

Building Our Futures

Executive Summary

The employment and HR needs of DPOs in London

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The employment and human resource needs of Deaf and disabled People's Organisations in London.

Executive Summary

Over the past 18 months a piece of in-depth research funded by the City Parochial Foundation, has taken place that looked in detail at the employment, management and HR (Human Resources) issues that London's Deaf and disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) face.

The project was managed by a steering group, consisting of representatives of London DPOs and people with HR expertise. The official launch of this report will take place in June 2010.

Over 120 London-based DPOs and their staff took part in the research. The research explored all HR-related issues, including those that might be considered 'sensitive', for example the impact that impairment and disability can have on work performance, and noted the views and experiences of numerous DPO staff members, Chief Executives (CEOs), management committee members and other stakeholders. The process included desk research, an examination of previous research into disability and employment issues, a detailed needs analysis of DPOs, and 'action research': the trialling of various support interventions, again involving numerous people and organisations. At the end of this process a series of recommendations was developed to begin addressing the needs identified by the research.

Primarily, the research noted the extra demands that DPOs face in terms of managing their staff, who are in the vast majority disabled people, and the lack of support and understanding extended to DPOs by funders and second-tier organisations. DPOs have extensive and broad demands made upon them because of the access needs of their staff. Many DPOs have large part-time staff teams, and they are generally characterised as organisations with flat management structures, with over-stretched CEOs (usually disabled themselves) facing increasing demands on their time. DPOs face a number of management problems that other organisations are not likely to, simply because of the high proportion of disabled staff they employ, such as the management of long-term sickness issues, managing "difficult" staff-development and performance issues, and managing the Access to Work process. In addition the research noted that recruiting, inducting and training new workers for DPOs is a slow process when organisations try to fully meet applicants' access needs, and this impacts significantly on DPOs ability to meet service delivery targets, especially in cases of short-term funding.

DPOs face particular challenges with regard to HR, and this affects their capacity to take advantage of the growth of contract funding in the sector, particularly with the introduction of Centres for Independent Living (CILS).

The research also showed that DPO CEOs receive little management support themselves because of the lack of resources and the lack of knowledge, experience and expertise of their management committees.

The demand to meet DPOs staff access needs places a great strain on organisations in terms of time and funds, and disabled staff's access needs are not fully met by the Government's Access to Work scheme, even when it is fully exploited (which is rare). The research also revealed the failure of Access to Work to come to grips with the particular needs of DPOs.

The key findings of the research are summarised below:

Employment within DPOs: Employment within a DPO is generally a more complex issue than it is in other organisations, and this impacts on the organisation's management and service delivery functions. Key findings are:

- DPOs employ a high number of part-time staff, and as a result managers end up managing large staff teams.
- Recruitment processes take longer and cost more in DPOs.
- Induction processes take longer: it takes longer to embed a new member of staff, and to sort out their access needs, and as a result to get a new project going.

Access to Work: The research showed considerable problems with the Access to Work scheme, particularly in relation to DPOs that employ a very high number of staff with access needs. Key findings are:

- The Access to Work programme does not fully meet staff needs within a DPO because of fundamental problems within Access to Work's policies, procedures and most of all its implementation by local officers. In addition in many cases there is a failure to acknowledge the full costs of access.
- Access to Work will not cover the access costs of volunteers.
- There is poor knowledge of what support for disabled staff is available from Access to Work and of how to go about getting it.

Training and Development: There are many issues around training and development which impact especially upon DPOs. Key findings are:

- Training provision in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is often not accessible to disabled workers, and does not meet the specific needs of DPOs.
- Training provision is inconsistent across London.
- There are major gaps in terms of training available for DPOs

Volunteers: DPOs make differing use of volunteers as a resource, but there are generally clear issues about access that prevents their best use. Key findings are:

- Volunteers are only used effectively in small DPOs or in DPOs with specific, funded, volunteer projects.

Policies and Procedures: Like other organisations, DPOs often only find out how inadequate their policies and procedures are when they have to use them. Key findings are:

- Written policies and procedures within DPOs are often inappropriate, inadequate and are sometimes out of date.

Outside Help and Support: DPOs have specific specialist support needs, requiring expertise that is not often available. Key findings are:

- Outside help and support on HR issues does not always meet DPOs needs, even when it is available.
- DPOs try and get support from wherever they can, sometimes using expensive services that cannot fully meet their needs.

