

Written evidence from Brunel University London (DEG0098)

Progress so far and impact

Q) What progress has been made, especially since 2015, on closing the disability employment gap? How has this progress been made?

A) As a University we have implemented numerous things to attract a diverse range of people to work for us. We will continue to do this and to improve our data sets so we can better measure and understand the impact of our actions.

We already have Disability Confident Leadership status which reflect the specific actions below:

- We advertise in Disability Living magazine twice a year.
- We have a section on 'Information for disabled applicants' on our recruitment portal.
- The website incorporates the Recite Me toolbar, which should be helpful to disabled visitors.
- We have a recruitment good practice guide which has guidelines around equality and diversity and reasonable adjustments.
- In our online recruitment system applicants have the option to choose if they want to apply under the guaranteed interview scheme.
- We provide reasonable adjustments in the assessment process for candidates that indicate they need support.
- In the interview letter we ask if candidates need any reasonable adjustments.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training is mandatory for all new staff at Brunel as well as refresher training every three years. The training includes a case study on disability discrimination
- We run a workshop once a year called success for all. This is for academic staff who can apply for a promotion through an annual academic promotion round. This workshop targets disabled staff as well as others with protected characteristics such as BAME, Women and LGBT+ who are under-represented at the senior levels of the University
- We monitor the progression of disabled staff annually through our equality report which tracks recruitment, progression, retention and training that disabled staff participate in.
- Managers are given advice and guidance from occupational health, HR and the equality and diversity team as appropriate. Staff coming back to work from a particularly long-term sickness are offered a phased return and / or other reasonable adjustments as appropriate.
- We run a staff survey every two years and we collate the diversity information including disability on the survey. This then allows us to track the satisfaction of disabled employees. We also ran a disability online survey and focus group led by the Business Disability Forum to gather satisfaction levels from our employees. This culminated in a report with recommendations which we have implemented mostly

through our new reasonable adjustment policy.
Q) What is the economic impact of low employment and high economic inactivity rates for disabled people? Are some disabled people (for example, young disabled people or people with different health conditions) more at risk of unemployment or economic activity than others?
A) High unemployment rates for disabled people can lead to a range of mental health issues, i.e. isolation, depression and not feeling useful. High economic inactivity in relation to disabled people can mean higher levels of social economic deprivation within the disabled community requiring state benefits payments for example unemployment benefit, housing benefit etc, which in turn impacts on government spending.
Q) What has been the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on disabled peoples' employment rates?
A) The pandemic has made things worse with regard to mental health and disposable income, as disabled people are more vulnerable and therefore suffer more with recruitment freezes and redundancies. Some are also more at risk of becoming ill with COVID.
Providing support
Q) Where should lead responsibility for improving disabled peoples' employment rates sit (for example, DWP; Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Health and Social Care)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The responsibility for prioritising the employment of disabled people should come from the top. The PM's office and the Cabinet Office should set the direction for all government departments and agencies so that there is joined up thinking and policy development and implementation that promotes and supports disabled people to get work and to be supported in work. • There is no financial support for employers to invest in improving on-site and / or technological facilities. All support is through Access to Work which is employee lead and disabled staff do not always ask for help or the support available does not fully meet the needs of employees with disabilities. Funds should also be provided to employers. • People are concerned that if they declare a disability it may impact on their job security or their ability to get a job, particularly if they lack confidence. This should be reflected in this strategy and the policies that flow from it.
Q) What international evidence is there on "what works" in supporting disabled people into, and in work, and how applicable is this to the UK?
A) We do not have enough information on this subject to comment. The strategy should be informed by successful international practice.
Q) What is the right balance between in and out of work support, and is DWP getting the balance right? What more should the Department look to provide?
A) There is Access to Work to support employees at their place of work but we are not aware of any initiative to support disabled staff working from home. A full range of Government sponsored support for home working should be provided.
Q) How can DWP better support employers to take on and retain disabled employees, and to help them progress in work?
A)

- If there was funding available for employers to make provisions, which are not employee led, this would help make more progress. There is a lot of pressure on-line managers to recognize the psychological impact of unemployment on disabled people and more training is needed to help with this and the strategy should recognise and provide for this.
- Employers need support to recognise the psychological impact of unemployment on disabled people.
- Physical disability can lead to mental health concerns. People can feel more ostracised and lonely and if not employed this can also impact on their psychological and social needs. They want to be independent like everyone else and the strategy needs to recognise this and cater for it.

Q) How effective is the *Disability Confident* scheme?

A) We are a Disability Confident scheme leader but the award depends on how organisations choose to implement the scheme. It also relies on line managers understanding the scheme and looking to support its aims. It can be an effective tool if used to inform improvements in organisations. If it is not used it is not effective and mandating its use should be considered.

Q) What improvements should DWP make to the support it offers to unemployed disabled people via Jobcentre Plus?

A) We are not aware of the DWP's exact process but feel it would be fair for the disabled people (mentally and physically) not to have to attend the DWP offices when in some cases it can cause distress. The process should be customer driven, with the options for holding the meeting in person, via Zoom (or similar) or a home visit, giving them the choice to say what they would prefer.

Q) The coronavirus pandemic continues to make it difficult to offer in-person support. What evidence is there of "best practice" in supporting disabled people remotely—either in or out of work?

A) There is no best practice, but you should contextualise your approach based on your organisational needs, processes and practice. There are some benefits to working from home if you are disabled, but this can also mean isolation from being away from colleagues.

How can DWP put this into practice in services such as Access to Work and the Work and Health Programme?

Access to Work could be extended to include employers being able to call on funding for adjustments needed for a member of staff and making the initial application. We do not have knowledge of the *Work and Health Programme*.

Enforcement and next steps

Are "reasonable adjustments" for disabled people consistently applied? How might enforcement be improved?

We do not feel they are consistently applied. Any decisions are down to the employer and and/or line manager and the latter's emotional responses and what they think is fair. More consistency is needed but a lot comes down to funding which is where Government can help employers more.

What would you hope to see in the Government's National Strategy for Disabled People?

- Normalisation – so it becomes a non-issue.
- Home Working policies, this needs to give preference to disabled people to work from home if they want to,

- Unseen disabilities should be included in the strategy.
- The Strategy should recognize and mitigate for intersectionality. Disability issues can be compounded by other discrimination within society which potentially has an additional negative impact on individuals.

How should DWP look to engage disabled people and the organisations that represent them in formulating the Strategy?

- Speak to the bodies representing them - National Voices, Recovery Focus, SCOPE, Advance HE etc and the many condition specific charities and user groups. They often are service user lead and very knowledgeable and informed people.
- People with personal work and unemployment experience.
- Funding research, benchmarking and looking at good practice elsewhere including abroad.
- Engaging individuals with personal experience.
- There is also the Disabled Student's Commission which links with disabled bodies.

We also have some other comments relevant to this consultation

Organisations should be legally required to produce annual disability pay gap and disability employment gap reports to inform improvements in the employment of disabled people.

There is also the issue of staff who though not disabled themselves have responsibility for a disabled child, partner, parent etc who may need support, especially with mental wellbeing.

Finally, we feel there should be ongoing dialogue with continuing monitoring and consultation during the implementation of the strategy, especially speaking with disabled people to track progress, improvement and to inform future interventions.

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