

# Inclusive recruitment

Resources about making recruitment a more inclusive practice

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## Inclusive recruitment

The WAARC's commitment to inclusive recruitment draws on good practice in the University sector as well as expertise from disability communities. For example, our partners Speakup Self-advocacy make the simple though profound case that 'Employment is for Everyone'. Their [website \(https://www.employmentisforeveryone.org.uk/resources\)](https://www.employmentisforeveryone.org.uk/resources) provides guidance and resources Employers will find information on video CVs examples of inclusive recruitment and the My Employment Plan, which employers could adopt for all colleagues who are in employment within the university who are autistic this would ensure reasonable adjustments were made in the workplace.

### Lessons about inclusive recruitment from WAARC

WAARC sought to recruit four Researcher posts and one Project Manager. We wanted to do this as inclusively as possible; mindful of applications from disabled colleagues. In later 2023 and into early 2024 we worked closely with professional services colleagues from research and innovation and human resources to develop a recruitment process fit for purpose. We reflect here on:

#### [Writing person specifications](#)

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## Writing person specifications

Our aim was challenging; to ensure that as many disabled applicants as possible applied for five new positions. Applicants should feel comfortable sharing their impairment, disability or chronic illness when they apply for jobs. We need to recognise a pipeline problem for disabled people. Many disabled people have experienced educational exclusion that means under/postgraduate qualifications have not been easy to access. Some disabled people will not have a PhD but have extensive experiences of researching disability, for example, in the NGO and DPO sectors. Universities are intimidating places, not least because of their classed, racialised, ableist and heteronormative architectures. With these considerations we worked up the following Person Specifications:

**Figure 1. Project Coordinator Person Specification**

Criteria		Essential	Desirable
1	Experience of project management and/or supporting project activity.	X	
2	Experience of working with different stakeholders including academics and professional services of universities and non-academic partners (e.g. disabled people’s organisations)		X
3.	Experience of financial management and budget control.		X
4.	Experience of developing and maintaining data and information management, including the processing of sensitive data.		X
5.	Excellent customer service skills, with experience of responding efficiently and effectively to phone and email enquiries.		X
6	Ability to work independently and as part of a team.		X
7	Experience of and/or a willingness to engage with disability		X
8	Experience of building and developing a team and aligning the day-to-day work and goals of the team with the organisation’s strategic vision.		X
9.	Experience of developing and maintaining a network of contacts throughout your own work area.		X
10.	Experience of organising online and face-to-face events.		X

**Figure 2: Research Associate example Person Specification**

Criteria		Essential	Desirable
1	Have a good honours degree in the social sciences, arts or humanities	X	
2	Have a PhD or equivalent experience of independent research/evaluation in disability	X	
3	Experience of qualitative research methods (e.g. ethics, case study, interviews) and data analysis.	X	
4	Experience of project management and/or stakeholder engagement and/or co-production in research.	X	
5	Experience of working well as part of a team and taking responsibility for delivering the responsibilities of a specific role	X	
6	Experience of presenting information in a range of formats to meet the needs of different target audiences (e.g. reports, blogs, journal articles, policy briefs, guidance documents and recommendations)	X	
7	Experience of working with disabled people and/or their representative organisations	X	
8	Evidence of working with university / educational institutions and professionals including academics and professional service colleagues		X
9	Knowledge of human resources systems, policies and practices		X

Both Job Specifications included the following paragraph:

"You should provide evidence in your application that you meet the following criteria. We will use a range of selection methods to measure your abilities in these areas including reviewing your online application, seeking references, inviting shortlisted candidates to interview and other forms of assessment action relevant to the post.

The University of Sheffield is proud to be a Disability Confident Employer. We are committed to recruiting and retaining disabled applicants and supporting positive action. We encourage disabled people to apply for our jobs and to have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, talent and abilities at the interview stage. We commit to offer an interview to disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for the job. For further information on the Disability Confident Scheme, please follow the [link \(https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/\)](https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/) <https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/> [\(https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/\)](https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/)"

We wrote job specifications supported by colleagues with expertise relating to inclusive and talent recruitment, human resources, research and innovation administration and disability studies research. **A number of key headlines emerge from this process:**

- We changed the titles of the posts from Project Manager and Postdoctoral Research Associates to, respectively, Project Coordinator and Research Associates.
- We revised criteria to capture diverse and relevant experiences. We slimmed down our job specifications to 10 criteria which are easier for applicants to engage with than a longer list of criteria.
- For the Project Manager role we included only one essential criteria while also trimming the essential criteria for the Research Associate positions to six. Under the Disability Confident Employer Scheme, if disabled applicants meet the essential criteria then they are automatically shortlisted to the next stage.
- Disability is explicitly acknowledged in the criteria; encouraging disabled and non-disabled potential applicants to engage with these posts as markers of critical research in the area of disability.
- We worked critically with the ableist language often found in these documents, for example, substituting words such as 'ability' with 'experience'.

