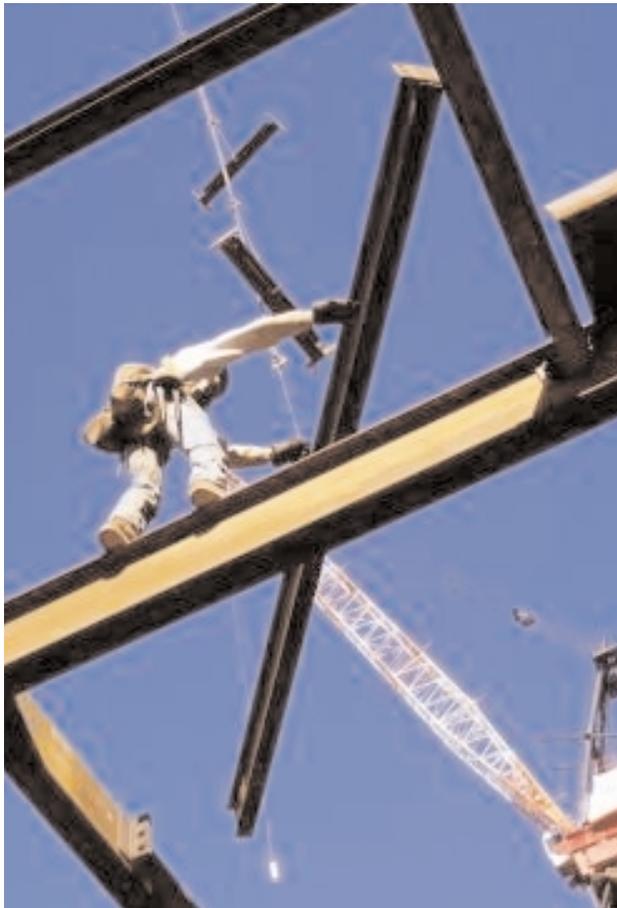


Employment at Every Level



Use Guide **12** when considering recruitment and retention – whether of staff, volunteers or trustees – as a practical source of advice on ways to ensure fair treatment for all disabled people in the workplace.

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The Portfolio is published as a result of collaboration with a working party, which includes specialist consultants, and aims to support the elimination of discrimination in service provision. The views expressed in these guides are not necessarily those of Resource.

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Front cover:

There are disabled people qualified for all kinds of jobs:
disabled graduates, professionals, researchers and specialists.
Employment opportunities should be opened at every level.

Photo: Steve Dunwell/Getty Images

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Employers who bring disabled people into their workplace report extensive benefits, including new perspectives, improved morale and better customer service. Photo: Guy Drayton for Greater London Authority

Introduction

Disabled people have a hard time finding employment. Every study demonstrates the difficulties disabled job-seekers find in getting qualified, applying for jobs, getting to interview and being selected.

Recent research indicates that disabled people form 12 to 16 per cent of the working age population. One million disabled people want jobs but are out of work. On average, disabled people are seven times as likely to be out of work, make at least twice as many job applications, get fewer interviews and are less likely to be selected for work after interview.

Understandably, disabled people are pessimistic about their chances of finding work. They believe that discrimination occurs at many stages of the recruitment process. Research among employers supports their beliefs, showing that they have little understanding about what disabled people can do, or of the implications of employing them.

“Employers fail to see past my wheelchair – it creates a barrier to them being able to see beyond the disability and look at my skills and experience.”

“Disabled people have to be twice as good as anyone else to even be considered for the job.” Disabled jobseekers quoted in *Ready, Willing and Disabled*, Scope 2003

There are many potential barriers to disabled people finding work. The Employers Forum on Disability states that ‘Exclusion of disabled people is rooted in fear and stereotyping’ (Unlocking Potential, EFD 2001). This can lead to attitude barriers: expecting disabled people only to be capable of certain jobs, wanting to keep them away from customer service, or believing that they will be costly to employ, slow and prone to sickness.

