Employment

• Why employ disabled people?
• How accessible is your recruitment process?
  - Job advertisements
  - Application packs
  - Selection
• Support for disabled employees
• What about the DDA?
"Since leaving secondary education at the age of sixteen, my training or preparation for a career in disability arts has primarily been accessed through a company called Theatre Resource. It offers people with all varieties of disability including mental health and other otherwise socially excluded groups, a way through to the arts.

Since my initial involvement with Theatre Resource as a participant in September 2000, my attention and intention was observed by them and they gently brought me in. First by showing me what I could be (by using role models) and by showing me how, by informing me of my choices and then encouraging me to choose, and supporting me every inch of the way while doing so.

I would have loved a more formal training, absolutely - just to be taken more seriously - like 'look I have qualifications AND experience'. But there are just not enough courses that I could attend with the support and services I know I would need. Plus there is the funding and the schedule - I just don't think I could trust my disability enough to be constantly on a good day, day in, day out, through all those terms and semesters. I don't know if I would have the confidence. I tell myself being thirty and starting life over again is bad enough, without complicating it by trying to be normal. And that is what the mainstream want - normal. Who is and who isn't remains another question, but right now I feel safe within the disability forum, because as a disabled person, I am respected in and by it.

Personally, I found the attitudinal barriers difficult, due to the unpredictability of my mental health states, but Theatre Resource have been outstanding, and I found most of the courses had a far more relaxed environment than the pressures I experienced at school. Some course content was particularly triggerish for me. And I can't say how I coped with it at the time, probably because I didn't cope well.

For me there had to be gaps. There were moments when even with the support I received, I needed head space because I didn't think I would finish it due to not coping. I distinctly remember having a big panic about how to present my one written assignment and getting it in on time. And I distinctly remember finding it hard to get it down in the first place. (continued on page 102)
Case Study - Paula Thompson Continued

I think that encouragement and training were a big part of me continuing in this field. I got my feet wet with just about the right measure of responsibility I could cope with without having a panic attack. I just wish there were more training opportunities all round.

The next steps for me - where do I take what I have learned? To whom? Will they want me with my baggage? How can I get them to pay me without the imbalance of regular work impeding my disclosure of such in relation to my benefit entitlements? What do I do if I can’t hold the job out? And it all goes horribly wrong? What is the next step?”

Why employ disabled people?

It is important that all schools recognise that they are, or shortly will be, covered by the employment aspect of the Disability Discrimination Act. Although at present applying to employers of more than 15 employees, the legislation extends to all employers in late 2004. Employers give many reasons as to why they do not employ disabled people - but they are often excuses based on ignorance and prejudice.

"A disabled person couldn’t do this job..."
What is ‘a disabled person’? It is important not to make assumptions. How can every disabled person be the same? Your job description and job specification will indicate what is required for the job, and then a disabled person can make up their own mind if they can do the job or not, before they apply. Remember that under the DDA you must, as an employer, be flexible about making reasonable adjustments to the job description but not to the extent of changing the job.

"No disabled people ever apply..."
Are your application processes accessible? There are over one million disabled people in this country who want to work and who are looking for work.
How do you know you are not employing disabled people already? Do you regularly encourage people to talk about any access support they might need? Most disabled people gain their disability - you may not employ a disabled person at the moment but who knows what peoples situation will be in the future.

"A disabled person would not be as reliable..."
Statistically disabled people are more committed, more likely to stay in a job, have good punctuality records compared to non-disabled people. They can also manage their time off better.

"The rest of the staff wouldn’t like it...."
Again, many organisations report an increased ‘feel good factor’ amongst other staff. It can be seen to encourage compassion and understanding, increase team building, and has benefits for image, PR and morale.
"We can’t just change everything for one person..."
Often access improvements benefit everyone - students, staff and visitors.

"It would be too expensive..."
The Employers Forum on Disability quotes average cost of adjustment as £200 (two thirds of adjustments cost nothing), and there is support from the Government’s Access to Work scheme (see page 113) to help with any costs you incur to support an employee.

How accessible is your recruitment process?

Job advertisements
Advertisements for job opportunities should be clear and concise. The layout should be uncluttered and easy to read. The information included in advertisements can be important. For example, if information about a post can only be obtained over the telephone, a range of people who cannot access the telephone have no easy way of getting further information and so might be put off. Depending on the post and the size of the advertisement, postal address, telephone and fax numbers and/or email address could be given.

Look at where positions are advertised and if necessary, take out additional advertisements in order to attract applications from disabled people (see section on page 66).

There is no legal requirement to state ‘equal opportunities employer’ or ‘this employer welcomes applications from disabled people’ but both have been found to encourage disabled people to apply for positions. Other ways of indicating your accessibility and willingness to employ disabled people are through making statements such as ‘reasonable access to workplace’ or ‘all application information available in alternative formats’, but naturally it is only worth making such statements if they are true!

Take some positive action - all the measures below are acceptable:

- guaranteeing interviews for suitably qualified disabled applicants
- positive training (i.e. training courses to bring disabled people to the same level of skill and qualification as non-disabled people in a similar position)
- positive advertising (i.e. placing adverts which ‘welcome applications from disabled people’)
- setting of direct experience of disability as a selection criterion for disability related jobs, such as access officers or outreach posts working with disabled people within job specifications

All the above points can equally apply to freelance staff. These still count as offers of employment even if the employment is for a brief or finite period of time.
**Application packs**

Application packs often contain a wide range of information. Ideally all the information should be written clearly and you should be prepared to offer application pack materials in different formats, if requested.

Application packs often include job descriptions, person specifications, equal opportunities monitoring forms and application forms along with information on the school and sometimes guidance notes to help applicants apply.

Many job descriptions contain details not only of the work that needs doing as part of a job, but also of the way in which it must be done. This can be discriminatory. For example, a job description may include the duty ‘to have discussions by phone with the DfES’ which would not be possible for disabled people who do not use the phone. Amending the wording to simply read ‘to have discussions with the DfES’ enables the specific task to be undertaken in a range of different ways.

Job descriptions should list all the key tasks of the post clearly, and all should be strictly relevant to the post. They should be written in a way that is flexible to maximise access.

The same issues often occur within person specifications. It is not uncommon for people to state ‘must have own driving licence’ as a condition for a post and sometimes this is a genuine requirement. However it is often used without any precise thought about its necessity and therefore discriminates against many disabled people. The real requirement might be that applicant must be able to travel. This will include many disabled people who cannot drive but who use public transport or who have a personal assistant who drives.

Equally the requirement to ‘communicate orally’ may discriminate against some disabled people who communicate just as effectively through a speech facilitator or sign language interpreter.

Qualifications are often asked for without being specifically required. In most cases it is specific skills held within the qualification that are needed. Discrimination in education and training means that many disabled people will not have the formal qualifications, yet still may have gained the relevant skills.

It is important to be flexible in the tasks and attributes required, and to be prepared to adapt working practices and incorporate new technology or personal assistance where required.

Remember that legally, if required, you must be prepared to allocate some of the disabled person’s duties to another person, alter their working hours, assign them a different place of work (move an office from an upstairs location to a downstairs one, for example), and to
acquire or modify equipment. This means you cannot discriminate against a disabled person who is the best applicant simply because they would need to work in a different environment or because they communicate in a different way, or even because they would not be able to do a small part of the job as written in the job description.

You should be clear about what is being assessed within the selection phase. If a job requires written skills then it is clear that a covering letter identifying why the applicant would like the job is a useful thing to assess for spelling, grammar and use of language. If the job itself does not involve a high degree of written skills, then it would not be appropriate to assess the material for these criteria.

In order to monitor the success of any recruitment procedure, monitoring of all responses must occur. The usual way of collecting this information is through an equal opportunities monitoring form. The monitoring form should be part of the application pack, but as it needs to be separated from the application itself when it arrives, many people include it as a separate sheet.

Many disabled people are worried that by declaring themselves as a disabled person, they will automatically be deselected. It is important to reassure disabled people that the declaration is for monitoring purposes only and will not adversely affect their application. Many equal opportunities forms still ask if the applicant is a ‘registered disabled person’. The national requirement to register was abolished in 1995 when the Disability Discrimination Act was passed.

You can ask
- are you a disabled person?
- do you describe yourself as a disabled person?
- are you a Deaf or disabled person?
- do you define yourself as a disabled person?

Or you can include a statement defining disability or your school’s stance before you ask.

Within an application form, many of the above points also re-occur. Asking solely for educational and previous work experience can be limiting to some disabled people and it is suggested that asking for paid and unpaid work experience might be a more positive solution. When someone has gained an impairment, or where their impairment has resulted in some time away from work, gaps may appear within employment histories. There is a degree of nervousness for many disabled people about being open and up front about these gaps as some employers might assume that the incidents may occur again. Only by generating a feeling of trust and approachability through the materials you produce will you enable a disabled person to feel confident that supplying information about gaps away from employment will not be detrimental to their application.
Application forms are difficult to fill in for some people and it is now common practice to enable anyone to reproduce the form on their own word processor, providing the questions remain in the same order and have equivalent spaces in which to answer the questions. One can also allow applications on computer disk, on audio tape, in Braille or even developed through the use of an advocate.

Guidance notes sent out with application forms can be a useful place to include the above information. A few welcoming and supportive sentences can be produced at the top of such information stating:

Anyone applying for this post can apply on the application form enclosed. If preferred, you may reproduce the form on your own computer or word processor, providing the questions remain in the same order and have equivalent spaces in which to answer the questions. Applications can also be accepted in different formats - on computer disk, on audio tape, in Braille - but please let us know if you are intending to apply in this way so we can ensure adequate translation time before short listing. If you have a problem with literacy, you may apply by asking another person to fill in the form on your behalf, but please ensure the wording remains your own.

Selection
Applicants should be clear on what is being assessed and how the short listing process will occur. It is good practice to indicate to applicants when they might hear by if successful and ideally to let all applicants know the outcome of their application, although for some organisations this is not practical. Where applicants will not be informed, it is best to indicate this within the application pack with a statement like: we are sorry that we will be unable to respond to unsuccessful applicants due to pressure of work. If you have not heard anything from us by the end of July, please assume your application has not been successful.

Applicants who have been granted an interview should be given the opportunity to state any access requirements they might have irrespective of whether they stated they were a disabled person or not. Some disabled people choose not to define themselves as disabled people on application forms for fear of prejudice.

Some disabled people may need longer to sort out their arrangements for an interview (to sort transport or other access needs). Some may need to alter the time of their interview (for example if they take medication that makes them drowsy in the morning they may prefer an afternoon interview slot) and so employers should be prepared to be flexible and ideally publicise the date of interviews within the application pack.

Access needs can be referred to within a letter calling a candidate to interview, and this letter should then include basic access information:
...the interviews will be held on the first floor meeting room above the library (accessible by a lift). Parking is available at the multi-storey car park opposite. Please let us know if the time is suitable for you and tell us if there is anything we need to know in order to provide you with a fair interview, e.g. sign language interpreter, lip speaker, speech-to-text operator, audio transcription, wheelchair accessible interview room, etc...

Otherwise if a map of the venue is being sent out, then some access information required may be included upon that. Some organisations choose to send out an access form enabling individuals to respond more fully to questions around access. It should be made clear that information about access is required in order to provide access to the interview and is not to be used as part of the selection process. Again, if required, this information should be sent out in alternative formats. It is also useful to state if any of the interviewing panel have relevant impairments, particularly if candidates have been asked to prepare a presentation.

Interviews should follow Equal Opportunities guidelines (with all candidates being asked the same questions) and so an employer may only ask questions about a person’s disability if these relate to the job. Ideally at least one member of the interview panel should have undertaken Disability Equality Training within the last 12 months and all members of the panel should be aware of the new responsibilities of employers under the DDA if of a relevant size. Basic information on communicating with disabled people should be known by all on the panel - how to work with a sign language interpreter and so on.

An employer may require applicants to undergo a medical examination, but may not single anybody out because they are disabled. They would have to be asking all applicants to undergo a medical.

Offer letters to successful candidates and rejection letters for other candidates should be available in other formats if required. Rejection information can be extremely useful for all rejected candidates, disabled candidates included. Organisations should be clear and honest, but tactful and sensitive.

Support for employing disabled people

Many employers worry about the additional costs of meeting a disabled person’s access requirements. It is important that employers familiarise themselves with the support that is offered by the government towards these costs.

There are a number of initiatives delivered through the employment service by the Disability Employment Advisers or Occupational Psychologists. Separate information leaflets are available about the scheme for people with disabilities and for employers. The
Employment Service can be contacted through Job Centres, and is responsible for employment assessment, rehabilitation and advisory services.

Schemes providing practical and financial support to disabled employees are administered by this service, schemes such as Job Introduction Scheme and the Access to Work (AtW) scheme, which includes special aids to employment (equipment), adaptation to premises and equipment, personal facilitators and fares to work. This can alter in amount depending on how long the person has been in employment and what support is needed. Generally, for an existing employee, the service works on a cost share basis with an employer, looking for £300 plus 20% of the costs as a minimum; for a new employee, costs may be met in full.

Disability Employment Services offer:

- a work preparation programme and other services available to disabled people looking for or in work
- a Job Introduction Scheme (JIS) which enables disabled people to have a trial period in a job and employers to take on someone with a disability for a trial period by providing a contribution towards their wages in the first few weeks. This is currently £45 per week for up to 6 weeks but can be extended up to a maximum of thirteen weeks
- access to Work - a scheme designed to provide advice and practical support to a disabled person and their employer to help overcome work related obstacles resulting from the disability. Access to work pays a grant through the Job Centre Plus towards any extra employment costs which may result from the disability.

Further information on Access to Work can be found on page 113.

There is also a Supported Placements Scheme (SPS) for severely disabled people. A host company provides the job alongside non-disabled colleagues and a sponsor such as a Local Authority or voluntary organisation employs the disabled person.

The Employment Service has a number of ways of supporting disabled people who are looking for employment including priority access to a number of schemes. Disabled people:

- can join a Job club sooner than non-disabled people
- can apply for Work Trials
- may qualify for support under a New Deal for Disabled people and a range of different tax and benefit packages aim to support disabled people moving away from benefits and into paid employment
- may benefit from the Workstep scheme provided by job brokers which could provide invaluable support in the work place, e.g. the Buddy Scheme where full support is offered initially and then the amount of support is gradually reduced over two years
Information on access to work can be found at www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
Your local disability services can be found listed in the Yellow Pages or your Phone Book under Disability – Information and Services.

What about the DDA?

Under the DDA a number of ‘reasonable adjustments’ are required to be made by all employers of over 15 people. In 2004, this is extended to all employers, regardless of the number of employees.

Examples of ‘reasonable adjustments’ required under the DDA:

• making adjustments to premises (for example, widening doors or installing visible fire alarms, though regulations may limit this obligation where Building Regulations have been complied with)
• allocating some of the disabled person’s duties to another person
• transferring her/him to fill an existing vacancy
• altering her/his working hours (for example, adjusting the core times of a flexi-time scheme)
• assigning her/him to a different place of work (for example, same job, different room)
• allowing her/him to be absent during working hours for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment
• giving or arranging training (such as specific training on issues such as working with a personal assistant for other team members)
• acquiring or modifying equipment
• modifying instructions or reference manuals
• modifying procedures for testing or assessment
• providing a reader or interpreter
• providing supervision (for example, providing additional support and training for a person with learning difficulties)

A number of helpful publications are available on employment and access:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 - What Employers Need to Know (DL170)
Employing Disabled People - a good practice guide for managers and employers (DLE7)
available from Disability Rights Commission
DRC Help, Freepost MIDO2164, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 9BR
Information is also downloadable from the web on www.drc-gb.org or can be ordered from the DDA helpline on 08457 622 633. Available in a variety of formats.

Employing Disabled People - how the employment service can help (DS18)
produced by the Employment Service and available from North West Regional Disability Service, Access to Work Business Centre, 2nd Floor, Job Centre, Blackhouse Street, Bolton BL1 1SX, tel: 08456 040214, Textphone: 01204 516492