



Recruitment & Retention
of Disabled People in the NHS:

A GOOD PRACTICE TOOLKIT



This toolkit is designed to enhance the recruitment and retention of disabled individuals and is intended for that use.

Should you wish to reproduce any part of this toolkit, whether in full or in part, you must first obtain permission from Culture & Engagement Experts Ltd (CEE Ltd).

Additionally, any use of this toolkit's content must explicitly acknowledge the Disabled NHS Directors Network.

Please contact CEE Ltd to obtain the necessary permissions.

© 2024 Culture & Engagement Experts Ltd. All rights reserved



Table of Contents

Introduction	04
About Us	08
Understanding Disability	12
Recruitment	18
Recruitment strategies	24
Accessible Hiring Process	42
Retention	59
Retention strategies: Organisational Culture	64
Retention strategies: Individual Support	80
Final Thoughts: Moving Forward with Empowering Ability	92
References	96
Resources	99
A Message of Thanks	100



 www.disablednhsdirectorsnetwork.nhs.uk

 dndn@lthtr.nhs.uk

Introduction

***“No-one knows what support I need better than me,
all people have to do is ask”.***

The Disabled NHS Directors Network (DNDN) would like to introduce a good practice guide for improving the recruitment and retention of disabled people.

Whereas this guide has been developed with the NHS in mind, it is designed in a way that other organisations will find it useful and benefit from the information.

It aims to provide actionable strategies and comprehensive information for organisations, to create a more inclusive, accessible and supportive workplace for disabled employees.

Covering all aspects from recruitment to retention and developed from lived experience, the actions outlined will improve the employment experience for disabled people.

This will ultimately enrich organisations with diverse perspectives and talents and improve the experiences of our disabled staff, patients and communities.

For the NHS this will be demonstrated through the following outcomes:

- **All NHS organisations will have an inclusive and disability-confident workplace, where disabled NHS employees feel comfortable in declaring their disability.** (Increased number of disabled people entering the NHS workforce; Increased number of disabled employees declaring a disability on their employment record)
- **All NHS organisations will meet the full needs of their disabled staff, patients and communities.** (Improved satisfaction scores; Improved Friends & Family scores)
- **Disabled NHS employees feel confident to apply for senior leadership positions.** (Increased number of disabled employees progressing into leadership and board level roles within the NHS)





The benefits of employing disabled people include:

Diverse Perspectives

- With 70% of patients who access NHS services at any one time having a disability **(1)**, disabled employees can offer new ideas and better understand the needs of disabled patients.

Enhanced Accessibility

- Making health facilities and services easier for everyone to use.

Improved Patient Experience

- Building trust and better communication between patients and healthcare workers, due to a shared understanding of having a disability.

Inclusive Workplace Culture

- Having disabled employees who are visible in the workplace, increases trust with both staff and patients and builds a positive reputation of inclusivity and diversity.

Increased Pool of Talented People to Fill Vacancies

- Accessing a wider range of abilities and experience.



Compliance in Legal & Social Responsibility

- Showing that the organisation respects laws about disability rights and equality.

Increased Social Value

- By hiring more disabled people, it supports their employment and contributes positively to society.
- Respecting the commitment as an 'Anchor Institution', and have a significant, long-term impact on the local community.
- By enabling disabled people to have the benefits of paid employment, this will assist in addressing health inequalities that are faced by disabled people.

It is evident that inclusive recruitment can bring a rich pool of talent, diverse perspectives and creativity to any organisation. However, we know that this can sometimes be overlooked due to systemic barriers and unconscious biases. This good practice guide is therefore not just a set of guidelines, but a roadmap towards genuine inclusion and equity for disabled people.

About Us




Disabled NHS Directors Network

The Disabled NHS Directors Network (DNDN) was established in 2020 (2) and is a national network representing NHS leaders with disabilities. Its membership consists of disabled Board or equivalent members (non-executive and executive) of NHS organisations and other providers of NHS service (including Community Interest Companies). This includes non-executive and executive members of Integrated Care Boards, NHS members of Place Partnership Boards (or equivalent) and NHS or DHSC Arm's Length Bodies.

Members include colleagues with a wide range of disabilities and impairments, including neurodiversity, hearing impairments, long-term conditions, mental ill health, mobility impairments and visual impairments. Our membership also includes a good range of gender, ethnicity and geographical coverage across England.

The Network was created to strengthen the collective impact and voice of disabled leaders and, through them, of disabled staff employed within the NHS, as well as to provide a peer support network for disabled NHS directors.



In 2023, the DNDN published its 12 high-impact actions (3). These 12 actions were developed by members of the DNDN and were categorised under the following headings:

Creating an NHS culture where all staff fully understand disability, celebrate the value that disabled staff bring to the NHS and support disabled staff to contribute to their full potential.

Ensuring that the NHS is fully equipped to support disabled staff with all the practical support they need to achieve their full potential in their careers in the NHS (including reasonable adjustments and disability leave)

Facilitating career and leadership development for disabled staff, from entry to the NHS to Board level.

NHS England have used these actions to inform the NHS Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) improvement plan (4), valuing the work of the DNDN and recognising the lived experience and expertise of its members. The EDI improvement plan details targeted actions for NHS organisations to address the prejudice and discrimination that exists, through behaviours, policies, practices and cultures, against certain groups and individuals across the NHS workforce.

“Let’s move forward together, building an NHS where every employee is valued, supported and empowered to reach their full potential.”



Kate Smyth
DNDN Co-Chair



Peter Reading
DNDN Co-Chair

Understanding Disability

16%

of the world's population live with some form of disability. (5)

24%

of the UK population are classed as being disabled. (6)

24%

of the UK working age adults have a disability. (7)

17%


of disabled people were born with their disabilities (8)

83%

of disabled people acquired their disability later in life. (9)

The World Health Organisation (2021) suggests that being disabled is something that every person will experience at some point in their lives (9). This could be minor and temporary, or major and permanent. People with severe, permanent health conditions that have a long-lasting negative impact on their lives, is what The Equality Act (2010) categorises as being disabled. This includes physical, mental, sensory and neurodivergent disabilities, and a person may have more than one type (8).

- Physical disabilities involve limitations on a person's physical functioning and mobility.
- Mental disabilities pertain to cognitive or emotional impairments.
- Sensory disabilities involve impairments in one or more of the senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste or smell.
- Neurodivergence refers to conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia, where individuals process information in a unique way.



Regardless of type, disabilities can be considered hidden or visible. This refers to primarily whether they can be seen by others.

“I use a wheelchair, which I control with my head and I have an assistance dog. A week doesn’t pass without someone mistakenly assuming that I am a patient and not an NHS employee”.


Visible disabilities are physical or mental impairments that are noticeable or apparent to others. Examples include mobility impairments that require assistive equipment such as crutches or a wheelchair. These disabilities are often immediately apparent to others, which can lead to immediate recognition of an individual’s need for accommodations or support.

Hidden disabilities are physical, mental or neurological conditions that are not visible from the outside. However, they can limit or challenge a person’s movements, senses or activities. Examples include chronic pain or mental health issues, where the extent of someone’s disabilities are not immediately apparent. Individuals with hidden disabilities can sometimes face misunderstandings, false perceptions and judgements about their condition, or a lack of appreciation of their need for support because there is no visible evidence of their disability.

“My condition isn’t always in people’s minds, as I seem ok a lot of the time. It is when my condition flares up that I need extra support. The problem is, some people think you are faking it when you say you can’t do something. Because they can’t see my condition, people assume I don’t need support”.

Long-term conditions are health conditions that require ongoing management over a long period, if not for the entirety of someone’s life. These conditions cannot be cured but can be managed through medication, lifestyle adjustments and other therapies. Examples include diabetes, autoimmune diseases and mental health conditions. Many long-term conditions are not visible to the outside observer, however, they can significantly impact on daily living and activities. It is reasonable to suggest that long-term conditions can therefore be both hidden and visible.

Visible and hidden disabilities, including long-term conditions, can profoundly impact an individual’s life, including their health, employment and social participation. The key difference lies in the visibility of a person’s condition to others. This can affect how others interact with them, as well as the type and level of support someone might receive. There may also be differences in the challenges they face, including stigma, preconceptions and misunderstandings.



It has been 29 years since the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) became law (10). The Act made it unlawful to discriminate against disabled persons in relation to employment. The Equality Act (2010) superseded this act and brought all protected characteristics together, and legally protects people from any form of discrimination in the workplace and in wider society (11).

However, official statistics continue to demonstrate a difference in the employment experiences of disabled people in the UK.

- The employment rate for disabled persons is **52.6%** compared to **82.5%** for non-disabled people.
- Disabled people are **almost twice as likely** to be unemployed as non-disabled people (12).


Academic research and personal accounts have detailed that it is a combination of negative attitudes, discrimination and a lack of understanding which is ingrained within society, that causes lower employment opportunities. This includes not only being successful in initially gaining employment, but also promotion and development opportunities.

The Medical Model of Disability is historically how disability has been defined and seen by society. This is an approach which focuses on the lack of physical, sensory or mental functioning, and whereby a cure or correction of the condition/impairment is sought. The emphasis is on returning disabled people to a 'normal' level of functioning.

