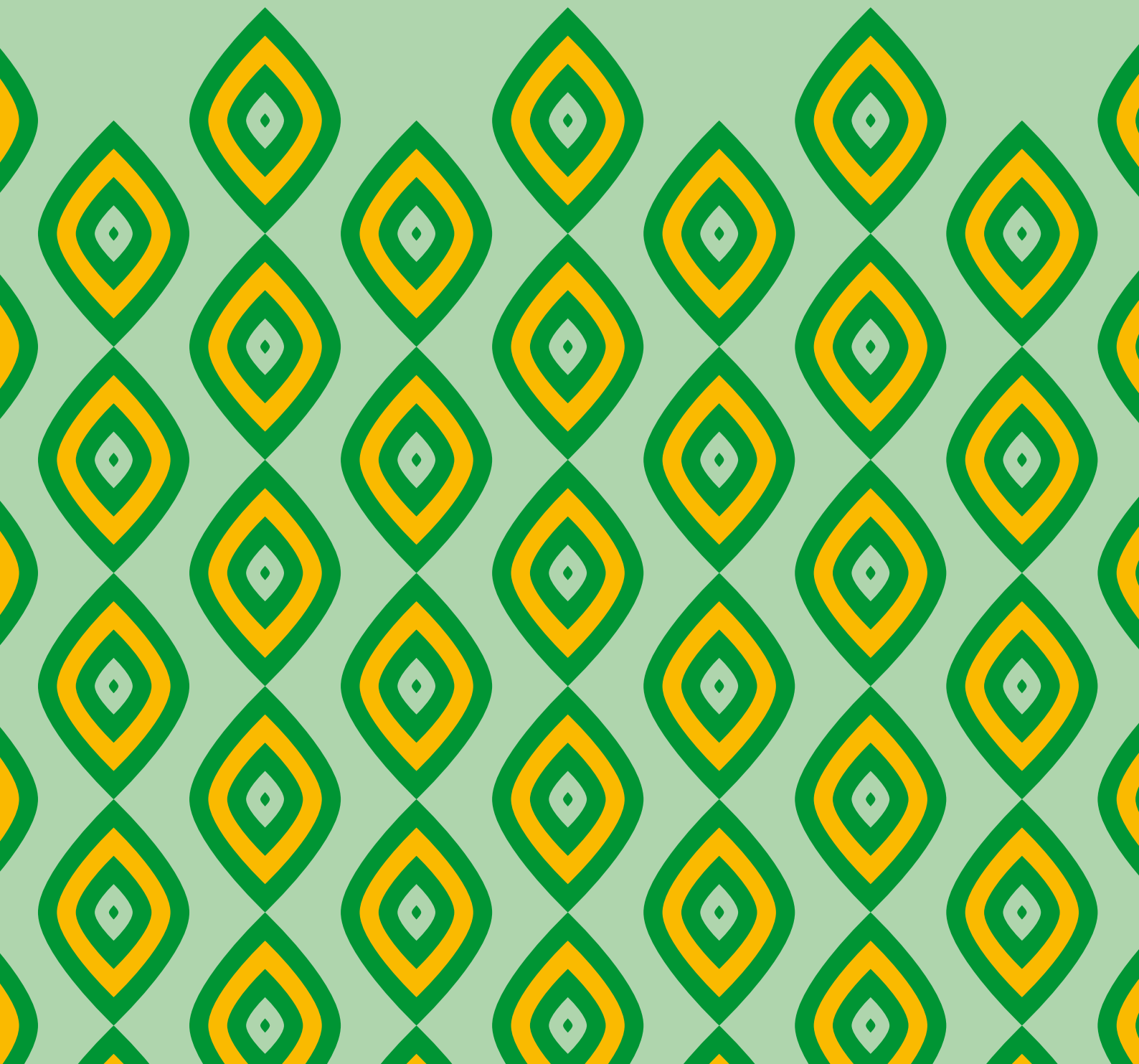




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# Disabled Employee Networks a practical guide



## Sponsors

This guide would not have been published without the support of our sponsors. We are extremely grateful.



