



Q-PRINTS & SERVICE GMBH



# **An effective model for the inclusion and integration of disabled and disadvantaged young people into employment**

Funded by



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# Introduction

The world of work is in flux. Everywhere, the impacts of technology and globalisation are transforming how we work and the ways in which employers operate within a fluid and fast-moving economy. It is crucial that the modern workforce is as diverse, representative and inclusive as the societies in which it functions. Unemployment has a potentially devastating effect on economies, communities and individuals, and we know that historically there have been, and remain, groups who are underrepresented or excluded from the labour market. This cohort commonly includes younger (under 25), older (50+), ethnic minority and lone parent jobseekers. It also includes the group perhaps most underrepresented in the workforce, and which encounters some of the greatest challenges in entering it: people with disabilities and other disadvantages.

The Employability+ project has tasked three European partner organisations with experience and expertise in the field of disability employment to research the current situation in their respective countries, with particular focus on the strategies and processes that can be implemented to improve inclusion.

The three partner organisations undertaking the project are:

**Fundacion Emplea (EMP)**, based in Alicante, Spain, is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the development of innovative methods and projects to promote full engagement in the labour market of people at risk of exclusion. The common denominator of all their interventions is the deployment of external support from job coaches, who guide candidates throughout their journey to work, from active job search to their onboarding with an employer.

The Foundation was created in 2008 by the Spanish Association for Supported Employment (AESE) with the mission of promoting the Supported Employment methodology for vulnerable groups.

They deploy a large number of initiatives and projects and have become influential in innovation for employment and overcoming social exclusion.

From 2008 onwards, the Foundation has carried out projects with a current network of more than 500 entities throughout Spain, having a presence in all provinces. They offer to their Network the transfer of knowledge and good inclusive employment practices, advice, training, financing and dissemination of social work.

**Q-Prints and Services gGMBH (QPS)** is a social and business-oriented integration company, based in Pforzheim, in the Baden-Wurtemberg region of Germany. It has worked with the unemployed since 2001, creating projects aimed to provide work for various target groups including individuals dealing with addiction, the long-term unemployed, and people with mental disabilities. QPS also has experience with and an understanding of a variety of projects concerning European transnational mobility.

Target groups are adolescents and young people who do not have formal school-leaving and/or vocational qualifications. They offer projects where these youths can identify their personal skills and strengths and develop social skills to bring them (back) into formal education, vocational training or jobs. Projects are also geared towards people who suffer from dependency problems or who have multiple impediments to finding employment or who have severe physical and learning disabilities.

Founded in November 2001, they have 250 locations that offer training, work and advice in various projects and programmes, where a special focus is also placed on transnational activities for providing employment market-related support. Facilities for providing work and training include service and production businesses, which encompass a wide range of opportunities from paper processing, lettershop work to data processing, typesetting, graphical design services and silkscreen printing. In addition, packaging work is undertaken for all sectors of industry. Transnational activities include carrying out exchange and mobility projects within Europe, especially for groups of people who have difficulty accessing the job market.

**The Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC)** is motivated by the belief that no child in the UK should grow up to be poor or lonely just because they are blind. They create a better life for blind children, by helping every young person we work with to find and fulfil their own unique potential, and are there for them from the moment they are told they have lost their sight, guiding them and their families on their journey through sight loss.

RSBC provides a combination of support, learning and development opportunities to help them develop the resilience and skills they will need to navigate their own futures.

They support parents to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to help guide their child through sight loss, via a national Families First service.

The organisation promotes best-in-class, inclusive education and learning at all levels, from a residential further education facility, Dorton College, to an Employment programme, which helps young blind people develop the skills to get into employment.

Participants are able to access services up to the age of 25. For employment, RSBC works with young people from the age of 16 upwards. The organisation is based in London, but

has reach and delivers services across England and Wales. RSBC has been the lead partner and coordinator on the Erasmus Employability+ project.

This model will provide background and context on the present situation for disabled and disadvantaged young people seeking employment, and present the findings of research undertaken to investigate the perspectives of both employers and prospective employees.

- Do they want the same things?
- If not, how can their differing expectations be reconciled?
- What are the barriers, real or imagined, to effective inclusion?

It will identify good practices in recruitment and retention discovered in our research, and offer recommendations to employers on how they can make their opportunities more accessible.

We have provided an at-a-glance appendix, summarising these recommendations, for ease of use by practitioners, whether youth workers, employment professionals or employers.

## Context: Methodology

To establish a basis of evidence for our recommendations, we undertook an investigation of attitudes and practices around employment for people with disabilities and other disadvantages in the job market.

Our data gathering focused on the two concerned parties in improving inclusion for disabled people: employers and disabled or disadvantaged jobseekers.



A survey of attitudes to, and expectations of, employment was identified as an appropriate starting point for our evidence gathering. By focusing on the experience and aspiration of disabled and disadvantaged job seekers we established a context for our subsequent investigations. These

are the people that employers need to engage with in order to build a more inclusive workforce, and therefore we wanted to identify what they want and need from employment. RSBC, as the project lead and UK partner, has the widest access to disabled candidates, and surveyed 50 blind and vision-impaired job seekers aged between 16 and 25. QPS and Fundacion Emplea surveyed a further 150 candidates across a broader spectrum of ages and circumstances. Among this sample, disability was one factor among others, including long-term physical and mental health conditions, substance misuse and social exclusion. The RSBC survey was configured as a series of guided conversations with focus groups, enabling qualitative and quantitative data to be gathered, and providing an opportunity to expand on responses and pursue a richer conversation than other, more schematic, approaches might permit. The survey was conducted via groups held in London, and through telephone and email surveys in Spain and Germany, given the more widely dispersed sample groups and larger numbers, between February and April 2019.