Disabled jobseekers show that barriers can also be internalised. They describe a lack of confidence in their abilities, being put off by advert phrasing, and fearing repeated rejection which dents their confidence still further.

Yet employers who do get past the barriers and bring disabled people into their workplace report extensive benefits. Not just productivity, loyalty and good attendance, but new perspectives, better awareness of health and safety, improved morale and customer service.

"The performance and contribution of disabled employees far outweighs the relatively inexpensive (and often government-funded) adjustments which may be necessary. Knowledge of the needs and expectations of a growing sector of the market, combined with enhanced morale and people management systems, are tangible benefits for companies who are good employers of disabled people." Unlocking Potential, Employers Forum on Disability, 2001

This guide explores the practical steps you can take to ensure that disabled people get a fair opportunity to contribute to your organisation, whether as employees, volunteers or other contributors. It looks at the support available, the effect on your organisation of employing disabled people, and describes some of the misunderstandings which create barriers.

Much of the guidance provided here will help employers to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, around recruitment, employment and retention (see Guide 5). Further information is listed in the contacts section of this Guide.

1 Employing disabled people: what it means

Employing disabled people is not the same as employing non-disabled people. It takes specific thought, planning and attention. You may need to think carefully about your workplace, get support from outside agencies, and learn more about the wider experience of disability. This process is a fruitful one, however. There are a number of sources of help, financial and information-based. Employees without disabilities often find that the workplace improves when disabled employees are present, and you may find that you are able to offer a better service to your visitors and clients.

Attitudes

Attitudes in your organisation may need to change, perhaps for the better, when you employ a disabled person. Scope's recent survey identified significant barriers in the employment of disabled people, including fear of the unknown (in this case not understanding disability through lack of contact) and worries about how colleagues and customers might react.

The best way to change attitudes is to increase contact with disabled people. This happens when disabled people are visible in society, through employment above all, when others have to interact with them – to request a service, get information or carry out their own duties.

If you are concerned about attitudes among your staff, arrange for disability equality training. This will improve your staff attitude to disabled visitors and clients, too. Staff should be encouraged to take responsibility for the accessibility of the workplace, and the way in which a disabled colleague may be treated, either by colleagues or by members of the public.

Some common misconceptions

Disabled people are always sick – disability is not sickness, and disabled people often have experience of managing their health in such a way as to reduce its impact on their career. The Employers Forum on Disability states that disabled people in work tend to have better attendance records, stay with employers longer and have fewer accidents at work. There is evidence that sick-leave can reduce among colleagues too (Unlocking Potential, EFD, 2001).

Disabled people work slowly – all new employees start slowly. A disabled employee in a workplace which has been adequately adapted will be as productive as their non-disabled colleague. There is no evidence that colleagues experience excessive demands for help from disabled employees, either.

Disabled people can only do certain jobs – although educational opportunities have been limited for many disabled people, there are disabled people qualified for all kinds of jobs. There are disabled graduates, professionals, researchers and specialists.

Customers won't like meeting a disabled person – customers, like everyone else, are affected by lack of contact with disabled people. Meeting a disabled person as a professional, or as someone who holds information that they want, will educate them to respect and understand disability better.

Employing disabled people is expensive – it need not be. For some disabled employees adjustments to the workplace are minimal. Where there are greater costs – for adaptations, facilitation or interpreters, for example – there are government schemes, like Access to Work (see 'Further information') which help with the costs.

Impact on your organisation

Employing disabled people will have an impact on your organisation, and it will be positive. EFD identifies these benefits: enhanced staff morale and team development; improved accessibility and appeal to customers; transferable problem-solving skills brought into the staff team by disabled employees.

A team which has disabled people in it is more reflective of the demographic profile of the community which it serves, and will feature more of the diverse perspectives representative of that community.

Employers in industry and retail have reported improved Health and Safety awareness because of the presence of disabled employees, plus better customer service and improved recognition amongst clients who notice the diversity of the workforce.

