Employing disabled workers in adult social care and health:
a guide for employers

Made in partnership by:

skillsforcare

V O D G

Disability Rights UK

Health Work and Wellbeing Group

NHS Health Education England | **Department for Work & Pensions**

It's never been more important to recruit and retain the right workers, and disabled people have lots to offer the adult social care and health sector.

If you're an adult social care employer, it's vital that you have the right support in place.

This guide provides the support you need to recruit and retain a diverse and talented workforce by supporting disabled people into employment.

Who should read this guide?

- Adult social care and health employers
- Individuals who employ their own care and support
- Policy makers
- Local authorities

Find out more

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/
disabilityandemployment

Introduction

How the adult social care and health sectors can improve the recruitment and retention of disabled people

In 'Improving Lives' (the recent Green Paper on Work, Health and Disability) the Government outline their commitment to halve the disability employment gap in the UK by 2025. Currently the employment rate for disabled people is 48%; this is 32% less than the employment rate for non-disabled people.

There are around 7 million people who have declared a disability in the UK, 3.8 million of whom are out of work. Many of these are able to and want to work, but are unemployed, which means that they don't experience the economic, health and social benefits that employment can bring. This represents a major injustice in society.

We're urging more adult social care and health employers to take action.

Who is this guide for?
■ Adult social care and health employers
■ Individuals who employ their own care and support
■ Policy makers
■ Local authorities

Key messages

■ There are over 100,000 vacancies in the adult social care and health sector on any one day, and 3.8 million disabled people are out of work, many of whom are able to and want to work.

■ There's a 32% employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people that the government is working to narrow.

■ Relatively small changes by employers can make a real difference to the employment prospects of disabled people, and a big difference to the positive contributions that disabled people can make to businesses.

■ Employing more disabled people in the adult social care and health sector will increase its capacity in the long-term and enrich the diversity of the workforce so that it can better serve communities.

Contents

1 The business case for employing disabled people

Demand for adult social care and health services is increasing, meaning we need more workers with the right values and behaviours to deliver high quality care and support.

17%
of the working age population has a disability; this is over 7 million people.

3.8 million
disabled people are out of work, many of whom are able to and want to work.

2%
of the adult social care workforce are disabled.

2.6%
of the health care workforce are disabled.

With increasing demand for adult social care and health services, it's never been more important to find and keep the best possible workforce. Being an inclusive workplace can help you do this and make your environment more accessible for disabled people who want to work.

Having disabled friendly recruitment and retention policies and practices will help you to:

■ **attract more candidates** – promoting your disabled friendly policies as part of a vacancy could help attract more candidates who have a disability and better reflect your local community

■ **increase your talent pool** – inclusive policies help you to select employees from the widest possible pool of talent

■ **find staff who deliver high quality care and support** - disabled people could bring a level of insight to workplaces which can only be gained through lived experience and which can enhance their ability to deliver high quality care and support

- **retain your workforce** - the working age population is getting older and a significant percentage of the social care and health workforce is over 55. With health conditions and disabilities more prevalent in this group, employers will increasingly need to support valued employees to stay healthy and manage conditions if they are to retain staff and make the most of their skills and experience.

  Reducing staff turnover also contributes to more consistent care and support, business reputation and efficiencies made from not constantly re-recruiting

- **enhance team performance** - diversity increases the overall knowledge and experience available within a staff team, and enhances team performance

- **deliver social benefits to the wider community** - employers who recruit staff from under-represented groups in the local workforce, including disabled people, are more likely to deliver against their corporate social responsibility in the wider community.

Learn from...

Thomas Pocklington Trust

Thomas Pocklington Trust is a national charity for people with sight loss, and in 2014 they took on their first blind office intern. Today, 30 of its 100 staff are registered blind or have sight loss. In the next few years, the charity aims to recruit more disabled workers so that 50% of its staff, and a similar proportion of its trustees and senior managers, will be blind or partially-sighted.

"We reviewed and completely changed our employment strategy," says chief executive Peter Corbett. "The new strategy involves proactively welcoming applications from all sections of society, by recruiting solely on the basis of ability with a genuinely accessible level playing field. Recruitment processes have changed, so jobs are advertised using networks in which people with sight loss participate and application forms are accessible. In addition, visually impaired people sit on interview panels."

