



The Business Case for the Employment of Disabled People

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Objective 3: Equal Opportunities in the Labour Market

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Background

UK Government statistics demonstrate that 18.2% of the population (9.5 million people) report a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities and the work they are able to do (www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/census2001). There are 4.3 million disabled people of working age (ibid) but they are twice as likely as non-disabled people to be unemployed (www.drc-gb.org/drc). Burchardt (2000) reports from her research that: one third of disabled people who find work are out of a work again by the following year and of those who become disabled whilst in employment, one in six lose their employment during the first year after becoming disabled. The IRS Management Review 18 (2000) reports a number of barriers to disabled people finding and keeping employment.

The UK Government's commitment to ending discrimination against disabled people is evidenced in the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the setting up of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the current consultation process on ways to improve the legislation. A number of government policy initiatives have also been

introduced to help the recruitment and retention of disabled people into employment. These include: the Welfare to Work Programme which includes New Deal for Disabled People; the Access to Work scheme; the Two Ticks disability symbol; the Job Introduction Scheme and the Work Step programme (www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk). These initiatives have had some limited success but the number of cases of discrimination reported to the DRC demonstrates that disabled people continue to face discrimination in employment (Gooding 2000, Woodhams and Corby 2003).

Alongside these government initiatives, there is also a growing recognition that employers can benefit from addressing the needs of disabled people and that a business case can be made for employing more disabled people (www.drc-gb.org/drc www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/guests/about/empagenda.htm). Whilst in principle the business case may be easy to articulate there is a dearth of empirical research which demonstrates whether and how the business case is implemented in practice (Woodhams and Danieli 2000; 2003).

From discussions with private sector organisations who are attempting to increase the proportion of disabled people in employment, it would appear that they are having difficulties achieving this - despite corporate support for the business case. In contrast some public sector organisations are demonstrating an increase in the number of disabled employees in their organisation but it is not clear how such increases are being achieved. It may be that such organisations have created a culture in which more people are willing to declare a disability so raising the numbers employed, or it may be that they are using different arguments to enable the recruitment and retention of more disabled people. Irrespective of the aggregate number of disabled people in employment, it is not clear whether disabled people are represented at all levels of the organisational hierarchy or whether they are relegated to low status, low paid jobs.

Research aims

This research project aims to:

- establish the extent of the employment of disabled people over recent years and currently within one private and one public sector organisation and the positions occupied by disabled employees.
- examine any differences in perceptions amongst different stakeholders on the desirability and possibility of implementing the business case for disabled people at organisational level
- identify any perceptual, structural and procedural barriers to the implementation of the business case
- make recommendations for overcoming any barriers in order to help increase the proportion of disabled people in employment.

Research Methodology

The project adopts a participatory methodology in order to provide findings which can be used by the various stakeholders within the two participating organisations and other interested parties.

We will be using the following research methods:

- Historical longitudinal documentary data on employment statistics within the two participating organisations. An analysis of this data will provide a more detailed analysis of the position of disabled people than is currently available at organisational level.
- Questionnaire survey of employees to establish the number of disabled people currently employed and their position within the participating organisations. This data will provide independent statistics on the number of disabled employees and so provide an indication of how disability friendly the culture of the organisation is perceived to be by existing employees. The nature of the questions to be included in the questionnaire will be determined in conjunction with representatives of disabled employees within the organisations.
- Qualitative interviews with senior managers, line managers, disabled and non-disabled employees. Data derived from these interviews will enable an examination of whether individual perceptions differ from those espoused at corporate level; whether there are any organisational barriers to the implementation of the business case as perceived by those with responsibility for recruitment, retention and promotion; whether employees perceive the culture of the organisation to be disability friendly and whether each of these groups believe that the business case is the best means of ensuring equality for disabled people. If the perceptions of those charged with implementing the business case are at odds with corporate views this may reduce the possibility of achieving significant changes in the employment of disabled people.
- Group interviews with representatives of disabled employees in each organisation. These interviews will be conducted throughout the lifetime of the project and will enable disabled employees to be actively involved in the research process so that they can advise on the issues that require investigation and help with the analysis of research findings.

Project Activities

January to March 2004

Recruit two Research Fellows. Set up Steering Group to monitor the progress of the project. Gather and analyse longitudinal employment statistics of the two participating organisations. Group Interviews.

April to June 2004

Design, conduct and analyse questionnaire survey. Group Interviews.

April 2004 to March 2005

Conduct and transcribe interviews with senior managers, line managers and employees. Group Interviews.

April 2005 to August 2005

Analysis of interview data. Group Interviews.

September to December 2005

Production of research reports and dissemination of findings.

Progress to date – January 2004

We have secured access to two participatory organisations – one private sector and one public sector organisation. In discussions with senior disability equality managers in each organisation we have agreed the project aims and schedule of activities.

We have advertised for two research fellows and will be holding interviews on 18th February 2004.

Both participating organisations are in the process of generating longitudinal employment statistics.

We have compiled a Steering Group for the project comprising representatives of managers, trade union representatives, disabled employee representatives from each participating organisation and representatives from the TUC, DRC, EFD, and Employers Organisation for Local Government. The first meeting is scheduled for 28th January 2004.