## Motability Operations

**Written by:** Kate Nash

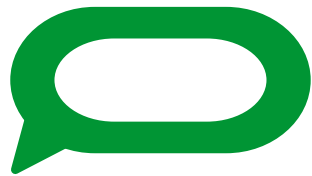
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# Disabled Employee Networks a practical guide



The development of vibrant and well resourced disabled employee networks is a fantastic way of encouraging disabled people to become ambitious for themselves and their career – and to send out a positive message about the organisations intent in developing an inclusive environment.

Alun Davies,  
Chair of Disability Committee,  
Equalities and Human Rights Commission



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I am delighted to see the introduction of a practical guide in how to set up a disabled employee network for both the public and private sector. It was of no surprise to me that Kate Nash chose to embark on this task as she is always looking for the next best way to improve the career prospects of disabled people by making systematic changes.



The Right Hon Lord Ashley of Stoke CH

# Introduction

Over the last decade we have seen the growth of Disabled Employee Networks (DENs) across all sectors.

This is partly because organisations are becoming more disability and diversity confident but also because disabled people are becoming more comfortable about expressing their needs at work and feel more able to come together in networks of support.

Disabled people are also increasingly aware of their economic influence as employees, as customers, as shareholders, as voters and as citizens.

To become employers of choice for talented disabled people, organisations need to demonstrate a good track record in accommodating the needs of disabled employees in more sophisticated ways.

Now the challenge is for employers to foster new thinking and practice from and between employees of different sector strands, to build, as the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggest, a Britain that is at ease with its diversity. A DEN provides a mechanism to glean, at first hand, information about the barriers to your organisation while also mining the talent of all sections of the community.

The trigger for a DEN and therefore its nature will vary from employer to employer. There are no hard and fast rules. Ensuring your organisation has the structure most congruent with its objectives demands a systematic approach. That is what this guide provides by harnessing the experience of 50 organisations who have set up DENs.

Our premise is that concentrating on process is the only real way to achieve a successful DEN.

Through the stories of some amazing individuals and organisations, the guide provides advice both for employers wanting to establish a DEN and employees who have been running a network for some time and are looking for ways to revitalise it, give it fresh direction and deliver more meaningful activities. I am delighted to have the endorsement of EFD and RADAR for this publication. I have been inspired by all the people I have met while preparing this guidance. I hope that their enthusiasm and success helps you and your network.



**Kate Nash OBE**

## Who are the key players?

The inspiration to set up a Disabled Employee Network (DEN) may be triggered by different things. However, to develop and grow they need involvement from people across the organisation.

### The key players may include:

#### Chairpersons, co-ordinators and committee members

These are employees who present themselves or are nominated, elected or identified as those who may be able to run the network.

They may come from any part of the organisation. They will guide the network and be the people who shape and uphold its values and ensure that its activities are delivered. The work of the DEN will usually be 'extra' to their day job although the delivery of outcomes may be incorporated in performance appraisals.

#### Senior sponsor / champion

This individual is a senior member of the organisation who chooses to champion and promote disability and/or diversity and/or the DEN. They may ask, or be required, to review and appraise the activities of the DEN annually. They may play a part in helping to secure its budget. Crucially, they keep disability in the mind's eye of senior colleagues.

#### Network Managers

These individuals work in the human resource or diversity department of the organisation. They may have a broader HR/diversity remit and be charged either expressly or implicitly with ensuring that the organisation's employee networks are successful and working to support the organisation's objectives. The issues that are likely to come up in the setting up and functioning of a DEN will be part of their day job.

#### Heads of HR / Diversity

These employees are responsible for how the organisation delivers its HR function and promotes its diversity policies and procedures. They will have ultimate responsibility for the organisation's success in eradicating discrimination and promoting equality. Clearly, if one of the objectives of the DEN is to support the process by which the organisation eradicates discrimination and promotes equality, then the individual will have a strong interest in the success of a DEN.



