

Emergency Budget 2015: mixed messages for working aged disabled people

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Ahead of the Conservative Government's first Budget today, disabled people are experiencing mixed messages about what to expect from their future support, writes [Rose Grayston](#).



On the one hand, the Government made welcome election commitments to halve the gap between disabled and non-disabled people's employment rates, which currently stands at 31.3 per cent, and to enhance and safeguard Personal Independence Payments (PIP). On the other hand, many disabled people are concerned by media speculation about cuts, taxation and means-testing of the benefits they use to live, work and participate in society.

Scope's recent [Enabling Work report](#) explores the important role the disabled labour force could play in the country's economic recovery. Expanding disabled people's opportunities to work and delivering a 10 percentage point increase in the employment rate by 2030 would deliver significant benefits:

- an additional £45 billion in Gross Domestic Product;
- savings to the Exchequer of £12 billion;
- a 3-5 percentage point reduction in the proportion of disabled people living in relative poverty.

Scope is concerned about the impact that £12 billion of welfare savings could have on disabled people's opportunities to fully participate in their communities and the economy. Media speculation that Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and PIP may be taxed or means-tested is especially troubling. All disabled people face extra costs as a result of the need for specialist equipment and services, amounting to on average £550 of additional spending each month. DLA and PIP provide on average £360 a month, enabling disabled people to manage some of these extra costs. For the 368,000 claimants who are in work, over half say they would not be able to work without it, and moves to tax or means-test DLA / PIP will affect this group disproportionately.

The Government's 'Disability Confident' campaign seeks to improve employer attitudes, an ongoing challenge which 74% of disabled people feel have led to them losing out on jobs. Beyond this, change to policy and practice in three key areas is needed to halve the disability employment gap:

- Personal Independence Payments must not be taxed or means-tested;
- Disabled people must be at the heart of plans to revolve employment and skills policy, such as the 'Northern Powerhouse';
- The Government and employers must ensure disabled people can retain work and progress their careers, for example by expanding Access to Work and providing flexible leave entitlements;
- Work Capability Assessments should be replaced with Distance from Work assessments, providing specialist support to disabled people through personalised budgets.

Enabling disabled people to play their full and active role in the recovery has clear benefits for disabled workers and for the economy. Scope will be interested to see how the budget, and the Comprehensive Spending Review to come, will support this goal.

About the Author

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