

Employment Rights Bill

Volume 849: debated on Tuesday 28 October 2025

See the full transcript [here](#)

The House of Lords held an oral question session on 28 October 2025 on **employment opportunities for people with disabilities**, following reports that a volunteer with autism had been dismissed by Waitrose. The debate, led by **Baroness Monckton of Dallington Forest (Con)**, sought to examine the Government's approach to encouraging employers to support disabled people and to ensure that employment schemes were inclusive and effective.

Opening the session, **Baroness Monckton** asked what steps the Government was taking to help employers support people with disabilities into employment, referencing her work with *Team Domenica*, a charity providing training and employment opportunities for young people with learning disabilities. She emphasised that only **5% of people with learning disabilities** are currently in paid work and proposed introducing exemptions or remissions from *employers' National Insurance contributions* for those hiring from this cohort. She argued that such fiscal incentives could transform lives by opening pathways to employment and community inclusion.

Responding for the Government, **Baroness Sherlock (Lab)**, Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), acknowledged the importance of the issue and paid tribute to Baroness Monckton's work in promoting inclusion. She stated that while the Government shared the objective of improving employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities and autism, it did not believe that changing the National Insurance or minimum wage framework was the most effective mechanism. Instead, she said, the Government's approach focused on **creating inclusive workplaces** and providing structured, tailored support through the new **Connect to Work** programme. This initiative, funded by DWP and delivered through local authorities across England and Wales, provides specialist advisers who work directly with both participants and employers, offering practical support, job matching, and ongoing assistance to sustain employment. Baroness Sherlock also highlighted the forthcoming **Keep Britain Working Review**, an independent inquiry aimed at identifying how best to create and sustain workplaces that support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.

Baroness Uddin (Non-Afl) spoke movingly about her personal experience as a mother of a 46-year-old son with learning disabilities and autism, and as a mentor to a highly educated autistic individual who remained unemployed despite holding multiple degrees. She asked whether funding for Connect to Work would be *ringfenced* and whether the Government would consider establishing **apprenticeship schemes specifically for people with autism**. Baroness Sherlock thanked her for sharing her experiences and confirmed that Connect to Work is designed as a **voluntary specialist employment support programme** for individuals with disabilities, health conditions, or other barriers such as homelessness. She described its structure: helping participants identify goals, engaging local employers, and supporting both sides through recruitment and employment. She explained that specialist advisers often assist employers who "want to do the right thing" but may lack confidence or knowledge about supporting disabled

staff. The Minister expressed optimism that Connect to Work would significantly improve opportunities across the country.

Lord Laming (CB) referred to the **Public Services Committee’s report** on the transition of young people with disabilities from education to adult services. He warned of substantial regional variation—some local authorities performed admirably, while others left parents feeling “as though they faced a cliff edge.” He urged the Government to set measurable targets requiring every local authority to increase the number of young disabled people entering employment each year. Baroness Sherlock agreed that the transition between education and adult support was a longstanding issue and stated that the Government had allocated **£167 million** to extend Connect to Work to nine further areas in England, with nationwide coverage expected by early 2026. She highlighted that local programmes are being tailored to reflect regional labour markets and demographics, stressing that employment brings not only income but also “self-respect, teamwork, and the chance to make a difference.”

Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (LD) asked for an update on the long-awaited **Charlie Mayfield report** into employment for people with long-term sickness and disabilities. Baroness Sherlock replied that the report was “very soon” to be published and that its recommendations would inform ongoing reforms.

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con) praised the success of the **2017 Conservative target** to get one million more disabled people into work by 2027—achieved five years early—and asked what practical steps Ministers were taking to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), such as cafés and pubs, accommodate employees with additional needs. Baroness Sherlock responded that DWP had developed a new online resource, **Support with Employee Health and Disability**, co-designed with SMEs and disability groups. This tool provides step-by-step guidance on handling workplace health and disability scenarios, ensuring compliance with the law and fostering open dialogue. She explained that the Connect to Work advisers also play a vital role by supporting small employers who often lack large HR departments but are “really up for hiring people in their local community.”

Finally, **Lord Sikka (Lab)** drew attention to the **disability pay gap**, estimated by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to be around **£4,300 per year**, and noted the compounded disadvantage faced by **disabled women from ethnic minority backgrounds**. He asked how many employers were investigated annually for underpaying such workers. Baroness Sherlock replied that failure to pay the legal minimum wage is unlawful and must be addressed accordingly. She acknowledged, however, that broader inequalities persist across gender, ethnicity, and disability. She reiterated that a key part of the Government’s strategy is to build a more inclusive labour market through **local “Get Britain Working” plans**, developed with combined authorities and local councils to reflect community needs and ensure everyone has fair access to employment.

The exchanges demonstrated cross-party consensus on the importance of increasing employment opportunities for disabled people, though differences remained regarding the best mechanisms to achieve that goal. The Government maintained that structural reform, localised delivery, and employer engagement offer the most sustainable path forward, while several peers called for more direct fiscal or legislative intervention.