Disability and Sickness Absence: As DPOs employ high numbers of disabled people, long-term sickness absence can occasionally be a serious problem. Key findings are:

- Sickness absence relating to disability is regarded within DPOs as a serious problem
- Long term sickness can cause a major problem, especially in smaller organisations

Management Committees: DPOs' management committees are usually inexperienced, and the organisation cannot usually meet their access needs. Key findings are:

- DPOs' management committees lack experience and skills and access to support
- Management committees of DPOs do not have enough skills, knowledge or experience for supporting CEOs of DPOs adequately.

Networking: Opportunities for DPOs to meet with each other are limited for a number of reasons, and thus there is little sharing of skills and experience. Key findings are:

- There is not enough networking by DPOs at any level, nor the sharing of knowledge, information and experience.

Personal Assistants: Staff in DPOs are more likely to need personal assistants than in other organisations. This has a specific and significant impact. Key findings are:

- There are particular problems relating to the employment of disabled staff's Personal Assistants (PAs) under the Access to Work scheme, in terms of responsibility for employment, employment status, impact upon physical space within organisations and full employment costs.

Workplace Culture: Life within a DPO is not the same as in other organisations. Key findings are:

- There is a specific 'workplace culture' within DPOs that can impact both positively and negatively upon service delivery. Staff impairments and their impact upon others are generally not discussed, and this can cause problems.

Agency Staff and Consultants: DPOs often employ freelancers to fill gaps when they cannot recruit. Key findings are:

- Employing agency staff or consultants can provide short term solutions but this is expensive.

CEOs in DPOs: CEOs in DPOs work very hard to cover gaps that are unique to DPOs. Key findings are:

- CEOs within DPOs are vastly overworked because of their wide range of responsibilities and the disproportionate amount of time they have to spend managing a large number of particularly demanding staff.
- CEOs receive a poor level of management support themselves, especially given that most of them are disabled people. This can have a significant impact on their organisations' services.
- CEOs have little time to undertake personal development, or even carry out basic updating of their knowledge and skills.

Workers in DPOs: Disabled employees have specific problems. Key findings are:

- Workers in DPOs face differing experiences, but in many cases feel that their access needs are not being met.
- Opportunities for career development within DPOs are limited
- Disclosure about an impairment can be a real problem
- DPOs' premises and equipment need modernising
- Working in a DPO is a positive experience for most disabled people

Funders and Stakeholders: There is little detailed understanding by stakeholders of what life is really like within a DPO, or understanding of the issues DPOs face on a daily basis. Key findings are:

- DPOs do not regard their funders and contractors as sympathetic, and their experience is that funders simply do not understand 'disability'. This specifically related to 'invisible' disabilities.
- DPO premises remain a problem, causing access problems for staff and organisations.
- Trade unions have no particular presence within DPOs despite having expertise in and experience of representing disabled staff in the wider workplace.

Providing Interventions for DPOs: There is little real understanding of how to meet access needs and what this actually costs. Key findings are:

- Planning and organising events for DPO staff, ensuring access needs are fully met is time consuming and expensive.
- Consultation with participants prior to events to ensure their access needs are met is vital.
- Accessible venues exist – but are expensive.
- Training tailored specifically to the needs of DPOs is in demand, popular and appreciated.
- Training gives much-needed confidence to CEOs in managing difficult situations
- Free events encourage people to book, but appear to discourage attendance.
- There is a great demand and need for organisations to be networked.
- Professional non-line management supervision/coaching offers a viable and positive alternative solution for the support of CEOs who receive little direct support from their management committees.
- Direct one-to-one support with a DPO can address a wide range of HR issues effectively.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of the 18-month research project, a number of recommendations are made around progressing HR development and support for DPOs. These recommendations cover a range of actions and strategies to be undertaken by a number of stakeholders, including funders, second-tier organisations, Access to Work and groups themselves.

The recommendations are as follows:

1. Costs

A number of issues were raised related to specific costs uniquely faced by DPOs. For example DPOs generally employ a greater proportion of part time workers, which adds to management and administration costs. Recruitment and induction takes longer within DPOs, events cost more to organise, whilst generally access costs are high and not fully met by the Access to Work scheme. These additional costs have not normally been recognised nor covered by existing funding and contract arrangements.

We therefore recommend that the extra HR costs of managing a DPO are recognised, and that therefore funders and contractors look to identify these costs precisely, in order to develop an appropriate funding formula.

In addition, we recommend London funders look to develop a contingency fund for meeting the costs DPOs face attributed to long-term sick leave, and recognise the longer lead-in and set-up times needed for new DPO projects. In addition, funders are recommended to fully meet the access costs of events and activities run by the DPOs that they fund. Funding formulas should reflect the full specific costs faced by DPOs.

2. Flat Management Structures

Often as a result of employing a greater proportion of part-time workers, managers are required to manage a large staff team. We specifically recommend the above funding formulas tackle the issue of flat management structures that DPOs have, by providing larger organisations with funds to employ extra management staff, and smaller organisations support with back-office functions.

3. Non-managerial Support

Because of the lack of managerial support we identified that is currently received by CEOs in DPOs we recommend the development of non-managerial support opportunities for CEOs in DPOs, and funding for this to be included in the formula noted above.

4. Training

To meet the identified HR training needs of DPOs we recommend the development of a new tailored accessible HR training package for DPOs, organised and delivered by a partnership of appropriate agencies, such as London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC) and Inclusion London

5. Direct HR Support

To meet DPOs HR support needs, we recommend the development and delivery of a specific DPO HR service, modelled on LVSC's successful PEACe BMER HR project. This should link with the HR training programme, and should help DPO organisations meet recognised quality standards.

6. Networking – Bringing DPOs Together

The research identified the lack of existing networking opportunities for DPOs, and the impact this had on them. We therefore recommend the development of networks for a) CEOs of DPOs b) disabled staff and c) management committees of DPOs. We recommend that these link into the development also of a ‘virtual’ internet-based network, and further capacity building of DPOs’ management committees .

7. DPO Management Committees

DPO management committees were identified as being in need of support and development. We therefore recommend the development of a new DPO management committee project, to be linked with the network programme above.

8. Information Resources

We recommend the development of easily accessible appropriate HR information resources or adaptation of existing resources, to be delivered in conjunction with the direct support outlined above.

9. Outreach

We recommend that a partnership of second-tier organisations, to include Inclusion London and LVSC as above undertake mapping and outreach work to ensure all London DPOs benefit from services offered.

10. Second-tier Organisations

As second-tier organisations were shown not to be fully meeting DPOs’ HR needs, we recommend that second-tier organisations undertake to engage better with DPOs, and work to provide fully accessible support services.

11. Workforce Development

To provide the much-needed development opportunities for DPO staff, we recommend the introduction of skills-development pathways, by a partnership of second-tier organisations working in this sector, to tackle the lack of current routes available to workers in DPOs.

12. HR Development in DPOs

We recommend that DPOs are supported by funders and umbrella agencies to help concentrate their efforts on improving their HR practices, policies and procedures.

13. Access to Work

The research showed that Access to Work were failing DPOs in a number of ways. We therefore recommend the introduction of a programme of training and development for Access to Work itself, delivered by disabled people, to enable it to provide a more appropriate, easily accessible service to DPOs, and we recommend that development is funded to train organisations in gaining Access to Work funds. Funding also needs to be provided to train workers with PAs to manage their support staff. In addition we recommend that funders pro-actively promote the Access to Work scheme to groups that they fund.

14. External Issues

The research showed that funders and other stakeholders had a poor understanding of the specific issues and challenges faced by DPOs. We therefore recommend that stakeholders, funders and contractors make greater efforts to understand and appreciate the wide-ranging issues faced by DPOs.

Conclusion:

There is much work to be done by those with a stake in the future of DPOs. DPOs provide vital services to thousands of disabled people in London (and throughout the UK). They are the voice of disabled people, and have provided an effective lobbying and campaigning voice on disability issues and played a major role in the progression of disability equality in last 20 years. In addition, DPOs provide employment and volunteering opportunities for significant numbers of disabled people.

Perhaps most importantly DPOs have a major role in delivering new personalised social care and independent living services over the next 10 years.

This research project has shown that DPOs face a great number of HR issues that impact on their ability to deliver services effectively and sustainably. Specialised infrastructure support for DPOs is limited, particularly in the HR area, and there has yet to be a recognition by funders and contractors of the full access issues faced by DPOs. The Government's Access to Work programme aims to meet the needs of disabled people in the workplace, but does not have the impact it should have in a workplace where nearly all workers have specific access needs. Budgets for staff development within DPOs are extremely limited, opportunities outside equally so. Managers managing large staff teams receive little support from inexperienced, under-supported management committees.

DPOs survive and flourish because of the hard work and commitment of their staff and volunteers, but it is clear that investment in HR support for DPOs is vital to their future development and sustainability and to ensure they continue to play the vital role they do in our society.

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