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Latest research | Current policy priorities | Good operational practice
Dialogue and debate from the employability sector

In this issue

1. A note from the Editor – **Steve Hart FIEP**
2. Striving for improvement: disability and inclusivity in the workplace – **Dan Howard FIEP | Operations Director for Learning for Work | NCFE**
3. The Glass Bubble - My experiences as a lonely Autistic - **Kellyanne Miller | Enrolment Administration Assistant | Acacia Training**
4. The strength of weak ties - **Tim Jeffery FIEP | Partnership & Integration Manager | The Growth Company**
5. Every business big and small can become Disability Confident - **Professor Amanda Kirby | CEO | Do-IT Solutions Ltd**
6. Supporting mothers of autistic children – **Liz Sewell FIEP | Director | Belina Get Ready for Work**
7. **Remembering Paul Hughes FIEP**
8. Confessions of an Ageist - **Maryam Bello-Tukur AIEP | Initial Engagement Adviser on JETS | Shaw Trust**
9. 100 years of disability employment support – are we there yet? – **Petra Kennedy | Deputy CEO | MTIB**
10. Mental health and the talent pool you need to show you are including – **Stuart Duffey FIEP | Director | Coyne Recruitment**
11. Taking a fresh approach to finding the right candidate – **Diane Lightfoot | CEO | Business Disability Forum**
12. IEP Journal Interview - **Grant Neems FIEP | Director of Employer Services | Ingeus UK**

Letters to the Editor

Sian Wilson FIEP | Executive Director – Commercial | The Skills Network

Björn Elmqvist MIEP | Partner | Werket AB

Teresa Scott FIEP OBE | Managing Director | Building People CIC

Roger Chapman MIEP | Head of Service | The Growth Company

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A note from the editor



Steve Hart FIEP
Guest Editor

Where did that 33 years go? 33 years in the industry and I still feel as passionate today as I did all those years ago.

Helping those that need our support, we all now work in an industry that is so diverse and ever growing. But is our market still disjointed, do we work closely enough together, or do we work in silos? I think a classic example is skills and employability: It's a topic that comes up time and time again, roundtables and workshops are held to close the gap, but it still feels far apart. Who doesn't gain from this, of course it's our participants?

Scott, Pat and all the IEP team have done an amazing job to develop the Institute into a loud voice for professionalising our industry. I am incredibly pleased to have become a Board Member this year, two board meetings under my belt already and what a talented team I work with. It's great to see the internal workings of the Institute, I am now even prouder to be a Fellow.

I hope you find this journal informative and its articles useful. It was so pleasing to put out a 'call to action' to all Fellows of the Institute but I was initially unsure as to the response I would get. I was inundated, no surprise there, in fact as I hand the baton over to the next guest editor, we have several offers for the next journal: a great start! So why choose 'Disability' as a topic? I knew it would gain so much interest and passion from prospective authors. I particularly wanted to make sure we had frontline representation, those people that really matter, the people supporting our participants every day. I wanted to ensure we

showed the diverse nature of our team members and even the challenges that they personally face. I am also a bit competitive, for those who know me it will not be a surprise, so it was important for me that this Journal was a bit different from past editions with a good number of letters to the editor included. We have an interview with Grant Neems FIEP, around all things Disability Confident, has this been done before? I hope the personal nature of these articles grabs everyone's interest; there is some real honesty in here which cannot be a bad thing.

Thank you so much to all authors who contributed, thank you for not making me have to chase authors and thank you to those receiving feedback on articles for the quick turnaround. I know there were several of you, due to year end, that couldn't contribute for the April journal due to timing. Please do get in touch with David Imber FIEP, who is an absolute legend by the way, and a massive support to me in getting this Journal together.

I wanted to finish by dedicating this Journal to our dear friend and Fellow of the IEP Paul Hughes FIEP who sadly passed away in March. A true gentleman, a very kind and caring man who cared passionately for what we do, changing the lives of our participants. Our thoughts are with Paul's family at this very sad time and to all of Paul's colleagues at Seetec Pluss.

So where has that 33 years gone, every target exceeded is a life changed.

Steve Hart FIEP

Striving for improvement: disability and inclusivity in the workplace – The Disability Employment Gap



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Over the past year, there's been a lot of discussion around some of the silver linings that the pandemic has brought to our working lives, such as global flexibility and the idea that you can work from anywhere, at hours that suit you, and from the comfort of your own home.

However, here's a fact that might surprise you – as a result of the pandemic, there was actually a fall in the disability employment rate and a [widening of the disability gap](#)¹, which had been narrowing for seven years prior. So, why did this happen? Why didn't more flexibility automatically equal more accessibility to everybody in the working world?

It's a difficult question to answer – undoubtedly, there are many forces at play. Recent research by the [Learning and Work Institute 2](#) stated that whilst a number of disabled people may have had to shield for health reasons, there is also “a risk that employers' perceptions of disabled candidates as more vulnerable and difficult to support [may] reinforce barriers to their entry and retention in employment”. Further to this, it's well reported that disabled people are much more likely to face discrimination and redundancy³ in general.

Understanding Access to Work is to acknowledge that there isn't a one-dimensional solution; it's a complex and multifaceted issue, with a spectrum of individual needs and reasonable adjustments to be considered. Take the funding of equipment, for example – the options available to individuals who require accessible equipment aren't always known or understood, whether that be by the employer or the individual.

Yet, reasonable adjustments can and should be made even when working from home – they shouldn't just be limited to physical office spaces, particularly with hybrid working paving the way as the 'new normal'.

The accessible job search site [Evenbreak](#) offers an innovative solution, by helping disabled job seekers to feel confident that they're connecting with inclusive employers, as well as providing resources on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. But it's my belief that all employers should be striving to be inclusive, welcoming spaces for individuals with a range of disabilities.

Acknowledging hidden disabilities

Hidden disabilities, and the ways in which individuals with these disabilities can come up

¹ Gov.UK, 'The employment of disabled people 2021', updated 11 February 2022 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021>)

² Learning and Work Institute, 'Disability Employment: from pandemic to recovery' – Asli Atay, Lovedeep Vaid and Naomi Clayton, May 2021

³ Citizens Advice press release, 6 August 2020 (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/about-us1/media/press-releases/parents-carers-and-disabled-people-at-least-twice-as-likely-to-face-redundancy-warns-citizens-advice/>)

“As a result of the pandemic, there was actually a fall in the disability employment rate and a widening of the disability gap, which had been narrowing for seven years prior.”

against obstacles or barriers in their working lives, are often overlooked. Accessibility culture is hugely important when it comes to invisible illnesses, and this is something that we’re proud to constantly be striving towards at NCFE.

In fact, one of my brilliant colleagues Jessica Blakey, our Head of Assessment Innovation, recently spoke on the importance of accessibility culture, sharing her own experience of her working life whilst living with Multiple Sclerosis.

Jessica said: “Invisible illness and disability are more common than you might think. It takes more for me to stay well than most people; a balance of disease modifying drugs, health and fitness, and lifestyle choices.

“I started at NCFE in February 2020. Working through a pandemic while having an invisible disability is full of hurdles, but at NCFE these have been massively reduced; all the team members I’ve worked with have gone above and beyond to support my needs. That’s not coincidence, that’s culture. Luckily, I’ve chosen an incredibly inclusive place to work.”

Jessica shared practical solutions that she’s experienced in response to her illness, including fatigue (colleagues are happy to rearrange meetings and deadlines) and a reduced immune system (remote accessible meetings as standard and ramped up hygiene measures). I also echo her final remarks on self-advocacy, too:

“Remember that self-advocacy is important when you need reasonable adjustments, and to always speak up if you need something.”

Listening to the lived experiences of colleagues is of paramount importance when it comes to disabilities, as it is these individuals – and *only* these individuals – who can share true insight, and understanding of these issues, as well as what effective solutions might look like. People’s own lived experiences, regardless of what is happening around them, is their reality.

That’s why at NCFE, we provide a platform for these voices to be heard through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) team, which I chair on a monthly basis. Such opportunities offer an open and honest space for disabled people to be able to share their lived experiences, as well as a chance for our colleagues to inspire others and improve their confidence and openness. I strongly believe that these platforms are something that all employers should offer – because if you’re not prepared to understand the reality of people’s situations and circumstances, how can you truly support them? Furthermore, these spaces encourage that difference is something that should be embraced and celebrated – *not* something that divides us.

Recognising and supporting mental disabilities

Mental health and wellbeing is another hugely prominent topic that has rightfully been spoken about frequently since the pandemic, affecting so many of us and those we know.

And unsurprisingly, there was also a marked intersectional overlap in disabled individuals who experienced mental health problems throughout the pandemic; according to data⁴ from the ONS, almost two thirds of disabled people said their wellbeing has been affected by the pandemic compared to 50% of non-disabled people. This research also showed that 65% of people with mental health disabilities said they had high levels of anxiety compared to 30% of non-disabled people. This data highlights the detrimental impact on both the physical and mental health of disabled people.

⁴ ONS. Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain. Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (Covid-19 module), 3 to 28 February 2021, cited in the Learning and Work Institute ‘Disability Employment: from pandemic to recovery’, May 2021.

“Remember that self-advocacy is important when you need reasonable adjustments, and to always speak up if you need something.”

It's crucial, therefore, that mental wellbeing is addressed throughout the population and at all levels. This is why at NCFE, we've chosen to partner with innovative mental fitness platform Fika. Designed by expert psychologists, Fika is the first app of its kind that takes a proactive approach when it comes to mental health, helping users to train their mind just as they would their bodies by equipping them with 7 mental fitness skills to build mental muscle and become more confident and resilient. We've helped to fund access to Fika in 69 FE centres to benefit their staff and learners – as well as funding access for our own internal colleagues.

Beyond this, we've also launched the first regulated awards in the UK to raise awareness and reduce suicide, through the provision of Level 2 and 3 qualifications in Steps Towards Suicide Reduction. Increasing awareness, discussion and education around such topics is of incredible importance, and I hope to see further innovation and collaboration in the future.

Looking towards the future

With [1 in 5⁵](#) of the working-age population being classed as disabled and [1 in 4⁶](#) experiencing a mental health problem each year, we must continue to improve support and accessibility when it comes to disability and inclusivity at work. Whilst the latest figures suggest that the disability employment rate has [returned⁷](#) to its pre-pandemic level in 2021, it's clear that much more can be done.

There are plenty of solutions that can quickly be implemented in terms of reasonable adjustments; for example, I myself experience a hidden disability related to my eyesight, so having support from NCFE with adjusting fonts and sizes of the text on my laptop has been a game-changer for me. But we also know that technology and AI will go on to play a significant role in the development of accessibility solutions that don't yet exist – an exciting prospect which I welcome and encourage.

The future of work simply must result in more flexible and accessible working practices and beneficial outcomes for disabled people. Because securing meaningful, sustainable employment where individuals feel supported, valued and seen, vastly improves the mental health and wellbeing of us *all* – helping us to contribute to society and thrive in both our professional and personal lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dan has worked in the employability and skills sector for over 10 years. Passionate about the life-changing power of education, Dan actively collaborates with key influencers in the skills and employability industry to ensure NCFE offers the best curriculum, products and services to promote and advance learning for all.

