

## New Deal for Disabled People: Survey of Employers

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This report presents the main findings from a representative national survey of nearly 1,500 employers who had recruited individuals registered under the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) during the period July 2002 to July 2003. It aimed to provide a quantitative assessment of the nature and scale of employer involvement with the programme, as a complement to two waves of qualitative research with employers (undertaken in 2002 and 2003).

### Key findings

- Establishments recruiting NDDP customers are most likely to be medium-sized or large establishments (with 50 or more employees) than to be representative of all employing establishments nationally.
- Establishments recruiting NDDP customers are skewed towards the public administration and other service sectors, and incorporate a high proportion of public sector and voluntary sector establishments.
- Job Brokers do not appear to be significantly broadening the recruitment terrain for NDDP customers. They are not accessing (to any significant extent) employers who do not traditionally recruit disabled people.
- Although the entire sample had recruited at least one client registered under NDDP, only 74 per cent were aware of having any disabled employees (using the Disability Discrimination Act definition of disability).
- Whilst all establishments had recruited at least one NDDP client, less than half (49 per cent) reported being aware of NDDP prior to participating in the survey.
- Twenty-five per cent of establishments reported having had one or more contact(s) with an NDDP Job Broker in the year prior to the survey. Some 31 per cent of these contacts were reported as having led to the recruitment of one or more staff.
- Two-thirds of known NDDP recruits were still in employment at the time of the survey.
- Most employers were, when aware of recruitment via a named Job Broker, very or fairly satisfied with that recruitment.
- In cases where there had been some known contact with a Job Broker but no recruitment, the commonest reason given was that the employer had no vacancies. Only small minorities of this group said the lack of recruitment reflected a lack of confidence in the Job Broker, or the submission of unsuitable candidates by the Job Broker.
- In two-thirds of cases of successful (known) recruitment via a Job Broker, employers reported some after-care or post-recruitment follow-up activity on the part of the Job Broker. Much of this activity focused on: checking on progress; providing ongoing support to employer and employee; discussing further potential recruits; and to help and improve any poor performance on the part of the employee.
- Around one in five (18 per cent) of establishments had one or more contacts with some other (non-Job Broker) organisation, in connection with the recruitment of people with a disability or health condition, in the year prior to the survey.
- Seventy-five per cent of establishments that were not aware of NDDP said they would find it useful to have support and advice from an

organisation specialising in working with disabled people on topics such as their obligations under the DDA, and making adjustments for disabled employees.

### *Characteristics of participating establishments*

Establishments recruiting NDDP customers are not a representative cross-section of employing establishments nationally. They are much more likely to be medium-sized or large establishments (with 50 or more employees) than is the case among employing establishments as a whole. In addition, it seems that establishments recruiting NDDP customers are heavily skewed towards the public administration and other services sectors (with a high proportion of public sector and voluntary sector establishments), while the primary and manufacturing sectors are heavily under-represented in the sample as, to some extent, is the private sector more generally. This finding reinforces those from the earlier qualitative work which suggested that Job Brokers were not significantly broadening the recruitment terrain for NDDP customers (in the sense of accessing in large numbers employers who had not traditionally recruited disabled people).

Other key characteristics of establishments which recruit NDDP participants are as follows:

- Thirty-nine per cent are single site establishments (the remainder being part of larger multi-site organisations).
- Just under half (46 per cent) had experienced recruitment difficulties in the year prior to the survey.
- Sixty-one per cent (more among the larger establishments and those in the public sector) had an in-house personnel or human resources function at the establishment.
- Sixty-nine per cent had a written equal opportunities policy specifically covering the employment of disabled people.

### *Recruitment and employment of disabled people*

Just over one-third of establishments (36 per cent) reported a specific approach to actively encourage the employment of disabled people (a much larger proportion than typically found in employer surveys), and such approaches were more common in the sample among public/

voluntary sector employers, larger establishments or those that are part of larger organisations, and those with written equal opportunities policies covering disabled people's employment. Such an approach did not, however, appear to be a response to labour market pressures (indeed, establishments with recruitment difficulties were less likely to have a proactive approach to encouraging the recruitment of disabled people). Encouragement of the recruitment of disabled people, when it occurred, took place through a variety of means, the most common being: a specific welcome for disabled applicants in job advertisements; the use of the 'two-ticks' disability symbol in job advertisements; and specific requests to the Jobcentre or careers office.

Only three per cent of establishments said that they would not generally recruit disabled people, and such reservations generally reflected a view that disabled people would not be able to do some aspect of the job in question, or health and safety concerns.

Although the entire sample had recruited at least one client registered under NDDP, only 66 per cent were aware of having any disabled employees. When a prompted question was asked using a broad definition of disability related to that in the Disability Discrimination Act, however, this proportion rose to 74 per cent. These proportions are considerably higher than those reported in previous employer surveys of the general employer population, and it should also be stressed that a) not all of the eligible population for NDDP would be 'disabled' on these definitions; and b) there is no reason why the employer should necessarily be aware of an NDDP client's disability status, or indeed that he/she is an NDDP client (the nature of the programme is such that there is no expectation that an employer recruiting an NDDP client would know their status as a client of the programme).

### *Benefits of employing and retaining disabled people*

Among those establishments that were aware of having employed disabled people, 42 per cent felt that there were advantages to doing so compared with only 24 per cent of those that were not aware of having employed disabled people. The perception of benefits was higher: among the public and voluntary sector (compared

with the private sector); among those experiencing recruitment difficulties; and among those with a written equal opportunities policy covering disabled people. The commonest benefits anticipated related to: improved image of the organisation to customers; improved staff relations and morale; and improved staff retention rates.

Larger proportions of employers saw benefits in retaining existing disabled employees who became disabled – 57 per cent of establishments currently aware of having disabled employees saw such advantages, as did 45 per cent of establishments that were not aware of having employed any disabled people.

A third of employers (irrespective of whether they were already aware of having disabled employees) also saw disadvantages to the employment of disabled people. Perceptions of disadvantages were dominated by considerations of absence/sickness rates among disabled employees; and concerns regarding lower productivity levels.

### *Support and adjustments in the workplace*

Three-fifths of establishments (59 per cent) had made adjustments (e.g. to the workplace or to working patterns or arrangements) in order to retain an employee who became disabled; while 44 per cent had made similar adjustments to facilitate the recruitment of a disabled person.

Where adjustments have been made for disabled recruits/employees, the commonest form of adjustment (reported by 52 per cent of those making such adjustments) related to the provision of flexible working patterns or working hours. This was followed by the provision of equipment or adapted equipment for a disabled person (33 per cent of those making adjustments).

Most of those making adjustments (72 per cent) had found them easy to make, and for most types of adjustments, the majority of establishments reported that there had been no direct financial costs to doing so.

### *Experience of NDDP*

Although all establishments had recruited at least one NDDP client, just under half (49 per cent) reported being aware of NDDP prior to

participating in the survey. This proportion was 61 per cent in the public and voluntary sectors, compared with only 44 per cent in the private sector. Larger establishments were also much more likely to be aware of the programme, as were those who had previously participated in other government employment or training programmes.

Twenty-five per cent of establishments reported having had one or more contacts with an NDDP Job Broker in the year prior to the survey. Taking all separate reported contacts between NDDP Job Brokers and establishments (as some establishments had contacts with several Job Brokers), some 31 per cent of these contacts were reported as having led to the recruitment of one or more staff.

The commonest jobs into which NDDP clients had been (knowingly) recruited were routine, unskilled occupations, followed by administrative and secretarial occupations, and sales and customer service occupations (this occupational pattern is broadly consistent with that recorded in the separate survey of NDDP registrants, which was conducted as part of the wider evaluation).

Two-thirds (67 per cent) of known NDDP recruits were still in employment at the time of the survey. Most employers were, when aware of recruitment via a named Job Broker, very or fairly satisfied with that recruitment (81 per cent).

In cases where there had been known contact with a Job Broker, but no recruitment, the commonest reason given (36 per cent of these cases) was that the employer had no vacancies; only small minorities of this group (less than ten per cent) said that the lack of recruitment reflected a lack of confidence in the Job Broker, or the submission of unsuitable candidates by the Job Broker.

In two-thirds of cases (66 per cent) of successful (known) recruitment via a Job Broker, employers reported some after-care or post-recruitment follow-up activity on the part of the Job Broker, although such activity represents only a small part of the employer sample. Such activity focused on issues such as: checking on the progress of the recruit; providing ongoing support to employer and employee; discussing further potential recruits; and to help and improve any poor performance on the part of the employee.

Overall, it seems that although only a minority of establishments were aware of contact with, and recruitment via, a Job Broker, where this happened, most employers found the experience to be a positive one, have felt satisfied with the recruits and retained them in employment, and where an ongoing relationship is established with the Broker, it is for the most part a beneficial one.

Around one in five (18 per cent) of establishments had one or more contacts with some other (non Job Broker) organisation in connection with the recruitment of people with a disability or health condition in the year prior to the survey. Some 45 per cent of these contacts had led to a recruitment (a higher proportion than was found for Job Broker recruitments), into a similar range of jobs (again dominated by routine, unskilled occupations). As with recruits via Job Brokers, around two-thirds of such recruits remained in their jobs at the time of the survey. A somewhat higher proportion (78 per cent) of such recruitments were associated with ongoing post-recruitment contact with the intermediary organisations, than was the case with Job Brokers. As with Job Brokers, however, it seemed that the majority of these 'after-care' contacts led to successful ongoing relationships between the intermediary organisations and the employer.

### *Information, advice and support*

Just over one-third (37 per cent) of establishments in the survey had sought and/or received external support or advice about employing disabled people; this proportion was higher among public sector and larger establishments. The main types of advice sought and/or received related to: making adjustments in order to recruit a disabled person; the establishment's obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act; and providing support or making adjustments to retain a disabled member of staff.

The commonest source of support or advice was from organisations that were NDDP Job Brokers (although this advice/support may not have been provided in their role as Job Brokers), followed by Jobcentre Plus.

The majority of those making use of such advice and support found it very useful (65 per cent) or quite useful (29 per cent).

Establishments (half of the sample) that were not aware of NDDP were asked about their support needs. Three-quarters of this group (75 per cent) said they would find it useful to have support and advice from an organisation specialising in working with disabled people (on topics such as their obligations under the DDA, and making adjustments for disabled employees). Further questioning suggested that this group were not overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality or range of advice and support available to them with regard to the recruitment and employment of disabled people.

Overall, it appeared that although the awareness of NDDP and Job Brokers among the sample was much lower than might be expected (given that all had recruited at least one NDDP client), the group was generally favourably disposed towards the employment of disabled people, and a considerable proportion would welcome contact, support and advice from organisations such as Job Brokers (indeed, a minority were already receiving such help from non-Job Broker organisations). This suggests some potential unmet demand for this type of service among this group of employers.

The full report of these research findings is published for the Department for Work and Pensions by Corporate Document Services (ISBN 1 84123 921 6. Research Report 301. November 2005).

It is available from Paul Noakes at the address below.

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