the younger age groups (16-24 and 25-34 years old) the statistics highlight a very different trend as shown in Figure 5.7 and Figure 5.8. For the 16-24 age group NI has consistently had the lowest percentage of people identify as disabled across all UK countries. Across the period 2014–2020, NI was on average 2.0 percentage points lower than the UK average for this age group.

Figure 5.7 – Percentage of people with disabilities by year and country (Age: 16-24 years)



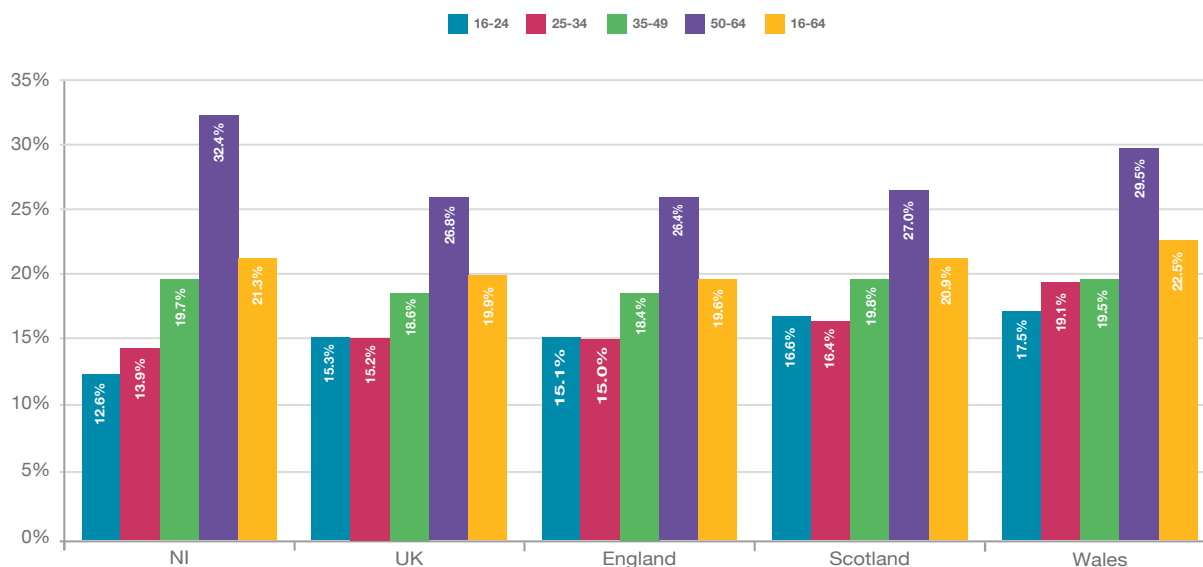
For the 25-34 age group shown in Figure 5.8, NI has one of the lowest percentages of population with a disability on average across this timeframe. In four out of the 7 years analysed, NI had the lowest percentage of the 25-34 age group identify as being disabled.

Figure 5.8 – Percentage of people with disabilities by year and country (Age: 25-34 years)



The variances in the demographics can be shown in the following chart, which shows the percentage of people with disabilities in each UK country across the different age bands for the year 2020.

Figure 5.9 – Percentage of people with disabilities by country and age (Year: 2020)



The above chart shows that NI has the lowest percentage of people with disabilities within the 16-24 and 25-34 age groups. NI has the highest proportion of people with disabilities within the 50-64 age group and only Scotland (19.8%) has a marginally higher proportion of people than NI (19.7%) in the 35-49 age group.

5.5 Labour Market Status

5.5.1 Overview of Terms

The table below gives an overview of some of the key terms that inform this analysis of the labour market.

Term	Definition
Economically Active	People aged 16 and over who are either in employment or unemployed.
Employment	The definition of ILO employed applies to anyone (aged 16 or over) who has carried out at least one hour's paid work in the week prior to interview, or has a job they are temporarily away from (e.g. on holiday). Also included are people who do unpaid work in a family business and people on Government-supported employment training schemes.
Unemployment	The definition of unemployment used in the LFS is in accordance with that of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). ILO unemployed includes those without a job who were able to start work in the two weeks following their LFS interview and had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained. The unemployment rate is the percentage of economically active people who are unemployed.
Economically Inactive	Economic inactivity applies to those individuals who are neither in employment nor unemployed on the ILO measure. The economic inactivity rate is the percentage of all persons of working age (16 to 64) who are economically inactive.
Disability Employment Gap	The difference in the employment rate of people with disabilities and people without disabilities.

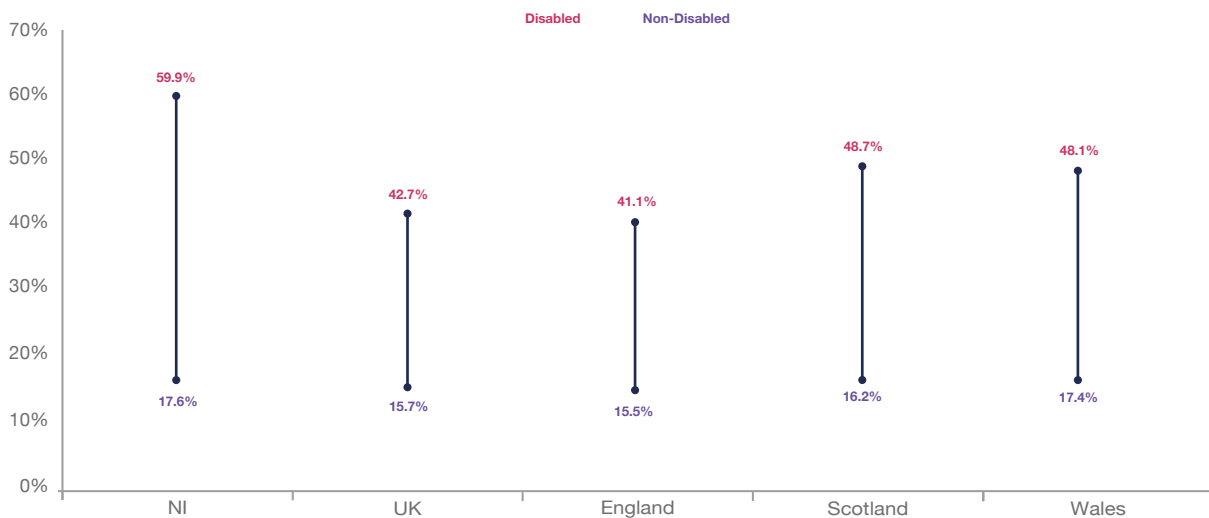
5.5.2 Economic Inactivity (16-64)

When comparing the 2020 economic inactivity rates for NI (17.6%) against the UK (15.7%) for non-disabled persons the gap is relatively small with the UK having a slightly (1.9 percentage points) lower rate of economic inactivity.

However, when looking at economic inactivity statistics for disabled persons the percentage point gap in economic inactivity rate increases significantly. The UK average economic inactivity rate (42.7%) is 17.2 percentage points lower than the economic inactivity rate for NI (59.9%).

The chart below shows that NI has the largest gap in economic inactivity between disabled and non-disabled people.

Figure 5.10 – Economic inactivity rate by disability status and country (Age: 16-64 years) (Year: 2020)



5.5.3 Employment Rate

Similar to the economic inactivity statistics, there is only a small variance in the employment rate for non-disabled persons when comparing NI (80.3%) and the UK average (80.8%). However when looking at the employment rate for disabled persons, the variance increases significantly. In the UK, people with disabilities had an employment rate of 52.9%. This rate is significantly higher than the NI rate of 38.1%.

Figure 5.11 – Employment rate by disability status and country (Age: 16-64 years) (Year: 2020)

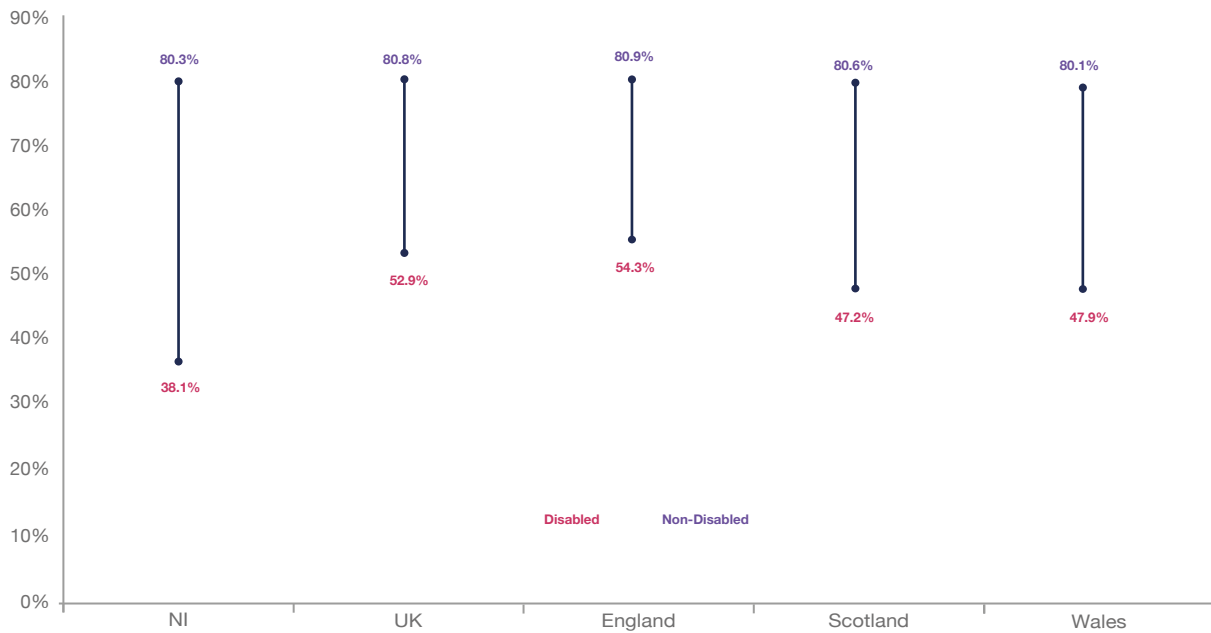


Figure 5.11 above shows that the gap between employment rates for disabled and non-disabled people is highest for Northern Ireland (gap of 42.2pp) compared to the UK average of 27.9pp.

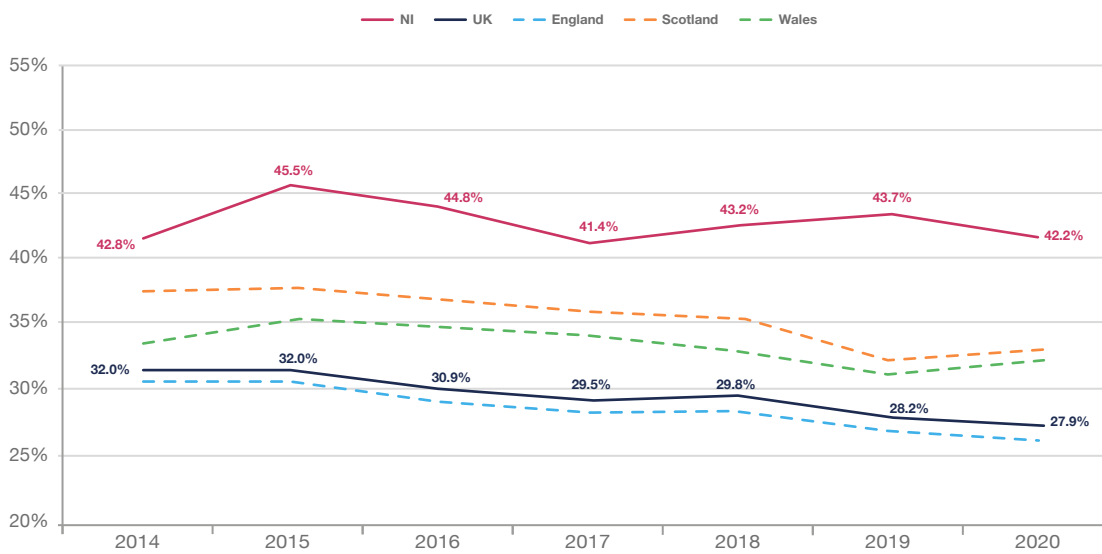
5.6 Disability Employment Gap

5.6.1 By Age

The difference in the employment rate of people with disabilities and people who are not disabled is known as the ‘disability employment gap’.

The disability employment gap in NI has been consistently higher than the rest of the UK since 2014, where the gap has been lowest in England throughout this period (Figure 5.12).

Figure 5.12 – Disability employment gap (Percentage Point Difference) time series by country (Age: 16-64 years)



The data in Figure 5.13 below shows that ‘Disability Employment Gap’ in NI is smallest in the 16-24 age group (gap of 18.0pp).

Figure 5.13 – Employment rate (aged 16-64, %) by age, disability status, NI, 2020

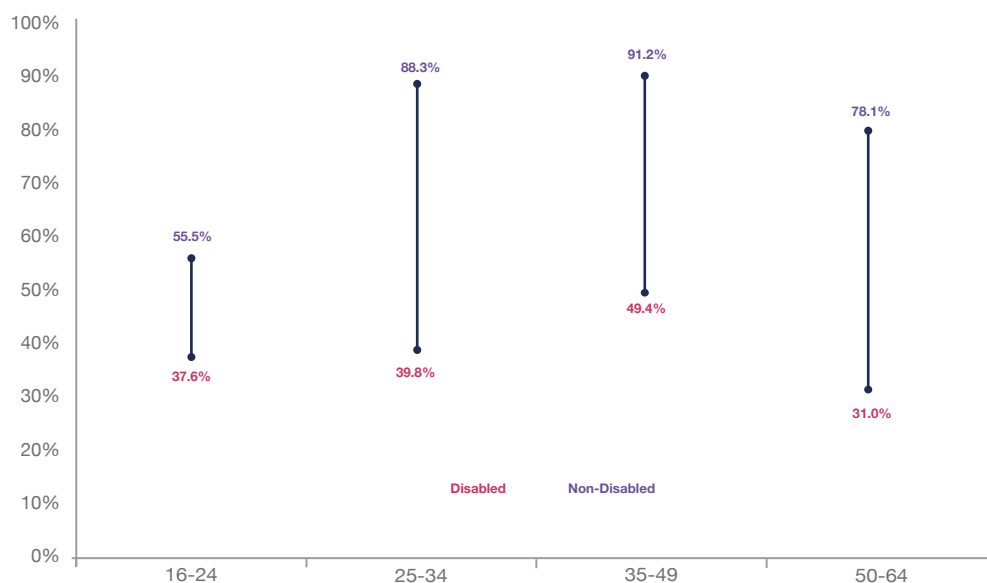
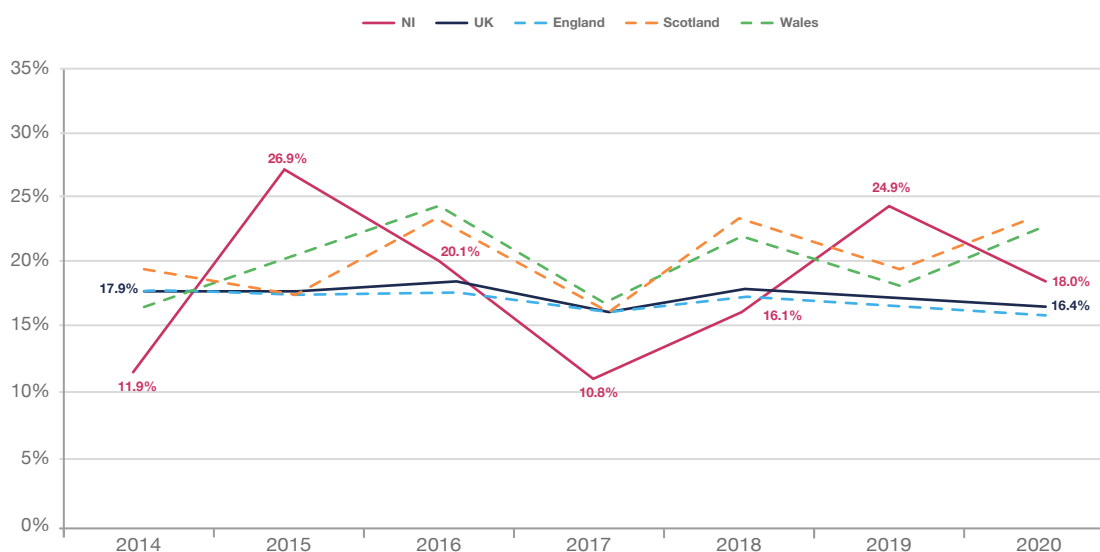


