

# THE DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT GAP

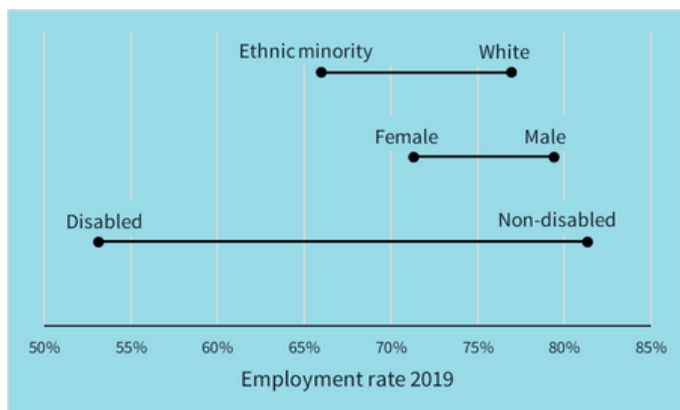
Evidence from the UK

Mark Bryan, Andrew Bryce, Jennifer Roberts and Cristina Sechel

## WHAT IS THE DEG?

The Disability Employment Gap (DEG) is the difference between the employment rate of non-disabled people and the employment rate of disabled people. In 2019, the gap was 28 percentage points, much wider than comparable employment gaps relating to sex and ethnicity. However, the DEG has narrowed in recent years, falling from 32 percentage points in 2014.

### DEG is wider than other employment gaps



## DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE UK

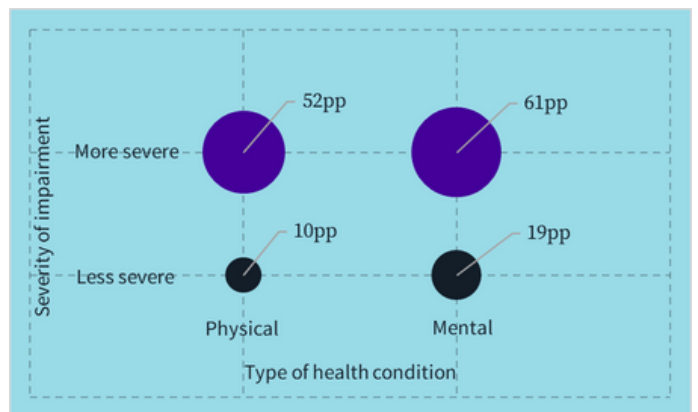
In the UK, about one in five people of working age is disabled. This is defined according to the Equality Act (2010): a person who has a long term mental or physical health condition (lasting 12 months or more) that affects their day-to-day activities.

Half of disabled people have a physical health condition only, a quarter have a mental health condition only and a quarter have both. Two in every five disabled people are considered to have a more severe impairment that has a substantial impact on their day-to-day activities.

## SEVERITY MATTERS

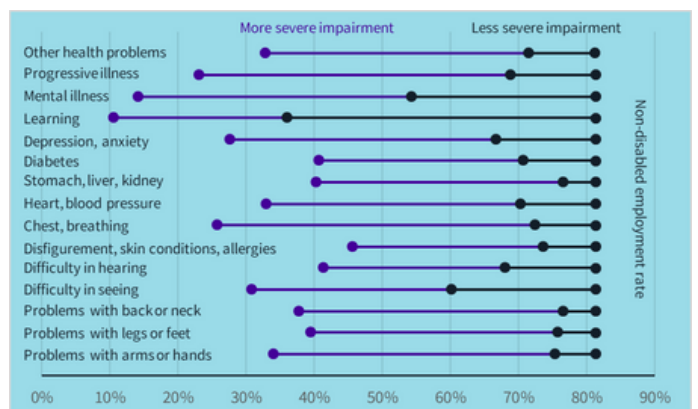
The DEG is much larger for disabled people with a mental health condition or a more severe impairment. Disabled people with a less severe impairment have an employment rate not far below that of non-disabled people.

### Disabled people with a mental health condition and more severe impairment have the biggest percentage point DEG



There is also a substantial variation in the size of the DEG across specific health conditions. In 2019, only 11% of people with a more severe learning disability were employed. In contrast, over 75% of people with a less severe musculoskeletal condition were in work.

