

connectability



The connection between
disabled people and
employers in the
work place process

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the many people who have helped us bring this research project to fruition. This undertaking had the aim of obtaining views from both disabled people and employers in order to learn from the experiences of both groups when they attempt or are successful in making workplace connections. We had the good fortune to obtain their participation and have learnt from the experience.

We would also like to specifically thank Lloyds TSB Foundation for Northern Ireland for supporting this work through their financial and ethical contribution to the research. Without this support the project could not have been undertaken.

We are also indebted to the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education's Centre for Applied Research and Development, who have formulated a thought provoking result to the qualitative and quantitative data gathered on our behalf.

USEL is also grateful for the continuing support of our funding body, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Disablement Advisory Service, for the delivery of USEL's employment and training initiatives and efforts to assist move disabled people into paid employment. This support is critical to our ongoing efforts to move more people into mainstream paid employment.

We truly hope this material will be of use to both disabled people and employers alike, that continued workplace connections occur and that the fruits and benefits of more disabled people and employers working closely in working environments will continue to remove and breakdown barriers both perceived and real.

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **4**

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| BACKGROUND | 4 |
| METHODOLOGY | 4 |
| FINDINGS | 5 |
| DISABILITY/HEALTH CONDITION | 5 |
| TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT | 5 |
| EMPLOYER PROFILES | 5 |
| BARRIERS | 6 |
| AWARENESS RAISING | 6 |
| INSURMOUNTABLE DIFFICULTIES | 7 |
| DOUBTS AND WORRIES | 7 |
| JOB FAILURE | 7 |
| SUCSESSES AND ACHIEVEMENTS | 8 |
| ADVANTAGES | 8 |
| USEL SUPPORT | 9 |
| CONCLUSIONS | 9 |

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND **10**

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 10 |
| BACKGROUND | 11 |
| ULSTER SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT LTD | 11 |
| THE BELFAST INSTITUTE OF FURTHER & HIGHER EDUCATION | 14 |
| THE RESEARCH | 15 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 17 |
| THE BENEFITS OF EMPLOYMENT/EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT | 17 |
| THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES | 18 |
| RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITIES | 19 |

METHODOLOGY **20**

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 20 |
| DATA COLLECTION | 20 |
| QUESTIONNAIRES | 20 |
| CASE STUDIES | 21 |
| SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS | 22 |
| THE SAMPLE | 22 |

FINDINGS

23

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| DISABILITY/HEALTH CONDITION | 23 |
| EMPLOYER PROFILES | 26 |
| BARRIERS | 28 |
| INSURMOUNTABLE DIFFICULTIES | 34 |
| DOUBTS & WORRIES | 37 |
| SUCCESSSES AND ACHIEVEMENTS | 41 |
| CASE STUDIES | 45 |
| USEL SUPPORT | 58 |

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

62

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| USEL SERVICES & STAFF | 62 |
| DISABILITIES | 63 |
| JOB SEARCH PROCESS | 63 |
| PROGRESS | 64 |
| GOOD PRACTICE | 64 |
| BARRIERS | 64 |
| IN CONCLUSION | 65 |

Introduction

The Centre for Applied Research and Development at the Belfast Institute was commissioned by Ulster Supported Employment Limited (USEL) to survey their client group (disabled people) and the employers with which they work. This report presents the findings of the research which was funded by Lloyds TSB Foundation for Northern Ireland.

The research was carried out between June 2003 and March 2004 and the aims were to:

- Identify barriers and opportunities facing disabled people in the labour market.
- Examine the experiences of disabled people in seeking and finding employment.

Background

USEL was established 42 years ago and offers varied support to people with a wide range of disabilities. It provides a range of services and programmes that assist disabled people to move into and sustain paid employment. The organisation also provides work experience or job sampling opportunities to disabled young people and adults to build job ready confidence and vocational skills and abilities.

Methodology

A 100% postal survey was used to collect the data from both clients and employers.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from clients and employers for the case studies. This method was also used to collect background data from the Chief Executive and the Development Manager.

The final questionnaire returns were as follows:

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| Employers | 20.1% |
| Clients | 19.2% |

Findings

Disability/Health Condition

Almost 1/5 of the sample (19.5%) declared that they had learning difficulties that range from mild to severe and 6.75% of respondents declared that they had epilepsy, ranging from mild to severe. Deafness, including severe hearing impairment, was declared by 6% of the sample as a disability.

The level of support given in the work place varied greatly from one situation to the next. The vast majority of respondents were very happy with the support received from the USEL support workers and from USEL generally. They were more critical of their employers and mentioned the need to involve USEL to sort issues such as pay, holiday entitlements and work hours.

Types of Employment

Almost a quarter (24%) of the disabled people in the sample are employed in administrative roles. A further 14% are employed in the retail trade, 13% are employed in general manufacturing or in a factory setting and 12% in the hospitality and catering trade. Almost two thirds (63%) of the sample are employed in these 4 vocational areas.

Employer Profiles

The businesses that participated in the study ranged in size from 3 employees to 4,000 employees. Micro businesses made up 21% of the sample, small businesses made up 42%, medium businesses 29% and large businesses 8% of the sample.

Almost all of the micro businesses and the small businesses employed 1 disabled person each. All medium businesses employed between 2 and 5 disabled people, while large businesses employed 6 or more disabled people.

56% of the sample have been employing disabled people for 6 years or more and obviously have a wealth of experience and an awareness of the need to make reasonable adjustment in the workplace to facilitate the employment of people with a disability.

Barriers

38% of employers felt that there were no barriers to disabled people in their workplace, a number of these employers indicated that they have made changes and would make any further changes necessary to facilitate the employment of disabled people in the workplace.

| Barriers | % |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| No barriers. | 38% |
| Physical demands of the job. | 17% |
| Physical layout of the building. | 16% |

57.5% of the sample of disabled people indicated that they had experienced difficulties or barriers in finding work. These difficulties and barriers started at the beginning of the process with the application form that presented problems for people with literacy difficulties. The barriers continue at the interview stage for some applicants due to communication problems and the traditional structure of the interview process.

Although approximately two thirds of the employers who answered this question did outline problems, many did indicate that some of the barriers only applied to people with a particular disability. Employers were keen to emphasise the important role played by USEL staff in facilitating the selection of the appropriate disabled person with the required skills for a particular job. 82% of employers felt that they had never employed a disabled person who was unable to meet the demands of the job.

10% of the sample of disabled people felt that they were hindered in their search for work by bias or prejudice on the part of a prospective employer.

Awareness Raising

There was a clear demand across contributions from respondents that non-disabled people be given the necessary information and training to enable them to work more effectively with disabled people. The respondents were particularly frustrated that non-disabled people often see the disability before the person or the ability.

Insurmountable Difficulties

46% of respondents felt that there was no problem or barrier that they could not overcome. While a further 10% stated that there were no barriers that they could not overcome, they went on to qualify this by emphasising the help they had been given by various organisations including USEL and colleagues, supervisors and employers.

9% declared that they could not do some jobs due to their disability, 7% of employees with a disability felt that they were denied the opportunity to apply for internal promotion/ training that is available to other staff.

5% of respondents identified serious bullying problems in the workplace, which could not be overcome. During informal discussion with respondents in relation to the case studies a further 5 respondents gave details of bullying by fellow workers which they felt was just part of the job and something they had to deal with.

5% stated that poor verbal communication and literacy or numeracy skills was a barrier, 3% felt that their employer/supervisor was unsupportive or unsympathetic to the needs of a disabled person.

Doubts and Worries

72% of employers stated that they had never had doubts or worries about employing a disabled person. Of the 28% who did express concerns, the 3 main causes for concern were health and safety/reasonable adjustment (22%), the suitability of a disabled person to do a particular job (20%) and the extra monitoring time required (14%).

Job Failure

Employers who had employed a disabled person who was unable to meet the demands of the job were asked to outline the reasons why the job had failed and whether or not anything could have been put in place by USEL or themselves to make the job successful.

Of the 18% who had employed someone who could not meet the demands of the job, the 2 main problems associated with these job failures were, the job was physically too demanding for that employee (26%) or the employee had very limited ability (20%).

Successes and Achievements

The disabled people in the sample were invited to tell us about any successes or achievements they had had in the work place.

19% of respondents felt that holding down their job or work placement was their most important achievement.

10% of respondents felt that they were a valued member of staff and that this was an important achievement for them.

6% of respondents detailed how they had been given some responsibility in their work place, which indicated that they had made progress and been successful to some degree.

6% had made new friends at work and begun socialising with them, some for the first time.

6% of respondents had gained a computer qualification, 6% had developed new vocational skills, another 5% felt more self-confident, 4.5% had gained an NVQ at Level 1 or 2 in one of a variety of vocational areas and 5% had gained another qualification.

Advantages

Employers were asked to note any particular advantages they found by employing disabled people.

61% of respondents outlined at least 1 advantage of employing a disabled person. A summary of the wide variety of responses is given below:

| Advantage | % |
|---|-----|
| Commitment/Effort/Dedication | 13% |
| Satisfaction of disabled person | 9% |
| Honest/Trustworthy/Dependable | 7% |
| Fosters understanding of disability & the problems disabled people face | 7% |
| Customers appreciate integration of disabled people | 6% |
| High standard of work | 4% |
| Example to others, good for morale | 4% |
| Flexibility/Motivation | 3% |
| Creates a caring pleasant atmosphere | 2% |
| Improves the confidence of the disabled person | 2% |
| General positive comments | 4% |

USEL Support

26% of employees described USEL as either supportive or helpful and 11% stated that USEL staff always take prompt action to sort out issues and problems.

11% appreciated the support visits to the workplace and 2% particularly appreciated home visits.

10% of respondents stated that USEL helped them to get their job while a further 7% stated that USEL actually got them their job.

9% of respondents felt that the financial assistance given by USEL was invaluable and many stated that without this they believed that they would not be employed.

9% explained that they know that if they need help they just need to ring their contact in USEL.

Conclusions

The results of this research project would suggest that the vast majority of the disabled people currently being supported by USEL and their employers are very positive about the crucial part played by USEL in facilitating and supporting disabled people in the workplace.

This research has training implications for all Disability Employment Providers who need to evaluate on a regular basis the staff training programmes offered to employers, Disability Awareness training in particular could be offered more widely.

Problems with the traditional staff selection process currently in use by most employers presents problems for people with particular disabilities including literacy and communication problems. New and innovative ideas must be considered if disabled people are to compete with their non-disabled counterparts on an equal footing.

There is an opportunity for USEL to facilitate the sharing of good practice between businesses with which they are associated particularly as they work with many businesses who have a wealth of experience of employing disabled people and are aware of the advantages of engaging in this process.

While some disabled employees were challenged in holding down a full-time job others felt that they were not reaching their full potential. Some safeguards need to be put in place to ensure that disabled people are allowed to exercise their right to control their lives and to make choices unhindered by bias and prejudice. This can only happen when selection is based on ability.

Introduction

The Centre for Applied Research and Development at the Belfast Institute was commissioned by Ulster Supported Employment Limited (USEL) to survey their client group (disabled people) and the employers with which they work. This report presents the findings of the research which was funded by Lloyds TSB Foundation for Northern Ireland.

The research was carried out between June 2003 and March 2004 and the aims were to:

- Identify barriers and opportunities facing disabled people in the labour market.
- Examine the experiences of disabled people in seeking and finding employment.

