

Contents

Please click on the heading below to be taken to that page. Use the navigation at the bottom of the page to move around this document and come back to this page at any time.

Executive summary	3
Introduction	5
1. Out of work	6
Looking for work	6
Jobcentre Plus	9
Interviews	11
2. In work	12
The jobs people have	12
Employer attitudes	12
Job satisfaction	14
Adjustments in the workplace	16
Access to Work	17
3. Conclusions and recommendations	20
Contact details	21

Executive summary

This report is based upon new RNID research into the employment experiences and views of 870 deaf and hard of hearing people. The results of this research represent a challenge to the government, employment professionals and employers alike if deaf and hard of hearing people are to enjoy equality of opportunity in the labour market.

The report shows that:

- only **63%** of deaf and hard of hearing people are currently employed, compared to 75% of the population as a whole
- **one in five** people in the survey were unemployed and looking for work, compared to one in 20 in the UK labour market.
- **34%** of people who had used the services of a specialist disability employment adviser said that even they were not aware of the needs of deaf people
- **48%** of those in work said that employers did not know a lot about the government's Access to Work scheme, a programme that not only benefits disabled people in work, but also makes a significant contribution to the UK economy
- **55%** of people in work said that they felt socially isolated because of their deafness, and **26%** said that being deaf had led them to being harassed at work.

Clearly, some deaf and hard of hearing people are being denied the opportunity to gain and retain paid work. This is despite the fact that deaf people work in a wide variety of occupations and careers: from bankers to artists, from teaching to engineering.

It is not their deafness that prevents people from working – rather it is the lack of understanding and awareness on the part of others as to what deaf people can do. Our research found that:

- **59%** of respondents identified the attitudes of potential employers towards deaf people as a barrier to employment
- **49%** of people who had used the service said that the staff in Jobcentre Plus offices were not aware of the needs of deaf people. Recent cuts in Jobcentre Plus are unlikely to do anything but magnify this problem

Unless these issues are tackled, the employment rate of deaf and hard of hearing people will remain below that of hearing people. The following recommendations to the government, advisers and employers are designed to ensure that this will not be the case.

The government should:

- invest in and promote the Access to Work scheme, to cope with the expected increase in the numbers of disabled people entering the labour market as a result of welfare reform
- work proactively with employers to promote the recruitment and retention of deaf and hard of hearing people while continuing to publicise the existence of the Disability Discrimination Act and employers' duties
- work in close partnership with voluntary sector employment providers, using the expertise and experience of the sector to provide specialist training for deaf people and assist them into work.

In Jobcentre Plus, we would like to see:

- specialist deaf awareness training for all Jobcentre Plus employees
- the opportunity for every deaf client to see an employment adviser with appropriate communication skills/support within 48 hours of a visit
- an end to the growing reliance on the telephone for contacting Jobcentre Plus
- more awareness and promotion of the Access to Work scheme to both employers and potential employees.

Employers should:

- be aware of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and ensure that the needs of their deaf employees are assessed properly and met in full.
- seek to encourage people with a wide range of disabilities, including hearing loss, to apply for jobs, and ensure that the application and interview processes are fully accessible to all.
- make sure that deaf employees are not discriminated against in terms of training and promotion opportunities, and take active steps to involve deaf workers within the workplace culture to avoid feelings of isolation.
- ensure that no employee is ever harassed because of their hearing loss, and be prepared to use disciplinary procedures when such incidents do occur.

The government has set out an agenda for change, based on the principles of opportunity and equal rights. However, unless changes such as those outlined above are made, this agenda will remain a series of unfulfilled promises. Only with the right investment and appropriate and timely support can deaf and hard of hearing people finally enjoy their rightful position in the workplace.

Introduction

This report is based on new research conducted by RNID. We examined the employment experiences and attitudes of **870 deaf people of working age in the UK**.

Throughout this report, we use the term 'deaf people' to refer to deaf, deafened or hard of hearing people, including those who use British Sign Language (BSL) and people with communication needs.