## Members

These are the employees for whom the DEN was designed. They usually include both disabled people and non-disabled colleagues who have a strong interest in how the organisation is progressing in terms of its track record on disability.

Equally they may include parents of disabled children or line managers of disabled employees. The majority of networks that have contributed to the guide are what might be termed 'inclusive' networks – where the members are both disabled people and employees who have an interest in the organisation's track record in recruiting and supporting its disabled people.

## Case History

### GlaxoSmithKline

GSK has a good track record in developing its people networks with several already in place e.g. Early Careers Network, Prime Time Partners Network, Gay Lesbian Bi-sexual and Transgender Network.

It held an open meeting for employees and talked through the possibilities of what a disability network might look like, who might get involved, what the business benefits would be and what activities it may deliver. The results of the dialogue will enable GSK to create a structure that truly fits the needs of its people.



One of the keys to a successful network is to have a highly motivated and dynamic steering committee. It is often not enough simply to find the right people in terms of personal experience and enthusiasm. In our experience, it is vital to ensure that before a member of staff joins a network committee, he or she not only has a good idea of what the role will entail, but has also given detailed thought to how it will both fit around and complement his or her normal day to day work within the firm.

John Cowling,  
Disability in Employment  
Co-ordinator,  
PricewaterhouseCoopers





At Ernst and Young we think about our people as being individually talented and collectively powerful. Creating a motivated, focused and vibrant network harnesses that talent and drives the progress we want to see towards our objective of becoming disability confident.

Fleur Bothwick,  
Director of Diversity and Inclusiveness,  
Ernst & Young



# The three main types of DENs

**There are three main types of DEN reflecting three different purposes.**

Having said that, none of the networks that contributed to this guide are of one type only. Most networks are hybrids of the three. Often DENs start out as one type – reflecting the primary trigger for the network's establishment – but morph, adapt and develop over time to take account of the needs and interests of a range of stakeholders.

There is no one correct type of network – they are simply different, with different aims and objectives driving different activities and outcomes.

## Leadership or champion groups

These have usually been set up by the organisation itself. They are sometimes called Steering Groups or Advisory Groups (with a membership or interest group mailing list).

They exist primarily to help the organisation become more disability confident and to raise awareness of the issue across the business or organisation. They are message givers as well as expert advisors and agenda-setters.

## Peer group or alumni networks

These are networks set up primarily by disabled people themselves usually in response to a growing need for disabled employees to seek peer group support for themselves. They may include personal development and training components in their activities.

## Consultation forums

These are networks set up primarily to act as a consultation group or a forum for the organisation to test out the development of policies, practices and procedures. They may have a formal role to play in consultations, such as in the development of the Disability Equality Schemes required by the public sector.

## A systematic approach

At the heart of a successful network is a systematic approach to getting things done.

All networks are organic and evolve as more people get involved and the organisation becomes more disability confident. A successful network is one that has developed the discipline to think through its aims and to constantly review success as it evolves.

Whether setting up a DEN for the first time or trying to refocus an existing one, developing a systematic approach provides the framework from which all activities can be developed.

**A confident DEN has three things:**

→ **a sharp sense of purpose**

This means clearly-defined and easily-articulated statement(s) about what the network is for, founded in a strong vision of what the organisation wants to achieve and how the network contributes to this;

→ **a burning desire to find the win / win between stakeholder groups**

Every organisation is on its own journey to becoming more disability confident. The current legislation requires an employer to be 'reasonable' in how it accommodates disabled people. The values of a confident DEN will tend to promote a culture that assumes it is possible to find the win/win for employer and employee;

→ **a firm commitment to deal with controversial issues and barriers**

The notion of what is 'reasonable' varies from organisation to organisation and it is sometimes necessary to test out standards of reasonableness.