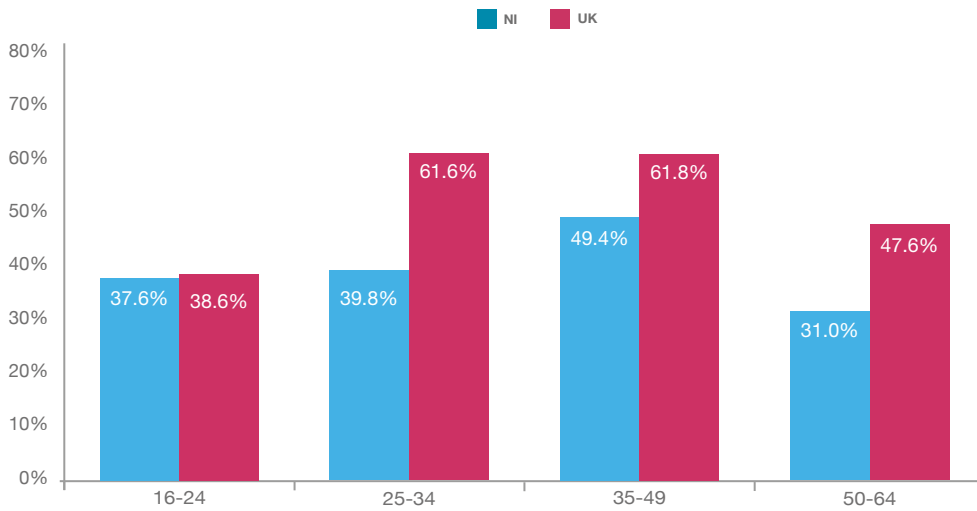
Figure 5.14 shows that the Disability Employment Gap is not as clear when looking at the younger age cohort due to the small sample size of the cohort being studied. The data shows that the average disability employment gap for 16-24 year olds in NI was 18.4% between 2014 and 2020. Analysis of the data would suggest that the lower disability employment gap for this age cohort is a result of lower youth (16-24) employment levels for non-disabled persons rather than a significant uplift in employment rate for people with disabilities of the same age group.

Figure 5.14 – Disability employment gap (Percentage Point difference) time series by country (Age: 16-24 years)



In the period 2014-2020 the average NI employment rate for the non-disabled 16-64 age group was 78.5% however, for the non-disabled 16-24 age group the average employment rate was only 50.1%.

Figure 5.15 - Employment rate by age and country, disabled, 2020



When comparing the employment rate for people with disabilities across different age groups in NI and the UK as shown in Figure 5.15 above there are a number of variances. NI has a lower employment rate for disabled people in each of the age categories, most notably in the 25-34 age group.

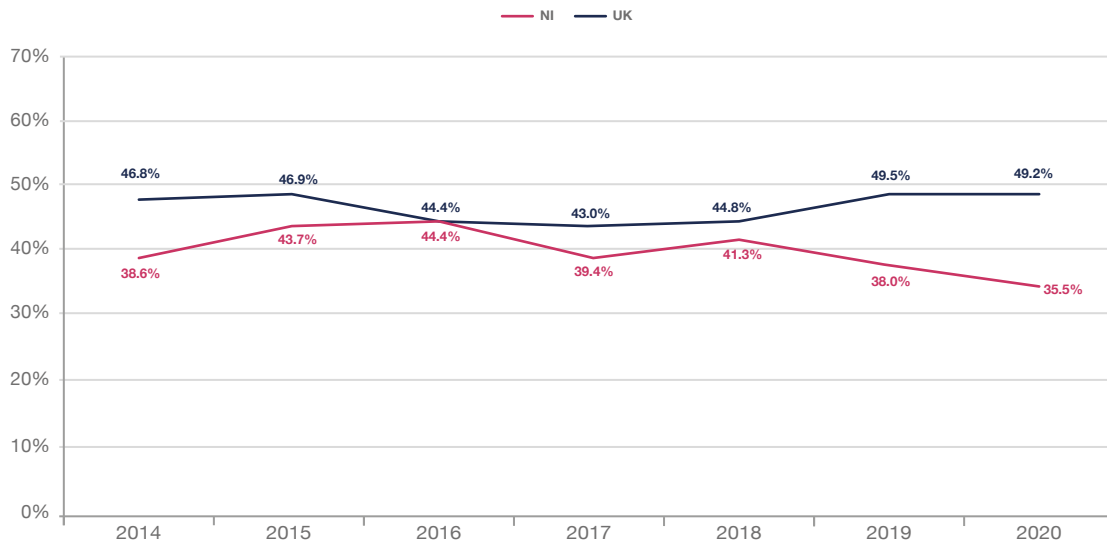
The table below also reflects on recent trends in each age group in terms of employment rate for people with disabilities in the period 2014-2020.

Age Group	NI Trend (2014-2020)	UK Trend (2014-2020)	Comparison
16 - 24	Increase of 6.1 pps from 31.5% to 37.6%	Increase of 4.0 pps from 34.6% to 38.6% Lowest Rate in UK	NI has a slightly higher rate of growth. Gap in employment rate is minimal (1 pps in 2020)
25 - 34	Decrease of 2.7 pps from 42.5% to 39.8%	Increase of 8.5 pps from 53.1% to 61.6%	Overall NI rate was increasing up until 2020 data, which showed a similar trend to UK (although slower growth). If 2020 data was excused the NI rate grew 4.6 pps from 2014-2019.
35 - 49	Increase of 11.2 pps from 38.2% to 49.4% Highest Rate in NI	Increase of 7.3 pps from 54.5% to 61.8% Highest Rate in UK	Steady growth in both NI and UK, higher in UK. Age group with highest employment rate in both.
50 - 64	Increase of 3.0 pps from 28.0% to 31.0% Lowest Rate in NI	Increase of 7.1 pps from 40.5% to 47.6%	Faster growth in UK. Lowest employment rate in NI.

5.6.2 By Sex

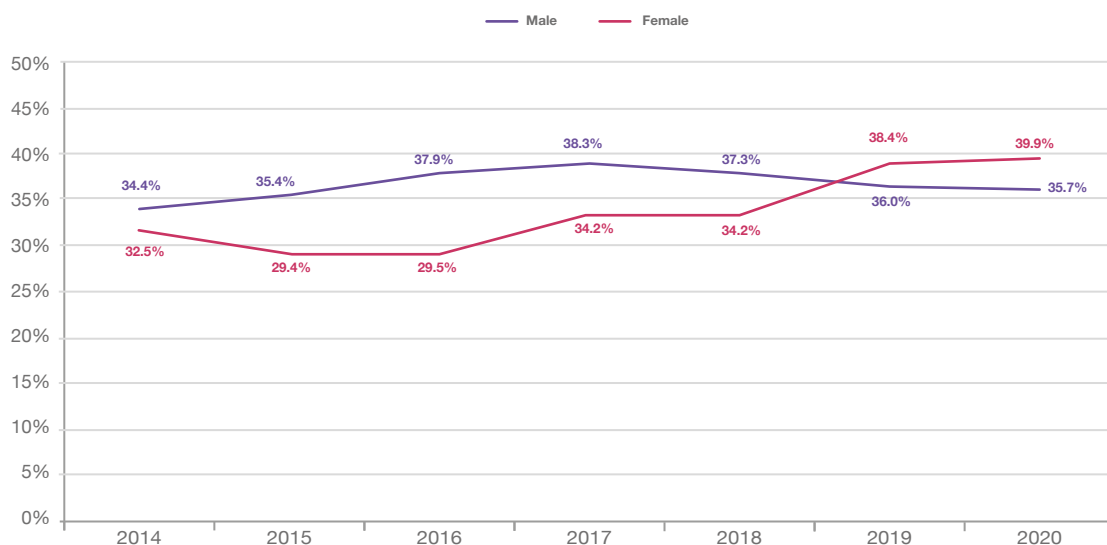
The data in Figure 5.16 shows the disability employment gap in Northern Ireland for all working age (16-64) by Sex. A large difference has appeared in the employment gap between men and women in recent years. In 2016, the Disability Employment Gap for Males and Females in NI both equalled 44.4pp. In 2020, the gap for males had risen to 49.2pp and the gap for females had closed to 35.5pp.

Figure 5.16 – NI disability employment gap (Percentage Point difference) by sex (Age: 16-64 years)



The reason for this widening gap can be illustrated below. Since 2016, the employment rate for disabled females has risen from 29.5% to a high of 39.9% in 2020 (a percentage point increase of 10.4pp). In the same time period the employment rate for disabled males has fallen from 37.9% to 35.7% (a drop of 2.2 percentage points).

Figure 5.17 – NI employment rate for people with disabilities by year and sex (Age: 16-64 years)



When comparing the employment rate for people with disabilities in NI to the UK average there are some noticeable differences but also some similarities. The employment rate for people with disabilities across the UK is noticeably higher than NI for both males and females. Some things to note for the period 2016-2020:

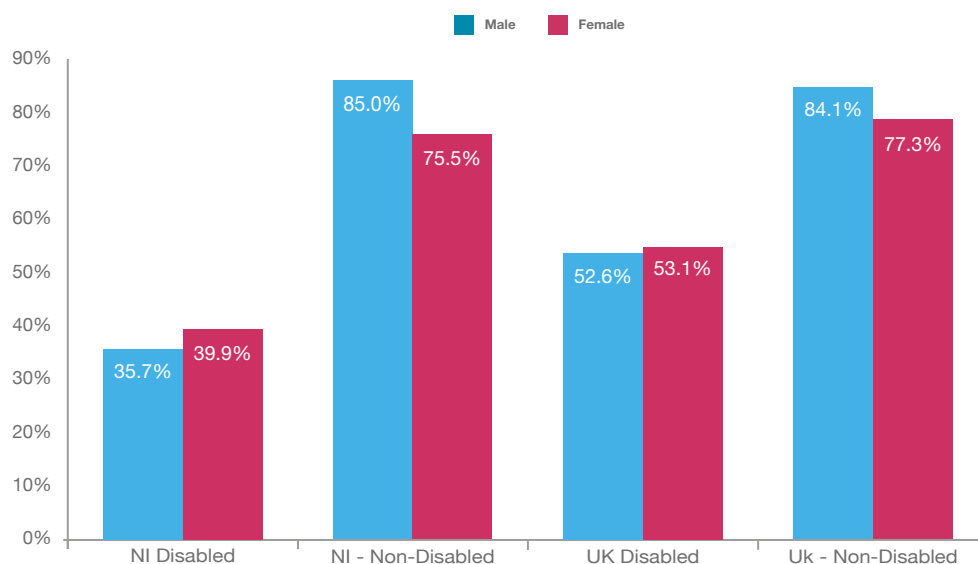
Employment Rate for People with Disabilities	NI	UK
Female	Increase of 10.4 pps from 29.5% to 39.9%	Increase of 5.9 pps from 47.2% to 53.1%
Male	Decrease of 2.2 pps from 37.9% to 35.7%	Increase of 2.1 pps from 50.5% to 52.6%

In both NI and UK, the female employment rate for people with disabilities lagged behind the employment rate for males in 2014. In both jurisdictions, the female employment rate has risen to be higher than the male employment rate by 2020. The exact reason for this change to the employment gap is not known but NISRA statistics show that there has been a shift in the underlying reasons for economic inactivity over the past 25 years. The proportion inactive due to ‘Family & Home Care’ has reduced substantially from 35.1% to 14.5% – the majority of this cohort is made up of females.

Female disabled employment rate increased beyond the male disabled employment rate in 2019. The male and female employment rates for non-disabled have both increased ~4 pps between 2014 and 2020. Although the employment rate for females has increased overall in this time period, the gains to employment for females who are disabled is greater than those not disabled (~7.5pps compared to 4pps). The converse is true for males where the increase in employment rate for males who are disabled was lower than the increase for males who are not disabled (1.3pps compared to ~4pps).

There is still a higher level of male employment in both NI (4.8 pps higher for males) and the UK (6.8 pps higher for males) based on 2020 figures.

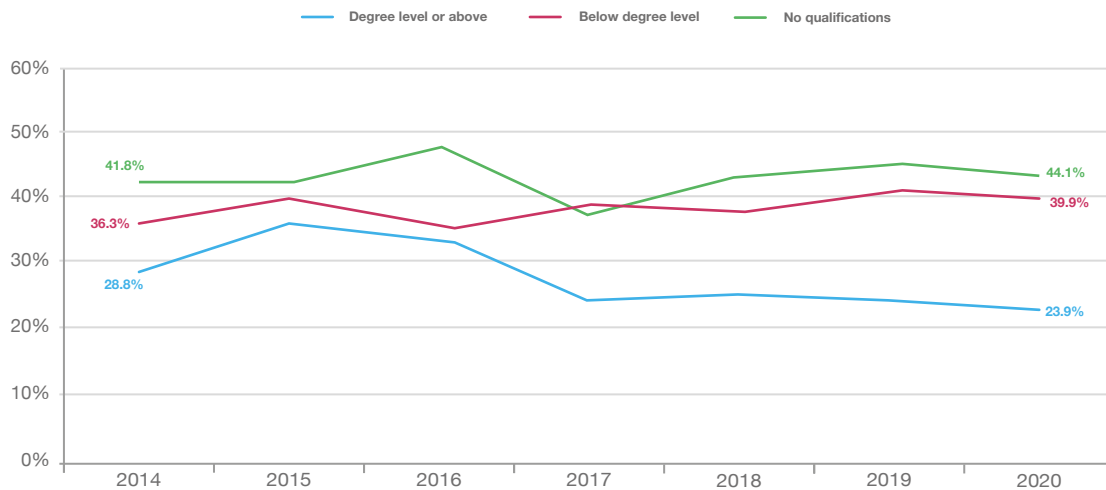
Figure 5.18 - Employment rate by sex, country and disability status (Year: 2020) (Age: 16-64 years)



5.6.3 By Qualification

The impact that level of qualification achieved has on labour market outcomes for disabled and non-disabled people in NI is shown in Figure 5.19. The graph shows the disability employment gap for three different levels of qualification.