We believe that deafness alone is no barrier to a full and successful working life. However, at a time when the UK is enjoying a sustained period of low unemployment, only **63%** of deaf people of working age are currently employed, compared to **75%** of the population as a whole¹. Our research clearly shows that some deaf people are being denied the opportunity to work that hearing people are not.

Similarly, **one in five** people in our survey were unemployed and looking for work. This means that they correspond to the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s definition of unemployment. Among the UK labour force as a whole, the percentage of ILO unemployed people is one in 20² – five times less than in our survey.

These statistics represents a challenge to the government. The challenge is to prove it is serious about providing opportunities to deaf people as a key element of its ongoing welfare reform programme.

In the past few years the government has introduced employment-focused programmes and legislation designed specifically for disabled people. Schemes such as Access to Work, Pathways to Work, New Deal for Disabled People and Workstep exist to provide training and assistance, while the Disability Discrimination Act exists to protect disabled people's rights. However, the situation remains that, as the government itself admits, "...disabled people are doing less well than non-disabled people in the labour market."³

This report examines some of the reasons why deaf and hard of hearing people are still denied the opportunity to work, and makes key recommendations as to how this situation can be remedied.

¹ Labour Force Survey, May 2006.

² Labour Force Survey, May 2006.

³ *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*, Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005 (p156).

1. Out of work

Looking for work

At the time of our survey, 60% of respondents who said they were unemployed were looking for work. We asked these people a series of questions about their experiences.

We found from this section of the research how difficult it can be for some deaf people to get into work.

Table 1.1
How long have you been looking for work?
(n=174)

Length of time	Percentage
Five years or more	18%
Between two and five years	18%
Between one and two years	21%
Between six months and one year	21%
Between three and six months	8%
Less than three months	12%

Table 1.1 shows that **36%** of respondents had been looking for work for more than two years, and that **57%** had been looking for work for more than a year. This compares very poorly with the national average of 20% of people unemployed and looking for work for more than 12 months⁴.

We wanted to know how active people were being in looking for work.

Table 1.2
How many jobs have you applied for within the past twelve months? (n=174)

Number of jobs applied for	Percentage
None	26%
One	11%
Between one and 10	36%
Between 10 and 20	12%
Between 20 and 40	7%
More than 40	4%

Generally speaking, the respondents were active in the labour market. **70%** had applied for work during the previous 12 months. **23%** had applied for more than 10 jobs during that period. Obviously, something is preventing these people from making the move into work.

Looking only at those people who had applied for work in the previous year (n=129):

- **27%** had not had a single interview for a job
- **26%** had had between one and 10 interviews.
- **43%** had had more than 10 interviews.

So it appears that although a sizeable minority do not get to the interview stage of the application process, many deaf people can and do get invited to job interviews. However, for both groups, barriers remain to that move into employment.

⁴Extrapolation from the Labour Force Survey, May 2006

1. Out of work

We asked respondents whether they thought that their deafness had an impact on their ability to find work.

Table 1.3
“Being deaf makes it harder for me to find a job” (n=174)

Response	Percentage
Agree strongly	71%
Agree slightly	15%
Neither agree not disagree	4%
Disagree slightly	2%
Disagree strongly	3%
Don't know/no answer	5%

This table shows conclusively that there is a strong perception that deafness can make looking for work harder. **86%** of respondents agreed to some extent with the statement, while only **5%** disagreed.

Among people who were unemployed but not looking for work, the results were similar.

Table 1.4
“Being deaf made it harder for me to find a job” (n=148)

Response	Percentage
Agree strongly	55%
Agree slightly	18%
Neither agree not disagree	8%
Disagree slightly	8%
Disagree strongly	3%
Don't know/no answer	8%

The results for people already in work also followed a similar pattern.

Table 1.5
“Being deaf made it harder for me to find a job” (n=548)

Response	Percentage
Agree strongly	46%
Agree slightly	27%
Neither agree not disagree	11%
Disagree slightly	5%
Disagree strongly	6%
Don't know/no answer	6%

Even among people who had found work, there was a significant perception that deafness had been a barrier, with **73%** agreeing with the statement.

