

Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)

Disabled Employment Gap Inquiry

16 February 2023



The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry on the disabled employment gap. The ALLIANCE is a national intermediary with over 3,000 members including third sector health and social care organisations, disabled people, people living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers.

Question 1: What progress has been made to reduce and remove barriers faced by disabled people to access Scotland's labour market?

Flexible working

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way in which we work in Scotland, with a move towards more flexible working patterns for individuals. This change in the models of working allows the labour market to be more accessible for some individuals who require flexibility in schedule or workplace. This may reduce the daunting nature of job interviews and labour market participation for disabled people or people with long term conditions. The CIPD state that flexible working has benefits for the workforce in general, stating it is linked to a higher level of job satisfaction and wellbeing, and can reduce absence rates.¹

For disabled people, having more flexible working arrangements can help employees to manage disability and long-term conditions while being supportive to mental health and stress.² The ALLIANCE would encourage a continuation of flexible working arrangements in all sectors to ensure the labour market is as accessible as possible for disabled people and people with long term conditions.

Online Access

As part of the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group (CPG) on Mental Health's *Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health* report, people with lived experience of mental health problems told the group that being able to attend online groups had been 'lifesaving', and that without this access they felt that their mental health would have been significantly worse as they would have felt more isolated.³

Improving Public Awareness

Furthermore, the CPG on Mental Health inquiry found that the pandemic has encouraged more people than ever to talk about their mental health and look after

their wellbeing. CPG members agreed that this should be capitalised on to improve public awareness about the importance of supporting mental health and wellbeing.⁴

Question 2: What are the remaining challenges, and why has progress been difficult?

Pay Gap

The Resolution Foundation's report on the living standards for disabled people in the workplace found that the gap in median household incomes between adults with a disability and without was 30% in 2020-2021.⁵ This considers income from disability payments, without this (because this is to compensate for the additional costs of having a disability) the gap would rise to 44%.⁶ Additionally the report added that the employment rate of disabled people is 54%, which is far lower than the 82% of non-disabled adults.⁷ However, employment status only explains a third of the income gap between working-age disabled and non-disabled people, the remainder of the gap is likely explained by the kind of jobs disabled people work in including their typical pay and the number of hours worked.⁸ This pay gap remains a challenge for the disabled employment gap.

Cost of Living

The cost of living crisis is having a profound impact in the UK and especially for disabled people and people with long term conditions. Disabled people are more likely to live in a cold home. Even before the cost of living crisis hit the UK, 9% of disabled people (compared to 2% of non-disabled population) could not afford to keep their homes warm.⁹ By the end of November 2022 41% of disabled people in the Resolution Foundation survey said that they couldn't afford to keep their homes warm, almost twice as many as the non-disabled population (23%).¹⁰

In addition, many disabled people do not have the option to reduce their energy usage in response to the crisis. Depending on their own individual conditions disabled people often have significantly higher energy requirements. For disabled people, people living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers, adequate support to cover their energy bills could be the difference between remaining healthy and home or needlessly ending up in hospital.¹¹

Transitions for young people

The ALLIANCE knows that for disabled individuals and their families the transition for young people out of the education system and onto the next step of their lives can be difficult and worrying. A strong and effective support system for those young people to move on from school onto their next step would increase accessibility for disabled people to enter further education or the labour market. The ALLIANCE welcomes the upcoming Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill which represents significant progress in the importance of ensuring that disabled

children and young people can move from education into the next step of their lives with the support they need.¹² Until changes to support are in place, the gaps in support are a key barrier to closing the disabled employment gap.

Question 3: What policy measures would you like to see to support disabled people and employers to increase participation rates in the labour market?

Co-production

To fully understand the best way to support disabled people in employment and their employers the Scottish Government must do work to fully understand the experiences of individuals. Any recommendations made to this response should be designed and developed with co-production at their heart from the outset, with full engagement from people with lived experience.

Fair work and valuing social care.

As set out fully in the ALLIANCE's response to the 2022 inquiry into the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market¹³ to address the burnout in health and social care caused by the pandemic, and the subsequent economic crises, the Scottish Government must prioritise recruiting, training, paying, and valuing social care staff better. This includes ensuring that fair work is implemented by enabling people working in care to have access to flexible working and career progression options. The ALLIANCE welcomes the recent campaign 'There's More to Care than Caring'¹⁴ which aims to raise awareness of the opportunities within a career in adult social care. Building understanding of the value of care sector staff is key, but real change to improve and reduce the burden placed on staff leading to burnout, is needed from the Scottish Government.

A duty to report on all protected characteristics within the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in Scotland

The ALLIANCE supports introducing a requirement listed authorities to publish disability pay gap information.¹⁵ Recent statistics have shown that Scotland's disability pay gap increased between 2018-2019 and is likely to have worsened due to the impacts of COVID-19. If implemented effectively, this duty could help to reduce employment gaps and uphold core human rights principles such as transparency and accountability within the public sector in Scotland.¹⁶

Improving access to volunteering

The ALLIANCE support calls from the volunteering sector, including Volunteer Scotland, to improve access to volunteering which would aid in increasing participation rates in both volunteering and employment. Participation in volunteering provides significant health and wellbeing benefits, many of which would support

progression into employment. The ALLIANCE agrees with the recommendations put forward by Volunteer Scotland in response to this consultation.