Having established the candidates' perspectives, we devised a survey to present to employers. Our intention was to map 'soft' (attitudinal, cultural) and 'hard' (structural, organisational) attitudes to recruiting disabled or disadvantaged staff. Conscious that we would not have the luxury of time or extensive contact that we had with the jobseekers' survey, most employers being busy and time-poor for all but essential business, the survey was configured as a self-assessment questionnaire, to be completed virtually. An initial Evaluation Survey of 47 employers was conducted between August and October 2019. The survey comprised eight questions, delivered by email with the intention of being accessible and 'light touch' to encourage employers' engagement and response. The questions covered strategies, process and attitudes towards employing disabled staff; the questions and their responses are covered in the Key Findings section was carried out by the project's German partner, Q-Prints and Services gGmbH.

The responses to this survey raised a number of additional questions, to clarify ambiguities and establish context. We agreed that each of the three partner organisations would return to their 15 key employer contacts to drill down on the data reported in the Evaluation Survey. This process took the form of a guided conversation around these three leading questions:

*Q1. Our learning indicates that two thirds of the companies we have spoken to have employed people with disabilities. We would like to understand whether this was a positive experience for your organisation.*

*If yes, what made it positive, and what structures did you use? If no, what would have made it better? What support did you require?*

*Q2. What value has the employment of people with disabilities contributed to your organisation?*

*Q3. What do you understand to be your key responsibilities in ensuring your workplace is fully accessible to people with disabilities?*

It was agreed that, to capture and reflect variances in response from different types of business, we would ensure that respondents were chosen to represent each of these sectors:

- SMEs (small-medium enterprises)
- Charities
- Public sector
- Corporates

There were some complications to this process as the coronavirus pandemic hit Europe. Questionnaires were completed and collated over the first and second quarters of 2020 (February to May).

## Context: Findings

We have summarised responses to the three surveys conducted (one with people with disabilities seeking employment, two with employers) to form a narrative of correspondences and divergences in attitudes and approaches.

### Jobseekers' Survey

The composition of the four focus groups convened by RSBC, and the sampling carried out by QPS and EMP, was intended to reflect the full spectrum of ability and aspirations, from graduates to those with additional needs and learning difficulties or disabilities. The conduct of the guided conversations required, from time to time, some remodelling of the survey questions to clarify or make accessible their meaning to some participants. Nonetheless, there was a broad consensus of response across all demographics.

#### ▪ *Why is it important to work?*

The respondents' discussion addressed who determines what is 'important' in this statement. It was pointed out that there can be, and often is, a difference between why society deems it important to work and why it matters to them as individuals. It was



proposed that the question might also ask 'what are the benefits of working?' A consensus was reached that we should focus on the latter, subjective category.

From the responses, these were the most common across all demographics:

- To exercise independence and control over their future (28%)
- To improve self-esteem, pride; feel a sense of achievement (24%)
- Money and financial independence (21%)
- Personal development, growth and learning (18%)

The financial drivers to work (disposable income, economic independence, saving, the opportunity to acquire own home) were not seen as being of great significance to the young people at RSBC, with only 4% of responses claiming that this was an important factor. This may be attributed to the fact that almost all respondents lived with parents, and felt that both the cost of living in London and South East England, combined with the practical difficulties of living independently as a blind person (mobility, household management), mitigated against aspiring to living apart from family. Among the German and Spanish respondents, money was a much more important factor, reflecting the age and domestic status of the cohort.

▪ *Why do you feel you haven't got a job?*

Immediate responses to this question were, from some respondents, that they did not feel 'ready' to work. Reasons for this were participation in higher and further education or training, or that they were still engaged in the process of goal setting and careers guidance. Opening out the question and reframing it to ask: 'what do you feel are the barriers that might stop you getting a job?' yielded a richer response:

- Lack of experience and/ or qualifications (24%)
- Lack of confidence (22%)
- Impact of health conditions or disability (20%)
- Employers' negative assumptions about disabled applicants (18%)
- Logistical barriers (access to public transport, mobility) (9%)

The impact of existing conditions was a particularly significant response from the respondents surveyed by EMP and QPS. For many, the relative unpredictability of their conditions caused concern that these would be difficult to manage within the workplace.

▪ *What is your support network?*

A number of respondents found this question challenging; what kind of support? was the question they asked. Discussion expanded to reflect on the kinds of support they might



want or need in finding and securing work. For the majority, there was little awareness of or access to support systems outside the home:

- Parents/ family (73%)
- Supported employment providers (12%)
- Other disability organisations (6%)
- Friends (5%)
- Community/ faith group (4%)

The supported employment providers mentioned included, in addition to RSBC, QPS and EMP, local organisations and social entities. The strongest representation of this infrastructure came from respondents in Spain, citing such regional initiatives as Zaragozafundacion, Down Vigo and Down Galicia.

▪ *What obstacles could there be when you find employment?*

For most respondents, the primary obstacles discussed were attitudinal rather than practical; how they would be seen and understood, how they would integrate:

- Fitting in (33%)
- Adjusting to workplace attitudes (21%)
- Being able to work quickly enough (18%)
- Forming relationships with colleagues (16%)
- Accessibility (location, technology) (12%)

▪ *What supports are there for you when you find work, and can you access them easily?*

Again, the first response of most respondents was 'family'. In terms of structural support, there was little awareness. Some respondents seemed uncertain that their employer might be willing or able to support them:

- Parents/ family (49%)
- Job coach/ support worker (33%)
- Employers (9%)
- Don't know/ none (9%)

Almost all respondents expressed a positive attitude to work and reflected a belief in a work ethic. There are perhaps questions as to how this ethic might be applied in practice, given that the majority had no experience of paid employment and the workplace was therefore seen as a conjectural rather than actual environment. Nevertheless, most clearly understood the value and benefit of employment *to them*.



Almost half of the focus groups felt that the barriers to work were structural rather than attitudinal or a matter of ability. Their concerns about the accessibility of the recruitment process (many said that they were often discouraged from applying for jobs because online application forms and websites were often inaccessible or difficult to use as vision-impaired and disabled candidates) and the perceptions of employers (that they might be seen as a liability, or a less efficient and effective worker) reaffirm a social model of disability, in which a lack of disability awareness by employers creates an often inadvertent discrimination. This was reinforced by concerns about what might happen when they started a job, with the majority of respondents again indicating a concern with how their colleagues and managers might perceive and behave towards them.

