

Employment

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 barriers to and enablers of employment for adults(2).

Employment status

- Working age(3) disabled adults, as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)(4), were less likely to be in work than non-disabled adults of working age. Half (50 per cent) of working age DDA disabled adults were in work (as seen in Figure 1), compared with three-quarters (76 per cent) of non-disabled adults of working age. This is similar when compared with the Office for Disability Issues disability equality indicator(5) B1 – ‘Employment rates’.
- The findings are the same when using the impairment based definition of disability(4).

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

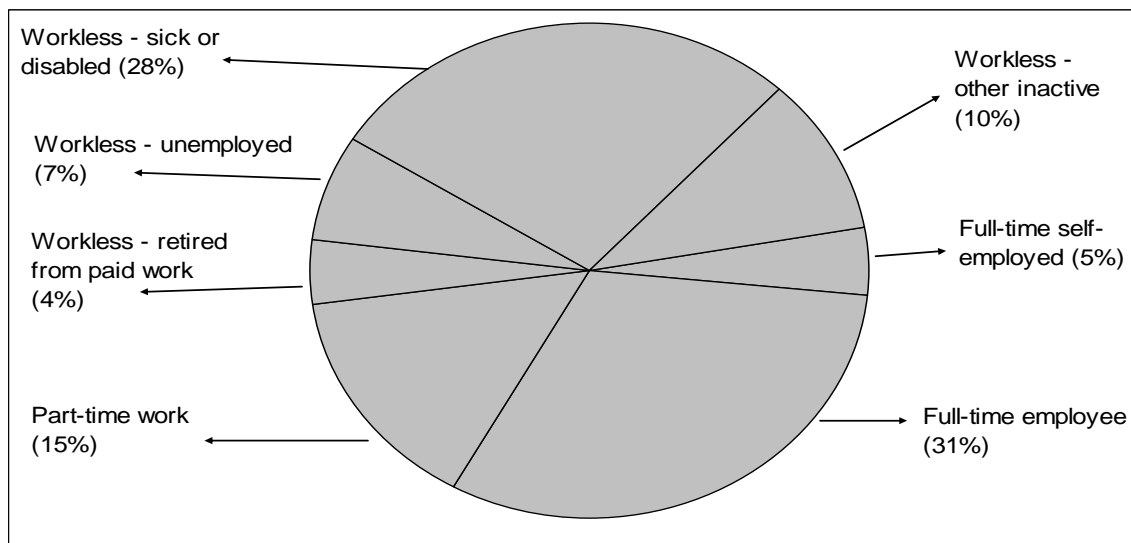
2 Results presented are from adults (those aged 16 and over) who were interviewed as part of the LOS between June 2009 and March 2010.

3 Old working age definition (males 16 to 64 and females 16 to 59).

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

5 Further information regarding the Disability Equality Indicators can be found at www.odi.gov.uk/indicators

Figure 1: Summary of employment status for DDA disabled adults of working age, 2009/10



Source: Office for National Statistics

Barriers to employment for economically inactive adults(2) (not working and not seeking work)

- The most common reason economically inactive adults gave for why they were not seeking work was reasons relating to a health condition, illness or impairment. 70 per cent of adults with impairments gave this reason.
- A common barrier to work for economically inactive adults was family responsibilities, identified by 43 per cent of all adults. Other barriers identified by economically inactive adults with impairments included anxiety or lack of confidence (19 per cent), difficulty with transport (11 per cent) and the attitudes of employers (6 per cent).

Participants in the qualitative research showed how perceptions of employer attitudes to disabled people can create a barrier to employment. For example, some participants with impairments reported that their employers were unwilling to provide equipment and assistance. One participant with impairments explained that, because her impairments were not immediately apparent, her colleagues did not believe she required any assistance. Other participants with impairments were unwilling to disclose their impairments when applying for a new job, as they feared they would not be offered the position, and then found it difficult to request assistance after they started.

“I wrote on my applications that I had ..., so I think maybe employers thought, oh, he’s going to have a hard time, so maybe I didn’t get as many interviews as I could have if I hadn’t mentioned it.”

Barriers to employment for unemployed adults(2) ie those seeking work

- Lack of job opportunities was the most common barrier reported for both adults with and without impairments (both 41 per cent).
- Difficulty with transport was the second most common barrier identified by adults with impairments (31 per cent).

The qualitative research shows how public transport can act as both a barrier to and an enabler of employment. One participant with impairments used to take the train to work, but could not hear announcements about platform alterations which were rarely shown on information displays. She watched other passengers who she knew travelled on the same train to find out what platform she should be on, but often missed her train completely. She therefore decided to get the bus, which has a visual display giving the destination and the name of each stop, which makes it much easier for her to get to work.

- A total of 16 per cent of unemployed adults with impairments identified anxiety or lack of confidence as a barrier to employment.

A number of participants with impairments in the qualitative research expressed concern that they lacked the skills employers were looking for. This in turn affected their confidence about gaining future employment.

“Who's going to take on a 55 year old person who's got no qualifications and is ... disabled? Nobody, I've just been discarded now.”

Enablers of employment for economically inactive adults(2) (not working and not seeking work)

Respondents who were not working were asked what factors, if any, would enable them to work. We refer to these as 'enablers'.

- The most common enabler identified was modified hours or days or reduced work hours. This was identified fairly equally by adults with and without impairments (26 per cent and 30 per cent respectively).
- Other enablers identified included equipment to help with a health condition or disability (19 per cent), modified duties (13 per cent) and a job coach or personal assistant (7 per cent).

Enablers of employment for unemployed adults(2) ie those seeking work

Respondents who were not working were asked what factors, if any, would enable them to work. We refer to these as 'enablers'.

- The most common enabler identified by unemployed adults was modified hours or days or reduced work hours. This was identified by more than one third of adults with impairments (36 per cent) and a half (50 per cent) of adults without impairments.

The benefits of flexible working in enabling employment are shown by the qualitative research. One participant with impairments has a long commute to her office. Her employer agreed that she can work from home a few days a week. When she goes into the office she comes in later, leaves earlier, and makes up the hours at home. Without these adaptations to her work routine she feels she would find it very difficult to undertake full-time employment.

“When I ... have been traveling long distances I need a day to be able to work at home, just to regenerate that energy and [my workplace] has been brilliant about trying to help with that time.”

- Other enablers identified by a high proportion of unemployed adults with impairments included tax credits (21 per cent), modified duties (13 per cent) and changes to work area or work equipment (8 per cent).