We were interested to know what deaf people thought were the main barriers to looking for work.

1. Out of work

Table 1.6
In your experience of looking for work, what are the main barriers to employment for deaf and hard of hearing people? (n=870).

Response	Percentage
The attitude of employers	59%
A lack of communication support	52%
A lack of suitable jobs	33%
A lack of skills and training	22%
A lack of English language skills	17%
Low pay relative to benefits	16%
The attitude of disability employment advisers	14%
The attitude of employment advisers	13%

The single most important barrier, with more than half of respondents identifying it, is the attitude of employers towards deaf people. It is disappointing to find that 10 years after the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), an Act designed in part to legislate for equality of opportunity for disabled people in the labour market, employers are still perceived as being unwilling to take on deaf staff.

In a way this is not surprising. The DDA promotes the notion of equality of opportunity and requires employers not to discriminate against disabled people. However, it cannot, by itself, have a significant impact on employment rates in the short term. The DDA is fundamentally compensatory in nature, existing to provide recompense to disabled people after they have been discriminated against. In this way, the legislation relies on individual disabled people recognising that they have been discriminated

against – and also having both the ability and the will to take legal action. If employers continue to discriminate, they will continue to face court action, but it will take considerable time for real change to be seen. The DDA is important legislation, and the government needs to continue to promote it. However, in the meantime, it is vital that deaf people are also given all the support and assistance they need to get into work.

Table 1.6 also shows, however, that the very advice and support that currently exists to assist disabled people into work is itself perceived as a barrier to employment. Employment advisers, including those who exist specifically for disabled people, are felt by some to display a negative attitude towards deaf people. Similarly, the notion that there is a lack of suitable jobs can be interpreted to suggest that deaf people are given poor advice about the kinds of work that they can do. A number of people also identified low pay as a barrier, as well as a lack of skills and training. Again, it is the responsibility of employment advisers to give their clients the opportunities to receive the training and skills to help them find and achieve fulfilling and rewarding work.

Finally, Table 1.6 shows the importance of communication support for deaf people when looking for a job. **52%** of respondents identified this as a barrier. Communication support, such as the use of a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, a speech-to-text reporter, a lipspeaker or notetaker, is often vital for a deaf or hard of hearing person to fully take part in job hunting. Communication support needs to be present at all stages of this search, from advice and support in Jobcentre Plus offices, through training programmes and into the application process and interviews. It is up to employment advisers and employers to ensure that the appropriate support is available at the appropriate time.

1. Out of work

“49% of respondents who had used Jobcentre Plus found that staff were not deaf aware”

Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus is the first port of call for anyone who is looking for work and claiming benefits. It seeks to provide individuals with advice and assistance in getting into work, and can refer disabled job seekers to a specialist disability employment adviser for specialist help.

The fact that employment advisers and professionals were identified as actually providing a barrier to finding work led us to investigate respondents' experience of using Jobcentre Plus. Of those who said they were currently looking for work, **74%** had either used the services that Jobcentre Plus provides, or had visited one of their offices.

We asked those who had used Jobcentre Plus whether they thought it was accessible.

Table 1.7
How easy to use do you find Jobcentre Plus services, as a deaf or hard of hearing person?
(n=128)

Ease of use	Percentage
Very easy	11%
Quite easy	26%
Neither easy nor difficult	23%
Quite difficult	19%
Very difficult	18%
Don't know/no answer	3%

While using Jobcentre Plus services poses no problem for the majority (**60%**) of respondents, a significant minority (**37%**) find them difficult to use.

To be able to use Jobcentre Plus services efficiently and with confidence, deaf clients have to feel that staff are aware of their needs.

Table 1.8
How deaf aware did you find the staff at Jobcentre Plus? (n=128)

Level of awareness	Percentage
Very deaf aware	8%
Quite deaf aware	16%
Neither aware nor unaware	20%
Not very deaf aware	26%
Not at all deaf aware	23%
Don't know/no answer	7%

49% of respondents who had used Jobcentre Plus found that staff were not deaf aware, while only **24%** identified deaf awareness.

