

FACTSHEET

DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

This factsheet, as part of our [Opening Doors](#) campaign, aims to raise awareness of the barriers disabled people face securing work and when in employment, make the case for improved support, and inspire employers to act by providing examples of existing best practice. We are grateful for the expert input to this factsheet provided by Business Disability Forum, Leonard Cheshire, and RNIB.

Introduction

One in five people of working age living in the UK are disabled,ⁱ yet 19% of employers state that they would be less likely to hire a disabled person.ⁱⁱ This means that the talents of disabled people are underutilised, harming individuals and businesses alike.

Under the Equality Act 2010ⁱⁱⁱ, it is unlawful for employers in the UK to discriminate against anyone with a disability. From recruitment, to training and progression, or termination of a contract, an employer has a legal duty to not treat a disabled person unfavourably because they are disabled.

Employers also have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce the impact of barriers that disabled people experience at work or obtaining work, because of their disability which places them at a substantial disadvantage compared to people without that disability.

Despite this, disabled people experience worse employment outcomes:

- The disability employment gap – the proportion of disabled people in employment compared to the proportion of non-disabled people in employment – stands at 28.4%.^{iv}
- The disability pay gap – the gap between median pay for disabled employees and non-disabled employees is 13.8%.^v
- Disabled people must apply for 60% more jobs than non-disabled jobseekers before they find work.^{vi}

What is a disability?

The Equality Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The definition is so broad that it is impossible to provide a definitive list of disabilities. Many long-term conditions may well be disabilities



under the Equality Act even if the person themselves would not describe themselves as disabled.

As such, the best approach for employers is to ask what they can do to enable each candidate or employee to work to the best of their ability and reach their full potential. This may involve making workplace adjustments that remove barriers that disabled people might experience at work.

BARRIERS TO WORK

Across a range of key employment measures, disabled people of working age are at a disadvantage compared with non-disabled people.

They are less likely to be in work, less likely to be economically active, and those who are economically active are more likely to be unemployed and unemployed for longer.^{vii}

All of this points to the existence of multiple, significant barriers to work for disabled people. Disabled people report barriers right across the employment journey, including:

- **Employer perceptions:** one third of employers are concerned whether a disabled person could do the job.^{viii}
- **Failure to make reasonable adjustments:** 58% of disabled jobseekers report experiencing no reasonable adjustments, despite Equality Act legislating for it.^{ix}
- **Recruitment processes:** one third of people with a learning disability find it hard to apply for jobs because of inaccessible application forms.^x
- **Fear of discrimination:** 43% of disabled people have avoided sharing their disability due to the belief that it would stall their progression at work or affect a promotion.^{xi}
- **Physical barriers:** 32% of disabled people experience a lack of general accessibility and 29% struggle to even get into an office building.^{xii}

WE'VE HAD DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION LAWS FOR THE LAST 30 YEARS BUT THINGS STILL AREN'T REALLY CHANGING. THE LAWS ARE CHANGING BUT BIG COMPANIES NEED TO DO MORE THAN PAY LIP SERVICE – THEY NEED TO TREAT IT AS A REAL PROBLEM. MANY AREN'T MOVING QUICKLY ENOUGH, AND I WANT THAT TO CHANGE^{xiii}

Paul Smyth, Head of Digital Accessibility, Barclays

BENEFITS OF DISABILITY INCLUSION

24% of employers say that they would be less likely to hire a disabled candidate^{xiv}, yet there is a strong business case for hiring people with a disability. Some of the benefits of creating an inclusive environment for disabled people include:

- **Addressing skills shortages:** there are 8.4 million disabled people of working age in the UK yet only half of them are in work.^{xv} This represents a huge pool of untapped talent which businesses cannot afford to ignore, especially given the post-pandemic labour market in which there are a record number of job vacancies alongside rising rates of economic inactivity.^{xvi}
- **Greater diversity:** organisations with a diverse and inclusive workforce can tap into different perspectives which can boost innovation. Studies have also shown that productivity increases when the number of workers with disabilities is increased.^{xvii}
- **Reflect your customer base:** given the prevalence of disability in the general population, disabled employees will make your workforce more reflective of your customer base – on top of that, disabled

customers and their families have a spending power worth an estimated £274 billion.^{xviii}

- **Better financial performance:** companies that prioritise the inclusion of individuals with disabilities were four times more likely to outperform their competitors in shareholder returns and have, on average, 28% higher revenue, double the net income, and 30% higher profit margins.^{xix}

INSPIRE, HIRE AND GROW DISABLED TALENT

To support businesses to develop a strategic approach to their work on inclusive employment, we recommend using the Business in the Community (BITC) Employment Framework of:

- **inspire:** pre-employment support
- **hire:** removing barriers in recruitment processes
- **grow:** in-work support.