Figure 5.19 – NI disability employment gap (Percentage Point difference) by year and qualification level (Age: 16-64 years)

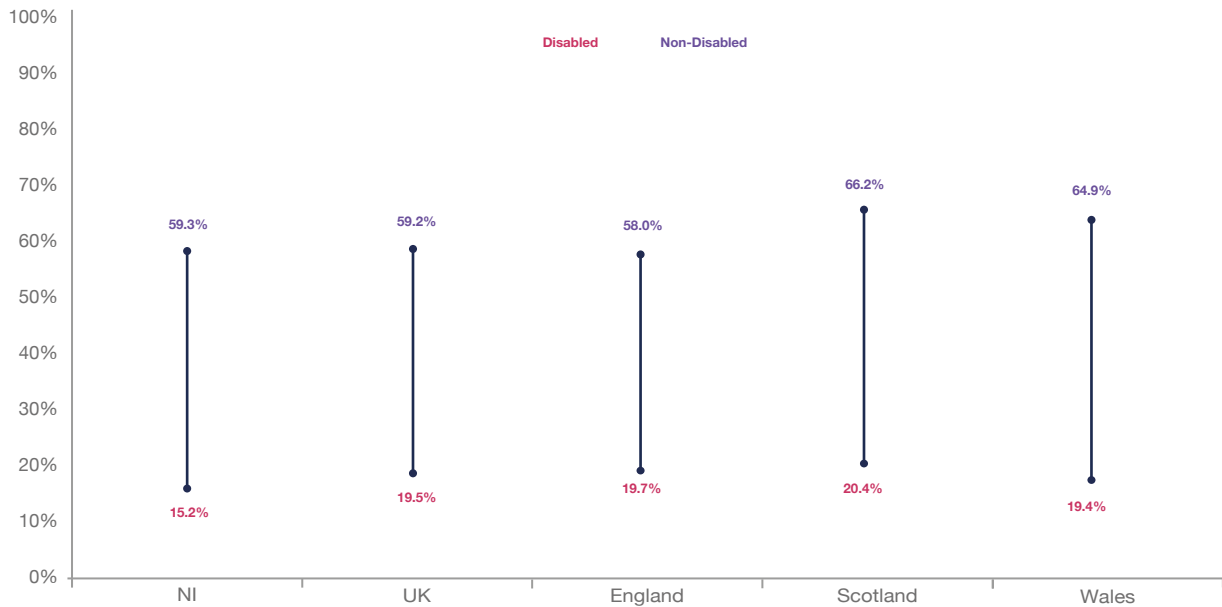


The data in Figure 5.19 shows that the largest gap between disabled and non-disabled employment rates occurs when employees have ‘No qualifications’ and the smallest gap is when employees have ‘Degree level or above’ qualifications.

Qualification Level	Average Gap between Non-Disabled and Disabled (2014 – 2020)	Change (2014 – 2020)
No qualification	43.0 pps	Increase of 2.3 pps
Below degree level	38.6 pps	Increase of 3.6 pps
Degree level or above	28.5 pps	Decrease of 4.8 pps

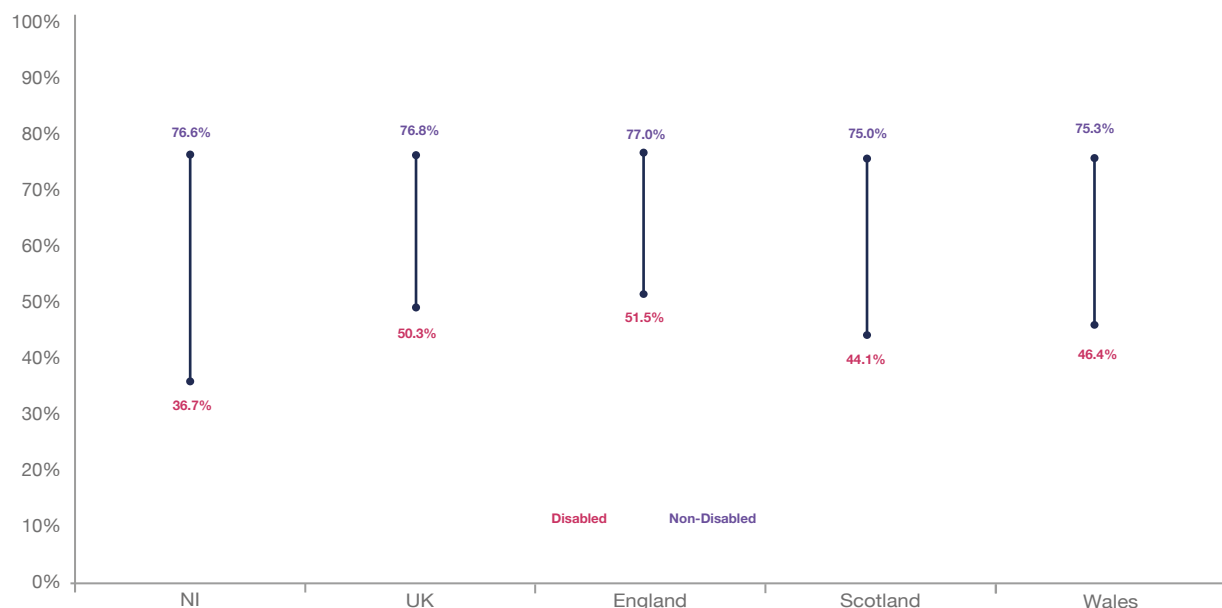
In NI the disability employment gap for the working age population in 2020 **with no qualifications** was 44.1pp, this compares to the UK gap of 39.7pp. NI had the lowest employment rate (15.2%) for people with disabilities with no qualifications when compared to other UK countries, second lowest was Wales (19.4%).

Figure 5.20 - Employment rate (aged 16-64, %) by country, disability status, no qualifications, 2020



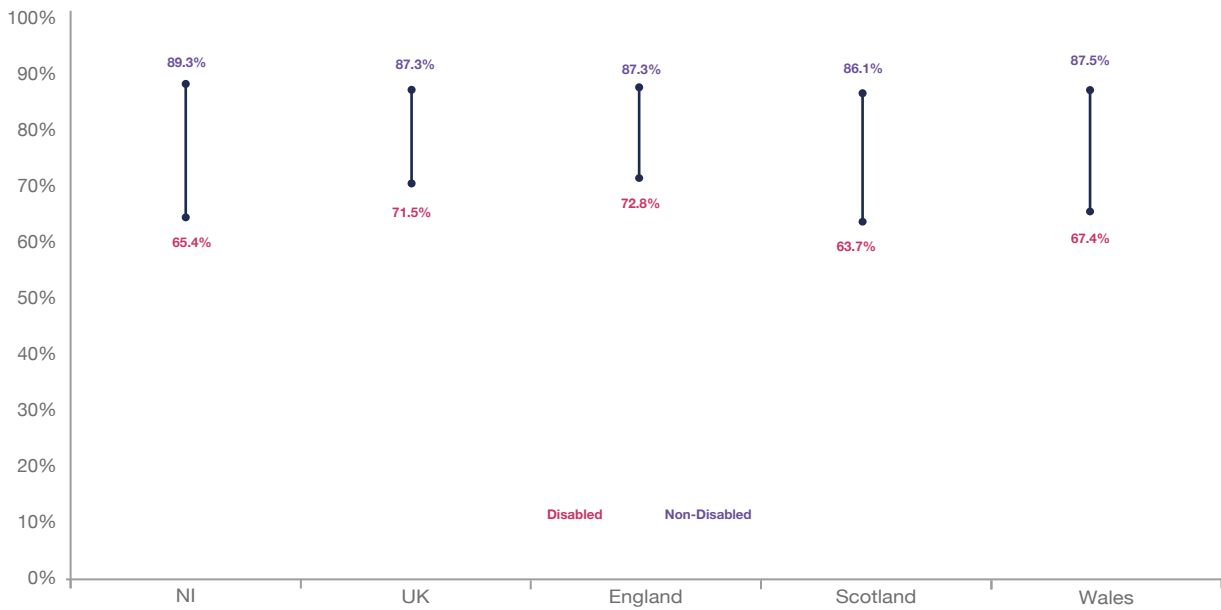
As shown in Figure 5.21 below, in NI the disability employment gap for the working age population in 2020 with below degree level qualifications was 39.9pp, this compares to the UK gap of 26.5pp. NI had the lowest employment rate (36.7%) for people with disabilities with below degree level qualifications when compared to other UK countries, second lowest was Scotland (44.1%).

Figure 5.21 - Employment rate (aged 16-64, %) by country, disability status, below degree level, 2020



As shown in Figure 5.22 below, in NI the disability employment gap for the working age population in 2020 with degree level or above qualifications was 23.9pp, this compares to the UK gap of 15.8pp. NI had the second lowest employment rate (65.4%) for people with disabilities with degree level or above qualifications. Only Scotland had a lower rate (63.7%) when compared to other UK countries.

Figure 5.22 - Employment rate (aged 16-64, %) by country, disability status, degree level or above, 2020



Impact of Qualification on Disability Employment Gap

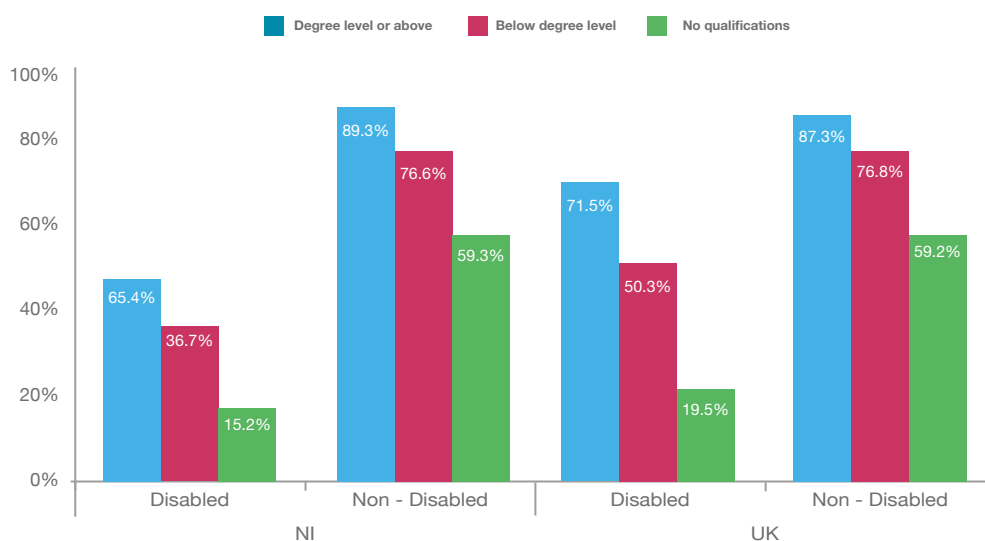
Whilst the gap is lower for higher qualified people, there is still considerable inequality in labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in NI compared to non-disabled people with similar qualifications. **For every qualification level NI disabled people have a lower employment rate than NI non-disabled people with the same qualification level. This group also have a lower employment rate than disabled people with the same qualification level in the UK as a whole.**

Non-disabled people in NI achieving degree level or above qualifications have consistently had a marginally higher employment rate than the equivalent group in the UK. Figure 5.23 below illustrates this point.

- Non-disabled people in NI achieving degree level or above qualifications had an employment rate (89.3%) – higher than the equivalent group in the UK (87.3%).
- However, those with similar qualifications who also happen to have a disability have considerably worse labour market outcomes as shown in Figure 5.23. NI had an employment rate of 65.4% for people with disabilities with degree level of higher qualifications. This compares to the UK average of 71.5%.

The data illustrates clearly the impact that disability has on the employment rate in NI compared to the UK for similar types of qualification. Whilst NI is on a par with the UK average employment rate, and in some cases exceeds it for non-disabled employees, there is a noticeable drop in employment rate for ‘degree level or above’ and ‘below degree level employees’ in NI below the UK rates for people with disabilities.

Figure 5.23 - Employment rate by qualification level, country and disability status (Year 2020) (Age 16-64 years)



5.7 Employment by Industry ⁴

The analysis in Figure 5.24 calculates the percentage point difference within those actually employed. So it only takes into consideration employed disabled and employed non-disabled people and compares their relative employment rate by industry.

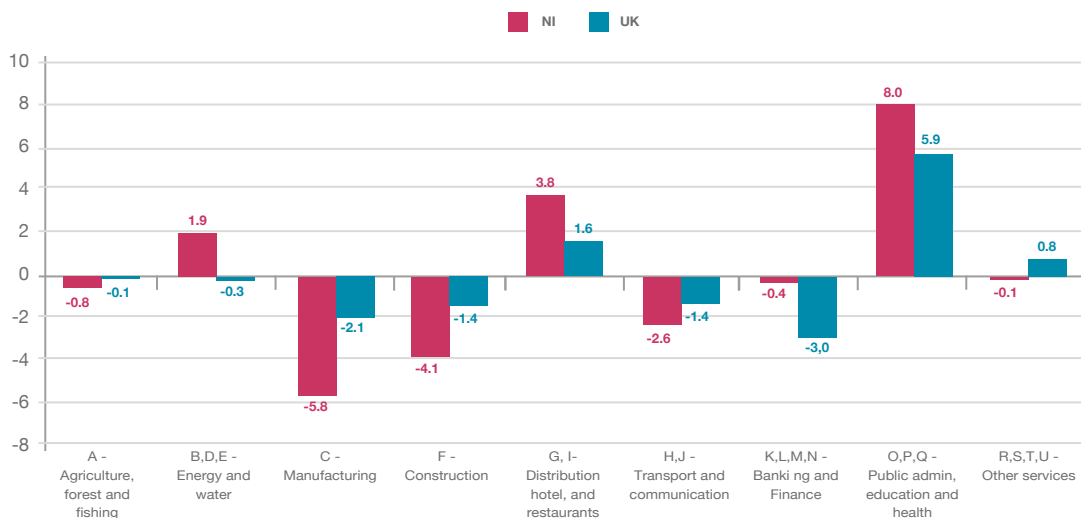
The graph below shows that people with disabilities have a higher representation in three specific sectors in NI:

- **Public administration, education and health – 8.0 percentage points higher** rate for people with disabilities;
- **Distribution, hotels and restaurants – 3.8 percentage points higher** for people with disabilities; and
- **Energy and water – 1.9 percentage points higher** for people with disabilities.

The sectors where people with disabilities had a lower level of representation in NI were:

- **Manufacturing – 5.8 percentage points lower** for people with disabilities;
- **Construction – 4.1 percentage points lower** for people with disabilities; and
- **Transport & Communication – 2.6 percentage points lower** for people with disabilities.

Figure 5.24 - Relative disability employment gap by industry and country - (Year: 2020)



4 Section 5.3.1 identified that 21.3% of the working age population in NI identified as having a disability. It should be noted that disabled employees do not account for 21.3% of any of the industry or occupations noted in Figures 5.25 and 5.26. The data only takes into consideration employed disabled and employed non-disabled people and compares their relative employment rates.

5.8 Employment by Occupation ⁵

The analysis in Figure 5.25 calculates the percentage point difference within those actually employed. So it only takes into consideration employed disabled and employed non-disabled people and compares their relative employment rate by occupation.

