



DWP Milburn Report is another excuse to throw disabled kids under the bus

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The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) released the [interim report](#) for the Milburn Review on Youth Unemployment yesterday. The report was an [exercise in how the DWP has a compliant corporate media at its beck and call](#). But as always, we need to look at the parts of the report the DWP didn't want shouted from the rooftops.

Corporate shills marching to the DWP's beat

The corporate media, of course, had a field day yesterday getting to crow about the [lost generation](#), especially those with [mental health conditions](#). At one point, both the [BBC](#) and [Guardian](#) were running live rolling coverage. Yes, of an interim report into youth unemployment.

But what was missing is that the report is, in places, quite nuanced on disability. It actually acknowledges that there are many different reasons why the level of disability or poor health has increased in the last decade. This includes socioeconomic factors such as the cost of living, growing up in poverty, and lack of support.

It also mentions inadequate support in schools and that Covid had a huge part to play in both creating and exacerbating underlying conditions.

However, by only relating these factors back to how it stops kids from getting into work, Milburn ignores that disabled people deserve to be supported to have a good life regardless of whether they can work.

Milburn presents opinion as fact

Despite him actually setting out the logical reasons why disabled young people are much more likely to be unemployed, this is [Alan Milburn](#) so he still has to blame them.

There are many examples of Milburn adding his own opinion disguised as fact, and by doing so, completely rubbishing the actual evidence provided.

After including a report on young people's psychological distress, he says:

It confirms that what we are seeing is not simply a change in how young people talk about their mental health. It is a change in their capacity to participate. There is a difference between a generation that is more willing to name its struggles and a generation that is functionally less able to engage with education and work.

Basically, talk about it all you want, but do it at work or shut up.

Implying depression and ADHD aren't real disabilities

What's most interesting is that disability and mental health are split into separate sections. Disability is basically classed as something which does need help and he accepts that many disabled people will never be able to work.

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However, he then includes mental health and neurodivergent (which he calls neurodevelopmental) conditions in the health section. This states clearly that he thinks these aren't real disabilities and shouldn't be seen as an excuse not to work.

He also shows what he thinks about anxiety and depression by saying:

This explosion has primarily been in mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, rather than in serious mental illnesses

Milburn also essentially blames the rise in ADHD and diagnosis for the strain on the NHS. Coincidentally, this is also what Wes Streeting is trying [and failing](#) to do with his [review into overdiagnosis](#).

After giving the evidence of why more young people (especially girls) are being diagnosed with neurodivergent conditions now, he can't resist contradicting the evidence again:

If the rise in diagnoses were simply the correction of historic under-recognition, the response would be straightforward: more assessment capacity and more clinical treatment.

If, as the evidence increasingly suggests, the current patterns are shaped as much by the design of systems as by underlying need, including the incentives those systems create and the tendency to medicalise forms of distress that may have broader social or developmental roots, then the response must be broader.

Basically, our systems werenâ??t designed for you to realise youâ??re not the problem. But instead of solutions to make the system better, he, of course, relates it back to kids just not getting off their bums and working.

He is so close to getting it, but canâ??t resist:

It must include earlier, more accessible forms of support that do not depend on long waits for specialist diagnosis. And it must address the social determinants producing the distress in the first place: poverty, family instability, social media.

Critically, as there seems to have been a widening of what is recognised as disability within the system â?? and with it an expansion of the range of diagnoses and conditions that legitimise non-participation â?? the key issue is not the label itself but the functional impact. Until the health â?? and wider â?? system gets to grips with that key distinction, too many young people will be categorised as unfit to work when, with help, support and earlier intervention, they would be able to do so.

Review isnâ??t proving **default watermark** foregone conclusion

Despite all this bluster about wanting to support young disabled people into work, [Access to Work](#) is mentioned just three times in this almost 68,000-word report. Once as part of a support package, then in the annex explaining what it is and then again as a footnote.

Itâ??s a tale as old as time, the DWP pretends to care about getting disabled people into work, but wants as little attention brought to [the support theyâ??re trying to cut](#) as possible.

Essentially, this is exactly the same problem [Wesley had with](#) trying to prove ADHD is overdiagnosed. Despite Milburn already deciding that kids are faking disability not to work, the evidence very much says that disabled young people need support. And no amount of his snide comments and DWP-induced media hysteria will change that.

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