

THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

TX: **YOU AND YOURS - DISABILITY - 10.01.03**

PRESENTER: **Peter White**

WHITE

Now all this week we've been trying to solve the conundrum: why don't more disabled people have jobs? And why is the joblessness figure so far resisted all attempts to boost it? Things like anti-discrimination laws and New Deal - aimed specifically at getting long-term unemployed disabled people into full-time work. Disabled persons' tax credits, enhanced services at job centres - the list goes.

The Labour government said very early on in its administration it thought that there were a million disabled people who wanted to work and it's a figure which still gets trotted out from time to time. Numerous agencies, statutory and voluntary, say they're doing their best to place people and many of the disabled people who've contacted You and Yours - and there have been a lot of them since the series began on Monday - obviously want to work too. But many of them cite as reasons for not being able to do so, things like an inflexible benefit system, government programmes like the New Deal which are too restrictive and either employers who don't want them at all or who can't handle the adaptations that they're asked to make in their work methods to accommodate them.

oment. We're also going to be hearing from some of the people the system seems to be letting down, starting with Chris Phillips. Now Chris is partially sighted, he got a good upper second from the London School of Economics last summer and he's desperate to start work and develop a career. But as you'll hear it's not happening for him.

PHILLIPS

Actually my first interview I had was with a company who hire English teachers to work abroad. The first couple of stages they were very enthusiastic about my application, so I've gone there on the day and the interview seems to be going very well. At one point I was asked to read a passage from a book, now I have a special set of reading glasses which I use for small print, so I just slipped these on and read the passage and immediately I kind of noticed the mood of the interview changed after I put my glasses on. Basically I didn't get the job and I was kind of off-put by the change in the interview tone.

WHITE

When you say it changed, what happened?

PHILLIPS

It was before - the guy who was interviewing me - he was very enthusiastic and we seemed to be having a good rapport but after I'd read the passage I got the impression that he was going through the motions rather than actually taking in what I was saying.

WHITE

What effect - what influence would this have had on your ability to do the job that you were applying for?

PHILLIPS

I don't think it would have had any effect at all.

WHITE

Now I think in another instance you actually got as far as doing the job, tell me about that.

PHILLIPS

I'm signed up with a lot of temp agencies just to hopefully get some money in to keep me going. And one time I was put into a mail room, I had been there no more than two hours and the initial position was supposed to be a for a week and a half when the supervisor basically told me that she didn't think I would be dextrous enough for the job. I wouldn't have minded this if by the end of the day I hadn't completed all the work that was asked of me and the mail - all of the mail got out, there wasn't any problems but of course she'd already made her decision and that was that.

WHITE

Have you had any work at all of any substance since you graduated?

PHILLIPS

No, I've had a few days temp work and that's really been it.

WHITE

What's your reaction to what's happened to you so far?

PHILLIPS

It's difficult, I don't want to - I don't want to say that I'm continually discriminated against, I don't feel that I really have been. There are those two instances which they do rile me, they make me annoyed but I'm at a state where I just accept these things and carry on. If I'm in this position in a few more months time I may start to wonder. It's quite depressing, it really is, it's demoralising.

WHITE

Chris Phillips. And more stories to come.

Let's get a comment from our guests about this case and its implications. First of all with us is the Secretary of State for work and pensions - Andrew Smith. Minister I don't doubt - nobody doubts the governme

More generally, of course, we are, as a government, dedicated to extending employment opportunities of disabled people and we've got a range of programmes, both the action we've taken to counter discrimination, setting up the Disability Rights Commission, the New Deal programmes, the introduction of disabled persons' tax credit and of course more generally running the economy in a way that generates more jobs. Job Centre plus as well.

WHITE

Can I ask you - sorry - can I ask you specifically about New Deal - we'll come back to many of these things as we go along - but surely the New Deal for disabled people has been much less successful than you hoped and indeed than some of the other new deals like those involving youth employment?

SMITH

We recognise that New Deal for disabled people which, let's acknowledge, has helped 8,000 people now into jobs ...

WHITE

Which compared to a million that you say are looking for ...

SMITH

And we're looking at how it can be streamlined and further improved so the benefits of those who are providing the help through New Deal for disabled people and ultimately of course disabled people themselves. But can I just make one very important general quick point on overall levels of employment of disabled people because whilst it's true the labour force survey shows something like a million disabled people not in work who would like to work and we want to help them and whilst progress is never fast enough in this area and I'd like it to be faster, it's not true to say that no progress is being made. Since 1998 the gap in the employment rate between non-disabled and disabled people has narrowed by some three per cent, it does represent some 200,000 more disabled people in jobs. So there's a lot further to go but we are making progress. I actually think ...