The report raises a number of key issues relating to barriers to employment for people with disabilities, as well as highlighting ways in which these might be overcome. It outlines successes and achievements in the work place. Finally it details the part played by USEL in supporting a variety of disabled people in their work places.

It is intended that this research will act as a catalyst to attract more disabled people to consider employment opportunities, build self-confidence and self-esteem, enable disabled people to contribute more fully in their communities and raise awareness among employers of the benefits of employing people with health conditions or disabilities.

The research findings will be disseminated to over 1000 Northern Ireland businesses and community groups, in particular to groups with a specific interest in disability matters, and will be the focus of a media campaign to connect disabled people with employers.

Background

Ulster Supported Employment Ltd

USEL was established in 1962 to provide supported paid employment for disabled people within its Belfast manufacturing base. In 1980 USEL incorporated the Workshops for the Blind becoming the largest employer of disabled people within Northern Ireland. It is a Non-departmental Public Body and operates under the direction of the Department for Employment and Learning and on a day-to-day basis the Disability Advisory Service.

USEL works to expand the choice of paid employment opportunities for disabled people and by means of training and development assist progression. The organisation supports, on a yearly basis, an average of 1000 people who have a disability or health condition enter and retain employment and training opportunities.

To do this USEL operates a number of programmes on behalf of the Department for Employment and Learning's Disability Advisory Service, which provides the funding to support the work and outcomes of the organisation's various employment initiatives that have the specific aim of placing, supporting, training and developing disabled people in paid employment opportunities.

The programmes are:

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

USEL is the largest sponsor of the Department for Employment and Learning's 'Employment Support Programme' and currently supports over 625 disabled people in paid employment with 360 employers at over 470 locations across Northern Ireland. The aim of the programme is to secure and maintain employment for severely disabled people who have the ability to take up work but find it difficult to obtain a job in competition with non-disabled people.

The programme integrates disabled people into ordinary work settings and the employees benefit from the same terms and conditions as their non-disabled colleagues. Ongoing regular work support visits from USEL Placement Officers are agreed at planned intervals.

The programme is intended to promote new and additional employment opportunities for disabled people, but it may also be used to assist an employer retain in employment an employee who has acquired a disability and who can no longer achieve a satisfactory level of performance as a direct consequence of the impairment.

JOB BROKER SERVICE

This service aims to move people in receipt of qualifying Social Security Benefits into employment. USEL provides a tailored approach matched to the needs of the individual and the employer to ensure the successful entrance to and sustaining of paid employment.

Individuals are assisted in exploring career options, financial aspects of job entrance and support needs. They are provided with job search assistance, practical support, careers guidance and confidence building sessions.

Employers are assisted to gain valuable staff with disabilities or health conditions. The Job Broker team will identify and pre-screen applicants, provide professional support in selecting people to match job requirements and will also analyse tasks and provide advice and guidance on the removal of barriers and reasonable adjustments.

The team also provide disability awareness training, advice on how to retain valued employees and information about the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its implications.

WORK EXPERIENCE

USEL offers work experience or job-sampling placements within its Belfast Headquarters and Manufacturing base to disabled adults and young people participating in the Job Broker Programme or through requests from Schools, Recognised Training Organisations, or Health & Social Services Trusts.

This service aims to offer opportunities to allow individuals build skills and job ready confidence within a real work environment and can be used to assess skills and abilities and test job aspirations and job-readiness in a non-threatening environment. Work experience placements are also sought and supported within other external employer organisations.

The manufacturing areas in which USEL specialise are as follows:

- Bedding-USEL has over 25 years experience in the manufacturing of handcrafted beds, which are sold to retail and contract outlets.
- Travel Goods - USEL has produced specialist equipment carrying holdalls for the emergency services and private sector for the past 40 years.

- Contract Services - This service allows the organisation to hire out its employees to third party employers to carry out specific tasks on a contracted out basis, including for example CCTV monitoring for the private and public sectors on a national basis. USEL has developed a reputation for delivering high quality contract service programmes and this is an area of growth for the organisation.

The Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education

The Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education is the largest provider of further and higher education and training in Northern Ireland. The Institute has 140 community based out-centres and delivers courses ranging from Essential Skills to Higher National Diplomas and post-graduate qualifications. It is the first Further Education College in Northern Ireland to establish a Centre for Applied Research and Development¹ with the remit to:

- Conduct internal and external quality research, which will generate income and increase the profile of the Institute within the academic research community.
- Undertake internal academic and non-academic research projects in order to analyse and evaluate the Institute's provision and provide data, which will assist in planning future strategy.

¹ www.belfastinstitute.ac.uk/research

The Research

As part of USEL's ongoing desire to improve service and delivery performance, customer satisfaction surveys were carried out and analysed early in 2003. The Job Broking Service survey responses from both employers and service users reflected extremely high levels of satisfaction in the full range of delivery areas. The lowest satisfaction score achieved was 92%. The Employment Support programme levels of satisfaction responses ranged from 89% to 100%. The majority of scores fell within the 95% to 100% levels with only one area reflecting a lower level of satisfaction.

Regardless of the high scores achieved in the USEL surveys, service improvement objectives were set for both programmes and progress on the implementation of service developments will be monitored on a quarterly basis. USEL has a commitment to monitor customer satisfaction on all projects on an annual basis.

Additionally, in order to further develop their work strategically, it was considered necessary to commission a specific piece of research to examine more generally current issues facing both disabled employees and their employers.

Disabled employees and staff within USEL are well aware of a range of barriers and issues that affect disabled people in the work place to differing extents. These barriers to employment have also been discussed by organisations working with disabled people. There is also a considerable amount of literature available that relates to disability and employment. It is important that the findings of this report are considered in the context of this awareness and these works. This literature will be reviewed in an attempt to summarise some of these issues.

The methodology used to undertake this research, both with individuals and with employers will be outlined. A detailed section in which the findings will be presented will follow this and will examine:

- Range of disabilities and health conditions.
- Job roles and employer profiles.
- Barriers and problems.
- Benefits and successes.
- USEL support.

This research will identify the key issues and the number of people affected by them. This will enable USEL, employers and other organisations to plan their future strategies based on actual evidence and examples, and not just their own experiences.

Comparisons will be made between the key issues as identified by the disabled employees and the key issues as identified by employers with regard to finding work and holding down a job.

The research will reinforce the need to continue to work with employers with regard to the employment of disabled people. Also with regard to their responsibilities in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and in relation to the many benefits of employing a person with a disability.

The research will underline the need to continue to work with disabled people to support them in exercising their right to be employed and to progress within their place of employment with the same rights, support and encouragement as their non-disabled counterparts.

In the final section conclusions will be drawn and recommendations made, identifying the main issues, which emerge from the research with a view to considering the implications of these issues for the development of the services provided by USEL and other Disability Employment Providers as well as implications for employers.

Literature Review

The Benefits of Employment/Effects of Unemployment

The benefits of employment to the individual cannot be overestimated and include the following:

- Financial Independence
- Job Satisfaction
- Status
- Self-confidence and Self-esteem
- Disciplined Routine
- Social Contact (which helps prevent loneliness and isolation)

As well as loss of financial independence, unemployment has been linked with loss of personal identity; Professor David Bell² of Scotecon, in discussing the issue of workless households, (no one in the household working) suggests that a lack of employment can result in social exclusion and generating your income only from benefits can result in a culture of dependency.

Unemployment has also been linked to crime; Weinberg and Grabmeier (2002)³ suggest that a decline in wages increases the payoff of criminal activity.

Unemployment is linked with poor health and suicide. A recent study discussed on the BBC News Online web-site⁴ states that unemployment increases a person's risk of suicide by up to three times. In the same discussion a spokeswoman for The Samaritans agreed that there was a link between suicide and unemployment. Other studies have linked unemployment with stress, which can potentially have serious health consequences including angina and heart disease.

As well as the burden of unemployment, disabled people face other barriers including prejudice and bias which can further affect self-confidence and self-esteem and can cause marginalisation, which can in turn cause them to be more vulnerable and the detrimental effects of unemployment more heightened.

In a report published in 2000 by Save the Children⁵ young disabled people stated that they were sometimes discouraged from staying in mainstream education because of bullying and isolation rather than a review of their ability. Some young people were further concerned by the shorter day and the lack of subject choice in special schools, which they feel can have a significant effect on their career choice when they leave school.

It is also widely accepted that people tend to search for work less actively if they are on benefits, which can in turn lead to longer term unemployment.

² "Worklessness Among Scottish Households" Professor David Bell 2003 : Scotecon

³ "Crime Rates, Low Wages and Unemployment" Bruce Weinberg; Jeff Grabmeier (2002) Ohio State University

⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

⁵ "No Choice: No Chance - The educational experience of young people with disabilities" 2000 Save the Children

The Employment of People with Disabilities

Depending on measure and definitions, rates of unemployment for disabled people vary. However, the outcome remains the same - disabled people are more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled people. Prescott-Clarke⁶ found that disabled people are up to three times more likely to be unemployed. More recently the Labour Force Survey of spring 2001⁷ indicates that disabled people (33.5%) are only about half as likely as non-disabled people (75.3%) to be in employment. It also indicates that disabled people (62.6%) are almost 3 times more likely to be economically inactive than those who are not disabled (20%). The most recent statistics from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) suggest that disabled people are still less likely to have qualifications, to be economically active or to be in employment than non-disabled people.

Barnes 1991⁸ found that disabled people are disadvantaged in the type of work they do which is often low paid, low skilled and with low job status.

In relevant literature examining rehabilitation and employment for people with mental illness Crowther et al⁹ and Hatfield et al¹⁰ found that unemployment rates are high amongst people with mental illness, yet surveys show that most people with mental illness want to work.

Current literature emphasises the value to the individual of being employed and the negative effects of unemployment. It also suggests that despite the Disability Discrimination Act and the fact that disabled people want to work, the levels of employment of disabled people remain low and often people with a disability or a health condition find themselves in low paid, low skilled jobs. There is an obvious need to address this on-going issue and to ensure that disabled people are being educated and then employed in meaningful jobs which allow them to reach their full potential.

⁶ "Employment and Handicap" Prescott-Clarke 1990 London : Social and Community Planning Research

⁷ Available from www.statistics.gov.uk/

⁸ "Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination: A Case for Anti-discriminatory Legislation" 1991
Barnes C : London Hurst & Co

⁹ "Vocational rehabilitation for people with severe mental illness" Crowther R; Marshall M; Bond G;
Huxley P : The Cochrane Library Issue 1 2004

¹⁰ Accommodation and employment: a survey into the circumstances and expressed needs of users of mental health services in a northern town. Br J Soc Work 1992; 22: 60-73. Hatfield B, Huxley P, Mohamad H.

Right and Responsibilities

It is now against the law to discriminate against disabled people in the workplace. The Disability Discrimination Act¹¹ was introduced in 1995 and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has responsibility for enforcing the Act. It also has a duty to work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled people; to promote the equalisation of opportunities for disabled people; to encourage good practice in the treatment of disabled people and to keep under review the working of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Act applies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The Act defines disability as a “physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities.” It is unlawful for an employer to discriminate on the grounds of disability. This includes every aspect of a job:

1. Recruitment and selection.
2. Terms and conditions of service.
3. Arrangements for induction.
4. Harassment.
5. Sickness policies and procedures.
6. Pensions.
7. Opportunities for promotions, transfer, training or receipt of other employment benefits, or refusal of such opportunities.
8. Dismissal or any other detriment.

It includes the need to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to facilitate the employment of a disabled person. The Equality Commission¹² have summarised the factors identified in the Act which may have a bearing on whether it will be reasonable for the employer to have to make a particular adjustment. These are:

1. The effectiveness of the particular adjustment in preventing the disadvantage.
2. The practicability of the adjustment.
3. The financial and other costs of the adjustment and the extent of any disruption caused.
4. The extent of the employer’s financial and other resources.
5. The availability to the employer of financial or other assistance to help make an adjustment.

Reasonable adjustments to either the physical features of premises or the working arrangements should be made by employers to prevent substantial disadvantage to disabled people both at the recruitment stage and during employment. It is estimated by the DEE that 44% of reasonable adjustments cost less than £50 to implement¹³.

¹¹ Available from www.legislation.hms.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/

¹² “A Guide for Everybody: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995” The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

¹³ “Integrating Disabled People” - Department for Education and Employment Research Report 56

Introduction

The Belfast Institute's Centre for Applied Research and Development was commissioned to carry out this research project between June 2003 and March 2004. A variety of data collection methods that complement each other were used to ensure robustness and rigour. They facilitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data on each key aspect of the project.

Data Collection

A 100% postal survey was used to collect the data from both clients and employers.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from clients and employers for the case studies. This method was also used to collect background data from the Chief Executive and the Development Manager.

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were designed to facilitate the gathering of the information, one for the client sample and one for the employer sample.

It was agreed that in an attempt to avoid confusion and delay over the holiday period that the questionnaires should be distributed in late August 2003. Participants were invited to return their questionnaire within a 3-week period. The staff of USEL agreed that when they were in contact with either an employer or a client that they would encourage them to take part in the research and they agreed to assist the client group in completing the questionnaire where appropriate.

All 809 clients on the Employment Support and the Job Broker Service programmes in June 2003 were surveyed using questionnaires that were posted to their home addresses with a letter of explanation from USEL. Those clients on the work experience programme were not surveyed, as their involvement with USEL is short-term.

All 606 employers working with USEL in June 2003 were surveyed using questionnaires, which were again posted to their business addresses with a letter of explanation from USEL.

In an attempt to maximise returns a freepost envelope was included with each questionnaire.

It was agreed that employers not returning their questionnaire within the 3 week time period would receive a follow up telephone call with a further copy of the questionnaire being posted, e-mailed or faxed for completion as required.

This exercise would be repeated 6 weeks after the original date for completion. With these additional measures in place we expected a return rate of 15-20%.

It was agreed that the client group would not be contacted by telephone as their decision not to return the questionnaire may more likely be due to the fact that they had decided not to take part in the research or the nature of the task was too demanding. However, client support workers notified individuals that assistance with completing the questionnaire would be given to anyone who wished to access this process. A small number of people took up this option and were given the assistance requested. A small number of the client questionnaires were completed by a family member on behalf of the disabled person. They were very keen to stress that the views were those of the client. In some cases the disabled person signed the questionnaire to confirm that the views were theirs.

The final returns were as follows:

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| Employers | 20.1% |
| Clients | 19.2% |

Respondents were invited to include their name on the client questionnaire if they were prepared to be involved in case studies. Alternatively they were advised that if they wished to remain anonymous they should not complete the 'Personal Details' section of the questionnaire.

Case Studies

The main purpose of the case studies was to draw upon respondents' experiences and feelings about employment at a level of detail that would not be possible using other data collection methods. It was hoped that this experience would be a positive and empowering process for participants and for prospective employers who read the report.

Candidates for case studies were identified from the information given by either themselves or their employer in the questionnaires. It was intended that 6-8 case studies would be useful in demonstrating the value of employing a disabled person across a range of jobs with a variety of disabilities, as well as outlining some of the barriers overcome by these individuals. 10 candidates were initially invited to become involved in the case studies 8 declined; a further 10 were invited to become involved. In all 28 candidates were invited to become involved.

7 candidates agreed and their cases are detailed in the report. The other 21 declined for a variety of reasons and at various stages. Some declined at the initial stages as they did not want to be treated differently from their non-disabled co-workers. Some were worried about the publicity they would receive, others were involved in the initial stages and then withdrew following discussions with their families.

All semi-structured interviews were conducted in the candidates' place of work. This facilitated the gathering of qualitative data for the case studies and gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate some of their duties in an environment in which they felt comfortable.

All participants gave their approval to the publication of the material included in this report.

Semi-structured Interviews

The Development Manager and the Chief Executive of USEL were informally interviewed for the purpose of collecting background information about USEL and their views on the various issues facing disabled people in the work place.

The Sample

It was established that the age profile of the entire sample of clients involved in both the Employment Support and the Job Broker Service programmes was 34 years while the age profile of the sample that responded to the survey was 38 years.

The composition of both groups was further analysed in terms of sex. The breakdown of the sample including all clients from both the Employment Support and the Job Broker Service programmes was 66% male and 33% female. The breakdown by sex of the sample that responded to the survey was 65% male and 34% female.

The results of this profile analysis indicate that the sample responding to the survey is representative of the entire sample and will allow conclusions to be drawn with confidence with regard to the whole group based on the data collected from the sample.

All data submitted for inclusion in the report has been quantified and presented in a summarised format. The report also contains numerous direct quotations in an attempt to provide accurate and detailed real examples of the experiences of disabled people in the labour market.

Disability/Health Condition

In response to the first question - “What is your disability/health condition?” the answers were as follows.

Table 1: Disabilities

| Name of Condition | Number | % |
|--|--------|-------|
| Learning difficulties (ranging from mild to severe). | 46 | 19.50 |
| Epilepsy. | 16 | 06.75 |
| Deaf (includes severe hearing impairment). | 14 | 06.00 |
| Arthritis/Osteoarthritis. | 12 | 05.00 |
| Spinal/back injury. | 11 | 04.60 |
| Cerebral Palsy. | 11 | 04.60 |
| Mental Health Impairment/Depression. | 10 | 04.25 |
| Spina Bifida (some including hydrocephalus). | 09 | 04.00 |
| Registered blind (includes partially sighted & severe loss of vision). | 09 | 04.00 |
| Speech impairment. | 09 | 04.00 |
| Downs Syndrome. | 07 | 03.00 |
| Literacy and numeracy difficulties. | 07 | 03.00 |
| Heart related problems. | 06 | 02.50 |
| Reduced use of one or more limbs. | 05 | 02.00 |
| Problems with balance and co-ordination. | 05 | 02.00 |
| Multiple Sclerosis. | 05 | 02.00 |
| Asthma. | 04 | 01.50 |
| Severe tiredness/fatigue. | 04 | 01.50 |
| Limb lost or missing. | 04 | 01.50 |
| High blood pressure. | 04 | 01.50 |
| Head injury/acquired brain injury. | 04 | 01.50 |
| Fybromyalgia | 03 | 01.25 |
| Brain related illness/disease. | 02 | 01.00 |
| Diabetes. | 02 | 01.00 |
| Aspergers Syndrome. | 02 | 01.00 |
| Thyroid problems. | 02 | 01.00 |
| Wheelchair user. | 02 | 01.00 |
| Other (named once) | 21 | 09.00 |

Total number of respondents stating disabilities - 157
 Single Disability - 091
 Multiple Disabilities - 066
 Total Disabilities identified - 236

Although literacy/numeracy problems would not be considered to be a disability or a health condition, this problem was identified in each case with at least one other disability and was considered by respondents to be different from having a learning disability. It has, therefore, been included separately.

Almost 1/5 of the sample (19.5%) declared that they have learning difficulties that range from mild to severe. Those respondents who declared that they had mild learning difficulties explained that they needed extra time to learn new skills, they needed clear instructions and most of all they need to work with people who understand their difficulties and are supportive to their needs. For those respondents with severe learning difficulties they tended to be in jobs which require repetitive tasks, they need to be in a setting in which they feel secure with a supportive employer and work colleagues. Many of the respondents with a learning difficulty felt that they could make progress in the workplace with supportive colleagues who were understanding and patient, which in many cases they were getting. However, in a number of cases respondents felt that people in the workplace who should be supporting them did not know the best way in which to do this which has led to frustration and anxiety. The research findings indicate that progress in the workplace when it exists is slow and employers need to be aware that this is an important issue for the employees concerned.

6.75% of respondents declared that they had epilepsy, this ranged from mild to severe. Many respondents went on to outline the problems epilepsy caused for them in terms of getting a job, as this condition must be declared on job application forms. Some respondents felt certain that a number of prospective employers were reluctant to employ a person with epilepsy, as they were afraid that they might injure themselves while at work. However, this theory is not supported by employers, no employer stated that they considered epilepsy to be a barrier to employing someone. Only one employer declared that they had an employee with epilepsy, although this may indicate that people with epilepsy are not always declaring it.

Further details were given by people who have epilepsy about the support needed during a seizure, although in many cases seizures are infrequent. Generally quick but simple actions to ensure the safety of the person having the seizure are required. However, in some other cases the co-workers might be required to ring an ambulance. It would also be important to know how to tell which action would be appropriate. Most of the disabled people who declared that they had epilepsy were not completely confident that their employer and their co-workers understood their condition or how to support them in the event of a seizure, employers did not comment on this as they did not see it as an issue as stated earlier.

Deafness, including severe hearing impairment, was declared by 6% of the sample as a disability. The level of support given in the work place varied greatly from one situation to the next. For example, in one situation the deaf person had the opportunity to teach her co-workers basic sign language because they were so interested in supporting her as best they could. At the other end of the scale there are several examples of deaf people who declared that they were unable to get through the interview stage of the job search

process because employers were not interested in them even when they met the criteria for the job and the job would not be affected by the fact that the prospective employee was deaf. It was not within the remit of the research to ask employers specifically about support for disabled people during the selection process although several employers did give examples of times when they employed the assistance of a signer or an interpreter when employing a deaf person. In another example a deaf employee felt that her employer made no effort to communicate with her and refused to recognise that BSL was her first language:

“... he simply gets frustrated with me and treats me as if I am stupid.”

A further 24 disabilities and health conditions were declared by between 1% and 5% of the sample and a further 21 disabilities or health conditions were declared by one respondent each.

The vast majority of respondents were very happy with the support received from the USEL support workers and from USEL generally, as detailed later in the report. They were more critical of their employers and mentioned the need to involve USEL to sort issues such as pay, holiday entitlements and work hours.

IMPLICATIONS

Because the total number of disabilities and health conditions outlined are so large and varied in severity of condition, it would be unrealistic to expect that all support workers and other contact staff within USEL would have detailed expertise in all of these disabilities/conditions. In cases where the condition affects only a small number of disabled people, USEL would need to call in expertise from specialist organisations to deal with specific issues that impact on work place behaviours.

There are obviously training implications for Disability Employment Providers in terms of the delivery of disability awareness training as well as training in the support of disabled people in the work place. However, there are issues while approximately half the sample was keen to talk about their disability in the workplace and to have their condition recognised, the other half wanted their employer to know about their disability but they did not want colleagues and customers to know. They preferred to be treated like everybody else than to have staff trained to support them and therefore be informed formally about their disability.

However, in the more frequently occurring cases like learning difficulties, deafness and epilepsy it would be reasonable to expect that the organisation should have staff specifically trained in these areas with the expertise to support a person with this condition in the work place as well as the skills and knowledge to facilitate employers in training themselves and their staff to assist in the process of supporting a disabled person with such a disability in their work place.

Employer Profiles

Employers were asked to outline the role in which their disabled employee is employed. The job roles of the disabled employees fell into the following 14 categories.

Table 2: Job Roles

| Job Roles | % |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Administrative | 24% |
| Retail | 14% |
| General Manufacture/Factory | 13% |
| Hospitality/Catering/Bakery | 12% |
| Caring (elderly & children) | 6% |
| Horticulture/Garden | 6% |
| Pet Care/Vet/Fishery/Farming | 4% |
| Construction | 4% |
| Car Maintenance/Body Repair/Valet | 3% |
| Timber Manufacturer | 3% |
| Cleaning | 2% |
| Education | 2% |
| Steel Manufacturer/Fabrication | 2% |
| Golf Centre | 1% |
| Other | 4% |

Almost a quarter (24%) of the disabled people in the sample are employed in administrative roles. A further 14% are employed in the retail trade, 13% are employed in general manufacturing or in a factory setting and 12% in the hospitality and catering trade. Almost two thirds (63%) of the sample are employed in these 4 vocational areas.

There is evidence as discussed in the introduction that disabled people tend to be employed in low paid and low skilled jobs, the evidence in this research would support this. A large percentage of the sample seem to be in jobs where they work in teams, where they can find help and support easily and where the jobs are not necessarily specialised and are often low paid.

Employers were asked to indicate the number of employees they had. The following national business size categories were used to summarise the responses:

- micro business less than 10 employees
- small business 10 - 49 employees
- medium business 50 - 249 employees
- large business 250 + employees

The businesses that participated in the study ranged in size from 3 employees to 4,000 employees. Micro businesses made up 21% of the sample, small businesses made up 42%, medium businesses 29% and large businesses 8% of the sample.

Almost all of the micro businesses and small businesses employed 1 disabled person each. All medium businesses employed between 2 and 5 disabled people, while large businesses employed 6 or more disabled people.

Employers were asked to indicate the period of time over which they had been employing disabled people. The responses were as follows:

1-5 years 35% 6-10 years 33% More than 10 years - 23%

An additional 2% did not indicate the exact time period but did make comments such as 'always', 'from commencement of business' and 'a long time'. An additional 7% did not answer this question or stated 'unknown'.

56% of the sample have been employing disabled people for 6 years or more and obviously have a wealth of experience and an awareness of the need to make reasonable adjustment in the workplace to facilitate the employment of people with a disability. This would indicate that there is an opportunity here to share knowledge and examples of best practice during networking opportunities such as conferences. There is an obvious role here for USEL in facilitating and supporting this initiative.

The fact that 35% of the employers in the sample have employed disabled people for 5 years or less indicates that USEL are continuing to build up their bank of employers by regularly bringing new employers on board. Obviously these employers would benefit from the shared experience of other employers as discussed above.

It is important to note that Northern Ireland is becoming more and more dependent on small to medium enterprises (SMEs), which have up to 250 employees. It would be important to ensure that in these organisations disabled people are given the support they require and do not feel 'lost' simply because of the size of the organisation.

Barriers

Employers were asked to identify barriers in their workplace that might prevent disabled people from working there. 6 respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did, their answers may be summarised as follows:

Table 3: Barriers - employers

| Barriers | % |
|---|-----|
| No barriers. | 38% |
| Physical demands of the job. | 17% |
| Physical layout of the building. | 16% |
| Dangerous site/heavy machinery. | 8% |
| Dangerous nature of some jobs. (Hot plates, speed, safety issues, chemicals) | 8% |
| Steps/Stairs/High Shelving. | 7% |
| Nature of customer contact required. | 3% |
| Additional time required supervising a disabled employee. | 2% |
| Own attitude/self image of the disabled person. | 1% |

It is interesting to note that no employer felt that the financial investment in employing a disabled person in terms of decreased output, monitoring or additional training was a barrier to them. There are many examples of cases in which USEL assess the ability of a disabled person and, where appropriate, supplement the wages of that employee.¹⁴ There are also opportunities for employers to apply for specialised equipment to support the employment of a disabled person.

It is commendable that 38% of employers felt that there were no barriers to disabled people in their workplace, a number of these employers indicated that they have made changes and would make any further changes necessary to facilitate the employment of disabled people in the workplace. A number of employers also indicated that they are keen to comply with the Equal Opportunities Policy by removing barriers. In one of the large businesses, an Equality Assurance Manager is employed; part of his job is the training of staff in disability awareness; there is also a code of practice for the recruitment and selection of employees with disabilities. This is no doubt an example of best practice but it is also a luxury, which most smaller businesses could not afford. There are obvious benefits to sharing this practice and perhaps there is a case for USEL to extend their role in providing this service for the SMEs with which they are involved. The networking opportunities discussed earlier could also include aspects of this example of best practice.

¹⁴ Funded by the Department for Employment and Learning

Disabled employees were asked to outline the difficulties or barriers they have experienced in finding work.

In response to this question a total of 42.5% of respondents did not experience difficulties in finding work. 27% of these respondents stated that they had not experienced any difficulties or barriers in finding work although this group included respondents who developed their condition/disability while in employment, took a period of time off work and then returned to their original place of employment. It also included respondents that had their productivity rate reassessed on their return and their wages supplemented by DEL via USEL in line with the results of this assessment. Another 9% felt that they had not experienced difficulties or barriers due to the support given to them by USEL. A further 5% felt that they had not had difficulties in finding work due to the support of a sympathetic employer or teacher and 1.5% due to the support of a helpful careers officer.

57.5% of respondents indicated that they had experienced difficulties or barriers in finding work. These difficulties and barriers started at the beginning of the process with the application form that had presented problems for people with literacy difficulties. The barriers continued at the interview stage for some applicants who felt that they were not being considered for interview having stated their disability on the application form even though they meet all the essential criteria. There were further difficulties expressed by other disabled people during the interview process due to communication problems and the traditional structure the interview process takes.

In all of the examples given the respondents emphasised that the level of literacy or communication skills required during the job search process did not reflect the levels of literacy and communication skills required to do the actual job for which they were applying. Otherwise they would not have applied, as the respondents in question felt that they are as aware of their disabilities as they are their abilities. No employer mentioned these issues as a barrier in their work place that might prevent a disabled person from getting a job there. It would be useful to examine alternative application forms with tick box options and fewer literacy dependent sections as well as alternative information gathering tools requiring less writing. The response from employers to these changes might be more positive if the benefits were actually demonstrated and clarified and support offered in implementing them in their work place. There is a clear role for USEL and other Disability Employment Providers in this process.

Only 11% of respondents stated that the main barrier they faced was the fact that many jobs were not suitable for them due to the restrictions placed upon them by their disability. This can be compared to the responses of employers; 33% of who felt that the physical demands or dangerous nature of the job would prevent a person with a specific disability from doing it. A further 23% of employers felt that the physical layout of the building including steps, stairs and high shelving would prevent disabled people with restricted mobility from working in their work place. This does not necessarily demonstrate reluctance towards employing disabled people but it does suggest that many of the employers have considered the restrictions in their work place and therefore the need to employ the right person who can work in these conditions, however the requirement for reasonable adjustment must be considered.

Although approximately two thirds of the employers who answered this question did outline problems, many did indicate as discussed earlier that some of the barriers only applied to people with a particular disability. Employers were keen to emphasise the important role played by USEL staff in facilitating the selection of the appropriate disabled person with the required skills for a particular job. 82% of employers felt that they had never employed a disabled person who was unable to meet the demands of the job; employers also stated that when a disabled person was appointed to an appropriate job that in the majority of cases they were a more valuable employee than their non-disabled counterparts as detailed later in the report. There was also evidence that many employers did make reasonable adjustments to facilitate the employment of disabled people.

10% of the sample of disabled people felt that they were hindered in their search for work by bias or prejudice on the part of the employer. Some of the contributions on this subject are as follows:

“I have found that employers are put off when they hear that you have a disability, it is like they have a fear of disability.”

“Because I cannot speak clearly some employers think that I am not capable of working and that I am stupid, they did not even try to communicate or give me a chance to show what I could do.”

“I have been looking for a career change since my diagnosis and I have not even been interviewed, I feel that this is in part due to the fact that I am classed as disabled.”

“Some employers, especially small ones, do not want to know you when you have a disability, before I was introduced to USEL I was unsuccessful in applying for jobs even when special arrangements were made to accommodate my disability. “

“Employers are worried about health and safety issues and are not interested in finding out what I can do.”

“Some able-bodied people are embarrassed when I speak to them because of my disability.”

“Some colleagues don’t understand my disability and think that I am just lazy.”

While some of these employees were aware of their limitations they felt that sometimes their disability prevented them from being given the chance to do things that they could do.

“My disability looks more severe than it affects me and my voice doesn’t help this, employers do not consider my qualifications first - a degree, A levels, training in various computer applications, just my disability.”

“With my disability I am limited to the types of job I can do, some employers refuse to believe that I could do a good job.”

14% of respondents admitted to having numeracy, literacy or communication difficulties and a further 6% of respondents felt that the fact that they had no formal qualifications was a barrier. These difficulties obviously presented a variety of further problems during the job application process including completing the application form which requires a good standard of literacy and attending an interview which is heavily reliant on verbal communication.

Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) of Spring 2001 indicates that in Northern Ireland disabled people (43.9%) are more than twice as likely as non-disabled people (21.8%) to have no qualifications, this difference is consistent across all age groups. This data also indicates that only 9.2% of disabled people have a degree or higher education qualification compared to 21.4% of those without a disability.

One respondent felt that:

“People are unwilling to give me the chance to prove myself, it is impossible to apply for jobs directly by answering job advertisements, I would have no chance, I need the help of USEL even to get an interview.”

Other barriers mentioned include a lack of confidence (4%), difficulties with public transport (2.5%) and age (1.5%). Some respondents felt that following a period of unemployment due to an accident or the diagnosis of a disability there was a need for retraining in an alternative vocational area. However some felt that the current opportunities for retraining in the form of apprenticeships were more suited to younger people, and some employers (1.5%) require recent experience. A further (1.5%) of respondents felt that they would not pass a medical.

Other respondents cited other barriers such as the amount of support they required (1.5%), the fact that they did not have a driving licence (1%) and the fact that some employers (1%) are reluctant to employ disabled people for insurance reasons. Although these barriers are significant for some disabled people the number is small and it would seem that the most effective way for USEL to proceed is to continue to offer individual support with regard to these difficulties as each case is identified.

One disabled employee detailed the barriers he faced in the course of carrying out his duties when in work.

“Being told lies, not being given an equal opportunity, being bullied, pressurised and treated unfairly, my health problems are not seriously accepted, my employer has not followed the doctor’s recommendations even though they had requested the involvement of the doctor. I am not being offered suitable alternative employment. Finally there is no support from any quarter to ensure that when any of these barriers are overcome they do not occur again.”

There was a clear demand across contributions from respondents that non-disabled people be given the necessary information and training to enable them to work more effectively with disabled people. The respondents were particularly frustrated that non-disabled people often see the disability before the person or the ability.

One respondent explained:

“Some people have problems when dealing with a person with a disability and I feel that there should be more training available to make able-bodied people more aware of the issue of disability, some employers expect too much from people with a disability.”

Another responded:

“I have experienced a lot of discrimination, employers will not employ you when they realise that you have a disability, at interviews I feel that I am only making the numbers up so that the employer can say that they met the requirements with regard to not excluding disabled people, I believe that this will never stop.”

Different types of businesses had different issues regarding barriers to employment. For example, some employers explained that the number of barriers had dropped as purpose built facilities replaced older less suitable premises. Others felt that barriers were removed with the move away from manual operations towards machine operations.

The issue of reasonable adjustment was a problem for some employers particularly in smaller businesses where other staff were resistant to taking on the duties that could not be completed by the disabled employee. Other employers felt that reasonable adjustment was not always possible. One employer explained:

“There is now an increased emphasis on quality and standards with the added pressure of time-scales and the increased pace of work that there are no longer ‘basic’ posts, a wide range of skills is required by all employees”.

This has presented problems for this employer with his current disabled employees who cannot now meet the changing and more demanding requirements.

A small number of employers were particularly concerned with health and safety issues and the increase in insurance premiums when employing a disabled person.

IMPLICATIONS

It is clear that the awareness of employers with regard to barriers in the job search process must be raised with a view to making changes to the recruitment process particularly when literacy and communication skills are not essential to the job itself. There is an obvious role for Disability Employment Providers in this process.

This process might include the job application being made by video rather than written or the interviewee being accompanied by a support worker during the interview. It might also include short-term job trial to allow both the employer and the employee to establish whether or not a person is suitable for a particular job, based on evidence of strengths and abilities rather than literacy or communication difficulties at the recruitment process. It would also be important that this job trial process did not affect benefits and getting back on to benefits if it is not successful. It is however, notable that only 1 disabled person in this sample voiced concerns about how their benefits might be affected by employment or unemployment despite this being an issue raised by USEL staff at the outset of the research.

As with other reasonable adjustments it might be worth employers offering some or all of these adjustments to all applicants both disabled and non-disabled.

Respondents raised the issue of attitudinal problems and explained that some employers and fellow employees were simply unable to deal with disability, feeling uncomfortable, not looking disabled people in the eye and not even attempting to communicate. The question is, is this prejudice or is it ignorance and fear of giving offence. It would seem that there is a role for USEL in identifying such employers and in supporting them in addressing their fears and those of their employees in relation to disability. There is also a training need in relation to awareness raising, providing information and clarification to improve understanding and helping employers and employees respond to their fears to help prevent disabled people being disadvantaged.

Insurmountable Difficulties

Respondents were asked to tell us about any difficulties or barriers they have experienced in the work place that they could not overcome. 46% of respondents felt that there was no problem or barrier that they could not overcome. A further 10% also answered 'None' but qualified this by emphasising the help they had been given by various organisations including USEL and colleagues, supervisors and employers.

5% of respondents identified serious bullying problems in the workplace. During informal discussions with respondents in relation to the case studies a further 5 respondents were very positive about their job and their employer but they did give details of bullying by fellow workers which they felt was just part of the job and something they had to deal with. Some of the contributions were as follows:

"I have been a victim of bullying by my employer in the work place."

"Bullying because of my disability, had to find another job."

"Being called names and bullied in my present place of work, when I explained that I could not stand in the same position for long periods they accused me of using my disability as an excuse to get doing the jobs that I liked, this is very stressful."

"I was asked to do the work of 2 people when a colleague was moved to another section, I explained that I could not do this but I was ignored, I am treated differently because I am supported by USEL, this is bullying"

As with many of the other issues raised previously, USEL will need to continue to play a role in identifying individual cases of bullying and in raising awareness within the workplace of what constitutes bullying and the harmful effects of this on individuals.

A further 7% felt that they were denied the opportunity to apply for internal promotion/training that is available to other staff.

"I have missed out on some training because of my disability but I feel I could do the training on a one-to-one basis so that I don't feel that people are talking over my head."

"There is no career path for me at work to show progress and to get promotion even though I have a very understanding employer."

3% felt that their employer/supervisor was unsupportive or unsympathetic to the needs of a disabled person.

"The fact that I would struggle to find another job is to my employer's advantage."

“I have been placed in areas which do not suit me because I am not fast enough but when I am in my usual area there are no problems.”

3% suggested that the job that they were currently in was not suitable for their skills, ability and strengths and there was no opportunity for change.

“Because I have developed so much my job is now boring and I have no opportunities for promotion and despite the financial contribution from USEL and disability working tax credit I am still the lowest paid worker, I have a very good work record but I do not feel that I am valued”

9% declared that they could not do some jobs due to their disability.

“I cannot lift heavy weights.”

“Steps and stairs are a problem for me.”

5% stated that poor verbal communication and literacy or numeracy skills was a barrier.

“I am held back by poor numeracy skills although I would be willing to do something about this if I knew where and how.”

Further barriers included the fact that there was no lift (2%), working with certain machinery (2%) and the use of a cash register (2%).

The remaining 3% of respondents cited one of the following barriers:

- No wheelchair access.
- Travel can be difficult and expensive.
- Can't cope with computerisation.
- Using a microscope or computer increases tiredness.
- Attitude of others, own feeling of inadequacy.
- No driving licence and no academic qualifications.

Other direct contributions were as follows:

“I attended school until I was 16 and then spent 3 years on a Jobskills programme at an RNIB college but still I cannot find work because I am blind I am very disappointed.”

“I cannot overcome my health problems and they do cause me to take time off, I will never be the same as other workers.”

“By receiving the services mentioned earlier I am marked out as different, I would prefer to be treated like everyone else.”

“Too numerous to answer.”

“The attitude of others has been difficult to deal with, although I asked that my situation be kept confidential others within the office were told about my health problems and my contact with USEL, this appears to have caused resentment from some staff members which has not been properly dealt with by my employers.”

“Some able-bodied people are ashamed to be involved with me because of my disability, it is not their fault it is because I was born that way.”

The evidence given in response to this question demonstrates the individual nature of the problems faced by each respondent on a daily basis. This perhaps emphasises the very complex task facing USEL and other Disability Employment Providers in terms of supporting each individual and putting in place the necessary measures to facilitate their participation in the workplace.

Doubts & Worries

Employers were asked if they had at any time had doubts or worries about employing a disabled person. They were then asked to outline the nature of this doubt or worry and to indicate if their feelings were confirmed or overcome and how.

72% of employers stated that they had never had doubts or worries about employing a disabled person.

The remaining 28% outlined the nature of the worries they had had and the outcomes of employing a particular disabled person.

Table 4: Doubts & Worries

| Doubts & Worries | % |
|---|-----|
| Health and Safety/Reasonable adjustment | 22% |
| Suitability of a disabled person to do a particular job | 20% |
| Extra monitoring time required | 14% |
| Inaccurate awareness of own ability | 10% |
| Lower productivity rate | 8% |
| Inappropriate behaviour | 8% |
| Reaction of able-bodied staff & training needs | 6% |
| Increased insurance premiums | 6% |
| High number of sick days | 6% |

One employer gave his disabled employee a company mobile phone so that they would not be so isolated when working in the community. This solved what had previously been a health and safety issue.

Some employers have introduced a risk assessment for all new employees in relation to the environment, also looking at skills required before an employee is placed in a particular job to help overcome health and safety problems and to allow them to investigate the need for reasonable adjustment of the job at the earliest opportunity. Thus, every new employee is at least able to do the job they are allocated.

Many employers were aware that often the problems that arose were due to the fact that the disabled person did not have the skills required for a specific job and therefore unrealistic expectations were placed on them. Some employers went on to explain how the USEL staff had sorted this out by offering a training option or by arranging to move the employee to a different job. Employers frequently explained that ability and disability are individual to each person and assumptions should not be made about a person's ability to undertake a role safely just based on whether or not they are disabled.

Although 14% of those who had had worries or doubts were concerned about the time required to monitor and support their disabled employee, most felt that the financial help given by USEL allowed them to carry out this support role effectively while remaining competitive. One employer gave details of a disabled person who had made so much progress that they themselves had been given a support role with new employees.

In some businesses employers had recruited a disabled person who was not aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and felt that they were capable of doing more than they could actually do. In each case USEL were involved in the negotiations between the disabled person and the employer and significant progress was made.

In terms of lower productivity rate, employers were initially worried about this but most found that the rate of work of their disabled employee was at least as good as their non-disabled staff and, where this was not the case, the financial assistance given by DEL via USEL made up the shortfall.

In some instances employers employed disabled people who behaved inappropriately in the workplace. Occasionally this problem was solved with experience and training while in other cases the employee was moved to another job often with the support of USEL.

In a small number of businesses employers got a negative reaction from non-disabled staff regarding the employment of a disabled person. Again USEL supported the management in providing disability awareness training, which did help solve the problem although some staff remained reluctant to take on work that they viewed as that of the disabled employee.

Some employers did mention increased insurance premiums as their worry or fear but only one employer suggested that when they investigated this, their insurance premium went up because they were employing a disabled person.

In terms of sick days although a small number of employers had fears that disabled employees might take a high number of sick days, only one found this to be the case in reality.

While a number of employers outlined the worries and doubts they had, most felt that they were not confirmed and even when they were, the staff at USEL were effective and efficient in their handling of each situation. In one situation a disabled employee was unable to work independently following instructions, which was unfair to both the employee and the manager. The USEL worker immediately visited the place of work, confirmed the view of the manager and counselled the disabled employee. The result was the removal of the disabled person to another area with their full consent despite the fact that they had resisted this move when first suggested by the manager.

Several employers were concerned about their legal obligations and sought assistance from The Equality Commission.

Only in two cases did the employer feel that a disabled person was inappropriately placed in a job and that they were getting no help or support and they were worried about dealing with the situation in case it was viewed that they had victimised or taken advantage of the disabled person.

One employer was annoyed by the fact that disabled employees receive the same rate of pay as their non-disabled counterparts but end up financially better off because they receive other benefits due to their disability.

Employers were asked if they had ever employed a disabled person who was unable to meet the demands of the job. 82% of respondents felt that they had never employed a disabled person who was unable to meet the demands of the job.

Employers who had employed a disabled person who was unable to meet the demands of the job were asked to outline the reasons why the job had failed and whether or not anything could have been put in place by USEL or themselves to make the job successful.

Of the 18% who answered 'yes' the details of their responses are as follows:

Table 5: Job Failure

| Job Failure | % |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Job physically too demanding | 26% |
| Very limited ability | 20% |
| Took too much time off | 13% |
| Left due to ill health | 10% |
| Inappropriate behaviour | 10% |
| Could not understand instructions | 6% |
| Poor communication skills | 6% |
| Changing demand of job | 3% |
| Epilepsy | 3% |
| Personal hygiene | 3% |

The reason why 46% of the jobs were not successful was due either to the fact that the job was either physically too demanding for the disabled employee or the employee had very limited ability. In all examples given the employee was redeployed elsewhere in the same business or transferred to another place of employment, almost always with the help and support of the staff of USEL.

13% of the group took too much time off normally in the form of self-certified sick leave rather than illness related to their disability and a further 10% left this place of employment due to ill health which prevented them from doing the job allocated to them.

Inappropriate behaviour included things such as behavioural problems, inappropriate familiarity with customers, rudeness, bad language and eating food that was on sale, accounted for a further 10% of the jobs that had failed. In all these examples where the employee was moved and replaced by another with the appropriate skills, the USEL staff were involved in this process.

The 12% of employees who either could not understand instructions or had poor communication skills were reassessed; in two cases the employees were transferred within their current workplace and in the other cases the employees were moved to other places of employment requiring different skills.

In relation to the individual problems listed in the table, the employee, who could not meet the changing demands of the job, is currently finishing his contract with his present employer and will be moved to another job in 6 months time. Due to the nature of the work, the employee with epilepsy had to be moved to another job for health and safety reasons. USEL staff worked with the employee with personal hygiene problems to ensure that she was employable in another business.

One employer felt that despite the fact that the disabled employee had been assessed as unfit to carry out the job in question, even after the job had been altered in an attempt to facilitate them, they were unable to terminate employment as no one was willing to take action which may be regarded as unfair to disabled people. USEL have been given details of this case and are currently in negotiations with the employee and the employer.

Successes and Achievements

The disabled people in the sample were invited to tell us about any successes or achievements they had had in the work place.

19% of respondents felt that holding down their job or work placement was their most important achievement.

“Holding down a job has helped give me a sense of purpose and has increased my self-esteem, I am now financially independent.”

“Being able to hold down a job gives you a purpose in life like an able-bodied person.”

10% of respondents felt that they were a valued member of staff and that this was an important achievement for them.

“I have demonstrated that someone with a severe disability can make a valuable contribution to an established concern, I have received a national award for overcoming adversity to return to work.”

“I have overcome all of the problems associated with starting a new career, I supervise a team of staff who would do anything for me, I have regained confidence and self-esteem, I have completed a variety of training courses and intend to do more, I have been congratulated on the quality of my work and that of my team by many of the organisations we work for.”

“I can now milk 150 cows twice a day, I also work independently in a totally computerised milking parlour.”

6% of respondents detailed how they had been given some responsibility in their work place, which indicated that they had made progress and been successful to some degree.

“Demonstrating tasks to others who are learning, ability to make adjustments to ensure quality”

“I can use the photocopier and guide others through the process of correcting problems.”

6% had made new friends at work and begun socialising with them, some for the first time.

“My workmates now understand my disability.”

6% of respondents had gained a computer qualification, 6% had developed new vocational skills, another 5% felt more self-confident, 4.5% had gained an NVQ at Level 1 or 2 in one of a variety of vocational areas and 5% had gained another qualification.

5% of respondents felt that they could do more tasks now than when they first started.

“I have made progress from basic office jobs such as filing and entering information onto the computer to checking billing addresses and generating a variety of letters.”

The remaining responses ranged from 2.5% to 1% of the sample and included promotion in work, building up valuable relationships with customers, positive feedback when work has been completed, fork lift truck/tractor licence, financial independence, gaining full-time employment, Basic Food and Hygiene Certificate, independent travel, working independently, moving from part-time to full-time work and not taking time off.

A number of respondents were keen to emphasise the importance of being employed:

“My current employer has allowed me to have a life by giving me a job, I am now seen as a person rather than a person with a disability. I have developed many IT skills and qualifications”

“My biggest achievement has been starting to rebuild my life, getting out of bed everyday and going to work, my condition was so bad but I found a very sympathetic employer, I now go to work, I have made friends, I have a sense of achievement with regard to my work role.”

“I enjoy work it prevents me from falling into a rut.”

Other successes each outlined by one respondent included the following:

“I was runner up in the BT Young Deaf Achievers Award competition in 1993”

“I have learnt to convert inches to centimetres.”

“I was employee of the month.”

“I passed my driving test”

7% of respondents stated 'None'. Some went on to explain that they felt that they were deliberately prevented from achieving or progressing due to their disability.

"I feel that I have underachieved and made little progress although I do enjoy going to work."

"None as I have been prevented from doing so."

"I have no successes in my workplace as I am never given a chance."

5 respondents stated that promotion was not an option for them in their current place of work.

Employers were asked to note any particular advantages they found in employing disabled people.

61% of respondents outlined at least 1 advantage of employing a disabled person a summary of the wide variety of responses is given below:

Table 6: Advantages of Employing a Disabled Person

| Advantage | % |
|---|-----|
| Commitment/Effort/Dedication | 13% |
| Satisfaction of disabled person | 9% |
| Honest/Trustworthy/Dependable | 7% |
| Fosters understanding of disability & the problems disabled people face | 7% |
| Customers appreciate integration of disabled people | 6% |
| High standard of work | 4% |
| Example to others, good for morale | 4% |
| Flexibility/Motivation | 3% |
| Creates a caring pleasant atmosphere | 2% |
| Improves the confidence of the disabled person | 2% |
| General positive comments | 4% |

Many employers outlined at length the many advantages they had found with employing a disabled person. Some of the comments made include:

"The work experience of all employees is enriched through having a diverse workforce".

"My experience is that disabled employees are more committed to and appreciative of their jobs and are less likely to take sick leave than able bodied employees".

“Diversity and inclusion are always a good thing, customers find it reassuring that we offer multi-level services with a staff team with different skills”.

“The inclusion of a disabled person on our staff team has given all of us an insight into the changes we need to make to facilitate disabled employees and disabled customers”.

In one instance the employer noted that the parents of their disabled employee could not believe the improvement in her confidence.

It is interesting to note that in answering the question about success the disabled respondents applied the question only to themselves and outlined personal successes. However, employers tended to view advantages and successes from a wider perspective in terms of the personal successes of the employee as well as the advantages to the customer and the organisation as a whole.

Case Studies

Seven case studies are detailed below and give depth and meaning to much of the data presented in this report. They give employees an opportunity to share their personal experiences. They give employers an opportunity to explain the advantages they have found from employing this person; they also have a chance to outline the benefits of employing a person on the basis of what they can bring to the job rather than whether or not they have a disability.



ARMAGH CREDIT UNION LIMITED



The Armagh Credit Union is a community based financial co-operative owned and controlled by its members. In 1999 there were 7 members of staff employed to cater for 5500 members with assets of £7.7million. Current membership is approximately 7000 with assets in excess of £13 million. A voluntary Board of Directors who is elected by the members at each Annual General Meeting operates the Credit Union.

Maeve applied to the Credit Union through a family relative to do some voluntary work to enable her to build up her work experience having completed her formal education. The Credit Union had its full complement of staff but the Board of Directors agreed to investigate the possibility of giving Maeve a temporary voluntary placement. As Maeve is profoundly deaf there were some issues that needed to be addressed to ensure that she

would be comfortable working at the Credit Union and to ensure that the Credit Union could function as efficiently as it normally did. The issues identified as possibly presenting problems for Maeve included communicating with staff, answering the telephone, dealing with member queries and evacuation of the building in the event of a fire or another emergency.

A meeting was set up with the Employment Advisor for the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) to discuss working hours and issues raised. A list of duties that Maeve would feel comfortable with was agreed, these included typing, filing, shredding, bookkeeping entries and deliveries to and collections from the bank. The Employment Advisor met with the staff of the Credit Union to explain the duties that Maeve could comfortably take on and to explain that she could lip-read, sign and communicate through reading and writing. He worked with the staff to clarify how best to communicate with a person who is profoundly deaf.

Maeve commenced her voluntary placement in January 2000, she fitted in well with the staff team and made friends, she worked very hard and learnt the skills required very quickly. As BSL is Maeve's first language and the staff was keen to support her and communicate with her they encouraged her to teach them basic sign language, which she did. In March 2000 the Board of Directors offered Maeve a temporary paid contract until June 2000. In July 2000 she was offered employment under the "Job Introduction Scheme" and the Credit Union successfully secured a grant to supplement Maeve's wages.

When Maeve was employed full time her employers took specialist advice and discussed with Maeve the equipment that could be put in place to enable her to work in a safe environment and to do her job to the best of her ability. The building has recently been renovated and included in those renovations was the upgrade of fire and security alarms that flash as well as sound. A BT converse 225 telephone with amplification has also been installed. USEL also advised on the purchase of IT hardware and other specialist equipment most relevant to enhancing Maeve's working environment.

Maeve's employers describe her as a well-respected full-time member of staff, they say that she is an excellent worker and carries out all her duties to the highest standard. Maeve can communicate with customers with hearing difficulties that sign or lip-read; her employers feel that it is a huge advantage to have someone with these skills on the staff. Maeve has not only taught her co-workers some sign language but also something about the needs of disabled people.

Maeve is obviously very comfortable in her workplace and explained that she really enjoys her job and the financial independence this gives her.

Doherty Meats is a family run business, which manufactures meat products. It is situated in Pennyburn Industrial Estate and is run by Seamus Doherty. This company supplies meat products to large retail chains such as Sainsburys, Tesco's and Safeway as well as the independent grocery trade mainly in the North West of Ireland. It employs 38 full-time workers 4 of whom are disabled, many staff are employed by this company all their working life and staff turnover is very low.



Sean Walton has been employed at Doherty Meats since 1987. Despite having Cerebral Palsy and other health related difficulties, he has remained in employment doing light work such as wrapping and packing. He has recently reduced his working week from 5 to 3 days due to his disability but he is very keen to continue working as he enjoys the financial independence, the social aspect of the job and the discipline this brings to his life. He has a very good relationship with his employer and is very aware of the support he receives especially at times when his attendance is poor.



Marie is married and has been employed on the factory floor of Doherty Meats since December 1987. She started work in Shantallow Area Workshop and was sent to Doherty Meats on placement. Following her successful placement her employer took her on full-time.

When Marie started working here there were seven girls on the factory floor but now she is the only one. She is very happy to work in an all male environment and is conscious of the support she gets from her co-workers.

Marie has cerebral palsy, which affects her walking and balance. She uses a scooter to get around outside work and a stick when she is at home.

Marie feels very settled in this job. She packs meat, assists with checkout sheets and sometimes has responsibility for counting stock. Her employer underlined the fact that she is very reliable and works well in the factory floor environment.



Ann Marie Houston is a single mother of 2 young children with a BA (hons) Consumer Studies & Home Economics. Ann Marie has worked full-time as a Library Assistant in Strabane library for the past 7 years. Ann Marie is registered blind and has a condition called Retinitus Pigmentosa which means that she has tunnel vision and night blindness.

Ann Marie completed a distance-learning course with RNIB and went on a 1-year work experience with Enterprise Ulster in Foyle St Library; USEL then assisted her in getting full-time employment in the library services. Ann Marie is very conscious that her supervisor played a big part in her development as a library assistant teaching her the skills, trusting her, seeing her potential and treating her as an equal from day one.

In her working life Ann Marie has had to work with people who have preconceived ideas about what a person who is registered blind should look like and behave like. She feels that she has had to challenge stereotypes.

The fact that none of the library customers are aware that she is visually impaired is a success in its self; she explained some of the strategies she uses, which allow her to operate in this way. Ann Marie's duties include using the computer to issue book loans, to log users onto the computer network, initiating catalogue searches, collecting photocopying money, sending faxes, use of the scanner and telephone duties.

There are facilities in the library for visually impaired users - Supernova, which offers magnification and speech packages. Ann Marie is trained in its use.

Ann Marie is a member of the Northern Ireland Library Services and Information Committee Vision Panel sub-committee, which examines the delivery and service of the organisation in terms of meeting the needs of the visually impaired.

Ann Marie is a member of the core committee of the Consumer Forum and represents the Forum on the RNIB committee that has an input into the general running of the RNIB.

In relation to her specific medical condition Ann Marie is the secretary of a self-help group, which has been so successful that other people with different visual impairment are becoming involved. This group attempts to provide support for members and organises social events.

Employment for Ann Marie means that she is treated as a whole person, her disability is only a small part of what she is, she is keen to emphasise that she has one disability but many strengths. She is very aware of the barriers that affect people with a sight impairment in competing with non-disabled people for jobs. Ann Marie feels that people who are visually impaired sometimes lack confidence, feel a bit inadequate and have greater problems with communication than able-bodied people. However, she feels that from the time a job is advertised a visually impaired person is disadvantaged for example with advertisements in newspapers. Ann Marie suggested that all jobs should be advertised in the talking newspaper and the radio and should be available in large print. She was keen to emphasise the very positive role played by social workers and Disability Employment Advisors in assisting people with visual impairment to work through the job search process.

USEL have been very supportive in Ann Marie's working life. She feels that she has a good relationship with her link worker and that he is never in a hurry. When he visits he stays as long as is necessary to deal with any issues she might have and to discuss how she is getting on in her job. Ann Marie feels that USEL staff make themselves available at all times, they are just a phone call away. They have been involved with Ann Marie's employers in providing equipment that she needs to allow her to do her job efficiently including providing blinds and pens that are fixed to the desk. Ann Marie has found the counselling service they provide very helpful especially when she has had difficult times in her personal life and she really appreciates their discretion when they are working with her in the work place. Ann Marie is also aware that DEL via USEL supplement her wages as there are some jobs, which she cannot do or is slower at doing.



Deirdre Montgomery started her working life in a supermarket where she worked for 10 years; she decided to move jobs when the work became too heavy. Deirdre had a stroke when she was 1 year old which left her paralysed on her left side; she also lost her eyesight but regained it. Despite wanting to work, Deirdre was then unemployed for a year, which she found very frustrating as she lost some of her financial independence and the chance to meet people and to socialise.

Deirdre then got a job in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and she has been in her current job for eight years, her main duties include operating the switchboard and dealing with incoming and outgoing post. Although there are complicated skills associated with her current job Deirdre mastered these and has attended a telephonist-training day.



Deirdre has made a number of friends at work and is keen to underline the help and support she gets from her fellow workers and her bosses. She experienced prejudice in the workplace on one occasion but she worked around it and she is very happy with her current job and the people she works with. Although Deirdre does not intend to change her job or apply for a promotion she does not feel that there are any barriers that would prevent her from competing with able-bodied people in this situation.

St Peter's Primary School Cloughreagh



St Peter's Primary School in Cloughreagh employs 39 staff; 13 of whom are teaching staff. Shauna Murphy went to St Peter's 5 years ago as a trainee. When her placement time elapsed, the Principal of the school was very keen to employ Shauna full-time but was hindered by bureaucracy and contractual difficulties.

Even with the backing of the School Board of Governors there were difficulties with the Education and Library Board as technically all school ancillary and auxiliary staff are their employees. Shauna was very keen to remain at St Peter's and was subsequently employed in a voluntary capacity while claiming unemployment benefit. Meanwhile the Principal of the school continued to attempt to make arrangements to take her on full-time. USEL then became involved and worked with the Principal to secure a job for Shauna in the school. The main obstacle was that there was no precedent for employing a member of staff with a learning disability in the role of classroom assistant. Eventually the Principal and Board of Governors agreed that they would employ her anyway and the Education & Library Board eventually put structures in place to allow this to happen.

The Principal and members of the teaching staff explain how Shauna has developed from being a very shy trainee into an invaluable full-time member of staff. She relates well to all the children in the school from the nursery class up to the primary 7 class, a member of the teaching staff explained that this is a challenge which some teaching staff would find difficult.

The Principal explained that she is not only an extra pair of hands but she has initiative, she adds to the ethos of the school and creates an atmosphere of happiness wherever she is working.

Another member of staff explained how she draws children to her, they love her and identify with her, she described how Shauna can make a connection with each individual child and establish a relationship with them.

Shauna has developed very good relationships with classroom assistants and takes responsibility for supporting new trainees while they are on work experience; she is particularly good with those from weaker backgrounds.



Shauna simply says that she is very happy in St Peter's and she loves her job. She is obviously very settled in this job in St Peter's and relates with ease to all staff and children in a variety of settings. She is given responsibility and she handles it well. The staff of the school rely on her.



Andrea O'Hagan has worked in the Courthouse in Derry for a year; her duties include answering telephones and computer work such as processing fixed penalties and processing legal aid for defendants as well as some written correspondence.

Andrea left school in June 1997 and went to the North West Institute where she completed a level 2 NVQ in Health & Social Care. In September 1998 she started a GNVQ in Health & Social Care but she decided that this was not the career she wanted. Andrea spent 6 months without work attempting to come to terms with her visual impairment - she had developed Retinitis Pigmentosa, which is a combination of night blindness and tunnel vision. Andrea had experienced some prejudice from students that she found difficult to understand.

In January 2000 Andrea completed a course with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) in Business Administration & Computing NVQ level 1. In January 2002 she completed a Diploma in Text Processing and Reception Duties.

Andrea then contacted the Training & Employment Agency and was put into contact with a Disability Employment Advisor who set up a placement for her with a voluntary organisation called the Sensory Support Service, which is part of the Foyle Health & Social Services Trust. Andrea worked here for 6 months dealing with non-disabled people as well as people with either hearing or sight impairment.

While working here Andrea was interviewed for paid employment but was unsuccessful, she feels that the biggest barrier was the attitude of prospective employers towards disability. She felt that she was not being taken seriously and that employers understood that employing a disabled person would cost a lot of money as some specialist equipment might be required to enable the disabled person to do their job efficiently. Andrea feels that some employers simply lacked the information and were not aware of the grants available or the system of supplementing wages or the Disability Discrimination Act.

Andrea was keen to continue to build up her CV and to get as much experience as she could so she took on another period of voluntary work with Action for Mental Health in their Day Centre. She did a lot of work on the computer and dealt with correspondence as well as talking with the people who were attending the Centre as she feels she could relate well to them in terms of disability and the frustrations and prejudice associated with everyday living.

While Andrea was working in this placement she applied for her current position in the Courthouse. Twice the staff of the courthouse assessed her; they also observed her in work using specialist equipment and software. In February 2003 Andrea started work in full time paid employment in the Courthouse.

There are approximately 30 workers employed in the office and before Andrea took up her job the rest of the staff in her office were given disability awareness training, which Andrea feels she has benefited from. Her colleagues have been very supportive and willing to be involved in training her to do the job. Although she does not intend to apply for a promotion in the near future she feels that she will be treated fairly and does not foresee any barriers.

Andrea is supported in her work by USEL, she has a support worker who visits her regularly and is available by phone when needed. Andrea has found this contact very useful particularly when she is required to complete complicated forms also when learning how to complete time sheets.

Andrea feels that in work she is treated just like everyone else, her job gives her life purpose, she feels that she is doing something for herself and both her self esteem and self confidence have improved. She is also enjoying the financial independence that full time paid employment gives her.



The Newry & Mourne Health & Social Services Trust has been committed to employing disabled people for many years; they work closely with USEL to support their disabled employees. The trust has a Code of Practice in place concerning the recruitment and selection of disabled people; they also have an Equality Assurance Manager who trains staff in Disability Awareness as part of selection training.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources in Newry & Mourne Trust outlined some of the measures they have put in place to facilitate the employment of disabled people. Some staff that attend the Occupational Health Department may have a disability. If reasonable adjustments are identified by the Occupational Health Physician regarding returning to work on flexible or reduced working hours to rehabilitate an employee back into the work environment, these are considered by the manager and the Personnel Department.

They also consider recommendations such as redeploying staff into more suitable working environments e.g. staff working in dusty filing rooms who may have a condition such as asthma which is not conducive to working in that environment. A full risk assessment is undertaken and an assessment made. Professional staff may be redeployed into a different Programme of Care due to a condition that may be controlled more easily in a less stressful environment. Other measures have been taken over the years such as more suitable office furniture for employees who may need adjustments to their workstation.

“Over the years managers from different disciplines and professional programmes of care in liaison with Senior Human Resource staff have made many adjustments for the health and well being of our valued staff.”

These moves again, help retain professional skills and experience crucial to The Trust especially in areas where there are recruitment difficulties, and have resulted in the Trust being able to retain the professional skills and knowledge from these valued members of staff, allowing them to continue in employment in a more suitable and healthy environment.

The Trust covers a wide geographical area across Newry and Mourne and a wide range of care within The Acute and Community Trust. The trust employs approximately 2400 staff throughout all its facilities and they feel that they have an obligation to consider how they retain their staff in a well-motivated safe environment. The benefits are obvious to the Trust as a whole to both staff and patients/clients.

USEL Support

Respondents were invited to detail the help or support that they have received from USEL and to explain how this had helped in the world of work.

26% of respondents described USEL as either supportive or helpful and 11% of respondents stated that USEL staff always take prompt action to sort out issues and problems as outlined below:

“USEL have been very good at supporting me in the workplace, they have sorted out various situations for example the issues of pay rises and when I can take my summer holidays.”

“I was very distressed and upset at being made redundant, the USEL placement officer was very supportive, set up interviews and attended with me, I got another job with their help.”

“USEL have facilitated my working in my current job since completing my work experience, they are very supportive while keeping a discrete distance to maintain my privacy and the support worker is only a phone call away.”

“USEL call regularly and do reviews, they helped with a bullying problem and found me another job.”

“USEL staff have been very helpful and approachable, they have sorted out my workload so I can now cope.”

“I don’t contact USEL often but it is a great support just knowing that they are there.”

11% appreciated the support visits to the workplace and 2% particularly appreciated home visits.

“I receive regular visits from USEL and I enjoy the opportunity to talk over how I am getting on in my job.”

“Contact with USEL showed me that I was not the only person in my situation and this restored my confidence and my self worth.”

“The support worker visited me at home and made me think positively when I was at my lowest ebb.”

“USEL made arrangements with the manager about work that I could do and the hours that I could work, when problems did arise the staff at USEL were available to talk to me and my supervisor at work to sort things out, I could not have been so happy for so long in my current job had it not been for the staff of USEL.”

10% of respondents stated that USEL helped them to get their job while a further 7% felt that USEL actually got them their job.

“USEL staff spent much time finding out the type of work I could do and then they found an employer in the local area who would accommodate my needs, they were also willing to do home visits and work visits and took phone calls to sort out any difficulties, I now have the confidence to address some of these concerns myself with the relevant people.”

“Without USEL I would be unemployed, they sorted out my job and now offer me support.”

“The support of USEL staff has been invaluable I got my first full-time job with their help after many unsuccessful attempts.”

9% of respondents felt that the financial assistance given by USEL was invaluable and many stated that without this they believed they would not be employed.

“USEL financially support my employment by 55%, this allows me to continue in a very specialist job with fewer outputs due to my chronic tiredness caused by my condition.”

“The financial help provided by USEL means that I can relax and do a good job and I am not expected to do anything beyond my capability. “

“Financial support to employer has been crucial in securing my job, the financial help with taxis to and from work has transformed my life completely and allowed me to maintain my independence, the help I have received with special equipment has been invaluable.”

“Contribution to wages, regular contact with employer and visits, I have been receiving help from USEL for 1 year now, they play a very important role between the disabled person and the employer, without their help many disabled staff would find themselves out of work.”

9% explained that they know that if they need help they just need to ring their contact in USEL.

“I know that there are people in USEL that I can turn to if I have any work problems or worries, they are aware of my needs so I don’t have to explain my circumstances to new people each time.”

“Without USEL I would be lost, they helped me to fill in job applications, I only have to phone them and they are very helpful.”

“USEL staff have helped me fill in forms and made me aware of the benefits I am entitled to, I only have to ring.”

3% outlined how USEL staff had negotiated shorter working hours.

“USEL have helped me address with my employer the number of hours I work, they give me advice and I have support visits at work, they help me to make decisions.”

3% stated that USEL monitor their progress

“Without the support and encouragement of USEL I could not have continued in my present work, being unemployed again would have been very difficult for me.”

“The USEL worker monitors my progress and gives excellent support, always available for help or advice.”

1.5% of respondents detailed the specialist equipment supplied by USEL and 1% specifically appreciated the help given with form filling.

1% of respondents didn't know if they got help from USEL and a further 1% was not aware of any help from USEL.

The negative comments from respondents were small in number, for example 1% felt that visits are infrequent. However even when respondents were not entirely happy with the work of USEL in most cases they did begin by crediting USEL for some aspect of their work.

“USEL have always been there when I needed them, I would have appreciated more help with furthering my education and it would have helped if my employer and fellow workers had some deaf awareness training.”

“USEL have in the past been very helpful and supportive to me and my family but now I don't get any support visits and I would appreciate them.”

2.5% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

Employers were asked about what help/support offered by USEL they found most useful in facilitating the employment of disabled people.

16 respondents did not answer this question. A summary of the responses is as follows:

Table 7: USEL Support

| Nature of Support | % |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Financial | 32% |
| Support Role | 30% |
| Good Contact Point | 10% |
| Very Helpful Staff | 5% |
| Providing Information | 5% |
| Monitoring Role | 4% |
| Training | 3% |
| Providing Equipment/Furniture | 3% |
| Little/no contact/support | 8% |

Some employers further clarified their responses, for example a number of those who felt the financial help provided was most useful explained that this had allowed them to employ disabled people while remaining competitive. Others explained that the financial help was essential as it allowed them to allocate the additional time required to train and monitor the disabled employee or it allowed other people to be allocated the tasks that the disabled person could not do.

Some employers detailed how the USEL staff had spent a lot of time with them matching the job on offer to the most appropriate person with the necessary skills. Other employers outlined the crucial part played by USEL staff during reviews and disciplinary hearings. Others explained that the visits were of more use to the disabled employee rather than to the business or the other staff. One employer stated that he was grateful for the financial assistance but he was not aware that any other support was available.

USEL Services & Staff

The results of this research project indicate that the vast majority of the disabled people currently being supported by USEL and their employers are very positive about the crucial role played by USEL in facilitating and supporting disabled people in the work place.

In terms of the contributions from the disabled respondents, the vast majority emphasised how easy it is to access support from USEL simply by making a phone call. This support also includes regular work visits as well as further visits to the work place or home as requested. Respondents were also very keen to emphasise the role of USEL in helping them to secure full-time employment. The respondents are very aware of the benefits they get from working, including financial independence, self-confidence and self-esteem as well as the discipline and routine that employment brings to their lives.

During interviews for the case-studies included in this report, respondents spoke at length about the many issues and barriers they have faced and the role played by USEL in helping to address these. The issues ranged from working conditions and hours to holiday rights and work relationships. The respondents explained how USEL dealt with each issue on an individual basis and how support workers dealt with problems immediately; frequently preventing situations from getting out of control. Respondents also felt that their support workers spent as much time as was necessary to address issues and they appreciated the discretion and the sensitivity with which each situation was handled.

It is obvious from both the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews for the case studies that many of the respondents had developed a close relationship with their support worker. These relationships are based on trust and confidence and many cases were detailed outlining the discussions and compromise reached between disabled employees and their employers facilitated by USEL support workers.

Employers too are very positive about USEL's services. Obviously the financial support is important and some explained that without it they could not have employed people with particular disabilities and remained competitive. Employers were also very complementary about the support role played by USEL staff in terms of mediating between themselves and disabled employees regarding conditions of service review meetings and disciplinary hearings. Employers are also very dependent on USEL for advice and information concerning reasonable adjustment. A small number of employers also outlined the value they placed on staff training provided by USEL to raise awareness among all their employees around disability.

USEL staff were also praised by employers for the amount of time they spent with them matching jobs with the most appropriate people with the necessary skills.

Disabilities

The 3 most frequently occurring disabilities/health conditions in the sample were learning difficulties, deafness and epilepsy. In the course of the research there were many examples of good practice and some examples of a lack of support in the workplace. As stated previously it is reasonable to expect that all USEL contact staff are specifically trained in supporting employees with these conditions in the workplace. However, there is a need for an additional training option for employers and their staff in terms of offering support. Examples include reasonable adjustments during the induction/training periods or practical training for all staff on assisting during an epileptic seizure.

Job Search Process

The traditional job search process with the written application form and formal interview is still widely used today for staff selection despite the growing concern that it is not in fact the best method of recruiting the right person for a job. In many organisations high profile executive positions are not filled solely on the basis of an application and a formal interview, the process now includes workshops, group discussions, assessment centres and other methods of allowing candidates to demonstrate ability and potential.

The traditional process is a difficult one for people with particular disabilities and some basic changes are required. There must be a move away from the written application form being the only method of application and with the latest development in technology the possibilities seem endless. Visual application would allow the applicant to communicate in a more relaxed setting and would allow applicants to include actual examples of experience. The development of specialised software and the wide use of the internet must offer further options for staff selection which are not so reliant on literacy skills.

At the interview stage, communication problems are the biggest issue; often made more acute by the nerves and pressure associated with the process. In the course of this research there were examples of interviewees being accompanied by a support worker at the interview and in other examples the interviewee was refused this assistance. It would seem reasonable that if an employer uses this method of staff selection that the presence of a support worker should be permissible.

In line with developments taking place at the top end of the staff selection scale, it would seem that a radical change in procedures is what is required, with a move away from the formal interview with an interview panel and set questions to a more dynamic set-up where people with a disability can compete on the basis of skills and ability. This would have obvious training implications beyond the remit of USEL but their role in supporting and facilitating the change would be crucial.

Progress

There is evidence in their annual report that the services offered by USEL are expanding and developing and the number of people they support increasing each year. In the research some people with severe disabilities outlined their difficulties and the challenges they face in holding down a job even when it has been adjusted to meet their ability levels. However, there is an issue with disabled people working in low paid and low skilled jobs. In this research there was evidence of disabled employees who are disappointed and frustrated, as they do not feel that they are reaching their full potential. In one example an employee in an administrative job was prevented from applying for promotion despite the fact that she had responsibilities in the work place and when a colleague left, she was allocated additional duties. In another example the employee stated that he had responsibilities in the workplace beyond some of his colleagues and yet he was still the lowest paid person in the office, as he could not apply for a promotion because he was supported by USEL.

It might help improve this situation if these issues were recorded formally by support workers during review meetings and discussed with employers to help ensure that employees are reaching their full potential. This will include some work on developing realistic expectations on the part of the employee while also accommodating their need to feel that they are progressing. It is obvious from the research that financial reward is not their only motivation.

Good Practice

56% of the sample of USEL employers has been employing people with a disability for 6 years or more. This is a resource, which USEL can use to initiate a process that will generate the sharing of best practice across the sector. When networking opportunities have been established USEL's role will be to facilitate the process and to support employers new to employing disabled people by introducing them to the process. From October 2004 all employers will be obliged to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. This process will be made easier if larger experienced companies are willing to share their expertise.

Barriers

The research would suggest that many of the employers who took part are positive about employing people with a disability. 38% felt that there are no barriers to prevent disabled people from working in their workplace. It is likely that the number of barriers in the workplace will decrease as smaller businesses with less than 15 employees come under the Disability Discrimination Act in October of this year. There is some awareness amongst employers that these changes to the Act are taking place and there was no

evidence of resistance to these changes but rather a willingness to change. Employers did outline details of the additional time and effort required to induct and train a new employee with particular disabilities, however, the financial implications of this were not seen as a barrier to employing a disabled person. There was evidence that they had confidence in the process involving USEL where a person with the right skills and abilities was matched to the available job. Employers went on to express details of experiences they had of employing disabled people with talents and qualities that their non-disabled co-workers lacked.

56% of employers stated that the physical demands or the nature of a job or the physical layout of the building would prevent a person with a particular disability from doing a particular job. There was evidence that employers had considered reasonable adjustment and were working to select the right person for the job based on ability rather than disability and USEL are playing an important role in this process.

10% of disabled employees felt that bias and prejudice by a prospective employer hindered their success in the job search process. In today's society with an emphasis on inclusivity and disability awareness it is unacceptable that disabled people are faced with this barrier. A cultural shift is required, the current advertising campaign "Think for a change. It's time for a change."¹⁵ is an important initiative that will promote discussion and perhaps encourage more people to examine their attitudes and more employers to employ people with a disability. 82% of the employers involved in this research have never employed a disabled person who was unable to meet the demands of the job and they detailed many examples of how the disabled people they employed improved the atmosphere in the workplace and attitudes of their other employees. They also dispelled the myth of disabled people taking more sick days off than their non-disabled counterparts

In Conclusion

The research reinforces the need to continue to work with employers with regard to the employment of disabled people and also with regard to their responsibilities in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and in relation to the many benefits of employing a person with a disability. It might be useful to survey employers not currently involved with USEL to establish their position on employing a disabled person with a view to pursuing the possibility of initiating the process of employing disabled people. As part of this, information would be provided on the funding system offered by The Department for Employment and Learning via USEL and the financial help available to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace or the job.

Employers who provide jobs for the disabled need to recognise that each disabled person will require a different approach and support system. While approximately half the sample was keen to talk about their disability in the workplace and to have their condition

¹⁵ Further information available from www.disabilityni.info

recognised. The other half wanted their employer to know about their disability but they did not want colleagues and customers to know. They preferred to be treated like everybody else than to have staff trained to support them and therefore be informed formally about their disability. However, the research underlines the need to continue to work with disabled people, to support them in exercising their right to be employed and to progress within their place of employment with the same rights, support and encouragement as their non-disabled counterparts.

The findings of this research emphasise the importance of employment to individuals, which highlight the need to ensure access to employment for people with disabilities. Disabled people have a right to control their lives and to make choices unhindered by the bias and prejudice of their non-disabled counterparts.

Employers have an obligation to realistically examine the business case for employing the right person for the job including work history. It is not enough to make up the numbers at the interview stage and to be seen to be working within the framework of the Disability Discrimination Act. While attitudes have changed, there is still room for improvement, it is not enough to argue that the prejudice comes from ignorance and not “ill will.” The prejudice must be eradicated. This is a social and moral duty.



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