

# Disability, Skills and the Future of Work

RIDI and diversity and inclusion consultancy **Delsion** ran a roundtable for business leaders at the University of South Wales' (USW) Conference Centre in Treforest, South Wales, in September 2017. The event, which was hosted by USW Business Exchange, explored disability, skills and the future of work. The key points and recommendations from the discussion are summarised below.

## DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT IN WALES

Julian John, Managing Director of Delsion, started the event by outlining his vision for Wales to become a leading country for diversity and inclusion. He also discussed his own professional background in HR and how his personal experience with disability shaped his view about the barriers to work that exist for disabled people. He then went on to highlight some key facts about disabled people and employment in Wales and the UK, before the discussion began.

### Wales

- **399,000** people of working age in Wales have a disability
- Only **171,000** of them (**43%**) are in employment
- **79%** of non-disabled people are in employment
- The disability employment gap in Wales is **36%**, which is higher than the UK average of **32%**
- **69,000** people of working age in Wales with a disability or impairment don't have a job but want to work
- This represents a huge, un-tapped talent pool for employers and recruiters in Wales

### Across the UK

- **85%** of disabled people find their condition has an impact on job hunting
- **56%** find barriers at the application stage
- **58%** felt at risk of losing their job due to an impairment
- **1 in 5** requests for reasonable adjustments in workplaces are refused



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## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PROMOTING DISABLED EMPLOYABILITY IN YOUR ORGANISATION/IN WALES?

Many employers have issues with skills shortages and disabled people can offer them the talent they need. **Disabled people in Wales form a huge un-tapped talent pool who can bring experience that can strengthen an organisation and improve its services.**

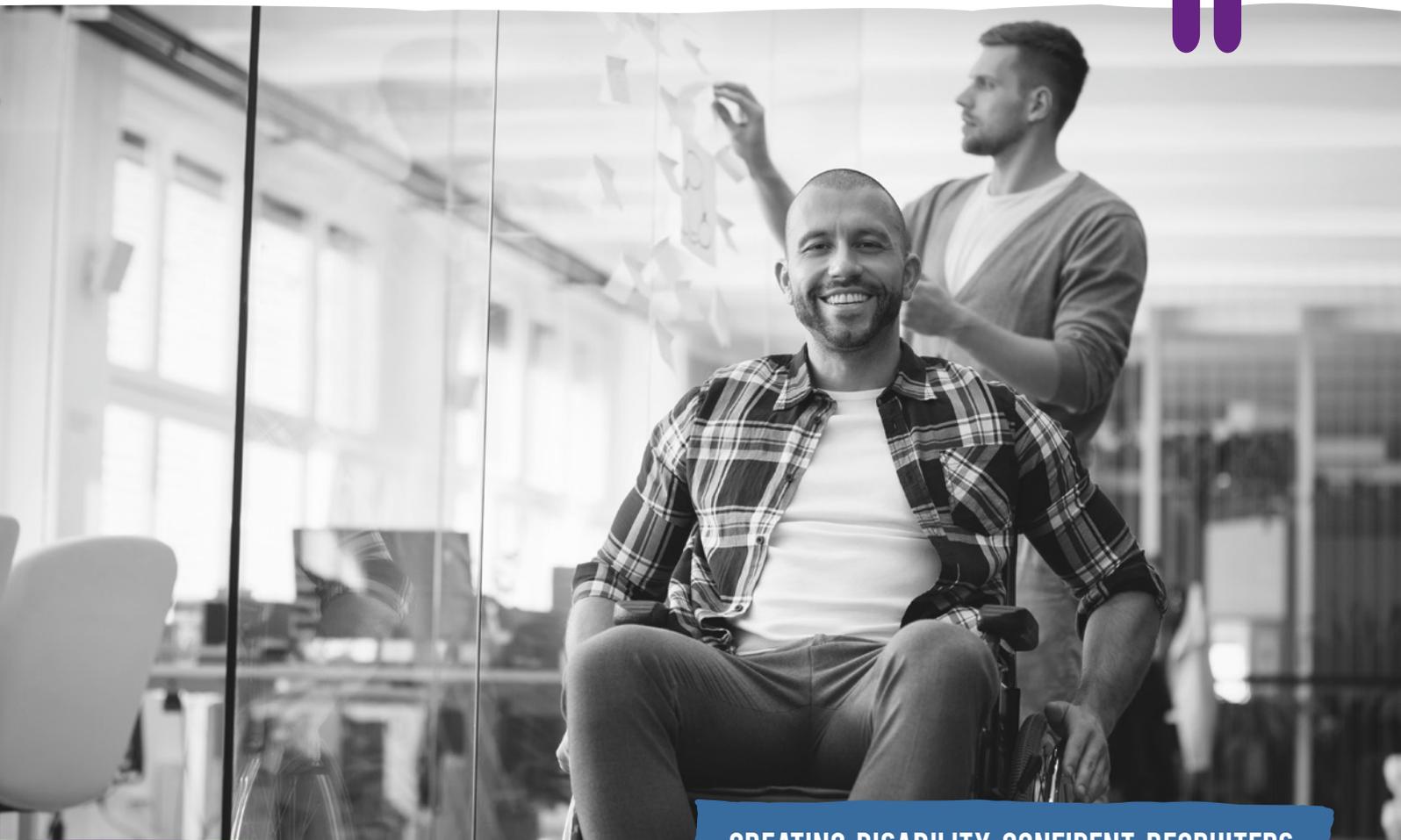
Employers are increasingly using strength based recruitment practice instead of, or combined with, competency based recruitment in order to successfully tap into this talent pool.

