

# Talented people aren't always where you expect to find them

An employer's guide to creating more opportunities with disabled people



**Leonard  
Cheshire**



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# Talent has no boundaries



As a large employer ourselves, we know how hard it can be finding great people to do great work, and to keep them. The search for talent has to have no boundaries. Nearly seven million people of working age in the UK are disabled or have a long-term health condition. That's almost 1 in 5 of us. The UK economy simply cannot afford to overlook such a source of talent and potential. Despite this, just under half of disabled people are employed – compared with 8 in 10 non-disabled people.

We know that many employers want to maximise the potential of disabled people in their workplace and make it possible for more disabled people to join their business. But often they aren't sure where to start. Our research showed, for example, that 6 in 10 (60%) line managers say the costs of workplace adjustments are a barrier to employing a disabled person.<sup>1</sup>

This spring, we spoke to employers about what has worked and what they feel could be done better to attract and support disabled employees. We have put together this guide to recruiting disabled people and ensuring they can fulfil their potential at work. It will help you to:

- **Get talking about disability**
- **Start at the top, and get your leaders involved**
- **Find talented people**
- **Make your organisation disability smart**

We would like to thank all the employers whose advice and experience has helped us to create this guide. We hope you find it useful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Jessop'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'D' and 'J'.

**David Jessop**

Executive Director – People

<sup>1</sup>ComRes research 2017: All UK line managers responsible for or involved in recruitment (504)

# Let's get talking about disability

**Talking more openly about disability is key to creating an open atmosphere in your organisation where disability isn't considered a taboo subject.**

We can all be worried about saying the wrong thing when it comes to discussing disability. However, it can often be as simple as having an open attitude and letting disabled people lead the conversation. Every disabled person is different so there is no single rule about how to talk about disability.



"When initially discussing someone's disability with them, it can be hard to know exactly what to say, but it gets easier with experience."

**Taylor Wimpey**

"When you are discussing someone's disability with them and you are worried you have said the wrong thing, sometimes it's best just to say sorry and move on, rather than to make too big an issue out of it."

**Into Work**

Talking openly about disability, whether by offering staff disability awareness training or giving staff the opportunity to share their story, can help to make disability become part of everyday conversations in the workplace. And it can help employees to feel more confident talking about it too.

"We have two employees with serious invisible illnesses. With their agreement, we decided to share a video with the rest of the company which provided information about the impact of the conditions on people's lives. This helped other employees understand why sometimes it was necessary for them to leave early, for example."

**Matthew Wood, CEO, Millwood Servicing Ltd**

## Case study: Science and Technology Facilities Council, England

**The Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) developed a Dyslexia Working Group after a number of dyslexic employees approached the HR team with ideas for changes that could be made in the workplace. The group is made up of dyslexic people working for STFC, some of whom have more than one learning disability, for example, dyslexia and autism or dyslexia and dyspraxia.**

The working group has developed a strong, positive and productive working relationship – and enjoys coming up with ideas about how to make things better for dyslexic people working for STFC. An example of the changes the group suggested is adapting the intranet so that it is easier for all staff to access information and support on dyslexia. For example, images and “push buttons” rather than text are used to aid navigation.

“The benefit of having a group of people working together who know what it is like to live with a condition is that they know what is best for them and are able to lead the conversation and inform the organisation’s decisions about disability at work.”

The group has grown from 6 to 50 members – people who had not previously shared that they have dyslexia now feel able to be open about it, as a result of the increased awareness and understanding in the workplace. All employees, whether or not they are part of the group, can access assistive technology and mind-mapping tools, so they can work in a way that best suits them.

The organisation has designed bespoke training for line managers and the HR team. Training on how to structure presentations, reports and emails in an accessible way is provided, as well as training to use mind-mapping. Learning Lunches on dyslexia and autism have helped to raise awareness, and role models from the dyslexia working group have come forward to tell their story. They have also organised a successful peer-to-peer mentoring scheme for dyslexic employees.