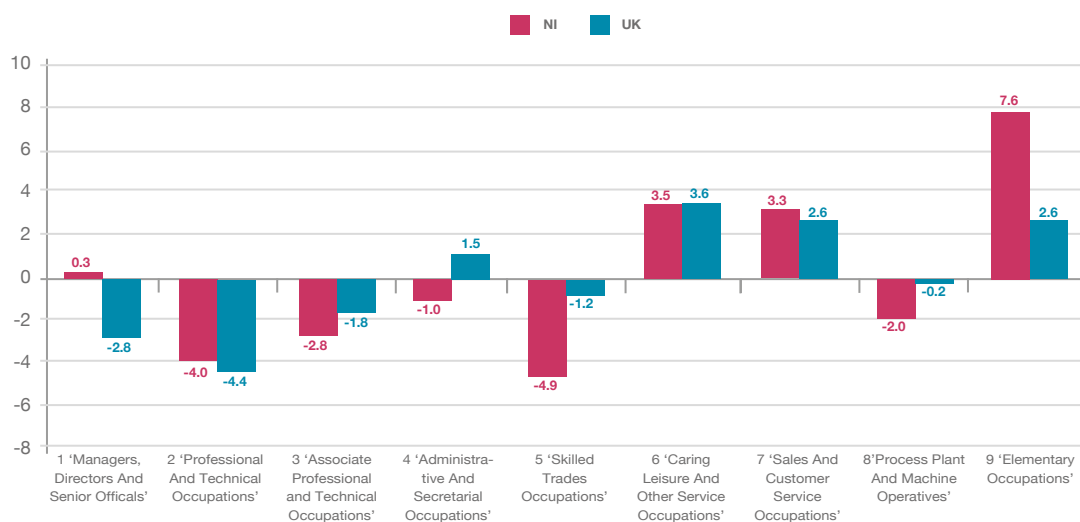
The graph below shows that people with disabilities have a higher representation in three specific occupations in NI:

- **Elementary occupations – 7.6 percentage points higher** rate for people with disabilities;
- **Caring, Leisure and Other Service occupations – 3.5 percentage points higher** for people with disabilities; and
- **Sales and customer service occupations – 3.3 percentage points higher** for people with disabilities.

The occupations where people with disabilities had a lower level of representation in NI were:

- **Skilled trades occupations – 4.9 percentage points lower** for people with disabilities;
- **Professional occupations – 4.0 percentage points lower** for people with disabilities; and
- **Associate professional and technical occupations – 2.8 percentage points lower** for people with disabilities.

Figure 5.25 - Relative disability employment gap by occupation and country - (Year: 2020)



5 Ibid

5.9 Work Quality Metrics

Work quality metrics are relatively new data sets looking at a range of indicators to measure quality of experience in the workplace (for employees only). As this data is new, a time series trend is not possible in-line with the rest of the data within the report. Whilst the differences between Disabled and Non-Disabled groups are illustrated, more years of data will be required to fully establish emerging trends.

Figure 5.26 below shows similar percentages of disabled / non-disabled people who are 'Permanent employees' or 'Temporary employees who did not want a permanent job'.

Figure 5.26 - Percentage of employees in NI who are either 'permanent' or 'temporary but did not want a permanent job' by disability status (Age: 18+) (Year: 2020)

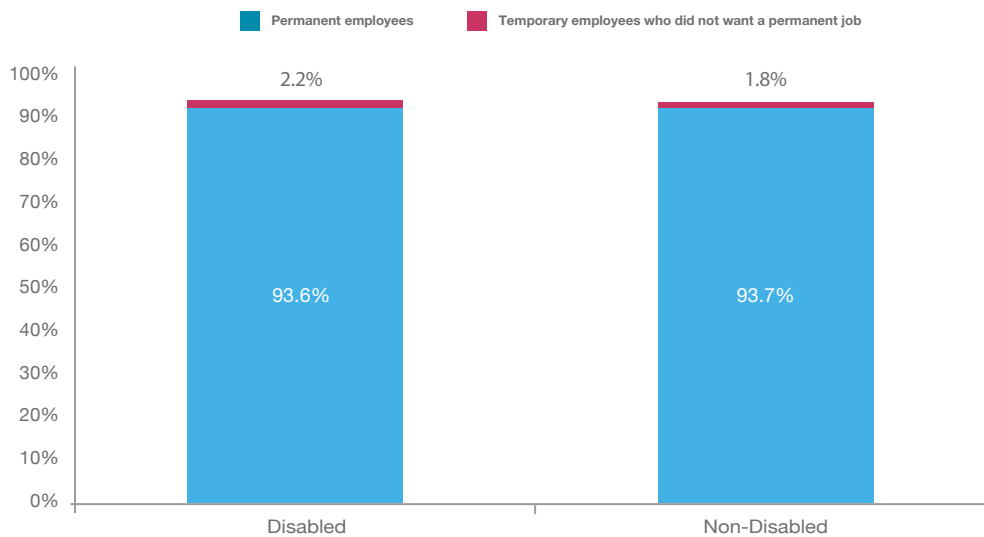
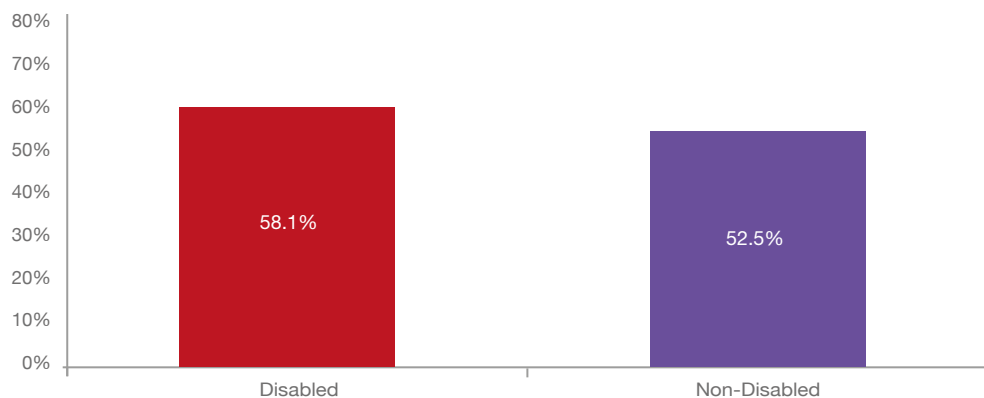


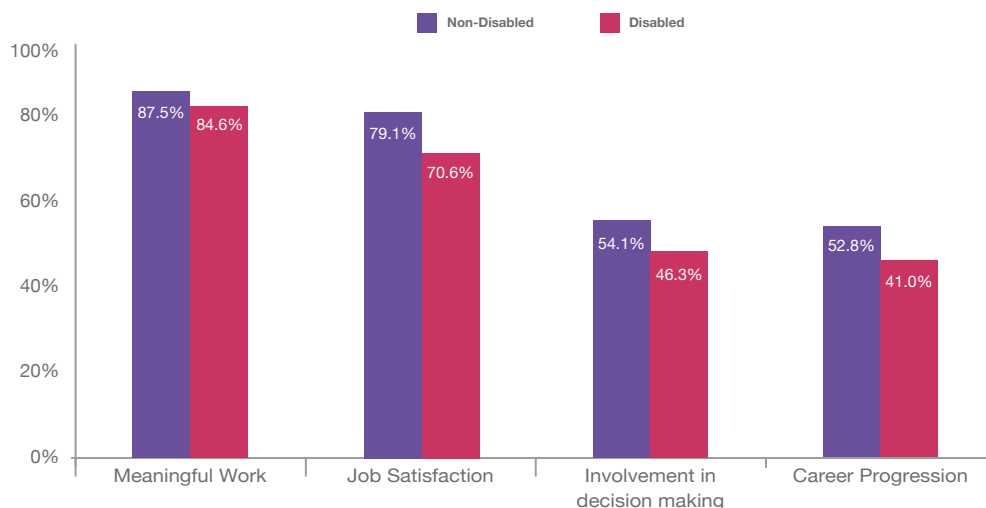
Figure 5.27 indicates that a greater proportion of disabled employees (5.6 pps higher than non-disabled) felt that they were in flexible work.

Figure 5.27 – Flexibility at work in NI by disability status (Age: 18+) (Year: 2020)



The graphs in Figure 5.28 highlight the work quality metric scores for employees in NI for the period January – December 2020 for both disabled and non-disabled people.

Figure 5.28 - Work Quality Indicator Scores '4 or higher' of employees in NI by disability status (Age: 18+) (January to December 2020)



The graphs above show that, for the grouping scoring '4 or Higher'⁶ against each indicator, Non-Disabled Employees had better outcomes than Disabled Employees. The variance in scores is shown below against each indicator.

Indicator	Definition	Scored '4 or Higher' Comparison in Disabled v Non-Disabled in (Percentage Points – pps)
Opportunities for Career Progression	Agree or strongly agree that their job offers good opportunities for career progression	Disabled Employees scored 11.8 pps lower
Involvement in Decision Making	Managers are good or very good at involving employees and their representatives in decision making	Disabled Employees scored 7.8 pps lower
Job Satisfaction	Satisfied or very satisfied with their job	Disabled Employees scored 8.6 pps lower
Meaningful Work	Agree or strongly agree that they perform meaningful work in their job	Disabled Employees scored 2.9 pps lower

⁶ Work Quality Metric Scores: 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither disagree nor agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

5.10 Underemployment

Underemployment refers to those who are employees but would like to work more hours either in their current job, a supplementary job, or in a new job. The data in Figure 5.29 below shows that disabled staff have consistently higher levels of underemployment in NI in comparison to non-disabled staff.

Across the time period, people with disabilities have an underemployment rate that is on average 2.0 percentage points higher than non-disabled staff. The smallest variance was in 2016 (1.4 pps) and the largest was in 2020 (3.5 pps).

Figure 5.29 – Underemployment rate in NI by year and disability (Year: 2016-2020)

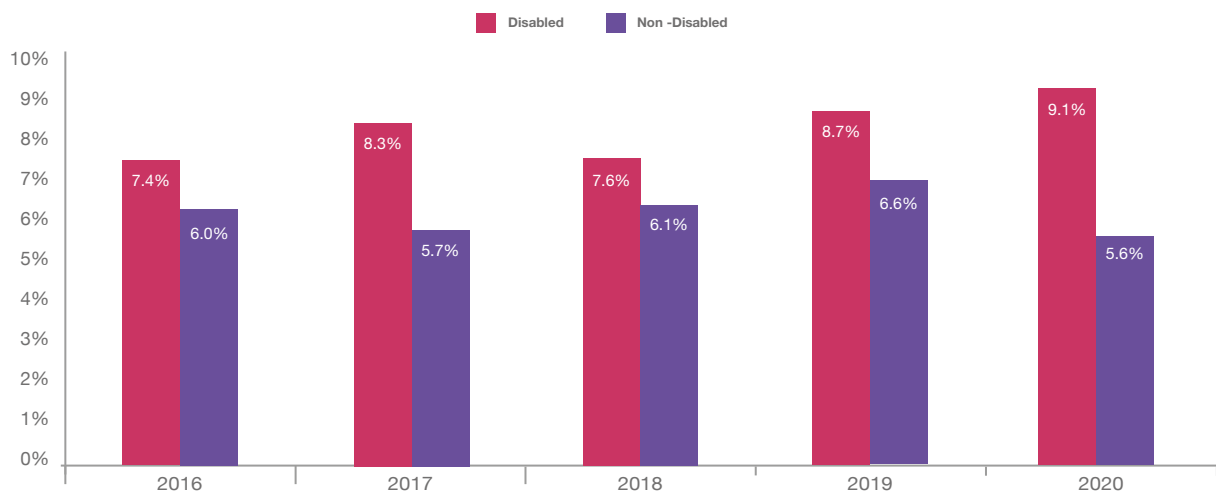


Figure 5.30 and Figure 5.31 shows that NI has consistently lower levels of underemployment for both disabled and non-disabled staff.

Figure 5.30 – Underemployment rate for people with disabilities - NI v UK (Year: 2016-2020)

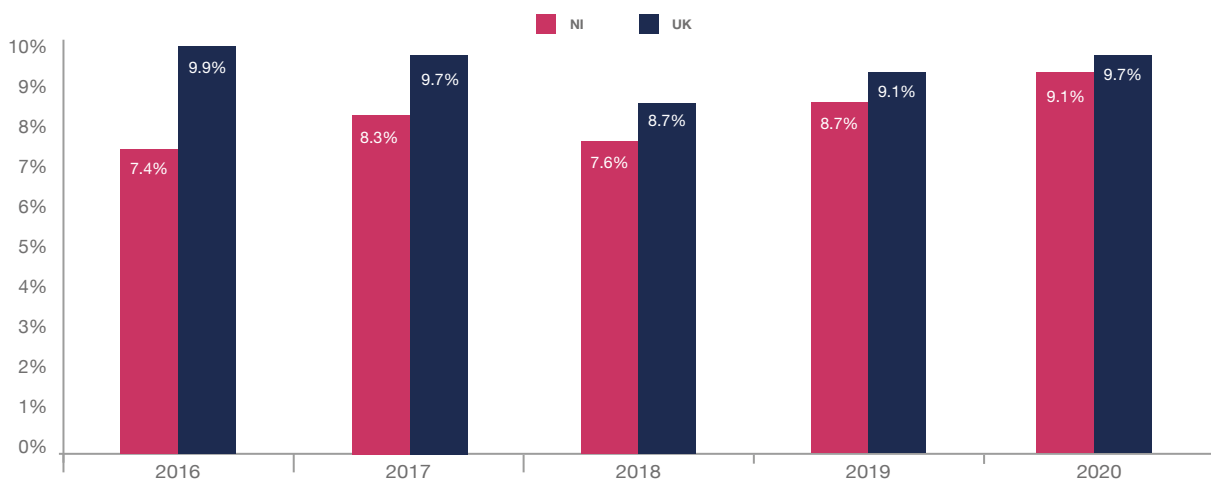
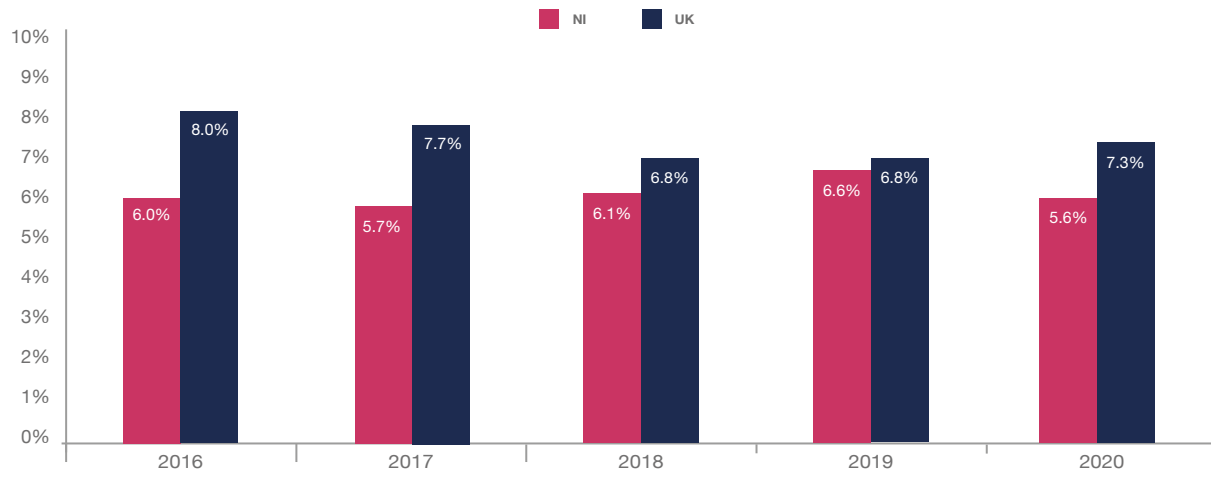