Inspire

Create partnerships with organisations who support disabled people into work. A list of organisations supporting disabled people into work is included at the end of this factsheet.

Hire

[Opening Doors](#) is BITC's inclusive recruitment campaign. Launched in February 2022, we have an ambition to make 2 million jobs more inclusive by 2025. The campaign seeks to help all disadvantaged and diverse jobseekers by calling on employers to take forward a minimum of three actions across five core principles. Several of the actions that underpin the core principles have specific relevance to disabled jobseekers.

Principle 2 asks businesses to **show candidates that you are committed to inclusion**. This includes:

- ensuring that your job adverts reach excluded and diverse talent by advertising through a range of channels and recruitment partners that target diverse groups. There are recruitment sites and companies that specialise in reaching talented people with disabilities
- making sure that your employees understand your commitment and providing training on inclusive recruitment to those involved in hiring.

Principle 4 invites employers to **focus on the essential skills and capabilities that are needed to do the job** by taking actions such as:

- asking for skills rather than experience and qualifications where possible
- reviewing the stages of the application and assessment processes to make sure that they are appropriate (e.g., is an interview the best way to assess the skills that you are looking for). The rate at which disabled people pass psychometric testing is significantly worse than those without a disability.

Principle 5 wants businesses to **prioritise accessibility and eliminate bias** by taking actions such as:

- including diverse colleagues on interview panels
- asking all candidates if they need any adjustments at every stage of the process
- advertising and accept applications across different media (i.e., not just online)
- stipulating in job adverts where a role can be done flexibly and the different forms of flexibility that will be considered (e.g.,

DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

compressed hours, working hours, locations, etc)

- providing information in accessible formats.

I KNOW THAT I SECURED THE JOB AT LEONARD CHESHIRE BECAUSE OF MY SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES. I'M TREATED THE SAME AS EVERYONE ELSE. I HAVE OBJECTIVES AND KPIS LIKE MY COLLEAGUES. THE ONLY THING THAT'S DIFFERENT IS THAT I MUST FACTOR IN MY TREATMENT REGIME. BUT, WITH EFFECTIVE PLANNING AND SCHEDULING, IT'S VERY EASY TO WORK AROUND THIS. AND I'M SURE THIS IS SOMETHING WE'VE ALL EXPERIENCED IN THE PANDEMIC – I WORK AROUND MY LINE MANAGER'S SCHOOL RUN, AND IN TURN THEY WORK AROUND MY TREATMENT REGIME.

Alex Greig, Leonard Cheshire

Grow

Actively promote your clear commitment to disability and inclusion to encourage your disabled employees to feel confident about sharing any adjustments they need to do the job.

Every disability is different. Listen to your disabled employees about the barriers they perceive and how they can be best supported through a person-centred approach and raise awareness by sharing knowledge at every level of your organisation.

Ask all employees whether they require any workplace adjustments regularly and review adjustments already in place to ensure that they are still effective. Adjustments may include physical adaptations; changes to working patterns and hours, or different responsibilities; additional support and training such as a reader or interpreter.

Make sure all employees have equal access to training and development and career opportunities.

WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS DOING?

Opening Doors to disability inclusion at Capita

"We know that disabled people are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people. To help close the gap, Capita has signed up to the Disability Confident scheme which encourages employers to be positive about the skills that people with disability can bring to businesses and, importantly, remove the barriers to recruiting and retaining them.

Our Personal Independence Business, which supports hundreds of thousands of people with long-term health conditions or a disability through our work for the Department of Work and Pensions, has led the way on disability inclusivity in Capita. It has implemented a raft of measures across recruitment, working arrangements and employee training to become a Disability Confident Leader. I'm proud it has been awarded the highest status as 'Leader'. Less than 350 UK businesses have achieved this level, and they have inspired the rest of Capita to become a truly disability inclusive employer.

Becoming Disability Confident is just one way to demonstrate we are serious about equal opportunities for disabled people, but we know there is more we can do."