Other employees may have to behave differently when an employee who is disabled, or becomes disabled, is in the team. In the short-term, you may need to manage this through training, and through careful supervision. A disabled staff member needs to be supported while colleagues learn to accommodate new ways of doing things – perhaps around communication strategies, parking spaces, meeting protocol or rotation of work.

Physical access

The existing state of physical access in your premises should never be used as a sole reason for considering someone unsuitable for a job.

Once you have selected a suitable candidate, or when an employee who becomes disabled is ready to return to work, you may need to make some physical adaptations. These should be decided in consultation with the employee him or herself (who probably has experience from home or other workplaces). However, you should be careful to draw out from them everything they really need, as some people will be reticent about a 'shopping list' of needs. For a thorough overview of alterations that are needed, use an access consultant or auditor (see Guide 4).

Most access alterations are easy and cheap to implement. They could include improved lighting, visible fire, door and telephone signals, or the allocation of a single parking space. In many workplaces, alterations put in for disabled employees benefit colleagues and visitors, too.

Where alterations are more costly, there are government support schemes which help meet the cost. Access to Work will fund adaptations or personal assistance where an employee needs them to perform their job. The officer who assesses for Access to Work may also be able to advise on what is needed, suppliers and costs.

2 Attracting disabled candidates

The biggest barrier for disabled people looking for work is the recruitment process. Employers often say that their jobs are available for anybody, but disabled people never apply. The reason for this usually lies within the way the job has been advertised, described or in the set-up of the interview and selection process. You can support disabled people to consider work with your organisation, and increase the pool of talent available to you, by taking a thoughtful approach to recruitment.

Supported work placements

A number of organisations work to provide opportunities for disabled people through supported work placements or job introduction schemes. These will help you to find someone to do a specific job, at the same time as supporting someone to enter employment. The 'Further information' section suggests organisations who may help you if you want to explore this.

Describing and advertising the job

There are many sources of guidance on fair recruiting (see 'Further information'), but particular issues need attention if you want to be open to disabled recruits.

The job description and person-specification – when you devise these, check for requirements that could be phrased differently to ensure they don't discriminate.

Where you advertise – in addition to your usual routes, make contact with the Jobcentre and notify the Disability Service Team that you have a vacancy. They can circulate it to disabled jobseekers. There are routes you can use for national, local or regional advertising to reach disabled and Deaf people directly through e-bulletins, circulation lists or newsletters.

Using the ‘two ticks’ scheme – this scheme, administered by Jobcentre Plus, asks you to make commitments to fair recruitment. Using the symbol in your advert shows disabled applicants that you have agreed to keep to that standard. You can get information from your local Jobcentre.

Getting information – all the information (job description etc.) should be available in different formats including email and large print. You need to have found out how to get the information onto tape or into braille quickly (see Guide 6). Anyone who makes contact by any route should find alternative formats available.

The application form – make sure that this is designed to allow space for answers (in case people have big or untidy writing). Your questions should be a minimum of 12pt print size, and a large format version should be available. It should be possible to download the form from the web, to fill it in on a computer and return it by email.

Flexible working arrangements – being able to job-share, do some of the work from home or have flexible working hours could make a difference to whether someone can apply. If flexibility is possible, say so in the recruitment materials.

Examples of potentially off-putting requirements

Must be car driver – a person who can't drive, but can use taxis and has these paid for by Access to Work, could be just as suitable. Ask for someone 'able to travel around the local/regional area'.

Good telephone manner – many deaf and hard of hearing people are put off by this phrase. Good communication skills is a fair request.

Good written and verbal communication skills – a BSL user, or someone with speech impediment, may be a great communicator, using facilitators paid for by Access to Work. Ask for 'good communication skills'.

Educated to degree level – disabled people limited in educational opportunities could be bright and adept. If you don't need a professional qualification, ask for experience and qualities like an enquiring mind, quick learner or enthusiast.