**A systematic approach involves working from a cyclical point of view. When something 'feels wrong' it is to these three qualities that your thinking should return.**

## Think first

Thinking is key. The initial thinking is about preparation – the context of the job, the aims and developing a plan. Subsequent thinking is about reviewing the quality of what has been produced and how to carry learning from the process forward to future work. In Western culture, periods of thinking are frequently under-invested in both in terms of time and rigour. The result is the need to re-work.

In your thinking, do not be satisfied with the first answer. Ask 'why' again, to take your thinking to a higher level. For example, the answer to the question 'why set up a network?' may be 'to provide opportunities for disabled employees to discuss issues relevant to our situation.' Another may be 'to enable us to point out to the organisation those things which would make us more effective in our work'. Another may be 'to enable the organisation to become more disability confident'.

Your answers to these questions need to be forward looking so they will probably begin with phrases like 'so that...' or 'in order to...'. The historical reasons – the answers that begin with 'because...' – are not important now.

Networks often take off when the organisation has agreed to commit time and resources to one. Or when someone has been identified, within the organisation, who is willing to 'volunteer' their time to do the work.

They may spring from an enthusiastic member of staff who feels isolated at work and becomes keen to share their experiences to help the organisation improve their practices in recruiting, training and developing their disabled employees. Or they may be initiated by an enthusiastic diversity manager who wants to build an authentic pool of champions who can advise and support the organisation in their intent to improve employment practice.

Many successful networks are established when energy is high following a key learning experience for the organisation such as a challenging result from the Employers' Forum on Disability Benchmark Standard. Or because of work with an external consultant or trainer. Or because the organisation has decided to formalise its structure for consulting with disabled employees as a result of producing a Disability Equality Scheme.

Alternatively, a DEN may develop in an organisation that has already fostered an inclusive culture and encourages people from other minority groups to set up Employee Networks.

Whatever the precise trigger, it is important to set time aside to think through the purpose of the DEN, so that, over time, you can measure your contribution and success. That's where a systematic approach makes the difference.



One of the most important elements of the work of our Disability Advisory Committee is that it works in a systematic and planned fashion. The role of the committee is to roll out positive messages about the intent of InterContinental Hotels Group in terms of our disabled employees and our disabled customers. This means we have to have a clear route map of where we want to be, a strong vision upheld by all the members of the committee, who come from hotels across the group – and a committed chair, Laura Frith, Vice President, Human Resources, UK and Ireland.

Christopher Rawstron,  
Vice President, Operations, UK and Ireland,  
InterContinental Hotels Group



# The ultimate action plan

The ultimate action plan is a 10 point plan for establishing and running a successful Disabled Employee Network (DEN). The steps are designed for those setting up a DEN or thinking of doing so but they are also a useful reference for organisations that already have a network. If you are involved in running a network and something isn't quite right, the chances are, one or more of the following elements has not been addressed.

The guide is structured into 10 sections that tackle each point of the plan:

<b>Action Point 1</b>	<b>Establish the business case and values;</b>
<b>Action Point 2</b>	<b>Research and engage with other employee networks;</b>
<b>Action Point 3</b>	<b>Develop clear aims and objectives;</b>
<b>Action Point 4</b>	<b>Establish clear success criteria and milestones;</b>
<b>Action Point 5</b>	<b>Secure top-level commitment;</b>
<b>Action Point 6</b>	<b>Secure organisational support;</b>
<b>Action Point 7</b>	<b>Develop the business plan;</b>
	→ structure and status
	→ proposed activities
	→ budget and resources
	→ membership requirements
	→ confidentiality policies;
<b>Action Point 8</b>	<b>Market the network to employees and communicate across the organisation;</b>
<b>Action Point 9</b>	<b>Develop support and succession plans for the network co-ordinators;</b>
<b>Action Point 10</b>	<b>Maintain, develop and review the network.</b>

## Business case and values

As we have seen a DEN can have a number of purposes.