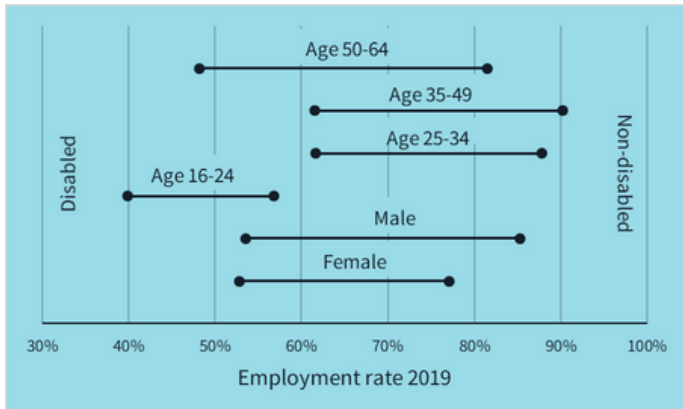
### Employment rate by main health condition and severity, 2019



# AGE, SEX AND ETHNICITY

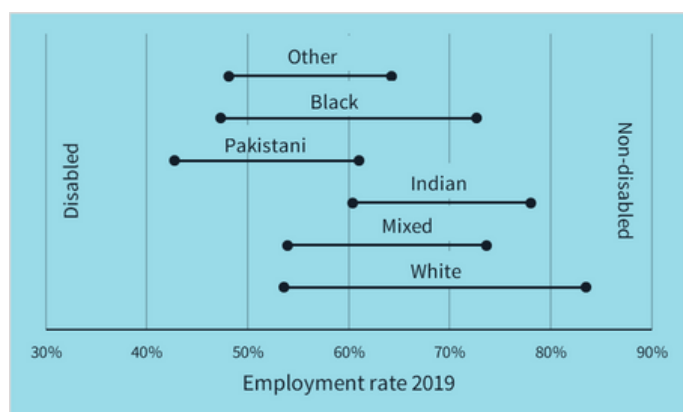
The DEG is wider for males than females, mainly due to non-disabled males having high employment rates. The DEG is also wider among older people, perhaps due to disabled people retiring early for health reasons.

## The DEG varies by age and sex



The largest DEG exists among white people, mainly due to white non-disabled people having a particularly high employment rate. White disabled people are employed at a lower rate than Indian disabled people, but at a higher rate than disabled people from Pakistani, Black and other ethnic groups.

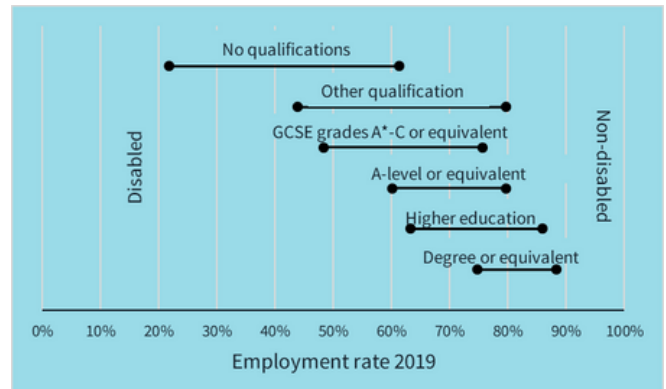
## The DEG is widest among white people



# THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

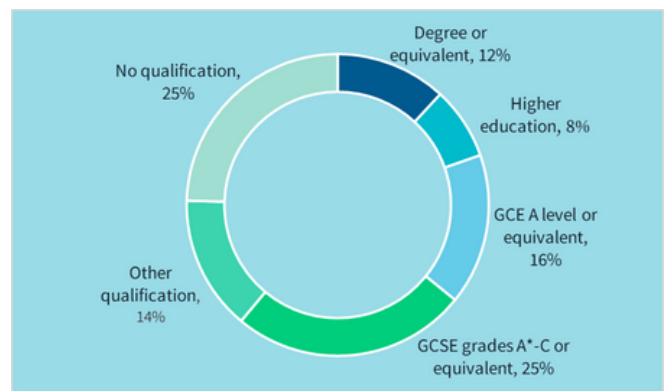
Education seems to matter much more for the employment of disabled people than for the employment of non-disabled people. The DEG is smallest among people holding a degree (and has been narrowing over time) while disabled people with no qualifications have particularly low employment rates.