## Advertising jobs

The wording of job advertisements can play a huge role in attracting or dissuading disabled applicants. Job adverts were written with various online disability networks and participants in mind.

### Figure 3: Advert for Research Associate positions

Are you a critical disability studies researcher? Have you worked to promote disability research? Are you a researcher with a lived experience of disability, or a disabled researcher?

We are recruiting four Research Associates (RAs) who will be based in iHuman (an interdisciplinary research institute at the University of Sheffield) and join the research team members of a new Wellcome Trust Institutional Funding for Research Culture project; 'Wellcome Anti-Ableist Research Culture'.

You will:

- have experience of research and project management.
- be committed to working as part of a team.
- be interested in translating research findings into practice.
- have experience of writing up research findings in various formats from images to text.
- have experience of organising engaging events that bring together key stakeholders.

We are recruiting four Research Associates who will help us to develop and deliver a suite of activities that centre disability in relation to a number of Priority Areas and Cross-cutting Themes.

- *Priority Area 1: Environment* will experiment with new ideas for inclusive recruitment and employment (RA post 1)
- *Priority Area 2: Development* will produce new guidelines on accessible research events and deliver a new 'Inclusive Research Methods' course to raise capabilities of taught postgraduate and postgraduate researchers, early and established career researchers (RA post 2).
- *Priority Area 3: Collaboration* will put disabled people front and centre and in collaboration will offer funding, via an open call, to other researchers and professional services colleagues to produce their own inclusive research projects. We will also revisit the **Concordat (<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/concordat-to-support-the-career-development-of-researchers>)** on Researcher Development to ensure inclusivity. (RA post 3)
- *Cross-cutting themes: 'Engaging the institution' and 'Sharing good practice'* - we will raise the profile of our work across the university and the wider higher education sector and seek to share good practice (RA Post 4)

We are committed to exploring flexible working opportunities which benefit the individual and University. This post is suitable for flexible, hybrid working.

### Figure 4: Advert for Project Coordinator position

Do you have experience of managing a project? Are you committed to promoting university inclusion for disabled researchers?

We are recruiting a Project Coordinator to support a team of researchers who will deliver on the key outcomes of a new Wellcome Trust Institutional Funding for Research Culture grant - Wellcome Anti-Ableist Research Culture - which seeks to identify and share inclusive practice for disabled researchers.

You will:

- have experience of supporting research and project management.
- be committed to working as part of a team.
- have experience of working with different stakeholders in and outside of the university.
- be interested in organising events aimed at sharing knowledge.

We are committed to exploring flexible working opportunities which benefit the individual and University. This post is suitable for flexible, hybrid working.

These adverts explicitly ask potential applicants to consider their own engagement with disability research. We also sought to flag flexible modes of working, which we know appeal to non/disabled applicants:

You can find more details of the research grant and our inclusive aspirations in relation to inclusive recruitment and employment [here](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/disability-research-job-opportunities):

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/disability-research-job-opportunities> (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/disability-research-job-opportunities>)

## **Frequently asked questions**

While honouring the fact that people might not want to self-disclose - especially in the process of applying for a job - we wanted to build a discourse of acceptance and encouragement. People can easily feel exposed when revealing their disability, illness or mental health. We constructed a microsite that used positive disability language; tapping into the new wave of disability:

## Figure 5: Frequently Asked Questions

### **When are the post details / application links made available?**

Hopefully we will update these pages in the first or second week of December 2023 for the posts relating.

### **I'm outside of the UK, can I apply?**

Yes - but the posts will be UK based. We are not able to support applications from people who wish to work remotely for extended periods from outside the UK. This is because of UK employment law. Some further details are found at this hyperlink <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/jobs/induction/before/international> (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/jobs/induction/before/international>)

### **Will I be expected to travel (and if so, what support is available to enable this)?**

All the fieldwork will take place in the University either on campus or online. There is no expectation for national or international travel. There may be optional and voluntary opportunities to attend and present at conferences and events. Many of these are now online or hybrid. Where these are in-person, we will work with event organisers to maximise accessibility for our researchers.

