INTRODUCTION

Disabled people are often viewed as being unable to work or access society. It is these attitudes that disable people and leave them less able to live the life of their choosing. This resource provides information about how you as an employer can support disabled people into your business and/or organisation, how to make working as accessible as possible for all people and how to make the accommodations a disabled person might need.

It has been produced by, and draws on the experiences of two disabled people, with support from researchers at The University of Sheffield. We aim to show that with the right support the workplace can be open to a wide range of people who bring a wide range of skills and experience.

What do we mean by ‘disabled people’?

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Disabilities are very varied, and many people have more than one type of disability or require more than one type of accommodation, adaptation and/or specialised equipment. Therefore, employers need to have in mind the varying needs of (potential) employees at all times. It is important to remember that some disabilities may be invisible, but their effects are not, so appropriate accommodations must be made.

Making the business case

Making resources and spaces accessible is not merely for the benefit of a few; there are 13.9 million disabled people in the UK, contributing £249 billion into the economy per year. However, currently, the employment rate for disabled people in the UK is 50.7% (compared to 81% for non-disabled people). Worse still, only 5.9% of people with learning disabilities are in employment. We need to ensure society, businesses and organisations, as well as, websites, resources and documents are accessible to all disabled people!

Employers are also sometimes unaware of the strong business case for employing disabled people. This includes:

- research evidence that demonstrates that disabled people make reliable, punctual and talented employees
- research that demonstrates that once an employer has employed a disabled person they are likely to do so again
- adjustments for disabled people can often have benefits for all employees
- supporting disabled people to live more independently is associated with lower overall costs to the state

CONTENTS

1. ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY
2. REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT
3. AVOIDING DISCRIMINATION
4. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
What does accessibility and inclusivity mean to us?

Spaces need to be physically accessible (ramps, lifts, accessible toilets etc) but it goes beyond this:

FLEXIBLE WORKING:
Living with disability may prevent employees fitting into the 9 to 5 structure of many jobs. However, if an employer is willing to be flexible this really increases the accessibility of a role. Flexibility can include working from home for some of the week, starting later in the day or taking an extended break. All employees have a legal right to request flexible working and employers must deal with requests in a “reasonable manner”. It can be very useful for a number of types of employees including parents and carers. Despite employers’ fears about offering flexible working it has been shown to increase employee commitment to an organisation and an employee’s focus on their work (Clarke and Holdsworth, 2017).

WORK BASED FROM HOME:
For some disabled people, physically making it into an office or workplace is the barrier that prevents them from working. This may be due to physical restrictions, barriers encountered on the commute OR because they may not have the health capacity to make it into work, e.g. if they suffer from fatigue or require nursing. This does not mean they cannot be valuable employees. There are a number of changes that can be made to enable people to work from home including utilising virtual technologies (please see Additional Resource 1: Flexible working and Using virtual technologies)

OPEN ENVIRONMENT:
Something else that is vital to creating an inclusive environment is providing a workplace atmosphere where everyone is open about their own needs. This involves a culture change within the workplace where ALL employees are empowered to feel confident to discuss their own personal needs and reasonable adjustments without fear of judgment. An employee will be unlikely to disclose their needs if they fear repercussions or feel they might be ignored. This can result in employees struggling while ill, not being able to maintain their job or going on long-term sick leave. Both disabled and non-disabled employees will benefit from a more open environment. If you are willing to be responsive and make reasonable adjustments then your employee retention rate can be increased (Selvenera and Whippy, 2015).

ADVERTISING AND RECRUITMENT
Creating an accessible workplace starts before recruitment and includes advertising posts to reach disabled people. Remember that it is not just particular roles within an organisation that need to be made accessible and inclusive but the whole culture of the organisation itself. When you introduce an inclusive, accessible environment where every employee can feel comfortable discussing their own needs, then make it apparent to all potential employees too.

Optimise your website and job advertisements to highlight that the organisation is accessible to disabled people, make it clearly visible and use keywords that help disabled people looking for a job find your organisation at the top of their search! There are also specific websites that include advertisements for jobs that accommodate disabled people. You can maximise your recruitment reach by advertising here too.

www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/finding-jobs
themighty.com/topic/remote-jobs/
There is no one size fits all approach to ensuring that you reach all disabled people but there are a number of strategies that can be implemented.