WHITE

Can I just ...

SMITH

..we're in the middle of a big cultural change ...

WHITE

Okay, well we'll talk ...

SMITH

... in this country's ...

WHITE

... about that.

SMITH

... and we need to carry that forward faster.

WHITE

We'

condition and circumstances, I very well understand that and we are trying all the time to make the system more flexible and responsive so it can help people like her. And of course many disabled people, I mean obviously we've got to make more flexible opportunities for employment and we do have a more flexible labour market in the UK than many other countries which does offer m

to a point where I could no longer support myself financially. In the same week I moved, turned 30 and, for want of a better word, retired. Retirement is the wrong word, not only because I don't claim any pension, I claim instead incapacity benefit, but more precisely it's the wrong word because I have a job. It takes me two hours, with the help of my carer, to get out of bed, breakfasted and dressed. I commit two hours a day to physiotherapy and exercise. At least one hour a day's consumed by the bureaucracy of disability. I spent this Tuesday afternoon in a surreal meeting with a social worker discussing how much extra I spend on washing powder to clean sheets soiled due to incontinence. The aim was to assess the additional costs of living with a disability, in order to calculate my contribution to the cost of my care. My carer suggested that the cost of Jaffa Cakes be considered as he would not broke a workplace absence of a ready supply. Five hours a day, seven days a week, no weekends, no holiday - 35 hours a week, a full working week in some of the more civilised countries in Europe. It is a difficult and demanding job and the pay is poor.

Still after months of adapting to the ever changing demands of this condition I've created a few spare hours a week, between 8 and 16 I would guess, and I try to write. And here's the rub. My talking to you now contravenes almost every rule. It's taken me most of the week to write this and I hope you find it informative because when my cheque arrives the path of least resistance will be to tear it up. This is hardly something of which the Inland Revenue would approve, after all some of it will belong to them. I'm not expecting a huge fee - nobody works in radio for the money - but if You and Yours pays me more than £70 it will be enough to jeopardise my income support and more seriously my housing benefit and council tax benefit.

The aim of the New Deal is to get those on long-term incapacity benefit back to full-time work. Personally I don't have the capacity, never mind the time. I've written these 500 words this week, I have physiotherapy to do, I have washing powder to weigh and Jaffa cakes to buy. There is only one

WHITE

So you're given the money and you pay it out to the people who you need equipment from or help?

MAYNARD-CAMPBELL

You have a budget ...

WHITE

You take control.

MAYNARD-CAMPBELL

... and you can use it, yeah.

WHITE

Tania Burchardt you've looked at this whole area for several years now - I don't want to make you sound too old - but I mean what do you think - what would you say to Andrew Smith what the government could do to make a real big difference?

BURCHARDT

Well I think there are three things very quickly. The first is that one of the lessons from the New Deal for disabled people pilots, which were undertaken during the first term of the Labour government, was that those schemes which had close links with employers and really concentrated their efforts on working with employers, informing them about the help that was available, overcoming ignorance and discrimination and indeed monitoring the progress of the employers at their success at taking on disabled workers - those were the most successful schemes. Not the schemes that concentrated on the job seeker. We heard from Chris, a job seeker who was doing all the right things in terms of looking for work, he wasn't the problem, the problem was probably with the employers.

WHITE

We may have to skip your other two I think, because I want to get everyone else's in as well. Susan, employers - that Scope report suggested that there was still a lot of prejudice, what would help them be less prejudiced?

ANDERSON

I agree with Tania that we can do a lot by providing information about the support that is available, both to employers and indeed to potential employees. So better information, particularly directed at those smaller firms who don't really know to whom to turn and often are put off because they just can't get access to good information. But can I just make a point? Employers are doing an awful lot already and some of the things they are doing don't cost money and often what a lot of disabled people need are flexible working or working from home and these things don't actually cost employers money and if we can get that message across to employers I think we can be doing a lot of good.

WHITE

Andrew Smith, finally and briefly, could you not simplify a lot of this stuff - this seems to be the overall message that people are sending, to the government anyway?

SMITH

We have been making it simpler, for example, for people to work whilst they get support, either through the tax credit or through, for example, incapacity benefit we increase the amount that people are allowed to earn in line with the minimum wage. In terms of what we can do, I very much agree with what's just been said about employers and it's important to remember that the Disability Rights