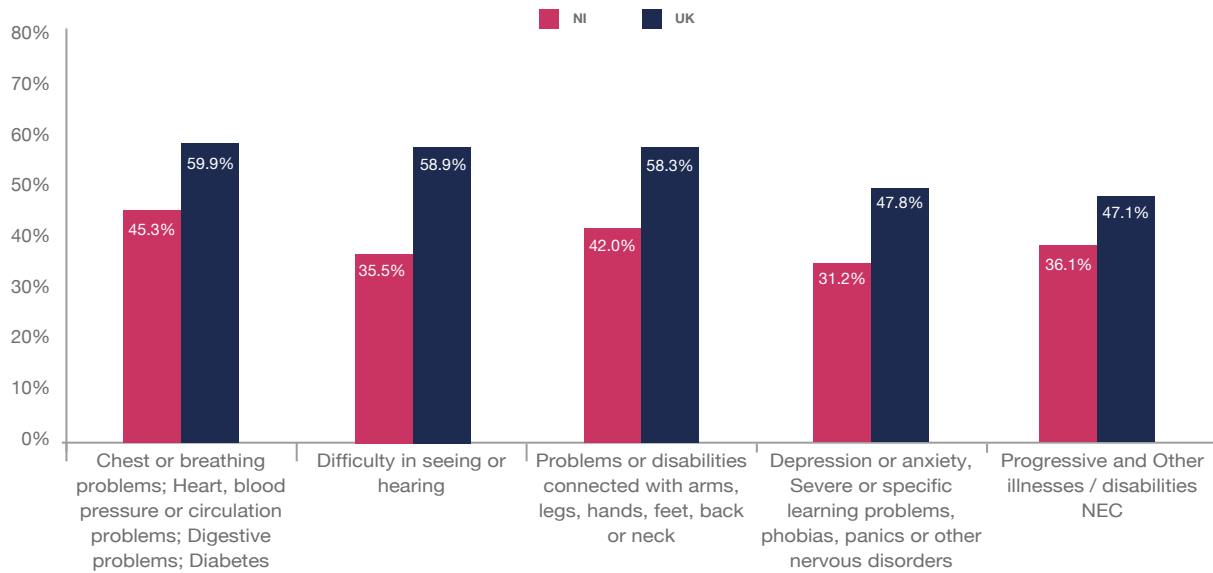
Figure 5.31 – Underemployment rate for non-disabled persons - NI v UK (Year: 2016-2020)



5.11 Main Health Problem

As was previously noted (Figure 5.11) there is already a noticeable difference (14.8 pps) in the employment rate for people with disabilities in NI (38.1%) compared to the UK (52.9%). Figure 5.32 below shows the employment rate by main health condition in NI compared to the UK average.

Figure 5.32 – Employment rate by country and main health condition (Year: 2020)



There is a noticeable variance in each category as shown below with NI underperforming against the UK employment rate in each case.

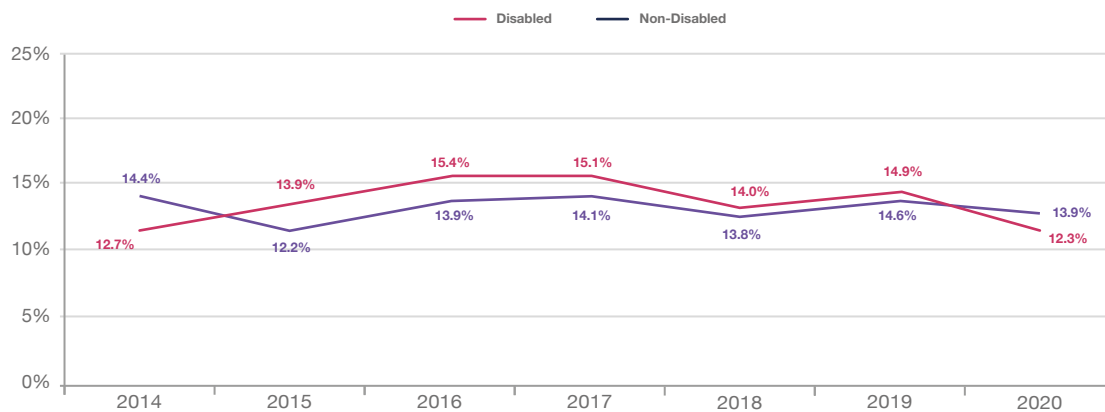
Main Health Condition	Gap between UK and NI Employment Rate
Difficulty in seeing or hearing	23.4pp ⁷
Depression or anxiety, Severe or specific learning problems, phobias, panics or other nervous disorders	16.6pp
Problems or disabilities connected with arms, legs, hands, feet, back or neck	16.3pp
Chest or breathing problems; Heart, blood pressure or circulation problems; Digestive problems; Diabetes	14.7pp
Progressive and Other illnesses/disabilities NEC	11.0pp

⁷ Small sample size for this condition.

5.12 Self-Employment Rate

The self-employment rate ⁸ has typically been higher for people with disabilities in NI in comparison to non-disabled people. That was consistently the case for the period 2015 – 2019 however the self-employment rate for people with disabilities dropped significantly (2.6 pp) in 2020 (the non-disabled self-employment rate dropped by 0.7 pp in comparison). Across the UK, the average drop in self-employment rate for people with disabilities was 1.1 pp.

Figure 5.33 – Self-employment rate by year and disability status (NI) (Age: 16-64 years)



The self-employment rate calculates the percentage of people in employment who are self-employed. It is not a calculation of the percentage of working age people who are in self-employment. So for the year 2020 above the 12.3% figure is the percentage of people with disabilities in employment who are self-employed.

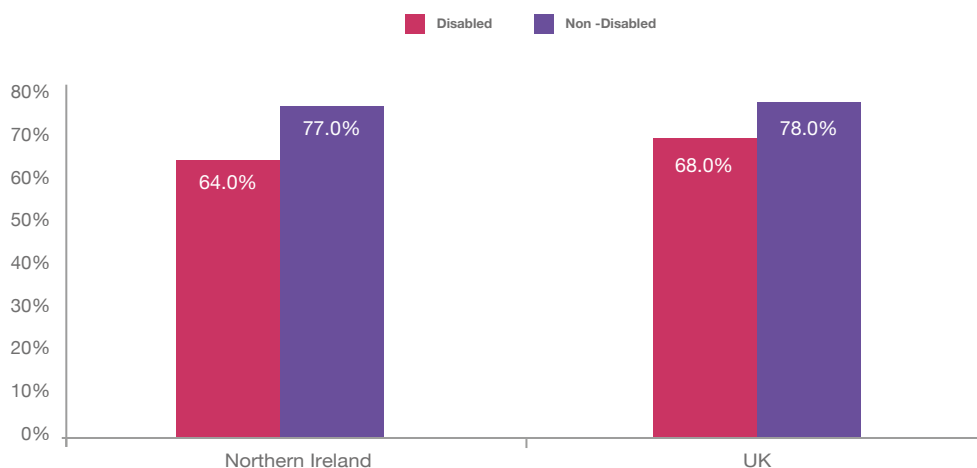
An alternative analysis shows that in 2020 there were 12,000 people with disabilities in NI who were self-employed out of a total of 246,000 working age people who were disabled. This converts to 4.9% of people with disabilities of working age who are self-employed. That compares with 101,000 non-disabled people in self-employment out of a total of 910,000 working age people who are not disabled (11.1%).

⁸ Self-employment rate: self-employed people aged 16+ as a percentage of those in employment aged 16+.

5.13 Full / Part-time Employees ⁹

The data in Figure 5.34 below shows the percentage of people in full-time employment in NI and UK who are disabled / non-disabled. The charts below show that people with disabilities are less likely to work full-time and more likely to work part-time (as noted in the literature review). For non-disabled people in full-time employment, NI lags behind the UK average by 1.0pp. However, for people with disabilities in full-time employment, NI lags behind the UK average by 4.0pp.

Figure 5.34 - Full-time employment (aged 16-64, %) by country, disability status, 2020



For people with disabilities in part-time employment, NI (36.0%) has a higher rate than the UK (32.0%) with a gap of 4.0pp. For non-disabled people in part-time employment, NI (23.0%) has a higher rate than the UK (22.0%) however the gap is only 1.0pp.

Figure 5.35 - Part-time employment (aged 16-64, %) by country, disability status, 2020



⁹ Self-employment rate: self-employed people aged 16+ as a percentage of those in employment aged 16+.

5.14 Pay

The data in Figure 5.36 compares the average weekly earnings between disabled and non-disabled people aged 16-64 in NI, UK, Scotland and Wales. The 2021 data shows that both the disabled and non-disabled in NI earned the least when compared to the other UK regions, and that the average weekly earnings for disabled people across all UK regions were considerably lower than for those without disabilities.

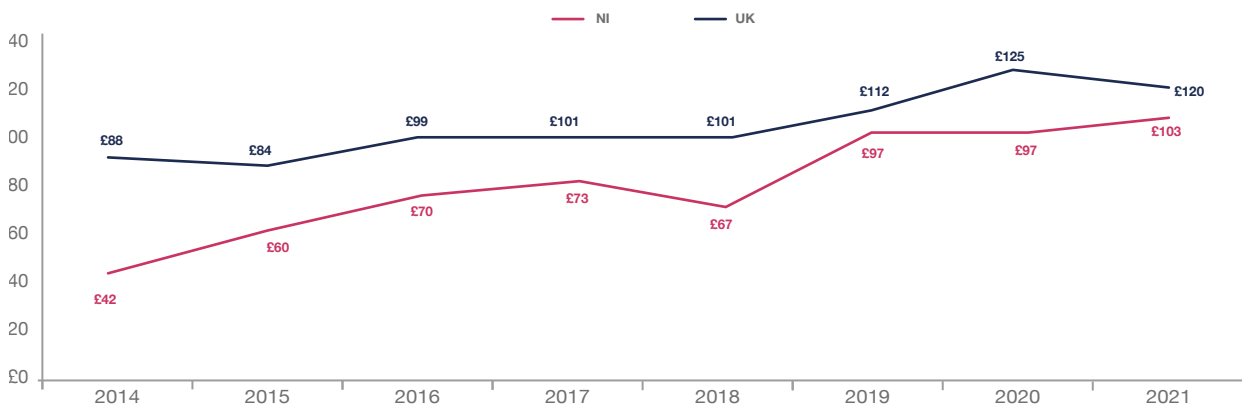
Figure 5.36 - Average weekly earnings (aged 16-64, £) by country, disability status, 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS, UUEPC analysis

Figure 5.37 shows that the gap in the average weekly earnings between disabled and non-disabled is greater in the UK than in NI, however, for both the gap has been steadily increasing over the last few years. Between 2014 and 2021, the gap in NI rose from £42 to £103, and in the UK from £88 to £120. This is mainly because the average weekly earnings rose at a faster rate for the non-disabled compared to the disabled, with the average weekly earnings between 2014 and 2021 for the disabled increasing from £359 to £414 in NI, and £397 to £492 in the UK, compared to non-disabled who saw a rise from £401 to £517 in NI, and £485 to £615 in the UK.

Figure 5.37 - Average weekly earnings gap (Aged 16-64, £), disability status, NI and UK, 2014-2021

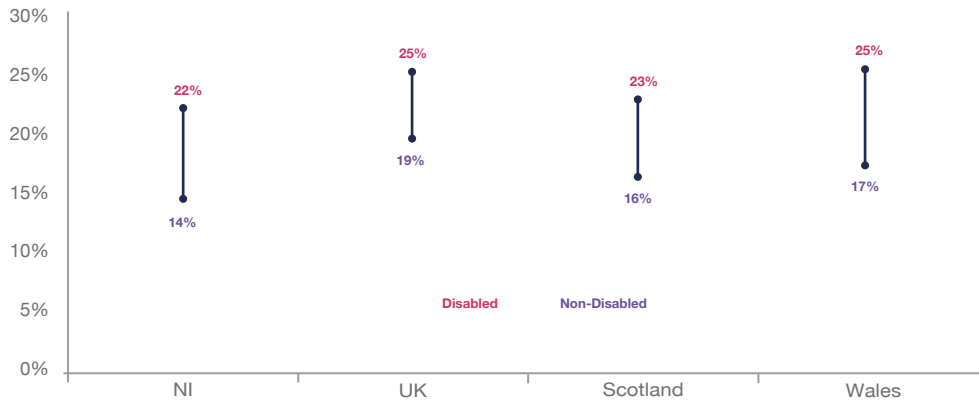


Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS, UUEPC analysis

5.15 Would like a job

Figure 5.38 below shows the percentage of those not in work who would like a job. The percentage of people with disabilities who would like a job in NI (22%) is lower than the UK average (25%). NI also has the lowest proportion of non-disabled people who would like a job (14% compared to UK average of 19%).