## The DEG is bigger for people with lower education levels



Even though less than 16% of the disabled working age population has no qualifications, this group contributes to a quarter of the overall DEG in the UK. The most common highest qualification level among disabled people is GCSE grades A\*-C or equivalent, accounting for 23% of the disabled population. This group contributes to a further quarter of the overall DEG.

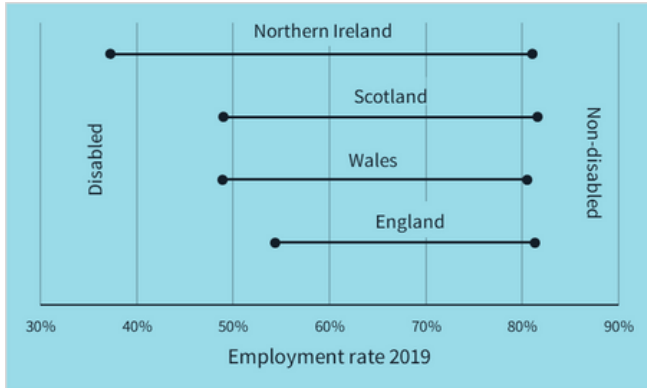
## How much of the overall DEG is attributable to different qualification levels?



# THE DEG ACROSS THE UK

Among the four nations of the UK, Northern Ireland has by far the widest DEG, a gap that has increased since 2014.

## Northern Ireland has the widest DEG



There is even more variation when we look at the DEG at a more local level. In 2019, East Ayrshire had the UK's largest DEG while Ceredigion had the smallest.

In general, areas with higher unemployment and lower productivity have a wider DEG. This suggests that local economic conditions have a disproportionate impact on the employment prospects of disabled people.

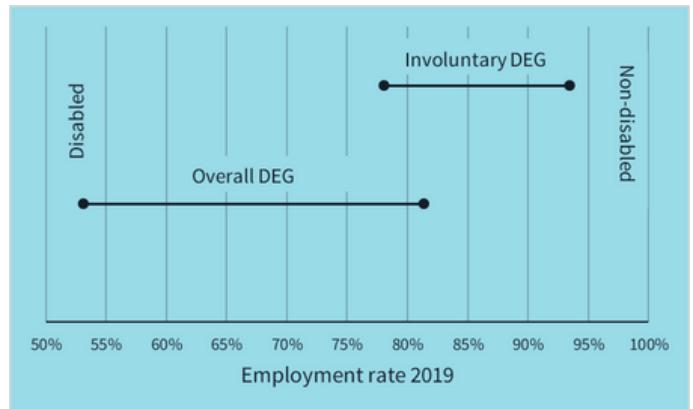
## Top five DEGs in the UK

Local area	DEG, 2019
East Ayrshire	48.7pp
North Lincolnshire	46.4pp
Clackmannanshire	46.0pp
Inverclyde	45.7pp
Belfast	45.5pp

# 'INVOLUNTARY' DEG

Not everyone without a job wants to work. In fact, it may be quite appropriate for many disabled people of working age to be supported not to work. We find that, if people who do not want employment are excluded from the analysis, then the DEG is much smaller. However, a DEG still exists (15 percentage points in 2019) showing that, even among people wanting to work, disabled people are much less likely to be employed.

## The 'involuntary' DEG is smaller than the overall DEG



# NEXT STEPS

Our programme of research, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, seeks to unpack the DEG in the UK, using statistical decomposition methods to identify the key factors explaining the DEG. Specifically, we address the following questions:

1. What factors explain the DEG at a point in time and how large are their relative contributions?
2. What explains differences in the DEG across areas?
3. What explains the change in DEG in recent years, and how has this been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

# FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, please see our website: [bit.ly/sheff-DEG](http://bit.ly/sheff-DEG)



Source of all data: Office for National Statistics, Social Survey Division (2022a). Annual Population Survey 2004-2021: Secure Access. [data collection]. 22nd Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6721. DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-6721-21

The project has been funded by the Nuffield Foundation, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation. Visit: [www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org)

