

People with Disabilities: Employment

Volume 849: debated on Tuesday 28 October 2025

See the full transcript [here](#)

On 28 October 2025, the House of Lords held an oral question session concerning **employment opportunities for people with disabilities**, initiated by **Baroness Monckton of Dallington Forest (Con)**. Her question followed reports that a volunteer with autism had been dismissed by Waitrose, and she sought to know what steps the Government was taking to ensure that employers are encouraged and supported to employ disabled people.

Opening the discussion, **Baroness Monckton** declared her role as Chair of *Team Domenica*, a charity supporting people with learning disabilities into work. She highlighted the persistent inequality faced by this group, noting that only **5% of people with learning disabilities** are in paid employment. To address this, she proposed introducing **exemptions or remissions from employers' National Insurance contributions** for those who hire individuals with learning disabilities, arguing that such fiscal incentives would transform lives by opening access to the workplace and wider community inclusion.

Responding for the Government, **Baroness Sherlock (Lab)**, Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), commended Baroness Monckton's work and reiterated the Government's commitment to improving employment outcomes for disabled people. She stated that while the Government shares the same objective, it does not believe changing tax or wage frameworks is the most effective approach. Instead, the Government's strategy focuses on **inclusive workplaces and tailored employment support**, particularly through the **Connect to Work** programme. This initiative funds local authorities across England and Wales to provide specialist employment advisers who support both participants and employers, ensuring disabled people are matched with suitable work and sustained employment. The Minister added that the forthcoming **Keep Britain Working Review** would explore further ways to create workplaces that allow disabled people to thrive.

Baroness Uddin (Non-Afl) shared a personal account as the mother of an adult son with learning disabilities and autism and as a mentor to a highly qualified autistic man struggling to find work despite holding several degrees. She questioned whether Connect to Work funding would be *ringfenced* for its intended purpose and asked if the Government would consider **autism-specific apprenticeship schemes**. Baroness Sherlock expressed optimism about the programme, describing it as a **voluntary, specialist support service** designed for those with disabilities, health conditions, or barriers such as homelessness. She detailed how advisers engage individuals to identify goals, liaise with local employers, and support both parties through the recruitment process and in-work adjustments. The Minister noted that many employers "want to do the right thing" but often lack knowledge or confidence about how to support disabled staff—Connect to Work therefore assists on both sides of the employment relationship.

Lord Laming (CB) referred to the *Public Services Committee's report* on the transition of disabled young people from education into adult services, which showed "remarkable divergence" across

the country. Some local authorities demonstrated exemplary practice, while others left parents feeling as though they faced “a cliff edge”. He proposed that the Government set **annual local authority targets** for increasing the number of young disabled people entering employment. Baroness Sherlock agreed on the significance of the issue, acknowledging persistent problems in the transition from education to work. She announced **£167 million in new funding** to expand Connect to Work into nine additional areas, aiming for full national coverage by early 2026. The programme, she said, is tailored to local labour markets, with the goal of delivering not only income but also “self-respect, teamwork, and the chance to make a difference”.

Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (LD) asked when the **Charlie Mayfield report** into employment for people with long-term sickness and disabilities would be published. Baroness Sherlock replied that it was expected “very soon”, confirming that its findings would inform the Government’s ongoing reforms to employment and disability support.

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con) praised Baroness Monckton’s advocacy and highlighted that the 2017 Conservative target of getting one million more disabled people into work by 2027 had been met five years early, in 2022. He asked what practical measures Ministers were taking to help **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)** accommodate employees with additional needs, particularly in local community businesses such as cafés and pubs. Baroness Sherlock responded that the DWP had launched a digital resource titled **Support with Employee Health and Disability**, co-developed with SMEs and disability organisations. This tool offers step-by-step guidance on supporting employees with health conditions or disabilities, including compliance with legal obligations and advice on communication. She added that Connect to Work advisers play a crucial role in helping small businesses without large HR departments to hire and retain disabled staff, remarking that many local employers are “really up for hiring people in their community” but need structured support.

Lord Sikka (Lab) then addressed the **disability pay gap**, citing a TUC estimate that disabled workers earn on average **£4,300 less per year** than their non-disabled peers. When compounded by gender and ethnicity gaps, disabled women from minority backgrounds face significant disadvantage. He asked how many employers were investigated annually for underpaying disabled or ethnic-minority women with disabilities. Baroness Sherlock responded that failing to pay the legal minimum wage was unlawful and should be prosecuted in all circumstances. However, she acknowledged the wider inequalities in pay and employment and emphasised that the Government’s strategy for a more inclusive labour market was not about “doing something for its own sake”, but about ensuring that all citizens’ talents are used effectively to promote economic growth. She concluded by noting that the Government is working with **combined mayoral and local authorities** to produce *local “Get Britain Working” plans*, reflecting community needs and ensuring that “everybody in the local area has a fair chance to get into work”.

The exchanges revealed strong cross-party consensus on the importance of supporting disabled people into employment but differing views on policy mechanisms. While peers like Baroness Monckton called for fiscal incentives, the Government maintained that sustained, locally driven support through Connect to Work and inclusive employment policies offered the most effective long-term approach.