Figure 5.38 - Would like a job (aged 16-64, %) by country, disability status, Q1 2021



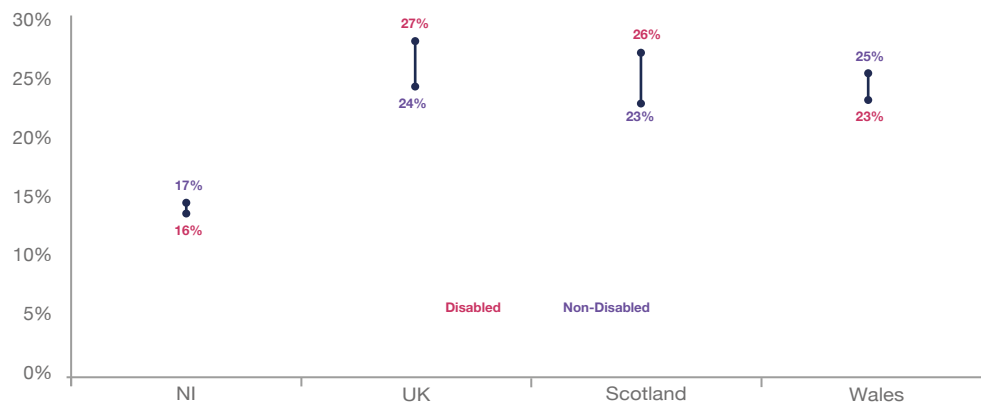
Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS, UUEPC analysis

5.16 Receiving job training

Figure 5.39 below shows the percentage of those receiving job related training across other UK countries. NI lags behind the UK average for both disabled and non-disabled people. The respective gaps in NI and the UK average are shown below:

- Non-Disabled People receiving job related training – NI (17%) **7pp lower than UK average** (24%)
- Disabled People receiving job related training – NI (16%) **11pp lower than UK average** (27%)

Figure 5.39 - Would like a job (aged 16-64, %) by country, disability status, Q1 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey, ONS, UUEPC analysis

6 Qualitative Feedback

6.1 Evidence Gathering

This section of the report focuses on the barriers and constraints that may prevent people with disabilities from achieving their employment goals. It is informed by qualitative evidence collated via the following sources:

- One-to-one interviews with disabled persons
 - 20 interviews with a mix of individuals across a range of variables including:
 - Those who had / hadn't previously engaged with DfC
 - Type of disabilities / impairments
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Labour market status
 - Location
- Virtual workshops with disability sector representative groups and funded delivery organisations
 - 7 sessions hosted in total
 - 34 organisations attended ¹⁰
 - 42 individuals attended ¹¹
- Virtual Workshops with a range of employers / industry bodies
 - 12 employers / industry bodies represented
- Virtual workshop with JobStart Participants from DfC
 - A virtual workshop was hosted with 5 x JobStart ¹² Pilot Participants who have disabilities currently working within DfC

¹⁰ In total 56 organisations were invited to participate in the research

¹¹ In total 71 individuals were invited to participate in the research

¹² <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/jobstart-scheme>

6.2 Analysis

The qualitative feedback has been analysed and presented using six key headings:

1. Barriers and Challenges to Gaining Employment
2. Challenges – Staying and Progressing in Work
3. Positive Employment Impacts of COVID-19
4. Negative Employment Impacts of COVID-19
5. Possible Interventions
6. Benefits and Opportunities of Hiring People with Disabilities

6.3 Barriers and Challenges to Gaining Employment

- People with disabilities suffering from lack of confidence
- Change in recruitment practices - increased use of recruitment agencies
- Issues with the traditional recruitment process
- Negative stereotype against people with disabilities
- Limited flexibility / willingness to accommodate people with disabilities
- (Perceived) Impact and cost of reasonable adjustments
- Inflexibility of the benefits system for people with disabilities
- Unreliable transport services

The qualitative sessions identified a range of barriers and challenges to gaining employment. Whilst there were a number of different perspectives from the respective groups there were some similarities as well. One of the key issues that came up consistently with people with disabilities was a **lack of confidence**. The common consensus was that they were less inclined to apply for jobs based on previous negative experience / limited feedback from previous applications that they had submitted. This ties in to feedback received from employers / industry bodies who noted that they often encounter difficulties in recruiting people with disabilities. It was noted that they have to specifically go out of their way to employ a person with disabilities and that applicant levels are low. One of the other factors that was noted by employers was the fact that due to labour shortages, **more firms are using recruitment agencies** and as such have less control over who they employ as they may not always get sight of who applies for roles and are less involved in the sifting of candidates and providing feedback. This is potentially an area that requires additional research.

The **traditional recruitment process** of job application, potentially testing, and job interview then commencement of role was also flagged up by people with disabilities as a barrier. It was felt that this formal process was sometimes restrictive in terms of specific criteria that was insisted upon (qualifications / experience) and that greater flexibility should be allowed for if the qualification is not essential to the role. The formal process was also noted as a barrier as people with disabilities may not be as comfortable in the testing / interview setting and as such may be less inclined to pursue these types of role. The issue of confidence was again touched on here and a number of ways to tackle this were highlighted during the focus groups, these included job trials instead of formal interviews. It was also felt that having a charter mark for companies to include on job advertisements noting that they welcomed applications from people with disabilities would be welcomed. The example of the Disability Confident Employer Scheme¹³ was cited.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>

The sessions with people with disabilities indicated that they felt the **negative stereotype against people with disabilities persisted**. It was felt that employers in some instances have had negative experience of disabled employees having a lot of absences affecting their job performance and that someone with a disability may not be as productive as someone who did not have a disability. This was tested at the focus group with employers and industry bodies and the feeling was that this was not the case. The employers noted their experience of people with disabilities being a positive addition to the workforce. It was also noted that there were likely to be increased opportunities for people with disabilities moving forward due to labour shortages in certain areas, a record number of vacancies in NI and the increase in home / flexible working roles.

The workshops with sectoral organisations noted that in the past the **limited flexibility / willingness to accommodate people with disabilities** had been a significant issue. Historically employers were less willing to accommodate flexible working patterns to suit specific needs of individuals. It is hoped that this will be something that has seen a shift in mind-set based on experiences of the past two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent Ulster University Economic Policy Centre report¹⁴ suggests that “Pre-COVID, home-working (complete or regular) applied to less than 10% of the NI labour force. This increased to 41% in April 2020 and then fell slowly to 30% in May 2021, but even with the lifting of restrictions last Autumn homeworking remained at 21%”. It is hoped that this shift in working arrangements will facilitate greater labour market access for people with disabilities going forward.

The issue of the **impact and cost of adjustments** was also flagged up both by sectoral organisations representing people with disabilities but also by people with disabilities. The common consensus was that there was a lack of understanding from an employer’s point of view as to what reasonable adjustments constituted. This lack of understanding then resulted in the assumption that the adjustments would lead to significant cost that would have to be borne by the employer. The interviews with people with disabilities also noted that they felt some employers aren’t aware of what reasonable adjustments are. Feedback from both sides would suggest that increased literature / communication is required to educate employers on what reasonable adjustments may entail. A signposting exercise to direct employers to available supports may also be beneficial as they may be able to get funding support in some instances and as such make them more inclined to employ someone with a disability. Of those employers who were aware of funding supports some criticisms included that most help was available to support the employee and not the firm with funding to make the necessary adaptations. It was also felt that some funding opportunities and job schemes are very bureaucratic and so firms will choose to avoid them.

14 https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1076762/UUEPC-Future-of-Remote-Working-in-NI-February-2022-Full-Report.pdf

The **inflexibility of the benefits system for people with disabilities** wishing to enter employment even on a part-time basis was cited as a deterrent that may put people off making that first step into the labour market. The fear of losing benefits and support and taking a risk for a role that is part-time or temporary is a risk that not many wanted to take so it was felt that if greater support / flexibility in this area could be shown that this may change attitudes.

It was noted that there were **unreliable transport services** generally (and particularly in rural areas) and that this led to a dependency on the wider support network for the physically disabled making it harder to get a job as they had a limited geographical area to work within.

6.4 Challenges – Staying and Progressing in Work

- **Specific health condition or disability impacting on or limiting the work that a person could do**
- **Lack of on-going supports for people with disabilities**
- **Lack of awareness of supports (both for employers and within the workplace)**
- **Fear of disclosing a disability**
- **Lower levels of confidence (employees and employers)**
- **Encountering changes or issues within the workplace**
- **People with disabilities become comfortable in the security that a particular company / role offers**
- **Lack of on-going skill development**
- **Lower levels of qualifications achieved**
- **Unreliable transport services**

During the workshops, people with disabilities indicated that there were a number of key challenges to staying and progressing in work. The most prominent issue was in relation to a **specific health condition or disability impacting on or limiting the work that a person could do**. Feedback from people with disabilities highlighted that to progress further in a particular job may result in more stress, therefore, it is off-putting to progress your career if it leads to additional health concerns. Feedback from disability sector representative groups also noted that on-going health problems may require medical appointments and time off work which can disrupt normal working patterns. The unpredictable nature of some health conditions can also impact upon day to day performance as some conditions can quickly change.

Linked to the above, the sessions with disability sector representative groups highlighted that they felt there were a **lack of on-going supports for people with disabilities** once they had navigated the ‘first hurdle’ and secured employment. Feedback suggested that there was a general feeling that there was a concerted effort and range of supports to get people with disabilities into employment but once that objective was achieved, the support was then cut-off. It was suggested in the workshops that the level of on-going support required was not always available to both employers and to people with disabilities seeking to sustain and progress within the workplace. It was noted that support must be available and reflective of job responsibility as increasing responsibility can mean more training / support is required and this isn’t always a consideration.

Other organisations noted that there was sometimes **a lack of awareness of supports (both for employers and within the workplace)**. This was two-fold in that feedback suggested there were on-going supports that were available but that employees and employers were not aware of them suggesting that greater emphasis on promotion of these supports was required. It was also suggested that employers were unaware of the types of in-work supports that they should be offering in order to assist staff to progress. This could be as simple as continuous disability awareness training. Feedback suggested that this was sometimes a one-off event when a person with a disability started a role however there should be a requirement to complete regular refresher sessions as many things are subject to change within the workplace including the specific condition, individual teams / line-management and day-to-day work responsibilities. **Fear of disclosing a disability** (particularly hidden disabilities) may mean that a disabled person does not receive the support they need as the employer is not aware of their specific needs

Lower levels of confidence amongst disabled employees was again cited as a barrier, not only in applying for jobs but also, in sustaining employment and progressing within the workplace. Examples of issues raised included a lack of confidence to speak up and ask for support – e.g. it can take a lot of time and confidence for a person with a hearing impairment or someone who becomes hearing impaired to speak up about their issues. Lack of confidence was also flagged up from the perspective of employers as well. It was highlighted that in some instances the **employer may have low confidence** in approaching a sensitive topic such as disability and may be afraid to ask ‘difficult’ or personal questions as they are concerned that they may say or do the wrong thing causing offence and potentially leading to claims of discrimination.

The workplace is an ever changing environment and **encountering changes or issues within the workplace** was flagged up as a major challenge in sustaining and progressing in employment for people with disabilities. People with disabilities noted that the most significant challenge related to internal changes of personnel having direct impacts upon them personally. If for some reason a disabled person’s primary work contact (e.g. line manager / colleague) leaves their role (either promoted within an organisation or leaves to go to another job) this can have a devastating impact as the person with a disability may be left feeling isolated. It was noted that changes to personnel without a proper handover and full understanding of individual requirements can lead to confrontation and a difficult working environment for some with a disability.

People with disabilities and disability sector representative groups noted that **people with disabilities become comfortable in the security that a particular company / role offers**. It was apparent that when a disabled person secured employment they appeared less likely to look for alternative roles even if that meant career progression. There was a prevailing fear that the new role / employer wouldn’t be as accommodating to their specific needs.

Lack of on-going skill development was also cited as an issue by disability sector representative groups. It was felt that disabled employees were not provided with adequate opportunities for skills development to progress in the workplace. Again it was noted that a lot of time and investment is put into people getting a job but this slows down once a person is in the job. An additional barrier linked to skill development was that it was highlighted that many people with disabilities are in low skilled jobs where there is limited progression available, therefore, to progress they need to move jobs. However, as noted in previous feedback, people with disabilities appear less likely to seek out opportunities for career development due to lack of confidence and fear of change.

Other issues that were noted include legacy issues in relation to **lower levels of qualifications achieved**. It was highlighted by people with disabilities that in some instances their disability may have had an impact on their learning experience at school and as such has limited the qualifications that they achieved. Again the issue of only including certain qualifications in job specifications if absolutely necessary was raised as this can limit labour market opportunities for people with disabilities. It was also noted by one participant that they are keen to gain new qualifications but that they struggle greatly with online learning which they don't believe is suited to some people with disabilities.

People with disabilities and disability sector representative groups also highlighted how **unreliable transport services**, particularly in rural areas, has led to a dependency on the wider support network for the physically disabled. If a parent / guardian / carer cannot offer assistance with transport then it pushes people with certain disabilities further from the labour market.

6.5 Positive Employment Impacts of COVID-19

- **Shift in employer attitudes and their willingness to now embrace flexible working arrangements**
- **Reduced transport requirement of home working**
- **Not as physically demanding when working from home**
- **Greater scope to manage certain conditions**
- **Greater access to training supports**
- **Ease of access to medical support reducing disruption of working pattern**

The most common positive impact cited by people with disabilities and sectoral organisations was around the **shift in employer attitudes and their willingness to now embrace flexible working arrangements**. Feedback from people with disabilities indicated that they hoped that the adoption of more flexible working patterns would lead to:

- More opportunities for online social interaction.
- Less relationship (work politics) issues from ability to work from home.
- New opportunities for people with disabilities from job shifts (however training is required).
- Increased accessibility due to flexibility of working arrangements.
- Employers' stronger focus on mental health and wellbeing across all of workforce.

This feedback was also reflected in the feedback from employers and industry bodies who noted that there had been more opportunities for people with disabilities to work from home which has led to a reduction in sick days and that staff are reporting feeling healthier and happier. It was also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has made employers more open to being adaptable and flexible going forward. One of the benefits of home / remote working that was identified was that during remote meetings the use of closed captions puts everyone on an equal footing. This is not always the case in an in-person meeting if someone has a hearing impairment.

People with disabilities and the sectoral organisations cited **the reduced transport requirement of home working** made it easier for some as this was a specific barrier for those with mobility issues. People with disabilities also noted that work is **not as physically demanding when working from home**. There is a reduced commute time and **greater scope to manage certain conditions**. It was noted that for certain conditions like MS people have the opportunity to take a short break / lie down during their lunch break – something that would not be as socially acceptable in the traditional workplace environment.

An additional benefit identified by sectoral organisations was the **greater access to training supports** as a result of COVID-19. In-particular it was noted that a greater number of people with disabilities were willing to engage in training and that as there had been a shift to online delivery, this training was now more accessible due to reductions in travel and staff time.

It was also highlighted by people with disabilities that the change in the delivery of wider medical supports mean that they **can now attend medical appointments virtually. This reduces the impact on normal working patterns** and can be accommodated during lunch breaks etc and as such reducing overall performance / issues with their employer if recurring appointments are required.

6.6 Negative Employment Impacts of COVID-19

- Deterioration in mental health and wellbeing
- Workplace specific issues
 - o Rapid shift to home-working and adoption of new technology didn't suit everyone
 - o Some industries such as hospitality disproportionately impacted
 - o People with disabilities seen as higher risk recruits
 - o Businesses now focused on survival – may be less inclined to hire someone with a disability as assumed to be 'less productive'
- Restrictions such as mask wearing disproportionately impacting those with disabilities
- More difficult to offer in work supports
- New working arrangements may hinder disabled employees progressing in the workplace.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has had far reaching societal impacts. A range of negative repercussions have filtered into the labour market experiences and outcomes for people with disabilities. The most prominent of these issues from the qualitative research sessions related to personal and mental health issues. There was a feeling that the response to COVID-19 disproportionately impacted people with disabilities as supports were withdrawn, less health and wellbeing services were available which led to **deterioration in mental health and wellbeing**. Examples of issues faced included:

- Loss of confidence / progress that may have been made in previous years – this was a view that was shared by employers / industry bodies who feared that some disabled employees may simply not return to their jobs.
- Anxiety has worsened due to feeling isolated during lockdowns.
- Missing social aspect that the workplace provides and at times feels isolated at home, which is bad for morale.
- Lack of face-to-face contact is not good and may lead to a regression in development of some individuals.
- People with mental health and anxiety might struggle with coming back to the office and having to use public transport again.

COVID-19 has also had a wide ranging impact on workplace issues, a sample of these include:

- A rapid shift to home-working for many organisations meant that there was a heavy reliance on IT for video conferencing etc. This caused issues for some disabled personnel as they **were not IT literate**.
- A squeeze on the labour market including an increase in the **number of redundancies (particularly in the hospitality industry where a higher proportion of people with disabilities are employed)** lead to fears that there would be a saturation of talented workers seeking work which would squeeze disabled employees further from the labour market.
- People with disabilities felt that as society eased its way out of lockdown that people with disabilities may be seen as **'higher risk' recruits as they may be immunocompromised** and as such less likely to gain employment.
- There was also a perception that businesses would have a completely different mind-set at present. They would be **aiming for survival** and recruitment of the most productive staff to get them through the post COVID-19 recovery period and as such would not be willing to expend additional time and resources hiring a person with disabilities who may have lower productivity and require additional training needs. The workshops with employers noted that in some instances for smaller employers that may be true.