Of course, it cannot reasonably be expected that all staff within Jobcentre Plus offices will be aware of the specific needs of all disabled people. To ensure that disabled people's needs are catered for, specialist disability employment advisers (DEAs) offer tailored employment assessments, information, advice and practical help in looking for and finding suitable work.

80% of our sample who had used Jobcentre Plus services had had contact with a DEA. We asked them how deaf aware these DEAs were (table 1.9).

1. Out of work

Table 1.9
How deaf aware were they (disability employment advisers)? (n=102)

Level of awareness	Percentage
Very deaf aware	21%
Quite deaf aware	27%
Neither aware nor unaware	16%
Not very deaf aware	22%
Not at all deaf aware	12%
Don't know/no answer	4%

Table 1.9 shows that less than half (**48%**) of respondents thought that their DEA was deaf aware. Such a low level of deaf awareness among the very professionals who are supposed to provide expert advice and assistance is a cause for significant concern.

We also found that only **36%** of people who had had contact with a DEA believed that the DEA understood the barriers facing deaf people looking for work.

Finally, we wanted to measure the satisfaction levels of all Jobcentre Plus users with the service. The results are not encouraging.

Table 1.10
Overall, how satisfied are you with the service Jobcentre Plus gives? (n=128)

Level of satisfaction	Percentage
Very satisfied	9%
Quite satisfied	15%
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	27%
Quite unsatisfied	19%
Very unsatisfied	21%
Don't know/no answer	10%

40% of respondents were unsatisfied with Jobcentre Plus to some degree, compared to only **24%** who were satisfied with the service they had received.

Recent changes in the way Jobcentre Plus is run could make this situation even worse. The Department of Work and Pensions is under pressure to make significant savings in expenditure as a result of a Review of Public Service Efficiency that reported in 2004. One of the report's recommendations stated that the Department of Work and Pensions should reduce its staffing levels by 40,000 full-time posts by 2008. The report also recommended that remote forms of contact (web-based or telephone) replace more expensive face-to-face contact⁵.

Reduced staffing levels and the use of contact centres will obviously have an impact on deaf job seekers, many of whom will find using the telephone difficult (if not impossible), and may not have access to alternative methods of communication.

It would appear that for many deaf people, the search for work is hampered at the very beginning. If the specialists do not understand the issues and obstacles confronting deaf job seekers, these obstacles can seem even more overwhelming. It is clear that if deaf people are to be successful in finding work, Jobcentre Plus needs to provide a much better service. Deaf people need to have access to specialist provision that meets their communication needs rather than the more general disability approach currently offered by Jobcentre Plus. We believe that the government should work with key organisations, including those in the voluntary sector, that have both the expertise and experience in providing specialist support if deaf people are to enjoy equality of opportunity in the labour market.

⁵ Gershon, P (2004), *Releasing Resources to the frontline: Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency*, HMSO

1. Out of work

“23% of respondents feel that employers make an issue of deafness in the interview”

Interviews

Another potential barrier to deaf job seekers is the interview process. It is here that the applicant first comes into face-to-face contact with the employer. We wanted to know whether being deaf made a difference to the interview process, and asked those who had attended a job interview about their experiences.

Table 1.11
“Employers accept my deafness in interviews, and do not make a big thing of it.” (n=727)

Response	Percentage
Agree strongly	18%
Agree slightly	25%
Neither agree not disagree	23%
Disagree slightly	13%
Disagree strongly	10%
Don't know/no answer	10%

This table shows that **23%** of respondents feel that employers do make an issue of deafness in the interview, a situation that may be seen as placing a deaf candidate at a disadvantage.

Table 1.12
“How deaf aware were the people who have interviewed you?” (n=727)

Response	Percentage
Very deaf aware	10%
Quite deaf aware	20%
Neither aware nor unaware	25%
Not very deaf aware	24%
Not at all deaf aware	14%
Don't know/no answer	11%

Table 1.12 shows that **38%** of respondents believed that the people interviewing them had not been aware of deaf people's issues and needs. This reinforces the suggestion that the interview process can be difficult for deaf people to negotiate successfully.