Andy Start, CEO of Capita Public Service

PEOPLE STILL USE WORDS SUCH AS 'MAD', 'CRAZY' OR 'MENTAL' TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE OR SITUATIONS. AND THEN THERE'S THE GENERAL MOBILITY CHALLENGES, TURNING UP TO OFFICES TO SPEAK ABOUT INCLUSION AND

ACCESSIBILITY AND NOT BEING ABLE TO WALK UP THE STAIRS TO GET TO THE MEETING^{xx}

Joseph Williams, CEO, Clu

Opening Doors to disability inclusion at Thames Water

Naman joined Thames Water through our Give Someone a Start scheme, a three-week programme designed to help individuals gain confidence and valuable work experience within different areas of the business. The aim is to give individuals the confidence and support required to equip them with a successful career going forward. The scheme has helped over 250 individuals in the last seven years. Naman was diagnosed with severe autism when he was 18 months old. He then went to a special school and later, with support, to a mainstream school. Although he struggled due to his autism, he went on to achieve good A levels and then got a BSc degree in Maths. After he finished his degree, he started to apply for jobs. He was invited to plenty of interviews, but a successful outcome was a challenge, despite his degree. He struggled to remain hopeful. He eventually came across a disability careers fair run by Reading DWP. This is where he was introduced to Thames Water and signed up to join the Give Someone a Start Programme. It was through this that he gained invaluable work experience to support his future. He felt not only appreciated but understood, and he saw that this would be a company where different backgrounds were valued. He now has a permanent job at Thames Water and is completing an apprenticeship.

Thames Water and the Disability network have both worked hard over the past number of years to make this a company where people with all abilities can feel welcomed and that they have a future with us. As a network they

have both an executive and senior sponsor. These two senior members of the Thames team attend all network monthly meetings to help raise any issues with the wider executive team.

Opening Doors to disability inclusion at Ricoh

Josh Watkins joined Ricoh as a Sales Executive in 2015. He was first diagnosed with Ankylosing Spondylitis in August 2018.

“Ankylosing Spondylitis is a type of arthritis causing inflammation in the spine, and it is this condition that has had the biggest impact on my day-to-day life as I’ve been suffering with a lot of pain. It was thanks to the health care plan that I have as an employee benefit that I was able to receive the necessary testing and diagnosis in the first place, as well as further treatment. Ricoh arranged an occupational health and display screen equipment assessment to ensure we all understood what adjustments were needed, including suitable office equipment both at Ricoh office and home office to ease symptoms and combat the speed of degeneration. It’s important that assessments take place on an ongoing basis as my health needs change, and Ricoh have been great at providing this support. Flexibility around travel and accommodation options, provision of wellbeing sessions and general empathy for struggles have all been an incredible help to me. Working at Ricoh, I feel empowered in my position to work effectively despite my disability and to have a long-standing career going forward.”

Catherine Morrell, Inclusion & Wellbeing Manager at Ricoh, says:

“Ricoh UK has been a Disability Confident Committed employer since 2019. Being able to support our colleagues who have a disability is key to our aim of creating a vibrant culture, where employees feel they can be open about who they are and have the support they need in the workplace. In February 2022, Ricoh

DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

was an early signatory of the BITC Opening Doors: inclusive recruitment campaign because we believe that individuals with disabilities can bring a wealth of diverse skills and experience to our workforce and add real value to the organisation. As part of our commitment, we continue to learn more about working with our candidates with disabilities and are now looking to create a disability affinity group where we can all share our experiences and learn from each other.”

MORE SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYERS

[Business Disability Forum](#) is the leading business membership organisation in disability inclusion. They are trusted partners, working with business, Government and disabled people to improve the life experiences of disabled employees and consumers, by removing barriers to inclusion.

[Disability Confident](#) is a government scheme designed to encourage employers to recruit and retain disabled people and those with health conditions.

[DWP's](#) employer service provides advice and guidance to employers on health and disability in the workplace.

[Leonard Cheshire](#) supports disabled people to live, learn and work as independently as they choose, whatever their ability. They will work with employers to develop and deliver bespoke training and consultancy solutions that will help you to develop a best practice approach to disability and create impactful organisational change.

[RNIB](#) supports blind and partially sighted people. Their Visibly Better Employer quality standard aims to help employers increase the number of visually impaired people in their organisation and support existing staff who develop sight loss.

ENJOYED THIS CONTENT?

You might also like to:

- [find out more about our Opening Doors campaign](#)
- [learn more about our advisory services](#)
- [join us for one of our upcoming events](#)



Talk to one of our expert team [today](#) to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further and drive lasting global change.

ENDNOTES

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