As Director - Learning for Work at NCFE, Dan manages delivery of NCFE's learning for work product portfolio which supports individuals to progress and excel in their careers, as well as providing employers with a highly skilled and productive workforce. Dan is also a Fellow of the IEP.

⁵ Gov.UK, 'The employment of disabled people 2021', updated 11 February 2022 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021>)





⁶ Mind, 'Mental health facts and statistics' (<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/>)

⁷ Gov.UK, 'The employment of disabled people 2021', updated 11 February 2022 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021>)

The Glass Bubble - My experiences as a lonely Autistic



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Living with Autism can feel as if you are living in a glass bubble. The social anxiety of my condition can also create a sense of detachment from what is seen as natural and almost expected in social consideration.

Autism in my experiences can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand you are part of a unique and vigilant minority that can create a lasting friendship because of being diagnosed or informed that you are in the same boat, from another perspective however it can mean that other people continuously misinterpret you.

Growing up I did not know that I was an autistic child. Being surrounded by my peers made me feel as if I was beneath them and strange because of the way I thought and even the way I spoke. My accent mixed with 100 creative words that did not need to be in the same sentence made me stand out in a way I did not intend. My creative streak meant that I pursued performing arts vehemently as if it was my dying wish to do so, in that I excelled, in maths at first sadly I did not.

My autism has assisted me in gaining a career as a part time professional performer with a music degree despite how different it has made some of my experiences.

That is the beauty of autism though from my perspective. Specialist skills and apparent superpowers can be found in us. Our ability to think in multiple ways allows us to transcend normalised constraints with ease, we are truly superhuman in our potential level as well.

So, if like me you are diagnosed as autistic or are granted Asperger's syndrome:

You are not alone

- It isn't a death sentence
- It depends on how you see it
- There are different levels to it
- You may have a superpower
- You are unique.

An autistic mind is an autistic talent, the right people will love you for who you are.

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The strength of weak ties



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My first paid job was as a Pot Washer at a Garden Centre Café when I was seventeen.

I'd spend Sunday from 8:30am until 6pm in the back of kitchen, loading dirty plates of Full English Breakfast and Sunday Roast Dinner into a large, industrial dishwasher. I decided it wasn't for me pretty quickly as I was handing my uniform back in after only 2 weeks! I justified this move by convincing myself that I wanted to focus on my up and coming AS Levels. In reality, during that fortnight I'd missed spending my Sundays either watching or playing football and I decided to sacrifice money for more free time. To be honest, I never was particularly enthusiastic about the role even before accepting it. The opportunity came up as my older sister was already a casual employee of the Café (and she lasted much longer than me). When a new Pot Washer vacancy was advertised, it was her that notified me of the opportunity and recommended me to her manager.

My assumption is that the story of how most people got their first job isn't dissimilar to mine. A lot of the time, people find their first paid job as a result of their personal connections – either through friends, family or people in the local community.

But what about subsequent jobs?

I've counted that I've had seven paid jobs. My second was as an office temp after I finished my A-Levels in the company my Mum worked for. Again, I was recommended to the job by a family member. My third job was some years later after graduating from university. I worked as the *Assistant Manager* of a small betting shop. Despite the grandiose job title, Assistant Manager was the lowest ranked position within the organisation. All employees who weren't a Store Manager were designated as an *Assistant Manager*! I found this job as my student house was on the same road as the shop. After seeing an advert in a window, I handed in a CV, attended an interview and despite having no customer service experience or knowledge of the gambling industry whatsoever, somehow...I was successful!

My fourth job was found through a friend. My fifth job was found through applying for a job on a job board and my sixth and seventh jobs were found through connections I had on LinkedIn.

I've become more interested in all this since stumbling across a book called "*Getting a job – a study of contacts and careers*" by American sociologist Mark Granovetter¹. The study was first published in 1974 and updated in 1995, so it isn't exactly recent – but in the study Granovetter wanted to explore how people found their jobs.

“A lot of the time, people find their first paid job as a result of their personal connections – either through friends, family or people in the local community.”

He proposed that there are 3 ways that someone can find a job: -

A formal application – Opportunities found through a formal job advert, recruitment or employment agency or arranged through a university or educational institution.

A direct application – An individual approaching a specific organisation where no opportunity is known about.

Personal connections – Whereby an individual is made aware of a job opportunity through a person they know for reasons other than job searching.

In his study, Granovetter found that roughly 18% of the people surveyed had found their current job through a formal application. Another 18% had found their job by making a direct application to their employer and a huge 56% of respondents had found their current job through a personal connection (with roughly 8% being categorised as “other”).¹ And presumably this study isn’t just including first jobs, as it was asking respondents how they found their current job. Granted, the data is from a long time ago, but it does show that by far the most common method used by the survey respondents was finding job opportunities through friends, family, and the local community.

But how can we quickly get hold of some more recent data?

If I offer up my career history to provide some evidence...

I found my first Pot Washing job through my sister, so we’ll mark that down as “Personal Contact”. The office temp job was found by my

Mum (Personal Contact). My job at the Betting Shop was based in my local community...but I did respond to a job advert – so we’ll put that down as “Formal Application”. Job four was found through a friend (another personal contact). Job five was found on a job board (another formal application) and job six and seven were found through LinkedIn connections. Now, LinkedIn (or any social media) didn’t exist at the time of Granovetter’s survey, but I would argue that LinkedIn connections represent an extension of an individual’s personal network so these would have to be categorised as “Personal Contacts”.

So here are the results for me: -

	Formal application	Direct application	Personal Contacts
Job #1			X
Job #2			X
Job #3	X		
Job #4			X
Job #5	X		
Job #6			X
Job #7			X
Total	2	0	5
%	28.5%	0%	71.5%

I’d be interested to know what the results are for others...?

It’s a small sample size, and admittedly not a scientific study...but more of my jobs have come through Personal Contacts than the 1974 survey respondents! Five of the seven paid jobs I’ve ever had have been sourced through personal contacts or connections. I have clearly benefited from having family members willing to recommend me to jobs, a friend at university and a relatively large network of virtual connections on a relevant social media

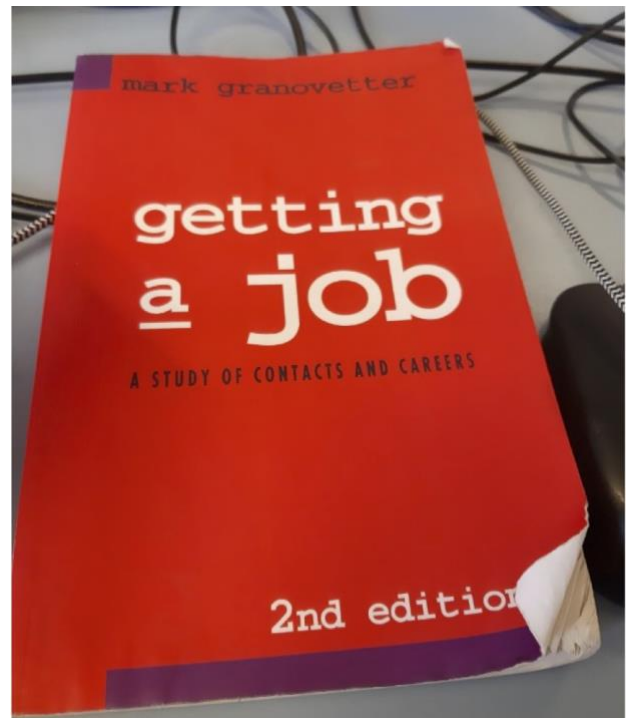
“it is still probably true that people who are long-term unemployed are likely to have lower levels of Social Capital and this is holding people back from finding out about relevant job opportunities.”

platform. The term sociologists give this is *Social Capital* which can be described as “the goodwill inherent in social networks” (Fugate, 2004)². Granovetter called this effect, *The Strength of Weak Ties*. If you have an extensive enough network, you can find out about job opportunities from friends, or friends of friends (or even friends of friends of friends!) Even if the personal contacts themselves aren’t particularly strong, well-developed relationships, having a large network of personal contacts will give you an advantage in the job market.

So, what’s the application of all this?

Much has changed in the nearly 50 years since Granovetter first published his research, but it is still probably true that people who are long-term unemployed are likely to have lower levels of Social Capital and this is holding people back from finding out about relevant job opportunities and entering employment. Some people may have strong Social Capital related to a specific sector that is in decline or they wish to exit, meaning their connections have limited value. The question that remains is whether this need is being effectively addressed by current employability provisions and interventions which are often designed to improve participants job searching skills and enable people to get better at making “formal applications” or “direct applications”. This is certainly what Granovetter argues – suggesting that it would be more effective to support individuals to develop a wider circle of contacts and build their Social Capital rather than just refining and honing job application skills.

There are obviously huge challenges in achieving this. Building relationships and growing networks



can take a long time – often years, which is typically longer than the lifespan of a single employability provision. It’s difficult to quantify the growth of someone’s “weak ties” and therefore very difficult to build a system of Outcomes to demonstrate whether this has been achieved. It’s also difficult to know where to start since many of the contacts of someone who is long-term unemployed may well be unemployed themselves. But based on what we know about how people tend to find their jobs and Social Capital – this is an idea that the employability sector needs to be aware of. As well as upskilling and coaching people in how to apply for formal job applications, we also need to be investing time in the *social strengthening* of jobseekers. After all, it’s the most effective way of finding a job that we know of.

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Tim has worked in employability since 2014 supported participants on the Work Programme, Work Choice and Community Work Placement programmes, Skills Support for the Unemployed, Skills Support for the Workforce and the Kickstart Scheme. Tim is also a Fellow of the IEP.

¹ Page 19 - “Getting a job – a study of Contacts & Careers” by Mark Granovetter (University of Chicago Press, 1995)

² M.Fugate et al. Journal of Vocational Behaviour 65 (2004) “Employability: A Psycho-Social Construct, Its dimensions and applications”

Every business big and small can become Disability Confident



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We all know or are people with disabilities. They are your parents, your children, your employees, and your customers, and You may also become disabled at some point in your life.¹

8% of children are disabled

19% of working-age adults are disabled

46% of pension age adults are disabled

The human rights of persons with disabilities to full and effective participation and inclusion in society on an equal basis with others are laid out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities², which is close to universal ratification.

Each one of us can make a difference in all stages of the recruitment, interview, and onboarding process that ensure there are equitable possibilities of showcasing our talents and progressing during our careers to be our best selves. This often means making a series of small adjustments along the way that considers the barriers that exist. You don't know the person who hasn't applied for a job nor the reasons why.

What do we value in society?

This journey needs to start with considering that the way we view and support everyone in society is a measure of who we are. People with disabilities

in many countries around the world often live in extreme poverty. Those with dual disadvantages (lack of access to care and poverty) are among the most stigmatised and marginalised people on earth. They often are isolated from society and excluded from their communities, from the education system, from healthcare and other vital services. Sometimes, they are sadly hidden away by their families. Many disabled women and children also face a heightened risk of domestic and sexual violence.³

Disability represents a cross-cutting issue that can affect us all at all points of our life span. It doesn't stand alone. Intersecting with gender, race, ethnicity, language, national or social origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or another status can result in multiple forms of exclusion, discrimination, and vulnerability.