2. In work

The jobs people have

63% of respondents were in work at the time we carried out the survey. We were interested to find out what jobs they were doing and who they worked for.

The sheer range of jobs listed by respondents proves there are very few jobs that deaf people cannot do. While more than one in five (**22%**) worked in clerical and administrative positions, we found people working in a wide variety of occupations and sectors.

These included: teachers, engineers, caterers, bankers, artists, designers, sales and marketing people, health professionals, estate agents and factory workers. These jobs were found in sectors ranging from utility supply, agriculture, social services, construction, information technology, the media and local government.

It is also worth noting that respondents worked at all levels of their businesses, from senior management to the shop floor. And **8%** of those in work were self-employed.

Finally, **82%** of people in work were employed full-time, and **91%** were on a permanent contract.

These findings show that being deaf or hard of hearing does not have to be a barrier to the world of work, and that deaf people are as adaptable, as skilled and as capable as hearing people.

Employer attitudes

We wanted to know what deaf people thought about their employers and how they were treated at work.

Table 2.1
How deaf aware are your colleagues? (n=548)

Level of awareness	Percentage
Very deaf aware	19%
Quite deaf aware	38%
Neither aware nor unaware	18%
Not very deaf aware	15%
Not at all deaf aware	8%
Don't know/no answer	3%

The very fact that our respondents were in work may account for the fact that **57%** believed that their colleagues were deaf aware. There is no better way for an organisation to improve its awareness of deaf issues than to employ deaf people. This is a positive sign, though it still leaves **23%** of respondents working alongside colleagues who are not deaf aware.

Further questioning revealed that **43%** of employed respondents worked for businesses or organisations that did not provide deaf awareness training for their staff. Of the respondents who worked for those organisations, **75%** believed that such training would be useful.

One of the main problems that can face deaf people in the workplace is the ability to communicate effectively with work colleagues.

2. In work

Table 2.2
How easy do you find it to communicate with your colleagues? (n=548).

Ease of communication	Percentage
Very easy	15%
Quite easy	33%
Neither easy nor difficult	27%
Quite difficult	19%
Very difficult	5%
Don't know/no answer	2%

While **75%** of respondents have no difficulty communicating with their colleagues, **24%** do. For complete integration into the workplace, there needs to be effective communication.

We wanted to know how deaf people fitted in at work, and asked them whether they felt isolated because they were deaf. The results are not encouraging.

Table 2.3
“I feel isolated at work socially because of my deafness” (n=548)

Level of agreement	Percentage
I strongly agree	25%
I slightly agree	30%
I neither agree nor disagree	20%
I slightly disagree	6%
I strongly disagree	16%
Don't know/no answer	3%

55% of working respondents agreed that they felt socially isolated at work because of their deafness. Although this may not appear to be the most important aspect of work life, social

integration with colleagues can have a significant effect on morale and teamwork.

Table 2.4
“I have been harassed at work because of my deafness” (n=548)

Level of agreement	Percentage
I strongly agree	13%
I slightly agree	13%
I neither agree nor disagree	17%
I slightly disagree	9%
I strongly disagree	42%
Don't know/no answer	6%

It is disappointing to learn that **26%** of respondents felt that being deaf had made them the subject of harassment while at work. Such behaviour, whether by colleagues or management, cannot be allowed under any circumstances, and those responsible should be disciplined or even prosecuted.

Of course, there are other forms of discrimination in the workplace, besides harassment. We were interested to discover if respondents felt they had been denied the opportunity to further their careers because of their deafness.

We found that **25%** of respondents believed they had been denied training or personal development because they were deaf or hard of hearing. **51%** felt their deafness had affected their promotion opportunities.

It is evident from these results that deaf people can face obstacles in the workplace. Employers have a significant role to play in making sure that deaf workers have equal access to promotion and self-advancement – as well as ensuring that they are fully integrated into the working environment.