### **Is there a possibility of the researcher or project coordinator posts being continued into the future?**

The researcher and project coordinator roles are fixed term (two years). In addition, the research team is keen and committed to supporting researchers and the project coordinator to explore job opportunities post-award. We can, for example, explore future-facing research funding and grant applications. There are also often redeployment opportunities at the end of the grant. Furthermore, we have secured some funds to fund bespoke Continuing Professional Development for our researchers and project coordinator - this is in addition to the CPD opportunities offered by the University of Sheffield. We believe that it is important to us to ensure individuals can grow their skills and capabilities and provide funds to support this activity.

### **Can I be considered for more than one researcher post?**

Yes you can you need to apply for each specific post. Each RA post has a different focus to it and you would be expected in your application and cover letter to explain your fit with the post. All details for each post are provided in the application details we will add to this page.

### **Tell me about your commitment to disability access.**

It is vital to ensure all activities and events are accessible to those who may need specialist equipment or specialist services like BSL Interpreters, captioners, personal assistants and care costs. Given experience on previous projects more personnel time is required to ensure marketing communications, the implementation of the event and follow-up activities are effective for all. Therefore £50,000 has been ring fenced to remove barriers and to support the development of an inclusive environment for the project's research community.

### **Can I work remotely?**

Yes, if you are applying for the researcher positions. We welcome applications from those who wish to work remotely from the UK. We are not able to support applications from people who wish to work remotely for extended periods from outside the UK. This is because of UK employment law. Please remember that we are not able to remunerate employees for travel to the University campus or for overnight accommodation in Sheffield to carry out work on the project.

For the project coordinator, we would expect the successful applicant to adopt a hybrid model with sometimes working at home and other times working on campus. We would negotiate this split with the successful applicant.

### **What are the opportunities for flexible working?**

We welcome flexible working arrangements. Members of the team can expect to be supported by their line manager to develop working patterns that work for them and for the delivery of the project. If you are shortlisted for interview we can definitely discuss flexible working options.

### **Will I be required to work in the evenings and weekends?**

Most of the work will take place between working hours and the working week. We know that research project work is adaptive and adaptable. So, for example, if a research participant would prefer an early evening interview then the researcher could move their working day to carry out this interview. As a research team, we'd be keen for the researcher to take back that time during the working week.

### **Are the posts part-time or full-time?**

The project co-ordinator is part-time (60%) and the researcher posts are full-time. We are, however, committed to exploring flexible working opportunities with our staff which benefit both the individual and the University. Therefore, we would consider flexible delivery of the role subject to meeting the business needs of the post. If you wish to explore flexible working opportunities in relation to this post, we encourage you to call or email the departmental contact listed below.

### **How will you support my career development?**

The University is committed to the **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** ([https://researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Researcher-Development-Concordat\\_Sept2019-1.pdf](https://researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Researcher-Development-Concordat_Sept2019-1.pdf)), also known as the **Researcher Development Concordat** (<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat2019/full>). This is an agreement between **employers of researchers and research funders** (<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/signatories>) on the expectations for the professional development and employment conditions of researchers in the UK. We are committed to achieving its **Principles** ([https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/concordat\\_principles](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/concordat_principles)) for the **environment and culture, employment and professional and career development** of researchers.

### **Will there be opportunities to publish?**

The project is very much focused on interrogating university culture, identifying good practice and sharing this internally and across the sector. We are prioritising writing that can be used and shared across academic and professional services colleagues. There may be some opportunities for publishing in academic journals but our focus is on practice-based

### **What skills and capabilities will I develop in the course of working on these projects? Will I be connected to fellow researchers and project coordinators?**

The Project Coordinator will get the opportunity to develop their project management skills and connect with the University of Sheffield's project manager network. The researchers will join iHuman and School of Education research communities which includes a large group of disability studies researchers.

### **When will interviews be?**

We are planning on these taking place on 26, 27 or 28th February 2024.