A DEN can be a mechanism for enabling disabled employees to come together to share experiences, information, support and learning. Some organisations call them affinity groups. It can also be a mechanism for enabling the employer to get better at understanding the causes of discrimination and improve its strategies designed to promote diversity.

These two functions – and others – can sit together comfortably within the same DEN, but they have different purposes and a balance needs to be struck. Before examining this in any depth, this section highlights the benefit in setting up a disabled employee network.

It can be helpful to develop a set of values within which you would expect people running or joining the network to subscribe to. This may feel like an irrelevant activity, or at least one that can be done quickly – the reason for the network may seem obvious. For example, it may be the response to the need to get better at recruiting and developing disabled employees or, perhaps, a response to the need for peer group support. However, for the network to evolve and become truly effective, many organisations have found a set of guiding values vital.

## The business case for the network

The first part of the Action Plan is to develop a business case – in other words: why would your organisation want to develop and resource a DEN? Some possibilities include:

### Benefits for disabled employees

#### A DEN builds communication channels

A network provides a structure for disabled employees to express the types of systemic adjustments that the organisation needs to make. It can be a mechanism for distilling a shared understanding about the key priorities for change and provide a forum for discussion that enables participants to feel valued as employees.



## A DEN provides peer-group support and networking

A network can provide a home for informal support for those acquiring an impairment for the first time or those whose existing health conditions have worsened. It may provide an opportunity to think through personal strategies for overcoming barriers to getting reasonable changes to the working environment or to getting promotion.

## A DEN encourages career progression

DENs can help to foster a climate that encourages disabled employees to develop their skills and pursue career opportunities. Easy access to role models and mentors, both formally and informally, may inspire participants.

“

When encouraging other members of the Employers' Forum on Disability to set up a Disabled Employee Network I would always stress the need to have crystal clear aims and objectives, to work hard at getting top level support and, crucially, to assign roles and responsibilities against key tasks.

”

Matthew Thomas, Co-Chair,  
Ernst and Young Disability Working Group

**Benefits to the organisation****A DEN promotes diversity**

The active support of a DEN is a direct demonstration of an employer's level of commitment to disabled employees. It signals real drive to build a diverse workforce, assists the organisation to demonstrate how it values its employees and might well help to attract and retain talented disabled employees.

**A DEN encourages activity in a spirit of good intent**

Laws evolve and the current anti-discrimination legislation has its limitations in, for example, the types of impairments covered. It also allows for 'justifiable' discrimination. Active support of a DEN can result in an employer doing more than the minimum legal requirements with amazing results.

**A DEN encourages compliance with employment law**

The Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and 2005 make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people at work. Between 2004 and 2007 over 15,000 cases went to employment tribunal. A DEN can be one of the best ways an employer has of demonstrating their strategic intent to tackle discrimination against disabled people in the workplace.

**A DEN builds communication channels**

A DEN can be a valuable route for consultation on policies, practices and procedures. It can be a good source of information about the challenges in the workplace and a helpful reference point for personnel, training providers, diversity officers, procurement advisers and facilities managers. Of course, DENs are not the only source of this information.

**Benefits for customers and clients****A DEN enhances customer reputation**

An employer which publicly recognises the value of its disabled employees is likely to reap the rewards of increased interest from disabled customers and clients.

**A DEN improves products and services**

Organisations that are involved in delivering a service to the public can use the DEN to help build a better picture of the needs and expectations of disabled customers.

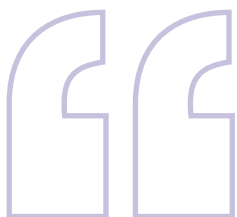
**A DEN helps anticipate changes to the market**

As the notion of what is 'reasonable' develops, it will be increasingly important for organisations to anticipate the aspirations and requirements of disabled customers. What better way of tapping into the potential changes than by working with a DEN?

It is vital not to duck this question of 'who benefits?' There are some risks in setting up a DEN. For example:

- Some colleagues may consider that it's purpose is solely to improve the external image of the organisation.
- Without strong leadership a DEN might turn into a complaining group.
- There could be an overlap in responsibilities between the network, its co-ordinator and those employed to develop the organisation's diversity policy and procedures.

