

Ulster University Non-Academic Staff Confidence in Interacting with Disabled People 2017

Summary of Data and Results

Introduction

As part of the review of the effectiveness of the University's Disability Action Plan, the Equality and Legal Manager carried out a short survey of non-academic staff confidence in interacting with disabled people. This took place between 7 and 21 December 2017.

The survey aims to provide comparative data to gauge changes in staff attitudes from 2011 to 2017 in relation to interacting with disabled people. The survey questionnaire was circulated electronically and in hard copy to all non-academic staff and one reminder was sent during the survey period. Despite this, the response rate was disappointing. 79 responses were received, constituting a response rate of 6.5%. Furthermore, not all responses were complete. 87.3% (69) respondents completed the survey. Because the response rate is low, the results cannot be considered to be representative of all non-academic staff. However, they do provide an insight into of staff confidence in interacting with disabled people.

Summary of Responses

As some respondents did not complete their questionnaires in full, percentages have been calculated using the total number of responses received for each question (i.e. in some cases this is not 79).

A brief summary of qualitative comments is included for some questions. Full comments and data are available on request.

Demographics

The survey was totally anonymous. 79.7% (55) of the respondents were female and 14.5% (10) considered themselves to be disabled.

Experience Working With or Supporting Disabled People (n=79)

62% (49) of respondents indicated that they had experience working with or supporting disabled people. The types of experience cited by respondents are summarised below.

Experience of working with or supporting disabled people	Number of staff reporting some experience
Worked with/supporting disabled people	15
Support disabled students	14
Customers are disabled	2
Volunteer at disability organisation	1
Colleague is disabled	2
Friend is disabled	1
Not defined	3

Positive Benefits to having Disabled People in the Working Environment

Staff were asked if they felt there are any positive benefits to having disabled people in the working environment. Their responses were as follows:

Please Select Answer	2017 (n=79)	2011 (n=226)
Yes	69.6%	59.3%
Unsure (Labelled “No” in 2011 report”)	5.1%	1.3%
Makes No Difference	25.3%	39.4%

69.6% (55) of respondents felt there were positive benefits to having disabled people in the working environment, whereas 25.3% felt that it made no difference. This suggests that attitudes have become more positive since 2011.

Some respondents provide additional comments about the positive benefits. These highlighted benefits such as enriching the learning environment and being inclusive:

‘All people can provide unique experience and skills.’

‘Having staff members with a disability has lots of advantages including offering personal experience and seeing/understanding things an “a-typical” person may not.’

‘At Ulster I have worked with two differently abled colleagues and on both occasions their presence in the office environment has challenged my thinking on a professional and personal level. At a practical level it helps our work culture to be more progressive about building design and accessibility. On a human level it has been inspiring for me to work with my colleagues.’

‘I think there are benefits in having a diverse work force as everyone views the world through their own experiences so having colleagues with different experiences helps us make our work more relevant to more people.’

‘More inclusive, an important element of our mission to widen access to Higher Education.’

‘Inclusive working environments promote endurance and resilience in the workplace’

Confidence in Interacting with Disabled People

Staff were asked how confident they feel about interacting with disabled people. In general, respondents were either very confident (31.6%, 25) or quite confident (62%, 49) about interacting with disabled people. Only 5.1% (4) of respondents indicated that they were not confident interacting with disabled people.

Please Select Answer	2017 (n=79)	2011 (n=226)
Very Confident	31.6%	31%
Quite Confident	62%	58%
Not Confident	5.1%	7.1%
Don't Know	1.3%	4%

Help and Advice about Disability from within the University

Staff were asked where they would get help and advice about disability from within the University. Their responses were as follows:

Please Select Answer	2017 (n=79)			2011 (n=226)		
	Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Unsure
Accessibility Advisers (Student Support)	88%	5.3%	6.7%	83.6%	4%	12.4%
Student Support Website	77.9%	10.3%	11.8%	65.5%	10.2%	24.3%
Staff Development	44.6%	20%	35%	29.2%	30.1%	40.7%
Colleagues	64.8%	15.5%	19.7%	47.8%	23%	29.2%
People and Culture (Equality and Legal Manager)	59.1%	12.1%	28.8%	73.9%	10.2%	15.9%
Occupational Health Services	67.2%	11.9%	20.9%	59.3%	15.5%	25.2%

As shown, the majority of staff would get help and advice from either Accessibility Advisers (Student Support), the Student Support website or Occupational Health Services.

Awareness of University Materials to Support Disabled Staff and Students

Staff were asked whether they were aware of specific materials that exist at the University to support disabled staff and students. Their responses were as follows:

Please Select Answer	2017 (n=79)		2011 (n=221)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
SENDO Staff Guidance Booklet	58.2%	41.7%	54.3%	45.7%
Disclosure Guidelines for all line managers	46.8%	53.2%	43%	57%
Developing competence standards guidelines*	25.3%	74.7%	-	-
Disability Action Plan	69.6%	30.4%	62.9%	37.1%
On-line disability awareness training	88.6%	11.4%	68.8%	31.2%
Staff protocol for making reasonable adjustments*	67.1%	32.9%	-	-

*Note: these documents were implemented after 2011

As shown, staff awareness of the of the online disability awareness training appears to have increased greatly, whereas awareness of the Disability Action Plan and various guidance documents has increased only incrementally. This is not surprising, taking into consideration the staff categories included in this survey (i.e. these guidance documents may not apply to their area of work).