"Making reasonable adjustments for sight loss is simple" says Peter. At the Trust, this involves modest changes such as bringing in more accessible computer equipment or ditching bespoke IT systems (which often do not allow the use of magnification or text to speech software) in favour of open and accessible systems.

In addition, the charity's meetings are run in a much more accessible way; everybody introduces themselves at the start of the meeting and questions are managed through the chair rather than on the basis of who shouts the loudest.

"Our aim is to eliminate inequality in employment rates between visually impaired people and the general population," says Peter. "However, it's important to stress that we've not compromised on hiring the best people for the job."

2 Busting the myths around disability and employment

There are lots of myths about employing disabled people.

Some employers worry about 'getting it wrong'. Some are fearful of the perceived cost, whilst others may have the perception that disabled people can't perform the job. However, many disabled people have lots to offer the adult social care and health workforce.

It's important that employers acknowledge that these are myths so they can find more workers people with the right values for our sector, avoid discrimination and change their workplace culture. Disabled people do not want or expect special treatment; it's about taking on the best person for the job and ensuring a 'level playing field' for disabled people by not putting up unnecessary barriers.

Here are just a few of the myths about employing disabled people. Download our Busting the myths key cards to read more.

Myth: It costs a lot to employ someone who is disabled

Truth: Although there may be changes you need to make in the workplace, a lot are simple and inexpensive, such as flexible working hours.

Disabled workers could also apply for an Access to Work grant to pay for support at work.

Myth: Disabled people have a higher absentee rate than staff without disabilities

Truth: In a study by Disability Rights UK with Reed, almost 90% of employers said they didn't think disabled people were any more likely to take time off work than non-disabled workers.

Myth: I can't fire or discipline an employee with a disability

Truth: While there are laws in place, such as the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act that serve to protect the rights of all workers, there are no special procedures for firing or disciplining disabled workers.

You must ensure you have effective people management processes in place to manage all your workforce.

Myth: Disabled workers are sensitive and I don't want to say the wrong thing

Truth: You're not expected to be an expert. If an applicant discloses a disability, have an open conversation with them and determine together what support they might need.

Ensure you have a positive workplace culture where staff feel confident to have open and honest conversations.

3 Next steps

Here are some of the steps that adult social care and health employers can take to increase their recruitment and retention of disabled people.

How do I get started?

- Have a look at the make-up of your current workforce. If disability is under-represented, establish the reasons why and think about how to change this.

- We know lots of people choose not to disclose a disability. Promote an open culture where everyone feels confident to talk about disability in the workplace. This can be reinforced by senior colleagues being open about their own experience of living with a health condition or disability. The Positive workplace culture toolkit can help you with this.

- Make sure you have systems in place to monitor and address any disparities in your workforce. Incorporate these into your future recruitment and retention plans.

- Sign up to the Government's Disability Confident employer scheme which has replaced the 'Two ticks' scheme. You could also become a 'Mindful employer' to show your commitment to an inclusive workplace.

- Support line managers and other colleagues to appreciate different disabilities to help them support disabled workers. You could build links with disability-expert charities or user led organisations to gain advice on and help to recruit and retain staff. Remploy has developed an A-Z of disabilities which might help.

- Arrange disability awareness training for all staff to raise awareness and build confidence about disability in the workplace.

- Review and revise recruitment processes to make them inclusive and accessible. For example use different media channels to promote your vacancies.

- Embed flexible working practices in your workplace; this is a common reasonable adjustment requested by disabled people and can be relatively straightforward and low-cost. It can also benefit your wider workforce such as older workers and those with caring commitments.

- Develop an Employee Assistance Programme for all staff as a non-pay benefit. This can help all staff deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their health, wellbeing and work performance.

- Ensure that choice and control is given to your workforce, as well as the people you support by developing and supporting disabled peer support activities that are led by disabled people themselves. This could include mentoring or buddying for disabled workers, group meetings and one to one sessions to encourage more confident or experienced disabled workers to support new or less confident disabled workers.

During recruitment

Think about how you can target and attract disabled people to your vacancies. Here are some ideas.