The Social Model of Disability was developed on the premise that it is not someone's differences that disables them, but the barriers in society. This includes: Attitudinal barriers; Policy barriers; Physical barriers; and Barriers linked to empowerment. This model was introduced in the 1980's by Mike Oliver (13), however, remains relevant today. It continues to be recognised that for disabled people to be treated equally, transformative changes are needed to society's structure and norms. The United Nations (2010) stated that for society to treat disabled people equally, their needs must be met as a matter of usual practice rather than being considered different or special (14).

Whereas we have provided you with an overview of the two models, it is important to recognise that members of the DNDN embrace the social model of disability, viewing it as a critical framework that more accurately reflects their experiences and challenges.

“I just want to be seen for my ability and not my disability”



The National Health Service (NHS) in England is the biggest employer in Europe, as well as the world's largest employer of highly skilled professionals (15). Since 2019 NHS England has implemented the Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES)(16). This is a national workforce equality data collection, that aims to promote equality of career opportunities and fairer treatment in the workplace. The WDES focuses specifically on improving the employment experience of disabled people.

The WDES contains ten specific measures which focus on the workplace and career experiences of disabled people, compared to their counterparts. Over the past five years, NHS organisations have been able to monitor the progress they are making to create disability inclusive cultures.

The number of disabled people in employment in the UK stands at 5.53 million as of 2023 (7). In the NHS, 4.9% of the NHS workforce openly declare having a disability (17). However, this figure increases to 23.4% when people are asked to anonymously state whether they have a disability through the national NHS staff survey (NHSE WDES, 2023) (17).

The latest key WDES findings are:

- The likelihood of a disabled job employee being in a capability process on the grounds of performance is **2.17** (Twice as likely)
- **52.1%** of disabled staff believed they had equal opportunities for career progression or promotion (47.9% did not)
- **35.2%** of disabled staff reported that they felt valued for their contribution (64.8% did not)

- The likelihood of a disabled job applicant being appointed through shortlisting is **0.99** (the national average suggests disabled and non-disabled applicants are equally likely to be recruited, but experience varies at Trust level)
- The percentage of disabled employees reporting having experienced bullying, harassment or abuse from patients, service users or public is **33.2%**; from managers is **16.1%**; and from other colleagues is **24.8%**
- **27.7%** of disabled staff experienced presenteeism
- **73.4%** of disabled staff reported they had the reasonable adjustment(s) required to perform their duties
- **100%** of NHS Trusts reported that they had facilitated the voices of disabled staff to be heard
- **5.7%** of board members declared a disability through the NHS Electronic staff record

(NHSE WDES, 2023) [\(17\)](#)

As part of this Good Practice Guide, examples of initiatives and programmes implemented by NHS organisations, will be identified and shared. These programmes aimed to improve the employment experiences of disabled people working in the NHS.

Recruitment



Join our team!

WE ARE HIRING

we are looking for:

- Marketing Coordinator
- Assistant Manager
- Project Manager
- Account Executive

Contact us at:
tel: 123 456 789
email: name@example.com



Recruitment



Recruitment is the gateway to your organisation and it is this first step that lays the foundation in promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace. Diversity is not just beneficial, but critical to providing comprehensive and empathetic care to our communities. The recruitment of disabled people therefore stands as a cornerstone of organisational excellence.

Employing disabled people is not merely about being compliant with legal and ethical obligations, but recognising and valuing the unique perspectives, insights and skills that disabled people bring. These contributions can lead to innovative practices, more effective patient care, and a more inclusive workplace culture.

Incorporating the views of disabled people can significantly help to avoid 'groupthink' and lead to better organisational decisions. Groupthink occurs within a group of people when they think the same way because they share similar experiences and perspectives. Without diverse viewpoints and experiences, the group may miss out on important insights and creative solutions, leading to decisions that might not deliver the best outcome.

This section of the toolkit provides guidance that will ensure your recruitment practices are accessible, equitable and welcoming to disabled people. By adopting these practices, NHS organisations can attract individuals who are not only skilled, but also deeply motivated to contribute to building a working environment that respects and uplifts all its employees.

Many talented and qualified disabled people often face challenges in obtaining employment. These can range from inaccessible job postings and application platforms to unconscious biases during the selection process.



The following sections aim to address these challenges:


Recruitment Strategies

- **Ensure the job description and person specification consider disabilities when they are drafted.**
- **Ensure the job advert and associated documentation is available in different accessible formats.**
- **Ensure the position is advertised in places and ways that will attract disabled candidates and to organisations who specialise in diverse recruitment.**

Accessible Hiring Processes

- **Ensure the application form can be submitted in various formats.**
- **Ensure the interview process is accessible and accommodations are made for all types of disability without making the candidate feel unwelcome or uncomfortable about causing the recruitment team extra work or inconvenience.**

These strategies have been developed alongside the Department for Work & Pensions Disability Confident guidance [\(18\)](#) and the Disability Employment Charter [\(19\)](#), which was developed by various charities in the voluntary sector.



The Disability Confident scheme helps recruit disabled people and demonstrate an organisation's commitment to recognising the value that they bring.

The Disability Confident commitments include:

- **Ensure your recruitment process is inclusive and accessible**
- **Communicate and promote vacancies**
- **Offer an interview to disabled people**

These will be referenced within this guide, acknowledging the existing and relevant guidance.

The Disability Employment Charter recommends nine areas of action for all organisations, and for the government to make mandatory in the hope that they **“address the disadvantages disabled people encounter in their working lives”**.



These nine actions are:

1. **Employment and pay gap reporting**
2. **Supporting disabled people into employment**
3. **Reform of Access to Work**
4. **Reform of Disability Confident**
5. **Leveraging government procurement**
6. **Workplace adjustments**
7. **Working with disabled people and their representatives**
8. **Advice and support**
9. **National progress on disability employment**

Further information on the Disability Confident scheme and the Disability Employment Charter can be found in the resources section of this guide.

Recruitment Strategies



Recruitment Strategies

Ensure the job description and person specification consider disabilities when they are drafted.

“I personally try to read past the disability unfriendly comments and focus on what support I need to do the job. I always believe that employers will put support in place once I am in the role. But this isn’t always the case”.



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Avoid jargon	Use inclusive language without organisational specific jargon.	<p>People with cognitive disabilities may find it challenging to understand complex jargon. This could cause them difficulty in fully understanding the job requirements.</p> <p>Assistive technologies, such as screen readers for visually impaired people, may not understand jargon or complex language, creating communication barriers for those who are unable to read for themselves.</p> <p>People who are neurodivergent require clear, direct communication. Using ambiguous language can cause confusion for these people and make it challenging for them to determine their suitability.</p> <p>Jargon can therefore be exclusive and discriminatory against disabled people.</p>	“an understanding of the constitutional targets of the National Health Service”.	“understand the need to achieve RTT, A&E, DTOC and 2ww targets”.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Recognise areas that would exclude disabled people	For each requirement, use language that would be suitable for a person with disabilities.	<p>There are some functions that are not sensitive to disabled people and don't recognise the accommodations that can be put in place to deliver the same outcome.</p> <p>Walking, driving, presenting, standing for long periods of time and communicating are all functions that are taken for granted. Even though disabilities may prevent some of these, supported accommodations can ensure the same outcomes are achieved.</p>	“ability to travel to various locations, with consideration for alternative transportation or accommodations as needed”.	“ability to drive to different locations”.
Seek advice and guidance from disabled people	Before finalising any job postings, seek feedback from disabled people (current employees, staff networks, disability organisations) to ensure the language and content are inclusive and respectful.	<p>‘Walking in someone else’s shoes’ can be difficult for people who don’t have personal lived experience. This is nothing to be ashamed of but should be recognised and addressed.</p> <p>Seeking advice and guidance from disabled people can ensure you have captured a perspective that is inclusive and doesn’t unintentionally discriminate.</p>	“accommodations will always be made where needed, to ensure all candidates are given an equal opportunity to apply”.	“we will attempt to meet the needs of any disabilities with no guarantee”.

Recruitment Strategies

Ensure the job advert and associated documentation is available in different accessible formats.

“It says a lot about an organisation when they acknowledge in their job advert that they encourage disabled applicants to apply and will provide the job documentation in alternative formats. Most say they encourage applications from disabled people, but it feels like a tick box statement. Providing more information on the accessible practices makes the organisation look more genuine”.



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Accessible information	Include within the advert that the documents associated to the position are available in different formats.	<p>Different disabilities require different accommodations to ensure information is accessible. This will ensure equity of access and an equal opportunity to apply.</p> <p>Visual impairments or mobility disabilities may require documents to be accessible via assistive technology such as a screen reader.</p> <p>Video subtitles for people with hearing impairments.</p>	<p>Documents can be circulated in different formats that do not reduce the available time for the candidate to complete the application. Which include:</p> <p>Braille and large print;</p> <p>Audio recordings;</p> <p>Easy-read versions;</p> <p>Video content with sign language interpretation.</p>	Documents are only available electronically.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Digital Accessibility	<p>The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) require all online documents to include:</p> <p>Screen reader compatibility;</p> <p>Keyboard navigation;</p> <p>Adjustable text sizes and contrast settings;</p> <p>Captioning and transcripts for videos.</p>	<p>The WCAG standards are incorporated within the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018 and specifically references the WCAG 2.1 Level AA as the standard for public sector websites and mobile applications.</p> <p>These standards aim to make online content accessible to disabled people. These include individuals with visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning and neurological disabilities.</p>	All online documents follow the WCAG.	Documents are written in different fonts, size, colours etc and do not follow the WCAG.

Recruitment Strategies

Ensure the position is advertised in places and ways that will attract disabled candidates and to organisations who specialise in diverse recruitment.

“I knew my current employer would support me because their values chimed with my own. I was excited about joining an organisation that saw past my disability and recognised the positives that I would bring”.



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Organisational values	Include the organisational values within the job description, outlining how employees are supported, empowered and how they can expect to be treated with compassion and respect.	<p>Demonstrating that the organisation is committed to encouraging diversity and embedding inclusive practices will attract disabled candidates.</p> <p>Organisations that have values that respect and provide support to all employees, assures all candidates that they will be given equal opportunities regardless of whether they have a disability/impairment/ long-term condition.</p>	<p>A more effective example:</p> <p>“Our organisation is committed to creating an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and valued. We pride ourselves on our values: Respect, Teamwork, Compassion and a commitment to Equity & Accessibility for all”.</p>	<p>A less effective example:</p> <p>“Our organisation values hard work, excellence, and success above all else”.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Diversity & Inclusion statement	Include a statement declaring the organisation's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion – which includes disability.	<p>Demonstrating that the organisation is committed to encouraging diversity and embedding inclusive practices will attract disabled candidates.</p> <p>A positive disability support statement is not just a symbolic gesture, it is a crucial component of an inclusive, supportive and successful organisation.</p>	<p>A more effective example:</p> <p>“We believe our strength lies in our diversity. We are committed to embedding an inclusive environment where every employee feels valued, respected and supported.”</p>	<p>A less effective example:</p> <p>“We do not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, age or disability. Our organisation is an equal opportunity employer and we comply with all legal and national requirements”.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Offer resources of support	Provide information about the resources available to employees when support is needed, such as employee assistance programmes, mental health resources, disability staff networks, Occupational Health support, access to courses such as Mindfulness and other wellbeing support services.	Offering resources of support signals an organisation's commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.	A more effective example: "Our organisation is deeply committed to creating an accessible, supportive, and inclusive workplace for everyone. We proudly offer a range of resources and support to all our employees to ensure they are empowered to succeed".	A less effective example: "Our organisation complies with all legal requirements regarding workplace accommodations for those who qualify".

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Encourage disclosure	Encourage candidates to disclose any accommodations they may need during the application or interview process. Provide assurance that their disclosure will not impact on their candidacy.	<p>Encouraging the disclosure of a disability fosters an open, inclusive and supportive work environment from the outset.</p> <p>Overcoming reluctance to disclose due to fears about being excluded from the process due to their disability.</p> <p>If adverts and applications are equally accessible, disclosure need not be made until after the longlisting stage.</p> <p>The Disability Confident scheme requires organisations who have signed up, to guarantee an interview to a disabled applicant if they meet the essential criteria.</p>	<p>A more effective example:</p> <p>“Our organisation is committed to diversity and inclusivity at all levels. If you have a disability, and prefer to disclose it, please feel free to do so in your application. We use this information to ensure you are fully supported during the recruitment process”.</p>	<p>A less effective example:</p> <p>“If you have a disability, please let us know in your application”.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Flexible work options	Be clear on what flexible work options are available for the role, such as remote or hybrid working. Also, be open and transparent about the working environment.	<p>By demonstrating that the organisation is committed to encouraging diversity, and embedding inclusive practices, will attract disabled candidates.</p> <p>This can be particularly appealing to disabled people who may require adjustments to their working patterns or environment to perform their best.</p>	Organisations highlights flexible work arrangements in their job adverts, job descriptions and on their website. This includes remote working, job share and part time. Also, during recruitment, the different options are discussed to emphasise the organisation's commitment to accommodating diverse needs.	Organisations dictate that only under exceptional circumstances can people be allowed to work in a flexible way. This creates animosity towards people who need to work flexibly for reasonable accommodations.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
<p>Advertised through disability charities</p>	<p>Disability charities often have established networks of potential disabled candidates and the disabled community.</p> <p>Advertising job vacancies through disability charities ensures that disabled people are given the opportunity to know about the vacancy and have the encouragement to apply.</p>	<p>Using disability charities as a platform for job adverts sends a positive message about the organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>Collaborating with disability charities can enhance an organisation's employer brand, demonstrating that it is socially responsible and committed to creating equitable employment opportunities.</p> <p>Advertising through disability charities can help build trust within the disabled community and increase the number of disabled people who apply for positions.</p>	<p>The job advert is created in collaboration with disability charities and highlights the organisation's inclusive culture, and specific support for disabled people.</p>	<p>A generic job advert is sent to a disability charity, asking them to share it within their network.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
<p>Training for headhunters and recruitment agencies</p>	<p>Bespoke training, delivered by disabled trainers on the nuances of successfully recruiting disabled people.</p>	<p>Training can provide recruiters with a deeper understanding of the accessibility and accommodation needs of disabled candidates.</p> <p>Barriers to disabled applicants and unconscious biases across the recruitment processes can be addressed and reduced.</p> <p>Trained recruiters are better equipped to offer a supportive and respectful experience to disabled candidates.</p> <p>Training ensures that recruiters are up-to-date on relevant laws and regulations regarding disability rights and employment equity.</p>	<p>Recruiters access specific training in diversity and inclusion, with a focus on recruiting disabled individuals.</p>	<p>Standard recruitment processes are put in place.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Internal talent team	An internal talent team trained in the recruitment and promotion of disabled people plays a pivotal role in developing strategies and implementing practices to recruit disabled candidates.	<p>It is important to ensure there is a dedicated team that is responsible for aligning recruitment processes to the organisational strategy. This ensures that the organisation can attract, develop and retain the talent required to deliver a high-quality, inclusive service.</p> <p>Recruiting disabled people requires a thoughtful, inclusive approach from the internal talent team. It is this team that emphasises the organisational approach to accessibility, understanding, inclusivity and support throughout the recruitment process.</p>	The internal talent team ensures the recruitment process is inclusive and accessible. This is demonstrable through the attraction of a wider pool of talented candidates, including more disabled applicants and employees at all levels of the organisation.	Standard recruitment processes are put in place.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Local community recruitment	<p>Local community recruitment is a valuable strategy for inclusively hiring disabled people.</p> <p>It not only facilitates access to jobs for disabled candidates but also builds stronger, more inclusive communities and workplaces.</p> <p>Anchor institutions are crucial to the community. By hiring locally the organisation can tap into knowledge and contribute to the economy by giving people employment and purpose.</p>	<p>Local recruitment can make the job more accessible to disabled candidates, who may find commuting long distances challenging.</p> <p>Recruiting from the local community can enhance the organisation's reputation and understanding of local needs.</p> <p>Disabled employees can offer insights into accessibility issues and help develop services that are more inclusive for everyone in the community.</p>	<p>An organisation partners with local disability advocacy groups, and communities to attract disabled candidates. The advert outlines the organisation's commitment to proactively attracting qualified disabled candidates living in the local area.</p>	<p>An organisation advertises on their website alone, with no engagement with local communities.</p>

We Work Here

<https://www.chesterfieldroyal.nhs.uk/work-us/why-join-teamcrh/weworkhere>

Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust produced a video to attract disabled people and those with long-term conditions to work in the NHS.

The work was led by their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead with support from their Disability and Wellbeing Network. By involving colleagues with lived experience, and sharing their stories, the video celebrates the diversity of people working locally in the NHS with disabilities and long-term conditions.

The video has been positively received and shared with organisations nationally and locally. It was also shown in a local shopping centre on the Chesterfield Town Council big screen. The Trust includes the video link in all job adverts and is shown in their Trust induction, demonstrating their commitment to inclusion.

For more information, please contact Trudy Stringfellow, Lead Organisational Development Practitioner.

Accessible Hiring Process



Accessible Hiring Process

Ensure the application form can be submitted in various formats.

“I spend so much time trying to format tables into something that my screen-reader can understand. I know what support I need because of my blindness, but application forms are a nightmare for me.”