Question 4: What has been the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people's experience of the labour market?

COVID-19 has brought new challenges and barriers which face disabled people when trying to access Scotland's labour market. ALLIANCE members have highlighted Long Covid and burnout in health and social care workers as two key factors contributing to labour market inactivity in Scotland following the COVID-19 pandemic, as detailed in our response to the inquiry on 'Road to recovery: impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market.'¹⁷

Long Covid

Long Covid has affected disabled people's experience of the labour market in Scotland and will continue to over the coming years. While some people with Long Covid are able to return to work, particularly when their employers are supportive and making suitable adjustments to support them in the workplace, many people have either not been able to work at all, or only with reduced hours.¹⁸

The ALLIANCE in partnership with Asthma + Lung UK and Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland have established a network for people affected by Long Covid to gain views from a wide range of people. As part of this project, the ALLIANCE has produced an online survey which received 113 responses as outlines in the Long Covid Lived Experience Survey Insights report.¹⁹

Within this survey, people shared that they had experienced difficulties when returning to work, with one respondent calling for workplace rights to be improved. One respondent commented that "the current reasonable adjustment legislation is too weak and open to interpretation and abuse... (for example), home working as an adjustment being denied despite being reasonable, due to office attendance quotas."²⁰

People also argued that there should be a greater recognition of the effect of COVID-19 and that recovery can be a slow process. One respondent said: "Make it clear to people in the early stages of Covid infection that, if they are suffering fatigue, not to try and push through or go back to work too early. I'm almost certain this is what has set me back. This must be an official position so that people don't feel pressured to return to work too soon and employers should be supported to allow this for their employees."²¹

A majority of respondents (50%) said that recognition of Long Covid as a disability should be prioritised. Within the survey, people were able to share other priorities which had not been specified in the online survey – most popular was that they would find financial support helpful to mitigate their loss of earnings. One person said that they have had trouble accessing social security – sharing that Employment and

Support Allowance (ESA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) documentation questions are not geared to understanding Long Covid.

The ALLIANCE has welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to a 'person centred' approach to Long Covid care and support²², though more activity is required to fully deliver this in practice. Respondents to the Long Covid Lived Experience Survey told the ALLIANCE that they felt that 'Long Covid care on the NHS is slow, patchy and ineffective' and that there was a lack of 'joined up' working to support people. The commitment to this approach by the Scottish Government must involve some sort of nation-wide approach to combat the uneven services within Scotland.

This survey found that 48% of the respondents thought that government legislation to improve Long Covid care should be prioritised, with 47% of respondents saying that mental health and wellbeing specifically should be prioritised. Our respondents stated that they would like additional information to support them to manage their symptoms of long covid.

Overall, the information gathered from this survey is extremely useful to get a better insight into the ways in which long covid is affecting people in Scotland. Further work to engage with people with lived experience would help the Scottish Government to provide support and guidance which will in turn allow people to feel supported in their workplace. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's has produced guidance promoting their whole system approach and IGLOO framework.²³ More widespread use of this guidance is key to improving people with Long Covid's ability to work and reducing the impact on the labour market.

Alongside work to provide more supportive employment for people with Long Covid, it is essential that the Scottish Government invests in research into effective treatments for Long Covid. Further information, including a list of ALLIANCE recommendations on supporting people living with Long Covid, can be found in the ALLIANCE report on the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish Labour Market.²⁴

Burnout in health and social care workers

As set out in the ALLIANCE's response to the COVID-19 Recovery Committee's inquiry on the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market²⁵ burnout has been an ongoing issue for health and social care workers since the start of the pandemic. Already existing issues surrounding recruitment and retention of workers were compounded by the pandemic, and worsened by the cost of living crisis. UNISON's 2022 report *The Burnout Pandemic*²⁶ set out that 96% of social care staff respondents reported that their employer was short staffed, and highlighting "stress and burnout" as the main cause of staff being off sick.

Furthermore, between 2020-2021 absences of 150,000 midwife and nursing days in Scotland were due to ill mental health.²⁷ In order to improve wellbeing for those working in health and social care, the Scottish Government must prioritise recruiting, training, paying, and valuing social care staff better. The ALLIANCE sets out its

recommendations for reducing burnout in health and social care workers within our report on the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market.²⁸

About the ALLIANCE

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector intermediary for a range of health and social care organisations. We have a growing membership of over 3,000 national and local third sector organisations, associates in the statutory and private sectors, disabled people, people living with long term conditions and unpaid carers. Many NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships, Medical Practices, Third Sector Interfaces, Libraries and Access Panels are also members.

The ALLIANCE is a strategic partner of the Scottish Government and has close working relationships, several of which are underpinned by Memorandum of Understanding, with many national NHS Boards, academic institutions and key organisations spanning health, social care, housing and digital technology.

Our vision is for a Scotland where people of all ages who are disabled or living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers, have a strong voice and enjoy their right to live well, as equal and active citizens, free from discrimination, with support and services that put them at the centre.

