



Senior DWP figure made ableist joke outside Access to Work inquiry

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DWP

A senior civil servant in the [Department for Work and Pensions \(DWP\)](#) made an ableist joke whilst waiting to give evidence on the department's failings.

[Disability News Service reports](#) that Neil Couling, director general of DWP services and fraud, made the joke surrounded by other senior figures in a corridor in Portcullis House. They were all waiting to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the National Audit Office's (NAO) [joint inquiry into Access to Work](#)

Couling shows exactly who the DWP are

The DWP came under fire because it's quietly cutting [Access to Work](#) whilst [forcing more disabled people into work](#). The scheme is also plagued with delays; the last figures show [66,000 disabled people](#) are still waiting.

Couling told a load of DWP cronies, including Peter Schofield, Helga Swidenbank and Bill Thorpe:

If it gets difficult in there, I will just demand a reasonable adjustment.

According to an onlooker, all of them laughed, and nobody made an effort to school him on his ableism, but of course they didn't.

The onlooker told [DNS](#)

[He] just brazenly stated it almost as if he was on a stage and they were in the audience, and they all thought it was hilarious.

When I saw the core part of that team move to sit down to give evidence, I was completely stunned

She continued:

It was just so shocking. If that's how he speaks to the team and that's his view about reasonable adjustments for disabled people, that says a lot.

Contempt for disabled people

Well, the department showed just what they thought of disabled people and reasonable adjustments once [inside the inquiry](#). Parliament Secretary Peter Schofield said that employers expected AtW to cover things they should be doing under, you guessed it, reasonable adjustments. This is fine for big businesses but could also be a hindrance to employing a disabled person for smaller employers.

Schofield also accused employers of using Access to Work staff because it was cheaper than employing admin assistants.

Couling agreed with this and made an even wilder claim about employers abusing the system:

I've seen applications coming from big employers who, they literally have an access to work department, their job is in funnelling claims to DWP, I mean, at one level, I don't mind that, if they also have a bigger reasonable adjustments team, they're looking at what they can do in their own department under the Equalities Act, to do what they should be doing already.

He also attempted to justify why so many are now seeing their funding cut. He claimed that, actually, the department had been too generous because they were rushing to clear backlogs

Couling said:

So those cases are coming up now for renewal, and they are producing lower awards, and people are saying, "Why have I got a lower award? Nothing has changed in my life."

But we'd wrongly gave them a job aide, normally for 100% of the time, and we should have given them about 20% of the time. Because the job aides are not designed to do the work, they're meant to support, lift the disabled person to the same level of an employee.

If that's an employee looked weird, it's because we edited it for clarity. What happened was a bizarre thing! Couling appeared to forget the word "nondisabled" and was clearly fighting his brain not to say "normal person".

In the end, he said:

lift the disabled person to the same level of a, of a, umm yâ??know, of an employee.

Couling is a hateful man, fits in well at DWP

The onlooker also told DNS:

If they can speak so openly about that, then what is it like as a culture within the department, and not just Access to Work?

This is definitely the case for Couling, who previously came under fire for saying that [carers were to blame for the Carers Allowance scanda](#). In an internal blog post seen by the Guardian, Couling said that a??at the hearta?? of the scandal is individual carers failing to report changes.

He wrote:

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Incidentally, what has been missed in all the [news] is that this error (and hands up we made it and we will put it right) affects only a relatively small number of cases and wasnâ??t the cause of the original complaint. Because at the heart of the overpayment issues in CA is a failure to report changes of circumstance.

The author of the damning report, [Liz Sayce, said](#) Coulingâ??s comments were typical of a department that wanted to brush the issue under the carpet.

She told the [Work and Pensions Committee](#):

What you were hoping for from senior people at that point was to really share with colleagues across the department the seriousness of this â?? what has been learned, what is going to be put right. Not attempt to minimise or again place a responsibility back on the carers, as if it was their fault.

As Sayce said, the department needs a massive culture change:

I think itâ??s important with culture change to understand where youâ??re at, to understand what youâ??re doing, to shift the culture and to track it. The senior team needs to be on that case. It needs to be a bit more systematic than just good intent.

The problem with people like Couling is that not only does he have no desire to change, but heâ??s clearly being enabled by a department rooted in ableism and demonising disabled people.

Couling will never stop being an ableist monster for as long as the DWP is an organisation that is out to destroy disabled peopleâ??s lives.

Featured image via the Canary

By [Rachel Charlton-Dailey](#)

[Source link](#)

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