

Employment for Disabled People

Social Obligation or Individual Responsibility? ¹

An outline to this research paper by John Kidd. Click on [full article](#) to view the whole thing.

Summary of the paper

Things have changed a great deal since early attempts to provide the disabled with work. Government initially took responsibility directly for providing the work but now those who can compete in the labour market are given both the liberty and responsibility for making their own arrangements. They have legal rights and guidance is available. Government has been influenced by disability groups such as The Independent Living Movement which has campaigned for individual rights to self determination.

Disabled people are three times more likely to be unemployed than their able-bodied counterparts. They are often underemployed. That is they are stuck in low paid jobs, not fulfilling their potential. They tend not to benefit from career advancement and training.

Official definitions of the problem as being within the disabled person have been contested by social model proponents. The quota scheme, introduced in 1944, performed poorly in getting the disabled into work and also in utilising the talents of those in work. The Secretary of State has only prosecuted 3 times for unjustified discrimination on grounds of disability. Other countries offer more protection.

Nowadays the government seeks to persuade employers of and educate them about the business case for employing disabled people, rather than enforcing a quota or providing financial incentives. This system can tackle underemployment, unlike the quota, and could have an educative role about disability rights.

Only those disabled people who can compete with the mainstream can claim anti-discrimination rights. Those said to be uncompetitive continue to be entitled to subsidy in the work place. A complainant needs education, training & support services to pursue legal redress, so the uncompetitive might not be able to do so anyway. The services of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) should be made available before the individual resorts to an industrial tribunal. A new Disability Rights Commission was set up in 1992 to monitor and investigate complaints independently.

The 'Two-ticks' symbol is similar to the 'Fit for Work' symbol which it replaced. The 'two ticks' symbol was first introduced in 1990. It is not awarded but adopted by companies.

Quotes from the paper:

The message that it 'makes good business sense' to employ disabled people is backed by a programme of personal help aimed at making the individual competitive. Existing programmes ensure that the employer will not be out of pocket by taking on a disabled person.³

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Disabled people's organisations are equally keen to dispel the myths that disabled people are less productive and have bad sickness records. RADAR⁴ (1993) cites evidence from a local survey of employers: 43 per cent reported the attitude of disabled people to work was better than able-bodied workers', with 55 per cent rating it equally; 70 per cent rated disabled workers' attendance as equally good, with 26 per cent rating it better.⁵

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A range of mainstream and specialist training services available for disabled people is organised by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in England and Wales...⁶

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Self-employment is considered important for disabled people because it may offer a more convenient and flexible method of working. This form of working is an area of growth within the economy. It is estimated that 12.4 per cent of the workforce are self-employed (Employment Department, 1994b), while disabled people are more likely to be self-employed than the general population (Prescott-Clarke, 1990).⁷

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Currently, policy options are severely constrained by the Government's concern to maximise the freedom of individuals and of business, to avoid interfering with the operations of the market, and to minimise the imposition of costs on private enterprise. Arguments put forward by disabled people are similarly constrained: attention must not be diverted from the campaign for enforceable and enforced anti-discrimination legislation. Nevertheless, it is surprising that little regard has been given to employment equity with its promise of addressing fundamental issues about the disabling role of the working environment.⁸

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Writing in The Guardian (30 November, 1994) James Erlichman questioned whether the 'feel good factor' of supermarkets' 'generous gesture' in employing people with learning difficulties would win more custom than it cost. Nevertheless, it may in fact make good business sense to employ a person under the Supported Placements Scheme in that the firm is only meeting part of a person's salary.⁹

Conclusion

Autistic adults nowadays have more autonomy than they did in the past. There is more scope for individual initiative. However, for those that are deemed to be competitive in the labour market more initiative and determination seems to be needed than for their non-disabled counterparts. It is up to them to overcome prejudice and discrimination, and where necessary seek legal redress.

For those not considered able to compete the previous sheltered employment is being replaced by subsidised placements in mainstream employment.

References

1. By Patricia Thornton and Neil Lunt
2. Employment for Disabled People p 21 and [Disability Rights Commission](#)
3. Employment for Disabled People p 6
4. [RADAR](#) stands for ***The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation***. The article cited does not seem to be readily accessible on-line now.
5. Employment for Disabled People p 31.
6. p 36.
7. p 40
8. p 17
9. p 32