



# Breaking Down Barriers and Recruiting Disabled Talent

According to official figures, there were an estimated 3.7 million disabled people in employment during the first quarter of 2018. However, while the percentage of people with a disability who are in work has now reached the momentous stage of breaking the 50% barrier, these individuals still remain hugely under-represented in the workplace: the employment rate for people without disabilities is 81.1%.

The Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDI) has one purpose, which is reflected in everything we do: to break down the barriers faced by the millions of disabled people who are entering or progressing through the job market.

RIDI hosted an event in partnership with **Bristol City Council** and **Guidant Global** in November 2018 to share insight on the benefits of recruiting disabled individuals with businesses operating in the local area and to offer guidance on the small but important changes required to tap into this valuable talent pool.

The event included keynote presentations from influential stakeholders such as: Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol and Paul Awcock, RIDI Executive board member and Head of Talent Sourcing at Lloyd's. Attendees were also offered a unique opportunity to hear directly from employees at Bristol City Council

and Laura Welti, CEO at Bristol Disability Equality Forum who shared their individual experiences of looking for work as disabled jobseekers and how their employer is supporting them in their roles. In attendance on the day were key HR decision makers from high-profile organisations operating in the Bristol area including Aviva, the NHS and Direct Line Group.

The discussion and key recommendations are summarised on the following pages.



**CREATING DISABILITY CONFIDENT RECRUITERS**

## THE BENEFITS OF BUILDING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

As **Mayor of Bristol, Martin Rees**, highlighted at the event, there is now vast and undisputable evidence that diverse organisations outperform their less inclusive competitors. In his presentation, he relayed how **Lou Gerstner**, former CEO of technology giant, **IBM**, turned the organisation's fortunes around after identifying workforce diversity as an area of strategic focus.

On the recommendation of its 'people with disabilities' task force - which was built to better understand how to appeal to employees and customers in this demographic - the brand launched an initiative focused on making all of its products more broadly accessible. The decision was made after the task force flagged incoming legislation in the US - an amendment to the federal Rehabilitation Act

- requiring that government agencies make accessibility a criterion for awarding federal contracts. Ultimately, through capitalising on the knowledge of its disabled employees, IBM was able to get one step ahead of the competition and monopolise the market. In fact, the firm estimates that this effort alone has produced more than a billion dollars in revenue since 2001.

This sentiment was echoed by **Laura Welti, CEO at Bristol Disability Equality Forum** who stressed that, **“the more diverse your workforce, the more diverse your thinking”** and highlighted how, **“there is nothing like disabled people for knowing how to get around barriers.”**

## INCLUSIVE HIRING

**Paul Awcock, Head of Talent Sourcing at Lloyd's**, who is on RIDI's Executive Committee, shared with the audience his own organisation's journey to becoming more inclusive to disabled talent as well as busting some commonly held misconceptions around disability in the workplace.

He outlined how, after bringing on board diversity consultancy, **The Clear Company**, to deliver an inclusive recruitment workshop, the business made monumental changes to the way it sourced and secured talent - and is reaping the rewards as a result.

The firm now has a policy where nobody within the company can interview for any role unless they have undergone the requisite training and, to date, over 200 managers have completed the course. As Paul highlighted, this has removed fear, raised awareness and repositioned Lloyd's as an inclusive and disability confident employer, as those who have gone through the

training process will attest: feedback from attendees has been 100% positive.

As a result of this new approach, requests for adjustments during the recruitment process from emerging talent candidates alone have increased from zero to 117 in just one year. After asking the audience what they imagine the average cost of a reasonable adjustment is - to which estimates from £100 to £500 were offered - he revealed, **“The cost of a reasonable adjustment is usually nothing or cost-neutral”**.

He finished his presentation by outlining how sharing best-practice throughout the recruitment supply chain is crucial to success in this area - and urging the audience to request the diversity and inclusion policies of the recruitment partners they work with to ensure that their values are aligned with their own.



## A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

On the day attendees also had the opportunity to hear first-hand from disabled employees at **Bristol City Council** on the barriers they have faced and how these have been overcome.

During the session, panellists began by discussing barriers they have faced during the recruitment processes. **Laura Welti, from Bristol Disabilities Equality Forum**, for example, spoke about how her neurological impairment means that she is unable to use a telephone - yet this form of communication is mandatory during many recruitment processes.

When asked for great examples of recruitment journeys, **Michael Alford from Bristol City Council**, who is visually impaired, explained how he finds it difficult to complete online forms when there is no potential to increase the font size, and how it a **“breath of fresh air”** when he finds that a website is accessible. He singled out the process through which he applied for his apprenticeship as offering a particularly great candidate experience as it offered the ability to save and reuse information. He also highlighted how employers and recruiters should allow him to use his own laptop, which has magnification software - a simple adjustment.

**Andrew Burton from Bristol City Council**, who has Asperger's, urged employers in the room to consider if the assessment methods they use throughout the recruitment process are really relevant for the role they are recruiting for. For example, those who habitually require candidates to participate in group exercises should question whether it is really necessary

for every the recruit for to be articulate and confident with strangers.

Panellists on the day also admitted to a reluctance to disclose their disability to a potential employer through a fear that this would impact their chances of landing the role. Although, as **Bruce Mathieson-Medrano from Bristol City Council** pointed out, **“If the organisation promotes the fact that it is a Disability Confident organisation, that speaks volumes”**. As a result, he would feel more comfortable disclosing his disability if he saw the Disability Confident badge.

When asked for examples of how Bristol City Council is supporting its disabled colleagues, **Rebecca Grant**, who has a brain injury, highlighted how the organisation had arranged for her whole department to receive training delivered by the brain injury association, **Headway**, so that they had a better understanding of the condition. Andrew Burton, meanwhile, outlined how set shift patterns and being assigned his own workstation in a 'hot-desk' environment enabled him to perform to his full potential.

There was unanimous agreement across the panel that supporting disabled colleagues is a learning curve for everyone involved and seeking out third party advice and guidance is key. Organisations must have the confidence to ask for help in finding what support is available and, crucially, be led by individual employees to determine what support they need.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The vast majority of organisations are, in theory, very open to engaging with disabled jobseekers - but many simply don't know where to begin. However, by seeking guidance from organisations such as **RIDI, Bristol Disability Equality Forum** and **Disability Confident**, businesses can gain the tools and expertise they need to successfully tap into this valuable, but underused, talent pool.

As the **Mayor of Bristol** succinctly summarised: **“Employers have a responsibility to remove barriers in order to help reduce this gap, but they cannot do that without support and guidance. Encouraging job applications from the widest pool of talent means companies can not only increase the number of high-quality applicants available, but also create workforces that reflect the diverse communities they serve.”**

Visit our website to find how you can get involved: [www.ridi.org.uk](http://www.ridi.org.uk)

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