2. In work

“62% of respondents felt that their skills and abilities were being fully used in their jobs”

Job satisfaction

We asked whether people were happy in their current job. Only **15%** of respondents were not happy, with almost half, **47%**, saying that they were happy. **62%** of respondents felt that their skills and abilities were being fully used in their jobs, compared to **29%** who did not. Again, this suggests a general level of contentment. However, in contrast, only half of the respondents felt that their job makes full use of their qualifications, compared to one third (**34%**) who do not.

Despite these satisfaction levels, we found that **40%** of respondents were looking for another job at the time of the survey. This would appear to be a high proportion of the sample, and we wanted to know why people wanted to change. The most popular answers are listed in table 2.6.

Table 2.6

Why are you looking for another job? (n=219)

Reason	Percentage
I want a change/new opportunities	64%
I feel isolated at work	29%
Not enough training opportunities	29%
The attitude of my employer	23%
Lack of communication support	18%
The attitude of my colleagues	16%
Family/personal reasons	12%
Reasons related to deafness	11%
I want to work more hours	10%

Apart from the very high proportion of people simply wanting change, most of the more popular reasons for people wanting to change jobs were negative – often concerning attitudes within the workplace, lack of opportunity or lack of support. More positive answers, such as a desire to earn more, to have more responsibility or a greater challenge were far rarer, with **less than 5%** identifying these as factors.

However, it is generally agreed that changing jobs is not easy for a deaf or hard of hearing person, as table 2.7 (overleaf) displays.

2. In work

Table 2.7
“Being deaf has stopped me changing jobs as often as I wanted to” (n=548)

Response	Percentage
Agree strongly	52%
Agree slightly	26%
Neither agree nor disagree	7%
Disagree slightly	5%
Disagree strongly	3%
Don't know/no answer	2%

A substantial proportion of working respondents – **78%** – believe that deafness has held them back on their career path. It seems that even those who have successfully found employment, and who have overcome the considerable barriers in the world of work, continue to face difficulties.

Finally, we also asked people who had left work, but who were not looking for employment at the time of the survey, why they left. Table 2.8 displays the most popular responses.

Table 2.8
Why did you leave your last job? (n=131)

Reason	Percentage
Illness or disability (not related to deafness)	24%
To look after family or partner	19%
Made redundant	18%
Illness or disability (related to deafness)	17%
Unhappiness (related to deafness)	13%
Early retirement	13%
Temporary job/end of contract	12%

Table 2.8 shows that **30%** of respondents had left because of reasons directly related to their deafness, either because of disability or unhappiness. RNID believes that no one should have to leave work for such a reason, and that deaf staff can perform in the workplace just as well as hearing staff. We believe it is the duty of employers to ensure that deaf staff are fully supported in the workplace, and their needs properly catered for.

2. In work

“78% of respondents believe that deafness has held them back on their career path”

Adjustments in the workplace

One of the key ways an employer can support deaf staff is to implement and use adjustments to make the working environment more accessible. A number of adjustments can help deaf people, and we examined these.

We asked respondents whether they needed or already had access to a number of pieces of equipment or adjustments. In many cases, there was little difference between need and access, but there were some areas where provision was lacking significantly behind need.

Table 2.9:
Whether people need/have access to specific equipment or adjustments at work (n=548)

Equipment/adjustment	Need	Have
BSL interpreter	40%	32%
Notetaker	32%	12%
Speech-to-text reporter	13%	5%
Speedtext operator	14%	4%
Lipspeaker	11%	8%
Hearing loop/infrared system	20%	14%
Amplified telephone	21%	19%
Textphone (or Minicom)	52%	49%
RNID Typetalk	50%	44%
Mobile textphone	44%	33%
SMS/text message service	52%	45%
Videophone	16%	5%
Flashing telephone	35%	29%
Pager	23%	7%
Flashing fire alarm	52%	24%
Page for the fire alarm	45%	23%

Table 2.9 clearly shows that there are some areas where deaf employees do not have access to the sorts of adjustments in the workplace that may assist them. The statistics suggest that one in five people who need a BSL interpreter at work do not have one, and almost two in every three people who need someone to take notes for them have to do without.