A confident DEN is clear on the balance of benefits between different stakeholder groups. The answer to the question 'who would be the key beneficiaries?' may well be 'both'. But reaching that conclusion means being very clear on developing transparent values about the way the DEN may operate.



The government's Life Chances report signalled its commitment to ensuring that disabled people have the opportunities they need to live independent and fulfilling lives – that includes employment. Our network represents and involves potentially thousands of disabled colleagues across government departments and agencies. It aims to provide a platform of support and dialogue and to remove blocks and barriers to progress in their careers, thereby releasing talent and tackling the under-representation of people with disabilities in senior roles.



David Bell, Sponsor,  
Civil Service Disability Network and  
Permanent Secretary, Department for  
Children, Schools and Families

## The values of the network

A good DEN will develop a set of values for the network – a framework of principles within which you want participating members to operate.

### Difference is to be celebrated

The fact that the organisation has decided to set up or improve an existing network is an indicator that disabled people have more to offer the organisation and that the organisation would profit from becoming more inclusive and disability confident. It is useful, therefore, to encourage values that embrace the view that all employees of difference bring a value to the organisation's talent pool.

### Case History

#### Lloyds TSB

Lloyds TSB's disabled staff network, Access, was created on the basis that no-one can support disabled staff better than those that have 'walked in those shoes' themselves.

Lloyds TSB ensure that all their staff networks have a 'consultancy' element built into their remit as standard. Being able to speak to individuals who have directly experienced policies and processes first hand is considered very important. This is particularly true with Access as disability issues can be so varied and difficult to understand for those that haven't experienced them.

You will start to network with a range of people, all with their own ideas and thoughts about what the network should focus on, and how it should interact with the organisation. Be explicit in the value of welcoming different contributions and encourage debate and discussion on difficult issues such as discrimination, promotion prospects, salaries and so on.

### **There is no hierarchy of difference**

You may come across people who will assert that some minority groups fare better than others. Give such views a wide berth and dismiss the idea that there are hierarchies of importance within diverse communities.

The understanding of diversity and the development of equality legislation has evolved in a piecemeal way, strand by strand. In the 1970s we saw the introduction of Race and Gender legislation. In the mid 1990s came the Disability Discrimination Act. In the Equality Act 2006, the protection of rights were extended to include sexuality, transgender, belief and age. The Equality and Human Rights Commission brings together all of those strands.

Promote a network that champions all sector strands as equally important. Many organisations encourage employee networks or affinity groups to network with each other and share learning.

All that said, of course, organisations may find that certain priorities need to be made from time to time.



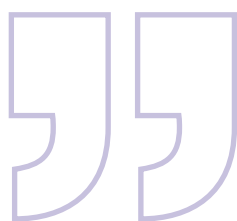
It helps to get an outside facilitator involved in chairing a meeting to determine the values of the network. If you are an experienced Network Co-ordinator or Chairperson, or just setting one up from scratch, removing yourself from leading the process of determining values puts you in a better position to provide ideas and hear the views of others. You are more likely to build a set of values that reflect the needs of everyone.



Simon Evans, Manager,  
Disability Working Group Chair,  
Motability Operations 2006-2008



It's impressive how the launch of a Disability Awareness Network struck a chord with so many people here. Many care for people, or know people, with some kind of disability, and the sheer range of areas the Network events have covered has meant many participate.



Matt Hale, Co-chair,  
Merrill Lynch's EMEA Disability Awareness  
Professional Network

## Case History

### Motability Operations

One of Motability Operations' strategic objectives is to enhance its disability expertise. In developing specific goals to meet this objective and address some suggestions made in the results of the Employers' Forum Disability Standard survey undertaken in 2005, the company identified the benefit of having an internal employee network. This group, called the Disability Working Group, was set up with the main aim of bringing together employees to share the company's plans to deliver its strategic objectives as well as to develop disability champions across the business.

