

## **Increasing the employment of disabled people in the public sector: SIAA response**

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) is Scotland's national membership body for advocacy organisations. The SIAA promotes, supports and defends independent advocacy in Scotland. It aims to ensure that independent advocacy is available to any person who needs it in Scotland.

### **1. In your view, or the view of your organisation, how could public sector organisation bodies better support self-reporting (self-declaration) of disabilities for members of their workforce, to improve response rates and the quality of data collected?**

We believe that there is a need for employers to clarify the purpose of their data collection and that currently the reasons for employees and applicant's providing data around disabilities are too vague. We believe that if this was clearer then applicants and employees may feel more comfortable about providing data and could fear less about being stigmatised.

We also think it is important for employers to use positive messaging and positive action statements.

Another measure which could lead to improved response rates would be for there to be a uniformed approach taken across the public sector. It would be particularly helpful if the same wording was used as is used in relevant equality legislation. This would help to ensure questions asked were specific and not subjective.

We would also like some further consideration made with regards to the issue of intersectionality and the fact that disabled people also have multiple other identities which could make them feel marginalised and discriminated against. With regards to monitoring, we believe there is a wider problem within statutory bodies not effectively collecting data about protected characteristics not just disability. We support the idea of the wider issue being addressed through staff training which ensures staff understand why they are undertaking monitoring and the importance of this, particularly in the context of employment.

It would also be helpful if the number of opportunities employees had in which to declare disabilities was increased. People may not feel comfortable telling their employer details at the recruitment stage as they could feel it could affect their chances of being successful in the recruitment process. This could also cover people who become disabled while they are employed. If there were opportunities throughout peoples employment for them to declare disabilities, public sector organisations could see response rates increase.

### **2. What should be the time scale for implementing these measures?**

We believe that the SG needs to set timescales for public sector bodies to implement the measures. We also believe public sector bodies should produce annual reports documenting the progress they have made in implementing the measuring. There also needs to be a focus on creating a cultural change which could be complemented with resources such as a toolkit (mentioned in more detail below) and the sharing of good practice from organisations with higher levels of disabled employees.

### **3. What support, if any, would public sector bodies need to implement measures, such as improving data collection?**

We believe it would be useful if the Scottish Government introduced a toolkit which public sector bodies could use which could include the sharing of best practice. As there is a big range in the size of different public sector organisations, it would be important for any best practice examples to

include organisations of all sizes, this would ensure that organisations can look to an organisation of similar size for guidance.

It would also be important to ensure that the toolkit is as simple and easy to use as possible to encourage widespread use across public sector organisations.

Within the toolkit, we believe it would be useful to include information about why the Scottish Government is encouraging an increase in the employment of disabled people in the public sector and the benefits that this can bring to the public sector workforce.

Another support which could be helpful to public sector bodies when implementing changes would be some research into why declaration rates are so low. If the Scottish Government undertook this research, it could prove helpful to public sector organisations as an evidence base and would be useful for them to learn from.

**4. In your view, or the view of your organisation, would setting targets improve the disability employment rate in the public sector?**

We do not believe that setting specific targets for the number of disabled people employed in the public sector will help towards the cultural change which is needed. We are concerned that this measure could lead to positive discrimination or the creation of poor quality jobs that are ring-fenced for disabled people, with the core criteria being to meet the 'quota' set by the Scottish Government.

Instead, we would like to see public sector bodies and employers being targeted in their approach to recruitment, disability awareness, flexibility in working structure, employee support etc. We believe that by setting targets on these processes, a gold standard could be created, altering human resource practices which could have the potential to lead to a cultural change. This cultural change could lead to better transparency and unity in the workplace.

**5. If you said yes to Question 4, please rank the following options in order of preference, where 1 is your least preferred option, and 4 is your most preferred option, and use the space provided to explain your rationale.**

As mentioned above, we do not support setting specific targets and instead would like to see targets set on timescales on how organisations change their processes to become better employers of disabled people.

Additionally, the language used in 'option c' could be offensive to disabled people as it implies that disabled people cannot do certain jobs.

**6. Please also tell us:**

**Where appropriate, what is your view, or the view of your organisation, on how long it would take to achieve the target set out from your preferred option above?**

**7. If you or your organisation do not think setting targets would bring about a significant change to the disability employment rate in the public sector, please tell us why.**

As mentioned above, we do not support setting specific targets and instead would like to see targets set on timescales on how organisations change their processes to become better employers of disabled people.

**8. What other measures or options do you, or your organisation, think could be put in place to:**

**a) Employ more disabled people in the public sector:, and**

As mentioned in our response to question 3, we believe a Scottish Government developed toolkit could help organisations employ more disabled people.

**b) Support disabled people to remain in employment in the public sector**

We would like to see Independent Advocacy available to all disabled people who would like to access it when working within the public sector, we believe this would help support disabled people to remain working in the public sector

**9. Do you, or your organisation, have any views on monitoring and reporting on the actions needed to increase disability employment rates in the public sector?**

As mentioned above, we would like to see targets set on changes to employment processes rather than specific targets for the number of disabled people employed in the public sector.

We believe it would be important for the Scottish Government to identify measurable outcomes which could be reported on and would indicate whether this move had been successful. We believe there is a role which the third sector could play here in terms of sharing ideas and best practice from third sector organisations which generally have higher disability employment rates.