

Qualitative feedback from the Inclusion Network around how to support disabled staff during a pandemic

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Introduction

This document sets out the findings and recommendations from the South East Network Inclusion event held on 2 December 2021. The event was a focused session dedicated to discussing the needs of disabled staff particularly during the pandemic.

Summary

The COVID pandemic has made us more compassionate and considerate to each other, particularly in taking care of each other's mental health or helping each other make adjustments regarding our different abilities or impairments. More forums for discussion have been created, and senior leadership teams are feeling more able to talk about the difficulties we all face.

Further action can be taken to ensure that all staff:

- i) Feel included;
- ii) Feel there is a safe space to talk about what they need and that this will be valued and respected, rather than used as information to penalise them in the future.

Recommendations and reflections

A. Communication

- Senior leaders to continue be more open about the difficulties they are facing and the support they need; and to continue to encourage their teams and staff to do the same;
- Let's think about the language we use with one another. Whilst 'disability' is a broad term, sometimes that way it is used can be exclusionary. Whatever language we use, how do we ensure that all those who consider themselves to have a disability feel supported? How do ensure our neuro-diverse staff, who do not necessarily consider themselves to be disabled but might put themselves forward as seeing and thinking about the world differently, also feel included?
- Explain the positive reasons why we ask staff to declare disabilities/impairments if they have them.



B. Being more sensitive and inclusive and kind

- Whilst it is helpful to have standard systems and policies in place to support staff and organisations, such as the Bradford Score/factor to monitor absence, use of these mechanisms without making reasonable adjustments may indirectly discriminate against disabled staff.
- Recognising that home working presents challenges for everyone. More home working arrangements has contributed to an increase in disabilities being declared.
- Some coping mechanisms and adjustments made for the office do not work or are not available at home. Managers need to be flexible about this.

C. Risk assess, support and signpost

- Consider the use of inclusivity tools and implement them where appropriate. Examples include:
 - o Disability passports
 - o Particularly where working arrangements remain fluid during the pandemic resourcing and promoting mental health and wellbeing sessions for staff.
 - o Setting up risk assessments e.g. re working from home
- Ensure training, HR and recruitment practices are clear about rights of and obligations to staff who have a disability;
- We can't always get our architecture or environments right first time. Some of our buildings aren't designed for what staff need now; some of our digital and virtual environments don't always meet the needs of those with certain impairments.
- Can we make it a) easier for staff to flag those issues and b) where changes can be made, easier for those changes to happen?
- Continue to build upon the successes achieved during Disability History Month.
- Consider having an Executive sponsor for disability/those with disability in the organisation.

If you would like to share your ideas or contribute to this discussion, please email:

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