

Disability and Employment



Summary of key findings

This report is based on a survey by employment specialists Reed in Partnership, supported by leading charity Disability Rights UK.

The report seeks to examine the views of businesses across the UK, with over 300 respondents taking part in our survey. We hope this report is a useful addition to the policy making process.

Summary of key findings:

- The biggest challenge to employing disabled people is that applicants aren't always willing to be open about their disability. Around half of respondents in our survey (47%) said that it would help if job applicants were more willing to be open about their health condition.
- Other key challenges to increasing the number of disabled people in work include fellow staff or line managers not having sufficient training to support disabled colleagues, and the lack of accessibility of some businesses for people with certain types of impairments.
- Almost one in ten (9%) respondents said their business is not able to support an employee with a disability or health condition.
- 76% of respondents welcomed additional disability training being provided for line manager or co-workers, and 71% agreed with the purchasing/modifying equipment and changing working patterns.
- The vast majority (84%) of respondents told us that disabled people make a valuable contribution to the workplace, however more than one in ten (12%) worry that disabled people are more likely to take time off work.
- Around a quarter (26%) of respondents said it was challenging to discuss the management of disabilities. 19% of respondents consider that the cost of modifying equipment makes it expensive to employ disabled people, and almost half (49%) of respondents said that additional funding for adaptations would help businesses to retain disabled people in employment.
- Almost a third (31%) said that businesses are worried that disabled people will claim discrimination if the job does not work out.

1. Introduction

Reed in Partnership and Disability Rights UK share the vision of a society where everyone can participate equally.

Reed in Partnership is a provider of public services and has extensive experience of helping long term unemployed people into work. Disability Rights UK is a leading disability charity supporting organisations to put disabled people's priorities at the heart of their policies and practices.

The latest official figures show that the UK employment rate for disabled people is 47.2%, compared with the rate for non-disabled people at 80.3%¹. The government has set a target of halving the employment disability gap by 2020, which would mean an additional 1 million disabled people in employment².

Organisations such as the Trades Union Congress have warned that this target looks set not to be met and that at the current rate of progress it will take until 2030 for the employment gap to be halved³.

Factors that help explain the disability employment gap include:

- **Lack of confidence amongst some employers** about how to employ disabled people, make workplace adjustments and make use of government support like the Access to Work programme. This can lead to disabled people being overlooked for jobs, or leaving the workforce unnecessarily if they develop an impairment during working life ⁴
- **A skills and qualifications gap** between disabled and non-disabled people⁵. For instance, disabled people are only about half as likely to go to university as non-disabled people; and less likely to take up an apprenticeship. To remedy this, improvements must be made in the education of disabled children, and it requires higher aspirations amongst educationalists, improved careers advice and access to work experience and traineeships.
- **Inadequate support programmes** for individual disabled people and employers. There is good evidence on 'what works' to support people into employment – including, for example, Individual Placement and Support (IPS) - but implementation is inconsistent.⁶

¹ TUC, 2016, Disability and employment

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ Sayce (2011) Getting In, Staying In and Getting On. An Independent Review commissioned by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions; Disability Rights UK (2016) Get Back to Where We Do Belong: An employment skills guide for people with newly acquired disabilities or health conditions

⁵ Disability Rights UK (2015) Closing the Disability and Skills Gap.

<http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/closing-disability-skills-gap>

⁶ Disability Rights UK (2014) Taking Control of Employment Support.

<http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/policy-campaigns/reports-and-research/taking-control-employment-support>; and The Work Foundation and Disability Rights UK (2016) Peer Support for Employment – a review of the evidence; and Peer Support for Employment – a practice review.

We believe that business has an essential role to play in closing the gap between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled workers. This report seeks to explore the current views of employers across the UK and how government employment support programmes can be re-designed to help break down the barriers that too often exist between business and disabled people.

1. 1 Benefit of reducing disability employment gap

Increasing the number of disabled people in employment would lead to benefits for both the individual and the wider economy.

Research by Landman Economics shows that 19% of disabled people live in poverty compared to 15% of non-disabled people⁷. A recent report by disability charity Scope states that a stagnation in the disability employment rate would mean that the incidence of relative poverty among disabled people will increase from 19% to 30%⁸.

An increase in the proportion of disabled people in employment will also bring huge economic benefits to the country. With a 5% increase in the employment rate of disabled people Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would grow by an extra £23 billion by 2030 and the government would receive an additional £6 billion in tax revenue by 2030⁹.

Evidence from the think tank Reform shows that disabled employees are as productive as their non-disabled colleagues.¹⁰ With one in six of the population living with a health condition or impairment, employers are missing out on a huge number of talented people. In addition, disabled people also often bring assets like problem-solving, empathy and resilience to the workplace because of the challenges they have faced.

1. 2 The view of government

The UK Government has introduced a number of significant initiatives to help get more disabled people into work. The **Disability Confident campaign** was launched in 2013, to encourage employers to take on more disabled people by promoting positive attitudes towards them and removing barriers to employment.

Introduced in October 2010, **Work Choice** is a specialist voluntary programme to help unemployed people with disabilities into sustained employment. The programme supports its participants by providing employability services such as confidence building and interview skills training¹¹. However, one of the drawbacks identified in the programme is that because participants are expected to work a minimum of 16 hours, people with more complex needs who are unable to do so do not benefit.¹²

⁷ Scope, 2015, Enabling work: disabled people, employment and the UK economy
http://www.scope.org.uk/Scope/media/Images/Publication%20Directory/Landman_Report.PDF?ext=.pdf

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Reform, 2016, The potential of Disability Confident

<http://www.reform.uk/reformer/the-potential-of-disability-confident/>

¹¹ Gov.uk, 2015, Work Choice

<https://www.gov.uk/work-choice/overview>

¹² House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2015, Welfare-to-work

Access to Work is a publicly funded support system for the benefit of disabled people to start or stay in work. The support targets people whose disability or health condition affects their ability to do their work and would require additional costs to do so (e.g. specialised equipment, a communicator at a job interview)¹³.

From 2017 the current national employment programmes 'Work Programme' and 'Work Choice' will be replaced by the new **Work and Health Programme**. The government has stated this new service will focus on meeting the needs of disabled people and those with long term health conditions.

1.3 International comparisons

Disabled people also face disadvantages in the labour market in other European countries¹⁴.

A report by Papworth Trust showed that the employment rate for disabled people is very low in Croatia (20%) Greece (30%) and Malta (32%), but high in Cyprus (55%), Germany (57%) and Sweden (59%)¹⁵.

Sweden and Denmark have higher rates of employment for disabled people compared to the UK, with both countries spending more on active labour market policies¹⁶. Additionally, employers in some Scandinavian countries are responsible for monitoring sickness absence and drawing out plans to support employees returning to work¹⁷. This plan is said to have decreased the number of individuals claiming disability benefits¹⁸.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmworpen/363/363.pdf>

¹³ Gov.uk, 2016, Access to Work

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/what-youll-get>

¹⁴ Papworth Trust, 2016, Disability in the United Kingdom 2016 Facts and figures

<http://www.papworthtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Disability%20Facts%20and%20Figures%202016.pdf>

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ DWP, 2013, What works for whom in helping disabled people into work?

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266512/wp120.pdf

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ ibid

2. Our survey findings

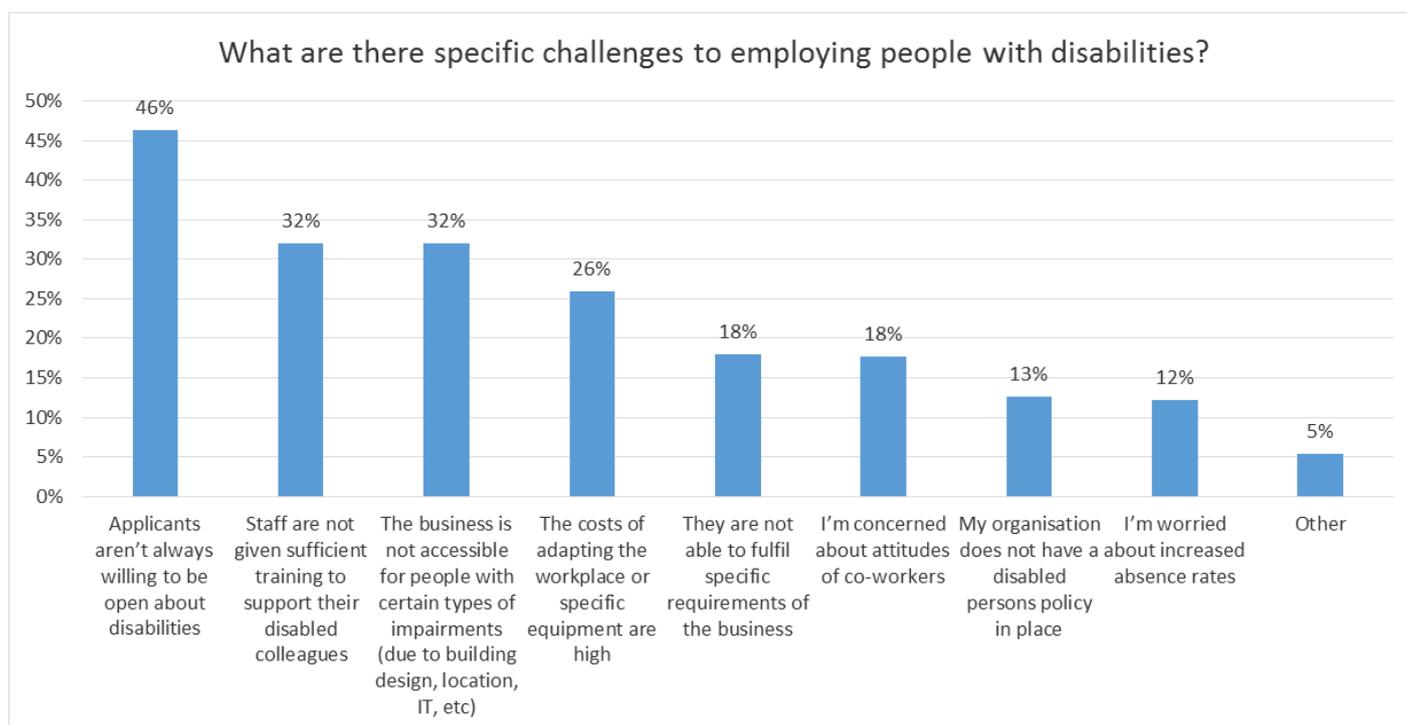
Reed in Partnership and Disability Rights UK surveyed over 300 people involved in recruitment, human resources or leadership positions within business on their views of the challenges disabled people face entering employment. This section of the report details the findings and our analysis of the survey.

We received responses from people working in organisations operating across the United Kingdom in companies of various sizes and sectors.¹⁹

Number of employees	Proportion of respondents
Fewer than 10	30%
11-50	24%
51-250	21%
More than 250	24%

2.1 Perceived challenges

When asked about employing people with disabilities, 78% of business respondents told us that there were specific challenges.



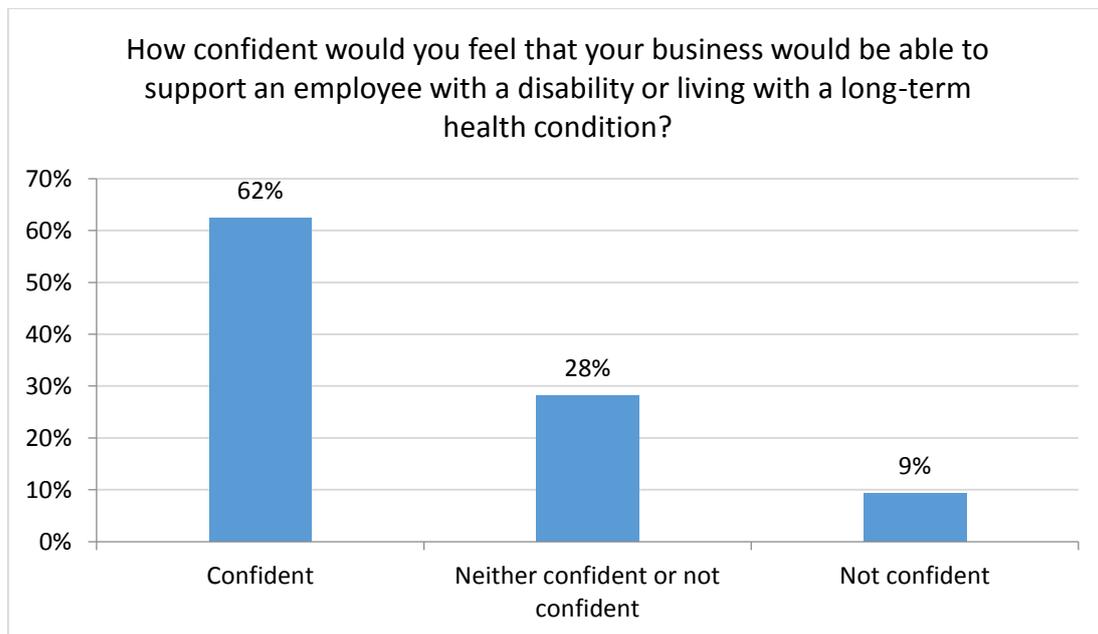
¹⁹ NB: totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The challenge most consistently cited by businesses - by almost half of respondents - is that *“applicants aren’t always willing to be open about disabilities”*. Almost a third of respondents said that *“staff aren’t given sufficient training to support their disabled colleagues”* and that *“the business is not accessible for people with certain types of impairments”*.

2.2 Supporting disabled people in the workplace

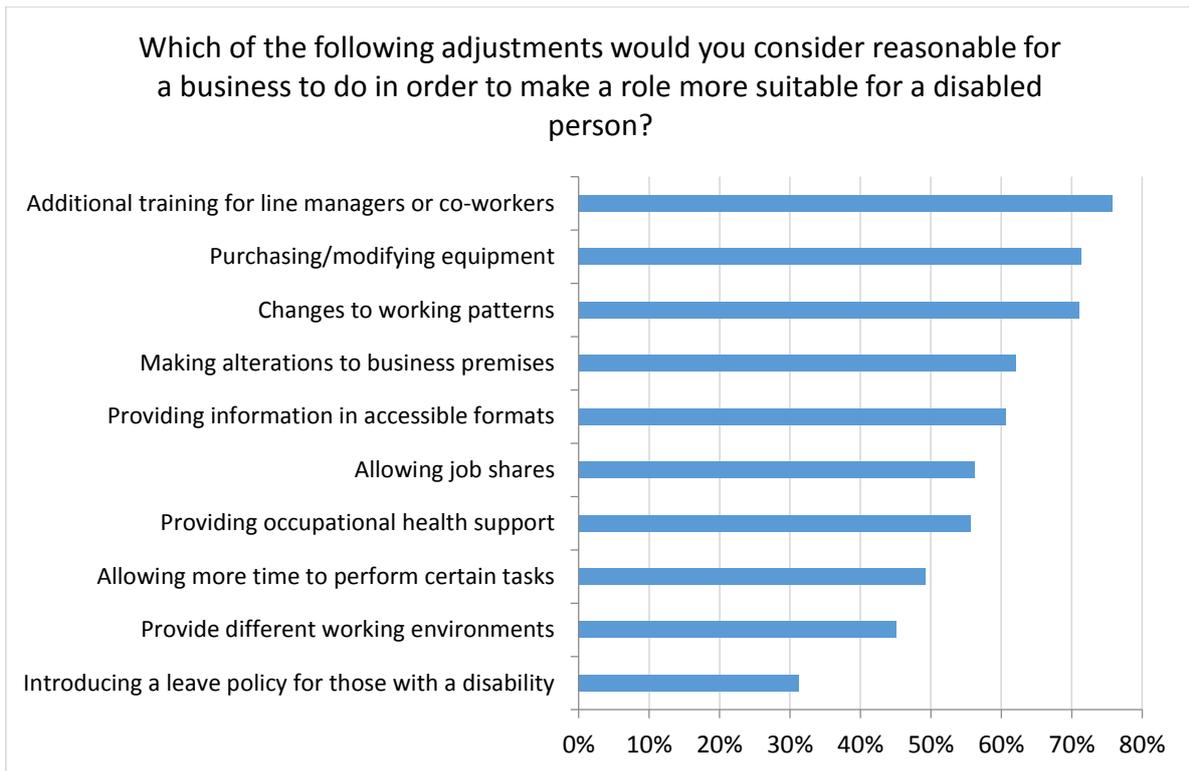
When asked about the support available within their business for disabled people, almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) said they felt their business would be able to support an employee with a disability or health condition.

However, it is notable – and concerning – that almost one in ten (9%) respondents said that they did not feel that their business would be able to offer this support.



Business respondents told us in our survey that they are willing to consider making a range of adjustments to make the workplace environment and roles within organisations more suitable for disabled people.

The most popular adjustment – by 76% of employers – was a willingness to provide additional training or mentoring for line managers and co-workers. The next most popular was purchasing new equipment, followed closely by changing working patterns (both 71%). The least popular adjustments were providing different working environments (such as quiet areas to work) and introducing a sick leave policy for those with a disability (31%).



2.3 Views of business

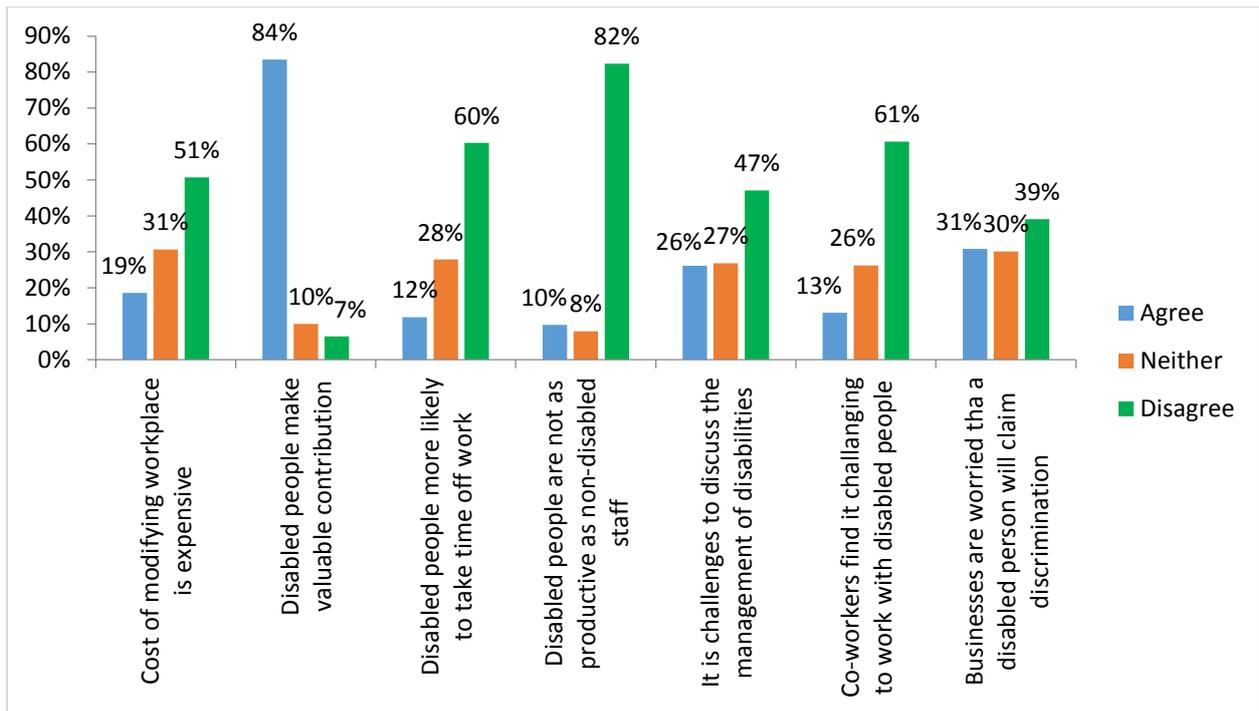
In order to gauge the views of business on disabled people and employment, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. The results are displayed in the below chart and showed that:

Positive views

- The vast majority (84%) of respondents say that disabled people make a **valuable contribution** to the workplace.
- More than four-fifths (82%) consider that disabled people **as productive** as non-disabled staff.

Views to challenge

- Almost a fifth (19%) of respondents consider the cost of modifying the workplace makes it **expensive to employ** disabled people.
- More than one in ten (12%) worry that disabled people are more likely to **take time off** work or need other staff to cover for them.
- Around a quarter (26%) told us it was challenging to **discuss the management of disabilities** and long-term health conditions with employees.
- More than one in ten (13%) said that co-workers find it **challenging to work with disabled people** or people living with long-term health conditions.
- Almost a third (31%) said that businesses are worried that disabled people **will claim discrimination** if the job does not work out.



2.4 Improving employment support for disabled people

Increasing the number of disabled people in employment

Survey respondents were asked what would help their business employ more disabled people, including both those that would require new government policy initiatives and those that would require change within their own organisation.

Only around one in ten (13%) said that their business is already doing enough in this area, which shows a recognition that the current level of engagement by business with this issue is not sufficient.

There was a clear indication from employers that businesses are seeking more information from disabled people themselves about the support they need in the workplace. However, we know from previous research that many disabled people are concerned about discrimination from employers. When disability charity Scope surveyed disabled people about problems they faced around employment, 76% identified employer attitudes.²⁰

Therefore, employers need to be more pro-active in showing they welcome applications from disabled people so that prospective employees can be confident they will not face discrimination. Employers must work to create inclusive cultures within their organisations by demonstrating that disabled people have opportunities to progress within their business. For instance, senior leadership should encourage openness about health conditions and impairments, and should speak about the value everyone brings through their range of experience.

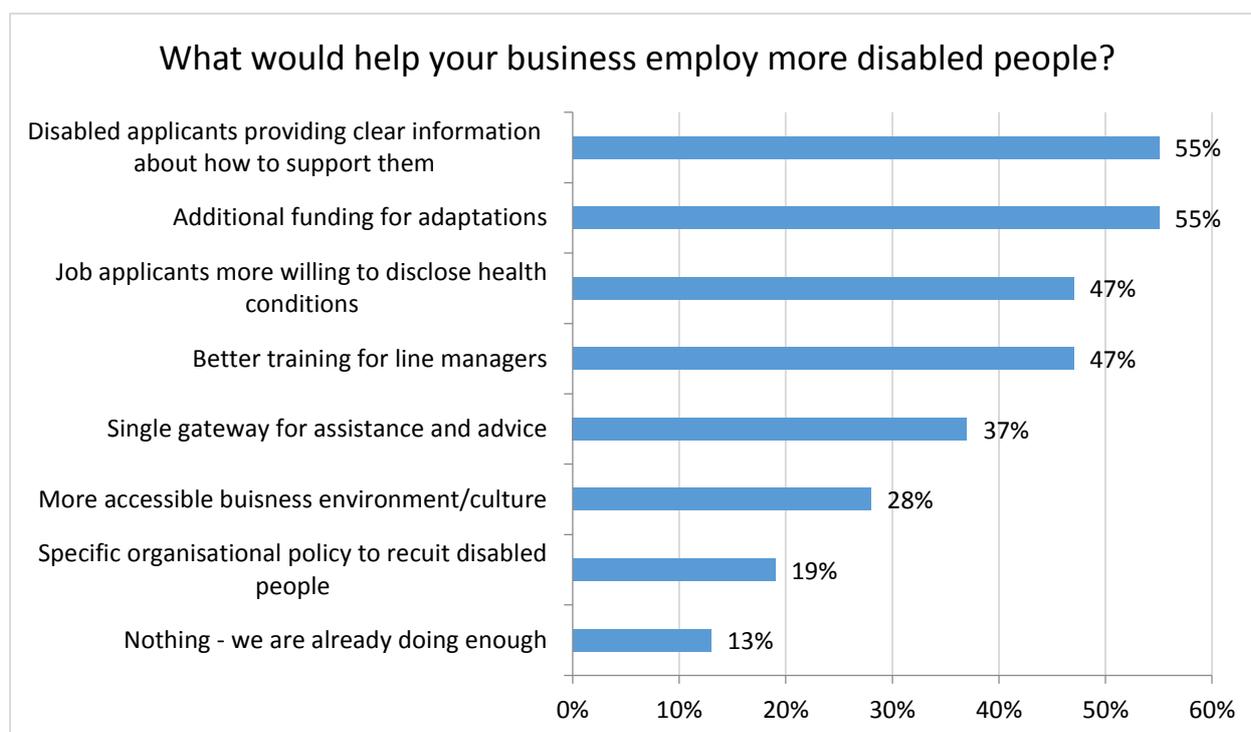
²⁰ <http://www.scope.org.uk/Scope/media/Images/Publication%20Directory/Current-attitudes-towards-disabled-people.pdf>

Our survey indicates that businesses feel constrained by a lack of information about the adaptations they may need to make, and the support available to them to do so. This supports the view of organisations such as the Resolution Foundation who state that too few people are aware of Access to Work, the government scheme that provides grants for adjustments to support people with disabilities or health conditions in employment.²¹

We therefore recommend an expansion of Access to Work and, crucially, much better publicity of the scheme among both disabled people and employers.

Almost half (47%) of respondents said that it would help if job applicants were more willing to be open about their health conditions, which would then allow the organisation to take appropriate measures at interview and assessment stage. The same proportion (47%) told us that better training for line managers would help employ more disabled people.

More than a third told us that a ‘one stop shop’ single access gateway that provided clear information and advice about the assistance available for the public and third sector would be beneficial to increasing the number of disabled people they employ.



Supporting disabled people to remain in work

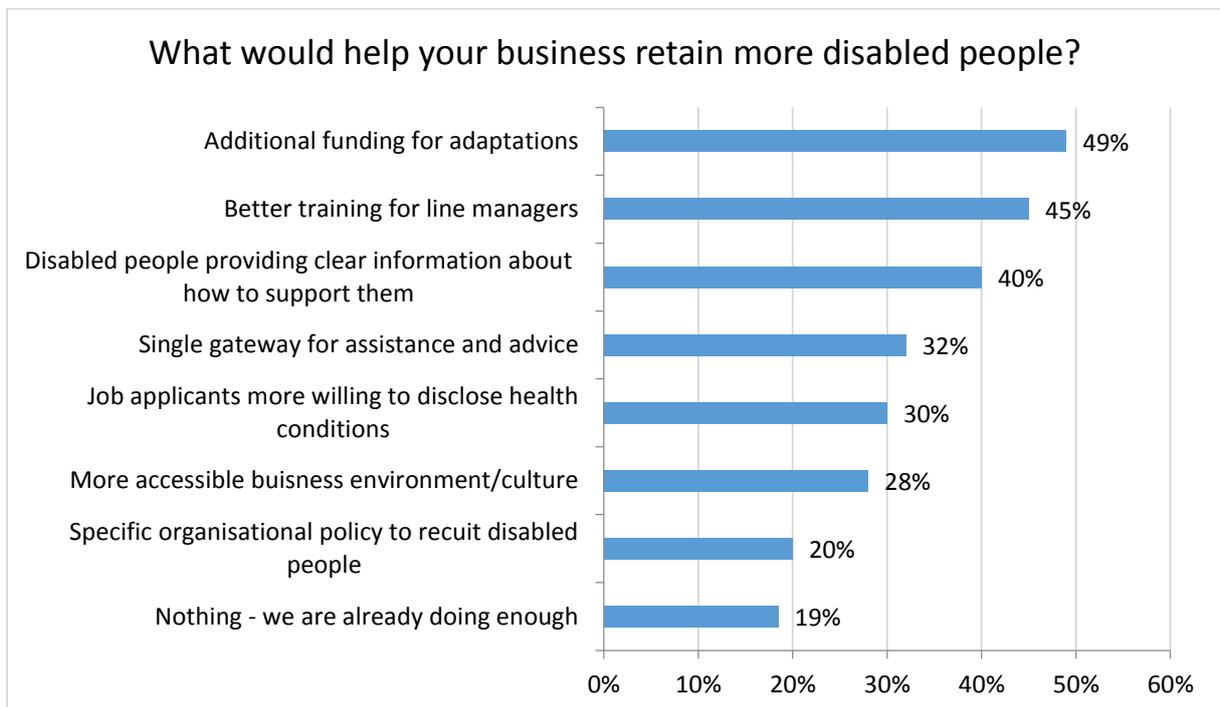
We asked businesses what would help them retain staff who developed a disability while in employment. Whereas only one in ten respondents felt their business was already doing enough to employ more disabled people, a greater proportion – one in five – was confident

²¹ <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Retention-deficit.pdf>

that their business was doing enough to assist existing staff who develop a health condition or disability during the course of employment.

Recent figures estimate that over 300,000 people drop out of work each year due to ill health, when in some cases they could remain in employment.²² Government employment policy is increasingly shifting towards assisting organisations to retain those who develop a disability and avoid them dropping out of the labour market.

The most popular choice for improvements that would help business retain staff who develop a disability while in work - chosen by 49% of respondents - was additional funding for adaptations. The second most frequently selected option was training for line managers (45%).



²² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49779/sayce-report.pdf

3. Recommendations

The government has set a target of halving the disability employment gap by 2020, which will mean an additional one million disabled people in work.

Following the findings of this report, Reed in Partnership and Disability Rights UK make the following recommendations to advance that objective:

- **Government expands Access to Work and increases publicity of the scheme**, which would offer more support with costs of adjustments. Access to Work addresses the cost concerns of adaptations expressed by businesses in our survey, but too few people are aware of the scheme.
- **Introduce a ‘one-stop-shop’** to offer help and workplace solutions for people with disabilities and their employers. For example, the Australian Government operate a service called JobAccess. It includes a comprehensive website and a free telephone information and advice service where employees can access confidential, expert advice on the employment of people with disability.
- **Encourage and incentivise employers to provide training in disability confidence** to their line managers; and more advanced training to their HR teams, so they are equipped to support and advise line managers in an ongoing way
- **Employers to create cultures in which people living with impairments or health conditions feel more confident** to be open about what they need at work. This could be achieved through senior leadership within the organisation speaking about the culture the organisation wants to have, and the value everyone brings through their range of experience. We would also encourage senior colleagues who themselves live with health conditions or impairments to be open about this.
- **Employers should embed flexible working practices.** Flexible working is one of the most commonly requested forms of reasonable adjustment made by disabled people, and can be relatively easy and inexpensive to implement.
- **Establish a mental health ‘in-work support service’** by forming close links between employers and mental health services, such as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT). This will help employees at risk of developing mental health problems to receive support at an early stage and ensure employers are better equipped to deal with the issue.
- Providers of the government’s new Work and Health Programme should provide a **1-1 health and employability mentor** who will act as a single point of contact for unemployed people with disabilities or health conditions.

Actions to take

Our survey results suggest that action is needed by government, employers and individuals to help more disabled people into work:

From government:

- Additional funding for adaptations, which could be achieved by significant further increases in Access to Work
- A single gateway or one-stop-shop for advice and information for both disabled people and employers

From employers:

- Better training for line managers
- A more accessible business culture
- Specific organisational policies to recruit disabled people

From individuals:

- Providing clear information to employers on how to support them
- Being more open about their impairments and health conditions, providing employers ensure they have inclusive cultures so people feel safe to do so.