Actions to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

Staff were asked what actions they thought the University could take to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people. Responses included:

'Employ more disabled staff.'

'More information on a regular basis on Insight – examples from students/staff with disability and how they manage'

'No images in UU mainstream prospectuses. This would have to be something obvious at first glance – a person in a wheelchair.'

'Awareness events for all staff. Around non-visible disabilities. How people can be professional, highly intelligent and still have disabilities.'

'Perhaps having a major representative in main sight, having a disabled person as President of the Students Union or a role similar to that.'

'I feel that we should be making a positive statements in our prospectus/website and detailing our provision for disabled staff and students using welcoming language. Also making sure that managers are sensitive to requests for reasonable adjustments and do not make the person feel uncomfortable for asking for them.'

'Ensure all students receive general advice on supporting their fellow students with a disability at induction and ensuring that any student or staff caught disrespecting someone on grounds of disability is pulled up for it. Ensure staff are regularly updated on the latest technologies available to assist disabled students, and to ensure their teaching and study materials take into account potential issues with a hidden disability e.g. have lecture notes in written and audio/video formats.'

'The mental health is very student focused, could do with supporting staff more'

'There is a very low % of staff who 'view themselves as disabled' or possibly who feel confident admitting this. I think the university does a splendid job in supporting student disability but more could be done to give staff the confidence that this disclosure will not be perceived as negative, particularly in the area of mental health. More open discussion and publicity would be helpful'

'I feel that every employee and department needs to take responsibility for accessibility. I think that this would promote a more positive and inclusive attitude rather than sometimes feeling that everything disability related comes back to student support.'

'Possibly more awareness amongst lecturers, tutors etc. regarding the need to develop a positive working relationship with the student whether the disability is physical and or mental. Relationship and pastoral care is key.'

'Greater help, guidance and advice for managers to enable them to act with confidence and appropriately.'

'More awareness and literature'

'More mandatory training. An institutional policy on mental health'

'More promotion/ education. You could give out information to staff and students as to what support is available and also what counts as a disability. Recognise that there is nothing wrong with being disabled. It is okay for people to be different.'

'Training and awareness workshops to support academic staff implement reasonable adjustments recommended.'

Actions to encourage greater participation of disabled people in University or public life

Staff were asked what actions they thought the University could take to encourage greater participation of disabled people in University or public life. Responses included:

'Be more prepared for people with disabilities, before they arrive, in every department. Better access to the building, transport links etc.'

'Better Accessibility routes in to the main building, more disabled parking spaces available to encourage as much independence as possible.'

'Improve the accessibility of the institution, regardless of disclosure, this will improve the experience of students with disabilities and this will encourage more students to apply.'

'Make the university more accessible e.g. don't put Student Support and the Students' Union at the bottom of a spiral staircase, with poor lift access; promote other societies (that may suit a disabled person) as much as the sports societies (that might not suit a disabled person)'

'Create an inclusive learning environment, from point of access to layout of classrooms, assessment criteria and measuring outcomes of courses. Therefore students with disabilities will not feel different and blend in better.'

'Making inclusivity through 'normal' things like the universal design for learning – so students have a choice in areas of University like assessments, rather than having to go to student support for adjustments'

'Measure attainment gaps non-disabled student v disabled student and put incentives in to improve these gaps.'

'Having access to good helpers where necessary is also key as not all personalities will match well which is nothing to do with the disability, just human nature. Appropriate use of the latest technologies is also enabling more people to participate in society.'

'Visibility is vitally important but it can be tokenistic. A positive and inclusive work environment will provide opportunities for any individual regardless of disability.'

'Give the students with disabilities a greater role in promoting the university in the media.'

'Promote student engagement in sports such as wheelchair basketball, able bodies and disabled alike.'

'Promote disabled events and highlight the good access.'

'In terms of their civic responsibility, the University could get more involved with the promotion of many of the excellent support groups in the community.'

Conclusions

The results of the survey would suggest that, in general, staff have positive attitudes towards disabled people. They believe that there are positive benefits to having disabled people in the working environment, they feel confident about interacting with disabled people, and know where to seek advice and support about disability at the University. However, awareness of existing University guidance varies.

Recommended actions

Based on the results of the survey, the following positive actions could be implemented to address some of the issues identified (and continue to promote positive *attitudes towards disabled people*):

- raise awareness of the disability support available from People and Culture (Occupational Health, Staff Development and the Equality staff);
- increase awareness of/publicise the guidance for staff and disabled students, which exists at Ulster; and
- ensure that the results of this survey are considered in the development of the University's third disability action plan.