

Accessibility of public services

Key facts from the Life Opportunities Survey interim results, 2009/10

The Life Opportunities Survey (LOS) is a new large scale longitudinal survey of disability in Great Britain. Interim results from the first year of the two year baseline survey were published on the 9th December 2010(1) and the information below presents some of the key facts from this report. In addition to these results, presented in boxes are some of the findings from the qualitative research that was commissioned to complement the statistics provided by the LOS(1).

The information below explores the experiences of adults(2) when accessing public services. The range of public services covered include benefits and pensions services, health services, tax services, justice services, social services and culture, sports and leisure services.

Experience of accessing public services

- When all public services are considered together, more than a third (36 per cent) of adults with impairments(3) experienced difficulty accessing public services compared with just over a fifth (22 per cent) of adults without impairments.
- As seen in Table 1, the public services where the highest proportion of all adults reported experiencing at least some difficulty were the benefits and pensions services (27 per cent).
- Almost a third (32 per cent) of adults with impairments reported difficulty accessing the benefits and pensions services compared with just under a quarter of adults without impairments (23 per cent).

1 See <http://www.odi.gov.uk/disability-statistics-and-research/life-opportunities-survey.php> for more information.

2 Results presented are from adults (those aged 16 and over) who were interviewed as part of the LOS between June 2009 and March 2010.

3 Please refer to the definition of adults with impairments included in Chapter 1 of the LOS Interim Report, 2009/10.

Table 1: Experience of using public services for adults by impairment status, 2009/10

	Percentage of	
	Adults without impairments	Adults with impairments
	%	%
Health services	17	28
Justice services	16	23
Benefits and pensions services	23	32
Culture, sports and leisure services	5	14
Tax services	19	24
Social services	24	27

Source: Office for National Statistics

Barriers to accessing the benefits and pensions services

- Many of the most common barriers were identified fairly equally by adults with and without impairments, including:
 - Difficulty contacting by phone (61 per cent and 63 per cent respectively)
 - Unhelpful or inexperienced staff (47 per cent and 49 per cent respectively)
 - Lack of accessible information (25 per cent for both groups)
- Adults with impairments were around three times as likely as adults without impairments to identify anxiety or lack of confidence (10 per cent and 3 per cent respectively) and difficulty with transport (7 per cent and 2 per cent respectively) as barriers to accessing the benefits and pensions services.
- These barriers were also more likely to be experienced by adults with impairments when accessing the other public services considered.

The qualitative research demonstrates how some of the above barriers interact to reduce the accessibility of public services to adults with impairments. For example, one participant with impairments said he did not know what to do when he entered a Jobcentre Plus, was reluctant to ask for help as he did not want to draw attention to his impairment, and so had left without using the service.

“What organisations do I contact? I don't know. I went to the dole office last week, I didn't know what to do.”

He felt the system was too complicated for someone with a learning impairment, and that he needed more help to navigate it.