If you can help people into the workplace, including disabled people, it inspires loyalty and commitment. **Disabled people tend to bring characteristics such as commitment, resilience and life-experience, plus strong problem solving and communication skills.**

And they are often used to managing change, which is a massive requirement for many organisations.

An organisation can be representative of the community that it serves by employing disabled people, which also helps make organisations provide a better service for the people they serve. **Employing disabled people also improves the diversity and inclusion of a workforce, which in turn can change behaviour across the whole organisation, and improve the overall accessibility of an organisation.**

Organisations that are committed to being diverse and inclusive and provide equal opportunities benefit from better staff retention as well as greater numbers of applicants for jobs. They also benefit from being able to recruit more people from the same demographic as their loyal employees.



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## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYING DISABLED PEOPLE?

**Two of the main barriers that get in the way of employing disabled people are lack of knowledge and ignorance of the support that's available.** For example, the Access to Work grant scheme has been around since 1994 and is extremely good for providing disabled people with the support they need to remove barriers to work. But not enough disabled people or recruiters and employers know about it and employees have to apply for Access to Work grants, employers can't do it on their behalf.

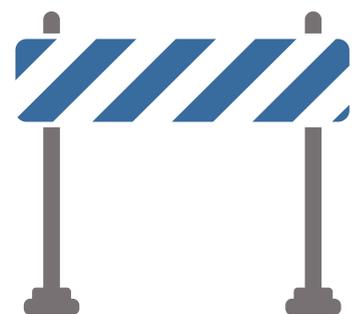
Also, Access to Work grants can only be awarded once a disabled person has started a job. But managers can work with disabled people to help them complete Access to Work applications in order to plan reasonable adjustments and get the right support they need.

**Some employers wrongly perceive disability as a potential sickness absence issue in the future.** Other barriers include whether managers have the confidence to give a disabled person a chance plus whether they have the right skills to manage a disabled person.

Time is also a barrier, as attendees noted that **'we talk about investing in disability employment, but we're not given the time to do anything about it.'** It was noted that some organisations need a shift in mindset and to change this lack of investment in resources to remove the barriers to employing disabled people. However, it was also noted that there can be financial barriers that stop some small businesses from making reasonable adjustments.

**The recruitment process can be a barrier, as competency-based recruitment can put some disabled applicants at a disadvantage.**

Also, for some disabled people online tests are not accessible. Disabled people may also self-reject and fail to apply for jobs due to a lack of self-confidence or because of an organisation's culture (e.g. long working hours). And disabled people also aren't always aware of what jobs organisations have, and at what levels those positions are.



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## WHAT SKILLS, EXPERIENCE AND BEHAVIOURS ARE YOU LOOKING FOR AS EMPLOYERS?

Employers are looking for employees with commitment, loyalty, reliability and flexibility. They want people who share the core values of an organisation and want to be part of it. Employers are increasingly looking for softer, core skills more than skill sets, although requirements vary depending on specific roles. **Attitude is hugely important, and increasingly employers are favouring a good attitude over experience and hard skills.** Employers can work with people with a good attitude and develop them, but a bad attitude can be hard to change. Time-keeping and work-ethic are also important, along with communication, IT and digital skills.

It was noted that some algorithms and processes used in the recruitment process filter out some good candidates and that you also can't measure some attributes with a CV alone. It's key for employers to capture this information and more debate is needed about how to achieve this. For example, in future digital media like videos of job applicants may help employers to find out what people are really like.

Disabled employees who overcome barriers and challenges to succeed in the workplace inspire their co-workers and have a positive influence on the workforce. They also display many of the key characteristics that employers are looking for: attitude, commitment, reliability, etc. This reinforces the opportunity for employers to tap into the talent pool of the **69,000** people of working age in Wales with a disability or impairment who don't have a job but want to work.



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## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF WORK LOOK LIKE?

**Flexibility is a key theme emerging around the future of work, which is great as most disabled people benefit from flexible-working.** One attendee mentioned that their employer (a large public sector organisation) currently has 250 people on a flexible working pilot, where they monitor each employee's output, not the time they spend in the office. It's up to the employees to decide when they want to work. Another attendee noted that some smaller companies find it easier than bigger companies to offer flexible working hours, as it's easier for them to manage this with a very small workforce compared to a large one. This is a benefit that smaller businesses can offer to employees, on an ad hoc or formal basis, and it helps make up for them lacking other benefits that larger organisations can offer to employees.

Future workplaces will offer more flexibility over working location as employees won't need to commute to an office as much as previously. **This will see more employees working from home and using digital technology (e.g. using Skype for meetings), and it will go hand in hand with the digital transformation that will continue in future.** It was noted that employers need to understand the future of work to make the most of the opportunities and that it's crucial to ensure that inclusion is part of the mix for future employment.

It was also noted that future workspaces need to be accessible (digitally and physically).

**People will work longer in future meaning that more older people will be employed, creating a greater mix of different generations within organisations.**

Automation will increase in future, which will take away some jobs and also increase the number of service roles. This means soft skills will become even more important. Also, employees are more likely to work in teams on a project basis, rather than managing specific departments or functions.

There is a huge opportunity for Wales to be at the forefront of changing recruitment and employment practices to remove barriers to work for disabled people, if employers act now. If employers do this and Wales can create a strong culture of diverse and inclusive workforces it can help the Welsh economy grow in future by attracting global employers to invest in Wales.

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

We would like to thank the University of South Wales (USW) Business Exchange for sponsoring the event. Visit their [website](#) now to find out how their business advice service can help your start-up, SME or social enterprise.



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