The ALLIANCE has three core aims; we seek to:

- Ensure people are at the centre, that their voices, expertise and rights drive policy and sit at the heart of design, delivery and improvement of support and services.
- Support transformational change, towards approaches that work with individual and community assets, helping people to stay well, supporting human rights, self-management, co-production and independent living.
- Champion and support the third sector as a vital strategic and delivery partner and foster better cross-sector understanding and partnership.

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¹ CIPD, *Flexible working practices*, (7 December 2022) found at: [Flexible Working Practices | Factsheets | CIPD](#)

² CIPD, *Health and wellbeing at work*, (5 April 2022), found at: [Health and wellbeing at work | CIPD](#)

³ Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Mental Health, *Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health* (July 2022) found at: ['Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health' - CPG Report.pdf](#)

⁴ Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Mental Health, *Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health* (July 2022) found at: ['Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health' - CPG Report.pdf](#)

⁵ Resolution Foundation, *Costly differences: Living Standards for working-age people with disabilities*, (January 2023) found at: [Costly-differences.pdf \(resolutionfoundation.org\)](#)

⁶ Resolution Foundation, *Costly differences: Living Standards for working-age people with disabilities*, (January 2023) found at: [Costly-differences.pdf \(resolutionfoundation.org\)](#)

⁷ Resolution Foundation, *Costly differences: Living Standards for working-age people with disabilities*, (January 2023) found at: [Costly-differences.pdf \(resolutionfoundation.org\)](#)

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⁹ Resolution Foundation, *Costly differences: Living Standards for working-age people with disabilities*, (January 2023) found at: [Costly-differences.pdf \(resolutionfoundation.org\)](#)

¹⁰ Resolution Foundation, *Costly differences: Living Standards for working-age people with disabilities*, (January 2023) found at: [Costly-differences.pdf \(resolutionfoundation.org\)](#)

¹¹ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Disabled People, Unpaid Carers and the Cost of Living Crisis: Impacts Responses and Long Term Solutions* (28 October 2022) found at: [ALLIANCE-Cost-of-Living-Report \(1\).pdf](#)

¹² Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Calls for views: ALLIANCE response to the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill*, (27 October 2022), found at: [ALLIANCE-Response-Disabled-Children-and-Young-People-Transitions-to-Adulthood-Final-1.docx \(live.com\)](#)

¹³ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Road to recovery: impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market inquiry – ALLIANCE response* (9 September 2022) found at: [ALLIANCE response to inquiry on the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ [There's more to care than caring - Adult Social Care \(caretocare.scot\)](#)

¹⁵ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *ALLIANCE response: Consultation on the review of the operation of the public sector equality duty in Scotland* (8 April 2022) found at: [ALLIANCE response to the Public Sector Equality Duty consultation - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *ALLIANCE response: Consultation on the review of the operation of the public sector equality duty in Scotland* (8 April 2022) found at: [ALLIANCE response to the Public Sector Equality Duty consultation - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](https://alliance-scotland.org.uk)

¹⁷ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Road to recovery: impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market inquiry – ALLIANCE response* (9 September 2022) found at: [ALLIANCE response to inquiry on the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](https://alliance-scotland.org.uk)

¹⁸ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Long covid Lived Experience Network survey – insights report*, (25 January 2023) found at: [Long Covid Lived Experience Survey Insight Report published - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](https://alliance-scotland.org.uk)

¹⁹ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Long covid Lived Experience Network survey – insights report*, (25 January 2023) found at: [Long Covid Lived Experience Survey Insight Report published - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](https://alliance-scotland.org.uk)

²⁰ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Long covid Lived Experience Network survey – insights report*, (25 January 2023) found at: [Long Covid Lived Experience Survey Insight Report published - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](https://alliance-scotland.org.uk)

²¹ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Long covid Lived Experience Network survey – insights report*, (25 January 2023) found at: [Long Covid Lived Experience Survey Insight Report published - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](https://alliance-scotland.org.uk)

²² Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *ALLIANCE briefing for Long Covid debate*, (19 May 2022) found at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/news/alliance-briefing-for-scottish-parliament-debate-on-long-covid/>

²³ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), *Working with Long Covid: Research evidence to inform support* (2022), available at: https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/long-covid-report-feb-22_tcm18-106089.pdf.

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²⁵ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, *Road to recovery: impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market inquiry – ALLIANCE response* (9 September 2022) found at: [ALLIANCE response to inquiry on the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](https://alliance-scotland.org.uk)

²⁶ UNISON, *The Burnout Pandemic: the causes and impact of staffing shortages – a UNISON survey of social care staff* (Feb 2022), available at: <https://unison-scotland.org/wp-content/uploads/14.03.21-The-burnout-pandemic-final.pdf>.

²⁷ Mimi Launder, “Scotland: Thousands of nursing and midwifery days lost to mental ill health”, *Nursing in Practice* (6 Jan 2022), available

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²⁸ Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, Road to recovery: impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market inquiry – ALLIANCE response (9 September 2022) found at: [ALLIANCE response to inquiry on the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland \(alliance-scotland.org.uk\)](#)