As work got started it was vital that the group worked with the business to complement existing efforts and avoid unnecessary duplication. For example, the group has proved to be an invaluable way to resource various conventions and exhibitions around the country. Mobility Roadshows, for example, are a great opportunity for members to share information about the Motability Scheme with prospective customers.

### **The organisation wants to do well for its people**

Develop values in the network that promote the fact that the organisation will, ultimately, want to do well for its people because, in so doing, it is more likely to deliver its business objectives.

### **The notion of 'reasonable' is, for the moment, a fair and helpful concept**

It is likely that the government will harmonise equalities legislation over the next few years but it is unlikely that we will see, in the short term, an abandonment of the notion of reasonableness as used in the current Disability Discrimination Acts. From time to time, colleagues who are involved with a DEN will notice organisational barriers that, in their view, are unreasonable. It is, however, recommended that the network promotes the notion of reasonableness as a helpful framework.

### **The win / win can be found**

Values that are based on the principle of win/win for disabled people and the organisation are likely to be the best drivers through any disagreements – whether these are between individual disabled people and their line managers or between the DEN and the organisation's policies and procedures. Leadership that can demonstrate a shared destiny between what the DEN and the organisation is looking to achieve is most likely to be successful.

### **Case History**

#### **British Airways**

BA's disabled employee group has been running for a number of years. They are recognised as a fantastic source of information to help the company understand the needs of both customers and colleagues. Members have taken part in trials prior to the opening of Terminal 5 and more recently tested seats in the 'first cabin'.

One member, who is a wheelchair user, was seconded to the Diversity team to work with the British Paralympic Association to ensure a smooth, stress free journey for Paralympians to Beijing. He also went to China to deliver diversity and disability awareness training. The members have the commitment from their line managers that they will be able to attend meetings and give their feedback on new products and services whenever possible.



## Research and engage with other employee networks

You may already be aware of the existence of other employee networks both inside and outside your organisation.

Indeed, you may well be setting up a DEN because your organisation already has a network in place for women, for people from the BME community, for international employees, for lesbian, gay and bi-sexual employees, for faith groups or for parents and so on.

Meet and talk with other employee networks. You may well learn from their experiences and be able to short cut some aspects of your start up – why reinvent the wheel?

People are not one-dimensional. Given our multi-faceted identities, it is important for every employee network to embody the principal that all human difference is to be valued and all discrimination to be challenged. Networks make an important contribution to the organisation's ability to anticipate, accommodate and celebrate human difference.

Networking with other networks is a key ingredient in developing good relations between different sector strands in the organisation. Joint activities could be held such as events to highlight our multiple identities. Similarly, joint representations may be made to internal or external/ government consultations.

### Case History

#### BT

At BT, if one of the 10 employee networks is thinking about holding an event, they consult the other networks to see if there is an opportunity to develop the agenda together and to build on their commonalities. An automatic invitation also goes out to the other network chairs, asking them to encourage their members to participate. This forges stronger links between each of the networks, creates a coherent voice for inclusion and leads to a better understanding of the challenges that each diverse group faces. Working collaboratively makes the networks stronger and gives members more opportunities to network extensively across BT.



Researching what other DENs do will also help develop a vibrant and productive network, valuable to both the organisation and the disabled employees.

As we have seen, all networks have different 'triggers'. Indeed, each organisation and each sector strand will have very different experiences of setting up employee networks. The journey and structure of every network is different depending on:

- the 'trigger' for the network;
- the availability of resource;
- the organisation's culture and needs;
- the external environment;
- whether it is a public body or a business;
- the level of commitment to diversity within the organisation.

Researching into other employee networks in general and other DENs in particular builds understanding about the benefits of your DEN.

