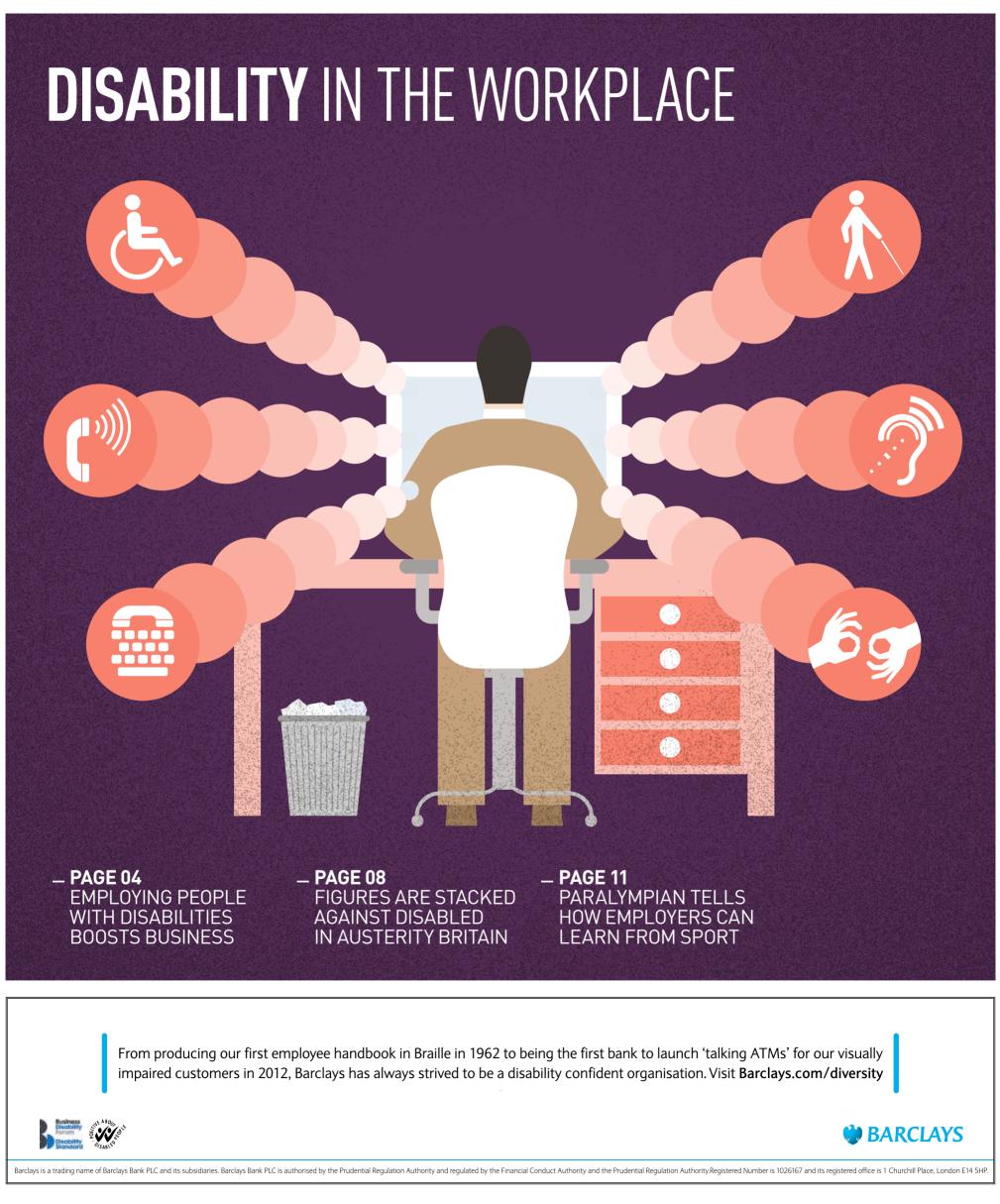
# RACONTEUR

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Attitudes towards disabled people are changing for the better, but there are still significant barriers to overcome in the workplace, writes Nick Martindale

#### OVERVIEW

■ The success of the UK's Paralympians last summer did much to change attitudes and challenge misconceptions around disabled people.

"It was the first time I had heard people talking on a daily basis about the achievements of disabled people and the amazing things they had done - and not just about their disabilities," says Beth Carruthers, director of employment services at Remploy. "That has prevailed across society as a whole and employers are certainly alive to that."

Businesses are now more willing to consider people with disabilities, says Mark Brooks, head of communications at Shaw Trust, a not-for-profit organisation that helps find disabled people employment. "The shift has been from 'can't' to wanting to, but needing help," he says. "For employers, the key thing is to get the best staff and, if they need extra support, they're able to get that."

Often employers require help in identifying issues that may unwittingly be deterring those with disabilities from applying for positions in the first place. Ms Carruthers cites the use of telephone interviews or online applications as potential barriers for some disabled people, as well as software that can filter out applicants, without the involvement of a human being, on grounds of not having particular skills or experiences.

"The reality is that, if you've become disabled while in work, it's likely that you're looking for a different job from the one you have experience in," she points out. "You might have transferable skills, but does that really come out in an automated CV search? It's unlikely, Employers need some hints and tips: what they don't need is a stick.' Ian Cox, managing director of Performance Telecom. attended a course on homeworking to identify new ways of encouraging

a more diverse workforce into

call centres, an industry that has traditionally suffered from high levels of staff turnover. He now operates Contactabil-

ity, an organisation that aims to place people with disabilities into the industry, either in the centres themselves, working from home or in a "hub environment", a resource organisations can draw on to meet periods of peak demand. The service is scheduled to launch in September. "We decided right from the start

that it would be a collection of partners who would be able to offer the various paths to employment,' he says. "More people are using different channels to communicate, so whereas someone who is deaf wouldn't be able to take phone calls, there's a natural fit with being able to respond to emails or SMS [text] messages."

Mr Cox concedes that those with learning disabilities often struggle to find work, but the hub concept. where call centres are operated by third parties with greater experience, could enable employers to draw on their skills without having to commit to any extra training or management time.

Some employers do still have concerns around taking on those with disabilities, admits Ms Carruthers, including perceptions that they tend to take more time off sick - anecdotal evidence suggests the reality is the exact opposite - and worries over what measures they will have to take to accommodate people in the office or workplace.

"With a disabled employee, you have to recognise whether there is something about the disability that is getting in the way and, if there is, you have to overcome it," she says. "The key is not to recruit disabled people for the sake of recruiting them, but to recruit disabled people who can do the job."

Schemes, such as Marks & Spencer's Marks & Start, and Sainsbury's You Can, that take on people with

disabilities to help them gain valuable experience, which can lead to permanent opportunities, can help overcome this, she says. Both parties are able to see whether they are a good match and those affected by disabilities can offer suggestions to improve the scheme.

With an ageing population and people tending to work for longer. employers are also increasingly likely to need to make simple adjustments for disabled employees within their existing workforce.

"Most of what I talk about is nonvisible disabilities, people who are not stereotypically disabled with the wheelchair or the white stick," says Bela Gor, legal director at Business Disability Forum. "Most don't call themselves disabled. They think of themselves as having developed a health condition, which they're managing, and they need assistance from their employer to manage in some cases.

Tom Walker, head of employment at law firm Manches, says employers should not fear either hiring disabled people or being compelled to make costly alterations. "The law on disability discrimination recognises that sometimes a disabled person needs more favourable treatment in order to reach the famous 'level playing field'," he says. "But if the employer carefully considers what can be done, they will be fulfilling their duty. The employer need not carry out measures to the detriment of other employees or that cannot be justified economically." R



The key is not to recruit disabled people for the sake of recruiting them, but to recruit disabled people who can do the job

of adults with learning disabilities

reported to be in some form of paid

Source: Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

of staff feel their employers

progression for disabled people

of people would automatically

assume a disability is physical

rather than mental

Source: BT

could do more to create

employment and career

Source: BT

employment, 2010-11

03

## **EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BOOSTS BUSINESS**

There are many good reasons why it pays to have a diverse workforce, as Karen Higginbottom discovers



#### BUSINESS CASE

■ Nearly eight million people of working age in the UK have a disability, according to the Office for National Statistics. However, figures from the Office for Disability Issues show that fewer than half of disabled people are in employment.

The under-representation of people with disabilities in the workplace means many employers are missing out on talent, says Robin Schneider, co-founder of diversity consultancy Schneider Ross, whose clients include Voda-

he says. "It means you have access

to talent that others may overlook

and you retain talent you might

otherwise lose. It's essentially

about skills, so if you have a bunch

of people who have those skills that

other employers aren't recruiting,

It doesn't make sense to ignore

a substantial proportion of the

working-age population in this

current economic climate where

employers are complaining of skills

then you want to recruit them."

fone and National Grid.

shortages, argues Dianah Worman, public policy adviser on diversity for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

"We're experiencing a skills crisis in the UK and if we disengage a large section of our population, then we continue to damage our competitive advantage," she says. Certainly the statistics bear this out: UK employers are more concerned about the lack of skilled employees in the labour pool than any of their Western Euroof an ageing UK workforce facing employers. This means they will have to take a progressive stance on disability, says Mustafa Özbilgin, professor of Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour at Brunel University. "As we age, we often gain disabilities and people will be working longer due to poor pension provision, so organisations need to prepare themselves for this," he says. "If organisations don't future-proof themselves, then this will affect them in the long term."

In fact, making provision now for disabled people can also help organisations get the best out of their existing workforce, adds Mr Schneider. "The majority of people with disabilities in the workplace will not be people that employers recruit, but employees who develop a disability during their working life," he says. "Employees who develop impairments would feel confident enough to be open with their manager about it and that is three-quarters of the way to ensuring that it doesn't become a problem.<sup>3</sup>

But there is another bonus for employers recruiting and Being in a wheelchair need not prevent a erson from working

> tivity rates, according to a 2010 United Nations report. Employers also experience a beneficial impact on their nondisabled employees from having taken a positive approach to disability in the workplace. "Creating

The business case for embracing diversity means you have access to talent that others may overlook and you retain talent you might otherwise lose



adjustment to any business needed to accommodate those with disabilities

Source: Disability Rights Commission



of disabled people who walk away from purchases feel unwelcome, or the product or service offering is inaccessible

Source: Business Disability Forum



hoost to the UK economy would result from improving the employment rate of disabled people

Source: Social Market Foundation

pean counterparts, according to "The business case for embraca survey of 1,300 chief executives ing diversity is straightforward," worldwide by Pricewaterhouse-

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Coopers (PwC). Employers are failing to exploit this pool of under-used talent, says Ms Worman. "You need to look at talent in all its forms. If you go for the same kind of person that you've always had, then you're not exploiting talent. It doesn't matter what packaging talent comes in. Employers should be more adventurous," she says.

Another impetus for change is the demographic time bomb

developing disabled employees

in the workplace, argues Mr Sch-

neider. "There is an assumption

that people with disabilities will

have greater absence levels and

lower performance levels, but

the opposite is true as they take

less time off sick and are better

performers," he says. Indeed, research backs up this view with

DIY chain B&Q finding that

employing disabled staff resulted

in better retention and produc-

an environment where disability is accepted as just another way in which, as individuals, we differ from each other plays out positively with employees," he says. "They feel proud that their employer is playing its part in society, helping to improve attitudes towards disability."

However, it's not just a case of ensuring you recruit the widest possible selection of talent from the UK population. Employing people who reflect your customer base helps inform your products and services to that particular community, and improves your profitability, says Ms Worman. "You need to ensure you offer a good customer experience, and that means a diverse approach so you can deliver products and services that add value to your business," she says.

This is the case for Habinteg, a national provider of affordable homes and support services, where one in three of its properties is designed specifically for wheelchair users and 17 per cent of its workforce is disabled, explains Paul Gamble, the housing association's chief executive. "Two of our twelve board members are disabled people so they are just as likely to be our bosses as our customers and the board members' experience frames our strategic direction," he says.

"Our disabled board members, along with the rest of the board, hold the organisation to account for delivery of our strategy which has the inclusion and experience of disabled people at its heart," he adds. "There is a wider, valuable impact in having disabled people represented at board level in that it grounds the organisation's leadership in the messy reality of the day-to-day experience of disabled people."

There could even be a backlash against organisations that fail to take account of their disabled customers, warns Phil Friend, chairman of Disability Rights UK. "Disabled customers will take their business elsewhere if employers get it wrong," he says.

Employers who are known for their progressive approach to diversity and inclusion are also more likely to attract the next generation to their organisation, says Ms Worman. "The younger generation have much stronger expectations around equality compared to older people and this could impact on recruitment if you're seen as a dinosaur organisation not delivering on diversity," she warns.

A PwC survey of more than 4,000 university graduates in 2011, otherwise known as "millennials", reveals that this generation are looking for strong diversity policies from employers. However, the millennials felt that, while employers talked about diversity, this didn't mean that opportunities were equal for all.

The benefits of employing disabled employees can also be tremendously powerful in terms of how the employer brand is perceived by the general public, says Mr Schneider. "There is no doubt that disability connects with the public at large," he says. "If you look at the Paralympics, it changed the patronising attitude of the public towards what people with disability can do. Disability does have a strong emotional connection and the general public recognise that disability could happen to them, and usually have friends and family who have some form of impairment."



Creating an environment where disability is accepted as just another way in which, as individuals, we differ from each other plays out positively with employees

He believes that employers, who show what they can do to help disabled people contribute effectively in society, are on to a triple win. "It's about showing you care and want to do something for the community, but also sending a positive message about being a progressive company and reaching out and engaging people with fantastic skills to bring them into the workforce," he says.

As the economy starts to heat up and the battle for talent emerges once again, these are compelling reasons to look to employ as diverse a workforce as possible.

#### CASESTUDY BANKING ON DIVERSITY

Employing people with disabilities is central to how Lloyds Banking Group (LBG) does business, says Graeme Whippy, senior manager of the bank's disability programme. "It's really about building deep, lasting relationships with our customers," he says. "We need our workforce to reflect the make-up of the communities where we do business."

Mr Whippy is responsible for overseeing the bank's approach to its workplace adjustments programme, which more than 12,000 disabled employees have completed in the last three years. "If a colleague says they have a disability, then we want to know what we can do to create a level playing field to minimise the impact of the disability," he says.

The programme covers both physical adjustments, such as IT equipment, and non-physical adjustments, such as flexible working patterns. Since the programme has been implemented, 80 per cent of managers have reported improvement in productivity for disabled colleagues who participated in it.

Another important aspect of supporting disabled employees is through the bank's personal development and career development programmes. The personal development programme is a three-day residential course aimed at junior employees with disabilities, says Fiona Cannon, LBG's group director, diversity and inclusion. "It's often the first time people have thought about their disability and how that relates to the world they live in," she says.

The career development programme is aimed at fasttracking talented employees with disabilities. "This focuses on their career in LBG, and identifies where the gaps are in their CVs and where they want to go next," says Ms Cannon.

In a survey of participants of both programmes, conducted earlier this year, 86 per cent reported their confidence had improved, 68 per cent said they were more engaged with the organisation, 63 per cent said their performance had improved and 15 per cent had been promoted since attending. To date, 400 disabled employees have attended one of the programmes.

A large part of supporting disabled employees is about educating line managers who manage people with disabilities. LBG has delivered mandatory e-learning on managing disability to managers across the group. So far, 22,000 line managers have completed the course.

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> Mark Fisher, Director of Group Operations, Lloyds Banking Group



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LLOYDS BANKING GROUP

## EMPOWERING STAFF IMPROVES MORALE AND PRODUCTIVITY

Advances in technology have liberated the disabled workforce and enabled more people with disabilities to play a full role in working life, as **Jo Faragher** reports

#### TECHNOLOGY

■ John Tipping is profoundly dyslexic and can read on average one word in ten. "Some days I read better than others, but on bad days I can't read at all," he explains. Since investing in screen-reading and transcription software eight or nine years ago, however, the way he runs his window film and sign installation company has changed dramatically.

"Before I had access to the technology, my wife had to write all my emails, quotes and invoices," he says. "Now I use a program called Dragon NaturallySpeaking which writes all of this up for me. I've also got reading software that highlights what I'm reading. I press 'play' and it reads everything. I remember feeling really emotional when I sent my first email. It was so liberating."

Because he's out on-site a lot, he now also uses apps on his iPhone to send and read emails from customers, enabling him to get back to them much quicker, which in turn has helped his business to become more profitable. "Before I worked for myself, companies didn't want to invest in me because they thought that, because I couldn't read or write, I couldn't do the job," he recalls. "But it's just about having the right tools - it's like me telling someone to dig a hole for a sign, but not giving them a shovel." As Mr Tipping's story demonstrates, investments in assistive technology (AT) can reap huge benefits in terms of productivity and engagement. While the range of products available can cover anything from screen-reading soft-

ware to special purpose computers

with head-tracking devices, many employees with disabilities may only require small adjustments to existing systems. A change can be as simple as being able to alter the colour contrast on a Word document or a web screen for someone who has dyslexia.

Yet there can be reluctance among IT departments to make these changes because they fear they will disrupt their existing networks or compromise their security. "In many organisations, IT departments tend to lock down systems so users can't change them or introduce their own corporate branding or fonts," explains Paul Day, chief of staff at Business Disability Forum. "So much information now on corporate websites is via video, but few have subtitles for those with hearing impairments



2,710

special aids and

Access to Work

in the first four months of 2013

Source: DWP

equipment have been provided through

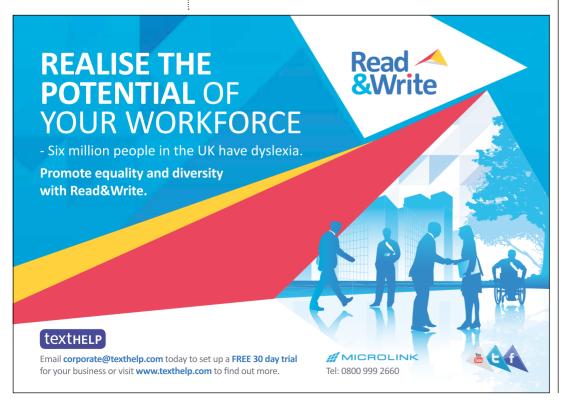
government funding

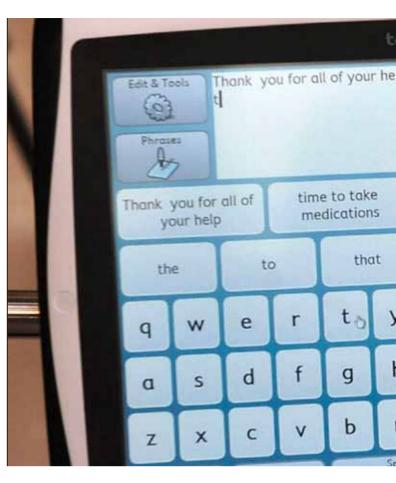
£

**£80,000** saving per employee to employers who retain staff if they

become disabled

Source: BT





or audio description for those with visual impairments."

Thinking about who might be accessing a document or a website, or controlling a keyboard or piece of machinery, rather than assuming it will be someone with "eyes, hearing and arms", can make a major difference to a disabled person's ability to do their work, not to mention their confidence, he adds.

Q

Hardwa

Software

solutions

What's more, with an ageing workforce, employers will increasingly need to invest in technology to help their employees be productive. Problems, such as hearing and sight impairment, as well as musculo-skeletal problems, will become more commonplace.

"There will be an increasing number of people who need adjustments, who have the classic prob-

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2

It's just about having the right tools – it's like me telling someone to dig a hole for a sign, but not giving them a shovel

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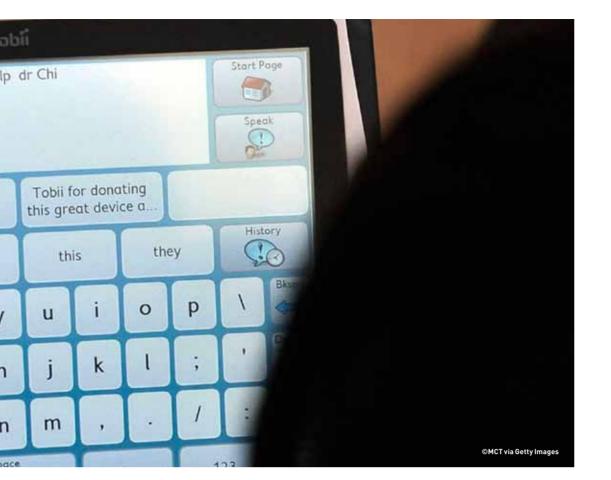
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lems associated with old age," says Dr Nasser Siabi, chief executive of Microlink, which works with organisations to come up with disability access solutions. "A wise employer will start putting provisions in place now to stop problems getting worse, rather than trying to fix the problem later. Preventative measures are far cheaper.'

Often, the benefits of an investment in AT stretch beyond employees with disabilities. Dragon NaturallySpeaking, for example, is one of the most widely used pieces of software among lawyers, as it enables them to speed up the rate their words are transcribed; the simpler user interfaces and touchscreen technology on tablet computers make certain tasks easier for everyone, not just those with cognitive issues.

"In my dream world, there would be no such thing as AT, because it's a label," says Mark McCusker, chairman of the British Assistive Technology Association. "I think people should think about it as an extra tool that helps improve productivity and helps the workforce enjoy what they do.'

Centralising the budget for AT, as they have at Lloyds Banking Group, can take the burden off individual line managers having to authorise purchases from their own departmental budgets and also increase buying power. After all, the legal obligation is with the employer, not the individual manager.

There is also funding available from the government, through the Access to Work scheme, although only a small percentage of the funding that has been given out to date has been allocated to technology spending. According to Mr McCusker, this accounts for only around £5 million of more than £100 million awarded so far, often because employers are either unaware of the support avenues

available or because they choose to avoid the paperwork and just buy the technology they need.

AT investments can also help to save employers money in the long term. Devices, such as the UbiDuo, a portable touchscreen device which helps hard-ofhearing and hearing people to communicate with each other face-to-face, can save thousands of pounds that might have previously been spent on British sign language interpreters, while remote-captioning services enable deaf staff to participate in meetings as every aspect of the conversation is written down.

In terms of managing the technology, increasingly sophisticated software management systems can help IT departments control all their AT centrally and push out specialist programs or updates to those who need them.

The growing trend towards employees bringing in their own devices to work has positive implications for those with disabilities too, according to Peter Johansson, chief executive of C Technologies, which produces portable pen-scanners that transmit handwritten text from paper to digital media.

"Mobile devices linked to work desktops, as well as peripheral assistive technology devices such as handheld scanners or recording devices, mean there are fewer bar-



ties can improve productivity across the organisation as a whole, which can only be good for business As Mr Day at Business Disability Forum concludes: "We're all 'situationally impaired' from time to time. So if you install a ramp at work, it doesn't just help the person in the wheelchair, it helps the guy who broke his leg in a skiing accident who's in plaster for two months and the woman with the

they help everyone." R

riers for people with disabilities to

overcome," he says. "Doing so also

becomes much easier when people

can incorporate the devices used in

their personal life into their work.' Looking beyond the limited scope

of the desktop computer also means

disabled staff can work remotely

- helpful if someone has an impair-

ment that makes commuting dif-

ficult, for example, or needs to work

in a solitary environment to aid their

concentration. "Removing location

boundaries is really important," says

Jeff Willis, business solutions direc-

tor at Toshiba. "All these things are

issues employers should be looking

at anyway now; it just happens that

helping people with disabilities is a

Here lies the ultimate selling

point of AT - that adapting existing

systems or investing in specialist

technology for those with disabili-

pushchair. Many adjustments don't

just help those with impairments;

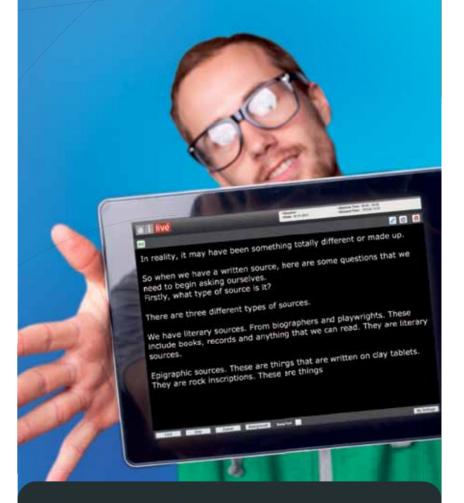
positive by-product."

Adapting existing systems or investing in specialist technology for those with disabilities can improve productivity across the whole organisation

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07

## FIGURES ARE STACKED AGAINST DISABLED IN AUSTERITY BRITAIN

Despite greater understanding of their needs, disabled people continue to face barriers to employment as well as wage discrimination, writes **Clare Bettelley** 

#### DASHBOARD

■ The London 2012 Paralympic Games portrayed people with disabilities in a positive light and for many it was the first time disabled people were viewed as part of British society.

Rob Trotter, a public policy adviser at disability charity Scope, says: "What we had was this amazing glimpse of what Britain could be like if disabled people were part of society – that was a breakthrough moment."

A poll conducted by Scope in December 2012 found that 72 per cent of disabled people think the Paralympic Games had a positive impact on attitudes towards them, with 20 per cent claiming it changed the way people talk to them and the same number saying the event made people more aware of their needs.

However, there are fears that

As part of its welfare reforms and pledge to overhaul the UK benefits system to help weed out fraudulent claimants, the government introduced in April the personal independence payment (PIP) to replace the DLA. PIP claimants can expect a face-to-face assessment of their disabilities and regular reviews, designed to ensure they are entitled to the benefit for which they are claiming. But Scope argues disabled

But Scope argues disabled "scroungers" are tiny in number compared to genuine benefit claimants and the introduction of the PIP is little more than a costsaving measure that will result in 607,000 fewer people getting PIP than would have received DLA by 2018.

One of the biggest myths about benefits claimants is that they don't want to work and this is

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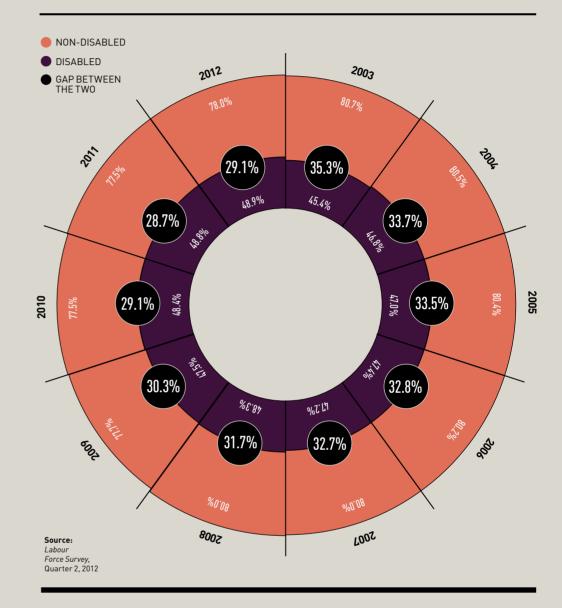
this positivity could be just a short-term spike. In response to a separate poll, conducted among those with disabilities by Scope in July 2012, 54 per cent of respondents said they experienced discrimination on a regular basis, with 84 per cent believing that people patronise them and 63.5 per cent revealing they have experienced people refusing to make adjustments or do things differently to support their disabilities. Worse still, 73 per cent of respondents said they had experienced the assumption that they don't work, with many having been questioned about their right to benefits support.

According to a Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) report, *Fraud and Error in the Benefit System: 2011-12 Estimates*, published in December 2012, the government's disability living allowance (DLA) expenditure totalled £12.6 billion of which 0.5 per cent (£60 million) was fraudulent. equally applicable to disabled people. In fact, the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) second quarter *Labour Force Survey*, published in October 2012, shows that 37 per cent of non-working people aged 16 to 64 in Britain would like to work, compared with 45 per cent of non-disabled people.

According to the survey, more than half of working-age disabled people (51 per cent) are not in work, with a 29 per cent gap remaining between the proportion of disabled and non-disabled people in work in 2012. This is only marginally lower than the 36 per cent gap reported ten years earlier in 2002. Further, the proportion of disabled people in full-time work (31 per cent) in 2012 is just under half the proportion of nondisabled people (57 per cent).

Barriers to work for people with disabilities can help to explain this predicament. Attitudes about employing disabled people remain a huge barrier, particularly in THE EMPLOYMENT GAP: JOBS ANI

#### EMPLOYMENT RATES FOR MALES AGED 16-64 AND FEMALES AGED 16-59 IN BRITAIN



terms of the assumed support required to help them perform their role. But Scope's Mr Trotter says: "Adjustments are quite small and they can make all the difference for disabled people, such as a



What we had was this amazing glimpse of what Britain could be like if disabled people were part of society – that was a breakthrough moment screen reader for someone with a visual impairment or an adjustment at a desk for someone in a wheelchair." Flexible working can also help.

But even with the necessary support in place, disabled people continue to face wage discrimination. The ONS survey shows that the mean hourly wage rate for disabled people in 2012 was £12.15, which compares with £13.25 for non-disabled people.

Alongside the difficulties in finding work, this perhaps explains the results of research by the DWP, the *Family Resources Survey* 2010-11, published in June 2012, which shows that 22 per cent of children in families, where are least one member is disabled, live in low-income and material deprivation, compared with 12 per cent of children in families where no one is disabled. Furthermore, 20 per cent of households, where at least one member is disabled, have an income below 60 per cent of median household income, compared with 15 per cent of households where no one is disabled.

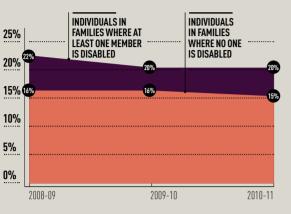
The consequences of disabled people being unemployed are huge, particularly for individuals who also find themselves unable to claim the PIP. At an individual level, disabled people potentially face poverty and homelessness as a result of a lack of income, due to their cost of living. Disabled people face additional costs in most areas of their everyday life, for items including equipment to help them live independent lives, as well as ongoing higher costs for food, clothing and recreation.

A Joseph Rowntree study, *Disabled People's Costs of Living*, published in October 2004, found that the weekly budget required for people with disabilities ranged from  $\pounds 632$  for a person with visual

## D INCOME

#### PEOPLE LIVING WITH LOW INCOME

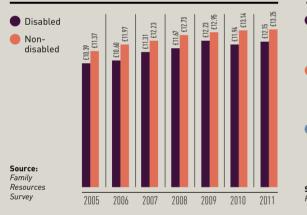
Individuals living in households with income below 60% of median equivalised household income before housing costs, including Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance



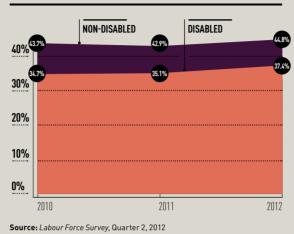
Source: Family Resources Survey

### NOMINAL MEAN Hourly wage rates

Disabled as defined by the Disability Descrimination Act

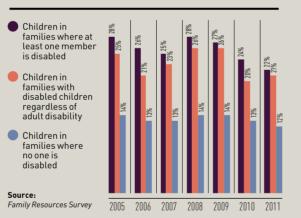


NON-WORKING PEOPLE AGED 16-64 IN BRITAIN WHO WOULD LIKE TO WORK



#### CHILDREN LIVING WITH LOW INCOME AND MATERIAL DEPRIVATION

Including Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance



impairment to £1,513 for a person with high to medium mobility and personal support needs. Such costs will almost certainly have risen in the meantime.

These can apply to people living with a range of disabilities, such as learning disabilities, which are often hidden, and conditions, such as visual impairment, which often develop with age. There are also disabilities that are, as yet, undetected. According to the Papworth Trust, only 17 per cent of disabled people are born with impairments. On a societal level, a lack of disabled people in the workplace can result in social exclusion, which can lead to individuals becoming further marginalised in society.

The economic consequences are equally grave. Firstly, there is the issue of the loss of the spending power of a sizeable proportion of UK society. The Papworth Trust claims the annual spending power of disabled adults in Britain covered by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, now absorbed into the Equality Act, is around £80 billion a year.

Secondly, disabled people constitute a hugely valuable and untapped resource for employers. Disability consultant and campaigner Mary-Anne Rankin says: "It is often said that disabled people are brilliant problem-solvers. Well, they have to be because they're problem-solving from the moment they wake up in the morning."

Initiatives such as the government's Access to Work scheme, which offers funding to people with a disability, health or mental health condition for practical support so that they can perform their job, can help some people find jobs and rewarding careers.

But Ms Rankin believes that a more constructive approach would be for government to support disabled people to set up in business. "The opportunity for disabled people to be helped with grants and mentoring services, so they can actually set up their own businesses, would be an incredibly positive way forward," she concludes.



The consequences of disabled people being unemployed are huge, particularly for individuals who also find themselves unable to claim the personal independence payment

## **IN THE INTERESTS OF THE ECONOMY** ... AND FAIRNESS

The UK's lack of "disability knowhow" is unfair and a brake on the economy, says Business Disability Forum's **Susan Scott-Parker** 

OPINION



Susan Scott-Parker is founder and chief executive of Business Disability Forum, which aims to enable companies to become disability smart by making it easier to recruit and retain disabled employees, and do business with disabled customers

■ Business funds Business Disability Forum to help "UK plc" learn how to adapt for human beings as they really are – noting that every customer, every applicant, every employee is disabled now or is potentially disabled in their lifetime.

If you live to the once grand old age of 70, you will probably experience at least ten years of disability. Disability is after all a natural and inevitable part of what it means to be human. Our tendency to label people, chuck them into little branded boxes and then leap to assumptions about those boxes is, sadly, also very human.

We need to talk more about the 3.5 million disabled people already in work and the many employers we see taking the need to improve their disability performance very seriously indeed, given the compelling business rationale for becoming disability-smart.

How can we justify the waste of human potential, combined with the profound sense of unfairness, reinforced by our disability-incompetent labour market?

Everyone wants to be treated fairly, disabled people are no different; and everyone wins when employers, in the private and public sector, enable everyone's contribution to business success.

Most people want to work and can work. Yet hundreds of thou-

sands are denied the chance to even compete for the limited number of jobs available. They are, in effect, not "allowed" to work because our lack of basic "disability know-how" reinforced by weird Victorian stereotypes, prevents them from getting what the Australians call "a fair go". Recently a blind graduate was not allowed to apply to a large corporation because the company refused to give her an application form she could read. Her problem is not her visual impairment. She knows she can do this particular job. Her "problem", and indeed our problem, is the disability inflexibility of this employer.

The only good thing about this story is it conveys so clearly that what is unfair to this graduate is also bad for our economy. For reasons outside her control, she will need longer than a non-disabled job seeker to find a job – the cost



How can we justify the waste of human potential, combined with the profound sense of unfairness, reinforced by our disabilityincompetent labour market?

implications for the state of this unfairness are surely obvious.

The usual approach to helping disadvantaged job seekers, especially those confronting disability-specific obstacles, is wasteful. We need to do more to help business raise its game and government needs to do more to help the "supply side" deliver for both the employer and the disabled job seeker if we are to get significantly better outcomes – in the interests of labour-market cost efficiency and, above all, fairness.

09

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## BOUNCING BACK IN SPORT AND THE WORKPLACE

Paralympian **Claire Harvey**, captain of the GB sitting volleyball team, says business could learn from her experience of disability sport



Claire Harvey was a successful international rugby union player and senior civil servant, but her Whitehall and able-bodied sporting careers were cut short when a bicycle accident left her right leg paralysed. She battled back – in sport and the world of work – to represent Britain at the London 2012 Paralympics and is now head of corporate responsibility at the Financial Conduct Authority

#### OPINION

■ Since the dust has settled after the Paralympic Games, I have had time to reflect, not only on just how lucky I was to be part of such a once-in-a-lifetime event, but also on how much I have discovered about myself and how the world works.

The last four years for me could be headlined as "starting from scratch". Before 2008, I thought I had done the hard work in my life and was reaping the benefits: a history of sport at high level to look back on, a solid reputation in a good career and a family unit. Then, one day in 2008 changed everything.

As always, time passes and life returns to some level of normality. I was grateful that my employer had found me a different role, but it reminded me every day what I couldn't do anymore. And I began to realise what a hole sport had left in my life.

Looking back, it was a time when my sense of identity, self-worth and confidence were at their lowest. But I was lucky to have people around me who kept pushing me to go forward, otherwise I can see how easily I could have slipped into isolation.

My first experience in the sporting world, post-2008, was the people who were around to help and encourage me. Websites, my local sports development officer and the RFU [Rugby Football Union] Injured Players Foundation were all straight back in contact and keen to help me find a sport.

But the opposite was true for employment; recruitment and disability websites or services were all hard to find and left me feeling less than positive about what I had to offer.

In disability sport, people were keen to see beyond the disability to what I could do, what I had done before and what my interests were. In fact, my disability, alongside my skills and attributes, made me valuable and I was headhunted by a number of sports.

This wasn't the case in employment; going into recruitment agencies and speaking to potential employees, the focus of the conversation was often on how brave I must be to get back to work and how important it was that I really thought about what I could do. It left me feeling that my previous experience of being a senior manager in a tough profession was worthless.

Eventually I found a great job, although perhaps a little predictably in the diversity field. And about this time I took up sitting volleyball, having never played volleyball before in my life, and was being fast-tracked into the GB training squad. So I found myself in two new teams at the same time. Again, the two were very different. The volleyball team was a space to be free; once we were on the volleyball floor our disabilities were irrelevant and I think for many of us that was a first. There was an open and frank culture from both the team and the support staff; in-depth questions about effects of disability,



history, practical points. I guess there had to be; the goal was to get the best out of us all and to find a way of operating as effectively as a team as we could. London 2012 was coming, ready or not, like a steamroller.

For me that was a breath of fresh air, especially compared to my initial experience in work where my disability was like the "elephant" in the room that no one mentioned. People tripped over words like "stand up for..." or "let's walk over there", not because they were cruel, but because they were trying desperately to do the right thing and make me feel included. I found it frustrating that, in the working environment, there was always an element of "do your best". I didn't want to get a job because of my disability, neither did I expect to do anything less than anyone else once I had one.

I found myself fighting for the ability to be judged the same as everyone else; I wanted a job because I was the best person to do it and I wanted to be held to the same expectations as others. Of course, there are adjustments and conversations to be had about how I do things and what support I need, but once those things were



Companies would do well to take the step forward even if they have doubts or fears, see the disabled population as the wealth of different talent and skills they are, and take a risk clear, I didn't want to be treated with kid gloves.

The fear element of getting it wrong is definitely a factor in the workplace that isn't present in sport. Organisations, rightly, want to make a good impression and be as accessible as they can be. I see many times that organisations are scared to open their doors to disabled staff until they are sure everything is in place, which of course never comes.

Paralympians are not super heroes; to succeed you need to bring everything you have to the table, to have good people around you who believe in you and to exploit the "X factor" difference you bring to the team.

I would argue that the workplace should be exactly the same; companies would do well to take the step forward even if they have doubts or fears, see the disabled population as the wealth of different talent and skills they are, and take a risk.

That's what someone did with me in 2009, with no history of volleyball, no talent and low selfbelief, but a heap of transferrable skills beneath the surface, such as resilience, experience and problem-solving. And here I am, head of corporate responsibility for the financial regulator and captain of the Paralympic sitting volleyball team.



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of disabled people use wheelchairs



of disabled people were born with impairments

Source: Papworth Trust



disabled people of working age

Source: Disabled Living Foundation



## people in the UK are deaf or hard of hearing

Source: Action on Hearing Loss



spent last year by Access to Work, the government support programme, to help employers recruit or retain disabled employees

Source: DWP

## THE HIDDEN MAJORITY MUST NOT BE IGNORED

Businesses can best accommodate disability in its varying forms by making room for difference and enabling people, like those featured here, to join the workforce, writes **Tim Smedley** 



#### NATURE OF DISABILITY

■ Society's default image of disability, emblazoned on parking spaces and toilet cubicle doors, is of a person in a wheelchair. However, fewer than 8 per cent of disabled people actually use wheelchairs. The majority of disabilities

are non-visual. Most disabilities begin during a person's working life, rather than from childhood, and many people prefer not to disclose their disability at all. All of which could add up to a scary situation for employers: the Equality Act requires employers to make "reasonable adjustments", yet if installing wheelchair ramps only covers a small proportion of disabilities, just what is an employer to do?

In truth, there's plenty that businesses can do and none of it is onerous. If a physically disabled colleague requires office alternations, there is generous funding and advice available from the government's Access to Work programme. But, for the most part, accommodating disabled colleagues simply concerns the culture of an organisation rather than making physical changes. Clodagh O'Reilly advises companies on disability, diversity and assessment for workplace consultancy Kenexa. "Accommodating disability is about accommodating difference," she says. "Any environment which is encouraging, with respect and role-modelling from the top, is going to be more healthy for people to be themselves, including being able to work with their disability as opposed to being sidelined."

Ms O'Reilly speaks from personal as well as professional experience. She has suffered from manic depression in the past and is dyslexic; both recognised disabilities under the Equality Act. When working at PricewaterhouseCoopers she founded the Disabled Employee Network as well as a national dyslexia forum for people in professional services.

Such employee networks, she says, provide "a signal of acceptance that we have people like that here and we celebrate that, and want people like that". "It's the same as having lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] networks or ethnic minority netAbove: Most disabilities begin during a person's working life and may not be disclosed works; any visible networking or events just gives people permission to disclose," she says. "It makes it less likely for people to avoid admitting they are dyslexic, for example, if there is a dyslexic network at work and training courses available to help them."

Ms O'Reilly argues that the disability agenda is ten to fifteen years behind that of the LGBT, but she is seeing steady improvements. Louise Taft, an employment specialist at the law firm Prolegal, also believes there is still a long way to go in terms of



For the most part, accommodating disabled colleagues simply concerns the culture of an organisation rather than making physical changes educating employers. "But there are some businesses which are doing a lot in terms of looking at the business need for flexibility," she says.

For disabled employees, the ability to talk openly about their condition remains a personal issue. Ms Taft, who also does probono work for an HIV charity, says she is often asked the question whether people should disclose their status to their employer. "My answer always is 'do you need adjustments?' Because if you do, then you need to disclose. If you don't, then it's your call. The same would apply for any other [nonvisible] condition," she says.

For both the employer and the individual, a lot could be gained by openness and embracing diversity. "Every time you demonstrate commitment to your staff, you are buying loyalty, not just from the person you have made the commitment on behalf of, but as a message to all your staff," says Ms O'Reilly. "There is a huge advantage from the implied psychological contract that says 'we'll support our people through thick and thin'."



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#### **REPETITIVE STRAIN**



#### **BRITTLE BONES**



Allan MacKillop project manager, and disability and inclusion network lead, **CGI** (formerly Logica)

James Bennet, technology sector

director, global

Ernst & Young

technology group,

About five years ago I was diagnosed with RSI [repetitive strain injury]. I was unable to type for about six months, which in a B2B [business-to-business] consulting organisation is challenging. The firm connected me with Access to Work and provided me with a very ergonomic set-up in terms of screens, mouse and chair. I dictate long emails which are typed out for me, which also helps with my dyslexia

I was born with the skeletal

condition known as osteogenesis

imperfect or, as it's often referred

to, "brittle bones". The imperfec-

(hardening) process during child-

tion restricts the ossification

hood, creating a much weaker

skeleton than normal. I'm both

the natural deterioration of the

led to partial deafness.

of abnormally small stature and

wheelchair-bound, and over time

bone within my inner ear has also

In August 2008 I had an aneurysm

I got involved with the Disability Working Group because, as a large and complex organisation, processes can have unintended consequences. For example, the first thing I was required to do when I had this condition was to fill out a form online, which of course I couldn't. It's about making sure we are thinking about different accessibility needs. Self-assessment really speeds the process up and is much more effective.

I think most disabled people have probably had one or two negative experiences with regard to a lack of understanding at work. This can often be caused by a lack of formal processes to underpin diversity support. The single thing that has had the most negative impact on my career is the movement from in-house IT provision to a more outsourced service delivery model. As companies strive to

problematic to support the needs

intranet site to share stories and control costs this has created a natural reduction of infrastructure services, making it more

I put on my email footer "Apolo-

dyslexic". I prefer people to know

I am dyslexic, rather than see an

email with typos and think you

are stupid or sloppy. I am also

very involved with our mental

health group, which is perhaps

the last taboo of disability. I have

personally suffered from some

severe bouts of depression,

so we have put up an internal

gies for errors/typos as I am

of an impaired employee. My own adjustments include a car-parking space, lower desk height, desk-mounted printer, audio-adapted telephone, smaller swivel chair and a personal fire evacuation plan. The adjustments were put in place a number of years ago in conjunction with my

advice on how to access support, but also to show that senior, high-performing people within our business have had mental health problems too.

The overriding goal is that we are a disability-confident organisation and that we want people with a whole range of disabilities to feel that they can join our organisation, and that we can support whatever needs they have.

own line manager, health and safety, and Access to Work.

The positive attitude of my employer really helps. If the level of engagement between employer and employee is strong, everything else should fall into place. Many problems can be worked through without much distress. Having the correct working culture in place should minimise the risk of misunderstandings and confrontation.

#### STROKE



which resulted in a stroke. I lost a lot of strength and use in my left Simon Birri, senior side and also have some cognitive problems, particularly around producer/director. IMG Media memory and time-keeping.

> At the time I was working as a sports TV producer and director. I travelled a lot around the world. directing and producing outside broadcasts. When my aneurysm happened I couldn't imagine going back.

But my illness protection provider Unum liaised with my employer to come up with schedules that would ease me back into the workplace and looked at what needs I might have, such as a special chair or keyboard. They also monitored my progress to ensure it wasn't too much, too soon, I changed job roles and am now officebased, helping out with ideas and research into other productions, twice a week for six hours on a Tuesday and a Thursday. IMG Media has an accessibility committee at work that meets regularly. It makes a huge difference, because otherwise people might not notice a need that may be there. For example, it's very easy for me to get lost, so just having maps around on every floor saying where different places and rooms are is vital for me and

people like me, and it's something that no one else would really have thought about. People are overly keen not to offend. My company actually produced Channel 4's coverage of the Paralympics and its latenight programme The Last Leg - a comedy programme making light of Paralympic issues which helped a lot.

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## JOBS FIT FOR Heroes back on civvy street

Disabled ex-servicemen and women battle for civilian jobs, but there are people and agencies who are willing to help, as **Peter Crush** reports

#### ARMED FORCES

■ In 2011 Ben Nash's life turned upside down. Barely three years into his career as a private in the Adjutant General's Corps, the then 20 year old got the news many soldiers dread most – he was going to be medically discharged.

That day Ben joined the pool of approximately 2,000 Armed Forces personnel who each year suffer the same fate: having a disability that prevents them from active duty. Disabilities range from illnesses to battlefield injuries, blast and gunshot wounds, and missing limbs.

"Dealing with my medical condition [he's reluctant to go into details] was tough enough," he says. "But on top of this was the prospect of having to find normal work. I was sending out hundreds of applications, running down all my savings and just not hearing back. It was a real nightmare."

Today though, Ben says he's one of the "fortunate ones". Last year he qualified as a chef, having been given an apprenticeship after helping out in the kitchen at the Help For Heroes-funded Tedworth House Recovery Centre in Wiltshire.

But not all have the same luck or speed finding employment. "A lot are struggling to find work," says Graham Brown, managing director of Forces Recruitment Service (FRS), founded specifically to link ex-military personnel to the civilian job market. "While we help about 200 to 300 people a year, as soon as disabilities come to the fore, we're seeing doors close for people. Clients find it difficult and disheartening."

Organisations like FRS are part of a wide range of private companies and public bodies aiming to help ex-servicemen and women into work. They include the likes of the Regular Forces Employment Association, and agencies including ForceSelect, which last month partnered with Capita, CivvyJobs, Demob Job and 4exMilitary. None specifically focus on disabled ex-Forces personnel, but this is no bad thing, according to Nicolas Harrison, founder of consultancy Soldier On! "The problem with disabled ex-Forces employment is a problem of disabled employment across the board," he says. "It's not just a Forces issue. From my perspective, it's simply about looking at someone's skills and potential, not their situation. We must view them as normal and non-homogenous people."

It's why he's also wary of labelling any improvements in disabled ex-Services job prospects as being due to a "Paralympic effect". "Paralympians aren't the same as disabled ex-soldiers looking for a job," he says. "While some ex-Forces disabled may show the sort of mental strength exhibited at the Paralympics, there are plenty who do not. The point is they're all different."

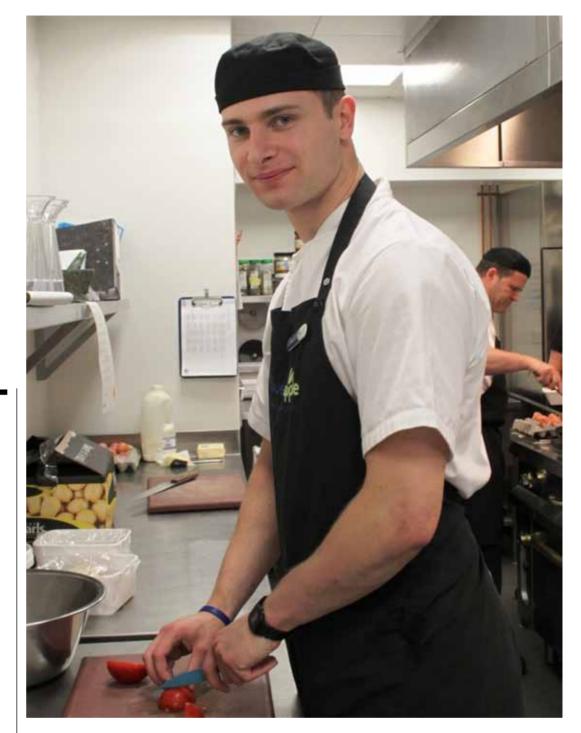
Joining the Army straight from school, Ben admits he felt he didn't have "any qualifications employers need" and those who help former Services personal often note that the first problem is most ex-Forces staff frequently under-sell the skills that being in the Armed Forces gave them.

This compares very differently with how many enlightened employers see ex-Forces staff as



Enlightened employers see ex-Forces staff as displaying strategic thinking, leadership, calmness under pressure and getting the job done without watching the clock

sa- Ben Nash was forced to leave the Army, but retrained as a chef



displaying strategic thinking, leadership, calmness under pressure and getting the job done without watching the clock.

But often, argues Matt Fellows, head of Armed Forces' and veterans' services at Remploy, which has helped 150 disabled veterans into work in the last year, employers have a media-driven image that disabled Forces personnel are at the severest end of the disability spectrum, which deters them from reaching out.

"Actually," he says, "the really severely disadvantaged have numbered only about 1,000 in the last 13 to 14 years; most of these tend to go down a fundraising path. Of the 2,000 discharged annually, most won't suffer anything requiring drastic alteration to the workplace."

Employers who are trying, though, include BT, which recently announced 250 engineer opportunities, McDonald's and pub chain JD Wetherspoon. At the latter is Steve Saxton, manager at the Robert Bruce pub, in Dumfries. His 22-year career in the Queen's Lancashire Regiment and Duke of Lancaster's Regiment ended soon after he suffered a stroke, leaving him with memory loss and coordination problems. "My initial thought was who would want me? But the hospitality industry has restored my confidence and developed my skills," he says.

In 2010, Barclays launched its Armed Forces transition, employment and resettlement (AFTER) programme that helps wounded and physically disabled personnel find work, tackling confidence issues by running CVwriting and job-finder workshops at all of the UK's Army recovery centres each month. In addition, it then brings people in for work experience – 50 have so far done this – and, in some cases, it does lead to jobs.

"We believe in focusing on this group because we believe they need help," says Stuart Tootal, Barclays chief security officer. "Although we don't give them any special advantages, what we do say is that, if we're right for them and they're right for the business, we'll take them on." The bank already employs many ex-soldiers – its Armed Forces network has more than 300 UK members – which means the skills ex-Services people bring are already well understood internally.

Despite stories to the contrary, some have suggested that disabled Armed Forces personnel actually have better chances at work than "regular" disabled people because of the defence skills they possess. "The fact our heroes are so much more in the public domain is definitely a draw," accepts Gerry Hill, chief executive of Hire a Hero, which works with employers to help them make adjustments in the workplace, such as how to be more accessible and fit jobs around individuals' abilities.

Perhaps ex-Forces staff and employers both need to believe in each other more. But, says Mr Harrison, perhaps if there were more employers with an open attitude, then it might make more ex-Services people feel their skills are worthwhile. "In 2013, it's still a case of disabled ex-Forces staff getting what's on offer, rather than what they really want," he says. "Once we see this change, disabled people will be able to pursue meaningful careers."

#### CASESTUDY

#### TRANSITION FROM ARMY TO OFFICE



For Ed Addlington, 29, a captain in the Riffles and veteran of Irag "I was invited on a work and Kosovo, disaster struck

when, ten days from ending a tour in Afghanistan in 2009, 35 kilos of explosives detonated under his vehicle. Despite terrible injuries to both legs and an arm, he was able to keep all his limbs.

Ed spent some time at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Unit at Headley Court in Surrey, where he was introduced to a partner from Deloitte – a meeting which was to help put his shattered life back together.

Deloitte was running 'insights' days, helping soldiers make the transition from army to office, in partnership with the Officers' Association, the Army Recovery Capability and the Career Transition Partnership

placement in the risk group in April last year," Ed says. "After formally being discharged in December 2012, I was given a full-time job in its consulting division at the start of this year." Deloitte began running

insights sessions in 2012 and in January this year formally launched its military transition and talent programme, to help ex-Forces personnel "civilianise" their CVs

Stevan Rolls, Deloitte's UK head of HR, says: "These guys have a great set of skills, but they don't often know how to verbalise them into the language of business. We also find that coming into the workplace is a positive part of a person's recovery.

Ed. who was also diagnosed with a brain condition, had to teach himself how to stay focused while reading, gradually increasing his concentration span. "I'm now able to concentrate for an hour at a time," he says. "Beyond that I don't need any adaptions. I walk using a stick and I have to allow more time for journeys, but that's about it.

"When you come from a position where you should have been killed, you tend to rethink life," he adds. "But I definitely knew I wanted to work.

## WHERE TO GET HELP AND ADVICE

ACCESS TO WORK is a government scheme that helps people with disabilities who wish to take up employment or who are in work and experience difficulties related to their disability. It can also help employers who wish to recruit or retain people with disabilities in employment.

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