One of the biggest successes in raising awareness about dyslexia was a lecture for STFC staff and the local community from an eminent and well respected professor with expertise in dyslexia. This was extremely popular and got everyone talking. Raising awareness in a way that made sense to their scientists and engineers meant that people became fully engaged, curious and wanted to learn more, and now feel confident talking about disability in everyday conversations.

STFC is part of UK Research and Innovation.

“I have seen a shift to a much more positive culture. A lot of barriers are about fear. It’s about understanding that [disability, including dyslexia] isn’t to be feared, it’s just a difference. STFC has created and continues to develop an open and productive environment. It’s business as usual – we have learnt what to do, so let’s just get on with it.”

# Start at the top – getting your leaders involved

Getting buy-in from your organisation's senior leadership is important. Once senior leaders are on board with making changes, the next step is to get their support to implement them.

## Here are some tips to get you started:

- Demonstrate you are flexible to all employees' needs so that they feel valued and included.
- A diverse workforce representative of your customer-base will help build a better product or service that gives your customers – including disabled customers – what they need. For example, Barclays designed talking ATMs as a direct result of disabled people being involved in product development.
- An open culture where people feel able to share their story is good for everybody and helps to build positive working relationships as people get to know each other better.

"Getting wider buy-in from the top of the organisation is essential for success. Senior officials acting as ambassadors for a diverse and inclusive environment is key to influencing the wider business."

**Enterprise**



# Finding talented people



“Tap into the vast amount of resources available from disability charities and take a risk. If you treat disabled people like individuals you will find they will tell you what they need and it is usually quite easy to provide it.”

**Christos Tsaprounis, Head of People and Culture, Auto Trader**

**Recruitment processes aren't always accessible to all disabled people. Making adjustments gives everyone the chance to showcase their skills. There are steps you can take to make sure your recruitment processes don't put disabled people off from joining your organisation in the first place.**

By law, disabled people don't have to tell you they are disabled, but you can make a few simple changes to encourage disabled people to apply for jobs and feel comfortable sharing what adjustments they might need:

- The Disability Confident badge can let people know that you encourage disabled people to apply for the job.
- State on job adverts that you welcome applications from disabled people, and are happy to make adjustments to the recruitment process if needed. Give a few examples of what's available.
- Make sure the requirements listed on the job description are really needed for the role – for example, think about whether a degree is really essential for someone to be able to do the job.

- Be aware that some people might not want to share very personal information. Many organisations provide job applicants with a person they can contact if they would like to confidentially talk through any adjustments they need for the interview.
- Make sure it is clear why you are asking for information about a person's disability, and who it will be shared with.

“The benefit of Disability Confident is not just the information you have access to, but the badge that says to candidates 'you are welcome here'.”

**Science and Technology Facilities Council**

## Case study: Pearson, England

**Pearson has come up with a number of ways to increase the number of disabled people they employ.**

The learning company encourages disabled people to apply for jobs by including information about reasonable adjustments on job adverts. They explore ways to actively reach out to disabled people and find people who might not otherwise apply for jobs, so that Pearson can benefit from the skills disabled people have to offer. For example, when Pearson heard about Leonard Cheshire's Change100 programme (see next page), they took advantage of the opportunity to connect with disabled people.

Some of the changes they have made include putting the Disability Confident badge on their website to show their commitment to being an inclusive business. They have also made some changes to their recruitment process to make it more accessible. For example, they have tried carrying out assessments without CVs to help eliminate unconscious bias and assess people on their skills alone. They also ensure that their interview panels are diverse.

“Diversity and inclusion is not just a legal tick box, saying ‘we are an equal opportunities employer’. We have a video with the CEO talking about diversity, people with different disabilities working for us. It says ‘we are a warm, inclusive organisation, come and join us!’”

**Kevin Lyons, Diversity and Inclusion Lead, Pearson**

### **Some top tips to adapt the recruitment process itself include:**

- Providing recruitment materials, like job descriptions and written test materials, in accessible formats. For example, someone with a visual impairment may use screen reading software, which often won't work with PDFs.
- Thinking about different ways to interview candidates, such as using work trials, allowing someone to showcase their skills 'on the job'. Some organisations offer interactive workshops where candidates demonstrate their key skills.
- Offering alternative ways to submit an application. For example, allowing people to submit forms on paper, by phone or online, and making clear on the advert that this is possible. Some people might be better able to show you their skills and experience by submitting a video CV.
- Allowing individuals extra time to complete written tests if necessary for example, if they have a learning disability or dyslexia.
- Offering guaranteed interviews to disabled candidates who meet the minimum criteria for the role.
- Being open to making changes to interview location or timing. As an example, you could ensure the room is fully wheelchair accessible.







