

“What’s not to like about hiring exceptional candidates? We’ve quickly learned that there can be a fabulous overlap between candidates with learning disabilities and exceptional employees – and any employer that isn’t interested in that overlap is missing out in a big way.” – Raj Panasar, partner at law firm Cleary Gottlieb.

Economic benefits

There are currently record numbers of vacancies in the UK labour market, with nearly 1.25 million unfilled positions as of September 2022 (1). Data suggests that around one-third of businesses with 10 or more employees are experiencing a shortage of workers as of November 2021 (2). But hiring people with learning disabilities can be a solution to businesses’ recruitment challenges. There are approximately 870,000 working age adults with a learning disability in the UK (3). But Mencap’s Big Learning Disability Survey found only 26.7% of respondents with a learning disability are currently in work, the lowest employment rate of any health condition or disability (4). Yet research commissioned by Mencap has found that as many as 86% of people with learning disabilities not currently in work would like a job (5).

People with learning disabilities often prove loyal employees. Research has found people with learning disabilities stay in their jobs longer than their non-disabled co-workers. The same study found people with a learning disability had no whole day absences, compared to 1-6 days missed by matched non-disabled co-workers, and they were late only 3 times, compared to 20 times for non-disabled comparators (6). This can represent significant financial value for employers who can save money on recruitment processes and experience increased productivity.

“We haven’t lost anybody we took on and they are very loyal and hardworking people.”(7) - Private sector employer that does employ people with a learning disability.

Reputational advantages

Your customer base will appreciate the efforts you are making to be an equal opportunities employer. Many of your actual and potential customers are disabled people. Your organisation will be more representative of the community. In a large study, 92% of consumers interviewed said they felt more favourable towards companies that hired people with disabilities, with 87% specifically agreeing that they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire people with disabilities (8).

Employers who spoke with researchers commissioned by Mencap stated the belief that employing people with learning disabilities can help build trust with communities, enabling their projects to run more smoothly. An employer in the construction industry, for example, reflected that their employment of people with learning disabilities provided a means to give back to, and build trust with, a community in which they were undertaking a large construction project (9). For businesses bidding for public sector contracts and funding, the ability to offer social value – which could include extending work opportunities to underrepresented groups like people with learning disabilities – is often given substantial weighting in the evaluation of tenders and can be a deciding factor as to which organisations are awarded contracts and funding.

Benefits to staff teams

Your staff will overcome any misconceptions about learning disability by getting to know a colleague with a learning disability. This will also be useful when dealing with disabled clients or customers. Your staff are likely to respond well to a more diverse team, particularly if they are given the chance to 'buddy' or line manage the person. Most people with a learning disability face multiple barriers to finding employment. Overcoming challenges to find work is a huge achievement and this is often reflected in the positive attitudes they bring to the workplace as a result. Their enthusiasm can be infectious and improve staff morale. Team dynamics and overall performance have been known to improve as a result of employing someone with a learning disability (10). One employer reported to researchers that the introduction of a student with a learning disability to one of their underperforming teams had had a transformational effect that "changed the whole dynamic of the team", while another reflected that people with learning disabilities create "positivity" in teams and help "other people with their outlook on life." (11)

Sources:

- 1 Office for National Statistics (2022), [Vacancies and job in the UK, October 2022](#), Available online:
- 2 Office for National Statistics (2021), ['Changing trends and recent changes in the labour market'](#).
- 3 Figures calculated by Mencap using learning disability prevalence data from Public Health England (2016) and population data from the Office of National Statistics (2020), <https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/research-and-statistics/how-common-learning-disability>.
- 4 Mencap (2022), [Big Learning Disability Survey](#), p.15.
The rate for adults with learning disabilities known to adult social services in England is significantly lower still at 4.8%, though some people with learning disabilities who are in work may not be known to these services. See NHS Digital (2022), ['Measures from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework England, 2021-22'](#), p. 26.
- 5 Harflett, N., Blood, L., Melling, K., Robinson, C., Richards, B., Chapman, S., Cooney, G., and Woodward, E., (2022), 'Work and Learning Disability Research', p. 20.
- 6 Citera, R.E. (2009). The monetary benefits and costs of hiring supported employees: A pilot study. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 30, 2, 111-119.
- 7 Harflett, et al (2022). [Work and learning disability research', p. 57](#)
- 8 Siperstein, G. N., Romano, N., Mohler, A. and Parker, R. (2006). [A national survey of consumer attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities](#). *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 24, 1, 3-9.
- 9 Harflett, et al (2022). 'Work and learning disability research', p. 58.
- 10 Beyer, S. and Beyer, A., (2017), 'A Systematic Review of the Literature on the Benefits for Employers of Employing People with Learning Disabilities', p. 23.
- 11 Harflett, et al (2022). 'Work and learning disability research', p. 58.

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