There was a lack of knowledge and awareness of initiatives that might offer support to them at work and in the application process. Most relied on family and friends (non-experts

in other words) for support and guidance. They also identified the organisations and professionals they had personal experience of, not all of which had experience in the field of employment. This was echoed by the responses of employers elsewhere, where a similarly uncertain grasp of support was expressed.

## Evaluation Survey

The findings of the initial employer evaluation survey were as follows:

- *Does your organisation have experience of employing people with disabilities?*

66% of employers have some experience of employing people with disabilities. It was not evident from the initial survey responses whether these experiences have been positive, negative or neutral.

- *Whether or not you employ people with disabilities at the moment, would you be open to doing so?*

79% stated that they were 'open' to employing people with disabilities.

- *Do you feel there is a value to your organisation employing people with disabilities?*

37% of companies stated that they saw 'value' in employing people with disabilities.

- *Does your organisation have a policy on inclusion?*

There was an almost exact split on inclusion policies, with around 50% of companies not having, or being unsure if they have, a policy on inclusion.

- *Who in your organisation is responsible for decision making about employing people with disabilities?*

Responsibility for decision making about employing people with disabilities rested with management, but the seniority level of this was dependent on company size.

- *What do you feel are the barriers to your organisation employing people with disabilities?*

Key barriers identified to employing people with disabilities were around the accessibility of the workplace and the perceived 'burden' a disabled employee might present, with an (assumed) lack of productivity.

- *What policies and procedures does your organisation have in place for sharing information about disability with staff?*

Most employers who responded were unsure of what policies or procedures their organisation had for sharing information around disability or did not know how to go about this.

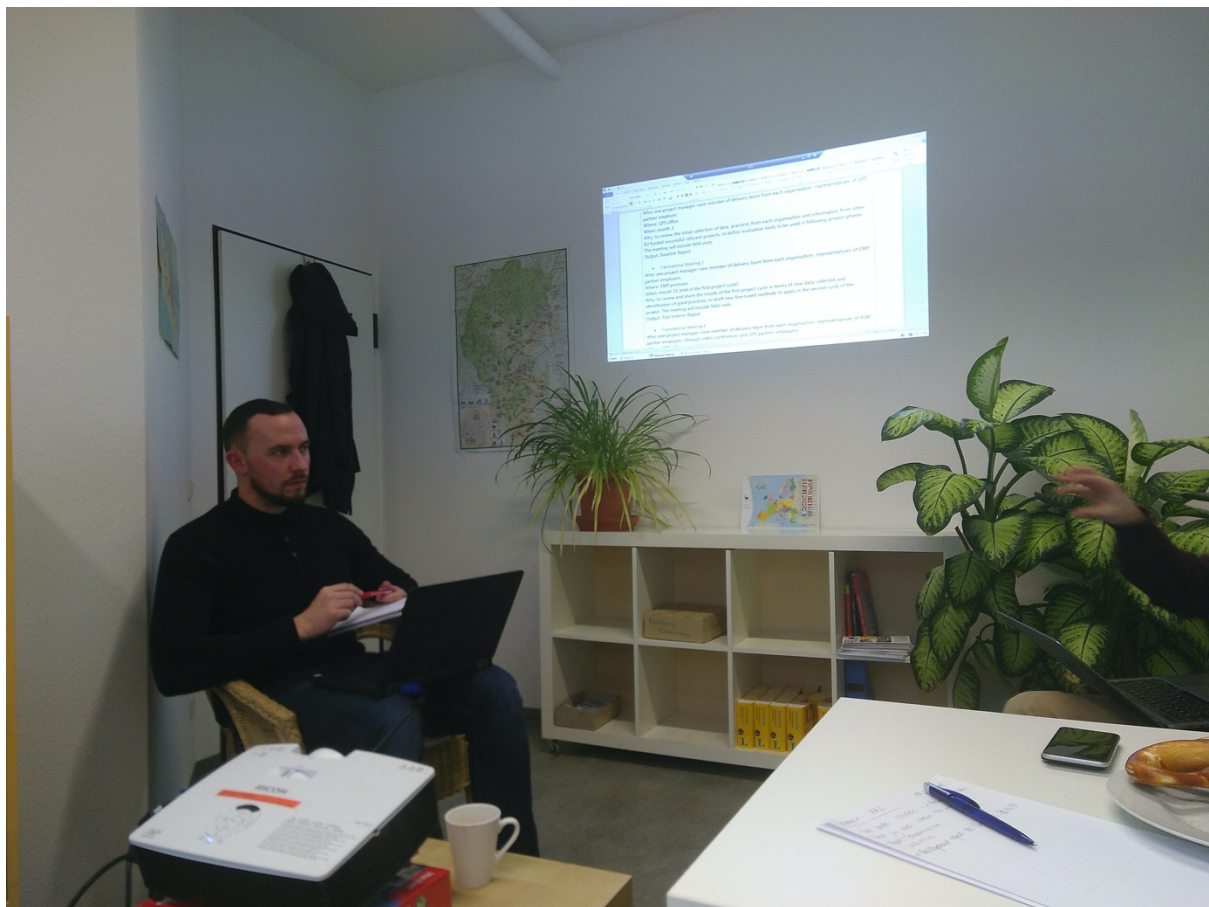
- *Are you aware of any structural initiatives that can support your organisation when employing people with disabilities?*

60% were aware of some of the governmental and/ or institutional support available to support them with employing people with disabilities.

It seems to be the case then, that although most employers either have experience of hiring staff with disabilities, or express openness to the prospect of doing so, little more than a third of our respondents saw or were able to identify value to their organisation in doing so. Although it is clearly understood that inclusion is a good and important thing, there is perhaps a scepticism about its results, or at least, that these results have not been evident in many organisations surveyed. This connects with the identified barriers to employing staff with disabilities, the perception of 'burden', and in consequence perhaps a belief that this investment (of time, effort, resource) may not be sufficiently rewarded to seem worthwhile.



A lack of clarity about policy and procedure, dissemination of information and lines of responsibility suggests that, although organisations are broadly positive about inclusion, there is not always infrastructure in place to enable it effectively. Although almost two thirds of respondents were aware of support systems outside their organisation, from governmental or social entities, it seems that the actual take up and engagement in these initiatives is currently quite small. It is apparent that when organisations take up this offer, as in the case study of Viva Hotel and Resorts included in this report, drawing upon external expertise and experience to make quick wins in recruitment and upskill non-disabled staff, that a substantial impact can be made on inclusion.



## Good practice

### Case study: the employer's story

#### Viva Hotels and Resorts, Mallorca, Spain

Viva Hotels and Resorts is a medium-sized hotel chain which has provided accommodation and tourist services in Mallorca and other tourist destinations across Spain and America since 1975. The company has been very responsive to hiring and retaining people with disabilities at all its facilities for more than twenty years.

In 1988 the regional authority, the Council of Mallorca, approached Viva with an offer to participate in a new programme called Supported Employment, with a view to provide permanent, secure employment to people with disabilities. Having agreed to participate in this initiative, the company has created numerous jobs in their hotels and applies the supported employment method to all recruitment processes for disabled candidates to ensure full accessibility and inclusivity. Viva were the first tourist chain in Mallorca to offer structured support and regular employment to this segment of the community through the scheme promoted by the Council.

Recruitment of disabled candidates for a new vacancy is undertaken by a partner organisation in the social sector, which consults closely with Viva and undertakes the process with a knowledge and expertise in both recruitment and effective onboarding. Training and support extends to not only disabled employees but to all staff, in terms of cultivating awareness. When a non-disabled worker is hired, there is a process of acculturation, whereby they are guided and made aware of best practice in working with disabled colleagues. This is a process often overlooked but has been crucial to Viva's success in this area; many non-disabled employees are unaccustomed to working alongside colleagues with additional needs and can benefit from acquiring new strategies in their communication and relationship building.

Viva deploy people with disabilities across all areas of the business: at gardens and swimming pool areas, at laundry, restaurants, kitchens, cleaning services, and administration, often maintaining the same workers for years. They have found that the investment of time and resourced they make in new appointments is repaid and rewarded by improved staff retention and satisfaction. At the beginning of the contract, a job coach provides support services to both the new worker and their colleagues and they work collectively to identify and develop strategies to manage and address accessibility and other practical challenges that arise. All staff are familiar with and supportive of company

policy regarding inclusion, and this helps a lot to maintain good practice and ownership of organisational values and culture. The company has been rewarded several times with local awards for their philosophy and practise. At the time of interview, Viva employ 21 staff with disabilities.

The manager we interviewed summarised Viva's strategy and ethos in this way:

*Quite often when I am interviewed in the media they pose the same question and my answer is always very simple. What leads me to hire a person with a disability is because I know the social body offers me an efficient support system to achieve success in the whole process, and this makes me and the staff feel secure in this venture.*

*We do not hire people with a disability for charitable reasons. If we had not hired these people before it was because nobody in the social sector had approached us to hire them. Since we have experienced this programme we have added hiring people with a disability as a core goal of our Company Social Responsibility Plan.*

## Good practice

### Case study: the candidate's story

#### Apple Store, Bluewater, Kent, UK

Tom (name changed) is a 23-year old male, registered as Severely Sight Impaired. His condition was diagnosed at birth and he has never had any functional vision. He uses a cane to navigate and, outside of his immediate and familiar surroundings, requires guiding from a sighted person to travel distances. Having attended mainstream schools for much of his education, where he was not always supported with his vision impairment, it was not until he moved into post-compulsory education (16+) that he was able to access appropriate support. As a result, his academic achievements are not entirely reflective of his ability. Although extremely passionate about and well-versed in technology, and with a great ambition to work in the sector, he has not, up to the point of his application discussed here, been employed in this or any other role. Capitalising on his love for all things tech, Tom applied to Apple to work in one of their retail outlets.

For many applicants, customer-facing, store-based roles are their point of entry into the company and are often seen as one of the most effective and valuable ways of assimilating



the company's culture. The standard entry-level role is as an Apple Specialist, with a progression route to Apple Expert.

The store in question is based in the Bluewater Shopping Centre in Dartford, Kent, around 25km south east of central London. The complex is vast, with over 300 retail outlets, and extremely busy with visitors.

Tom applied to Apple twice before, making some headway in the selection process, but was ultimately unsuccessful. Feedback from the panel indicated that this was not uncommon in terms of candidates' journeys, and that he should continue to apply. The assessment and interview sessions had been held in hotel locations that were quite remote and not easily accessible by public transport, leading to the candidate arriving for interview in a stressed condition. Additionally, the configuration of the assessment centre around role play had presented additional difficulties. Although he was confident in his answers, he shared that he was conscious that his perceived 'difficulties' with physically navigating an unfamiliar space for the first time had, inevitably, shown him to be a weaker candidate.

Tom applied to Apple for a third time in early 2020. This time around, and with the company conscious of both his accessibility needs and the looming coronavirus crisis, the assessment and interview process was conducted virtually, via WebEx and FaceTime. For Tom, this proved, in his words, a 'liberating' experience. By migrating interviews online, the following good practice was enabled:

- The removal of extraneous, environmental factors that might compromise a disabled interviewee's performance (navigation, managing confined space, dealing with transport)
- 'Blind' selection, insofar as candidates can only be judged on how they present on screen
- Foregrounding what disabled candidates can do, rather than fixing on what they cannot (or are believed not to be able to do)

As a result, Tom sailed through all three stages of the selection process and secured a job offer from Apple. He reflected on his experience like this:

*Last time, I knew from the minute I walked in that, however confident and positive I was, however much preparation I'd done, however well I matched the job requirements, all the employer would remember was that I was the blind guy who came in with a cane and needed to be guided to his seat. I can understand why that might have scared them off, to be honest. This time, it was just me on a screen, like everyone else. All they could see was a smiling, positive young man, and that's what made the difference.*

## Good practice

### Case study: the employee's story

#### Restaurant Goldener Anker, Pforzheim, Germany



The restaurant *Goldene Anker* (Golden Anchor) is housed in an historic building dating from 1722. It is located on the river Nagold, on the outskirts of Pforzheim, near the northern entry of the Black Forest.

The restaurant has been trading since 2006, with a large open space for diners, and is a busy and popular wedding venue. There are two large function rooms, used to celebrate parties, to hold business meetings or to host charity events. It specializes in regional cuisine, ecologically produced using seasonal ingredients from the region.

The Goldene Anker presents a variety of cultural and artistic events with regional artists, musicians and cooperatives. Twice a year it hosts an arts and craft market, where local artisans offer their handcrafted products.

A core team of five employees (three in the kitchen, two in the service area) runs the Goldene Anker, with the support of a manager. If needed, there is a pool of additional helping staff to support the team. With a relatively small permanent workforce, it is essential that all staff can work efficiently and responsively, making constant verbal communication central to the restaurant's effective operation.

One of the Goldene Anker's employees is hearing-impaired. For her, it can be particularly challenging to understand customers' orders or communicate with other staff members if there is background noise. Large events and functions involving many guests and music also present difficulties.

In order to best meet the needs of the employee, the whole team work together to adapt to the circumstances. The issue is discussed, with her permission, at the regular team meetings. In these meetings, the employee articulated her specific needs and the team has discussed, modelled and agreed solutions which work for her and do not compromise

business performance. By adopting this whole team approach, the Goldene Akener ensured that all staff were aware of and understood their hearing-impaired colleague's needs and contributed to the process of making reasonable adjustments. In doing so, these solutions were fully integrated into their day-to-day working practice and behaviours and became more deeply embedded than if they had simply been 'imposed' as a set of rules and procedures to follow without an understanding of context and purpose.

Having risk assessed the job role and the site, evaluated the team's solutions and in consultation with the hearing-impaired staff member, the following measures have been introduced to support her:

- Acoustics and noise levels in the serving area are monitored and kept low. To achieve this, curtains and carpets have been deployed as sound absorbers to deaden background noise. Similarly, the background music that the restaurant had often played as an ambience was removed during her service hours.
- The team is briefed to speak with the staff member at an appropriate level of volume and with clear and distinct pronunciation. Furthermore, they take care to stand right in front of her, so that she can see their faces, lips and expressions well, ensuring that she is able both to lip read and infer meaning from body language.
- The restaurant has installed a telephone set to a higher volume ringtone and hearing function, so that the colleague is able to respond and answer normally.
- Service staff do not wear shoes with hard soles or noisy heels to minimise surface and background noise.
- Staff rotas and schedules have been adjusted to ensure that, wherever possible, the colleague will not be required to cover at major events as she encounters more hearing problems when serving on these occasions. If she has to attend due to staff shortages, they have developed a system of support for her.

## Good practice: Recommendations

Disability is, by definition, diverse. Each individual will experience and manage their condition in a way unique to them, whether learned or improvised. Similarly, the range of conditions, and the spectrum of disadvantage within each, is so vast as to make generalisation near impossible. 'vision impaired', for example, can encompass people who use onscreen magnification to read large fonts, or those who have no working vision at all and are wholly reliant on other coping strategies.

This is to contextualise the recommendations below. They cannot be exhaustive or comprehensive. However, the research undertaken by the project, combined with the historical knowledge and experience of the three partner organisations, enables us to offer some broad guidelines for good and best practice.

At a whole organisational level, it is best practice to embed a culture of awareness across all aspects of a business. Disability awareness training across all levels of responsibility is strongly recommended. Equally, awareness should be embedded in the local and every day, rather than be seen as an external, 'special' circumstance, which can be an unintended by-product of training initiatives. Embedding a disability awareness item in team meetings or briefings as a regular agenda point can normalise and establish the topic as part of business as usual.





Our employer survey indicated that, although there is broad awareness of governmental and social sector support mechanisms, take up of these opportunities by employers is relatively low. A large, untapped resource is available and can make a profound difference when accessed. As the management respondent from our employer case study told us *'nobody in the social sector had approached us to hire them'*. There is a clear need for more transparent communication between employers and such entities, with marketing and awareness raising a critical first step. Profiles of such initiatives need to be substantially higher in the regions they support, among both employers and potential employees. At the highest levels, through regional and national authorities, employer engagement with these organisations might be incentivised.

With specific regard to the core processes of recruitment, onboarding and retention, we identify these as key recommendations.

## **1. Recruitment and selection**

- *Disability proof the role*

Building this into the design of a job role before it is advertised can significantly reduce the expenditure of time and resource further along the process. What reasonable adjustments can be made to the job description? Can flexibility be introduced around working hours, or location? Can some or part of an office-based role be undertaken remotely, to enfranchise candidates who may have mobility issues? Risk assessment is also fundamental at this stage of the process. Is there likely to be a higher level of risk in the role if a candidate has certain disabilities? How can you minimise the risk?

Consultation with a specialist organisation, such as the three partners on this project, or social entities such as those engaged in the employer case study, can yield information, advice and guidance to employers on how disabilities may impact a role, and how effective compensations can be built in.

- *Make your application process accessible*

Many potentially excellent candidates are excluded from even making an application due to the inaccessibility of the process. Those with vision impairments may find online applications difficult to navigate. Those who are severely sight impaired will use speech software, and this will have difficulty reading web pages and forms that are densely populated with graphics or formatting. Plain text versions should be available in these instances. Where possible, audio description should be tagged for graphics and photographs.

Streamline and simplify as much as possible. Applicants on the autistic spectrum, or those with other learning disabilities or difficulties, may struggle with lengthy blocks of text. Make sure instructions are clear and unambiguous.

- *Offer multiple points of entry*

One size does not fit all. Offering alternative pathways in at least some of the application and recruitment process opens up opportunities to the widest number of suitable candidates. Consider your standard methods: how might they disadvantage candidates? If it is a given part of your process to conduct an initial telephone interview for screening, how would a hearing-impaired applicant access it? Could it be undertaken as a video call, for instance, using Skype or FaceTime, where they might be able to lipread or access a signer? Applicants with learning difficulties or disabilities may struggle with written submissions, such as CVs or application forms. Might they be able to submit a video application, where they talk through their skills and experience? The UK's public service broadcaster, the BBC, uses this method as part of their application process for apprentices, for example.

- *Use 'blind' evaluation*

Applicants should be assessed solely on the basis of their competence and ability. This is, of course, a truism of every organisation's recruitment process, but it is easy, perhaps unavoidable, for unconscious bias or assumption to arise and influence decision making. Ensure that recruitment decision makers do not have access to personal information about candidates, including their disability or condition. Consider how this might impact the interview process particularly. We saw, in the candidate case study, how the transfer of the interview from the physical to the virtual removed any indicators of the applicant's disability, and therefore of prompts to reject him. By 'flattening out' the interview process, every candidate, regardless of circumstance, was simply a voice and a face on a screen.

## 2. Onboarding

- *Consult with the employee*

The employee with a disability is likely to be the best informed about their support needs. Use their resource. Employers can be resistant to asking employees about their conditions; it may seem intrusive or give the impression that the employer is unconfident. For an employee with a disability, however, it can often be a relief to be asked directly, as it will defuse concerns or anxieties they may have about how much to disclose or if their

employer will be able to support them effectively. Candidates with sensory impairments, for example, are likely to be highly knowledgeable about software applications that can make their role accessible.

- *Everyone needs to understand disability*

Ensure that training or briefing is in place for all staff to ensure that they are aware of the particular support or access needs of their new colleague. Both employers and jobseekers have reported that the perception of the employee with a disability as being 'other' impacts negatively on performance, morale and retention. Nobody needs to be an expert, but there should be an understanding of how everyday behaviours can impact. If a blind employee enters an office, for example, how will she know who else is there? Again, the employee with a disability is best equipped to advise on what they need their colleagues to understand about their condition. However, it is not their responsibility to train or brief their co-workers. It may be the case that they do not wish to disclose at all, or feel the need to do so, and this should be respected as long as it does not compromise safeguarding or health and safety procedures.

In the employee's case study, we saw how the whole team was involved in working collectively to develop practical accessibility solutions with their hearing-impaired colleague.

- *Put a support system in place*

Shadowing or buddying are commonplace induction processes for new employees, and often happen informally with staff 'learning on the job'. With a new employee with a disability it is prudent for this process to be more robustly structured and managed. The 'buddy' may need, beyond the routine duties of showing the new appointee how the department or role functions, be required to support in other capacities. For a severely sight impaired employee, for example, there is likely to be a need for them to build sense memory and a mental 'picture' of the work environment. The buddy may need to assist them with navigation and simple mobility until they acclimatise to the workspace. A role outline should be created and agreed with the staff members concerned and management/HR to formalise and clarify responsibilities. It may also be prudent to split aspects of the role across several team members to reduce any adverse impact on performance. If the employer has other staff with disabilities in place, it will often be valuable to create a mentoring relationship with them and the new appointee.

It is important to remember that these issues can lead to a perception by employees and non-disabled staff that the disabled team member is receiving special treatment or is a drain on time and resource. In a busy, pressured workplace this may be almost inevitable.



There may also be a feeling that non-disabled staff are being asked to work too far out of their role or comfort zone. It is not necessarily the case that these services should be delivered in house. Indeed, we have seen in our research that onboarding processes are highly effective when delivered by job coaches or professionals sourced from external organisations and social entities. Employers should always consider this as a pragmatic solution, and one where the expertise and experience is known to be in place.

### *Use the expertise of others*

This element perhaps underpins all of the recommendations made here. It is time, cost and resource intensive to build expertise in-house for all but the largest companies. There are many organisations who can provide advice and guidance on specific conditions, and on resources available to support employees living with them. As we saw in the employer case study, partnering or otherwise engaging with a social or charitable entity that specialises in disability employment can yield quick wins and, as an organisation likely to be known and trusted by the disabled employee, have a profound, positive impact on inclusion and retention.

## **3. Retention**

- *Monitor and review*

Appraisal and review will be standard procedures for the management of all employees. When dealing staff with disabilities, it is best practice to clearly embed review of support processes in addition, with perhaps a separate and distinct review process and schedule to that concerning performance. Identify the effectiveness of strategies implemented and action changes as required, with clear timelines for further evaluation.

It should be a consideration too that employees may become disabled during their service with an employer, and that the capacity to discuss and address such fundamental changes are built into review and appraisal processes to, wherever possible, support the newly disabled worker in post.

### ***Implement best practice***

Ensure that learning from the recruitment, selection and onboarding processes leads to action. The day-to-day operational decisions made to support individual staff members can, and should, be scaled to the level of strategy. Good and best practices can be

identified from evaluation of specific support packages and be integrated into an organisation as matters of policy and procedure.