Change  
**100**

## Change100

**Change100 is an award-winning Leonard Cheshire programme. It brings together the UK's top employers with talented disabled students and graduates to offer three months of paid work experience. Both the people taking part and the employer receive support and guidance before, throughout and after the placement.**

The criteria used to score Change100 candidates' applications are designed to ensure that they are assessed based on their skills, so that those who have had less work experience are not excluded from taking part. Those whose applications score highly are invited to attend an assessment day. This involves different activities and group exercises designed to assess candidates' skills on a level playing field and allow them to show their strengths.

Assessors receive training to increase their awareness of how unconscious bias can lead them to inadvertently score someone's application differently because of their disability. Any relevant circumstances related to candidates' disabilities are taken into account to ensure they are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Whatever your company size or sector, Change100 allows you access to a unique candidate you might never have reached otherwise.

Email us for more details at:  
**[employer@change100.co.uk](mailto:employer@change100.co.uk)**

## Case study: Dynamic Earth, Scotland

**Dynamic Earth is a five star visitor attraction in the heart of Edinburgh. It focuses on facilitating a better public understanding of the processes that have shaped the earth.**

Dynamic Earth know disabled people have a lot to offer, which is why they try to connect with local organisations to reach young disabled people who might not have applied to their vacancies otherwise. They also found they needed to move away from a traditional recruitment process to be more accessible for disabled people.

For example, recruiting managers use a variety of interview styles and work trials when recruiting. Some departments require key skills that are better identified whilst on the job. For recruiting their front of house staff they run an interactive workshop, which includes candidates presenting to a group of other candidates. This works well for a public facing role, and also gives individuals the opportunity to demonstrate their people skills.



# How to get your organisation 'disabilitysmart'

## Discussing an employee's disability with them means you can work together to identify which adjustments need to be put in place.

When you are having a conversation about reasonable adjustments, avoid making assumptions about what a disabled person needs. Everyone is an individual and often will have had experience of what works and what doesn't. Listen to what a person needs and keep an open mind about what kinds of creative solutions can be put in place to tackle barriers they might be facing in their role.

Adjustments often cost very little, or nothing at all. Some examples of low-cost reasonable adjustments include:

- Providing someone whose condition makes it difficult to stand for long periods with a chair for a task that requires prolonged standing – such as operating a till.
- Offering the option of working in a quieter part of the office.
- Holding meetings in a wheelchair accessible location.
- Providing documents in accessible formats, such as in Microsoft Word rather than PDFs so they can be read by screen readers.
- Providing flexible working opportunities. For example, it might be helpful to enable someone to work different hours to fit around medication regimes or medical appointments. Someone else might need to work part-time in shorter shifts so they can manage their energy levels.

Some employers are unsure of how to broach the topic of reasonable adjustments. Disability awareness training can help line managers feel more confident in discussing disability. This is available from specialist external providers, including Leonard Cheshire. Our workshops provide the tools your business needs to become **'disability smart'**. The interactive sessions are suitable for people at all levels and delivered by expert trainers in your own workplace.

Email us at: [innovation@leonardcheshire.org](mailto:innovation@leonardcheshire.org)

"We also train our leaders so they can be sensitive around broaching the topic and are able to encourage employees to be open. It's important that those with line managing responsibility develop some knowledge on the disability in question so they have the capability to do this. We will provide them with the resources and support they need as well as, if required, the time and space to change their attitudes and be confident about disability."

**Christos Tsaprounis, Head of People and Culture, Auto Trader**

"We have staff with disabilities whose reasonable adjustment is to have slightly longer or more frequent rest breaks. They are excellent colleagues and we would not hesitate to employ them again. If I needed advice I would just refer to a higher level of management for guidance."