- We publicised these job opportunities two months before the release date of the job details through various online platforms.
- We received many questions about the posts from the first day of posting.
- All questions were added to the frequently asked questions (FAQs) of our microsite, which we updated every two days.
- Applicants told us they welcomed the comprehensive job role descriptions, the use of large text and the compendium of FAQs. Knowing times of disability are also times of contestation, tension and friction. One public post criticised the misuse of hyperlinks. We chose to address criticism by addressing mistakes through regularly updating on our microsite.
- We aimed to respond with consideration, compassion and humility: reminded of the equivocal nature of disability. On reflection we wonder about some of the wording used in our microsite. Following Price (2024: 13) the choice of the word 'welcome' can be read as 'Sara Ahmed (2012, 43) points out, "To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home". We should have deployed terms such as support, recognition and honour and made more about our emerging WAARC community (which successful applicants will help to build).

## **Shortlisting and interviewing**

- We received 172 applications for five positions.
- 56 people applied for the Project Coordinator position (11 were Disability-Confident applicants). 10 were shortlisted (8 were Disability Confident).
- The one essential criteria of 'Experience of project management and/or supporting project activity' worked well as a means of attracting a wide group of applicants and a long shortlist.
- 116 individuals applied for the four Research Associate positions, with some of the same applicants applying for a number of or all of the posts. Of these 116, 58 were Disability-Confident applicants. We shortlisted 52 applicants for the next stage with 35 being Disability-Confident.

Shortlisted candidates were informed of the next stage:

As part of the process for inclusively recruiting for these roles, we'd like to invite you to complete a short exercise. This is as follows:

**Please submit a short written piece (approx. 500 words) or a 2 minute video/audio on the following: 'What ideas do you have for working with disabled people as research colleagues and partners?' Please use accessible language and Plain English.**

- These submissions will be reviewed by academics on the Wellcome Anti-ableist Research Culture team and also by representatives of two disabled people's organisations who are partners on the project.
- If you have any questions about this, please do not hesitate to get in contact. We are not expecting a professionally edited film or audio and would happily receive a recording made on a mobile phone or other device.
- If your written task/film is reviewed favourably you will be shortlisted for an online interview. We will let you know this by [date]
- All successfully shortlisted applicants will be asked to attend an online interview - which will be held on either [date] (for Research Associate) or [date] (for Research Coordinator).
- We will be sharing the interview questions prior to the interview.
- If you have any questions or considerations about access, please let us know. We consider access to be an ongoing process, conversation and exercise in responding together as a community.

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We received some incredibly powerful responses to this task from the candidates.

A panel of academics, professional services colleagues and representatives of two disabled people's organisations rated task submissions out of 5 and gave written feedback. The task permitted applicants to showcase their skills, ideas and experiences relating to 'Experience of working with disabled people and/or their representative organisations' (Essential Criteria 7, Research Associate) and 'Experience of working with different stakeholders including academics and professional services of universities and non-academic partners (e.g. disabled people's organisations)' (Desirable Criteria 2, Project Coordinator).

Our panel met to discuss all the ratings and we offered an interview to all applicants rather than shortlist on the basis of the task. 'Offering an interview' to disabled candidates is just one of the ways in which employers can demonstrate that they are disability confident and can be used alongside other inclusive recruitment practices (e.g. inclusive language in job adverts, advertising vacancies where disabled people may be more likely to see them etc). The Business Disability Forum (2021) explains:

**What is the 'Offer an interview' scheme?** The 'Offer an interview' scheme is a commitment made by employers to offer interviews to all disabled applicants who meet the **essential** criteria for an advertised job. This forms part of the **UK Government's Disability Confident scheme (<https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/>)**. Employers participating in the Disability Confident scheme can choose to offer interviews to all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for an advertised job. This replaced the UK Government's 'Guaranteed Interview' scheme, which ran until 2016.

We understand 'interview' and 'selection event/activity' as interchangeable and could have shortlisted applicants on the basis of an assessment of the task submission. To do so would mean holding a calibration meeting to ensure consistency across reviewers. We did not do this.

We decided to longlist all of our applicants regardless of their task scores. This resulted in three full days of online interviews, across two panels, for the three posts. We gathered information on access needs, carefully devised and shared our interview questions with candidates two weeks before the interview date.