Where the cost of the adjustment is a one-off payment, there are fewer gaps in provision, although almost one in three respondents who need a loop or infrared system in their workplace do not have access to one. It would also appear that inexpensive technology, such as pagers, would benefit almost one in four of our respondents, but only one in 14 has access to one.

We are also concerned that employers do not appear to have taken notice of the needs of deaf employees in emergency situations, such as a fire. Only around half of those surveyed who needed a flashing fire alarm or a pager for the alarm had access to such devices.

The lack of provision is disappointing. Yet it is unsurprising when we consider that of respondents currently working, 24% said no adjustments had been made at work to meet their needs.

2. In work

Access to Work

The government's Access to Work scheme exists to provide financial assistance to employers and disabled employees to meet the costs of some of the adjustments that may be needed in the workplace. These adjustments may take the form of physical alterations (such as widening doors, wheelchair lifts and ramps), technology (computer screen readers for blind people), help with paying for travel to and from work and personal assistance (communication support).

Access to Work is a highly effective and important scheme that not only assists disabled people into work, but also allows employers to experience the skills and abilities of disabled workers. This can help to break down some of the barriers between disabled people and work. Many users of Access to Work believe that without its support, they would find it difficult or impossible to continue in employment⁶.

Not only is Access to Work a work-effective intervention, but it is also a cost-effective one. The Department of Work and Pensions has calculated that for every pound spent on the scheme, the government receives £1.70 back⁷, in national insurance contributions, taxation and reduced demand on state benefits. Similarly, the government has stated that for every individual helped by Access to Work, there is a net benefit to the Exchequer of £1,400 and a net benefit to the economy of £3,000⁸.

It is a measure of its success that the Access to Work budget has been increased year on year since its introduction in 1994. The budget has quadrupled over the past 10 financial years from £14.6m in 1997-98 to almost £60m in 2006-07. The scheme assisted 32,000 disabled people in 2005-06. If we apply this to the net benefit analysis above, this means an effective contribution to the UK economy of £96m.

However, despite the success of the scheme, there has been a growing reluctance to increase the Access to Work budget further. If the government's welfare reform agenda to increase the numbers of disabled people entering employment are to work, we believe that the Access to Work budget must be increased substantially in order to cope with growing demand.

Given these facts, we were interested to learn about our respondents' experiences of Access to Work, and, indeed, whether they had heard of or used its services.

We thought that people currently in work would have been more likely to have heard of the scheme, and were surprised to find that a sizeable minority (**27%**) had not, compared to **56%** who definitely had.

Of those who had heard of it, **40%** were using it at the time of the research and **27%** had never used it.

More specifically, we were interested to learn where people had heard of Access to Work.

⁶ See Thornton, P. & Corden, A. (2002), *Evaluating the Impact of Access to Work: A Case Study Approach*, CDS, London.

⁷ Letter to Roger Berry MP, from Margaret Hodge, the then Minister of State for Work and Welfare Reform, September 12, 2005.

⁸ Written answer provided by Anne McGuire, the Minister for Disabled People to the House of Commons on March 20, 2006.

2. In work

Table 2.10
When you started the job you are doing at the moment, did your employer say anything about Access to Work? (n=548)

Response	Percentage
Yes	31%
No	53%
Don't know/no answer	16%

More than half of those respondents currently working and who could potentially benefit from the services that Access to Work provides did not have the scheme mentioned to them by their employer when they joined. Further questions, addressed only to those people who had used the scheme, revealed various sources of information.

Table 2.11
How did you first find out about Access to Work? (n=370)

Source of information	Percentage
An employer	28%
Disability/employment adviser	24%
Jobcentre Plus/job club	16%
Trade Union official	14%
Social worker	7%
Publicity/government	6%

Job centres and employment advisers account for **40%** of all cases, with employers accounting for only **28%**. But it is important for disabled people to learn about the scheme at an early stage, and we would expect to see specialist advisers telling job seekers about the benefits of the scheme before they came into contact with employers.

However, it is important that employers are aware of the scheme themselves. We asked current and former users of Access to Work about their perceptions of employers' understanding.