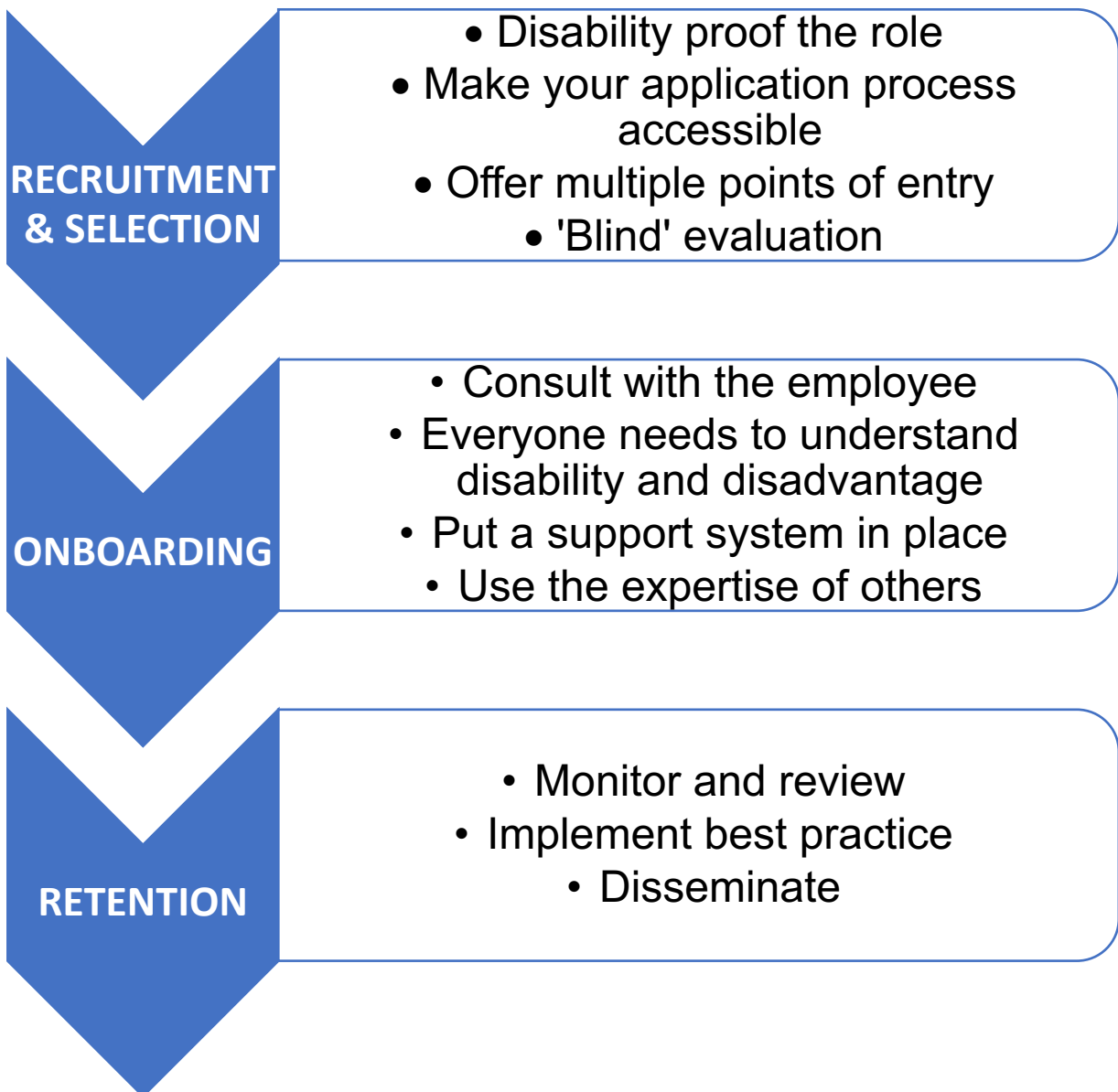
### ***Disseminate***

Share your learning. Given the diversity of issues and needs among people with disabilities and other disadvantages, it is unlikely that all parts of an organisation will have direct experience or knowledge of supporting a given condition, or of best practices. There may be sectoral partners and peers, or social entities, to whom such learning will be of use. Put systems in place to share this and normalise the conversation about disability and disadvantage in the workplace. Use social media platforms, conferencing and business networks to distribute information.

# GUIDANCE FOR YOUTH ORGANISATIONS ENGAGING WITH EMPLOYERS:

An effective model for the inclusion and integration of disabled and disadvantaged young people into employment.

## AT A GLANCE



## HOW TO USE THIS MODEL

This easy to use model provides best practice for building and sustaining effective engagement with employers. It can be used to:

- Support the employer to make their vacancies inclusive
- Support the employer to integrate disabled and disadvantaged young people into the workplace
- Support the employer to improve their retention of disabled and disadvantaged young people in their workplace

## RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

### Disability proof the role

Building this into the design of a job role before it is advertised can significantly reduce the expenditure of time and resource further along the process.

Workshop solutions to these questions with the employer:

- What reasonable adjustments can be made to the job description?
- Can flexibility be introduced around working hours, or location?
- Can some or part of an office-based role be undertaken remotely, to enfranchise candidates who may have mobility issues?

Risk assessment is also fundamental at this stage of the process.

- Is there likely to be a higher level of risk in the role if a candidate has certain disabilities?
- How can you minimise the risk?

Consultation with a specialist organisation, such as the three partners on this project, or social entities such as those engaged in the employer case study, can yield information, advice and guidance to employers on how disabilities may impact a role, and how effective compensations can be built in.

### Make your application process accessible

Many potentially excellent candidates are excluded from even making an application due to the inaccessibility of the process. Those with vision impairments may find online applications difficult to navigate. Those who are severely sight impaired will use speech software, and this will have difficulty reading web pages and forms that are densely populated with graphics or formatting.

- Plain text versions should be available in these instances.
- Where possible, audio description should be tagged for graphics and photographs.
- Streamline and simplify as much as possible. Applicants on the autistic spectrum, or those with other learning disabilities or difficulties, may struggle with lengthy blocks of text.
- Make sure instructions are clear and unambiguous.

## Offer multiple points of entry

One size does not fit all. Offering alternative pathways in at least some of the application and recruitment process opens up opportunities to the widest number of suitable candidates.

Consider your standard methods:

- How might they disadvantage candidates?
- If it is a given part of your process to conduct an initial telephone interview for screening, how would a hearing-impaired applicant access it?
- Could it be undertaken as a video call, for instance, using Skype or FaceTime, where they might be able to lipread or access a signer?
- Applicants with learning difficulties or disabilities may struggle with written submissions, such as CVs or application forms. Might they be able to submit a video application, where they talk through their skills and experience? The UK's public service broadcaster, the BBC, uses this method as part of their application process for apprentices, for example.

## Use 'blind' evaluation

Applicants should be assessed solely on the basis of their competence and ability. This is, of course, a truism of every organisation's recruitment process, but it is easy, perhaps unavoidable, for unconscious bias or assumption to arise and influence decision making.

- Ensure that recruitment decision makers do not have access to personal information about candidates, including their disability, condition or background.
- Consider how this might impact the interview process particularly. We saw, in the candidate case study, how the transfer of the interview from the physical to the virtual removed any indicators of the applicant's disability, and therefore of prompts to reject him. By 'flattening out' the interview process, every candidate, regardless of circumstance, was simply a voice and a face on a screen.