**Local supermarket, WalesTrader**



## Case study: Auto Trader

**Auto Trader recruits around 150 people a year and is always looking for ways to increase the numbers of disabled and neurodiverse people they employ.**

They make it clear in their job adverts they are positive about disability and are open to making adjustments to support individuals.

They also believe it is important that disabled people and those with long-term conditions are able to share any adjustment needs in the workplace from the get go. It is often something quite simple like ensuring they can take regular breaks.

Sometimes people might be reluctant to share something personal. So they encourage and give various opportunities to job applicants to speak to a specific member of the team if they would like to talk through any adjustments they need for the interview.

This signals to everyone that it is OK to ask for what you need.

Those in charge of recruitment are continuously being developed to handle this process very sensitively as they understand the challenges of disclosing personal information with someone you have never met before.

“It is vitally important to be led by disabled people (and seek advice where needed), but if you think you need to devise a policy or processes on every eventuality then you will never get anywhere. You need to make a well thought out start but you should not delay taking action. We need to disprove the stereotypes that adjustments are always costly and complicated. Tap into the vast amount of resources available from disability charities and be comfortable with some risks involved.”

**Christos Tsaprounis, Head of People and Culture, Auto Trader**

# Things can change – keep talking

**It's important to keep in touch with individuals about how things are going once they have begun working for you. This helps them to tell you about any changes in their adjustment needs. Sometimes people need to try out the job before knowing what adjustments they require. Others might have a fluctuating condition and adjustments may need to change. This can help to foster an inclusive atmosphere and give disabled people the confidence to ask for adjustments to do their job to the best of their ability.**

Some organisations have created a 'workplace adjustments' passport which provides information on what adjustments an employee already uses in another role. This means when they move to another part of the organisation, their new manager has the information they need.



## **Case study: Millwood Servicing Ltd, England**

**Millwood Servicing Ltd is a family run and owned small business based in Surrey. It celebrated 25 years this year, specialising in all aspects of fire safety engineering and fire risk assessments. This includes training, designing installation services and commissioning of fire protection systems and electrical and lighting solutions.**

The company wasn't actively seeking to recruit disabled people. But when they recruited a couple of people with disabilities they soon realised they could be missing out on an untapped pool of talent.

The company's philosophy is based on openness, honesty, work-life balance and fairness. They communicate this from the very start at recruitment stage to encourage potential recruits to be open about any adjustments they might need. In second interview they are open about their HR practices, sick pay and adjustments they offer. They feel this encourages people to share their access needs, if they have any.

All managers are entrusted to plan any adjustments their employees may have, in partnership with the individual. Managers will then conduct regular reviews to check the employee is continuing to have all their adjustment needs met so they are able to do their job well.

Adjustments are wide and varied. It could be something simple like letting the individual work around their hospital appointments, changing their responsibilities slightly or allowing them to finish early. Another example would be trying to arrange it so those with a physical disability only work on jobs which will take them a short while to drive to, to help them manage their energy.

# Getting financial support from Access to Work

The cost of adjustments doesn't have to be an issue. Access to Work is a government scheme that provides funding for the costs of equipment, technology, support workers and other adjustments. This can fund software, help cover the costs of changes to your premises to make it accessible, or pay for support workers and British Sign Language interpreters.

"It's about an awareness of how much better that person can perform with some simple adjustments. Knowing about Access to Work helps you as an employer stop worrying about hidden or extra costs."

**Taylor Wimpey**



## About the research

**This guide is informed by research we carried out with employers. In March and April 2018 we spoke to representatives from businesses across England, Scotland and Wales to explore their experiences of employing disabled people, and find out their views on what steps employers need to take to increase diversity in the workplace.**

We spoke to 20 employers at roundtable discussions in England and Scotland. We also carried out 10 interviews with employers in England, Scotland and Wales.

We would like to thank all the employers whose advice and experience has helped us to create this guide.

**For further information on any of the information mentioned here please email [innovation@leonardcheshire.org](mailto:innovation@leonardcheshire.org).**