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
<p>Accessible application formats</p>	<p>Digital resources such as software applications and websites are usable by everyone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible applications include: • Text-to-Speech • Speech recognition • Screen readers compatibility • Keyboard navigation • Adjustable text size and colours • Closed captions and transcripts for multimedia • Clear and simple language • Consistent layout and navigation 	<p>Accessible formats ensure that all users have equal chance to apply for a job.</p> <p>It is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010 to provide accessible job application processes.</p> <p>Accessible application processes can help mitigate unconscious bias by ensuring that all candidates, regardless of disability, are assessed based on their skills and experience.</p>	<p>Online applications are compatible with assistive technologies – the removal of tables and the ability for text to be read from left to right.</p>	<p>Tables!</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Alternative application methods	<p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper applications • Phone applications • In-person applications • Video or audio applications • Assisted applications • Email applications 	<p>Alternative ways for candidates to apply for positions are particularly important for individuals who may face barriers when using digital platforms. This could be due to accessibility issues, lack of internet access, or unfamiliarity with digital technology.</p> <p>It needs to be communicated clearly that alternative methods are accepted without prejudice.</p>	<p>“we understand that not everyone can apply through digital methods. If you need to apply in a different way that suits your needs better, please contact us and we will be happy to accommodate your application in a format that works for you”.</p>	<p>“applications are only accepted through our website”.</p>
Flexible submission dates	<p>Allowing candidates the option to submit their applications within a broad time frame rather than adhering strictly to a conventional date</p>	<p>Recognising that candidates have different needs and circumstances demonstrates empathy and understanding from the employer.</p> <p>Organisations that adopt flexible and inclusive recruitment practices are more likely to be seen as progressive and attractive places to work.</p>	<p>Implementing preferred deadlines with allowances for candidates to request an extension if needed.</p>	<p>Strict deadline</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Clear advice on who to speak to about the position or specific accommodation requirements.	<p>Providing clear advice on who to speak to about a vacancy is a critical aspect of an inclusive recruitment process.</p> <p>This approach involves explicitly mentioning in the job advert the contact details of a person who can provide more information, as well as the person who can address any specific needs or accommodations.</p>	<p>Candidates will know that there is an open line of communication where they can discuss their requirements without fear of discrimination.</p> <p>Every individual's needs are unique. Having a person that candidates can directly contact allows for personal discussions about specific accommodations.</p>	Provide contact information for accessibility coordinators or support staff who can assist candidates as needed.	Organisations only provide details of a recruitment agency rather than organisational specific people.

Accessible Hiring Process

Ensure the interview process is accessible and accommodations are made for all types of disability without making the candidate feel unwelcome or uncomfortable about causing the recruitment team extra work or inconvenience.

“I didn’t get a job that I applied for. I thought the first two interview panels went well, but I was so tired for the final exercise that my mind just went blank. The feedback I was given all related to the final panel, which they focused on the negatives rather than anything that I did that was positive. I wish I could have just stopped after the first two.”



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Pre-interview conversations / visits	There is a growing expectation that candidates will speak to the interview panel members, or people of influence prior to an interview. This may include visits to the office or location where the job will be.	Recognise that not everyone can undertake pre-interview meetings/ visits. This could be considered as discrimination if disabled candidates are unable to speak to the interview panel or visit the organisation prior to the interview process.	To ensure an equitable approach, all conversations should be held on the day of the interview and not beforehand.	Candidates who speak to the interview panel members are given an advantage during the interview process.
Flexible interview formats	Offering candidates different ways to participate in the interview process without prejudice. This approach can include options such as the usual, in person interview; video calls; telephone interview.	A variety of options are required to accommodate different types of disabilities, from mobility issues to auditory or visual impairments. It is important to also recognise that mental health or neuro-diverse conditions might affect how a candidate can best showcase their skills and experience in a face-to-face interview.	Interviews are offered in different formats to accommodate the needs of candidates. It is important to ensure when alternative interview methods are used, that there are no negative repercussions to the candidate.	A one-size-fits-all approach is adopted – usually in the form of face to face interviews.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Encourage candidates to discuss accommodations	Encouraging candidates to discuss accommodations they might need is essential to making the recruitment process more disability inclusive.	<p>Ensures all candidates have an equal opportunity to succeed in the recruitment process.</p> <p>This is crucial to creating a level-playing field and promoting an equal and fair recruitment process.</p>	<p>“We want to ensure that our recruitment process is accessible to everyone. If you need accommodations at any stage, we are here to support you. This might include but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of materials in alternative formats • Flexible interview arrangements • Specific equipment for completing technical assessments.” 	<p>“All interviews will be conducted in a consistent and equal manner”</p> <p>Equity is not achieved by treating everyone the same.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Interview environment	Ensure the environment is appropriate for people with different disabilities, such as wheelchair access and no background noise. It doesn't just mean the physical space, but also the atmosphere created by the interviewers.	<p>A welcoming, comfortable environment helps all candidates to feel at ease and allows them to show their best selves.</p> <p>Giving disabled candidates the opportunity to select their preferred time will ensure they are able to get themselves ready and prepared. A person who requires assistance to get dressed or to travel, will require a later interview time due to being dependent on the support of others.</p> <p>Ensuring the layout of the interview room is accessible will allow disabled candidates to feel welcomed and comfortable. Recognising that an interview room on the top floor where there isn't a lift, automatically excludes those with mobility issues.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to car parking. Disabled candidates with mobility issues, who don't necessarily have a disabled parking badge, will require a car parking space near to the interview location. It will also reduce anxiety in some candidates if parking arrangements are clearly identified before the day of the interview, especially if the location has limited car parking.</p>	<p>Examples of a positive interview environment:</p> <p>Accessibility – consider physical and sensory disabilities.</p> <p>Comfort – avoid distractions.</p> <p>Technology – ensure the technology needed to complete the interview is accessible.</p>	Candidates expected to walk to different buildings or locations for parts of the interview process.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Candidate's appearance	Disregarding a person's appearance in the selection process, helps create a fairer, more equitable approach.	Some disabilities need loose-fitting clothing and do not lend themselves to the wearing of formal clothing such as suits. Not judging someone by their appearance aligns with the fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination, acknowledging that a person's physical appearance has no bearing on their professional abilities or skills.	A smart appearance is what is required, recognising the individuality of people and allowing them to be themselves.	All candidates are expected to wear a suit, which is something that is not openly declared. Candidates who don't wear a suit are negatively judged.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Interview questions	The interview questions should focus on one question at a time. There should not be numerous questions grouped together and asked all at the same time.	<p>These types of questions can present specific challenges for candidates with disabilities for several reasons, impacting their ability to respond effectively.</p> <p>This can be especially challenging for candidates with neurodiversity impairments, as well as those who have physical disabilities where they are unable to write down the questions.</p> <p>Long questions can instil anxiety and stress, making it harder to focus on the entire question and respond with an articulated answer.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to candidates who are neurodiverse and would find it more effective to have the interview questions beforehand. This isn't about giving someone an upper hand, but ensuring they are able to take the time to concentrate on their answers.</p>	<p>"I have a detailed question on problem-solving that is in three parts, but I will ask them individually:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me about a time you faced a significant problem at work? 2. What specific steps did you take to address the problem? 3. How did this align with your personal values? 4. What was the outcome and what did you learn?" 	<p>"Tell me about a time when you faced a significant problem at work, describe in detail the steps you took to address this problem, how this aligned with your personal values, what the outcome was and what you learnt".</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Presentations / assessments are inclusive	<p>To ensure an equitable and inclusive process, all interview materials and requirements should be accessible. This includes providing documents in alternative formats (large print, braille etc), and asking for assessments in accessible formats.</p> <p>Prepared beforehand.</p> <p>Consider different formats for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>There are many reasons why the assessment part of an interview should consider appropriate accommodations for disabled candidates. This includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written tests – candidates with motor impairments, visual impairments or cognitive impairment. • Group Activities – candidates with neurodiverse conditions, hearing impairments, anxiety disorders. • Presentations – Speech impairments, visual impairments, anxiety disorders. • Interactive role-play – candidates with neurodiverse conditions, social anxiety disorders <p>It is important to advise all candidates about the assessment part of an interview process and ask whether they need accommodations.</p>	<p>An interview requires a report to be produced.</p> <p>A neurodivergent candidate is given the task prior to the interview.</p> <p>A visually impaired candidate is given a personal assistant to read the information and type the report up for them.</p> <p>A candidate with motor impairments is given a personal assistant to type the report up for them.</p> <p>All accommodations are put in place for those who need them, with no negative detriment to the candidates.</p>	<p>An interview requires a report to be produced in an unseen exercise – whereby candidates are given the detail on the day. The information to complete the report is on a computer, with an expectation that a typed report is produced. The candidates are all given 30 minutes to complete the exercise.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Subsidising costs for required accommodations	Disabled candidates may incur costs to attend the interview. Consideration should be given to ensure these are subsidised regardless of whether they are successful at interview.	To ensure the interview process is equitable, organisations should ask whether disabled candidates have incurred additional costs to meet their needs for attending the interview. Examples include: specialised transport, personal assistance including the use of an interpreter, overnight accommodation, assistive technology.	Disabled candidates are asked prior to interview whether they will incur additional costs to attend the interview. These are either subsidised or alternative interview formats are offered.	The organisation refuses to pay for costs that are incurred.
Carefully selected panel members	Interview panels should have a specialist who recognises the value in lived experience and diverse perspectives. Their opinion should be important in the selection process and not a 'tick-box' exercise.	The awareness of the challenges and barriers that disabled candidates may have faced can guide the interview process to be more accommodating and sensitive to the needs of the candidates. An EDI expert can ensure that every candidate is assessed on their skills and abilities, rather than disabled candidates being subjected to unconscious biases or misconceptions.	An EDI expert is present and their contribution to the interview is shared with all candidates as part of the feedback process.	No recognition or understanding of the need for an EDI expert or someone with lived experience.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Offer breaks	Offering breaks during the interview process is a positive and inclusive practice that can significantly enhance the recruitment experience for all candidates including those with disabilities.	<p>Providing breaks helps accommodate candidates with different types of disabilities such as, chronic pain, fatigue or concentration issues.</p> <p>Breaks allow all candidates to manage their energy levels and any discomfort, ensuring they can fully engage in the process and present their best selves.</p>	<p>An interview process where the following inclusive practices are fostered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-interview communication • Flexible scheduling • Regular breaks • Candidate support • Accommodations are offered and met 	<p>An interview process that takes all day and requires candidates to partake in different activities each after the other, without adequate breaks and time to employ different accommodations as needed.</p>
Gain feedback about the recruitment process	Feedback from disabled candidates can ensure the organisation continuously improves their recruitment processes. It leads to a more accessible, inclusive and appealing workplace for everyone.	<p>Every disability is as unique as every person. Gaining feedback from disabled candidates can help identify barriers or challenges within the recruitment process that might not be obvious to others.</p>	<p>Anonymous process that respectfully asks both successful and unsuccessful candidates for feedback.</p>	<p>Asks candidates for feedback in a way that identifies them. Candidates are unsure whether to be honest, for fear of negative repercussions.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Confidence in asking questions about disability	Interviewers should be confident in how to ask questions about a disability and how the disabled person can undertake the role with appropriate accommodations. It should not be the 'elephant in the room'.	Ensuring interviewers are equipped to have these conversations thoughtfully and effectively is not just beneficial for the organisation but it fundamentally is about respecting and valuing the experiences and contributions of disabled people. Open discussions enable candidates to clearly articulate the specific accommodations they need to be successful in the role. Assumptions and biases are reduced, and disabled candidates are given the opportunity to showcase their abilities on an equal footing with their non-disabled counterparts.	“We appreciate the unique perspective and skills that your life experiences, including those shaped by your disability, will bring to our team. Could you share if there are any accommodations we can provide to support you in this role?”	“....silence....” (Interviewers avoid all questioning about disability due to being afraid of legal challenge)

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
<p>EDI specialists are an equal partner in the panel evaluations and decision making</p>	<p>EDI specialists are an equal partner in assessing each candidate's performance and the decision on who should be offered the role. Where they are listened to and their expertise recognised as a valuable part of the evaluation process, with panel members open to reviewing their scoring of a disabled candidate in the light of the views from the EDI specialist.</p>	<p>EDI specialists are trained to identify and challenge unconscious biases and discriminatory behaviours. By making them equal partners will ensure that candidates are evaluated fairly, based on their skills and fit rather than being judged on their appearance or personal characteristics.</p>	<p>EDI specialists undertake the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review applications and ensure disabled people are given a fair chance at an interview. • Ensure interview questions are equitable and evaluated consistently. • Advocates for diverse perspectives during the decision to appoint. <p>EDI specialists are not just part of the HR team, but are specially trained staff across all teams who can be called upon to assist in recruitment processes.</p>	<p>EDI specialists are considered not important to be a member of the interview panel.</p> <p>Where an EDI specialist is on the panel, they are considered a 'tick-box' requirement and their views are not considered in the decision making.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
<p>Additional feedback is provided to unsuccessful disabled candidates from the EDI specialist.</p>	<p>Alongside feedback from the recruiting lead, feedback from the EDI specialist will provide disabled applicants the opportunity to discuss what additional accommodations might have helped them on the day. This can assist them with what they can request for the next time they apply for a similar role. They can also provide feedback on the panel's conclusion on the day, areas of strength and additional development to all candidates.</p>	<p>Disabled people may have faced unique challenges during the interview process which can be discussed with an EDI specialist. By providing tailored feedback as well as acknowledging the challenges can help disabled candidates better equip themselves for interviews and also ensure the organisation learns about what practices they can put in place to better support disabled people.</p>	<p>A good example is provided below – an organisation that offers support and training to unsuccessful candidates to develop their interview skills.</p> <p>This not only encourages and supports disabled candidates but provides an opportunity to invite them to apply for future positions that match their skills and experience.</p>	<p>A generic email is provided to all unsuccessful candidates. No support is given for any future job applications.</p>

“Ready, Steady, Apply” – The Inclusive Healthcare Recruitment Pre-employment Programme

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have developed an in-house pre-employment programme specifically designed to help people from the local population learn all the skills they need to apply for and succeed in gaining a position in their hospitals. When applicants initially apply for a role with the Trust and are not shortlisted as they either lack the experience or don't give enough detail to meet the criteria, they are given the opportunity to book on a week-long course that has been specially designed to take them through the recruitment process. Or candidates can just book on directly even if they haven't applied for a role as the course is widely advertised. Focusing on specific roles such as Healthcare Assistants, Administrative roles, Domestic Assistants the course also provides interview skills, how to identify transferable skills and offers a guaranteed interview for a role for successful participants

This programme is delivered internally by the Trusts Widening Participation Team and the theme of the course changes depending on gaps identified in staffing. This programme not only supports disabled people who may need additional support to apply, but also people whose first language is not English and those who have come from low-income families. It supports local recruitment, contributing to improving community links, however, what it also does, is demonstrate to all applicants and potential future employees, that the organisation values them and is willing to support them, even before they join the organisation.

In addition to the Ready Steady Apply course the Trust is also working with an external training provider to offer another course which focuses just on the application form part of the recruitment process and is being sent to all candidates in Band 3 and 4 roles who have not been shortlisted. It's still in its infancy, but the Trust hopes this will really add value locally.

For further information please contact Stefanie Johnson, Head of Recruitment & Volunteers.

Retention




Retention



In the constant evolving world of the NHS, retaining talented and skilled employees is as critical as recruiting them. Continuously hiring and training new staff costs significantly more than developing and retaining existing personnel. Furthermore, the NHS continues to experience a shortage of skilled workers applying for positions, making retention even more vital. This is even more important when employing disabled people. Alongside their skills, experience and abilities that they bring to any role, disabled people also bring a unique perspective, high levels of resilience and the much-needed skills that are essential for supporting an inclusive and innovative workplace.

Despite these invaluable contributions, disabled employees often face barriers that can affect their job satisfaction and longevity within an organisation. This is said to be associated with an unconscious bias that disabled people are ‘not as good’ as their counterparts, or that their “disability hinders their ability” to successfully undertake their work.

It is, therefore, vital for the NHS to not only focus on inclusive recruitment practices, but also to prioritise strategies that support the retention and career development of disabled employees. Especially with the recognition that 83% of disabled people acquire their disability/impairment/long-term condition later in life rather than being born with it (6). This means that existing staff may become disabled during their career and the cost of losing this knowledge, experience and talent is more than the cost to an organisation of accommodating their new needs.



This section of the toolkit recognises that these retention strategies must be built on a foundation of sincere understanding, compassion, respect and genuine support for the diverse needs of disabled employees. This includes building an environment where accommodations are not just reactive, but proactively planned and where inclusivity and equality is embedded innately within the organisation's culture.

Employers must recognise the importance of constant communication with disabled employees to understand their needs, aspirations and any challenges they face. This is more imperative when a disability becomes progressively worse. Strategies that can help disabled employees include, flexible working arrangements, accessible workspaces and individualised professional development opportunities. Each initiative should aim to empower disabled employees to excel and feel valued within their roles, whilst recognising them for their ability instead of their disability.

By committing to adopt the strategies outlined, NHS organisations will not only demonstrate their dedication to equality and diversity but will also leverage the full potential of their workforce. This will undoubtedly contribute to the success of the organisation as well as enhance the quality of care provided to their communities.



The following sections detail these retention strategies:

Retention Strategies

- **Ensure that the organisational culture is inclusive and supportive.**
- **Ensure that reasonable accommodations are proactively identified, implemented and regularly reviewed to support the unique needs of disabled employees.**
- **Ensure that continuous support and resources are available to all employees, with a focus on fostering an environment where disabled employees feel valued, understood and fully integrated.**
- **Ensure that career development opportunities are equitable, accessible and offer personalised growth.**


These strategies have been developed alongside the Department for Work & Pensions Disability Confident guidance, the Disability Employment Charter and the Access to Work programme (20).

The Disability Confident scheme helps to retain and develop disabled people and demonstrate an organisation's commitment to recognising the value that they bring.

The Disability Confident commitments include:

- Anticipate and provide reasonable adjustments as required
- Support any existing employee who acquires a disability or long-term health condition, enabling them to stay in work

These will be referenced within this toolkit, acknowledging the existing and relevant guidance.



The Disability Employment Charter recommends nine areas of action for all organisations, and for the government to make mandatory in the hope that they “address the disadvantages disabled people encounter in their working lives”.

These nine actions are:

- 1. Employment and pay gap reporting**
- 2. Supporting disabled people into employment**
- 3. Reform of Access to Work**
- 4. Reform of Disability Confident**
- 5. Leveraging government procurement**
- 6. Workplace adjustments**
- 7. Working with disabled people and their representatives**
- 8. Advice and support**
- 9. National progress on disability employment**

The Access to Work programme is a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to provide practical and financial support for organisations to accommodate the needs of disabled people and help them to succeed in employment.

Further information on the Disability Confident scheme, Disability Employment Charter and Access to Work can be found in the resources section of this guide.

Retention Strategies – Organisational Culture



Retention Strategies – Organisational Culture

Ensure the organisational culture is inclusive and supportive.

“My organisation says that they promote an inclusive culture, but I still feel nervous about declaring my disability and asking for help”



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Leaders' commitment	Organisational leaders should openly commit to inclusivity and diversity.	<p>When leaders prioritise and visibly support diversity and inclusion, it sends a powerful message that these values are important.</p> <p>When leaders model behaviours demonstrating inclusivity, this is replicated across the entire organisation.</p>	<p>Regular leaders listening sessions.</p> <p>Evidence of cultural changes based on what has been heard.</p> <p>Leaders engage in reverse mentoring with disabled employees.</p>	<p>No clear channels for discussing diversity-related concerns or suggestions.</p> <p>Leaders do not engage with employees on matters of diversity and inclusion.</p>
Organisational goals	A core part of the organisation's values and mission.	<p>Clearly defined goals related to inclusivity and support gives the organisation a shared direction and purpose.</p> <p>Employees understand the importance and priorities are established with inclusivity in mind.</p>	<p>SMART goals are implemented that demonstrate clear outcomes and success measures.</p> <p>E.g. To enhance our organisational inclusivity by increasing the representation of underrepresented groups in our workforce by 25% within the next 18 months.</p>	<p>Superficial goals – Leaders do not communicate or behave in a way that is congruent to the goals.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Inclusive working environment	Policies and procedures that promote inclusive practices and eliminate attitudinal barriers.	All employees will feel valued and respected for their unique perspectives and contributions. Foster a sense of belonging, which can significantly boost engagement, motivation, productivity and morale.	Organisational policies on how to support disabled employees and that discriminatory behaviours will not be tolerated.	No organisational policy. Discriminatory behaviours are unchallenged.
Disability awareness training	Mandatory training for all employees that focuses on disability awareness, sensitivity and discrimination.	Training brings issues to the forefront of people's minds, therefore can help to reduce unconscious biases and stereotypes. Disability training helps to challenge and change perceptions by educating employees on disability and debunking common myths.	Training provided by disabled trainers that can bring lived experience to the discussions. Leaders support staff development in disability awareness and how to support disabled staff and patients. E.g. BSL training.	Training is considered a 'tick box' exercise. Attendance is not mandated.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Legal responsibilities (Equality Act 2010)	<p>The legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing discrimination • Making reasonable adjustments • Equality in recruitment • Confidentiality and privacy • Equality in training and promotion • Duty to consider • Occupational health support 	<p>It is important for employers to understand and fulfil the responsibilities as detailed. Failure to comply with the Equality Act 2010 can lead to legal challenges, that can result in significant penalties and damage to the organisation's reputation.</p>	<p>All employee assistance such as: access to counselling, flexible working arrangements to accommodate appointments and the need to take frequent breaks during the working day, should be discussed, agreed and kept in confidence by the employee's line manager.</p>	<p>The inappropriate disclosure of confidential information about an employee's hidden disabilities or accommodations.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Promote disclosure	Encouraging disabled employees to share information about their disabilities in a safe and supportive environment.	<p>This practice is vital for creating an organisational culture that is genuinely inclusive and supportive.</p> <p>When employees feel secure in disclosing their disabilities, it allows organisations to properly understand and accommodate their unique needs.</p> <p>This benefits both the individual and the organisation by capturing diverse perspectives and skills.</p>	Regular communication is shared across the organisation regarding successful stories of employees who have benefitted from accommodations – in an anonymous and empowering way.	Even though there is a policy on supporting disabled people, the process involved is intrusive, uncaring and individuals fear negative repercussions.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Staff network	<p>A group that is created for disabled employees to connect, share their experiences and offer mutual support.</p> <p>Together, the group can have a collective voice that raises issues to the organisational leaders as well as inform policies and processes from a disability perspective.</p>	<p>A disability staff network provides peer support as well as educates the wider workforce about disabilities. It allows for valuable insights to be shared and promotes the inclusion of disability perspectives in organisational wide decisions.</p>	<p>The network is supported by the organisation's leadership who value their input into policies and processes.</p> <p>Monthly meetings/ workshops on disability rights and accommodations.</p> <p>Links with local communities to strengthen the relationship between community and employment support.</p>	<p>Organisational leaders support the development of a network, but do not give it time, commitment, resources, guidance, influence or visibility.</p> <p>Disabled employees perceive the network to be a 'tick box' exercise rather than meaningful support.</p>

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Inclusive communication	Exchanging information in a way that is respectful, accessible and understandable to everyone, regardless of their disability.	<p>It is vital to the retention of disabled employees to remove communication barriers, as these can significantly hinder their ability to not only fulfil their role, but to fully participate in organisational wide activities as well.</p> <p>It is a legal requirement to ensure that all forms of communication are accessible.</p> <p>Selecting language that respects and acknowledges diversity. Avoiding terms that might inadvertently cause offence, bias, disrespect or exclusion.</p>	<p>An organisation asks their disability staff network for advice on how to describe disabilities for organisational policies.</p> <p>The organisation adopts a 'compassionate curiosity' approach, which empowers staff to talk to each other regarding questions they may have about disability.</p>	The organisational leaders decide on the language used across the organisation regarding disability and use inappropriate terms – which are then mirrored by the staff.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Community engagement	Going beyond the workplace to collaborate with local organisations and disability advocacy groups to partner programmes and events to improve disability awareness.	By engaging the community, the organisation can tap into a wealth of knowledge and resources for their employees as well as improve the relationship with the local disabled community.	An organisation welcomes the collaboration with local disability groups and hosts events both internally and externally to the organisation. Disabled employees feel valued and recognised.	An organisation does not encourage collaborative working. Disabled people feel isolated and disconnected from local support.

Evenbreak Job Board

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust partnered with Evenbreak, a social enterprise that is run by disabled people for disabled people, to integrate the use of a specialist online job board that helps disabled people find employment. Disabled people were able to access the different vacancies, speak to career coaches, access mentorship and contact other support agencies through Evenbreak. Evenbreak was linked to community disability groups where disabled people were able to sign up and speak to the team about whether they had the right skills for positions, without feeling like their disability was hindering the process.

With many different organisations available that provide inclusive recruitment practices such as Evenbreak, WAHT were able to demonstrate the improvements that were made in accessing disabled people. The Job Board increased the number of applications from disabled people and also increased the awareness that disabled people can have NHS careers.

This programme was just one of many across the Trust to improve the disability-inclusivity of WAHT recruitment practices, but by advertising differently and through community organisations that can support disabled people, it demonstrated that different approaches are needed.

For further information, please contact Donna Scarrott, Chair of the Diverse Ability Working Network (DAWN), or Jack Wilkinson, Organisational Development Practitioner.

Retention Strategies: Organisational Culture

Ensure that continuous support and resources are available to all employees, with a focus on fostering an environment where disabled employees feel valued, understood and fully integrated.

“I have had nothing short of an exceptional experience at my Trust. I feel valued by my peers for my contribution and I am asked my opinion based on both my professional experience and my lived experience. I know it isn’t the same experience that everyone has and that is really upsetting.”



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Recognition and representation	Ensuring disabled employees are represented in all aspects of the organisation, whilst being recognised for their achievements.	<p>Disabled people should be recognised for their achievements as well as their contribution to the diversity of the organisation. Having representation at a senior level will ensure a role model is visible to aspiring disabled leaders as well as being the spokesperson for all disabled employees on important organisational wide decisions.</p> <p>Role models are a positive influence to the career progression of disabled employees.</p>	Disabled employees' stories are publicised, including how their unique perspectives have led to innovative solutions.	All recognition of disabled employees is to meet legal compliance.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Mentoring and support programmes	Creating mentoring and support programmes that meet the needs of disabled employees. This can include establishing social networks with other disabled employees in other organisations.	Having a mentor that understands the challenges faced by disabled employees will provide personalised guidance to employees. Disabled employees will more likely be open and honest with a mentor who understands their issues.	A mentoring programme where disabled employees are matched with mentors with similar disabilities, or in a senior position which the employee aspires to achieve.	A one-size fits all programme where all protected characteristics are grouped together and disability is not singled out.
Disability Passports	A document that details an employee's required workplace adjustments or accommodations. This is a formal commitment by organisations to continue meeting the needs of disabled employees when they change jobs.	A disability passport will facilitate a smooth transition between jobs. This includes the acceptance of the identified adjustments, without the need for repeated negotiation or approval from new line managers.	A confidential, employee-controlled document that is reviewed and updated on a regular basis in partnership with HR. Organisational leaders support the process and all managers support the disability passport programme.	A 'tick-box' exercise that the disabled employee fills in, but managers across the organisation don't support.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Regular reviews	Conducting regular, inclusive reviews to discuss workplace adjustments, career development and address any immediate concerns.	It is important to ensure that disabled employee's needs are continually met. Disabilities can deteriorate, therefore it is important to provide additional support so that they can continue to succeed in their job.	An organisation has annual appraisals for all employees, however disabled employees are given 6 monthly reviews to provide additional support.	An organisation treats all employees the same and doesn't provide additional support to disabled employees.
Performance management	A performance management system that fairly evaluates the abilities and achievements of disabled employees.	With disabled employees twice as likely to be placed into performance management than their counterparts, it is important for the retention of disabled employees to ensure any organisational performance process is inclusive.	Performance criteria and goals that are adjusted to accommodate an employee's disability.	Standardised performance standards that lead to discriminatory behaviours and unfair practices.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Bullying & harassment	Establishing specific policies and training programmes to prevent bullying and harassment, especially targeting disabled employees.	A policy and Identified training create a safe and respectful work environment for all employees. This ensures that every employee has the opportunity to work without fear of discrimination or harassment.	An anti-bullying policy is embedded coupled with regular training sessions for employees at all levels. Championed by the organisational leaders. A confidential and anonymous reporting system is adopted.	No specific bullying policy with no formal consequences for such behaviours. Issues raised or observed are ignored or not taken seriously. Those who speak out are ostracised.