In good health – this is a subjective statement, which could make people feel they need to justify their disability. A health check can be part of the recruitment process (for all candidates) but shouldn't be on the application or person spec.

Shortlisting: be fair

When shortlisting, remember to keep certain points in mind to ensure that you aren't discriminating.

Education and qualifications – there are fewer opportunities for some disabled people. After noting qualifications, look also for evidence of how people have developed experience, showed interest or gained personal skills that could be relevant to your job.

Look for skills – disabled people may have life experience which gives them skills. Managing a team of personal assistants or interpreters is a management skill, for example.

Career gaps – accidents, surgery, illness, unemployment, caring and maternity could all feature in a disabled person's career pattern. Look to see whether career gaps are explained, but don't assume that a gap between jobs means lack of motivation.

Untidiness – poor handwriting, a shaky signature or uneven print sizes could all be the result of impairments. It doesn't necessarily mean the person can't do the job.

Interviewing: tips for a fair hearing

- Ask whether people have access requirements for the interview. These might include BSL or SSE interpreters or other communication support, easy access or a particular time for an interview.
- You can get Access to Work support for access needs at interviews to ensure candidates get a fair chance. Contact your Jobcentre.
- Book interpreters and communication support workers well in advance – it is easier to cancel after the deadline has passed than to get an interpreter at short notice.
- Timetable interviews to be fair to people with further to travel, or who request a late or midday interview. This may be to enable them to arrange transport, facilitation or other personal care.
- Choose an accessible location for an interview – and make sure there are accessible facilities including toilets available.
- Avoid asking questions about disability or access needs in the interview. Access requirements can be sorted out after appointment.

Unsuccessful candidates

Ready, Willing and Disabled reminds us that "continual rejection damages anybody's confidence". Take the time to give unsuccessful candidates feedback about their strengths at interview, and to offer further contact with your organisation as a volunteer, work placement or other contributor if you feel they would benefit from more experience.

3 The disabled employee

Preparing to start work

During the notice period from a previous job, or before an employee starts work, you should meet at least once to discuss what, if any, changes are needed to the workplace. If the changes are minor – tidying up, moving desks or reserving a parking space – it should be possible to get these in place before the employee starts work. A feeling of 'being a nuisance' can arise if changes are only started when a disabled employee arrives, and this can contribute to difficulty settling and starting the job.

Make contact as soon as the appointment is confirmed with the Disability Employment Advisor (DEA) at Jobcentre Plus, who can advise and help to set up Access to Work. An assessment will be needed of what services or equipment are going to be necessary. Access to Work is there to support the employee, but also help employers by meeting a percentage of costs for access, including fares to work.

Support services

If you are likely to need interpreters, note-takers or additional equipment to create access, do some local research so that you know where to get these services and how they are booked or set up. Again, the DEA should be able to advise you, and you could ask the new member of staff if they have particular preferences or already have useful contacts.

Working in different ways

All your staff need to understand what changed ways of working will be implemented to support access. This could include:

- Meeting protocol, so that during meetings there is time for interpretation, note-taking and breaks for facilitators.
- Keeping circulation spaces clear; no boxes in the lift or corridor, no mops and buckets in the loo.
- Reception uses email alerts to call staff to meetings, reducing reliance on the telephone gives a Deaf employee equal access.

You will find many ways to change how you work, without cost, to integrate your new staff member. Remember to include social contact – choosing a lunchtime pub that is accessible, or quieter.

Management and mentoring

A disabled person may benefit from a mentor to support their development. This could be a disabled employee from another site (with more experience of the organisation), a freelance consultant, or a representative of a support organisation. Mentoring should take place during work time. Meetings should be confidential, and the mentor should ask permission of the employee before passing on any concerns to the employer.

Whether or not there is a mentor, the line manager should take time for appraisal meetings, which should include clearly delineated time for discussion of how successfully access issues are being tackled. These discussions should be separate from those about work, achievement and targets, to avoid any appearance of performance being judged on the grounds of access or disability.

4 Keeping your employee

One third of the disabled people who find work are out of work again by the following year. Of people who become disabled, one in six lose their job during the next year. Employers need to pay attention to factors which may lead to disabled people leaving, or being asked to leave, a job. Employment Tribunals increasingly deal with unfair dismissal, harassment, failure to offer training, promotion and other benefits – all relating to disability discrimination.

Flexibility and attention

However carefully you plan a new employee's start at work, new situations will develop during their first few months. This could be because they become more confident and ask for support in areas they previously tried to manage themselves, because they understand better what they need once familiar with the job, or because you observe additional support needs.

The management process should include appraisals which allow employees and employers to discuss what is not working, and how it can be helped to work. If there are actual problems – for example, with attitude of another staff member – the employee should be told how this will be addressed, so that they feel confident in being supported.

Flexibility in making slight changes to the job could bring out the best in the employee. Similarly, you should go back to Access to Work if it turns out that more, or different, support is needed.

Retaining disabled staff

People who become disabled go through a substantial life change, during which they have to learn to view themselves differently, as well as being viewed differently by others. An employee returning to work after becoming disabled needs to be supported to rethink their job description, establishing what can still be done in the same way and what needs to be changed in terms of tasks, hours or the working environment.

Retaining disabled employees makes sense because they already have the skills for the job and the knowledge of your organisation. *The Employment Code of Practice* from the DfEE suggests that it might be reasonable for an employer to spend at least as much on adjustment, including retraining, as might be necessary for recruitment of a new postholder. You can also get Access to Work support for personal assistance, adaptations or new equipment needed to support the retained worker.

5 More than employment

Paid employment is one substantial way for disabled people to contribute to your organisation and sectors. There are other roles for disabled people, too – as volunteers, board members and through work experience. The same principles of fair treatment should apply.

Volunteers

Volunteering for duties as ushers, attendants, receptionists, play-scheme assistants and many other roles is as possible for disabled people as for others. Volunteering can also be a way in which a disabled person can gain experience to support job applications.

Local volunteer bureaux, and national organisations such as Skill – the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities – promote volunteering for disabled people and may provide contacts. When recruiting volunteers, make sure you use disability networks to publicise the opportunity.

Board members and trustees

All boards benefit from diversity in viewpoints, and involving disabled people in decision-making at this level can have a substantial cultural impact. Disabled people who are local ‘names’ are often asked to make this kind of contribution, which can lead to a small group having disproportionate influence, or to the exclusion of less experienced, less visible and less vocal disabled people. To attract disabled board members it is worth investing in training for disabled people to participate.

Disabled board members should not be typecast as equal opportunities specialists, but asked to contribute in their areas of knowledge and skill. Board meetings should be made accessible through choice of meeting venues, timing of information distribution, print formats, interpreters and any other means necessary.

Work experience

For young disabled people to form career aspirations and gain experience, an opportunity to be placed in a museum, archive or library for work experience could be invaluable both to them and to the sector.

To identify disabled work experience students, contact learning support units at mainstream schools, access and support officers at colleges, and specialised schools such as Deaf schools. Specialist youth clubs may also help. Make them aware of specific opportunities and time periods that you have available, so that students can be matched to the opportunity. Access support can often be arranged either through the school or college, or through employment support services run by organisations such as RNID.

Apprentices and work placement

Under New Deal, through Jobcentres and through organisations like Scope and other charities, there are a variety of schemes for supported placement of disabled people, or apprenticeships specifically open to them. These offer opportunities for disabled people to learn their way into the job, while the employer is supported in giving them appropriate support.

Conclusion

There is growing agreement that better opportunities for disabled people to participate in employment are desirable for economic, social and cultural reasons. Strong commercial arguments have been proposed following research, while organisations who employ disabled people report a range of benefits including better customer service, improved staff morale and broader knowledge of cultural issues.

