

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Business and Management Studies (17)		
Title of case study: Using statistical evidence to enhance policy and practice on disability equality at work in the UK		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 – 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Melanie Jones Vicki Wass	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 28/09/2015 – present 01/10/1988 – 01/10/2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/10/2015 – 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Disabled people represent one sixth of the UK working-age population. Their comparatively low employment rate, at about fifty percent, is a significant form of social exclusion and has been an enduring concern for government. Cardiff research, quantifying and exploring disability-related labour market inequality, enabled equality organisations and politicians to scrutinise government, stimulate political debate, and recommend research-led policy interventions. By helping improve national data collection and monitoring on disability, the researchers also ensured that the government can be more effective in, and be held to account on, its employment commitments. The research also reframed policy emphasis on employers and encouraged the introduction of organisational disability measurement and reporting.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Jones and Wass' quantitative analysis of UK survey data is distinct in the disability field by establishing nationally representative facts, monitoring trends, and identifying the determinants of labour market inequality. This body of evidence [3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4] addressed two major omissions in the literature: the importance of measurement and the role of employers in determining inequality in relation to disability. In doing so, the research identified a lack of progress on government employment commitments and suggested a new avenue for policy focused on organisational measurement and reporting.</p>		
2.1 Government disability employment commitments: measuring progress		
<p>Since 2013, research by Jones and Wass (and subsequently with Baumberg (Kent)) has established the size, persistence, trends, and determinants of the disability employment gap (DEG) [3.1, 3.2]. The DEG - the gap in employment rates between non-disabled and disabled people - has been a key indicator of disability-related labour market inequality since 2008 and, from 2015 to 2017, was used to measure progress on national disability employment commitments.</p> <p>The researchers analysed a series of large-scale individual-level surveys, including the main survey used by government, the Labour Force Survey. Findings highlighted [3.1, 3.2]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discrepancies across data sources and discontinuities within surveys; • variation arising from the definition and measurement of disability. <p>These outcomes demonstrated that the government's claim of narrowing the DEG was not robust because it was specific to the choice of survey and related to a rising trend in disability prevalence [3.2].</p>		
2.2 Experience of disabled employees and the role of employers		
<p>Both scholarship and policy on disability-related labour market inequality has focused narrowly on employment. Since 2013 research at Cardiff University demonstrated the broader inequality experienced by disabled people in work [3.3, 3.4]. Wass (with Foster (Cardiff)) developed the concept of ableism embedded in organisational policies and practices as an important determinant</p>		

of the treatment of disabled employees [3.3]. Jones' research, prior to joining Cardiff, established and quantified disability gaps in employee's experience of work in Britain. Building on these contributions, Jones and Wass' analysis of matched employer-employee data from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) (in collaboration with Hoque (Warwick) and Bacon (City)) established workplace practice as a driver of disability-related gaps in work-related wellbeing and workforce disability composition [3.4]. It also demonstrated the importance of organisational monitoring through illustrating that the understanding and evaluation of these gaps depend on the availability of data within organisations.

2.3 Developing policy recommendations – monitoring and reporting

These strands of research underpinned the development of evidence-based policy recommendations through two main channels. As part of a project with other Cardiff University colleagues funded by an ESRC Impact Acceleration Award (IAA) (£24,233, 2016), Jones and Wass argued for enhancing the accuracy of national evidence, with recommendations including [3.5]:

- widening monitoring using multiple surveys and measures of disability;
- ensuring continuity of data collection;
- focusing on a relative measure of disadvantage to track progress;
- broader consideration and monitoring of disability gaps in in-work indicators, including through organisational monitoring.

In 2016 Jones and Wass (with Hoque and Bacon) formed disability@work, a collaboration which brought together complementary expertise, including a distinct Cardiff contribution on measurement. Their research-led report, *Ahead of the Arc*, co-produced with Disability Rights UK, was motivated by Jones and Wass' critical assessment of progress on the DEG commitment. Recommendations included [3.6]:

- policy interventions need specifically to favour disabled people's job prospects;
- organisations must learn to collect, record, and monitor the disability status of their users, employees, or applicants, in order to track progress towards targets;
- private sector organisations that are awarded contracts to supply the public sector should be required to demonstrate they have a plan to increase the proportion of disabled people employed.

This body of Cardiff research identified that government claims of narrowing the DEG were not robust, and inequalities faced by disabled people in the labour market were broader than employment. The researchers' subsequent engagement with parliamentarians and other key stakeholders translated their findings to directly impact the political agenda and government policy.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Jones, M., and Wass, V. (2013) Understanding changing disability-related employment gaps in Britain 1998-2011. *Work, Employment and Society* 27 (6), 982-1003. 10.1177/0950017013475372 [Jones; Swansea University]

[3.2] Baumberg, B., Jones, M., and Wass, V. (2015) Disability and disability-related employment gaps in the UK 1998-2012: different trends in different surveys? *Social Science and Medicine* 141, 72-81. 10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.07.012

[3.3] Foster, D.J., and Wass, V. J. (2013) Disability in the labour market: an exploration of concepts of the ideal worker and organisational fit that disadvantage employees with impairments. *Sociology* 47 (4), 705-721. 10.1177/0038038512454245

[3.4] Hoque, K., Bacon, N., Jones, M., and Wass, V. (2018) Are high performance work practices enabling or disabling? Exploring the relationship between selected HPWPs and work-related disability. *Human Resource Management* 57 (2), 499-513. 10.1002/hrm.21881

[3.5] Fevre, R. Foster, D., Jones, M., and Wass, V. (2016) *Closing Disability Gaps at Work: Deficits in evidence and variations in experience*, Cardiff: Cardiff University.

<https://orca.cf.ac.uk/96511/1/CLOSING%20DISABILITY%20GAPS%20AT%20WORK%20Ralph%20Fevre%20et%20al.pdf>

[3.6] Connolly, P., Bacon, N., **Wass, V.**, Hoque, K., and **Jones, M.** (2016) *Ahead of the Arc – a Contribution to Halving the Disability Employment Gap*. A report produced by APPG (Disability).

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/pdf/AheadoftheArc110518.pdf>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Despite a range of UK Government policy initiatives over several decades, disabled people experience pronounced labour market disadvantages. After failing to make significant progress towards its 2015 commitment to halve the DEG, the government weakened its target in 2017 to one more achievable at that time – getting one million more disabled people into work. Through the disability@work collaboration, Cardiff research provided evidence of the need to revert to the DEG target and that – despite claims to the contrary – progress was insufficient to meet the DEG commitment, revealing the case for active policy intervention. The findings made accessible to policymakers via a range of pathways (including presentations, workshops, policy briefs, a website, and documentary), *“had a profound impact on the political agenda”* (Dr Lisa Cameron MP) **[5.1a]**.

Alongside influencing political debate to hold the government to account for the DEG target, the other primary impacts of the research are i) improving national data collection and monitoring on disability and ii) underpinning the introduction of organisational disability measurement and reporting. Reflecting the importance of this research, MPs passed an Early Day Motion 53440 in 2019 to praise the *“invaluable contribution”* of disability@work in *“improving the lives of disabled people in Britain”* **[5.1b]**.

4.1 Shaping political debate and the advocacy work of Disability Rights (DR) UK

The *Ahead of the Arc* report **[3.6]** changed the policy recommendations of leading disability equality organisations, including Disability Rights UK (DR UK) and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) (Disability). Its recommendations – motivated by Cardiff’s distinct contribution on measurement – led to a new policy focus on organisations and organisational measurement and reporting.

Philip Connolly, DR UK’s Policy Development Manager described the disability@work researchers as *“key influencers with regard to the promotion and development of disability employment policy across government”* **[5.2]**. He confirmed that DR UK *“benefitted hugely”* from the *“high-quality evidence”* with lasting impact on their perceptions of, and an ability to use, quantitative evidence to influence policy **[5.2]**.

Dr Lisa Cameron MP, Chair of the APPG (Disability) confirmed that: *“This contribution has been indispensable in informing and influencing the work of the APPG since 2016”* and that the research collaboration has *“massively enhanced the influence of the APPG and, in doing so, has pushed issues relating to disability inequality in the labour market far higher up the political agenda in the UK than would otherwise have been the case”* **[5.1a]**.

The report’s findings were highlighted in the House of Commons (January 2017) in a question to the Prime Minister by Dr Cameron **[5.3]**, and through written questions **[5.4]**. The written question prompted the first debate on the economic contribution of disabled people within the House of Commons (February 2018), during which evidence from disability@work was used to scrutinise the change in government commitment and highlight the value of organisational monitoring **[5.3, 5.1a]**.

The report, which received cross-party support (signed by MPs from seven parties), was subsequently endorsed by Sarah Newton MP, then Minister for Disabled People **[5.1a, 5.2]**. Dr Cameron confirmed Newton’s decision *“that all of the report’s recommendations are being taken forward across government”* **[5.1a]**. Changes highlighted by Dr Cameron *“as a result of the work undertaken by the disability@work academics”* include *“acceptance of the need for more active policy intervention, acceptance of the weaknesses of the government’s current commitment on*

disability employment and greater recognition of the importance of National Statistics to evaluating and monitoring disability inequality” [5.1a].

4.2 Government disability employment commitments: improving national monitoring

Cardiff’s research on disability measurement led to significant policy and public benefit by enhancing the accuracy of national disability data collection and monitoring, essential for understanding the DEG and holding the government to account on its commitments. Evidence from Jones and Wass (with Baumberg) was cited extensively to justify recommendations in a House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee report (January 2017), including [5.5, p.14]:

- avoid discontinuities in surveys used to track progress on national commitments;
- collect data on a range of measures of disability to ensure a robust evaluation;
- monitor “*disabled people’s experiences of the quality of work*” – a significant broadening of existing policy focus.

Jones and Wass continue to support implementation of these recommendations as expert members of the Government Statistical Service Health Statistics Steering Group [formerly known as National Statistics Harmonisation Group (NSHG)], which initiated a programme of scrutiny on disability measurement in light of their evidence [5.6]. This included recognition of the limitations of its harmonisation strategy in this context, new emphasis on enhancing data collection and analysis using multiple disability measures and future plans to address evidence gaps.

Helen Colvin (Head of Census, Lifecourse and Disability Analysis, ONS) stated these recommendations have “*[improved] our understanding of disability and will inform future data collection, monitoring and policy evaluation*” [5.6]. Indeed, as a consequence of Wass highlighting the deficiencies in national statistics on disability in her advice to the Cabinet Office, the ONS published a range of new national disability indicators in December 2019 [5.1a] to better measure and monitor disability inequality in the UK.

Jones and Wass also drew on their expertise on measurement as expert panel members for the National Audit Office’s review of the Department for Work and Pension’s (DWP) disability employment support (March 2019). In line with the researchers’ recommendation to retain a relative measure of disadvantage to track progress, the resulting report criticised the government’s change from its 2015 commitment to halve the DEG to the more achievable commitment of getting one million more disabled people into work [5.7, pp. 6-7]. In response, the Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, confirmed that the new commitment would be reviewed (April 2019) and, in December 2019, the government’s plans for the 2020 National Disability Strategy included a renewed commitment to “*reduce the disability employment gap*” [5.8, p.62].

4.3 The role of employers: promoting organisational monitoring to measure and enhance disability equality at work

The discussion of *Ahead of the Arc* report’s [3.6] findings in the House of Commons [5.3] initiated a dialogue with the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. This formed the basis for extensive meetings across government departments aimed at integrating disability into economic policy and resulted in the endorsement of organisational monitoring. This report and other disability@work recommendations prompted changes in national policy and practice [5.2, 5.1a], which include:

- The Government’s launch of a Voluntary Reporting Framework [5.1a] in November 2018, supporting employers to commit to reporting on disability in the workplace, is cited by DR UK as among the “*most significant changes resulting from our efforts*” [5.2]. This is now mandatory for employers seeking accreditation as Disability Confident Leaders, the highest level of a government scheme encouraging employers to recruit and retain disabled people and was included as part of the Cabinet Office’s consultation on Social Value in Procurement [5.1a, 5.2].

- The DWP reconsidered the recommended question for employers when measuring disability in the workplace. Lord Shinkwin, member of the House of Lords, confirms that disability@work played “a central role” and that “this represents an important step forward in ensuring consistency in the measurement of disability across government policies and with national disability employment commitments” [5.9].
- Cardiff research was used in the Lord Holmes Review (‘Opening up public appointments to disabled people’) to recommend using internal disability monitoring to set targets to enhance the representation of disabled people [5.10, p15]. Recommendations on data and transparency from the Review have been incorporated into revisions to the Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan announced in June 2019.
- The *Ahead of the Arc* report’s [3.6] emphasis on the role of employers in both creating and narrowing the employment gap has also been incorporated into plans for the 2020 National Disability Strategy which proposes to “set out measures to encourage employers to play their role in retaining disabled people” [5.8].

Building on the Voluntary Reporting Framework, disability@work continues to advise on organisational reporting, including by providing evidence to Lord Shinkwin, British Conservative politician and member of the House of Lords, on the most informative measures for inclusion in a Workforce Information Bill introduced to the House of Lords in February 2020. The Bill extends the provisions of gender pay gap reporting and proposes mandatory organisational reporting on disability. Lord Shinkwin confirms that “The Bill was shaped with direct input from disability@work who, given their expertise in disability measurement and data collection, helped redraft the Bill as an amendment to the 2010 Equality Act and refocused the detailed provisions to require employers to report on disabled people’s employment” [5.9].

Cardiff research has – through scrutinising progress on government disability employment commitments, improving national data collection on disability, and encouraging the introduction of organisational disability measurement – achieved tangible impact on UK policy. Although it is too early to quantify the expected social and economic impacts of these policy changes, the benefits to disabled people are likely to be profound. This is especially so for the 3.7 million disabled people currently without work in the UK, for whom Lord Shinkwin predicts disability@work research “will have had a significant and lasting impact on wellbeing and social inclusion” [5.9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] a. Testimonial: Dr Lisa Cameron MP, Chair APPG (Disability) b. The Early Day Motion Lisa Cameron sponsored October 2019

[5.2] Testimonial: Philip Connolly, Policy Development Manager, Disability Rights UK

[5.3] *Ahead of the Arc* Report mentioned by Dr Lisa Cameron MP in Prime Minister’s Question Time, January 2017; question to Penny Mordaunt, Minister for Disabled People, July 2017; Main Chamber Debate, February 2018

[5.4] Dr Lisa Cameron’s written questions to DWP

[5.5] House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2017) Disability Employment Gap, Seventh Report of Session 2016–17, HC 56

[5.6] Testimonial: Helen Colvin, Head of Census, Lifecourse and Disability Analysis, Public Policy Analysis, ONS

[5.7] National Audit Office (2019) *Department for Work and Pensions, Supporting disabled people to work*

[5.8] Queen’s Speech 2019. p.62 National Disability Strategy

[5.9] Testimonial: Lord Shinkwin

[5.10] Lord Holmes Review (2018) *Opening up public appointments to disabled people*, December 2018; The recommendations have been included in an update to the Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan (June 2019)