**RECRUITING EMPLOYEES FROM SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

In some ways it is easier to ensure that you are reaching potential disabled employees by approaching them when they are still in educational institutions. This is because there are already processes in place to get young people ready for employment. There are a variety of organisations, such as Youth Employment UK, that provide a framework for employers to ensure they are reaching out to all young people, including disabled young people. Other ways to ensure disabled people are being reached include ensuring career exploration and inspiration opportunities are accessible to ALL. For example, taster days, assemblies in schools/colleges/universities, career fairs and site visits need to be deliberately inclusive to disabled people. Ensuring there is representation of disability within mentoring schemes is another great way to help disabled people in the workplace, our experience is that seeing other disabled people thrive at work is very motivating. Furthermore, working with institutions means that you can target employer engagement to a variety of settings such as Special Educational Need (SEND) schools.

**RECRUITING DISABLED PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF EDUCATION**

It may seem more difficult to reach disabled people who are not in an educational institution because, just like non-disabled people, they are dispersed throughout society. However, there are several proactive measures your organisation can take to make sure ALL people are reached during the advertising stages of recruitment.

When advertising a position consider whether the post is/can be made to be more flexible and accessible to a disabled person. For instance, can the job be done from home, is there potential for flexibility in working hours? If this is the case, then advertise as such. Include keywords such as ‘accessible’, ‘flexible working’ and don’t shy away from inviting discussion of the role to meet all needs.

**RECRUITING EMPLOYEES WHO ARE ON BENEFITS**

Some disabled people are on a form of benefit called Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) because their disability or health condition affects how much they can work. However, under a scheme called ‘Permitted work’ a person receiving the ESA benefit is still able to do some work. Please Additional Resource 2: Employment Support Allowance and Permitted Work

If your organisation is already doing all this then tell us (email: rachael.black@sheffield.ac.uk)!

We want to celebrate inclusivity at work and encourage other employers to do the same. By sharing your successful strategies, we can help reach more disabled people looking for work.
Reasonable Adjustments during recruitment

Reasonable adjustments should be applied during the recruitment process to enable disabled people to apply for a role. This includes ensuring the interview room is accessible and that the applicants have access to any equipment they may need to complete all parts of the interview process.

Good practice example: Extended working interviews

For some disabled people a spoken interview is not particularly accessible nor the best way of finding out if they can do the job. In this case an extended working interview may be more appropriate:

Charlie, a learning disabled man in his fifties, works five days a week for the city council meals service. He has a range of jobs there from marking up the boards for the drivers, to being responsible for the recycling as well as a host of office tasks. When Charlie got the job at the meals service, he went for Charlie a ‘working interview’; this meant he had a work trial, trying out the tasks in order to secure the post. Charlie was also supported by a job coach: a person who specializes in supporting people with learning disabilities into employment. Charlie’s job coach helped Charlie in his first few weeks in his new job, supporting him to learn new tasks as well as the workplace culture. Charlie has been working at the meals service for seven years, he was forty-seven when he got his first paid job (bigsocietydis.wordpress.com)
Reasonable Adjustments once working:

Reasonable adjustments include physical adaptations such as ramps and lifts. However, these are not the only type of adjustments, examples include:

- Allowing employees who become disabled to make a phased return to work, including flexible hours or part-time working
- Changing methods of working to suit individuals, such as allowing someone with social anxiety disorder to have their own desk instead of hot-desking. Further information is available here
- Easy read information e.g. using pictures, symbols and clear language
- Assistive technology such as screen readers and eye gaze technology (see Additional Resource 3: Assistive Technology)

Access to Work:

Employers should attempt to make reasonable adjustments for employees in the first instance but if the person needs additional support to work they can apply for Access to Work. This is a fund to support disabled people to get the help they need to start or return to work. Although it is the disabled person who makes the application, employers can support employees by informing them about the fund. It does not affect access to other benefits.

An Access to Work grant can pay for special equipment and adaptations. It can also be used to fund support worker services to help employees do things like answer the phone or get to and from work. Further information available here.

Good practice example: Assistive Technology

Due to pain in my hands and dexterity issues, as well as postural issues with sitting up for long periods of time, I have needed to use assistive technology to help me when working on the computer inputting data as well as reading information. I have used a piece of dictation software (called Dragon Naturally Speaking) that allows me to input information by dictating into a headset instead of using the keyboard to type. It has learned to recognise my voice and speech patterns.