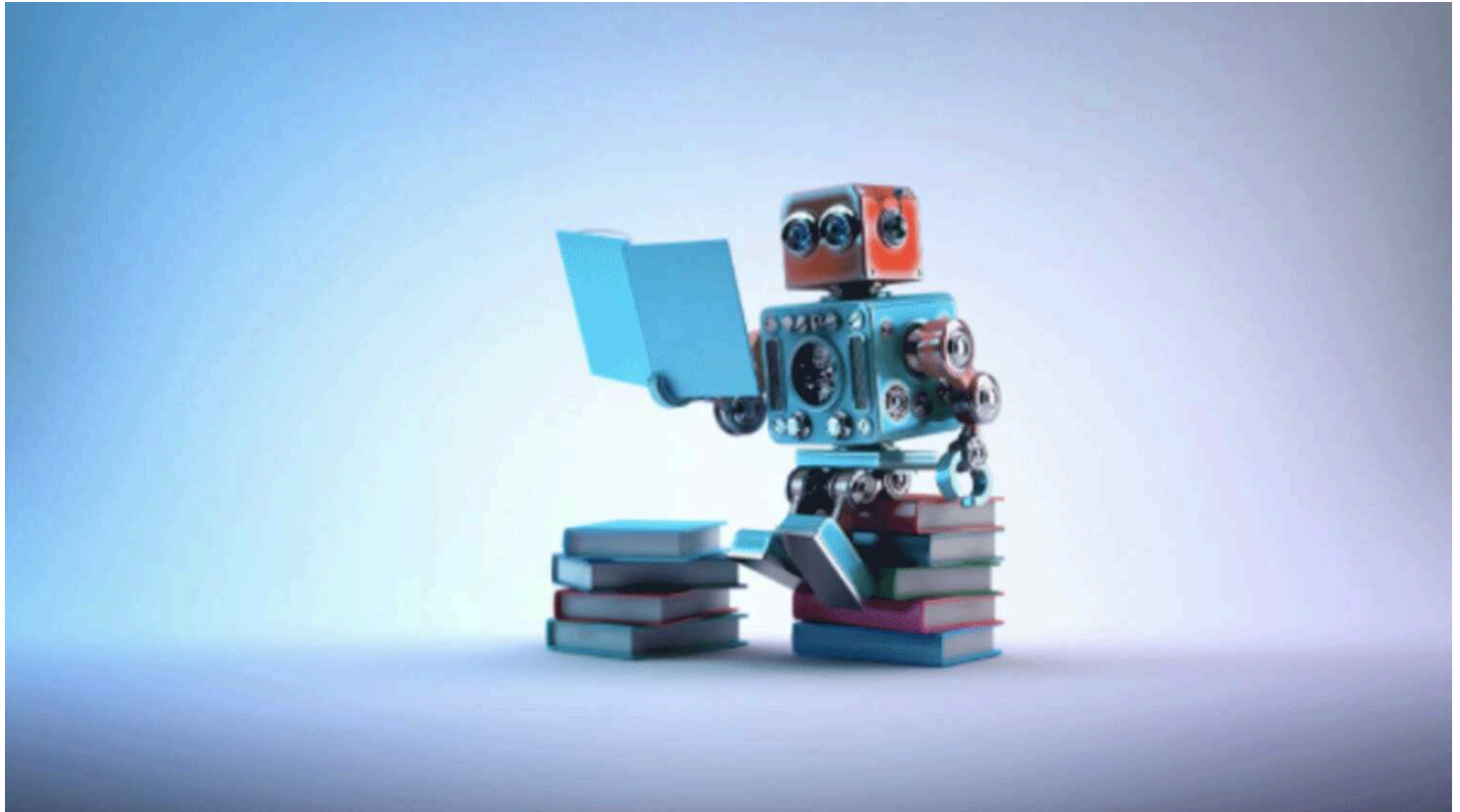


We fell upon a wonderful Freudian-slip offered by one of the authors; the phrase ‘disability-positive’ rather than ‘disability confident’. While the latter is a bureaucratic and discursive space known and promoted in the university, the former draws upon a potential more-encompassing and inclusive approach.

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## Related information

- **Disability Confident Scheme at the University of Sheffield**  
**(<https://sheffield.ac.uk/inclusion/disability/support-staff/disability-confident>)**
- **Read more about WAARC's work on anti-ableist environment**  
**(<https://sheffield.ac.uk/iHuman/waarc/anti-ableist-environments>)**



## iHuman

How we understand being ‘human’ differs between disciplines and has changed radically over time. We are living in an age marked by rapid growth in knowledge about the human body and brain, and new technologies with the potential to change them.

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## Centres of excellence

The University's cross-faculty research centres harness our interdisciplinary expertise to solve the world's most pressing challenges.

Centres of excellence

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