- Work with other local organisations to find potential candidates for the role. You could contact your local Jobcentre Plus, recruitment agencies, user-led organisations or other disabled support organisations to ask them to promote the role to suitable candidates. You can find a list of these support organisations on the information hub for individual employers and PAs.

- Find out about any schemes and initiatives in your local area that have been set up to develop the employability skills of disabled workers. These might present opportunities for recruitment. There may also be opportunities for you to get involved in these. Your Jobcentre Plus or local council might be able to help you find out more.

- Look for advertising opportunities that specifically target people with disabilities. For example advertising with local community groups or with disability charities. You could use this poster to help you promote careers in social care to disabled people.
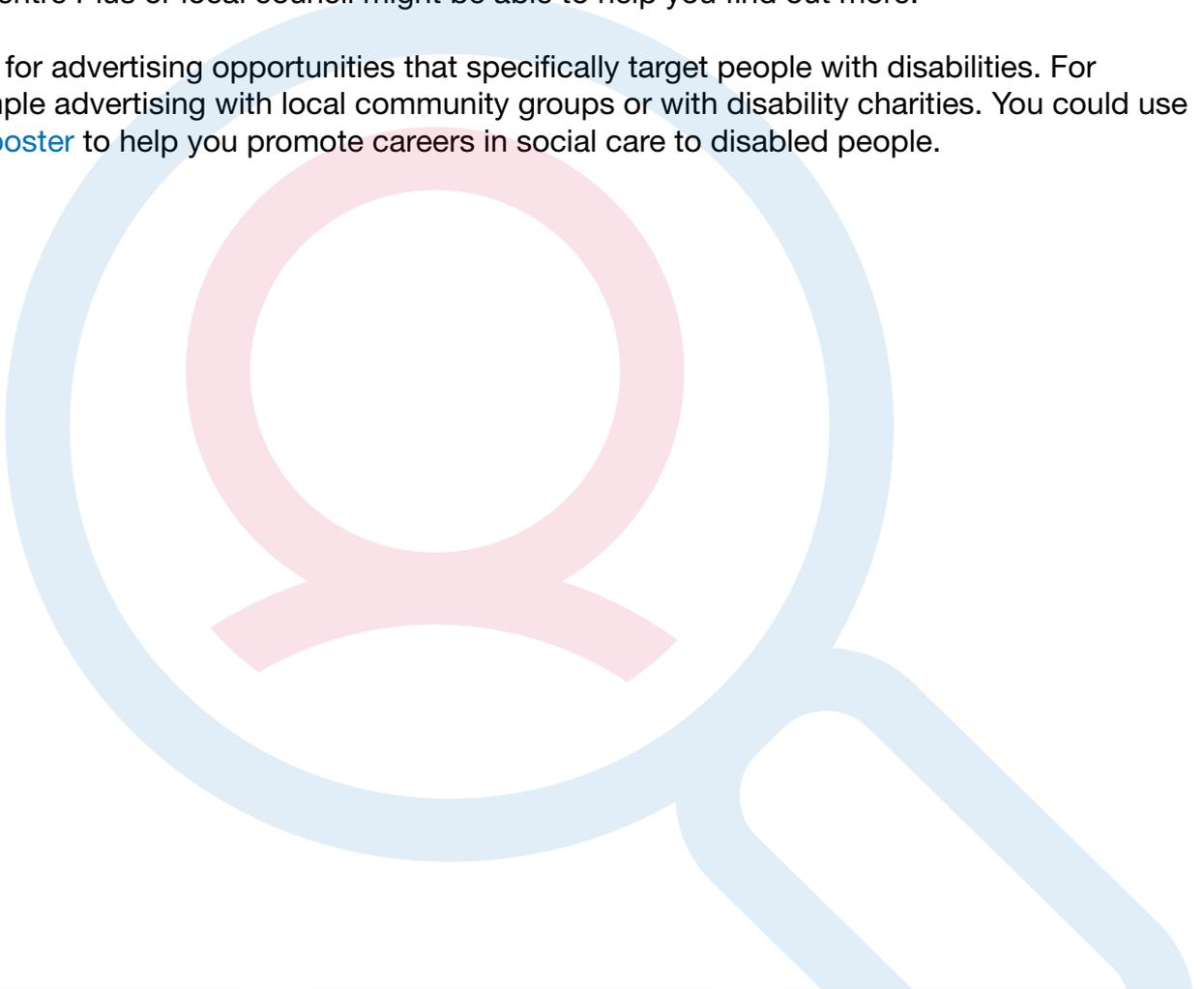
Review your application process

Here are some ideas.

- Ensure application forms and job descriptions are accessible. This may include providing documents in large print, Braille or easy read version. You should also make sure any online documents are compatible with screen readers.

- Use alternative methods to help people fill in application forms, such as taster days or telephone interview.

- You could take an approach that specifically invites disabled workers to apply for the role. This could link to an equality and diversity form – this will also allow you to see if they have any specific requirements if invited for interview.

- Make sure the job description is up to date and focuses on essential criteria rather than preferred criteria. Small factors may in-adversely discriminate by saying things that aren't required in the role and deter some disabled workers from applying.

- Monitor the outcomes and appointments from the application process to review your own policies and ensure they're effective in recruiting disabled people.

- Think about any participation needs disabled people might have on the day such as wheelchair accessibility, hearing loops or computer access.

- Give timely and accurate feedback to candidates throughout and following the interview process.
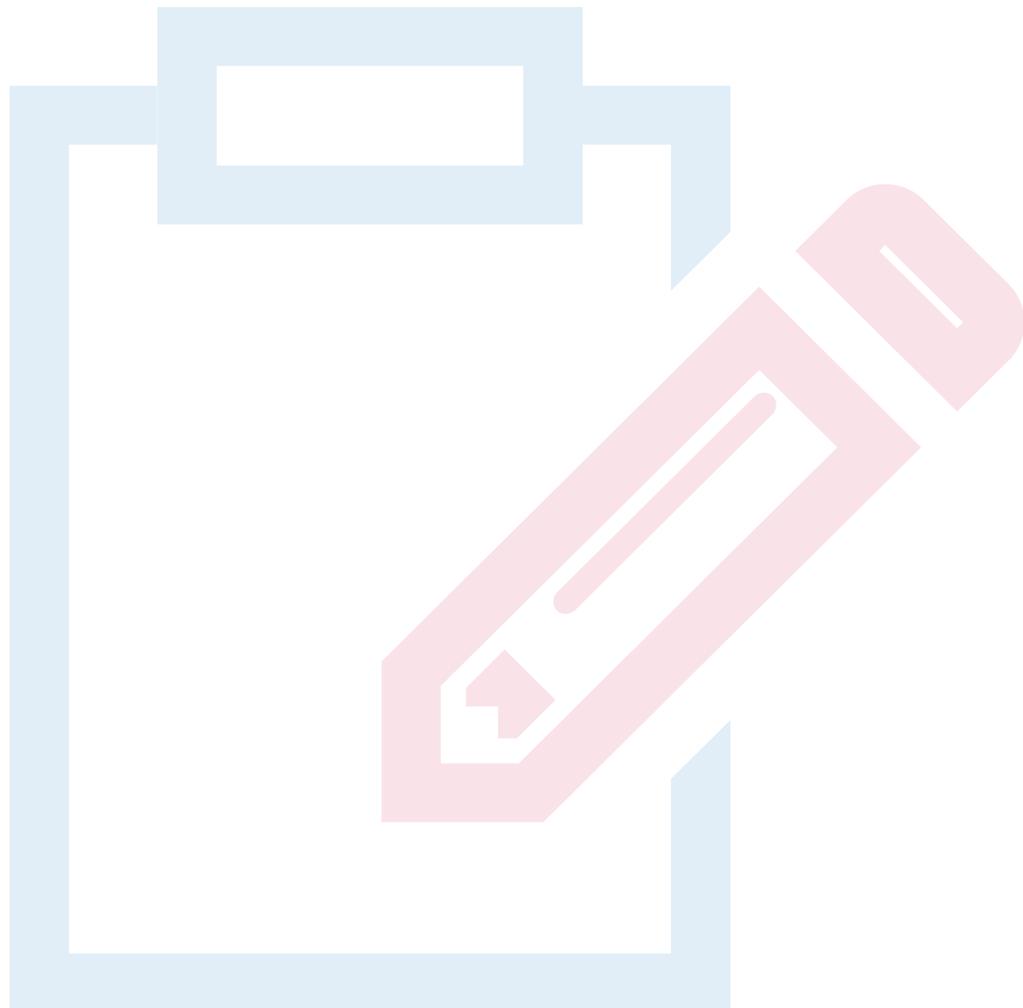
When a disabled person starts their role

Remember, not everyone will disclose a disability when they start a new role. They might need to feel confident in your organisation before they disclose their disability. Don't presume that if a disability isn't disclosed at first, that one doesn't exist.

- Have open conversations with the individual about their disability and what they feel comfortable sharing with others. They will also be able to tell you how they'd like to be supported in the workplace. Encourage them to identify what they think will work well or to use their self-initiative to recommend where changes in the workplace could be made.

- It's important to carry out a workplace assessment for a disabled worker and make reasonable adjustments where applicable to ensure they're not disadvantaged when doing their job. Review and monitor this on an ongoing basis, possibly as part of supervisions or appraisals.

- It's important to assess any adjustments needed for disabled workers on a case by case basis, and this should all be addressed through the workplace assessment. You may be able to access Government funding to make these adjustments.

  You can find out more at www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/work or speak to the Disability Employment Advisor at your local Jobcentre Plus.

  There's more detail about employers' obligations and how to meet them on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website.

- In some cases you may need to make physical changes to the work environment, such as widening the walking space between desks or being flexible with home working.

- In some cases you may need to provide special equipment such as a special keyboard or hearing loop for someone with a hearing impairment. Often these can be low cost and funding is available through Access to Work loans.

- Ensure disabled workers have an effective induction, such as the Care Certificate, and are supported to access any training they need.

- Support disabled people to do roles that they would like to do, rather than pigeon-hole them into roles that you assume will fit their potential.

Julia is 53 and has a physical disability. She works as a social work team manager and says

"I was talked into doing an admin job as many disabled people get rushed into these roles. I did this for a number of years and then decided, at the age of 37, to get into social work training. Many people said that I would never get a job at the end of it. I qualified and I went to work in a local authority"

Ongoing support and retention

Your workforce is made up of unique individuals. Everyone, regardless of their ability, may need specialist support at some point in their working life.

- Support leaders and managers to feel confident in supporting disabled workers. Quite often disabled people themselves will have positive suggestions so involve them in any discussions or training.

- Ongoing supervision and appraisal will help to build a relationship between yourself and your employees.

- An inclusive workplace culture is important in retaining all your workforce, not just disabled people. Any changes that you implement, such as flexible working, can make you a good employer. The Positive workplace culture toolkit can help you with this.

- Peer support might be a good way of supporting disabled workers. You could set up a disabled workers group or a buddy scheme. Disabled workers who are willing to engage and make positive suggestions and developments in the workplace can enhance ways of working for all workers, not just disabled people.

- Ongoing training, learning and development opportunities can motivate disabled workers, and help them to progress within your organisation.

- Ensure that disabled people are offered the same progression opportunities as their colleagues.
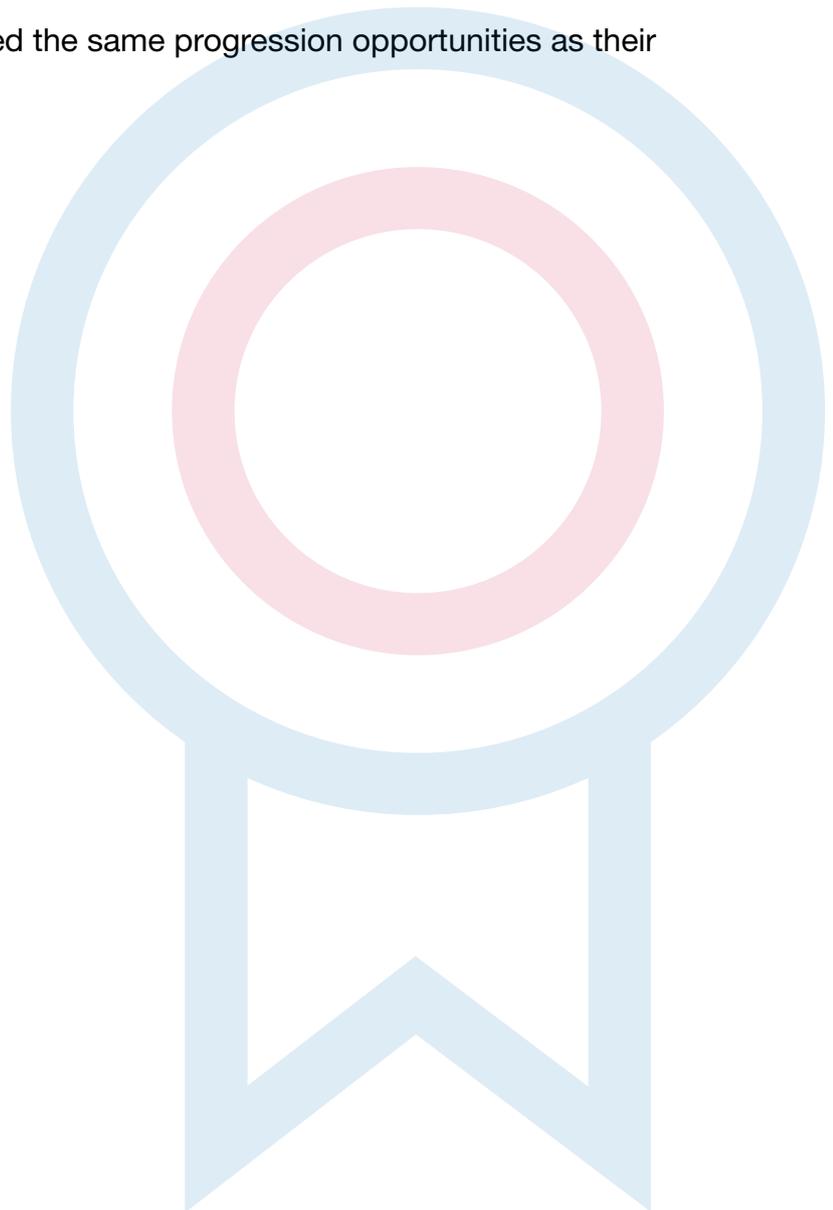
4 Resources to help

Employing disabled people and people with health conditions, Department for Work and Pensions
Step by step guidance about employing disabled people.
www.gov.uk/government/publications/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions

Research and practice reviews about disability and employment, Disability Rights UK
www.disabilityrightsuk.org/policy-campaigns/reports-and-research

Finding and keeping workers, Skills for Care
Library of online resources to help social care and health employers recruit and retain workers.
www.skillsforcare.org.uk/finderskeepers

Closing the disability and employment gap, Voluntary Organisations Disability Group
Outlines successful employment and training schemes delivered by specialist disability organisations, including recommendations.
www.vodg.org.uk/publications/closing-the-disability-and-employment-gap/

Workforce Disability Equality Standard in the NHS
The NHS has announced that a Workforce Disability Equality Standard will be mandated from April 2018 to look as areas such as workforce representation, reasonable adjustments, employment experience and opportunities for disabled workers.
www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/plan/building-a-diverse-workforce/need-to-know/workforce-disability-equality-standard

Links to useful organisations

Disability Rights UK
www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Health Education England
www.hee.nhs.uk

Remploy
www.remploy.co.uk

Skills for Care
www.skillsforcare.org.uk

Voluntary Organisations Disability Group
www.vodg.org.uk

We are Purple
www.wearepurple.org.uk

Links to disability charities

British Deaf Association
Supporting people with hearing impairments.
www.bda.org.uk

Mencap
Supporting people with learning disabilities.
www.mencap.org.uk

RNIB
Supporting people with sight loss.
www.rnib.org.uk

Scope
Supporting disabled people, parents and carers and professionals.
www.scope.org.uk

The Disabilities Trust
Supporting people with a range of disabilities including physical impairments, acquired brain injury, learning disabilities and autism.
www.thedtgroup.org

The National Autistic Society
Supporting people with autism.
www.autism.org.uk