Personally, I also struggle with sitting up looking at a screen or manipulating a heavy book for long periods of time. I have been greatly aided by text to speech software that scans the text (either in a digital format or scanned from a book onto the computer) and then reads the words aloud at a speed (and with an accent!) that suits me. This means I am able to receive large amounts of information whilst lying in my bed. In turn, this means I am able to work for longer periods of time and use my energy for creative outputs as opposed to using it to physically cope with merely taking in data.

The use of these 2 technologies mean I have been able to work where previously I would have not been able to keep up with my colleagues and would have been left behind. The difficulties I previously experienced from handling materials (like books), navigating resources and producing my own have been relatively easily overcome and means I am no longer at a disadvantage to my co-workers.

- Sally, Research Associate.
AVOIDING DISCRIMINATION

It is against the law to treat someone less favourably because of personal characteristics such as disability, religion, sex, gender reassignment or age. Discrimination can include:

- not hiring someone
- selecting a particular person for redundancy
- paying someone less than another worker without good reason

Discrimination can be intentional (direct) or unintentional (indirect) such as offering working conditions that disadvantage certain groups of people.

Case Study: What is reasonable to one person may not be to another.

I experienced this in a past employment. The team I was part of were based upstairs in a building with no lift. The desks downstairs were all in use so the reasonable adjustment my employer made was to buy a desk and put in the stationary cupboard. I was eager to please and be seen as a hardworking employer so I made an effort to get on with it. As time went on I felt more isolated from my team whom I only saw in weekly meetings. I would hear snippets of banter but I was always on the perimeter. I had queries to run past my colleagues but I didn’t want to keep exchanging emails upstairs – I just wanted to be able to chat to them from my desk.

I began raising my concerns in supervision. I was told I just had to phone them and someone would come down and ‘keep me company’. I tried this a couple of times but felt guilty that I was putting my colleagues out... It is true I was given a desk which didn’t require me to negotiate stairs. However, I was excluded from my team and resources which made my job practically challenging. It also left me feeling isolated and questioning my role within the team.

- Katy, Charity worker

Stereotypes

Using stereotypes means making assumptions without getting to know employees as individuals. This can create negative workplaces and allow discriminatory practices to thrive. Some of the language we use can be discriminatory, for example, “wheelchair bound” or “suffers with” or “afflicted by” etc. It uses the stereotype that disabilities are all negative and “tragic”.

Creating an open work environment where employers can express the language they prefer is a good way to mitigate any potentially discriminatory language.

Policy: An Equality Policy

Creating an Equality Policy, which draws on other policies such as bullying, harassment and discipline, can help your organisation to operate in an equal way. It can demonstrate that, as an organisation, equality is central to what you do and the kind of workplace you wish to foster.

Your Equality Policy, and any others that seek to tackle discrimination and ensure an accessible workplace, should be developed in collaboration with employee representatives. It should build in ways to measure the success of the policy.

More information about avoiding discrimination and creating an Equality Policy is available here

Other policies that can help to avoid discrimination are:

- Accessibility
- Diversity / Equal Opportunities
- Sickness absence policy that understands disabled and chronically ill individuals
- Policies for supporting family carers in work
- Safeguarding
CONCLUSION AND FEEDBACK

As disabled young women, we have faced many challenges and it has been a long and arduous road to find employment. The struggles of the journey began at the point of contemplating how to even be in the workplace, continuing through to starting work and then meeting hurdles and requiring adaptations to be made.

This document demonstrates that disabled employees are an untapped resource for employers to hire from. By opening up the workplace to disabled employees, both the employer and employees (disabled and non-disabled) all benefit. It also highlights the importance of creating a workplace environment that cultivates a culture of openness where ALL employees are able to express their differing needs (and potential required reasonable adjustments).

This resource serves to highlight that there is great diversity in disability and each person needs to be treated as an individual. At the same time, we have aimed to empower employers to be able to support disabled employees by signposting a large range of resources and technologies as well as highlighting disabled employees’ rights.

We want employers to feel equipped to welcome disabled people into the workplace by providing information and resources that we wish were available to our employers and potential employers.

We would love to hear if you have used these resources or if you already have an inclusive workplace. Please contact rachael.black@sheffield.ac.uk to let us know!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE 1: FLEXIBLE WORKING AND USING VIRTUAL TECHNOLOGIES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE 2: EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT ALLOWANCE AND PERMITTED WORK

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE 3: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY