State of the Nation:

Retaining and developing employees with disabilities – Stage 2

What helps and what gets in the way of employers retaining and developing their employees with disabilities and long-term health conditions?: The employee perspective.

By George Selvanera
Director of Policy, Services & Communications

Kim Whippy
Events Officer

December 2015

Business Disability Forum

Building disability-smart organisations

Table of Contents

FOREWORD **3**
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **4**
KEY FINDINGS **4**
Key aids and barriers to retaining and developing employees with disabilities 4
Strategy for retaining and developing employees with disabilities 5
Workplace adjustments 7
Support and development for employees, including those with disabilities and long term health conditions 8
Absence related management and return to work 8
STATE OF THE NATION: AT A GLANCE **9**
1. KEY AIDS AND BARRIERS TO RETAINING AND DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES **11**
2. STRATEGY **15**
2a. Role models 15
2b. Named leads for encouraging retention 15
2c. Data collection and recording 16
3. MAKING ADJUSTMENTS **17**
3a. Workplace adjustments 17
3b. Knowledge about how to make adjustments and where to access advice 18
3c. Access to Work 19
4. SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES **21**
5. ABSENCE RELATED MANAGEMENT AND RETURN TO WORK **22**
CONCLUSIONS **24**
Appendix: Methodology, sample profile and limitations 26
BDF Partners 28
Accessibility Statement 29

FOREWORD

In June 2015, Business Disability Forum (BDF) was thrilled to release the first ever State of the Nation report reviewing how widespread the skills, confidence and practices are amongst employers in the UK which help retain and develop employees with disabilities and long term health conditions.

Figures show that expenditure on staff turnover in just 5 sectors cost UK business more than £4 billion each year and the average cost of replacing individual employees is estimated at £30,000[1]. The business case for investing in retention is a compelling one.

Now, six months on, BDF is pleased to present the second stage of this national research, which investigates the employee perspective and compares the findings with the previous report to gain a more in-depth sense of the biggest barriers and most effective aids in this area.

This second report builds on the recommendations and practical actions offered in the first report. It confirms the importance of addressing challenges such as the skills and confidence of line managers, making available targeted development opportunities for employees with disabilities and organisations ensuring they have good quality workplace adjustments processes.

We are delighted by the large response to this survey from employees across the UK. We are pleased that the research will contribute to continuing developments in knowing what helps and what gets in the way of retaining and developing employees with disabilities.

George Selvanera

Director of Policy, Services and Communications

[1] See: HR REVIEW (Feb 2014)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> "Recruit, develop and support a disabled person, and they're likely to stay with you. The benefits of retaining an experienced, skilled employee are usually far greater than expensive recruitment and training costs to replace them. According to RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People), keeping a newly disabled person in employment has a cost benefit of at least 2.5 times an employer's investment"[2]

As part of the Department of Work and Pensions Disability Employer Engagement Steering Group (DEESG), Business Disability Forum (BDF) chairs a sub-group committed to promoting what works in retaining and developing employees with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

Working with representatives from de Poel Community, EY, Royal Mail, Lloyds Banking Group, Department of Works and Pensions, Equal Approach and Remploy Employment Services, BDF initially led a research project engaging 145 private, public and third sector employers across April - May 2015. Following this, we undertook a second stage of research with 352 employees between July-October 2015 to confirm the key findings and recommendations. Our next stages of work relate to the promotion of a retention maturity model and the development of specific guidance to help employers with making evidence based improvements to their own retention practices.

This second stage report sets out the employee perspective and draws comparisons, where relevant, with what employers told us earlier in 2015. For the fuller analysis and the wider context within which this work has taken place please read the first stage report[3].

KEY FINDINGS

Key aids and barriers to retaining and developing employees with disabilities

1. As with employers, employees identify that the biggest aids to an organisation retaining and developing employees with disabilities and long term health conditions are:

[2] Chris Clarke is CEO of AdviserPlus, 'Embracing Disability is Good for Business' (2014)

[3] See: https://app.pelorous.com/media_manager/public/261/RETAINING%20DISABLED%20TALENT%20STATE%20OF%20THE%20NATION%20REPORT%202%20doc.pdf

a. Organisational values are most significant with more than half of all employees and employers reporting this.

b. Close to half of all employees identified that a good quality workplace or ‘reasonable’ adjustment process was key. This was even more fundamental to employees with disabilities where half reported that workplace adjustments are paramount.

c. A consistent approach to policies that affect employees with disabilities such as how workplace adjustment policies and disability related absence policies are implemented within organisations.

2. The biggest barriers to retaining and developing employees with disabilities and long term health conditions are:

    a. As with employers, just over half of employees reported that a lack of skilled and confident line managers are the single biggest barrier to employee retention and development.

    b. Close to two fifths of employees note that a lack of targeted development opportunities is a significant barrier to their progress and retention. This is more significant than employer perspectives where one in three reported this barrier.

    c. For a third of employees, a general lack of visibility of disability within the organisation was seen as a primary barrier.

Strategy for retaining and developing employees with disabilities

1. There are strong correlations between those employers that rate well for ‘disabled role models’ and for wider aspects of strategy for the retention and development of employees with disabilities and long term health conditions.

    a. For example, employees who indicated they knew the lead for retention, were far more likely to be positive about workplace adjustment processes within their organisation, their organisation taking account of disability within in professional development planning and about the skills and confidence of their line managers.

2. There is a reasonably high level of agreement amongst employers and employees about the extent to which organisations have the features of a good quality retention strategy:

a. 25% of employers identified having disabled role models within their organisations. 30% of employees with disabilities report having disabled role models within their organisations.

b. Just over 2 in 5 employers and employees report that there is a named lead for retaining disabled employees.

c. The main data collection about employees with disabilities is at the stages of applying and accepting offers of employment. Over 3 in 5 employers and employees note that this happens within their organisations (noting that 11 in 20 private sector employers report that they do this). This data collection drops to much less than half when tracking the progress of employees with disabilities in training and promotions (less than 7% for private sector employers).

Workplace adjustments

1. Overwhelmingly, employers and employees identify that there is a workplace adjustment process (96% and 92% respectively).

    a. However, there are significant differences about whether these are, at least some of the time, written agreements: 72% of employers reported that they used written agreements in some form for recording workplace adjustments while 57% of employees reported that this is at least sometimes the case.

2. With respect to employees having confidence that their employer has the knowledge to manage legal obligations vis-à-vis adjustments and employees have the knowledge about where inside and outside the organisation they might go for advice and guidance about workplace adjustments, employees' perspectives suggest this is a priority area for improvement. For example:

    a. Less than 7 in 10 employees with disabilities were 'very' or 'mainly' confident that their employer has the knowledge to manage legal obligations with respect to adjustments; and

    b. Close to 3 in every 10 employees with disabilities indicated that they were 'very' or 'mainly' confident about where to source advice about adjustments from within their organisation.

3. Far fewer employees than employers report awareness of the Access to Work programme which can assist with funding specific adjustments for individuals

that would not reasonably be expected for all employers to fund: 90% of employers outside the Civil Service were aware of the programme compared with 74% of employees outside the Civil Service.

Support and development for employees, including those with disabilities and long term health conditions

1. Overall, more than half of all employers and employees identify that their workplaces have in place key supports for employees such as healthy workplace initiatives and disabled employee networks.

    a. Employees are much less likely than employers to identify that there are healthy workplace policies. This includes within the same employer.

    b. Employees are much more likely to identify networks and peer support for employees with disabilities and long term health conditions than employers. This includes within the same employer.

    c. The extent to which professional development planning and employee engagement surveys take account of disability was broadly similar.

Absence related management and return to work

1. Overall, more than half of all employers and employees report features of good absence management and return to work processes in their workplaces.

    a. Employees are much less likely than employers to identify that there is a clear distinction between how disability related absence and sickness absence are managed. Just 11 in 20 employees consider that this distinction is drawn compared with 14 in 20 employers. This is an area of potential legal and reputational risk for employers and it is recommended that employers review guidance to make the distinction clear.

    b. Employees are much less likely than employers to report that line managers are appropriately knowledgeable about how to manage absence.

    c. Employees report that for 1 in every 4 employers there are no policies for return to work or for existing staff that may acquire a disability.

So what should employers do?

As with our initial research report, the five key areas that any organisation should make changes to improve the retention and development of employees with disabilities and long term health conditions are:

1. **Give visibility to disability within the organisation.** Quick wins include:

- Have testimonials of employees with disabilities on recruitment webpages and profile contributions of employees with disabilities in staff newsletters and other communications.
- Having staff networks for employees with disabilities.

2. **Build the skills and confidence of line managers to effectively manage disabled colleagues through training and access to good quality advice and guidance.** Quick wins include:

- Publicise the availability of centrally-stored, up-to-date advice and guidance on all aspects of how disability affects employers on the intranet.
- Ensure line managers are supported when on-boarding new team members with adjustment requirements and when existing staff acquire a disability.

3. **Have consistency in key policies so it is not left to line managers to operationalise policies. It creates uneven outcomes for employees with disabilities and increases legal and reputational risks.**

A quick win includes having a stand-alone disability related absence policy and clear guidelines for line managers about how disability related absence is managed (as distinct from sickness absence).

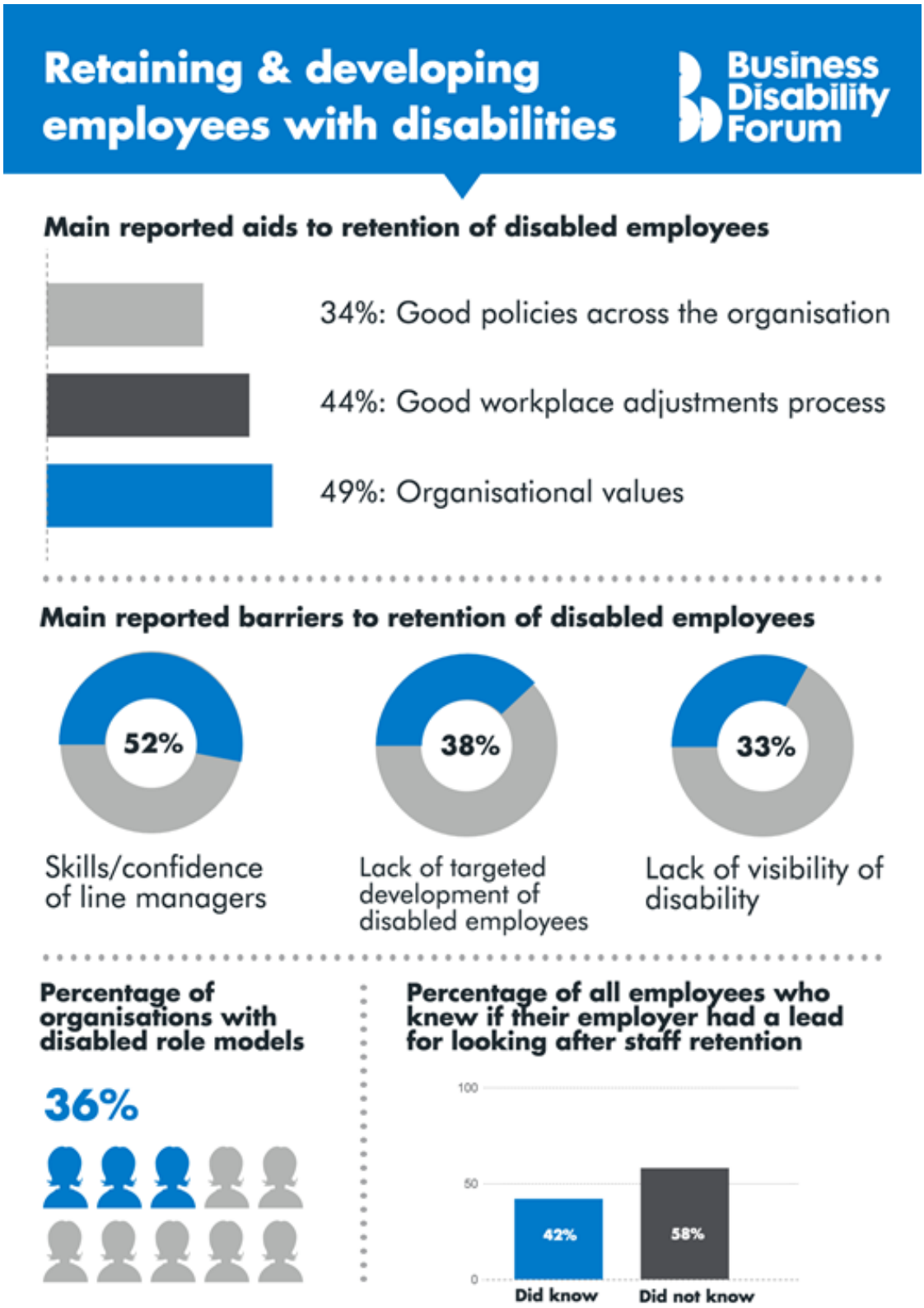
4. **Have a workplace adjustment process based on: trusting employees; what helps an employee be productive and at work (rather than a medical model); and can deliver the right adjustment quickly.** Quick wins include

- Publicise guidance about how your workplace adjustment processes operate.
- Provide training and clear guidance to line managers.
- Identify the most commonly request adjustments and establish a central stock of these within the organisation. This will help ensure these can be made available quickly to any employee requiring the adjustment.

5. **Provide targeted development opportunities for employees with disabilities.**

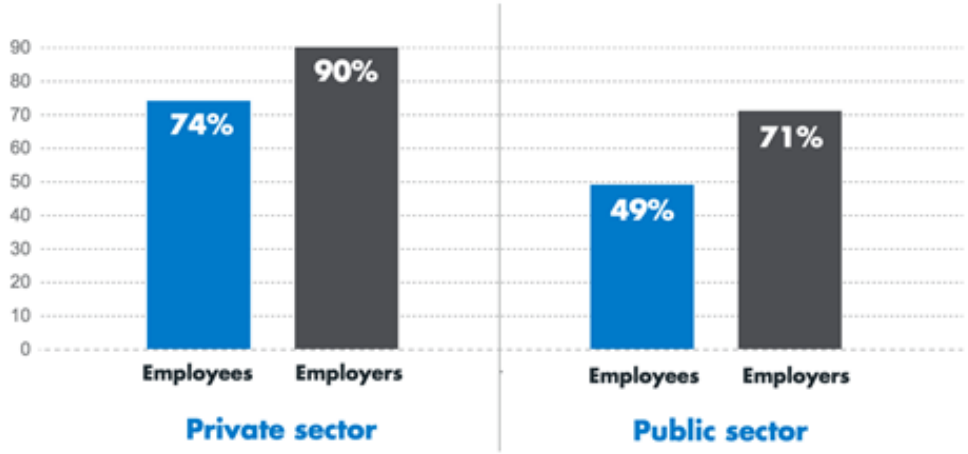
Best practice includes reviewing performance appraisal systems for unconscious biases that limit the progress of employees with disabilities.

STATE OF THE NATION, THE EMPLOYEE PERSEPCTIVE: AT A GLANCE



35% of employees
claimed their organisation set targets for the number of disabled people in employment

Gap between employer and employee knowledge of the Access to Work scheme



83%
of employers felt that advice on adjustments could easily be found by their employees;

Yet only 32%
of employees were very confident that they could find advice on adjustments.

1. KEY AIDS AND BARRIERS TO RETAINING AND DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

Key barriers

In the first stage of research, our priority was to identify what employers report as the primary aids and barriers to retaining and developing employees with disabilities and long term health conditions. In this second stage of research, we wanted to confirm with employees whether these same, or different, aids and barriers were key.

The research found significant agreement amongst employers and employees about these aids and barriers (see Table 1). Most particularly is the central role of line managers in influencing the experience of employees with disabilities. Across both surveys, insufficiently skilled and confident line managers was identified by more than half of all employers and employees as the primary barrier to the retention and development of employees with disabilities.

There is some difference in the level of priority visibility of disability and targeted development opportunities of disabled employees have. It may be that employees in prioritising targeted development opportunities will more keenly feel the impact of a lack of progression in their own individual careers, whereas employers look more broadly to workplace culture given its positive impact on absence levels, productivity and morale.[4]

Table 1: Main reported barriers to retention of employees with disabilities

Barrier	Employers	Employees
Skills/confidence of line managers	53%	52%
A lack of visibility of disability within the organisation	40%	33%
Lack of targeted development of employees with disabilities	33%	38%

Base: Employer: 106, Employee: 277

[4] See: CBI/Pfizer study, On the path to recovery: absence and workplace health survey, 2010

In addition, more than 1 in 5 employees cited a lack of straightforward workplace adjustment processes as a key barrier to retention and development and as many employees also cited other challenges in their workplaces. These include:

- Not simply a lack of skills and confidence, but negative attitudes towards disability by line managers;
- A lack of consistency in how policies are applied within their workplace;
- Fears about disclosure and mistreatment;
- Problems using the Government's Access to Work initiative that is intended to meet the costs of an employee with a disability in work that would not be reasonable for an employer to meet;
- The sheer volume of initiatives and pressures within workplaces particularly impacting line managers; and
- A general lack of awareness and communication within workplaces.

Aligned with the initial research findings, top tips to overcoming these challenges to retention and development include:

- Ensuring there is good quality advice, guidance and training for line managers. As well as encouraging better interactions with colleagues, this helps address inconsistency in the application of policies that lead to uneven outcomes and experiences for colleagues with disabilities and long term health conditions.
- Providing targeted development opportunities for employees with disabilities and long term health conditions. BDF Partner Barclays Bank, for example, has done some great work in this area with their disabled colleague network, Reach, including holding a conference that focused on supporting the career development ambitions of employees with disabilities.
- Creating greater visibility about disability within organisations. There are some quick wins in this too. Testimonials by employees with disabilities for internal and external communications was identified as especially useful. See examples from BDF Partners Fujitsu and Shell: http://blog.uk.fujitsu.com/responsible-business/supporting-engaging-employees-with-a-disability/ and http://www.shell.com/global/aboutshell/careers/feature-stories/2013/thinking-outside-box.html.

Key aids

As set out, the research found significant agreement amongst employers and employees about aids and barriers to retaining and developing employees with disabilities and long term health conditions. On the key aids, organisational values and a good workplace adjustment process were agreed as most significant (see Table 2).

Table 2: Main reported aids to retention of employees with disabilities, employer/employee comparison

Aid	Employers	Employees
Organisational values	52%	49%
Workplace adjustments process	44%	44%
Consistent policies	42%	34%

Base: Employer: 106, Employee: 277

We note however when we assess solely the data from employees that identify as disabled, workplace adjustment processes are identified by half as the single most important aid.

In addition, employees also report the value of:

- Disabled employee networks;
- Open dialogue about adjustments; and
- Flexible working in supporting effective retention and development.

Not surprisingly, those employers which were rated positively for both supportive organisational values and good workplace adjustment processes by employees with disabilities tended to have the best retention practices in nearly all categories. This provides a very strong message to employers about where to focus actions for improving the retention and development of employees with disabilities and long term health conditions.

Organisational values and improving workplace adjustment processes are less amenable to straightforward ‘quick wins’, although work to improve visibility about disability within organisations and having senior champions speak to the importance of improving disability confidence will help demonstrate supportive organisational values in action.

For those employers that already have a disabled employee network or are looking to establish one, BDF Partner HSBC encouraged colleagues to participate in a global platform of 'Ability Stories' as part of their own Ability Network: employees sharing their own experiences and testimonials on what it is like to live and work with a disability. Not only did this show a global commitment to disability inclusion, the 'Ability Stories' initiative dramatically expanded membership of the network worldwide- it rose by 30%.

On workplace adjustments, best practice is evident in the transformation of workplace adjustment processes undertaken by BDF Partner Lloyds Banking Group[5]. For organisations wanting to make some initial improvements in adjustment practice, they might consider: publicising guidance about how workplace adjustment processes work within their organisations; ensure guidance is clear for line managers so that there is consistency in how processes are implemented; and identifying their most commonly request adjustments and establishing a central stock of these within the organisation so that these can be made available quickly to any employee requiring the adjustment.

[5] http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/about-us/news/case-study-lloyds-banking-group-transforms-workplace-adjustments-process/

2. STRATEGY

In considering key aids and barriers to retaining and developing employees with disabilities and long term health conditions, supportive organisational values are pivotal. In translating these values into action, the most positively rated employers by employees with disabilities for their retention and development practices were those that have disabled role models and other features of a strategy for understanding how and why disabled people are attracted to working for, remaining work at, and progressing with the organisation.

2a. Role models

Across all employees, more than one third identified that there were disabled role models prominent within their organisation. This is much higher than what employers reported in the initial research (36% compared with 25%).

However, when we assess solely the perspectives of employees with disabilities and long term health conditions, 30% of these employees reported that there were prominent disabled role models within their organisation. It is an interesting and significant difference for employees with and without disabilities (30% compared with 47%), although not necessarily straightforward to explain and a subject for future review.

The scores suggest there is scope for employers to significantly improve the visibility of disabled role models within organisations.

2b. Named leads for encouraging retention of employees with disabilities

Having a named lead for the retention and development of employees generally; and employees with disabilities, is strongly associated with good retention practices. There is consistency in perspectives across both research stages. Both employers and employees report that about 2 in 5 of all organisations (41% for employers, 42% for employees) have a named lead for the retention of employees with disabilities.

These employers were also those which rated best on other areas of retention practice. For example, employees who responded positively to whether they knew the lead for retention, were far more likely to be positive about workplace adjustment processes within their organisation, their organisation taking account of disability within in professional development planning and about the skills and confidence of their line managers.

2c. Data collection and recording

Employers in the first stage of research identified one of the challenges affecting disabled staff retention as a lack of data to inform their overall strategy. The initial research identified that while most employers collected monitoring data in relation to application and work offer acceptance processes (although only 11 in 20 private sector employers did so), most did not continue to do so in relation to training and promotions (although 3 in 5 public sector employers did so). Added to this, more than 1 in 3 employers indicated that the information that was collected did not inform strategy about recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities.

Employees were not asked about their knowledge of all aspects of data collection and how it was used to inform strategy. Rather they were asked about their awareness of data collection more generally. This revealed employees were likely to be aware of data collected in the initial stages of recruitment and joining the organisation (66% and 60%, respectively) than they were of data collected about training and promotion (45%). This is broadly consistent with employer perspectives.

3. MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for their employees with disabilities, to ensure equality in the workplace through the removal of physical or non-physical barriers, or by providing extra support. Workplace or reasonable adjustments form an essential part of the retention strategy.

In both stages of research with employers and employees, 'good workplace adjustment processes' are reported as a fundamental aid to the retention and development of employees with disabilities and long term health conditions. As reported earlier, amongst employees with disabilities, good workplace adjustment processes are the most significant aid.

3a. Workplace adjustments

While overwhelmingly, employers and employees identify that there is a workplace adjustment process (96% and 92% respectively), there are significant differences about whether these are, at least some of the time, written agreements: 72% of employers reported that they used written agreements in some form for recording workplace adjustments while 57% of employees reported that this is the case.

This is an area where employers are encouraged to improve practice. Recording agreements made between employers and employees about workplace adjustments helps communication at the same time as minimising potential legal and reputational risks. It also helps when requirements for a particular adjustment change or in those situations where a line manager changes or an employee changes roles.

Increasingly, employers working towards best practice use tailored adjustment agreements that enable the portability of adjustments between roles. This includes the Civil Service and BDF Partners Barclays Bank, Fujitsu and Lloyds Banking Group. See: http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/employee-engagement/the-law/ for a template tailored adjustment agreement.

3b. Knowledge about how to make adjustments and where to access advice

There is a strong correlation between employer and employee perspectives about the extent to which they report being 'very' or 'mainly' confident about the organisation having the knowledge to manage legal obligations with respect to adjustments and employees knowing where inside or outside the organisation they might seek advice and guidance about adjustments. See Table 3.

Table 3: Confidence in knowledge, employer/employee comparison

Knowledge	Employer	Employee
Legal obligations	75%	72%
Internal Advice	83%	76%
External Advice	41%	55%

Base: Employer: 112, Employee, 305

However, with respect to employees having confidence that their employer has the knowledge to manage legal obligations vis-à-vis adjustments and employees knowing where inside and outside the organisation they might seek advice and guidance about workplace adjustments:

- Less than one third of employees have 'very high' confidence about any of these, with fewer than 3 in every 10 employees very confident that their employer has the knowledge to manage legal obligations vis-à-vis adjustments and that they know where outside the organisation they might seek advice and guidance about adjustments:

- Employees with disabilities were far less likely than non-disabled employees to have even this level of confidence. Less than 7 in 10 employees with disabilities were 'very' or 'mainly' confident that their employer has the knowledge to manage legal obligations with respect to adjustments and close to 3 in every 10 employees with disabilities indicated that they were 'very' or 'mainly' confident about where to source advice about adjustments from within their organisation.

These differences in employer and employee perspectives indicate a key area for development for organisations. This is reinforced by how essential having the right workplace adjustment is for an employee with a disability or long term health condition to their retention and development. As set out at Section One organisations wanting to make some initial improvements in adjustment practice might consider:

- Publicising guidance about how workplace adjustment processes work within their organisations;

- Ensuring guidance about workplace adjustment policies are clear for line managers; and
- Identifying the most commonly request adjustments and establishing a central stock of these within the organisation so that these can be made available quickly to any employee requiring the adjustment

In moving towards best practice in workplace adjustments, key principles for employers to embed in their process:

- Developing a robust process that is easy to use and clear about the roles and responsibilities of all parties;
- Delivers the right adjustments quickly; and
- Is based on trusting employees with adjustment requests and so demedicalises' disability within the workplace.

BDF Partner Lloyds Banking Group working with BDF Partner Microlink delivered just this transformation in workplace adjustment processes. Productivity and morale increased, sickness absence was reduced, the cost of individual adjustments was substantially reduced as they centralised procurement of adjustments and the time involved in delivering workplace adjustments reduced from an average of 3-6 months to 14 days[6].

3c. Access to Work

The Government's Access to Work programme helps people with disabilities who wish to take up employment, or who are in work and experience difficulties related to their disability. Access to Work is a partnership with employers where the Government meets the additional costs associated with disability that go further than would be reasonable for an employer to meet. This includes, for example, grants to meet the costs of transport, support workers and job coaches.

The programme is open to all employees with disabilities (as well as trainees and apprentices) outside of the Civil Service and since its inception has enabled more than 110,000 disabled people to be 'tax paying citizens' rather than 'benefits recipients'. In any given year, approximately 35,000 disabled people are in work because of Access to Work.

[6] See supra n.16 http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/about-us/news/case-study-lloyds-banking-group-transforms-workplace-adjustments-process/

Amongst employers there is a very high level of awareness about Access to Work (90% for employers outside the Civil Service). However, amongst employees' awareness of Access to Work is considerably less (72% for employees outside Civil Service). This includes for employees with disabilities with 78% indicating they were aware of this programme. This suggests that the observations made by the Work and Pensions Select Committee Inquiry into Access to Work (December 2014) about the need to improve marketing of Access to Work continue to remain important.

4. SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

Employers and employees have different views about the availability of key areas of support for employees with disabilities and long term health conditions that are strongly correlated with good retention. Specifically:

- Employees are much less likely than employers to identify that there are healthy workplace policies. This includes within the same employer.

- Employees are much more likely to identify networks and peer support for employees with disabilities and long term health conditions than employers. This includes within the same employer. This suggests that more informal peer support exists outside of formal mechanisms such as employee networks than employers are aware of[7].

- At the same time, the extent to which professional development planning and employee engagement surveys take account of disability was broadly similar.

Table 4: Support for employees with disabilities, employer/employee comparison

Support	Employer	Employee
Healthy workplace policies	91%	75%
Professional development planning	63%	60%
Networks/peer support	61%	85%
Employee satisfaction surveys	61%	62%

Base: Employer: 111, Employee: 300

[7] It also in part reflects a bias arising from the research methodology where disabled employee networks distributed the survey amongst members.

5. ABSENCE RELATED MANAGEMENT AND RETURN TO WORK

Since the launch of the initial report about employer perspectives, the Government's Fit for Work Service is now operational nationwide. Fit for Work is intended to help employers manage sickness absence and provides the employer, employee and the employee's GP access to work-related health advice. This includes:

- Free health and work advice through a website and telephone line to help with absence prevention;

- Free referral for an occupational health assessment for employees who have reached, or whose GPs expects them to reach, four weeks of sickness absence. While employees will normally be referred by their GP employers can also make a referral after the employee's fourth week of absence[8].

The Government also introduced a tax exemption of up to £500 (per year, per employee) on medical treatments recommended to help their employees return to work from January 2015. This is available for treatments recommended by health professionals within Fit for Work and health professionals within employer-arranged occupational health services.

These initiatives speak to the importance of early support to sustain the employment of employees at risk of being absent for long periods. Preventing long term absence is in everyone's interest: 50% of people who go off sick for six months never return to work and for those who remain off work even longer, they almost always not return to work.[9]

As with support for employees, employers and employees have different views about the extent to which good absence management and return to work processes are in place. Specifically:

- Employees are much less likely than employers to identify that there is a clear distinction drawn between how disability related absence and sickness absence are managed. Just 11 in 20 employees do compared with 14 in 20 employers.
- Employees are much less likely than employers to report that line managers are appropriately knowledgeable about how to manage absence.
- Employees also report that for 1 in every 4 employers there are no policies for return to work or for existing staff that may acquire a disability. These

[8] See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/458952/gp-fit-for-work-employers.pdf

[9] Attendance Management and Disability, Business Disability Forum

organisations were the same employers where there were concerns about whether they had the knowledge to manage legal obligations vis-à-vis adjustments and employees knowing where inside and outside the organisation they might seek advice and guidance about workplace adjustments.

Table 5: Absence related management and return to work, employer /employee comparison

Support	Employer	Employee
Disability absence vs sickness absence	70%	55%
Harassment is unacceptable	77%	79%
Return to work policies	70%	71%
Existing staff policies	62%	61%
Managing absence for line managers	77%	65%

Base: Employer: 108, Employee: 293

CONCLUSIONS

This second stage research helps us better validate the extent to which the good practices that help retain and develop our colleagues with disabilities and long term health conditions are in place.

It is very encouraging that employers and employees overall tend towards identifying good practices within their organisations. Generally speaking, there is agreement amongst employers and employees about where practices are good and where they need improvement.

There are areas where employers and employees have different perspectives and in several of these, the differences give strong support to employers looking to prioritise where they make improvements. This is most particularly true in the case of workplace adjustments.

This might mean better publicising existing processes and initiatives such as Access to Work. It is also likely to mean transforming existing processes so these deliver the right adjustment quickly for employees. Given workplace adjustments are identified by employers and employees as so decisive in influencing positive retention, it is concerning that less than 7 in 10 employees with disabilities are 'very' or 'mainly' confident that their employer has the knowledge to manage legal obligations vis-à-vis adjustments and that close to 3 in every 10 employees with disabilities are 'very' or 'mainly' confident about where to source advice about adjustments from within their organisation.

Indeed, the 5 actions for all employers are:

1. **Increase visibility of disability within the organisation.**
2. **Build the skills and confidence of line managers to effectively manage their team members with disabilities.**
3. **Have consistency in how policies are implemented that impact disability.**
4. **Have a good workplace adjustment process.**
5. **Provide targeted development opportunities for employees with disabilities.**

Some of these actions can start with relatively simple actions. So while these actions are positive in themselves- for signalling to colleagues with disabilities and long term health conditions that the employer is committed to their retention and development- the simple actions also create the momentum for more substantial changes to systems, processes and procedures and the equipping of line managers with the skills, confidence and knowledge to interact effectively with team members with disabilities and long term health conditions.

We encourage you to review your own practices with reference to learning set out in this report. In early 2016, do also look out for new tools and practical guidance

to help employers plan for, and make improvements to how they retain employees with disabilities and long term health conditions.

As we said in the first stage report, if all employers can take the ‘5 actions for better retention of employees with disabilities’, not only will the Government’s ambition of reducing the unacceptably high rates of unemployment amongst disabled people be achieved, but employees with disabilities will be developing and progressing within their roles and careers. Business will do better too as they reduce the stubbornly high costs of staff absence, low productivity and staff attrition.

Appendix: Methodology, sample profile and limitations

Methodology

Subsequent to the first stage of employer research launched in July 2015, between July and October 2015, employees were invited to share their perspectives about the skills, confidence and practices associated with good retention and development of employees within their workplaces. The survey was distributed by employers to disabled employee networks, and it was also promoted via social media.

Sample profile

352 employees responded to the survey, of which 345 gave a valid organisation name. Employees were asked whether they were male (37%) or female (63%). They were also asked if they were from a black or ethnic minority (BME) community, with 8% selecting 'yes' and 92% selecting 'no'. Employees were asked to indicate whether or not they were disabled or not disabled, and 61% said that they were disabled, while 39% said they were not. The employees were also asked to select their age group.

- Under 25 (7%)
- 26-35 (23%)
- 36-45 (26%)
- 46-60 (40%)
- Over 60 (3%).

Key caveats

The key caveats associated with this research are:

- A bias towards representation of larger employers with larger workforces, as the survey was primarily spread through disabled employee networks (DENs).
- A bias towards more disability confident organisations as DENs were a key element of survey distribution so if anything the results reported are more positive than the general picture. DENs are associated with more disability confident organisations.
- Greater representation of female employees (two thirds of all respondents), although it should be noted there were no discernible differences between male and female perspectives when these were analysed.
- Greater representation of employees aged more than 46 (more than 2 in 5 employees). This is somewhat older than the average age of an employee

in the UK (age of 39 for British born employees and 38 for employees not born in Britain)[10].Akin to gender, however, there were few differences in perspectives based on age.

- A very small group identified as from a BME community, so caution should be taken in extrapolating the data as a representative of the entire UK workforce.

[10] http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/ as at 2013

BDF Partners

Accenture
Allianz
American Express
Atos
AvePoint
Bank of America Merrill Lynch
Barclays
BBC
BT
CGI
Cisco Systems
Deloitte
Department for Transport
Department for Work and Pensions
Enterprise Rent-A-Car
Environment Agency
EY
Fujitsu
Gender Gap
GlaxoSmithKline
HM Revenue and Customs
Home Office
HSBC
Kingfisher plc
KPMG
Lloyds Banking Group
Lorien Resourcing
Microlink PC
Ministry of Defence
National Crime Agency
Nationwide Building Society
NHS Scotland
Nuance
PricewaterhouseCoopers
Royal Bank of Scotland Group
Royal Mail Group
Sainsbury's
Santander
Shell International Ltd
Sky UK Ltd
Standard Chartered Bank Plc

Accessibility Statement

Business Disability Forum is committed to ensuring that all its information, products and services are as accessible as possible to everyone, including disabled people.

If you wish to discuss anything in regards to accessibility or if you require alternative formats please contact Gary Francis.

Tel: 020-7403-3020

Email: garyf@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk.

Business Disability Forum (BDF) is a not-for-profit member organisation that makes it easier and more rewarding to do business with and employ disabled people. BDF provides pragmatic support by sharing expertise, giving advice, providing training and facilitating networking opportunities to support organisations become fully accessible to employees with disabilities, candidates and customers.

Working with business and public sector organisations for more than 20 years, BDF has a membership of more than 300 large corporate and public sector employers that, together, account for close to 20% of the UK workforce. This includes 140 companies which are multinational including some of the UK and world's best known brands in energy, financial services, telecommunications, retail, transport, professional services, IT, outsourcing, retail, manufacturing and recruitment companies.

BDF's Disability Standard is the only whole-organisation tool to driving improvement in disability performance across an organisation. Developed collaboratively with our Partners and Members, the Disability Standard offers the best way of checking how disability-smart your organisation is, right across your business.