The Equality Act 2010 in the UK⁴ sets out the expectations when someone is disabled and how they are protected from discrimination. In the UK you are considered disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect - beyond 12 months - on your ability to carry out day-to-day activities. An impairment doesn't have to be a diagnosed medical condition. If you don't have a diagnosis, you will still need some professional evidence to show your



“People with disabilities face higher rates of multidimensional poverty compared with persons without disabilities.”

impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to do day-to-day activities.

Gaining and sustaining a job for people with disabilities can remain challenging at every point in the journey. Lack of digital or literacy skills may make completing the application form hard despite potentially having the skills for the job being advertised. CVs may be discarded with spelling errors despite spellcheckers being available if required. Challenges with travelling to an interview may create another barrier to entry. Ironically, we once thought that working from home or making adjustments to do so was an impossibility but within weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic being a reality we saw IT kit installed and Zooms, and Teams meetings becoming the norm. We need to question why it took a pandemic to make these changes when people with disabilities had been asking for the same thing for years. Once at an interview stage we often favour applicants who respond to questions quickly and are good communicators which may not be the actual competencies required for the job.

The flip to home working not only flattened the playing field but also opened opportunities to work remotely for those with physical and sensory challenges that may not have been possible before. However, as the restrictions for Covid-19 recede and the expectation for many will be a return to the office we may then see some people with disabilities not only being at greatest risk of becoming unwell, but also once again having fewer flexible options for working. This may lead to the disability employment gap widening more.

The economic impact

People with disabilities face higher rates of multidimensional poverty compared with persons without disabilities. The employment rates of people with disabilities are substantially lower than the rates for persons without disabilities in developed and developing economies (WHO and World Bank, 2011)⁵. The lower rates of economic and labour market participation of persons with disabilities impose a higher welfare burden on governments, highlighting the costs of exclusion, which are estimated to range from 3 to 7% of GDP. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that in 2018 the median pay for non-disabled workers was £12.11 an hour, against £10.63 for disabled.⁶ According to Scope, in 2019 the average 'Disability Price Tag', or, the extra cost of living that disabled people have, was £583 a month - that's on top of food and housing.⁷

The economic contribution

In any business why we would not consider the value of the 'purple pound'? The 'Purple Pound' is the name given to the spending power of disabled households, that's any household where at least one member is disabled⁸. In 2019 in the "Click Away Pound" report they wrote that people with access needs as having an annual online spending power of £24.8 billion in the UK. In contrast to that there have been estimates of the impact of inaccessible websites and that businesses lose £17.1bn each year as disabled people click away from a website they can't access.⁹

The numbers are huge and the contribution to society could be massive. When you write your business plan tomorrow can you really ignore 15-20% of potential customers and say you won't bother with them? What business does that?

“The Disability Confident Scheme in the UK helps companies of all sizes to consider their policies, operations, and measure the gaps that still exist.”

Who is disabled by the processes and practices we put in place?

One group we are increasingly recognising are the 15-20% who are neurodivergent. This is even higher in specifically marginalised groups such as those in prison (around 30%¹⁰), excluded from education, and the poor (because of lack of recognition and cumulative adversity). Every person will have some significant and varying challenges and barriers to everyday functioning that are not necessarily noticed or supported unless identified or disclosed.

Why do some people miss out on getting their needs identified and supported?

- Don't know that their challenges can be supported or that their strengths are of great value to society
- Stigma, fear, and shame disclosing their needs and may be based on poor past experiences
- Don't know how or where to ask for help
- Don't have the money to pay for support or diagnosis
- Don't have services available in their locality
- Some employers consider the cost of supporting them is too expensive
- Lack of systems and pathways in place and lack of service provision and professional know-how
- Been misdiagnosed e.g., females with ADHD and Autism Spectrum conditions. (This is called diagnostic overshadowing).

What can we all do?

We need to have the confidence to implement disability-inclusive development programmes to ensure hiring and retaining all disabled talent is at the forefront of our minds. This is a pro-active and

not a retrofit approach that only supports those who disclose they need adjustments to be made and favours those with diagnoses and confidence to speak up.

The Disability Confident Scheme¹¹ in the UK helps companies of all sizes to consider their policies, operations, and measures the gaps that still exist. It allows companies to show others they are not only interested but committed to implementing change. This is a badge if taken seriously that can embed change.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Professor Amanda Kirby MBBS MRCGP PhD | CEO | Do-IT Solutions Ltd

Professor Amanda Kirby is a campaigner, medical doctor, academic, researcher, entrepreneur, and most importantly a parent/grandparent of a neurodivergent family and is also neurodivergent. She is an emeritus professor at the University of South Wales and honorary professor at Cardiff University and alumni from Leeds University.

Supporting mothers of autistic children



Liz Sewell FIEP
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As part of Belina's GRoW Programme to support women to get back to work, we run a specialist support project for mothers of children with autism and special educational needs. This is a growing group as the condition is becoming more widely recognised and understood.

Like most Mums, the Mums in this group do want to work and want that work to fit in with their family life but they face a wide range of practical and emotional issues. For example, there is far less childcare available for their children; and those children may be less likely to be happy with a change to their routine. And emotionally the fears and guilt that many parents feel when they're going back to work can multiply if your child has additional needs. Conversely, it can be even more important for them to get a job, as otherwise they can feel subsumed.

The seeds for the project began when Remploy (now Maximus) asked us to run some support sessions for mothers of children with disabilities. It acted as a pilot project, and we learnt so much from talking to those women. They told us they often felt alienated from support because people did not understand their situation.

When setting up our own project we heard the same issues. Kelly one of the first Mums to join told us; "You can feel quite lonely when you have a

child with autism. I sometimes feel I am judged by other people when I'm out and about with my son and that people just don't understand the challenges parents like myself face every day." What she liked about the project was "it was a group session where I could meet other Mums like me. It was so good to just be able to relax around other people who were going through the same experiences as I was." Kelly went on to get a job and felt more confident to ask for what help she needed.

The project is run by two members of staff from Belina who themselves have autistic children and have the knowledge to help parents to access a broad range of services including formal and informal support. They also act as both good examples and advocates for work.



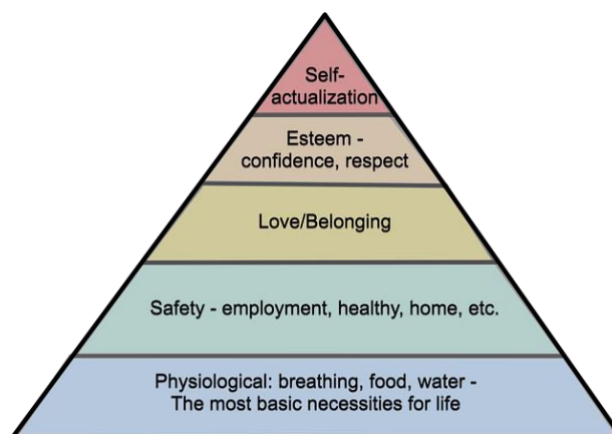
“People need time and space to talk about the issues they care about, not the issues that you care about.”

When we first started the groups, who met in local libraries, foolishly as the manager I suggested that all the topics be about how people could get back to work, but after a couple of weeks my team members said to me ‘Liz people need time and space to talk about the issues they care about, not the issues that you care about’ and so the group became a much better place because it was talking about the issues that our Mums raised. This helped make the group more effective because these Mums are at the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy of need: Until these Mums’ needs for their children are met, they’re not going to be able to think about going back to work.

During Lockdown we set up an online Zoom group for the Mums and this remains an effective way of Mums being able to meet without having to organise venues, childcare and travel.

What we provide

- A project that openly acknowledges their situation
- Peer support group - that focuses on what the Mums want to talk about and offers the chance to support each other
- Advisers who understand their emotional and practical needs
- Case studies that show what individuals are achieving
- Networks into existing groups
- Mainstream employability services as soon as they are ready to use them
- Ongoing In work support.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

What the project gives is confidence, motivation, and the skills to move into a job. We have found that after a few months in the group Mums who previously felt work was impossible are searching for and then finding work. And because they have thought about their needs, they have made the provision for childcare and flexible hours that means work is viable.

All the other advice we provide for Mums is part of our mainstream support. They live in the world and so have to apply for jobs alongside everyone else. What we try to do is to help them turn all they have done to support their children and their family into a positive, something that adds value to them as employees.

And as an employer myself, I have five members of the team with children with autism and SEN and I would advocate for them generally as excellent advisers and staff. Their resilience, ingenuity, compassion and acting as a role model adds value to our ability to support everyone.

Khatera Ahmed MIEP, Belina GRoW Adviser and co-runs the programme said;

“Being a mother of children with special needs, I was finding it extremely difficult to find a good balance between my duties as a Mum

“After a few months in the group Mums who previously felt work was impossible are searching for and then finding work.”

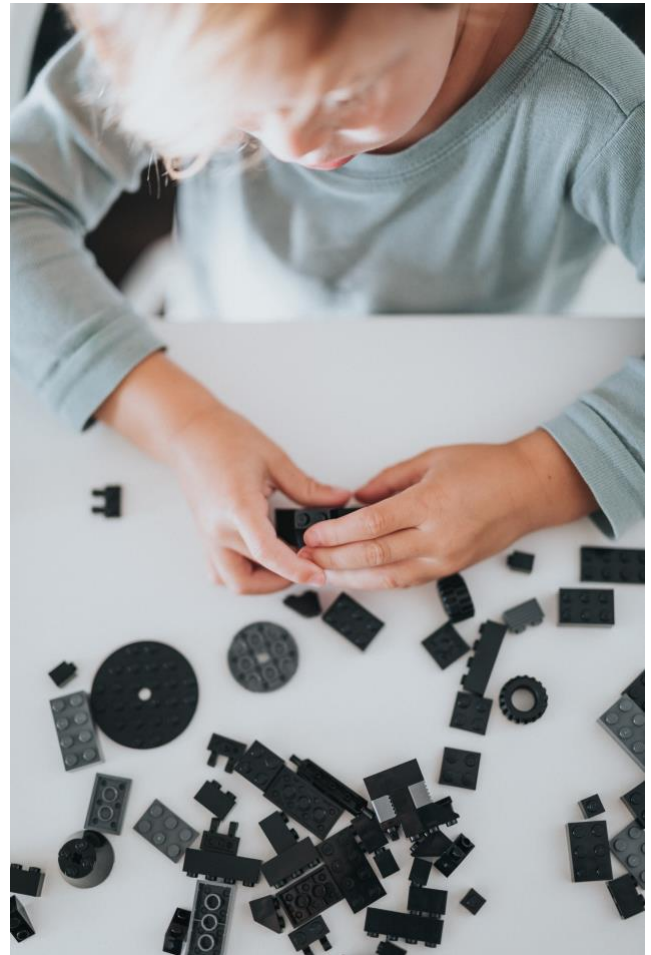
and my regular life including my career, but through experience, I learned that we need the right support and motivation to succeed and achieve our career goals as well as maintaining our parental responsibilities.

In my opinion our sessions help parents to increase their strength and resilience when it comes to dealing with their responsibilities, it supports them to achieve their full potential and reduce the sense of isolation. This essentially helps parents to restart their career goals and aim to find the jobs that they would like to have.”

Parents with special needs children have more responsibilities and they need extra support, this support includes:

- Finding local services and service providers
- Parenting education and strategies
- Childcare and childminders concern (special need experience)
- Emotional support
- Guidance towards employment (long-term unemployed)
- Support and guidance focussed on social isolation, and financial strain.
- Families with SEN children may become overwhelmed and find it difficult to navigate the services that are available for them and their families.

Running such sessions will help their candidates to understand that they are not alone, they see other parents with similar

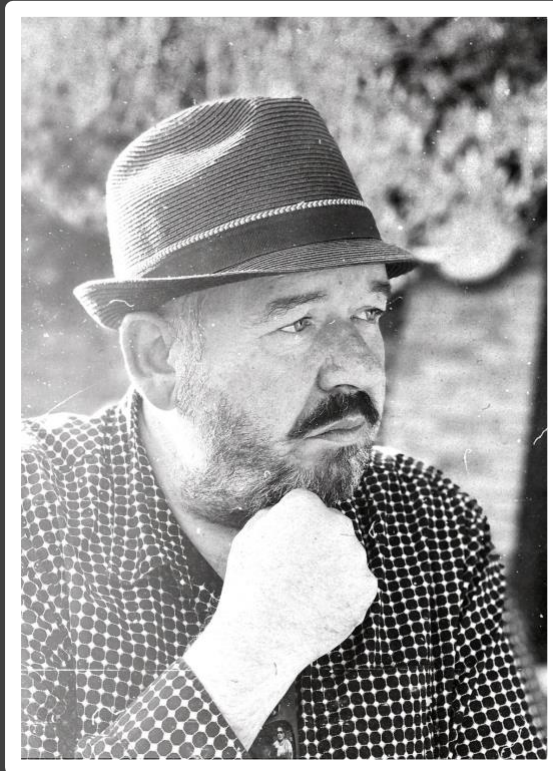


experiences. They learn how to bring a balance to their family and work life. The session will help with easing their worries and concerns and they will be able to start focusing on their journey towards employment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liz Sewell FIEP | Director | Belina Consulting

Liz Sewell FIEP is Director of Belina Consulting Ltd, which runs the GRoW programme to support women get back to work, and the FLEX programme to support employers become more family friendly. She is on the Mayor of London' Skills for Londoners Board, and the ERSA Board. She is a Former director of the IEP and the single parent charity Gingerbread. Last year the App she developed for Belina won the ERSA Innovation Award. Liz is also a Fellow of the IEP.



Remembering Paul Hughes FIEP


FIEP were saddened to learn that Paul Hughes FIEP has passed away. Paul was a Fellow of our Institute and Chief Operating Officer, Employability at Seetec Pluss and previously worked at Serco, Powys County Council, Working Links and the Department for Work and Pensions.

Chris Harrison FIEP said; "I remember one of my first conversations with John Baumbach, when I joined Seetec almost 4 years ago, talking to him about Paul; I used words like trust, integrity and measured. I was delighted when he chose to come and work with us and over the years he has brought all of these, and more, in bucketloads. I feel privileged to have had these recent years working closely with him, getting to know him better in work and, on not enough occasions, over a pint or two of real ale at a Tap room near a station somewhere – one of his passions, along with good food, Crown Green bowls and always beating us all on Friday lockdown quizzes!

He was so committed to supporting other people, be it service users or colleagues, and applied his tireless work ethic to that pursuit of making a difference every day. Talking to a former colleague of ours last week we pondered how many lives he must have positively impacted during his time in our sector; at Seetec alone it's well into the tens of thousands. Extrapolate that out into the successful career Paul has had and we will be talking hundreds of thousands of individuals, families and communities positively impacted by him and the teams he has supported across the UK. It's a big legacy left by a big personality, and he will be sorely missed.

All of us at Seetec are devastated, we've lost a great colleague and friend who has been taken from us far too early."

Debbie Vaughan said; "Paul was my direct line manager at Working Links where I was North



Wales Employment Zones Delivery Manager from Feb 2007-Sep 2009. Not only was he my manager but also my mentor, teaching me everything I needed to know about Welfare to Work. He was smart, funny in a dry sort of way, and unique. Who else do you know who has a degree in physics and business studies?!

He was just the same with chief executives as he was with his staff, and he liked to let his hair down with us all. He was a stickler for good grammar and would always pull you up on it in a lovely Paul kind of way.

He left for Powys County Council, and I left for Serco, but we would catch up with other friends for a night out now and again. He often travelling the furthest to meet up.

Such a gentleman and taken far too early."

Colin Davies FIEP said; "I first met Paul when I interviewed him for the manager's role in North Wales, for Working Links. It was clear from the outset that he was measured and thoughtful in his responses to questions and provided clarity in well-constructed replies – and this was exactly how he approached his work too. Never flustered, never angry or exasperated, no matter what the situation was, you could always rely on Paul to be calm and clear in his thoughts and deeds. He deliberately avoided any internal politics, preferring to focus on delivering a service to customers – and he succeeded.

Over the following years, I got to know him better and I always enjoyed his company. He was a likeable man, with a great attitude to life – he enjoyed his work and enjoyed keeping his private life separate from his work. Deliberately so, I think, he could compartmentalise his life and run it the way he wanted to. An admirable approach. It was during social events – Paul loved good food and a few beers – that he might reveal a little more about himself. His love of travel – I can recall him and Sarah visiting Japan and

Madeira along with other trips that I have long since forgotten about. I am sure he told me once that he had enjoyed fishing in Llyn Clywedog in his youth and had played bowls for Llanidloes. He took some ribbing for playing bowls in his younger years, as we teased him that it was an "old man's sport", but he took in all in good part and gave as good as he was given.

He would go out of his way to meet up socially – a group of former Working Links colleagues would meet up every year, until just before the Covid pandemic hit. We would reminisce about old times. He had the ability to remember the important things in life and to put them in perspective.

I will miss him greatly. Rest in Peace my friend."


Julia Cain said; "Paul was a fantastic manager, one of the best. He always had time to listen to you and would come up with innovative solutions to your problems. He was a great man who will be sadly missed by all who knew him."

Brian Bell FIEP said; "We work in an industry that is very competitive. Populated with organisations that compete to win contracts, strive to be the best and encouraged by funders to move up league tables.

All normal activities in service industries and it usually results in the best service possible for customers.

And in and around that are some incredible people who do their best every day to help change people's lives.

Last week, I learned of the very sad and sudden passing of Paul Hughes FIEP, Chief Operating Officer at Seotec Pluss.



Paul worked with me many years ago at Working Links. A quiet unassuming man, who just got on with the job, without fuss - but beneath that, was somebody who cared passionately about the service he was delivering and knew how to get the best out of the people around him.

Paul worked in the industry from the very beginning. He epitomised what we are all about and helped us to build what I think is a world leading industry.

Thank you Paul, we will miss you. “

Gareth Matthews FIEP said; “I wish I had Paul’s ability to express himself articulately in the most demanding of situations, conveying both thought and feeling, something I’m struggling to do as I come to terms with writing about his passing.

I’ve known Paul for nearly 30 years, with our relationship extending beyond work to become long term friends. I first met Paul in his role as an Executive Officer in Newtown Jobcentre. His larger-than-life presence, his great sense of humour, combined with his ability to motivate colleagues, and a passion for making a difference to people’s lives through work, singled him out for a bright future within the employability sector.

Paul enjoyed a successful career progressing from DWP Business Manager, Powys, to senior management positions with Working Links, Serco and Seetec. Throughout his career he was an advocate of continuous personal development, and a supporter of the IEP. To this day, (more so now) I cherish the book he gave me as my leaving present from Working Links ‘The Circle of Innovation’. There are many whose career benefitted from knowing Paul, by working with him, none more than I.

There are many things I will miss about Paul; his quirky choice of home addresses, The Gaol Llanidloes and The Old Post Office, Llanidloes, his immense intellect and grammatical prowess, (he’s probably tutting at my misuse), his ability to understand complex issues then explain them in accessible ways to others, his love of books and the warmth of his friendship.

The sector we love, and which Paul loved, is so very much the better for having him amongst us.

I, like many in the sector and beyond, will miss him enormously.”

Scott Parkin FIEP said; “I will remember Paul as a self-effacing, humble and down to earth man who was wholeheartedly committed to getting the job done well with a focus on the people who were being supported. He was always there to listen, even if my ideas were less well developed than they should be because he cared about doing things right. The IEP were delighted when he became part of our Fellowship, only very recently in February. He will be greatly missed and on behalf of the IEP I offer my sincere condolences to his family and everyone who knew him.”

There is a virtual ‘Book of Condolences’ available for anyone who knew Paul to leave their thoughts and reflections. This can be found here <https://tolbc.com/PaulHughes>

In memory of Paul his family are raising funds for The Aortic Dissection Charitable Trust. You can find a link to their Just Giving page here <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/paulhughesllanidloes>

Confessions of an Ageist



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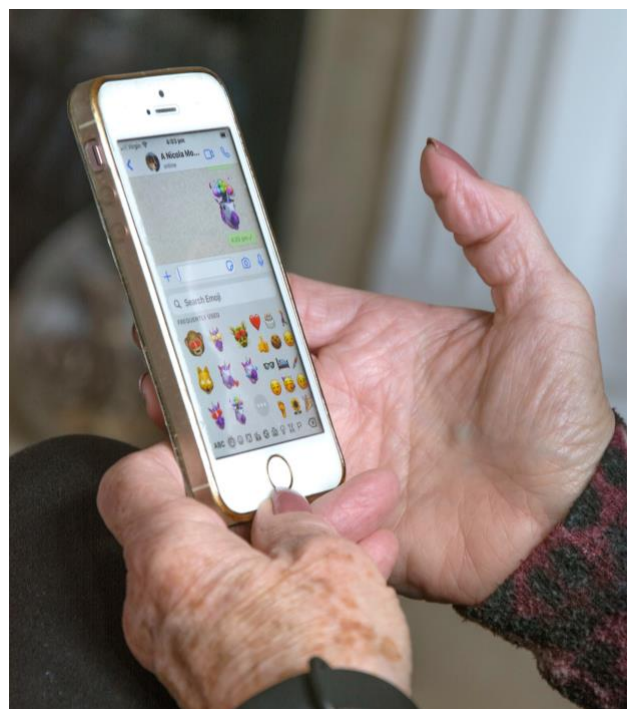
This is hard to admit, but I think I may be an ageist. Before you get all judgey – yes, I almost hear the gasps of disbelief and see the raised eyebrows as I type this - please give me a chance to explain. This is something I have given a lot of thought to and I would like to share my reasoning with you, you may even begin to see some wisdom behind it. Before we jump into why I may or may not be ageist, first a little back story.

I am an initial engagement adviser on the JETS programme. Like most people, I like to think that I am a decent human being. I don't litter, I am a good citizen, I am empathetic and respectful and I treat people the way I would like to be treated. I love my job, and the role I play in supporting people back into employment. Plus, and this is a big one, I never jump the queue no matter what kind of hurry I am in. See, I'm a good person, right? Thought so.

But here's the thing, in our mind's eye, most of us view ourselves to be consistently and unfailingly fair, more considerate, smarter or at the very least, more logical than we actually are. The ugly truth is that we all have unconscious biases that cloud our judgement and make us a little presumptuous or prejudiced every now and then.

When I took the IEP course 'Supporting Over 50's', I thought I would breeze through it. As an

individual from a minority group, I knew first-hand the importance of treating people fairly and not making silly generalisations and assumptions. But as I read through the material and watched the videos, it gave me pause for thought. I realised that I had committed the first no-no in the fairness and equality rule book. I'd assumed I knew more than I did about the challenges faced by the over 50's seeking employment. I mean, it doesn't take a genius to know that most employers prefer to invest in a younger work force, that experience brought by more employees is often undervalued, that





“I’d assumed I knew more than I did about the challenges faced by the 50’s seeking employment.”

mature employees are easier to retain or that being older does not mean lacking in creativity or innovation.

What surprised me was that I was unaware that I had been stereotyping as I had bought into the myth that older people can’t use technology. I received a rude awakening while I was on a call with a participant in his 60’s. I was using my computer’s audio as my headphones weren’t working. I asked the participant if he had any digital skills. In my defence, this is a standard question. He replied that he’d like to think so. As you can imagine, I wasn’t sure what that meant exactly so I asked him to expand on that. The gentleman sighed and said, “For starters, I can tell that you are using a (something I can’t recall) type of keyboard.” He asked me what kind of computer I was using. I thought I’d humour him. When I responded he went on to give me a brief product overview of my computer, common issues that spring up when the device starts to get old and recommended a headset for me to invest in.

I did not see that coming! I was glad it was a virtual meeting as I got the sense that he was laughing at me and I, certainly did NOT want him to see me picking my jaw up off the desk.

What a stark difference to my next call where I had a 20-something year old who had an iPhone but was struggling to attach his CV and email it to me. Needless to say, myth busted!

So, after realising my faux pas, I decided to wake up and pay more attention to my unconscious biases, the impact society and

the media has on over 50’s seeking employment and the possible solutions out there. That’s when the idea came to me. What if, we had a programme like JETS, but with a for-us-by-us type model. Us being the over 50’s, of course.

Stay with me here. JETS is a fantastic programme, and it has helped thousands of people back into work. And this doesn’t just include the participants registered on the provision, but the numerous people like me who were hired to work on the programme itself. The digital coaches, customer service team, the employment advisers, the team leaders, the account managers, regional leaders, support staff - scores of people that make up the backbone of the initiative. Now imagine a programme like that, only in this case, when putting together the team, priority would be given to the 50’s.

An initiative like this would accomplish two things; first, the entire layout of the project would be specifically targeted at individuals who are over 50. The interventions, the support, the jobs, the network delivery partners. The second thing is that would provide a powerful unique selling point. Can you imagine the difference it would make to a 62-year-old, when they hear that most of the people working on the programme are over 50? That a workforce of X number of people working to support 50’s back into employment are all over 50 as well? Now imagine that 62-year-old hearing that from someone very close to their age!

That is a powerful message!

In business we are taught that people buy from people, not companies. That the back story matters. Think about it, are you more likely to invest in a weight loss plan from someone who used to be overweight or from someone who has been fit their entire lives? Of course, you’d go with the person who battled with weight loss. That is because, that person understands your

“We all have unconscious biases that cloud our judgement and make us a little presumptuous or prejudiced every now and again.”

challenges and your pain on a personal level, has lived through it and come out on the other end. That creates instant rapport, hope and motivation. And for people who are told by society that they have very little to contribute, hope and motivation are powerful and necessary!

Brilliant plan! I thought. I was quite pleased with myself, until I realised that - oops, I've done it again. My brilliant idea is somewhat ageist. I imagined how the wordings on the job descriptions for roles on the scheme would be tailored to discourage under 50's from applying for the roles. Isn't that reverse discrimination? What about the strengths and skills that young people can contribute to the initiative?

Then I thought, why not have apprenticeship roles within the programme for 18–25-year-olds. Think about it, what better way to build a work force of future recruiters and employers who are aware of

the value of the over 50's as well as the challenges they face when looking for employment, than to have future recruiters and employers working for and alongside the over 50's?

While I strongly believe that people should be hired based on their skillset, experience and drive, and not their personal attributes, in this case, I am okay with it.

So, tell me what you think of my big idea? Could it work? Should it? Or is it still too ageist?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maryam Bello-Tukur AIEP | Initial Engagement Adviser on JETS | Shaw Trust





Maryam is an Initial Engagement Adviser on the JETS programme at Shaw Trust. She also runs her own business, Be W.O.M.A.N.E.S.T. to provide life coaching, clinical hypnotherapy and personal development courses specifically tailored for women.



100 years of disability employment support – are we there yet?



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Well, almost 100 years – that is how long MTIB or The Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind has been around as we look forward to our centenary year next year. A lot has changed in that time but in terms of attitude towards employing disabled people, has it really?

MTIB was founded at a time where there were people returning from WW1 who were blind and unable to work in traditional roles. There was also a lot of industrial blindness from people being injured in the local mines. As a result, the local community came together and started to take 'pit head collections'; each family would give a small amount from their earnings to help those who struggled. This collective approach reflects the community spirit in those days which still exist in the Valleys of Wales today.

From these early collections in the 1920's, MTIB grew as a charity and led by example by offering employment opportunities to blind and partially sighted local people. However, the overall need for support was greater than this initial small group of people and as times went on we started to support people with all disabilities and health conditions, resulting in the pan-disability organisation we are today.

With the word Institute in our name, we were often seen as something negative as views changed but, we have helped thousands of people into work across South Wales. Not many people know

about us because we don't shout about it, to us it is just what we do.

In the 20 years that I have been with the organisation we have delivered a wide range of Employability and Training contracts, for central government and DWP, for local councils and pilot projects and European Funded projects. We have always been successful, and many ask us why. It is hard to answer that, but I think it is because we care and our staff are passionate about what we do. We don't look at a person and think about what they can't do, we try to see what they can do. And we try to get other employers to do the same.

It isn't rocket science, it is just about finding the best person for the job and to see beyond a disability and to look for potential, attitude and the best fit. And time – time to engage with the individual we support, time to get to know them and for them to get to know us so that we can help them. We offer empathy and support, not sympathy, and we do not do things to people – we help them achieve their goals, aspiration and potential.

As an organisation we have seen many changes over the years; to funding, to our own organisation and the world around us. Who would have imagined just over 2 years ago that a pandemic was just around the corner? What remains is the need to help people, it is as

“Innovation isn’t all about new, shiny or digital. To us it is stripping back and looking at what needs to get done and how we can support our customers in the best way.”

basic as that. We not only help people into work, but we also help people find independence, friends, improve health and wellbeing because work is actually good for you.

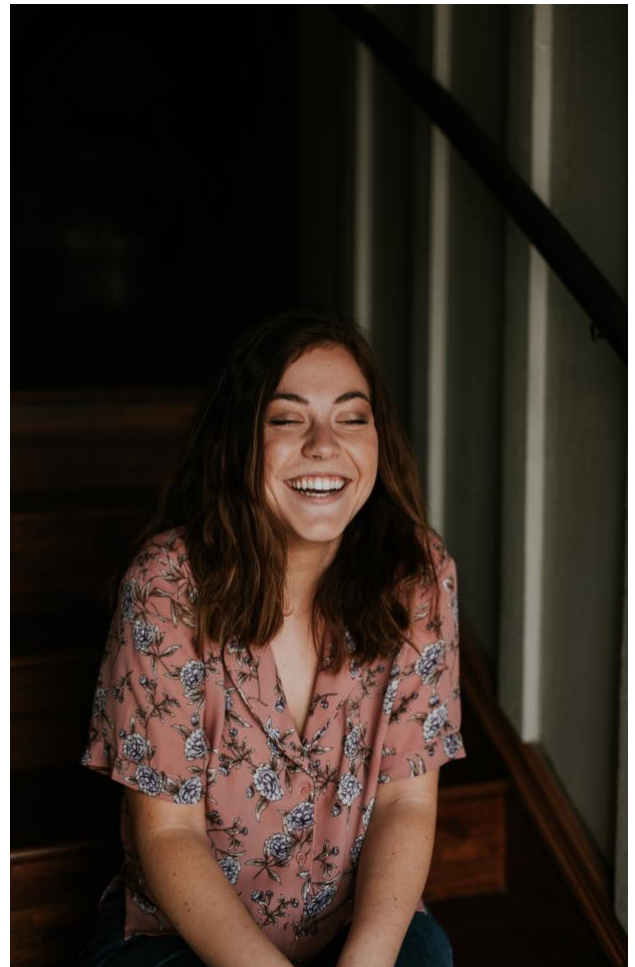
Our services have varied massively over the years but as an organisation we continue to support those who are disadvantaged or have a disability to move closer to or into employment. The government focus has changed, from older workers, carers, youngsters and disabled people but there will always be those who need some additional help – being unemployed creates barriers that sometimes we need help to solve. Finding innovative ways of working and keeping up with the times is how we make it work. We support and encourage our staff, constantly reinforcing that we can’t help others if we don’t look after our own.

Innovation isn’t all about new, shiny or digital. To us it is stripping back and looking at what needs to get done and how we can support our customers in the best way. This hasn’t changed much over the years as our focus remains personalised, flexible and holistic. It is only the badge, the name of the contract or project that change – and all the work we need to do to evidence it on new systems, databases etc.

Now we are delivering the mainstream programme Restart and have found that many customers on this programme have similar barriers to those who come to us on disability programmes. Being out of work is a barrier itself, with many struggling with poor mental health, low confidence and a lack of skills of how to look for work. For those with the

additional barrier of a disability, finding work today is even harder and that has not changed. What we can offer as a small employer is that personal touch and job matching. As we get to know a person, we understand what type of environment they would do best in, not only the job. We then link this in with what our employers need and expect from their staff and by matching these expectations we create job matches. This approach takes a little more time and effort but the outcomes, for the individual and ultimately for us, are much better.

The most marginalised of our customers are still those with sight loss and we were very excited to recently start a new project for those with sight and / or hearing loss. This project, JobSense, brings MTIB full circle back to our beginnings in the 1920’s.



“Just because the number of people with sight and hearing loss is small and they may need intensive support doesn’t mean that they are less valuable as an employee.”

It is a small group of people who we are supporting and their support needs are very different.

Just because the number of people with sight and hearing loss is small and they may need intensive support, doesn’t mean that they are less valuable as an employee.

MTIB ourselves recognise this and are proud to have employed someone who is blind to help us deliver this project. Her lived experience and her ability to engage with our customers and with our other staff who have faced the same barriers is invaluable.

However, this intensive support costs money and in a sector where funds are ever reducing, this investment sometimes seems out of reach. We hope that we can show the need for this support and the impact it can have on people’s lives.

Our customers are not just numbers and outcomes, they are real people who all deserve a chance. Time is money and when our funding is cut, so is the time we get to spend with each of our customers. This is an ongoing battle but realistically, can high quality services be delivered cheaply? Until this is recognised by DWP and other funders we continue to battle and advocate for our services and customers.

So, I guess we aren’t there yet. But we are working at it, and I think that helping people will always be needed. With our passionate, skilled and experienced staff who many



themselves have a disability or health condition; we are certainly on the way.

One way of supporting others on this journey is our involvement in the Disability Confident Scheme. This government initiative is encouraging employers to employ and retain staff with additional needs and allows them to be accredited for this. The scheme’s 3 levels, Committed, Employer and Leader, ensures that any employer can sign up and can be recognised for the work they do.

MTIB has supported a wide range of employers to sign up to the scheme and reach both Employer and Leader status. For us, this is one way of capacity building and spreading the message that employing a diverse workforce is a benefit to all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Petra Kennedy MIEP | Deputy Chief Executive Officer | MTIB

Petra is Deputy Chief Executive Officer at Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind who are an established charity and has provided training, development and employment opportunities for disabled and disadvantaged people to gain and sustain employment since 1923. Petra also represents MTIB at various forums such as BASE, WG Disabled People’s Employment Working Group and the Wales ATW forum.

Mental health and the talent pool you need to show you are including



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In 2017 I was asked to do a speech representing my employer at a disability confident event in London. Lots of big branded employers and public sector bodies were there who wanted to know about how we had utilised the “charter” of disability confident employers to engage and create opportunities for participants with a disability.

I couldn't find my speech when thinking about this article but, I do recollect it being a lot about physical disability and how employers can access support for changes to the workplace by working with great organisations such as Clarion. A big part was about how my team had worked with Sainsbury's to support a deaf man to gain his first role since leaving university by making reasonable adjustments for him to thrive in a store assistant role in London. I spoke about funding access and tapping into this talent pool. I didn't and was not asked or prompted to mention mental health disabilities, not out of a reason to avoid the subject, but it just felt out of place to discuss even at such an event.

I work with organisations across all aspects of the talent acquisition process. Talking about accommodation for candidates at interview stage is thankfully now the norm and a great talk to have with employers who, if new to the concept, are open to receiving advice and guidance.

It is, after all, to their benefit both from a candidate attraction and acquisition point of view, but also to underline their commitment to inclusion and diversity. It is, however, still an area that needs a lot of consultation.

When most organisations' succession planning around staff is so poor that they have multiple vacancies that needed filling a week last Tuesday; adding this layer to the process is not factored into expectation. I was recently working on a senior role for a training provider where one of the shortlisted candidates asked for accommodation to be made prior to the final face-to-face meeting due to a reasonable adjustment being made for their disability. The training provider agreed to bring on board a consultant from a charitable organisation to guide them through the adjustments and have now made this part of their recruitment process across the group and will be working with that consultant and charity moving forward.

So, what is it like as a candidate...

For those with disabilities, the question of whether or not to disclose a condition to an employer, if at all, can be a tricky one. For neurominorities, conditions are generally less visible and so, in theory, can be concealed long term in order to protect from stigma and

“For those with disabilities, the question of whether or not to disclose a condition to an employer, if at all, can be a tricky one.”

discrimination. The problem with masking such conditions, however, is that it leads to heightened anxiety and pressure, as well as preventing a person from getting the workplace accommodations and adjustments they may need to work at their best.

I want to look at how employers can address these problems in order to ensure they are not missing out on this fantastic talent pool.

The Recruitment Stage is where inclusion should start!

I think the single most difficult decision for a neurominority to make when looking for a job, is whether to disclose their condition at the early part of the process, at application and/or interview stage. We all know that disability is a protected category, but when it comes to employment discrimination, it is difficult to prove that you have been discriminated against when you have been turned down for a job.

Since a candidate knows very little about the colleagues they will be working with at this point in the process, it may feel like a huge risk to make themselves vulnerable at such an early stage, particularly if they have been searching for work for a long period of time or work in a highly competitive skill zone. On the other hand, not disclosing can make it harder to bring up later. As a result of this dilemma many people struggle in jobs, without disability adjustments that would make their life easier; not knowing how to bring it up as it may be perceived as subterfuge.

One great way to showcase to disabled candidates that you welcome their application is to become a disability confident employer. This cannot simply be a tick box exercise: your business must live this top to bottom as part of your culture. Beyond signing up, a business needs to implement inclusive policies, take a firm line on ableism amongst employees, and let it be known to people at recruitment stage that you walk the walk when it comes to your disability confident status. One way to do this, is to offer accommodations at interviews, and demonstrate your knowledge and ability to facilitate this, should someone take you up on that offer.

Inclusion Competence

Recently, I heard a story about a candidate who had been offered an adjustment at an interview for their neurodiverse condition, but the adjustment given was not relevant and did not help. For example, simply allowing extra time to complete a proficiency test will not be helpful to someone dealing with sensory overload in the noisy, brightly lit space you have provided. Similarly, providing a quiet space with natural light will not be of help to someone who cannot read the text because of the font and background colour your company has used.



“By offering this support to all candidates and delivering competently you can send a clear signal that you are genuinely inclusive rather than just trying to tick the diversity box.”

A stronger approach would be to offer options and invite conversation if the options you've provided don't meet a candidate's needs. If this process is new to your existing recruitment process, bringing in a neurodiversity specialist to consult is a good idea because you cannot expect the candidate themselves to anticipate every adjustment they may need. By offering this support to all candidates and delivering competently you can send a clear signal that you are genuinely inclusive rather than just trying to tick the diversity box.

Identifying and then addressing unconscious bias

On top of the practical support, it is also important to think about how you respond when a candidate does choose to be open with you. They may decide to fully divulge their condition, in fact these days many feel more confident to pitch their neurodiversity as an asset, and a perfect example of this can be read here by Catherine Bean of the Office of National Statistics <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace> .

How you or your business reacts can still send the wrong message. When trying to decide if your business is a good fit, ableist terms used in or out of context can be a red flag to a disabled candidate. Comments like “you don't look Autistic” or “I can't believe you are dyslexic, your application was so good” may be well intentioned, but the subtle implications of such statements suggests that you think of these conditions negatively. It is also not helpful to compare applicants to other people you may know with the same condition. These things may seem minor or trivial but, keep in mind that disabled people are

fine tuned to notice when they are being othered or belittled, and will not be keen to take a risk on a workplace if this has been their first impression.

Educating your team on these types of unconscious bias will help them to understand what is and is not appropriate to say. Beyond awareness training, it is important to build an open atmosphere where a disabled employee can offer correction within a safe inclusive environment.

There are some fantastic resources on the CIPD website <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/neurodiversity-work>

No one owes you their diagnosis if it is going to affect their chances. It is on employers to create a safe space and then watch their team flourish. You'll know you're getting it right when people feel safe to disclose their condition at work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR




**Stuart Duffey FIEP | Director |
Coyne Recruitment**

Stuart is a Specialist Recruiter and Talent expert within the UK Skills and Employability marketplace. Stuart has unrivalled network of leaders and influencers across these vital sectors. He consults and drives solutions on career management, development as well as personal growth and talent succession planning. He is a Fellow of the IEP and Director of Coyne Recruitment. Coyne Recruitment partner with people and organisations to offer specialisms in Recruitment, Coaching, Assessment, Training, Consultancy & Service Delivery Design.

Taking a fresh approach to finding the right candidate



Diane Lightfoot
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We are in the middle of a recruitment crisis. [Recent research from the British Chamber of Commerce](#) shows that all levels of businesses are facing issues in filling vacancies. Yet, at the same time, the number of people in employment, who identify as having a disability, remains low. [According to the latest Government figures](#), only 52.7 per cent of disabled people are in employment compared with 81.0 per cent of non-disabled people.

Disability employment

Something here doesn't add up. Why are disabled people not benefitting more from this time of full employment? This is one of the issues that we have been pondering at Business Disability Forum and it is not a new issue.

Over the last decade, the percentage of disabled people in employment has remained stubbornly stagnant, regardless of how general employment figures have ebbed and flowed. There have been shifts in the right direction and we could question whether the way the data is captured is part of the issue – many disabled people do not identify as having a disability, for example. But the fact remains, that far too many disabled people who want to work cannot find paid employment.

We know that the factors which affect disability employment are multiple and complex. Societal attitudes to disability, workplace cultures, the availability of employment support, inaccessible transport systems and lack of awareness of the support that is available are but some of the contributors. Business Disability Forum works with its members to increase understanding and to bring about change in all of these areas. But what about something simple and tangible, which could have an immediate effect?

Barriers around traditional interviews

We know that many disabled people – as well as many non-disabled people – find traditional panel interviews difficult to navigate. They may experience extreme and exacerbated anxiety at interviews, difficulty in interpreting complex or ambiguous questions, or have a condition that affects communication such as a stammer - often more pronounced in high-pressure situations - or difficulty making eye contact.

As such, traditional interviews can be a significant barrier, preventing someone, who in every other way, may be the “best” candidate, from securing the role. The result is that both the individual and the employer miss out.

“We know that many disabled people – as well as many non-disabled people – find traditional panel interviews difficult to navigate.”

Under the Equality Act, a work trial or placement or working interview are all reasonable adjustments for a candidate who might struggle with or be disadvantaged by a traditional panel interview.

Best practice includes asking every candidate what adjustments they need at every stage of the recruitment or application process: “how can we make this the best possible experience for you?”. But how about employers going a step further, ripping up tradition, and creating a recruitment experience which allows every candidate to show what they can do, rather than just talking about it?

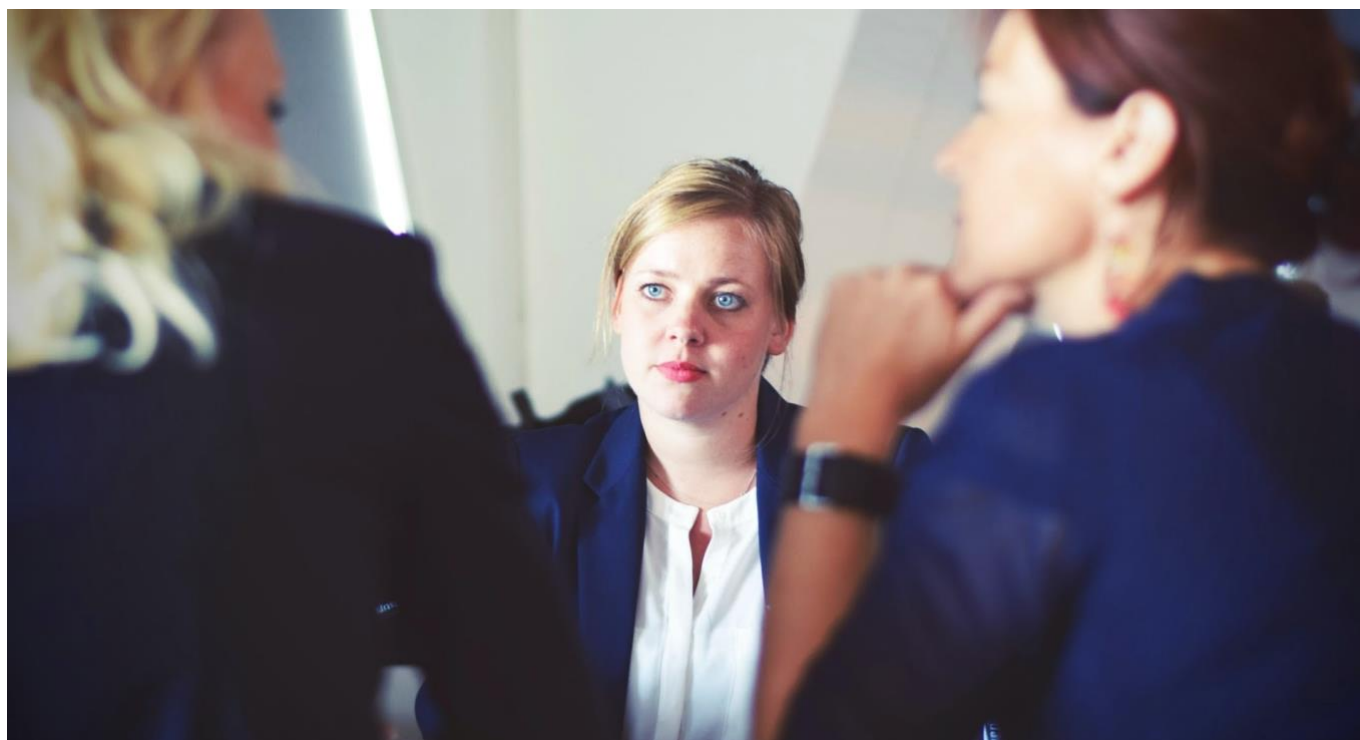
Work trials

Traditional panel interviews show you how good someone is at... panel interviews! That sounds (and is) a bit glib but more seriously, if the skills you need for a job are to be able to sell yourself

(or your company), to build rapport with strangers quickly and to respond to questions on the spot in an intense environment, then a panel interview may be a great test. But if the employer is recruiting to a technical or other skills-based role (construction, manufacturing, care and hospitality all spring to mind here – and they are all industries experiencing record skills shortages) then actually asking someone to show you how they would do the job – a work trial or working interview – is a much better test than asking them to tell you about it.

Let’s take the football transfer season as an analogy – an example which I have stolen from friend, and esteemed disability consultant, Phil Friend. A club will pay multi-million sums for a player purely based on watching their performance for a season (or more). There is no panel interview for that.

An example closer to the ground (in this case literally): if you were recruiting a bricklayer, would you look at examples of previous work and then ask your preferred candidate to show you how they build a wall? Or would you interview them? “Tell me about the best wall you’ve ever built and why you are proud of it.”



“A work trial or working interview – is a much better test than asking them to tell you about it.”

Followed by, “tell me about a time when a wall you were building went wrong. How did you put things right and what did you learn from it?” I think you get my point.

I mention bricklaying specifically as construction is an industry currently experiencing record skills shortages and which might – with some small tweaks to the recruitment process – be a great career choice for disabled people.

Getting the best candidate

Shifting to a work trial or similar could make a dramatic difference in the interview experience for both candidates and recruiters. Yet the vast majority of employers do not use them. Why? First and foremost, I believe this is due to a lack of awareness that this is a legal and reasonable alternative.

Second, I think is fear of change. How do we know that we will get the best candidate when we’ve relied on this tried and trusted method for so long? To this fear I would say, work trials do not mean the absence of a conversation. Rather they include a conversation that takes place within the actual environment of the job that someone will be doing. A meeting, for example.

Third, is that it can be difficult. To unpick the process and the HR machine for an organisation of any size is a huge task. Therefore we are suggesting to employers that they begin small with one business area or team and see how they get on – and who they recruit as a result.

We would welcome the views of IEP members on how we can replace traditional recruitment processes with a more ‘show me’ culture. We believe that this is a move that could benefit everyone – candidate and employer alike.

At the end of the day, the best candidate is the one who can ‘do’ the job, not the one who can ‘talk about doing’ the job. I can talk about football. On a good day I can even explain the offside rule without the use of a cruet set. But I don’t think any Premier League club will be signing me up anytime soon, and for very good reason.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Lightfoot | Chief Executive Officer | Business Disability Forum

Diane is Chief Executive at Business Disability Forum and has over 20 years’ experience of working in the charity sector with 15 years’ direct experience of working in the disability field.



Diane is passionate about the role that good work has in transforming people’s lives. Business Disability Forum is a not-for-profit membership organisation that supports businesses of all shapes, sizes and sectors to recruit and retain disabled employees and to serve disabled customers.

Business Disability Forum’s 300 members employ around 15% of the UK workforce and c. 8 million people globally. They range from FTSE 100 companies and central Government departments to transport providers, construction companies, retailers, higher education providers and public services.

IEP Journal Interview: Grant Neems FIEP



Grant Neems FIEP
Director of Employer Services
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IEPJ: Tell us a little about your role.

I am currently the Director of Employer Services for Ingeus UK, heading up our Employer Services Team which builds long-term relationships with employers across the Ingeus Group. I also sit on the DWP Professional Advisory Group for the Disability Confident Scheme for which I complete regular validations from Disability Confident Employer to Leader status as well as supporting other employer through all stages of the scheme.

IEPJ: Why was Employability the right career for you?


It's my own story that leads me to my focus on disability. I entered the sector having worked in recruitment. I was a semi-professional rugby player, but by my mid-thirties I was suffering from osteo-arthritis leading to multiple operations. This led to unemployment for nearly three years. But I've always loved working, having responsibility for my family, and my Disability Employment Adviser, Isobel Rossiter, referred me to West Country Training and Consultancy Services (WCTS). Their fantastic Employment Advisers, Gill Buff and Jenny Sandy suggested volunteering for her making sales calls to employers, to find vacancies. It went

really well, and I was employed by WCTS as an adviser and in due course was made regional manager. I always look back to those two people: how wonderful they were and how different things could have been if they weren't. I've also spent time managing National Careers Service Contracts; that gave me an element of careers advice, training and adult education aspects of employability. Part of that was working in prisons helping inmates towards paths that reduce reoffending and support their recovery.

I always think, if I can make a difference and give the best possible service, then people can get the opportunities that I had.

IEPJ: How do you do it well?

If you're not passionate about it, then I don't think you can deliver as well as you must. I am a passionate person about what I do, as anyone who has worked with me will tell you! Passion, understanding, having a non-judgemental approach. And being dogged and determined in this target-driven environment: I talk about performance because it is about people, going into employment, about lives changed. That performance translates into financial performance: it's crucial not to lose sight of that.



“I believe that everybody should work, regardless of any disability or barrier they may have. Everybody has the right to be employed, and they should be.”

IEPJ: Given the passion and commitment, what makes the difference between a good-enough and an outstanding service?

You have to understand people’s circumstances, and to be non-judgmental, but you also need to be able to influence, to hold a mirror up to your participant to show them where they are and where they could possibly be and convince them that they are capable. You’re there to help them, to offer a service, and if they don’t want that service, then there are plenty of people that really do.

It’s similar with employers: you’re influencing and impacting on their decisions about future possibilities; but they need to be on board and understand their responsibilities.

The Disability Confident Scheme is about informing and educating employers when they are making opportunities for people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. And about being more inclusive around how they operate culturally.

IEPJ: When you look at people who seem to have disadvantages, some do well, others less so. What is it that constitutes disadvantage?

Well, if you’re categorised as disabled, or challenged, you don’t see it yourself, you either want to work, or you don’t. The underlying element is that the individual themselves wants to work. With that

motivation, regardless of the disadvantage or the barrier, you will get those individuals employed. You might be restricted as to the type of work, but it’s working to what you can do and not what you can’t. That’s essentially what we must do. We must overcome the barriers.

I believe that everybody should work, regardless of any disability or barrier they may have. Everybody has the right to be employed, and they should be. Everybody should have the opportunity for work. It upsets me that there are five times more people without disabilities employed than disabled people. That’s wrong and we must change those numbers. We must create opportunities for the right jobs for the right people. And being realistic about what possibilities there are, working hard and getting ahead leads to being more positive and socially and personally content.

IEPJ: The employment rates of disabled people haven’t changed much over the decades, so what do we need to do better?

We’ve done better in the five years of Disability Confident. We’ve attracted more than 20,000 employers into the scheme, and we’ve got nearly 1 million people into employment. And it’s the goal of the scheme to get a million more into employment. But the key things is that there are 11 million employees that work for a Disability Confident employer. So, I agree it’s not fast enough, but it is happening, and with that many people influenced, I am confident that the momentum will gather. It’s about developing a culture. About equality and human rights and change, overcoming stigma associated with disability. Our bit around employability is a small but important part of the disability movement.

“Programmes will come and go; unemployment will rise and fall but there will always be a group of people that need additional opportunities.”

IEPJ: What changes do you think would make employability services more effective?

A big part of the Disability Confident Scheme is talking to employers about reasonable adjustments. And it's often a simple thing to do; it's a reasonable adjustment to create an opportunity. Front line advisers – and all of us - can treat people with disabilities the same as anyone else.

There have been so many changes in the last 5 years, around Mental Health awareness, Health and Well-being, equality, fights against racism and bigotry. Disability falls into the whole diversity and inclusion realm. So, as well as people having their own common decency, and not being racist or bigoted, in our sector we need to make sure that there is ongoing education around disability matters, with the passion and responsibility, to create opportunities for the person that sits in front of you and wants your support.

The IEP and Ingeus are currently working on a training and qualification course for Employer Services and promoting Disability Confident and being proficient in discussing inclusive recruitment with employers will be an important part of this learning.

We are a people sector – it's what we do. And there's always that element of 'we must do the right thing' and be passionate about helping people in whatever form our services take.

In our current marketplace, with Restart, huge investment from government and a fantastic response over the last two years, we've learned that there are so many ways we can deliver our services, as well as the good old face-to-face.

Programmes will come and go; unemployment will rise and fall but there will always be a group of people that need additional opportunities. We must remain aware of those needs, and not lose them in the bigger programme. And I am incredibly proud of what our sector has done in the last 10 years to help disadvantaged people to thousands of opportunities.

I think we all should be proud of what we do. We must keep making the difference. As managers and senior people in our sector, it's our responsibility to pass the baton and make sure there's always provision to meet the social need.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grant Neems FIEP | Director of Employer Services | Ingeus UK

Grant has 15 years' experience within the Employability and Adult Education sectors. Experienced in all aspects of Leadership and Management of multiple contracts including Contract Implementation, Business Strategy and Performance Management both in direct delivery and supply chain management environments. Grant has successfully implemented and delivered programs such as Pathways to Work, New Deal programs, Progress to Work, Work Program throughout London and the National Careers Service in London and the South West of England. and more recently the Work and Health Programme and the Restart Scheme.

Grant is also a Fellow of the IEP.



Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Levelling Up: How can it be actioned for greatest affect?

With talks of widespread devolution and the welcomed recognition of skills training in socio-economic development, the Levelling Up White Paper offered an optimistic view on the growth of equal opportunities throughout the UK.

While it's clear that skills are being prioritised in the Government's agenda, 'Levelling Up' must now create real action and avoid becoming the latest slogan for more unmet promises.

As new initiatives through Bootcamps and Multiply, as well as a boost to traineeships show positive steps towards this, there is a lack of wider action on some key areas. An effective 'Levelling Up' programme must have a full sector approach, with Maths, English, Sustainability, Digital, Employability and META skills fundamental in providing the individual functional skills development to truly "level up".

The move to devolution and greater local control is encouraging, opening more suitable upskilling opportunities within the local area. Government bootcamp initiatives, providing targeted skills training and subsequent guaranteed interviewing offer a great resource in this, with The Skills Network now providing bootcamps training in the West Midlands and East of England to upskill and develop in key skills areas.

Talks on a new digital education service is positive and represents the power of online learning and support, offering high quality digital learning experiences through the most accessible means.

While Levelling Up is a step in the right direction, action is key, and the education and employability

industry must work to ensure skills and employment opportunities are delivered in the best way for the individual. To do this we need more collaboration and a full sector approach – how best can we work together to ensure that we Level Up to the delivery of this agenda?

Sian Wilson FIEP | Executive Director – Commercial | The Skills Network

Dear Editor,

Employment service reform is all the rage in Sweden. Inspired by both Australia and the UK the Swedish government is currently undertaking a major reform of its employability measures and outsourcing its main employment service to private providers. The reform has been going through a trial phase where a new employment service program is being tested and evaluated. Although Sweden has a relatively strong labour market, its Achilles heel remains service design and delivery to tackle multiple barriers, linking health and employability and the integration of migrants. So far, the results from the trials are looking promising, and the final reform program is expected to be launched by the end of 2022.

This is not the first time that Sweden has outsourced parts of its employment services to the provider market. This has been ongoing since 2008, but with varying degree of ambition and success. The current reform was solely based on a political necessity as the current social democratic government needed the support of two liberal parties to form a government. The employment service reform became one of many main bargaining chips which secured the liberal support for a social democratic government. Sometimes political necessity is the best way to make good things happen.

By outsourcing its employment service program, more than 40% of jobseekers will be serviced by

employability professionals at provider companies instead of the Swedish Public Employment Service. This is not only a massive change in the way jobseekers will interact with the Swedish welfare system, but a huge change for the employment service industry which needs to attract more employability professionals as well as taking the main responsibility for developing the methodology of employment services in general.

As the industry has led a dwindling existence during many years, the role of the employability professional has been something left to the Public Employment Service to define in their tender documents. Procurement specialists often taking the easy way out by requiring university degrees in HR-related areas. As reform is nearing completion, both the government and the employment service industry are beginning to see the value in defining the role of the employability professional as well as making the career an attractive proposition to the right candidates.

In May 2022, the Swedish employment service industry will invite Scott Parkin FIEP to a conference where he will explain how the role of the employability professional has emerged in the UK and what lessons Sweden can learn. He will be joined on stage by the Director General of the Swedish Public Employment Service as well as the Chairman of Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees for a discussion.

I look forward to the discussion and will hopefully be able to share a video of the discussion with members of the IEP who will not attend the Swedish conference in May.

Björn Elmqvist MIEP | Partner | Werket AB

Dear Editor,

Construction and wider Built Environment needs your help

The UK needs to build, yet there aren't enough qualified and experienced workers, and the existing workforce is not inclusive, nor representative of local communities or wider UK society. This is exacerbating exclusion!

The statistics are alarming, with under 2% of women working in the trades, 5.4% Black Asian and Minority Ethnic workers, 22% of the current workforce over 50 and 15% in their 60s, and only 12% of those working in construction aged between 16-24. In contrast, 79% of construction businesses are struggling to recruit staff, with output expected to grow at an average rate of 4.4% across 2021-2025, meaning that construction will need to recruit an extra 217,000 workers, or over 43,000 per year*.

The sector offers a huge range of interesting and sustainable career opportunities, but apprenticeship places remain hard to fill. Whilst there is a lot of activity that showcases the sector to schools and colleges, they need to be more joined-up, so that the sector can operate in a more efficient, strategic and targeted way.

Why is it that more young people from diverse backgrounds do not choose a career within the Built Environment? Schools' engagement, for example, reaches nowhere near the full number of 3,456 secondary schools in England, with a great deal of activity delivered, but independently and not holistically; anecdotally the largest programmes that we are aware of reach just 100 schools. This doesn't make sense when you consider the huge industry across the country 'building back better' in large conurbations and rural areas. The race to increase housing alone has put a strain on already stretched resources.

Building People is collaborating with stakeholders across the Built Environment to achieve a more diverse, inclusive and equitable industry. It is by creating strong digital and human connections between local supply and demand, connecting all areas of the built environment to resources, job vacancies, events and organisations to support

under-represented individuals into a career within this sector. Consequently, significantly addressing the lack of diversity and the challenge of skills shortages.

Building People CIC is a UK social enterprise, founded in 2017 to tackle the lack of equality, diversity and inclusion across the built environment sector. If you are interested in more information or if you are working within diverse local communities, please Contact: Teresa Scott OBE (teresa@buildingpeople.org.uk) or Rebecca Lovelace (rebecca.lovelace@buildingpeople.org.uk)

Teresa Scott FIEP OBE | Managing Director | Building People CIC

Dear Editor

“Is there a need for a Standard that supports the provision of high-quality information, advice and guidance and enables continuous improvement?”

I must confess I've got a vested interest in this as my role is Head of Service for the matrix Standard and have 30 years' assessment experience, but I will remain open minded, listen, learn, and hopefully better support the Employability Sector. For those of you that have not heard about the matrix Standard it is the Department for Education's Standard for information, advice, and guidance services. The service is delivered by the Growth Company on their behalf, and it is an umbrella standard, meaning that can be applied in any setting such as careers, money advice, health, employability and education.

Whilst its roots have been education - would you accept that service users or customers in the employability sector should consistently receive high quality information, advice and guidance? Would you also agree that if we have a consistent framework to quality assure this and introduce good practice from elsewhere it will add value?

The current version of the Standard is 10 years old, and we are working with the IEP and others to modernise it. Scott Parkin FIEP of the IEP is represented on the Executive Group which is overseeing the review of the Standard and has supported us carry out an extensive literature review to identify best practice.

The literature review was carried out by David Imber FIEP of The Good Employability Company, whom many of you know. A total 317 studies were examined of which 189 studies were included in the review. So, it's a significant piece of work, that the employability sector should be aware of.

Fundamentally what we learnt from this literature review was that the current matrix Standard still reflected good practice which can be applied in any setting including employability. IEP and David Imber also pointed us in the direction of making further improvements to the Standard to make it even better. This included many points such as:

- Ensuring the standard better reflects the cycle of continuous improvement
- Highlighting the importance of strong ethical values
- Increasing the focus on the delivery aspects, such as establishing the service user's goals
- Working toward parity of outcomes for different client groups
- Establishing a strong evidence base that supports delivery
- Better valuing the role of the adviser
- Showing how leadership supports the whole process.

It's difficult to give justice to such a significant report in a list of bullet points, but If you want to find out more about the literature review - click here [Understanding the matrix Standard Review](#)

I know the IEP is equally passionate about professional standards and given their focus on this and ours on organisational service standards I believe we can make a

significant difference by continuing to work together.

In addition to some of the questions I have posed above, please contact me regarding anything in this letter and any ideas you have about how the IEP and the matrix Standard could collaborate going forward.

**Roger Chapman MIEP | Head of Service |
The Growth Company**

Dear Editor

Good Green Jobs

The creation of, and access to, good quality green jobs was already central to the Government's long-term priorities for achieving Net Zero by 2050. With the challenges we are facing in 2022, these priorities have never been more important than now.

In its flagship Levelling Up White Paper, our government set out its ambitions for transforming the UK, reducing the economic and social imbalances between different geographic areas and parts of society. Levelling up the country aims to spread opportunity and prosperity for all, rather than just some of us.

But this levelling up vision – with policy changes that make a difference to people's lives – is not keeping pace with the challenges many of us are now facing, with soaring energy prices and the cost-of-living crisis. Challenges that are set to worsen over coming weeks and months, hitting the poorest households the hardest and pushing more people into 'absolute' poverty.

In the far shorter term today, Government has announced its commitment to transitioning our energy supply domestically within 2022 to ensure we continue to keep the UK running – heating and powering homes and businesses and protecting people from the ever-intensifying energy pressures.

Our national Net Zero targets commit us to a combined agenda of decarbonisation and reaching better climate resilience across the natural and built environment. This agenda is bought into sharper focus still by the now urgent requirement to boost our energy resilience.

Driving job creation and opportunities in new, green industries across the country is now more fundamental than ever in achieving these goals.

Recognising the work required to realise these jobs and skills opportunities, Communities that Work and the Northern Housing Consortium convened the inaugural 'Green Jobs, Housing and Skills event' in late 2021.

During the event, key priorities emerged: building confidence amongst employers of all sizes to invest in green jobs; developing training and reskilling pathways so that both the current and future workforce can benefit; and embedding secure employment at a local level so that communities are sustainable, both environmentally and economically.

The social housing sector has a vital role to play in acting on these priorities. Housing providers are anchor institutions as both major employers and commissioners in their local areas. The sector is also a valued investor in people as well as neighbourhoods, supporting tenants to access employment and progress in work. Such local presence and national significance give the sector real reach and opportunities to ensure our homes, neighbourhoods and tenants can benefit from realising the potential of these well-paid, secure jobs of the future.

In a recent [webchat](#), Communities that Work and Ground Control discuss the need for new green jobs to deliver net-zero targets, and how the housing sector can best address the growing green jobs skills gap, to empower tenants to fill the new green jobs being created.

**Lynsey Sweeney | Managing Director |
Communities that Work**

Dear Editor,

I had the pleasure of attending the Institute for the Motor Industry Awards on 17th March, the highlight of many months of working collaboratively with several representatives from the Motor Industry, such as Linda Jackson, CEO of Peugeot. It was inspiring to see the significant investment that the Motor Industry is placing on the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda and to see disability, race, gender and sexual orientation being tackled with force through role models and ambassadors for the industry.

The awards evening and the EDI Task Force Report launched earlier that day captures well the significant growth that will take place within the motor industry as a result of car electrification, and the significant skills gaps that new technologies will compound, suggesting a shortfall of 25,000 skilled workers by 2027, not just in manufacturing, but also ensuring that our cars are maintained. It was interesting to consider how the skills adopted through HS2 and the electrification of the railway will have a longer lasting impact on the skills agenda, and the future work we as employability professionals will need to address towards the end of HS2 in years to come to transfer these skills to other high voltage industries.

Particularly impactful within the report is the understanding that employees with a disability is at least representative to the same level or higher than other industries, as a result of a historic and negative stereotype that has impacted the industry for many years. The report highlights the impact of professional influencers, such as careers officers and employability professionals of the past, encouraging individuals with dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia and poor literacy and numeracy skills to take up careers within the sector, as it is negatively perceived to be dirty, male oriented and for low achievers.

The motor industry benefits from leaders wholeheartedly tackling the EDI agenda for their industry, with several strong industry influencers, such as Carol Muir, Founder of the 30% Club, which seeks to achieve business transformation

through people and particularly gender balance. This is of great importance as the motor industry rapidly changes. It is no longer perceived to be about white, male-dominated roles, careers for low achievers, dirty garages and heterosexual cis men.

I would urge IEP members to read the report and to consider and reflect on a number of key themes:

The IEP's role to support specific sectors to achieve their business objectives and to consider to what extent sectors that are experiencing real recruitment challenges are being supported, e.g., the motor industry and care sector.

Also, I think it is important to consider to what extent employability professionals act as key agents for change for the EDI agenda and to what extent, on a day-to-day basis, employability professionals are supporting industries to address imbalances in the make-up of their teams through the influence they have on employment decisions and also how today's actions impact on the EDI workforce challenges of the future.

Gareth Saldanha-Fallows FIEP | Founder | Acorn Training

IMI Diversity Task Force Report (March 2022)
https://tide.theimi.org.uk/about-imi/diversity-task-force%3Futm_campaign%3DDiversity-Task-Force%26utm_medium%3Dfullreport%26utm_source%3DQRCode



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