The implementation of and the changing nature of restrictions was also flagged up as an issue for people with disabilities in the labour market. Some examples included:

- **Mask wearing** – it was felt that this disproportionately impacted those with hearing impairments who relied on lip-reading for communication.
- **In-work support** – It was also noted that it became more difficult to offer in-work support for people with disabilities. Restrictions on social distancing, the fact that people with disabilities may be immunocompromised and restrictions on capacity of some venues / workplaces meant there were considerable challenges to offering in work support.
- **Following of restrictions** – There was a perception that those people with disabilities were more likely to follow restrictions to the letter of the law and as such may be pushed further from the labour market. The changing nature of restrictions often left people confused and in some cases they defaulted to the most severe level of restrictions causing more isolation than was required.

The workshop with Employers and Industry Bodies also highlighted that the aftermath of **new working arrangements may hinder disabled employees progressing in the workplace**. It was noted that disabled employees who are shielding and remain at home might miss out on promotions as managers promote those who are in the office as they see them more often. It was also noted that working from home can be challenging for some staff with anxiety as they find engaging in virtual meetings with their cameras on a challenge.

6.7 Possible Interventions

- Offer increased amount of flexible / home-working positions
- Increased education and awareness within the workplace
- Greater flexibility with benefits
- Changes in approach to recruitment
 - o Job Trials / Analysis
 - o Disability Confident Scheme
- More training for existing employees and staff
- Increase in positive campaigns surrounding people with disabilities in employment
- Increase in funding to support employers
- Specialist career advice for people with disabilities
- Potential changes to disability legislation
- More approachable disability bodies
- Greater engagement with support networks
- Support via Procurement Routes

The qualitative evidence gathering identified a range of suggested interventions to aid people with disabilities gain employment and progress within the labour market. Examples include:

- **Increased flexibility from employers** was cited by people with disabilities and sectoral organisations. This included the provision of more part-time and flexible (home working) positions going forward. Feedback from people with disabilities highlighted that offering flexibility and allowing working from home can help reduce anxiety levels, and reduce sick leave. Flexibility could also relate to working patterns i.e. allow employees to work their hours in 4 days instead of 5 days so they have an extra day off away from pressures of the workplace. Flexibility around sick leave can also help i.e. allow employees to leave the workplace and finish working day at home, or introduce measures where they can make up their hours such as working later into the night, or when going through a good period allowing them to work an extra hour each day.
- People with disabilities and sectoral organisations highlighted that **more education and awareness** was required about what reasonable adjustments constituted and people with disabilities noted that there should be more frequent reviews of reasonable adjustments for existing staff. Employers suggested that greater guidance is needed on what people with disabilities think will help them in their role and also advice on the specific language to include in job adverts to encourage people with disabilities to apply.

- **Increase flexibility with benefit claimants** that they feel incentivised to gain employment without risk of losing benefits and being worse off.
- Sectoral organisations and people with disabilities highlighted the **recruitment process** as an area that could be adjusted. The following changes were suggested:
 - Instead of interviews, use 'Job Trials' that last about 3 months which could be funded by Higher Education / Further Education to help ease the funding issues
 - Mock interviews - If an employee with a disability is taken on after a job trial, then mock interviews can be hosted to boost confidence and prepare them if they want to move to a different role. Adjustments can also be made such as getting the questions in advance and getting to view the interview space prior to the interview to boost confidence and ensure the candidate is comfortable.
 - Increased job analysis to identify support and iron out potential issues for people with disabilities before they come up. Benefits of work message needs improved.
- **More on-going support and training for employees** - compulsory training could be offered to managers and colleagues to increase understanding and awareness of mental health disabilities. This training should be considered just as important as whatever qualifications they may have.
 - Support and training programmes should be offered to help improve interview skills, as they can be good for building confidence.
 - Training for staff - training to enable other staff to work alongside those with disabilities, allowing disabled employees to work more independently.
- The need for **promotion of positive messages and role models telling success stories of people with disabilities** in the workplace was highlighted. It was felt that there should be an emphasis on campaigns with positive messages and showcasing disabled role models. It was also suggested that employers should offer external advocates, someone with a good understanding of mental health disabilities, for employees to speak to and express concerns to.
- A sectoral organisation highlighted an **increased need for funding for employers to provide support** on an on-going basis. This could potentially take the form of incentives such as grants for employers who employ people with disabilities. Overall it was felt that more funding needed to be made available for making reasonable adjustments.

- Other suggested interventions included:
 - **Greater emphasis on specialist career advice for disabled young people.**
 - **Changes to Disability Legislation** - Review of regulations and updates to be more inclusive of mental illness; and, collating and summarising all information into one document so that employers can quickly access relevant information removing potential barriers to employing a person with a disability.
 - **More approachable disability bodies** – Some employers felt that there needs to be one leading body that is approachable and a safe space for employers to ask questions without fear of getting in trouble.
 - **Greater engagement with support networks** - Sometimes family members notice a deterioration in condition first, therefore employers should be open to having discussions with them. This can reduce the pressure felt by someone with anxiety as they then won't have to discuss it with their employer.
 - **Support via Procurement Routes** – The importance of social value clauses in large public sector contracts was noted as key. Feedback from sectoral organisations suggested that public sector organisations should use their procurement power to encourage the private sector to work with the voluntary/third sector. One method suggested was to make it a requirement for organisations to consider social value clauses in their contracts.

6.8 Benefits and Opportunities of Hiring People with Disabilities

- **Benefits**
 - o **Positive addition to the workforce**
 - o **Showed diversity / inclusivity and also increased morale**
 - o **Loyal employees with great team-building skills**
 - o **No major issues in terms of absence**
 - o **High job retention rates**
- **Opportunities**
 - o **Increase in Digital Jobs and working from home (including manufacturing)**
 - o **More access to on the job training**
 - o **Increase in high profile role models – increases confidence**

This theme was raised solely at the sessions with Employers and Industry Bodies to understand their experiences of employing people with disabilities and the benefits and opportunities that this has created. Key benefits included:

- Employers believed that people with disabilities were a positive addition to the workforce and helped to demonstrate that their firm was inclusive. They also believed that it increased morale within the workforce.
- Employers noted that disabled employees tend to be very loyal and also have great team building skills.
- It was noted that there is a negative perception associated with hiring people with disabilities such as more sick days, however the employers noted that there was actually low indications of extra sick days due to disability. Feedback from employers also highlighted that people with disabilities tended to have really good job retention as disabled employees tend to enjoy stability and routine. It was also noted that people with disabilities tend to report high job satisfaction.

Feedback from Employers and Industry Bodies also noted the following opportunities:

- An increasing number of jobs are going digital and offer working from home, which may be more suited to those with disabilities as homeworking is more accessible, flexible and adaptable.
- Sectors like manufacturing often offer on-the-job training meaning previous experience may not be required and helps people with disabilities build skills and employability – due to labour shortages in these sectors this may become more common.

- Increasing numbers of people with disabilities are achieving high profile roles which helps increase people with disabilities' confidence as well as bringing new ideas/insight on how to make firms more accessible.

7 Summary of Key Findings

There is a noticeable variance in the employment rate and challenges faced depending on someone's disability status. Those with disabilities were found to face the least favourable employment outcomes. People with disabilities were limited in the amount and variety of jobs they could apply for and the type of work they could do. From recruitment through to employment and progression within employment there are limitations and barriers faced by people with disabilities. A combination of complex job descriptions, complicated application processes and a lack of understanding by employers to recognise and accommodate each individual's abilities and potential limit the roles people with disabilities can apply for and progress in.

The evidence provided in this report across a number of spheres (literature review, data analysis and qualitative evidence) helps to provide answers to the overall aims of the research. The key questions that the report sought to answer were as follows:

- Employment outcomes – How do employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland compare to those for non-disabled people? What are the gaps and where are they widest? How have the gaps changed over time? How do disparities in NI compare with other UK countries?
- Barriers and challenges – What are the key barriers and challenges to people with disabilities gaining, staying and progressing in employment?
- Employment impacts of COVID-19 – What are the employment impacts of COVID-19 for people with disabilities in terms of outcomes, barriers and opportunities?
- Need for Intervention – What interventions might be needed to support and enable people with disabilities to overcome barriers and gain, stay and progress in employment?

The data analysis shows clearly that there are disparities in labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland. People with disabilities have consistently underperformed in key labour market outcome metrics over the time period 2014-2020. The data analysis shows that in NI people with a disability can be characterised as being:

Less likely...	More likely...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be employed • To work in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skilled trades occupations - Professional occupations - Associate professional and technical occupations • To score higher against key work quality metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Career Progression - Involvement in Decision Making - Job Satisfaction - Meaningful Work Score • To work full-time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be economically inactive • To work in lower skilled occupations such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caring, Leisure and Other Service occupations - Sales and customer service occupations • To be underemployed • To be paid less than non-disabled people • To work part-time

The above comparisons relates solely to comparisons between disabled and non-disabled people in NI. When comparing NI data to UK data it is clear that significant disparities exist which highlight that people with disabilities in NI are typically worse off than people with disabilities in the other UK countries. People with disabilities in NI underperform against the equivalent UK groups in a range of metrics including:

- Higher economic inactivity rate;
- Lower employment rate;
- Higher disability employment gap; and
- Lower levels of pay.

The literature review identified a number of barriers to gaining and sustaining employment, these included impairment factors, recruitment practices, access to transport, access to supports, discrimination, stigma and social attitudes. For NI specifically there was a consistent theme of a lack of confidence among people with disabilities in actually engaging with the labour market. This appears to have been as a result of previous negative experiences, including a lack of feedback from job applications, negative experiences at interview etc. Notably, the feedback from employers indicated that they received very few applications from people with disabilities and actually had to ‘go out of their way’ to hire someone with a disability.

It is clear that a multi-faceted approach is required to target the barriers and challenges to gaining and sustaining employment for people with disabilities in NI. The significant gaps that exist between disabled and non-disabled people in NI and the wider gaps that exist when comparing NI to other UK countries mean that actions and targets need to be coherent and adopt a longer term approach. Northern Ireland is facing a working age population that is growing at a much slower rate than in previous decades. For the three decades from 1980 to 2010, the working age population in Northern Ireland increased by over ~260,000. However, in the last decade those aged 16-64 increased by just ~15,000

and in the 2020s it is forecast to increase by less than 3,000¹⁵. This provides an opportunity for people with disabilities to be an untapped source of labour in coming years in NI and potentially realise greater labour market outcomes.

COVID-19 Impacts

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a number of additional challenges for people with disabilities including a deterioration in mental health and wellbeing as people became isolated. There were also instances where people with disabilities were disproportionately affected such as some industries (hospitality) that hired a greater proportion of people with disabilities feeling the greatest impact. It also became more difficult to offer in work supports. Feedback also suggested that there may have been a mind-set shift from business owners to focus on survival, making them less inclined to hire someone with a disability who could be assumed to be 'less productive'.

There were however a number of positive impacts that could help NI address the disparities in labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in coming years. Interventions suggested by key stakeholders included greater flexibility with the assessment and tapering off of benefit entitlement for people with disabilities seeking to move into the labour market. At present some people with disabilities are afraid to leave the 'safety net' of benefits for a temporary job or one which they are unsure that they can sustain long-term. The importance of emphasising the social benefits of people with disabilities within the workforce was also noted and it was suggested that this should be increasingly supported via public sector procurement and inclusion of social clauses.

Interventions

It was encouraging that there was a correlation between the interventions identified as part of the wider literature review and those interventions that were suggested by key stakeholders in NI. Examples of the interventions that were suggested included offering increased flexible / home-working positions, increased education and awareness within the workplace, changes to the traditional recruitment process allowing for greater flexibility for people with disabilities and also offering greater employment and individual supports. The importance of information and awareness raising was emphasised and the benefits of having positive role models in high profile roles was noted.

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Annex A: Research Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE

DISABILITY WITHIN THE NORTHERN IRELAND LABOUR MARKET

Background

- Article 27 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; including the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.¹⁶
- In line with Article 27, the Department for Communities (DfC) is committed to supporting people with disabilities to overcome barriers and achieve their employment goals. An Executive level Disability Strategy is due to be published in 2021 and DfC is developing a Disability Employment Strategy that will align with and deliver upon the Executive Disability Strategy.
- In addition, DfC is aware that the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the economy has exacerbated some of the pre-existing inequalities in society. The Department is keen to understand the challenges and opportunities the current situation brings so that it can put in place appropriate interventions to support equality for people with disabilities through employment.
- This research project has been commissioned to assist the Department to further understand the experience of and issues faced by people with disabilities in achieving their employment goals. It will seek to strengthen the evidence base on employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland and inform the development of the Disability Employment Strategy.

Objectives

- The research project will focus on providing evidence on employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland; identifying disparities, understanding barriers and exploring the need for targeted interventions to address the challenges. The research will also take stock of the employment impacts of COVID-19 for people with disabilities and the need for targeted interventions.

16 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

- In particular, the research project will aim to address the following questions:
 - Employment outcomes – How do employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland compare to those for non-disabled people? What are the gaps and where are they widest? How have the gaps changed over time? How do disparities in NI compare with other UK countries?
 - Barriers and challenges – What are the key barriers and challenges to people with disabilities gaining, staying and progressing in employment?
 - Employment impacts of COVID-19 – What are the employment impacts of COVID-19 for people with disabilities in terms of outcomes, barriers and opportunities?
 - Need for Intervention – What interventions might be needed to support and enable people with disabilities to overcome barriers and gain, stay and progress in employment?

Approach

- This research project will be undertaken by Professional Services Unit (PSU) in collaboration with Work & Wellbeing Division and the DoF ELMS team. The research will consist of:
 - Literature and policy review: examining barriers to employment for people with disabilities and interventions adopted elsewhere
 - Quantitative analysis: comparing labour market outcomes for disabled and non-disabled people over time across a range of indicators with breakdowns where possible by age, sex, impairment, location, sector, occupation, and qualification level.
 - Qualitative analysis – exploring the key challenges and barriers to employment for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland.

Steering Group

- A steering group chaired by the Director of Work and Wellbeing Division (Deirdre Ward) will oversee the research. The Steering Group will include:
 - **Work & Wellbeing Division**
 - Deirdre Ward (Chair)
 - Shauna Robinson
 - Stephen McGlew

- **PSU**
 - Gillian Callan
 - Jennifer Doak
 - Michael McFadden
 - Rory Saville
- **Disability Policy**
 - Martin Walker
- **DoF Statistician (ELMS)**
 - Cathryn Blair
- **DfC Customer Insights Team**
 - Patricia Maguire
- **UU Economic Policy Centre**
 - Richard Johnston

Output

- The main output from this project will be a research report setting out the key findings on disparities in employment outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland, the barriers to employment for people with disabilities, the employment impacts of COVID-19 and potential interventions that may be needed to support people with disabilities to overcome barriers and gain, retain and progress in employment.