UHMBT Neurodiversity Handbook

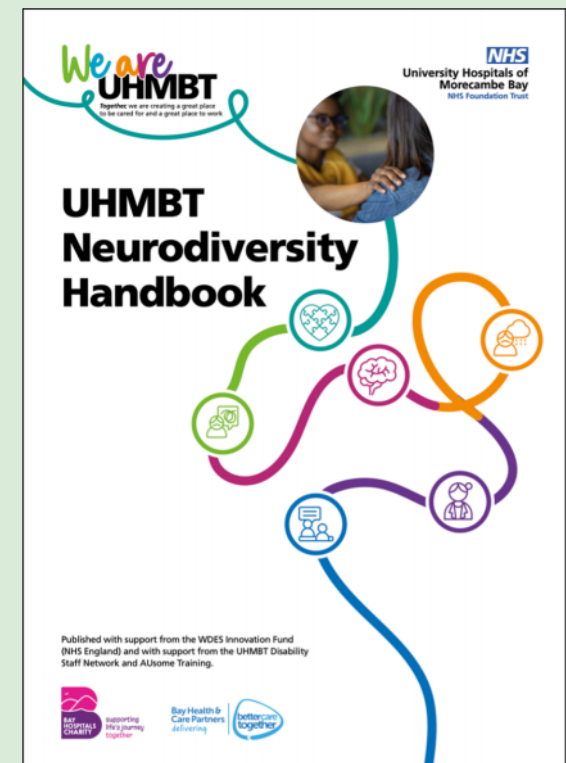
University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay developed a neurodiversity handbook that recognises the importance of understanding that traditional workplaces may be designed in ways that do not allow neurodivergent people to thrive and fulfil their potential.

The handbook not only describes what neurodiversity is but also outlines the challenges faced by neurodivergent people and provides examples of reasonable adjustments to support colleagues.

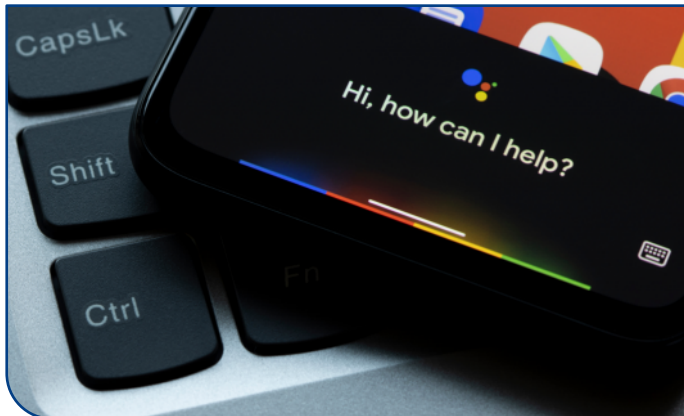
To promote the handbook and recognise the importance of listening to colleagues with neurodiversity:

- a series of films were made which featured neurodiverse colleagues expressing their personal experiences;
- specialised training was developed;
- a drop-in group was established which meets for a 'coffee and catch up session' on a bi-monthly basis to ask advice, share ideas and provide peer support.

For more information, please contact Francesca Higgins, Strategic Lead for Inclusion, People and Organisational Development.



Retention Strategies: Individual support



Retention Strategies: Individual support

Ensure that reasonable accommodations are proactively identified and implemented to support the unique needs of disabled employees.

“I have never felt more accepted in an organisation than when I joined my current employer. They asked me right at the start what I needed to make sure I was supported to carry out my work. It meant a lot to me.”



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Access to Work programme	The Access to Work programme is a governmental, publicly funded support programme that provides practical and financial assistance to organisations to accommodate the needs of their disabled employees.	The programme was established to help remove the barriers that disabled people might face in the workplace. It aims to support employees by providing practical and financial support tailored to their specific needs.	As part of the onboarding process, all disabled employees are advised about the Access to Work programme and supported to go through the process to ensure they have the right equipment to carry out their work.	The organisation takes a 'back seat' in providing disabled people with the information on how to access the Access to Work Programme. Only those in the know gain the support.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Flexible work arrangements	Flexible working arrangements allow employees to have varying work schedules, work locations or job structures to accommodate their individual needs.	<p>Some disabilities require flexible working arrangements to meet their specific needs or to attend medical appointments.</p> <p>Some mobility issues require the need for carers to assist getting ready in the morning – this means the employee is dependent on others to get ready for a certain time in the day.</p> <p>People with fatigue issues or those that have trouble with their sleep pattern may need to start later in the day and finish later than others. Or they may need a longer break to recoup during the day.</p>	A clear co-produced disability policy is in place that recognises both the employees needs and the needs of the organisation. An individual assessment is undertaken and tailored working arrangements are put in place.	Lack of consistency across employees who require flexible work arrangements, with a feeling of discontent from non-disabled employees who consider flexible working arrangements a way of getting out of work.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Centralised budget for reasonable adjustments	The amount of money identified within an organisation to fund reasonable adjustments for disabled people. This could include personal assistants, hearing equipment, special desks or IT equipment.	Many organisations manage their budgets in team specific ways. This means that if a team has a large number of disabled employees requiring accommodations, then there is an inequity in how the funding is used. It is important to recognise that reasonable adjustments are not an additional expense and the organisation should be considered as a whole, rather than having team specific budgets for accommodations.	Centralised budget that is managed for the whole organisation and not for specific teams to manage and oversee.	Individual managers own their own budgets, so when asked to make efficiency cuts, this is an area that they go to first.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Co-produced disability policy	<p>A co-produced disability policy involves collaborating with disabled employees and possibly external disability organisations, to create and implement policies that address their specific needs and challenges they face within the workplace.</p> <p>This approach ensures the policy is developed with real-life experiences and promote inclusivity, accessibility and equality for all employees.</p>	Co-produced policies with disabled employees ensures that the measures reflect their actual needs and challenges. This will make the policy more realistic and practical and less of a tick-box exercise.	Disabled employees lead on the development of the policy with HR support. Their voices are heard and incorporated into the practical solutions within the policy itself.	Involving disabled people at the end of the process of developing a policy. Their comments are not heard or incorporated, resulting in a superficial and disrespectful consultation.

Retention Strategies: Individual support

Ensure that career development opportunities are equitable, accessible and offer personalised growth.

“I attended a training course whereby the location was a large noisy room. Air conditioning units, high ceilings, a reception next door, and a café at the back. I could not hear a thing! I have a hearing impairment and most days I am fine with the equipment I already have, but this course made it impossible for me to hear.”



Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Inclusive recruitment for leadership programmes	Designing and implementing recruitment strategies for leadership development programmes that proactively include and accommodate disabled employees.	<p>It provides all employees with an equal opportunity to advance their career and become senior leaders.</p> <p>Recognising the necessary accommodations that disabled employees may need, this shouldn't then exclude them from leadership programmes.</p> <p>Ensuring the accessibility of leadership programmes meet the needs of disabled employees promotes the level of importance the current leaders place on diversity.</p>	Leadership programmes are available in different formats, offer flexible attendance methods and provides support to disabled employees.	Leadership programmes that base their acceptance criteria on a strict criterion that results in the exclusion of disabled employees.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Personalised development plans	Personalised development plans involve creating individualised career paths for each disabled employee. This takes into account their ambitions, areas of strength and development, as well as their workplace adjustment requirements.	Development plans should be personal to the individual. For disabled employees, their unique perspective should be recognised and utilised in the organisation. The plans should acknowledge the individual challenges they face, facilitating a more meaningful process and improving job satisfaction.	The organisation has a development programme that is individually tailored, recognises individual needs, capabilities and areas for improvement. Programmes that lead to more disabled people progressing to more senior roles in the organisation.	A one-size-fits-all development programme that doesn't acknowledge individual needs or accommodations.

Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Networking opportunities	Ensure networking events and platforms are fully accessible, offering various formats and communication aids.	<p>Networking is key to professional growth and should be inclusively designed to ensure everyone can fully participate.</p> <p>Disability networks are essential for peer support and for sharing experiences.</p> <p>Promote networking opportunities specifically for disabled people.</p>	When organising events, consider a hybrid approach to allow those with mobility or travel issues the opportunity to still attend. Also consider communication aids such as sign language interpreters and captioning services.	Organising events that are in person only do not take into account those with mobility issues, hearing impairments or visual impairments.

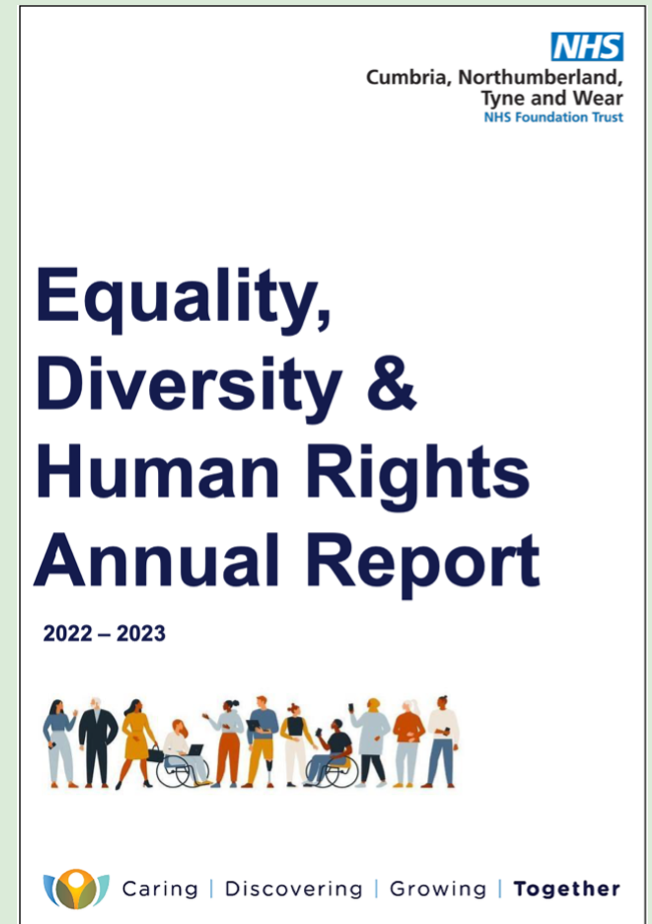
Inclusive Areas	Description	Why	Do this	Do not do this
Accessible learning and development resources	<p>Provide learning materials in various formats and ensure training facilities are accessible.</p> <p>The Access to Work programme provides financial support to organisations where reasonable adjustments are required and are expensive.</p>	<p>Accessible resources ensure that all employees have equal opportunities to learn and grow.</p>	<p>A training room that takes into account all disabilities, as well as being able to provide virtual conference working for those who are unable to attend in person.</p> <p>Access is available to disabled toilet facilities onsite and immediately available near the interview room.</p>	<p>A training room with no induction loop or speaker system, bad lighting, insufficient space for wheelchair users and steps leading up to the student's chairs.</p>

Reasonable Adjustments Pack

Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust have developed a set of resources to help disabled staff and their managers with the process of making reasonable adjustments at work, which included the adoption of a Trust wide process for requesting reasonable adjustments for disabled employees through a central budget.

The whole process has been guided by many different 'experts by experience'. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Team, along with our Disabled Staff Network, colleagues from Workforce and Organisational Development, and Digital Services, teamed up with a local charity called Difference. Working together, two Reasonable Adjustments Toolkits have been developed. One for disabled staff, and one for line managers.

These toolkits make it clear how to ask for help, what managers need to do, and where to get more advice. For further information, please contact Chris Rowlands, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Lead.



Final Thoughts:



Moving Forward with Empowering Ability

“Don’t see my disability as something you need to fix, all I ask is that you see me for me. My disability is just one aspect of my multifaceted, amazing identity.”

As we come to the end of this toolkit, we hope that the actionable strategies and information has equipped you with the tools you need to make your recruitment and workplace processes more inclusive for disabled people. We also hope that the incorporation of real-world lived experience quotes and examples of good practice have given you insights into how certain employment aspects affect and impact on those with disabilities.

The journey towards inclusivity is continuous, requires dedication, flexibility and needs commitment to learning and growth. You won’t always get it right, but by implementing the practices outlined in this guide, your organisation is taking a significant step towards in recognising the need to be equitable and inclusive and harnessing the full potential of all its members and communities.



Key Takeaways:

1. Disability Inclusion is an organisational strength:

Recognise that not only do disabled people bring unique perspectives and abilities to the organisation, but it is these perspectives that make impactful change when they are put into practice. Inclusion is not just a legal or moral obligation, it is a strategic advantage!

2. Commitment at every level:

Successful inclusion requires leaders to not only “talk the talk”, but also “walk the walk”. Fostering an environment where every voice is heard, valued and acted upon, with senior leaders’ role modelling visible and inclusive behaviours. Know who your disabled employees are and value their contributions in the daily operations of your organisation.

3. Ongoing education and awareness:

This toolkit is not about making changes at one point in time and that’s it. Disability awareness and inclusion require continuous education, training and awareness, tackling stereotypes and unconscious biases and building a genuinely inclusive culture.

4. Bringing community and staff support networks together:

Strengthening the links between the organisation and the community fosters a sense of belonging, support and personal connection between the workforce and the people they serve. Bring disability charities and your disabled employees together to strengthen the collective voice and encourage mutual support. This will also widen the scope for attracting disabled candidates.

5. Continuous improvement:

Inclusion is a journey, not a destination. Feedback should be used to continually refine and improve your organisational policies and processes. Actively engage with your disabled employees and ensure their views are heard and acted upon.



A Call to Action:

As you and your organisation move forward, remember that the implementation of this Good Practice Guide is just the beginning.

Building an inclusive workplace is an ongoing process that flourishes with persistence, empathy, an open mind and committed leaders. We encourage you to revisit this toolkit often, seek out advice, guidance from the disabled community and utilise the lived experience of your employees but, above all, remain positive and proactive in your disability inclusion efforts.

Together we can create an environment that not only respects the diversity that disabled employees bring but celebrates it as a source of strength and innovation.



References

- (1) NHS England:
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/blog/making-the-case-for-the-personalised-approach/>
- (2) Disabled NHS Directors Network:
<https://disablednhsdirectorsnetwork.nhs.uk>
- (3) 12 high impact actions, developed by the Disabled NHS Director Network:
<https://disablednhsdirectorsnetwork.nhs.uk>
- (4) NHS England: NHS Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Improvement Plan.
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-edi-improvement-plan/>
- (5) World Health Organisation:
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health#:~:text=An%20estimated%201.3%20billion%20people,1%20in%206%20of%20us>
- (6) UK Parliament: Defining Disability.
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9602/#:~:text=How%20many%20people%20have%20a,24%25%20of%20the%20total%20population>
- (7) UK Parliament: Disabled people in employment.
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7540/>
- (8) Sue Regan & Kate Stanley, Institute for Public Policy Research, 2003.
https://www.academia.edu/7872372/Work_for_disabled_people



(9) World Health Organisation:

https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1

(10) Disability Discrimination Act 1995:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/contents>

(11) Equality Act 2010:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

(12) Gov.Uk: Employment of disabled people 2022.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2022/employment-of-disabled-people-2022>

(13) Mike Oliver: Social Work with Disabled People:

https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Social_Work_with_Disabled_People.html?id=pzSmQgAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

(14) United Nations:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities#:~:text=To%20enable%20persons%20with%20disabilities,transportation%2C%20to%20information%20and%20communications%2C>

(15) NHS England, Long Term Plan:

<https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/online-version/chapter-4-nhs-staff-will-get-the-backing-they-need/#:~:text=The%20NHS%20is%20the%20biggest,quarters%20of%20whom%20are%20women>



(16) NHS England: WDES Technical Guidance:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/nhs-wdes-2023-technical-guidance/#:~:text=The%20Workforce%20Disability%20Equality%20Standard,Disabled%20and%20non%2Ddisabled%20staff>

(17) WDES: 2023 data analysis report for NHS Trusts:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/workforce-disability-equality-standard-2023-data-analysis-report-for-nhs-trusts/#key-findings>

(18) Disability Confident:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>

(19) Disability Employment Charter:

<https://www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org>

(20) Access to Work:

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Resources



The Equality Act 2010

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

Access to Work

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

Disability Rights UK

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org>

Disabled NHS Directors Network

<https://disablednhsdirectorsnetwork.nhs.uk/>

Scope

<https://www.scope.org.uk>

Business Disability Forum

<https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk>

Disability Employment Charter

<https://www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org>

Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES)

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/workforce-equality-data-standards/wdes/>

NHS Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Improvement Plan

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-edi-improvement-plan/>

A Message of Thanks

Thank you to you, for reading this toolkit and committing to the journey of disability inclusivity within your organisation.

Thank you to NHS England and the WDES Team, who supported the development of this work and saw the importance of bringing lived experience to the strategic table.

Finally, thank you to the Disabled NHS Directors Network members who have given their time, passion, personal stories and continued commitment to advocate for disabled people.

Working in Partnership with:

