

Disability smart approaches to engaging suppliers and partners

Research report
**Key aids and barriers to effectively
engaging suppliers and partners**

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Executive Summary

At Business Disability Forum (BDF) we have the pleasure of working with many businesses and public sector bodies that are determined to get better at securing great outcomes for their disabled colleagues, candidates and customers. There is a growing group of BDF Partners and Members that are leading at the front and becoming ever more innovative and creative in ensuring their disabled colleagues, candidates and customers are contributing at all levels and making their organisations more successful, productive and sustainable.

We also know that the good work to build disability-smart organisations relies on suppliers having the right know-how to improve inclusion for all employees, candidates and customers, including those with disabilities. Not surprising when we consider that in 2013/14 the total contract value of UK public sector outsourcing agreements was £51 billion and for the commercial sector was £30 billion¹.

In the absence of disability-smart suppliers and partners, improved disability performance within organisations can be stymied. Disabled candidates don't apply or get interviewed for roles, employees that acquire disabilities and health conditions are less likely to be retained, disabled customers move their business elsewhere and facilities become progressively more inaccessible as employees age and acquire disabilities and health conditions and visitors and customers find access challenging.

At BDF, we also know that since 2004 when we first launched the BDF Disability Standard, this domain of the Disability Standard is where organisations tend to perform least well. To add to our suite of guidance, we have been prioritising sharing what works in achieving disability smart outcomes through work with suppliers².

This research study involved 16 organisations (14 private sector and 2 public sector) is part of adding to that knowledge base. This is intended to identify the common characteristics associated with 'why disability-smart happens' in work with suppliers and partners; and what typically gets in the way. Following on from this, we are delighted to signal that new guidance will be available for early 2017 that offers an integrated guide to what works at each stage of the commissioning/procurement cycle for procurement professionals. Stay tuned.

George Selvanera
Strategy & External Affairs Director

¹ Rossi B., 'Public sector outstrips commercial sector in UK outsourcing market' - See more at: <http://www.information-age.com/it-management/outsourcing-and-supplier-management/> quoting Information Services Group research (2014)

² See BDF 2016 guidance sponsored about disability-smart approaches to talent acquisition and our recruitment and technology procurement protocols for examples.

Introduction

Business Disability Forum (BDF) aims to equip our Partners and Members with the know-how to secure good disability and inclusion outcomes through its engagement with suppliers and partners.

Across all sectors, procurement professionals are mindful of their legal obligations to ensure that products and services do not discriminate. Procurement professionals also routinely factor into product and service specifications expectations relevant to corporate values and priorities. For example, requirements for suppliers and partners to address specific economic, sustainability and environmental concerns.

Managing supplier relationships to achieve corporate responsibility and sustainability goals is one of the biggest management challenges faced by business. The complexity involved means that embedding sustainability across supply chain partners requires “a high degree of commitment and deep understanding of the issues” (Bernon, Baker et al. (2012)³).

Leveraging relationships with suppliers and partners to deliver better outcomes for disabled customers, employees and candidates is not yet common across UK plc, let alone business as usual. BDF is aware of some good practices particularly as it relates to procuring recruitment, facilities management, occupational health and safety and aspects of technology products and services. However, it is not routine practice in all procurement categories even within businesses that do well in some procurement categories.

Working with a small group of BDF Partners including American Express, HSBC, KPMG and Royal Mail, with some involvement of the Cabinet Office too, we identified value in establishing a picture of what businesses self-report as key aids and barriers to effectively engaging suppliers and partners in their business’ disability priorities. What we found was:

³ Mike Bernon, Peter Baker et al., “Evolution or revolution; new models for sustainable supply chain management”. In *Cranfield on Corporate Sustainability*, Edited by David Grayson & Nadine Exter, Greenleaf Publishing (June 2012).

Key findings

1. Third party suppliers have the potential to significantly impact disabled people on behalf of organisations nearly all the time:
 - a. In more than 9 in 10 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in at least some or all of facilities management
 - b. In more than 8 in 10 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in at least some of all of recruitment, training and development and occupational health
 - c. In at least 3 in 4 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in at least some of all of information and community technology, including websites.
 - d. In more than 2 in 3 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in at least some of all the customer experience and building works.
2. There are good results in relation to the extent to which research study participants report that third party suppliers are delivering disability-smart outcomes, although in all product and service categories the research study participants report that more is possible with third party suppliers to secure disabled people's inclusion and participation. This most particularly relates to ICT and recruitment, training and development and customer experience.
 - a. In more than 8 in 10 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in providing facilities management are contributing to positive outcomes for disabled people.
 - b. In more than 2 in 3 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in providing occupational health and are contributing to positive outcomes for disabled people.
 - c. In more than 6 in 10 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in providing recruitment, training and development and building works and are contributing to positive outcomes for disabled people
 - d. In at least 1 in 2 cases, third party suppliers are engaged in provision of ICT and the customer experience and are contributing to positive outcomes for disabled people.
3. All research study participants report that there are areas of their engagement with internal customers that make them confident that work with suppliers and partners is delivering disability-smart outcomes. This arises:
 - a. For more than half, because of a passionate individual in that area who champions disability.

- b. For more than 2 in 5, because they know that conversations happen between the internal customers and the relevant suppliers and partners about the importance of securing disability-smart outcomes.
 - c. For about one third, they know because:
 - i. Colleagues with disabilities and other adjustment needs report that supplier relationships are working well for them#
 - ii. Internal customers are consistent about expecting procurement professionals to source inclusive products and services and
 - iii. Internal customers provide them with good guidance about how to consider disability/inclusion in how they source products and services.
4. This suggests there are benefits to:
- a. Improving the confidence and knowledge of procurement professionals about disability-smart approaches to work with suppliers.
 - b. Building organisational resilience so achieving disability-smart outcomes is business as usual.
 - c. Increasing opportunities for disabled employees to feedback about their experiences and input into supplier review mechanisms.
5. However, there is not a coherent approach to embedding disability considerations across each stage of the procurement cycle.
- a. In more than half of cases, disability-smart outcomes are not built into service specifications, procurement/category management departments lack the know-how to manage supplier relationships to secure good disability outcomes and disabled colleagues are not involved in feeding back that the supplier is delivering good outcomes.
 - b. In more than half of cases, the research study participants report the market does not have at least one or two good suppliers of inclusive products and services.
 - c. There are relatively limited conversations with suppliers and partners outside formal processes about the priority for inclusive products and services (less than 2 in 5).
 - d. There is limited review through contract and performance management processes about the progress of suppliers and partners in delivering on inclusive requirements (1 in 4).

6. This runs counter to lessons from a BDF best practice case study about the London Legacy Development Corporation⁴ (LLDC) which found disability-smart priorities need to be visible at every step of the procurement cycle from needs analysis and phases of pre-solicitation, solicitation, evaluation and contract award. This was possible because there was a strong strategic commitment to delivering on inclusion and accessibility.
 - a. This suggests that for most research study participants they will secure more disability-smart outcomes where there is strong strategic commitment and this is embedded at each stage of the procurement cycle.
7. This is reinforced by the findings about the stages of the procurement cycle where inclusion and accessibility outcomes are integrated. While half report that these outcomes are included in the identification of need and the processes for agreeing the procurement internally, in solicitation phases less than 3 in 10 indicate these requirements and in just over 2 in 5 cases do award/contract management processes specific disability performance measures (and just 15% report they have access to good quality management information which helps them know whether a difference is being made).
 - a. At best, approaches to disability-smart engagement with suppliers and partners is patchy across the procurement cycle and so with a focus to make disability considerations visible at each stage, many more disability outcomes are possible for organisations.
8. Key priorities identified by research study participants about the main challenges to overcome are:
 - a. More than half report they need to start reviewing progress of suppliers and partners in delivering on inclusion requirements (and it is a feature of the contract).
 - b. More than 4 in 10 report they need more conversations with suppliers and partners about how they approach/ might approach inclusion.
 - c. Close to 4 in 10 report that staff within divisions and within procurement teams need more know-how about how to manage supplier relationships to secure disability-smart outcomes and that inclusion needs to be part of decision making about which prospective suppliers are successful.

⁴ See <https://members.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/resource-category/suppliers-and-partners/>

More detailed findings

Areas where third party suppliers impact

Table One shows the extent to which third party suppliers are engaged in delivering products and services that impact disabled employees, candidates and customers. Table One shows that overwhelmingly facilities management involves third party suppliers and moreover that in more than 3 in 4 organisations this is also true of recruitment, training and development, occupational health and information and communications technology (ICT).

Table One demonstrates how extensive the involvement of third party suppliers is as it concerns fundamental aspects of recruitment and retention of disabled employees and in how disabled customers will experience an organisation (e.g. facilities management and ICT). While the sample is small and more work would need to happen to be specific, there are also no statistically significant differences based on size of workforce or where offices/retail outlets/delivery sites operate from.

Table 1 Areas of business where external suppliers provide products and services which could impact people with disabilities⁵

Which areas are there third parties delivering products and services to your business which impact people with disabilities?	%	Response Count
Facilities management including front of house, facilities maintenance, parking and catering	93.8%	15
Recruitment	81.3%	13
Training and development	81.3%	13
Occupational health	81.3%	13
Information technology and communications including websites	75.0%	12
Building work	68.8%	11
Customer experience	68.8%	11
Communications	50.0%	8
Other (please specify)	18.8%	3

There are good results in relation to the extent to which research study participants report that third party suppliers are delivering outcomes that are positive for disabled people’s inclusion and participation, although in all product and service categories set out at Table One there is a less positive view about the role of the third suppliers in delivering good outcomes for disabled people. There is a gap between Table One and Two which points to more being possible with third party suppliers and partners to secure disabled people’s inclusion and participation. Building work and facilities management ratings less significant, with the more significant differences are in ICT and recruitment, training and development and customer experience.

⁵ ‘Other’ was a statement that every aspect of the business activities had the potential to be impacted by third party suppliers and others were staff uniforms and the provision of consumer goods.

Table 2 Areas of business where external suppliers provide products and services which could impact people with disabilities⁶

Which areas are there third parties delivering products and services that are helping deliver good outcomes for disabled people.	% where third party is involved	% where helping deliver good outcomes
Facilities management including front of house, facilities maintenance, parking and catering	93.8%	81.3%
Recruitment	81.3%	62.5%
Training and development	81.3%	62.5%
Occupational health	81.3%	68.8%
Information technology and communications including websites	75.0%	50%
Building work	68.8%	62.5%
Customer experience	68.8%	50%
Communications	50.0%	37.5%
Other (please specify)	18.8%	3

⁶ 'Other' was a statement that every aspect of the business activities had the potential to be impacted by third party suppliers and others were staff uniforms and the provision of consumer goods.

Key aids to achieving disability-smart outcomes in engaging third party suppliers

The research study participants point to varied business areas where they feel most confident about work with third party suppliers delivering more disability-smart outcomes, albeit with a bias towards facilities management:

- 5 organisations identify facilities management
- 2 organisations identify building work
- 2 organisations identify occupational health
- 2 organisations identify ICT
- 2 organisations identify recruitment
- 1 organisation identifies customer experience.

Table Three shows that primarily the confidence to know that any category of goods and services is delivering disability-smart outcomes arises from:

- For more than half, that there is a passionate individual in that area who champions disability.
- For more than 2 in 5, they know that conversations happen between the internal customers and the relevant suppliers and partners about the importance of securing disability-smart outcomes.
- For about one third, they have colleagues with disabilities reporting that supplier relationships are working well for them, they have internal customers who are consistent about expecting procurement professionals to source inclusive products and services and they also have internal customers providing them with good guidance about how we consider disability/inclusion in how we source products and services on their behalf.

This points to considerable scope to:

- Improve the confidence and knowledge of procurement professionals about how they can secure disability-smart outcomes in engagement with suppliers and partners.
- Build organisational resilience so that achieving disability-smart outcomes is business as usual and is not dependent on passionate individuals.
- Increase opportunities for disabled employees to feedback about their experiences and to input into supplier performance review mechanisms.

Table 3 Why are you mainly confident that there are these disability-smart outcomes from work with third party suppliers (from internal customers)

Thinking about the area that you feel confident most about what is it about relationship with INTERNAL customers (e.g. recruitment leads, facilities management leads, IT leads etc.), that gives you that confidence in good outcomes?	Response %	Response No.
We have a passionate individual in that area who champions disability.	56.3%	9
Our colleagues with disabilities and other adjustment needs tell us that the relationship is delivering good outcomes for them.	37.5%	6
External customer insight shared with us tells us that we are delivering good outcomes.	31.3%	5
These internal customers are consistent with us about the importance of our making sure that whatever we source on their behalf is inclusive of people with disabilities and other adjustment needs.	37.5%	6
These internal customers provide us good guidance about how we consider disability/ inclusion whenever we are sourcing on their behalf.	31.3%	5
We know that these internal customers have ongoing conversations with suppliers and partners about the importance of providing inclusive goods and services for people with disabilities and other adjustment needs.	43.8%	7
Other (please specify)	6.3%	1

The importance of a passionate individual and colleagues with disabilities report that the supplier relationship is delivering good outcomes becomes more significant when considering the key features of the relationship with external suppliers that provide confidence in good disability-smart outcomes.

How we know we are making a difference

However, as Table Four shows there is not a coherent approach to embedding disability considerations across each stage of the procurement cycle. While just over half of research study participants identify that staff within the relevant teams have the knowledge about how to manage supplier relationships to secure good disability outcomes, much less than half identify that inclusion/accessibility is visible in key stages of commissioning/procuring goods and services:

- In more than half of cases, disability-smart outcomes are not built into service specifications, procurement/category management departments lack the know-how to manage supplier relationships to secure good disability outcomes and disabled colleagues are not involved in feeding back that the supplier is delivering good outcomes.
- In more than half of cases, the research study participants report the market does not have at least one or two good suppliers of inclusive products and services.
- There are relatively limited conversations with suppliers and partners outside formal processes about the priority for inclusive products and services (less than 2 in 5).
- There is limited review through contract and performance management processes about the progress of suppliers and partners in delivering on inclusive requirements (1 in 4).

This runs counter to lessons from a BDF best practice case study about the London Legacy Development Corporation⁷ (LLDC) which found:

9. Inclusion and accessibility priorities must be included from the outset of articulating the business needs that give rise to the need for procurement. This requires a strong strategic commitment to inclusion and accessibility and so gives procurement professionals the authority to embed inclusion and accessibility at all stages of the procurement life-cycle so for example:
 - a. Prospective suppliers and partners need to know how important inclusion and accessibility priorities are. This needs reinforcement at every step in the processes of engaging suppliers and partners through the needs analysis and phases of pre-solicitation, solicitation, evaluation and contract award.

⁷ See <https://members.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/resource-category/suppliers-and-partners/>

- b. There is a role for incentives. LLDC gave weight to questions relevant to inclusion and accessibility in tender evaluation processes. In the range of 4-8% of total available scores, doing well at evidencing how a proposal would deliver on inclusion and accessibility priorities could prove decisive in decision making about which prospective supplier to award a contract.

This is reinforced by the findings about the stages of the procurement cycle where inclusion and accessibility outcomes are integrated:

- In the identification of need (50%)
- In pre-solicitation, i.e. internal processes to establish whether a request for information/proposals will be sought (57.1%)
- In preparing for the solicitation i.e. decision making about type of sourcing, creation of the product/service specification, developing evaluation criteria, choice of contract template etc. (35.7%)
- In solicitation, i.e. when advertising the opportunity, meet the buyer etc. (28.6%)
- In the evaluation process (50%)
- In the award/ contract management processes i.e. the contract specifies disability performance measures that are monitored in relation to the progress of the supplier (42.9%) However, it is also recognised that this stage is made challenging by a lack of good data informing monitoring (only 15% report that there is good data helping understanding about the difference being made).

Table 4 Why are you mainly confident that there are these disability-smart outcomes from work with third party suppliers (from external customers)

Thinking about the area that you feel confident, what are some of the key features of the relationship with EXTERNAL suppliers and partners and/or the wider market that contribute to good outcomes for people with disabilities and other adjustment needs, ? (tick all that apply)	Response Count	Response No.
We have a passionate individual in that area who champions disability.	62.5%	10
Our colleagues/ customers with disabilities and other adjustment needs tell us that the relationship is delivering good outcomes for them.	43.8%	7
Staff within the team/division have the knowledge about how to manage supplier relationships to secure good disability outcomes.	56.3%	9
Staff within our procurement/category management departments have the expertise about how to manage supplier relationships to secure good disability outcomes.	43.8%	7
Outside of more formal tendering/ contract management processes, we tend to have ongoing conversations with suppliers and partners about the importance of providing inclusive goods and services for people with disabilities and other adjustment needs.	37.5%	6
We built inclusion requirements into service specifications.	43.8%	7
The market contains at least some good suppliers of inclusive goods and services.	43.8%	7
Our contract and performance management arrangements include reviewing progress of suppliers and partners in delivering on inclusive requirements.	25.0%	4
Other (please specify)	0.0%	0

What might we improve on?

Table Five reinforces the value of a coherent and consistent strategic approach across the procurement cycle to embedding inclusion and accessibility considerations. This is reflected in:

- More than half identifying that they need to start reviewing progress of suppliers and partners in delivering on inclusion requirements (given it is a feature of the contract).
- More than 4 in 10 reporting that they need more conversations with suppliers and partners about how they approach/ might approach inclusion.
- Close to 4 in 10 report that staff within divisions and within procurement teams need more know-how about how to manage supplier relationships to secure disability-smart outcomes and that inclusion needs to be part of decision making about which prospective suppliers are successful.

Table 5 Key areas of challenge

Biggest challenges to securing disability smart outcomes from work with third parties	Response Count	Response No.
We don't have individuals championing disability in our supplier and partner relationships.	31.3%	5
The experience of our colleagues/customers with disabilities and other adjustment needs doesn't inform decisions about what goods and services we buy.	31.3%	5
It's not a business priority.	12.5%	2
Staff within team/divisions don't have the know-how to manage supplier relationships to secure good disability outcomes.	37.5%	6
Staff within our procurement/category management departments don't have the know-how to manage supplier relationships to secure good disability outcomes.	37.5%	6
We don't tend to have ongoing conversations with suppliers and partners about the importance of providing inclusive goods and services for people with disabilities and other adjustment needs.	43.8%	7
We don't build inclusion requirements into service specifications.	18.8%	3
Even though we ask for information about how a potential supplier might deliver on our inclusion requirements, we don't consider inclusion in decisions about which supplier to work with.	37.5%	6
There are limited suppliers of inclusive goods and services.	-25.0%	4
Even though it is a feature of contracts, our contract and performance management arrangements don't include reviewing progress of suppliers and partners in delivering on inclusive requirements.	56.3%	9
Other (please specify)	12.5%	2

The research study

The research study participants shared perspectives across June- August 2016. These comprise 14 businesses and 2 public sector bodies. These organisations largely work across the UK (11 of 16), while 3 organisations work internationally (3 of 16) and the remainder work in England only.

As Table Six shows most organisations that participated are large employers, with 3 of 16 SMEs and the remainder having more than 250 staff, with the majority having 10,000 or more employees (9 of 16).

Size of workforce	Response Count	Response No.
More than 100,000 employees	18.8%	3
50,000-99,999 employees (including 1 public)	25.0%	4
20,000- 49,999 employees	0.0%	0
10,000- 19,999 employees	12.5%	2
1,000- 9,999 employees (including 1 public)	18.8%	3
251- 999 employees	6.3%	1
Less than 250 employees	18.8%	3