

Summary of Priority Area 1: Environments

Below you will find details of the work undertaken for this Phase. If you would like to access more information relating to our information sheets and consent forms for research participants, please email d.goodley@sheffield.ac.uk)

<https://sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/waarc/anti-ableist-environments>

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Project partners: Pathfinders Neuromuscular Alliance and National Association of Disabled Staff Networks

We interviewed 30 Disabled staff and non-disabled professional services staff members. We asked our participants to discuss their recruitment and employment experiences at the University of Sheffield. Participants shared information about ableist practices within their work environments with us and recommended ways to remove the barriers they identified. We transcribed the interviews and, after co-analysis with Pathfinders, identified the following themes present across all of the interviews:

- Gaps in the provision of accessible and relevant information

- Ableist attitudes
- Gaps in the provision of support and reasonable adjustments

This empirical work fed into two key areas.

Recruitment

Problem: The under-recruitment of disabled researchers and research support staff due to systemic barriers.

Strategic plan: A work stream promoting the inclusive recruitment of disabled researchers that will review job description, specification, marketing and publicity, essential/desirable criteria, training materials for panel members and involvement of disability organisations in the recruitment process. We will work closely with our Project Partners to ensure that our proposals respond to current policy and legislation as well as adhering to key matters of disability justice.

Deliverables:

- **Inclusive recruitment** - advice on writing the job description, through advertising, Disability Confident Scheme, FAQs, shortlisting and interviewing. Drawing on advice from Speakup Self-advocacy.
- **Key recruitment findings and recommendations from interviews with disabled researchers and professional services colleagues**

Employment

Problem: Lack of imagination about how research positions can be configured in ways that attract and retain disabled researchers.

Strategic plan: A work package promoting equitable and inclusive forms of employment for disabled researchers including job profiling, flexible working, responsive institutional responses to reasonable adjustments, relationships with University HR, Contracts, Finance, Occupational Health, and Access to Work arrangements. We will also explore the payment and consultation arrangements with disabled non-academic research partners.

Deliverables:

- [Support for and by disabled staff in the university](#) - documenting the work and impact Disabled People's Organisations on University culture.
- [Key employment findings and recommendations from interviews with disabled researchers and professional services colleagues](#)
- [Access to Work recommendations](#) - a list of recommendations for Access to Work and university practitioners

Access to Work Recommendations

For Access to Work

- Produce a step-by-step guide describing the different parts of the application process, the expected timelines and who is responsible at each stage. Our participants demonstrated a desire for clear information

on what to expect – from the initial application through to the reimbursement stage.

- Have cover in place for staff leave so that cases are not put on hold until the caseworker returns.
- Recognise that some posts need to have flexibility and there should be different ways of assessing disabled applicants' support needs, instead of expecting set hours of support needs.
- Offer a baseline level of human support to Disabled applicants to help them with their AtW applications, on-boarding and induction before any decisions are made about their AtW award.
- Assign each applicant to a single caseworker, preventing cases from being passed around and further complicating an already-opaque system.
- Assign applicants to caseworkers with relevant knowledge of applicants' fields of work, who could provide suggestions of useful adjustments that are informed by knowledge of how the applicant's impairments may interact with role-specific barriers and guide the applicant through the application and assessment processes.
- Offer regular check-ins to ensure that any concerns are addressed and that adjustments are working effectively.

For the University

- Provide detailed and accessible information about AtW in recruitment packs, on the university's website and during induction processes.
- Ensure that applicants and employees are aware of the AtW scheme and what support it can offer – along with a clear expected time frame.

- Involve disabled staff in their own AtW application process.
- Be respectful of Disabled staff's experiences.
- Set out a clear work plan to help Disabled staff determine how much – and what type of – support they may need during their contract.
- Drawing on institutional knowledge, support Disabled staff with AtW application forms and with navigating the complex system.
- Create a small team who can support Disabled staff through the AtW journey and to cover leave.
- Have a dedicated member of staff who can provide bespoke support with navigating AtW to Disabled staff – both in terms of the application and of implementing any support and adjustments.
- To train professional services staff to be sensitive towards disabled staff's access needs and realise the significance of AtW support in their lives.
- Have AtW champions – people who are willing to talk about their experience of going through the application process, or who have worked in HR and are familiar with the system.
- Have a "Frequently Asked Questions About AtW" page on the university's website.
- Communicate – more often and more transparently – with employees during the application process.
- Liaise with an applicant's caseworker if the employee needs support with communication.
- Even after implementing support, continue to regularly communicate with Disabled staff in order to ensure that AtW adjustments are working effectively.

- Universities should adopt a proactive rather than reactive approach to AtW; channelling resources to properly support accessing and drawing down upon this support.

Related information

[More information on our non-academic Project Partners](#)