The knowledge needed to employ disabled people, and to make it possible for them to gain employment, is now widely available and is clearly signposted through this guide. Museums, archives and libraries have legal duties to demonstrate the social awareness and commitment needed to make equal opportunity in employment a reality.

Further information

The case for employing disabled people

The Code of Practice for the Elimination of Discrimination in the Field of Employment Against Disabled Persons

(ISBN 0 11 270954 0) from The Stationery Office.

The Disability Discrimination Act – Employment Law Handbook

Incomes Data Services (IDS) Ltd (ISSN 0308 9312) Ask for the latest edition from IDS.

Tel: 020 7250 3434

Fax: 020 7608 0949

Email: ids@incomesdata.co.uk

The Employment of Disabled People in Library Services

CILIP Equal Opportunities Briefing.

www.cilip.org.uk/practice/employment.html

Enduring Economic Exclusion: disabled people, income and work

Tania Burchardt, YPS for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/060.asp

Ready, Willing and Disabled

Liz Daone and Ruth Scott, published by Scope in association with B&Q, 2003.

Unlocking Potential: The new disability business case

Simon Zadek and Susan Scott-Parker, Employers Forum on Disability, 2001.

DDA 1995: What Employers Need to Know (DL170)
Employment Provisions – the Questions Procedure (DL56)
What Employees and Job Applicants Need to Know (DLE3)
DfEE call the DDA Helpline on 0345 622 633 or via
www.disability.gov.uk

Recruitment advice

Frequently asked questions on disability and recruitment
Employers Forum Fact Sheet from Employers' Forum on Disability
(see contact below).

Handbook of Good Practice: Employing Disabled People
Annie Delin, Arts Council of England 2002.

Access to Work and other support schemes

Access to Work, Disabled People as Workers, Disability Service Teams: Employers Forum factsheets from website
www.employers-forum.co.uk

Employment service information booklets

Access to Work: Information for Employers DS4E (1/00)

Becoming A Disability Symbol User: Information

for Employers DS7E 1/99

Employing Disabled People DS18 (4/00)

Employment Assessment for Disabled People DS10

The Job Introduction Scheme DS5E (12/99)

Offering Job Opportunities in Supported Placements DS12E

Sources of Information and Advice: Employing Disabled People DS13

All from Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisers

Learning and skills service

Royal National Institute for Deaf People

12 employment centres across the UK working with deaf and hard of hearing people

www.rnid.org.uk/employmentcentres

www.rnid.org.uk/workingforchange

Online recruitment websites aimed at disabled job seekers

<http://fast-forward.scope.org.uk>

www.jobability.com

www.readywillingable.net

www.yourable.com

To advertise vacancies for disabled jobseekers

Disability Now

Tel: 020 7619 7323

Email: editor@disabilitynow.org.uk

Work placement, work experience or volunteering

Fast-track

Graduate employment placements

Tel: 020 7619 7229

Email: fast-track@scope.org.uk

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Tel: 020 7450 0620 (voice/text)

Email: info@skill.org.uk

www.skill.org.uk

Volunteer Policy Officer Tel: 020 7450 0646

Email: alisonb@skill.org.uk

Remploy, Workstep, New Deal for Disabled People and Job Introduction Scheme. Government schemes – find out more through your Jobcentre or at www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Other organisations

Employers Forum on Disability

Tel: 020 7403 3020

Email: website.enquiries@employers-forum.co.uk

Scope Employment support services

Tel: 01480 309615

Email: employment.support@scope.org.uk

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The **Disability Portfolio** is a collection of 12 guides on how best to meet the needs of disabled people as users and staff in museums, archives and libraries. It gives invaluable advice, information and guidance to help overcome barriers and follow good practice.

The Portfolio is available in 12 point clear print or 15 point large print formats, braille, audio cassette and on the website. Please contact 020 7273 1458 or info@resource.gov.uk

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