barn wood

State of Gloucestershire

Opportunities and housing for disabled people and people with mental health challenges

Employment

Introduction

In 2021, Barnwood's Insights team carried out an Opportunities and Housing Survey. We asked disabled people and people with mental health challenges living in Gloucestershire to tell us about their housing and their experiences of accessing different types of opportunity.

Over 260 people from across the county responded to the survey. Those who took part in the survey told us they had a range of different impairment types. Looking at population data for Gloucestershire suggests that the proportions of respondents with different impairments broadly mirrors the overall county make-up. However, it should be acknowledged that these research findings may not reflect the experiences of all disabled people and people with mental health challenges in the county.

As well as carrying out the survey, we've also looked at the findings of research conducted by a range of other organisations, to contextualise the survey responses.

In this booklet, we share key findings from our survey and our review of research undertaken by others that are related to employment.

This booklet is one in a series exploring the findings of this research by theme (other booklets look at education/training, housing, volunteering, and leisure activities).

For more information about the methodology of the research please contact **Roz Warden**, Head of Insights, on **01242 539935** or **roz.warden@barnwoodtrust.org**.

What have we learned?

Disabled people and people with mental health challenges face numerous barriers to accessing work opportunities in Gloucestershire.

1 in 4
people can do the paid work they want to do

2 in 3
people said that their **health** made work difficult

1 in 2
people said that **flexible working practices** would make it easier for them to work

Many people said that their health was currently a barrier to doing the type of work they'd like to do. A lack of confidence and difficulties travelling were also mentioned frequently.
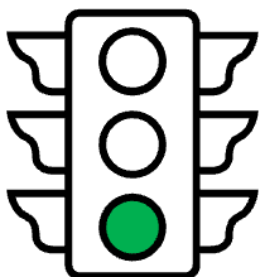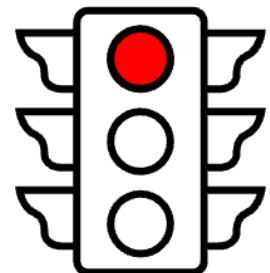
A lot of people, however, said that more flexible working practices would help them access work opportunities. This indicates that if conditions are changed these barriers can begin to be addressed.

From insights to action...

Together, the research findings from the survey and other national data highlight the importance of proactive **engagement** with disabled people to generate solutions, **accessible information** provision, and greater **choice**.

For employment, some suggestions for how you might do this are included below. More detailed recommendations can be found at the end of this booklet.

Engage | Regularly survey staff and encourage feedback to understand what is working and what could be improved

Inform | Provide timely information about schemes such as Access to Work, flexible working, and workplace adjustments – especially at the recruitment stage

Choice | Offering flexible working can increase the opportunities available to disabled people and employers' choice of candidates

For a conversation about funding or initiatives to support your organisation to take forward actions from this research, please contact Jessie Hoskin via **jessie.hoskin@barnwoodtrust.org** or **01242 539935**.

Our survey findings:

Access to paid work opportunities

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- If being able to do paid work matters to them
- If they can do the type of paid work they would like to do

- **50%** told us they cannot do the type of paid work they would like to do

- **52%** told us that being able to do paid work matters to them, but only **27%** reported that they can do the type of paid work they would like to do

There were variations in the responses given by people with different impairment types. When we compared the responses from people who told us that they had a particular impairment type to those from people who did not, we found that respondents who had a mental health challenge, hearing impairment, or neurological condition were more likely to report that they cannot do the type of paid work they would like to do.

Only
1 in 4
people can do the
paid work
they want to do

Other findings:
Access to paid work opportunities

Research highlights inequality in access to paid work opportunities.

The difference between the percentage of disabled people and non-disabled people in employment is referred to as the disability employment gap.

The disability employment gap in Gloucestershire is higher than the national average for England, which is **25** percentage points[1].

For January to December 2021, the disability employment gap in Gloucestershire was estimated to be **27.4** percentage points: it was estimated that **57.3%** of disabled people were in employment compared to **84.7%** of non-disabled people[2].

- Action for Hearing Loss conducted a survey of over 400 people with hearing loss and found that[3]:

  - **74%** of respondents believed that their employment opportunities were more limited due to their hearing loss

  - **Two-fifths** of the respondents who had retired early reported that this was related to their hearing loss

- **1 in 4** visually impaired people are in employment[4]. The employment rate for visually impaired people has not significantly changed in a generation: the employment rate is the same as it was in 1991[5]

Gloucestershire: Economically active adults (aged 16-64) in paid work

Disabled people (57%)

Non-disabled people (85%)

Other findings:
Access to paid work opportunities

- In England, **5.1%** of adults with a learning disability who are known to their local authority are in paid work[6]

- Leonard Cheshire commissioned a survey of over 1,600 disabled adults in 2018 and found that[7]:

  - **17%** of disabled adults who had applied for a job in the last five years reported that an employer had withdrawn their job offer because of their disability

  - **30%** of disabled adults who had applied for a job in the last five years felt like an employer(s) had not taken them seriously as a candidate because of their disability

National research indicates that people with different disability types have different experiences of accessing employment opportunities:

- The number of people with non-physical disabilities, such as mental health challenges and learning disabilities, using Access to Work (a government scheme that helps disabled people to start or stay in work) is disproportionately low in comparison to the number of people with physical disabilities[8]

- People who are visually impaired[9] and people with learning disabilities are amongst the least likely groups to be able to access employment[10]

Our survey findings:

Barriers to paid work opportunities

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- What, if anything, made it hard for them to do the paid work they would like to do

We listed barriers that people might experience and asked them if they faced any of these or any other barriers.

The three most frequently reported barriers were:

- My health (e.g. my disability means I need a lot of rest) (**59%**)
- I don't feel confident enough (**36%**)
- It's difficult for me to travel to places (**33%**)

Other common barriers reported included 'it would affect my benefits' (**25%**) and 'I need other people to help me' (**20%**).

Although health was identified as a barrier to taking part in paid work, respondents also reported a range of ways in which opportunities could be more accessible and inclusive.

This reflects the social model of disability which describes how people are not disabled by their impairment or health condition but by barriers in society (for example, inaccessible buildings).

Barriers to work

Health 59%

Lack of confidence 36%

Travel 33%

Our survey findings:
The importance of flexibility

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- What, if anything, would most help them to take part in paid work

We provided a list of possible enablers and asked them to select the three that they would find most helpful.

The option to work flexibly was the enabler selected by the greatest number of respondents (**51%**).

Flexibility was identified as a key enabler to accessing paid work opportunities by respondents with all impairment types.

Across all impairment types, between **33%** (for respondents reporting a learning disability) and **79%** (for respondents reporting a hearing impairment) of respondents stated that the option to work flexibly was one of the things that would most help them to take part in paid work.

1 in 2

people said that
flexible working practices
would make it easier for
them to work

What else would help?

After the option to work flexibly, the enablers that were selected by the greatest number of respondents to our survey were:

- Inclusive employment practices (e.g. reasonable adjustments being made) (**31%**)

- Being able to easily find information about what work is available (**28%**)

- Lots of choices of work I could do (**23%**)

9

Other findings:
The importance of flexibility

Research conducted by others highlights the importance of flexible working to enabling disabled people to access employment. Flexible working includes[11]:

- Part-time working
- Jobs that offer homeworking
- Flexible start and finish times
- Flexible shift patterns
- Remote working
- Term-time working
- The option to job share
- 'Agile working', which typically relates to full-time work where employers are open to flexible working patterns by arrangement with the employee

Only **1 in 4** jobs are advertised with flexible working[12].

Research commissioned by Leonard Cheshire looked at the extent to which employers support flexible working. The findings of this survey of over 1,600 disabled adults were mixed[13]:

- **80%** of the respondents who had requested flexible working hours said that their employer had made this adjustment

- Almost **1 in 4** of the respondents who asked to take breaks during the working day said this adjustment had not been made by their employer

- Just under **1 in 5** of the respondents who requested to work from home said their employer did not make this adjustment

Only
1 in 4
jobs are advertised with
flexible working

Recommendations

The recommendations which follow offer an approach that organisations and providers can take to establish what changes may be most impactful for the disabled people and people with mental health challenges they seek to work with. This approach recognises that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring greater choice and accessibility for disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

If you would like to discuss any of the recommendations related to this research, please contact: Jessie Hoskin on **01242 539935** or **jessie.hoskin@barnwoodtrust.org**.

1 Proactively and directly engage with disabled people and people with mental health challenges to understand how to improve access to meaningful employment opportunities and workplace support. Co-production and co-design can help ensure that information produced about employment is accessible

Engaging with groups of individuals who experience barriers to accessing employment opportunities and getting the support they need is vital to understanding how to address these issues. Working directly with people through co-production and co-design has the potential to generate solutions which encompass individuals' expertise about what would help.

For example:

Employers may look to engage with current staff to gain a better understanding of how inclusive and accessible their workplace currently is. This may include use of staff surveys, appointing disability champions, or creating a diversity and inclusion network.

Direct engagement can also help ensure information produced relating to the workplace and work opportunities is accessible. Incorporating lived experience and new perspectives around what makes communication accessible can help ensure that information reaches everyone.

Undertaking regular engagement may be built into regular review processes and organisational policies to become standard practice. In carrying out this engagement, it is also important to consider creating an environment where people feel safe to share both the challenges they face and the support or conditions that could best meet their needs.

For example:

Engagement within a workplace may explore how well known initiatives such as Access to Work are, and whether managers and staff are aware of different types of workplace adjustments. Engaging in co-production and co-design activities can help ensure that useful information is readily available about these initiatives.

2 **Provide clear and accessible information about employment opportunities and workplace support in a range of formats and via multiple channels, along with the option for in person contact. Accessible information provision should consider all the useful information that might be provided to enable real choice**

Clear and accessible information is essential in ensuring people can access meaningful employment opportunities and support.
This means providing timely information in a range of formats from Easy Read to audio, large print, and braille across a variety of media, print and digital.

For example:

Employers may want to explore including information about workplace adjustments and Access to Work at the earliest stages of the recruitment process, including in job adverts, application documents, and letters providing details of any interview processes.

Clear information provision isn't simply about making written communications accessible. Having staff members available to answer questions and plan with someone around individual preferences and access requirements can make a huge difference to a person's experiences and be invaluable.

For example:

Accessible information isn't just about what's included in formal documents or on websites. The option for a conversation to discuss any access requirements, prior to making an application or attending an interview, can help ensure everyone has the same chances of employment. Engaging with individuals in this way can help create the conditions that make an opportunity accessible for them.

3

Take proactive steps to ensure real choice is available and accessible to disabled people and people with mental health challenges about employment opportunities. Choice is more than just a greater range of options, it's about making sure that what's currently on offer is accessible to everyone

Proactive steps to increase choice and variety through better engagement might include looking at current practices and services and thinking about and discussing all the factors where choice could currently be hindered.

For example:

Employers may want to keep in mind that those who have experienced barriers to education and training may face additional barriers to employment as a result.

When recruiting, employers may consider flexibility in what is essential in relation to minimum education or qualification requirements. This may include identifying where there are possibilities for new employees to complete training whilst in post.
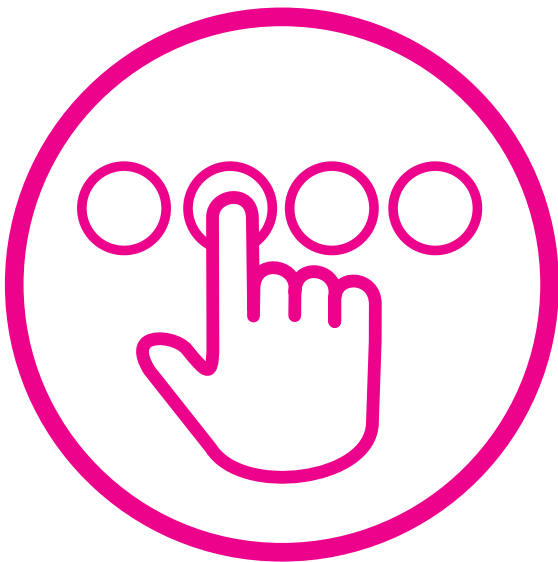
Current, available options might themselves be limiting choice. The conditions and context around a role, such as the workplace environment, facilities within the office premises, and accessibility of transport and parking are just as important as the variety of roles on offer.

For example:

Employers may want to review their flexible working offer and consider how promoting flexible working can help create more choice in the job vacancies that are accessible to disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

Flexible working arrangements may include home working, flexible hours, and breaks during the day. Home working and flexible hours can address certain barriers such as transport difficulties, but this should be an individual option, not an overarching solution.

Sources

[1] Office for National Statistics (2022) Annual Population Survey Data – Last Updated December 2021, Data available at: **https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?menuopt=200&subcomp=**

[2] Office for National Statistics (2022) see Source 1

[3] Action on Hearing Loss (2020) Hidden Disadvantage: Why people with hearing loss are still losing out at work

[4] Slade, J., Edwards, E. and Crawley, T. (2020) Employment for Blind and Partially Sighted People in 2019

[5] Slade, J., Edwards, E. and Crawley, T. (2020) see Source 4

[6] NHS Digital (2021) Measures from Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, England 2020-21 Data available at: **https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-social-care-outcomes-framework-ascof/england-2020-21**

[7] Leonard Cheshire (2019) Reimagining the Workplace

[8] Adams, L., Tindle, A., Downing, C., Morrice, N. and Domingos, M. (2018) Access to Work: Qualitative Research with Applicants, Employers and Delivery Staff

[9] Slade, J., Edwards, E. and Crawley, T. (2020) see Source 4

[10] NHS Digital (2021) see Source 6

[11] Timewise (2021) The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2021

[12] Timewise (2021) see Source 11

[13] Leonard Cheshire (2019) see Source 7