2. In work

“53% of respondents said that their employer did not mention Access to Work to them”

Table 2.12
“Employers know a lot about Access to Work and how it works.” (n=370)

Response	Percentage
Agree strongly	9%
Agree slightly	12%
Neither agree nor disagree	19%
Disagree slightly	18%
Disagree strongly	30%
Don't know/no answer	11%

Table 2.12 shows that **48%** of our respondents did not believe that employers know much about Access to Work. This is discouraging, considering that the respondents for this question were current or past users of the scheme.

This is not necessarily the fault of employers, though. RNID has long argued that the Access to Work scheme is under-publicised and that, as a result, many people who could benefit from it are unable to do so. The government's argument is that the scheme always runs over budget, and so to spend more money on advertising its existence would reduce the funds available to existing users while also creating problems of excess demand.

Our argument is that without greater promotion, many people will continue to be denied access to assistance that could help them gain and retain work. The government should be seeking to improve the system rather than justify the maintenance of random provision based solely on whether employers, advisers or clients have been fortunate enough to hear of it.

For those respondents who do use Access to Work, the experience seems a generally positive one. As we would hope, Access to Work staff are generally seen to be deaf aware. **65%** of respondents who have been into contact with them rated them as deaf aware.

Additionally, **40%** of Access to Work clients said that they found the system easy to use, compared to **26%** who had difficulties. There is some suggestion that deaf people find the system more complicated and less satisfying than others⁹, and this may be because the support they need (such as communication support workers) are long-term and require greater organisation than one-off adjustments and expenditures associated with other disabilities.

Despite the fact that some deaf people have experienced difficulties with Access to Work, RNID believes that it is a vital link in the chain connecting people with work. For these reasons, as well as the economic benefits it brings, the government should be seeking to invest further in the scheme.

⁹See Thornton et. al. (2001): Users' views of Access to Work: Final Report of a Study for the Employment Service, Research & Development Report ESR72, Employment Service, Sheffield (summary).

3. Conclusion and recommendations

This report shows clearly that the reasons why deaf people find it harder to find paid work are not related to their hearing or any limitations this may impose upon them. Instead, it is employers' perceptions of limitation and advisers' lack of awareness that stand between deaf people and the world of work.

If these barriers are to be removed, the government needs to act. RNID believes that only by following these recommendations can deaf people achieve equality of opportunity.

In Jobcentre Plus, we would like to see:

- specialist deaf awareness training for all Jobcentre Plus employees
- the opportunity for every deaf client to see an employment adviser with appropriate communication skills and support within 48 hours of a visit
- an end to the growing reliance on the telephone for contacting Jobcentre Plus
- more awareness and promotion of the Access to Work scheme to both employers and potential employees.

The government should:

- invest in and promote the Access to Work scheme, to cope with the expected increase in the numbers of disabled people entering the labour market as a result of welfare reform
- work proactively with employers to promote the recruitment and retention of deaf and hard of hearing people whilst continuing to publicise the existence of the Disability Discrimination Act and employers' duties
- work in close partnership with voluntary sector employment providers, using the expertise and experience of the sector to provide specialist training for deaf people and assist them into work.

Employers should:

- be aware of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and ensure that the needs of their deaf employees are assessed properly and met in full
- seek to encourage people with a wide range of disabilities, including hearing loss, to apply for jobs, and ensure that the application and interview processes are fully accessible to all
- make sure that deaf employees are not discriminated against in terms of training and promotion opportunities, and take active steps to involve deaf workers within the workplace culture to avoid feelings of isolation
- ensure that no employee is ever harassed because of their hearing loss, and be prepared to use disciplinary procedures when such incidents do occur.



We're RNID, the charity working to change the world for the UK's 9 million deaf and hard of hearing people.

There are a number of ways to find out more

www.rnid.org.uk

Information line

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

Or write to us

informationline@rnid.org.uk

19-23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL

Fax 020 7296 8199



2476/0706 Registered Charity No. 207720
Photography Stuart Freedman, Simon de Trey-White, Philip Meech. Illustration Kate Miller

RNID •

Changing the world for deaf
and hard of hearing people