## Onboarding

### Consult with the employee

- The employee with a disability is likely to be the best informed about their support needs. Use their resource.

Employers can be resistant to asking employees about their conditions; it may seem intrusive or give the impression that the employer is unconfident. For an employee with a disability, however, it can often be a relief to be asked directly, as it will defuse concerns or anxieties they may have about how much to disclose or if their employer will be able to

support them effectively. Candidates with sensory impairments, for example, are likely to be highly knowledgeable about software applications that can make their role accessible.

### **Everyone needs to understand disability**

- Ensure that training or briefing is in place for all staff to ensure that they are aware of the particular support or access needs of their new colleague.

Both employers and jobseekers have reported that the perception of the employee with a disability as being 'other' impacts negatively on performance, morale and retention. Nobody needs to be an expert, but there should be an understanding of how everyday behaviours can impact. If a blind employee enters an office, for example, how will she know who else is there? Again, the employee with a disability is best equipped to advise on what they need their colleagues to understand about their condition.

However, it is not their responsibility to train or brief their co-workers. It may be the case that they do not wish to disclose at all, or feel the need to do so, and this should be respected as long as it does not compromise safeguarding or health and safety procedures.

In the employee's case study, we saw how the whole team was involved in working collectively to develop practical accessibility solutions with their hearing-impaired colleague.

### **Put a support system in place**

- Shadowing or buddying are commonplace induction processes for new employees, and often happen informally with staff 'learning on the job'. With a new employee with a disability or any kind of disadvantage it is prudent for this process to be more robustly structured and managed.
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## **RETENTION**

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## Postscript: the world of work, post COVID-19

Since we embarked on the Employability+ project, the world has been shaken by the Covid-19 pandemic. The impact of this in all areas of life has been immense and we are all, locally and globally, attempting both to manage its effect on daily life and to imagine and plan for a post-Covid future. With all this happening in real time, and with the medium to long-term outcomes still largely unknown, it is difficult to frame how it will impact on employment, but we know that it has already, with the huge growth in unemployment across Europe, the closure and instability of many businesses and a looming recession, and we know that we will be living with the consequences of these for some time to come.

In the interests of future proofing the findings and recommendations of our project, we must take account of these factors, even if some conclusions are, at this point, necessarily a matter of conjecture.

The client groups that we have considered in this project, those dealing with disability or other disadvantage, have historically found it harder to enter and sustain employment than their peers. A newly saturated labour market, swollen by new job seekers who have recently fallen out of work, is likely to compound this problem. With larger numbers of applicants for each available vacancy, many of whom will have fresh skills and experience, disabled and disadvantaged candidates will be multiply challenged in the open market. There is likely to be a 'race to the bottom', with highly qualified and experience candidates applying for entry-level roles that have been historically the easiest way into the job market for many people in our demographic.

We have seen massive infrastructural engagement and investment in the workforce from governments across Europe and the wider world. From the Job Retention Scheme in the UK, where the exchequer subsidises the salaries of employees that companies are unable to find useful work for but do not want to lose, to the IMV/ Minimum Living Income initiative in Spain (essentially an experiment in Universal Basic Income), strategy and expenditure is focused on securing the workforce as much as is possible. We would hope that, on a structural level, initiatives might be extended to the creation of programmes to encourage employers to hire disabled and disadvantaged candidates. Intermediate Labour Markets (ILMs) might be one example, having had some success in the UK in the early 2000s. These would be small community-led businesses, funded by government, that employed eligible marginalised candidates for a fixed period, and embedded job coaching and support to ensure that leavers were better equipped to find employment elsewhere after their experience.

At the level of individual employers, an issue more fully within the ambit of this report, we might hope to see subsidy schemes along similar lines, whereby all or a percentage of an employee's salary is paid by the exchequer. A case can be argued for there being ringfenced, set aside opportunities specifically for members of our demographic.

There may also be positive factors to emerge from this enforced change. We have seen, and experienced, how rapidly many businesses have moved to remote working, and a number have realised the benefits of this, both economically (reduced expenditure on property, rent, maintenance) and operationally (decreased absenteeism and lateness, flexible working leading to improved performance).

We have often encountered, in discussion with people with disabilities, that the practical demands of a traditional, full-time, '9 to 5' job may not sit easily alongside the demands of managing one or more conditions. Flexibility, around hours, days and modes of working has been cited as a desired aspect of a job. The likelihood of employment becoming more fragmented and sessional, while troubling for many established workers with an expectation of returning to 'normal', can be empowering for people with disabilities. In an immediate future of relative underemployment, what we might identify as 'portfolio working' (one or more part-time jobs, occasional freelance or sessional work) may find a receptive audience among disabled communities.

For employees with disabilities, technology is very often a tool for empowerment. Virtual working effectively puts all employees in the same position, and so levels the playing field, enabling a workplace that is accessible for all. Many of the considerations that are problematic for employers hosting disabled staff in a physical space (issues with travel and transport, workstations, installing appropriate technology, health and safety) are reduced or removed in this way of working. It is, of course, not universal. For those employed or aiming to work in service industries or manufacturing, for example, a 'real' workspace is still essential. Nonetheless, the move to remote working is a qualified positive for many people with disabilities.

For employers and employees working in a physical space, there are again unexpected potential advantages arising from the pandemic. The process of risk assessment, of thinking about how a physical workspace functions, what adaptations and adjustments might need to be put in place to ensure staff can work safely has, in the past, been seen as an exceptional responsibility, something that was required only for employees with disabilities. Consequently, it may have been perceived as an onerous duty. In the wake of coronavirus, companies are having to review and implement new working practices and adjustments to their operating space. The matter has therefore become part of everyday practice and consideration, normalised, and in so doing has perhaps shifted workplace cultures to think about accessibility as a matter of course, at the heart of their operations, rather than as an afterthought. We hope that employers will continue to review their

cultures, and find new, smarter, more inclusive processes as they rebuild and plan for the post-Covid future.