Annex B: List of Organisations Who Participated in Evidence Gathering Workshops

Disability Sector Representative Groups who participated in Virtual Workshops (alphabetical order):

Access Centre NI	National Autistic Society
Access Employment Ltd	National Deaf Children's Society
Action Mental Health	Northern Health Trust
Cedar Foundation	Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment - NIUSE
Centre for Independent Living NI	Now Group
Clanrye Group Limited	Orchardville
Deafblind UK/NI	RNIB
Derry Youth & Community Workshop	RNID - National Hearing Loss Charity
Disability Action	South Eastern Trust
First Steps Women's Centre	Southern Health Trust
IMTAC	Specialisterne
incredABLE	Stepping Stones NI
Job Directions Ltd	The Appleby Trust
L'Arche Belfast	Triangle Housing Association Ltd
LEONARD CHESHIRE	Ulster Supported Employment Ltd (USEL)
Mencap	Western Trust
MY WAY ACCESS	Women's Centre Derry

Businesses / Employers and Industry Bodies who participated in Virtual Workshops (alphabetical order):

Alchemy Technology Services	NI Tourism Alliance
Concentrix	NIE Networks
Devenish Nutrition	Openreach
Hillsborough Castle	Pinsent Masons
Institute of Directors NI	Ryobi Aluminium Casting UK Ltd
Manufacturing NI	Titanic Belfast
NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry	

Annex C – Additional Policy and Literature Review

Policy Interventions Examples

Employment & Individual Support

Country:	Austria
Scheme Name:	Work assistance
Description:	Disabled jobseekers are provided a variety of consultations, information and counselling as well as support during job/apprenticeship searches and during the induction and training phases for new employees; clarification of occupational perspectives and alternatives; development of constructive solutions and crisis management; and, clarification of perspectives on safeguarding jobs and long-term (re) integration into the labour market.
Impact:	Improved outcomes for both people with disabilities and companies, however, difficulties in cooperation are a key hindering factor for the effectiveness of these interventions.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	Netherlands
Scheme Name:	Jobcoach
Description:	An employee with a long-term illness or disability is accompanied by a job coach to, or in, a job. The employee receives personalised training or an induction programme and guidance in the workplace and by the end, the employee should be able to work independently without personal guidance. However, the job coach remains available to provide support when difficulties arise.
Impact:	Widely used in the (re)integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market, with satisfactory participation rates. However, key challenges consist of a lack of harmonisation in service provision, and a limited number of hours available for job coaching.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	England & Wales
Scheme Name:	Intensive Personalised Employment Support programme
Description:	This programme launched in late 2019, and provides personalised support to those with more complex needs or barriers, with aims to benefit 10,000 people. Beneficiaries are provided with a dedicated support worker who provides one-to-one support and training to help them get into work. This support is usually received for 15 months, as well as 6 months of on-the-job support if employment is found.
Impact:	As of yet the programme's impact hasn't been evaluated, however, support for those with the greatest needs and in the most complex situations had previously been provided through Specialist Employability Support, which in the 4 years that it was open, had 9,720 referrals and 7,020 starts with 16% of those who started on the programme moving into sustained employment.
Cited in:	Powell (2021)

Workplace Adaptations and Assistance

Country:	Germany
Scheme Name:	Work assistance
Description:	Employees who have a severe disability and require regular and permanent support to adequately perform work are given a personal budget to hire a work assistant.
Impact:	This scheme helps support employees' performance and increases their chances of securing employment. The personal budget creates autonomy for the employee with disabilities, which results in freedom of choice, increases beneficiaries' independence and reduces bureaucracy. However, the scheme's impact is limited due to the restricted budget and duration of the support alongside the complex procedures, low visibility and limited sustainability of the results without continued assistance.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Training and Upskilling

Country:	Malta
Scheme Name:	Bridging the Gap
Description:	Supports people with disabilities to transition to employment through a work experience period, with the possibility of employment at the end of the placement. Employers benefit from specialised guidance, receive financial incentives and face no additional costs for this period.
Impact:	The exposure to the labour market enhances participants' skills and employment opportunities, even if they are not retained.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	Netherlands
Scheme Name:	Trial placement
Description:	Employers are provided with wage subsidies for a two-month period to enable them to employ a person with a disability on a trial basis. To qualify, a real job opportunity needs to exist in the company and employers must declare in advance that they intend to hire a candidate after the trial placement for at least six months.
Impact:	Results show that in half of the cases examined the candidate was retained.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	England
Scheme Name:	Supported Internships
Description:	Supported Internships have been in place in England since September 2013, and look to provide “coherent, personalised, learning programmes” to help disabled young people move into employment.
Impact:	Overtime the number of young people with statements of special educational needs (SEN) or education, health and care (EHC) plans who have partook in these internships increased from 1,186 in January 2018 to 1,646 in January 2019 and 2,231 in January 2020.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	England
Scheme Name:	Surrey Choices EmployAbility service
Description:	An EmployAbility run service from January to December 2015 that provided 16 autistic jobseekers across Surrey, training, work experience and ongoing support. Training included identifying people’s skills and needs for development, CV preparation, confidence building and interview training.
Impact:	Personalised internships were found in areas of work including retail, web design and administration. 7 out of 16 (43%) were in paid work at the end of the project, and half were in ongoing work experience or volunteering. The programme cost just under £3,000 head per annum and an evaluation of the project stated that it represented good value for the public purse as it led to savings to benefits, improvement in family life and socialising for the disabled individuals involved.
Cited in:	The National Autistic Society (2016)

Financial Incentives

Country:	Sweden
Scheme Name:	Lönebidrag (wage allowance)
Description:	Employers are provided with a wage subsidy to incentivise employers to make reasonable adjustments to the specific needs of employees with disabilities, so that they can be retained after the financial support ends.
Impact:	The main positive impacts of this scheme include improved personal, working and social situations for workers with disabilities, especially in the early years; an increase in employment duration; and, better future opportunities in the labour market. However, it has been recorded that people with disabilities who benefited from the support still face difficulties when they attempt to fully transition into the open labour market, appearing to be locked into a sequence of subsidised jobs.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	Denmark
Scheme Name:	Flexijobs
Description:	Employers who offer adjustments to hours and workplaces for eligible people with disabilities are awarded a permanent wage subsidy of 50 to 60%.
Impact:	Public Health Research Consortium [PHRC] (2009, cited in Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2013b) reported positive employment effects for people aged 35 to 44, but for no other age groups, with another report reviewing the evidence and concluding that that progression to unsubsidised employment is low. The evaluation of Flexijobs raised various concerns including; a potentially marginalising effect, with people with disabilities encouraged into low skilled work with low pay, mainly outside the normal legal framework of employment rights; crowding out effect and deadweight loss as over time people were increasingly assigned to Flexijobs who would have got jobs anyway; and, stigmatisation.
Cited in:	Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b)

Country:	Finland
Scheme Name:	Pay subsidy
Description:	Employers of people with disabilities are given a flat-rate wage subsidy paid at a level below the minimum wage for up to 24 months, with even more generous subsidies to social enterprises.
Impact:	OECD (2010, cited in Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2013b) found that the approach in Finland compared to the Flexijobs scheme in Denmark avoided the problem of deadweight loss by imposing very strict conditions on employers. As a result, the Finnish scheme was shown to have stimulated employment in subsidised firms without distorting competition or crowding out of employment in non-subsidised firms. However, a report by Purvis et al. (2013, cited in Coleman, Sykes and Groom, 2013b) stated that in Finland, there was a low take-up of the subsidies and few individuals were kept on after the subsidy ended.
Cited in:	Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b)

Vocational rehabilitation & Sickness Management

Country:	England & Wales
Scheme Name:	Work and Health Programme
Description:	This program was initially launched in North West England and Wales in November 2017 and then rolled out across the rest of England during early 2018. Its aim is to provide support on a voluntary basis to those with a health condition, disabilities and other various groups of vulnerable people to gain and keep a job (for those who have been unemployed for over two years, the programme is compulsory).
Impact:	Up to November 2020 around three quarters of the individuals who had been referred had started on the programme (133,900 out of 184,300, with the majority of these being people with disabilities). Out of these, there has been almost 21,000 job outcomes, meaning they had reached a specified level of earnings or have been in self-employment for six months.
Cited in:	Powell (2021)

Country:	Netherlands
Scheme Name:	N/A (Various initiatives)
Description:	Initiatives to transfer long-term absence costs to employers along with support and resources to implement reintegration of employees.
Impact:	Findings from an OECD study concluded that a fall in the number of new disability benefit claims could be attributed in the Netherlands to increased responsibilities among employers to monitor sickness absence.
Cited in:	Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2013b)

Job Carving and Crafting

Country:	Malta
Scheme Name:	Job-carving for jobseekers with disabilities
Description:	As a consequence of the enforcement of the 2% employment quota for persons with disabilities in Maltese enterprises, Jobsplus, the Maltese Public Employment Service, entered into a partnership with the Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF), which is an entity specialising in the labour market integration of job seekers with disabilities. LSF set up a corporate relations unit which supported enterprises in recruitment of people with disabilities by identifying existing occupations within an enterprise that are potentially suitable for people with disabilities. The job carving was then carried out by carefully analysing the enterprise requirements and operation/workflow, identifying elements, tasks and outcomes from existing jobs in the enterprise to design a new job or a workflow that can integrate a person with disability or a mixed-ability group of people.
Impact:	As of April 2018, due to making use of the job carving approach it was possible to create 278 suitable jobs for jobseekers with disabilities (As a note, as of 2021 population of Malta is around 440,000).
Cited in:	Eurofound (2018)

Country:	Belgium
Scheme Name:	WEB+
Description:	WEB is a social economy organisation in Belgium which focuses on the integration of vulnerable long-time unemployed with the labour market. WEB offers advice to employers, helping them to develop customised job design which aids them in incorporating people from vulnerable groups into their workforce. WEB also offers a variety of support options including individual coaching, support with job hunting and matching, internships and workplace learning.
Impact:	In 2017, 138 clients out of a total of 370 received workplace actions. 140 clients completed a pathway to a job in the regular open labour market.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2018)

Information and Awareness-Raising

Country:	Finland
Scheme Name:	Career opportunities for people with partial work ability
Description:	An online one-stop shop that addresses the fragmentation of available services, and targets professionals working with disadvantaged groups, people with a reduced work ability and employers.
Impact:	Makes information on each service easily accessible and available, contributing to the effectiveness of the overall support system.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	England
Scheme Name:	Disability Confident
Description:	A government programme launched in England in November 2016 which aims to influence, promote, and educate employers on the benefits of recruiting and retaining disabled employees. Disability Confident has three levels: Disability Confident Committed (level 1), Disability Confident Employer (level 2) and Disability Confident Leader (level 3), with employers having to complete each level before being given accreditation to move on to the next.
Impact:	<p>As of 4 June 2021, over 20,800 employers had signed up to the Disability Confident scheme with over 11.2 million employees working for a Disability Confident employer. Although the scheme has been successful at raising awareness of disability employment issues and its aims are laudable, the scheme was reported not to be making any measurable impact on increasing the number of people with disabilities in work and was described by many as a tick box exercise, with requirements for employers not being robust or challenging enough, with over-reliance on self-certification as a means of awarding accreditation to employers.</p> <p>In January 2018, the Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Marsha de Cordova, stated that there is little evidence that the scheme is enabling more people with disabilities to gain sustainable and supportive employment. However, following this, DWP did publish an evaluation of the scheme that concluded that it had some positive impact on recruitment, with half of surveyed employers reporting that they had recruited at least one disabled individual as a result of joining the scheme.</p>
Cited in:	HCWPC (2021) & Powell (2021)

Career Counselling & Guidance

Country:	England
Scheme Name:	Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme
Description:	This programme was rolled out nationally across England in November 2016 and aimed to provide targeted high quality careers advice, with one group that was targeted being young people aged 12-18 who, due to a health or disability issue, faced a potential disadvantage in the labour market.
Impact:	An evaluation of the programme in 2018, reported that the programme “was seen as positive in engaging with students from a wide range of schools” and that the targeted support “was felt to have a greater effect on student outcomes”.
Cited in:	Powell (2021)

Country:	Slovenia
Scheme Name:	Transition of young people
Description:	Promotion of systematic activities to ensure greater social inclusion of young people with special needs, which led to a unified supporting environment as an interface between school and the labour market. This scheme involved involvement of different stakeholders and educational institutions as well as the beneficiaries' parents, which allowed creation of specialised teams that were more able to support the transition of students with disabilities from education to the labour market.
Impact:	The scheme was found to be successful in increasing the motivation of people with disabilities and bringing them closer to the world of work.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Sheltered Employment

Country:	Sweden
Scheme Name:	Sheltered employment
Description:	Samhall a state-owned company offers education and training to individuals with disabilities and offers employment through a network of employers. Samhall primarily provides sheltered employment, but the training it offers also creates opportunities for people to move into the open labour market.
Impact:	Approximately 1,500 employees leave each year for a position with another employer, most often the employer for which they already work through Samhall. However, a key challenge is sustainability of such outcomes as there is a high probability of workers returning to sheltered employment after they leave.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Social enterprises & Public Procurement

Country:	Lithuania
Scheme Name:	Social Enterprise subsidies
Description:	Social enterprises provide subsidies to companies that have at least 50% of employees with disabilities, working at least 80 hours per month. These subsidies help cover costs related to wages, adaptations, assistance and training.
Impact:	Contributed to increased employment and prolonged job tenure of people with disabilities.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	Finland
Scheme Name:	Jobs through public procurement
Description:	Four municipalities piloted the use of social criteria in public procurement procedures, which used employment criteria that required suppliers to employ a certain number of disadvantaged people if municipalities were buying goods or services from them.
Impact:	New jobs were created, especially in social and healthcare services, without leading to higher prices for purchases. However, the main shortcomings included: long, slow processes involved; the requirement for a 'facilitator' to negotiate between the government organisations, public employment service officials and competing companies involved in the procurement; challenges to find suitable candidates; and, a lack of follow-up of the employment effects. Nevertheless, the scheme was found to generate positive outcomes and created a model that could be replicated in other municipalities.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Legislation

Country:	Germany
Scheme Name:	Special protection against dismissal
Description:	An employer can only dismiss a person with complex disabilities when there is prior consent from a specialised office.
Impact:	Evidence shows that it is effective in counteracting barriers related to discrimination and stereotypes, however, employers may considerate the measure as an employment obstacle and given that approval by the office in charge takes a long time, it can be used as a delaying tactic when negotiating a settlement.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

Country:	All European Member States except Denmark, Finland, Latvia and Sweden
Scheme Name:	Quotas
Description:	Employers must employ a minimum percentage of people with disabilities, typically between 2% and 7% and may apply to both the public and private sector or public bodies only. Most countries impose a fine on companies that do not fulfil their quotas, with the payment from the fine sometimes being redistributed to organisations employing more than the minimum number of people with disabilities, however, some countries allow companies other ways to fulfil their quota obligation beyond direct employment including financial contributions, the provision of internship programmes or outsourcing to sheltered employment structures for people with disabilities.
Impact:	Evaluation evidence suggests that the effectiveness of employment quotas is limited, leading to small employment gains which may be partly due to substitution effect, and the use of quotas may raise the risk of employers 'cherry picking' disabled jobseekers who can be more easily mobilised towards the labour market, leaving those who are most in need of support behind.
Cited in:	Eurofound (2021)

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