

Launch of the DPW Advisory Council 2.12.2014

The ability of people with disabilities to work isn't about whether they can hold a pen or whether they can stand to attention.

Most people with disabilities want to work, but the barriers they face must be considered, and acted upon by employers and government.

People with disabilities' employment rates remain around 50% in Europe and America, compared with more than 75% for the overall working population. In South Africa we suspect that the situation is much worse, with disabled people struggling to find employment.

As the Department of Public Works, we have a duty to employ disabled people. The target is 2% of our workforce. Last week I asked the EPWP branch to make plans to ensure that 2% of EPWP participants were disabled people. I am happy to announce that indeed

the EPWP has prepared detailed plans to ensure we meet our target.

I will also be talking to HR to ensure that disabled people also have a fair chance of getting a job in the Department of Public Works. Again, the target is 2%.

Having more people with disabilities working would be good news for the economy, too. Were disabled people's employment rates to be levelled with those of non-disabled people, the economy would receive a massive boost.

People with disabilities who can work and who want to work face many barriers. They have fewer opportunities to develop skills and experience, face practical obstacles, such as inaccessible transport, and often experience negative attitudes from employers.

Let me quote the experiences of one person with a disability. This person had a successful career in IT, in transport and founded their own consultancy. But, as a

person with a disability, at every stage the person had to go the extra mile to make it happen.

In a different industry, this person had a boss who refused to make a reasonable adjustment to the time of crucial daily team briefings during a major change programme, so that the person with the disability was unable to perform effectively in the team and failed in that role.

Our concern is that people with disabilities will be considered able to work without any understanding of the challenges they will face or the support they need to overcome those challenges. Then, when they fail to find a job or don't manage to hold down a job, they will be penalised.

Pushing people with disabilities through this system is like forcing square pegs into round holes. We are asking the government and employers to work with us to develop a serious understanding of people with

disabilities and the support they need to find employment.

The Advisory Council that we are launching today I believe will play a vital role in ensuring that DPW meets its obligations to employ 2% of disabled people, and it will also provide support to the disabled people that we employ.

Let us rejoice and celebrate this important step for the Department of Public Works. In a year's time I want a report on the progress made in relation to the employment of people with disabilities.

Thank you.