### Case History

#### Merrill Lynch

The initiation and development of Merrill Lynch's Disability Awareness Professional Network (PN) is what they describe as an 'organic process.' Over the three years before its establishment Merrill Lynch had developed a diversity strategy which was demonstrated by the success of the Professional Networks which were already up and running: the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender PN, the South Asian PN, the Women's Leadership Counsel, the Black PN and the Parents and Carers PN.

### Case History

#### Citi

Citi modelled the disABILITY network on existing, successful networks in order to avoid pitfalls and build on good practice. They borrowed lots of ideas from the Citi Pride network which helps address workplace issues related to sexual orientation. For example, they adapted the mission statement in order to derive the mission of the disABILITY network and mimicked Citi Pride's newsletter layout when developing their own.

## Develop clear aims and objectives

It is important to approach the establishment of a DEN in the same way as any other project and to really drill into the task of developing clear aims and objectives.

Every organisation is different so every network will have different aims and objectives. DEN chairs and co-ordinators need to think through what they want to achieve based on the business case. Developing a transparent and realistic set of objectives is the best way of measuring the networks' success over time.

### Focus on outputs

Employee networks are ultimately about people. With the right values, direction and leadership, they can make a significant and lasting contribution to how the organisation accommodates its disabled employees and develops products and services for its disabled customers. But how will you know if it is successful?

Only with clear aims and objectives can you monitor and measure how successful you have been. Demonstrating successful outputs against the aims and objectives will add to the process of garnering organisational support and may make it easier to secure the budget or other resources that are needed to develop future activities and add value to the aims and objectives.

All DENs will have a range of aims and objectives and will develop activities that support those aims. Networks are advised to work in partnership with the HR/Diversity department to ensure that the aims and activities are congruent with the organisational intent and other planned activities.

### Possible aims include:

#### To champion disabled people

One objective could be to become a forum for championing the issues that affect disabled employees at work. In this case, the organisation will need to incorporate consultation mechanisms with the network into its planning processes.

### Possible activities to support this aim include:

- Holding information sharing events with speaker sessions and briefings for managers;
- Being available for assisting with policy development;
- Being available to advise on the organisation's marketing literature to ensure the visibility of disabled employees and appropriate language and imagery.

**To define what is 'reasonable'**

The law talks about 'reasonable' adjustments to accommodate disability. The network could operate as a mechanism for the organisation to hear from a range of disabled people what they consider 'reasonable' in terms of making changes to the business.

**Possible activities to support this aim include:**

- Developing 'problem solving' values within the network and meeting with HR/diversity managers to shape direction in organisation policies;
- Encouraging the HR/diversity department to use the DEN as a sounding board for proposed strategy.

**Case History****Lloyds TSB**

It was very important for Lloyds TSB to have a strong vision and a mission.

**Vision**

- To significantly encourage, enable and empower staff with disabilities within LTSB Group and to help them realise their full potential.

**Mission**

- To provide networking opportunities to help overcome isolation; fulfil the need of disabled employees for solidarity and extend understanding of the importance and benefits of valuing diversity.
- To encourage disabled staff to focus on their own development by providing support, building confidence, forging mentoring relationships and facilitating learning from role models.

**Case History****Motability Operations**

By setting group goals that mirrored the company's core objectives, Motability Operations Disability Working Group ensured that its work has credence and adds real value. Group members really make an impact as they engage on projects that raise awareness of the Motability Scheme itself and of Motability Operations as an employer of choice for disabled people. The group regularly reviews activities to ensure that they are aligned to the key objectives.

Motability Operations has launched a scholarship-programme to attract talented disabled students into the company – an important outcome for the Network and the company.

## Case History

### Jobcentre Plus

The Department for Work and Pensions reviewed their network's terms of reference, including the roles and responsibilities of members. In particular:

- To actively promote and implement the principles of diversity and equality as outlined in the Jobcentre Plus diversity and equality policy statement and strategy.
- To contribute to the development of departmental diversity and equality procedures and effectively represent views to appropriate management bodies including the Executive Team and the senior management teams of the individual DWP businesses.
- To contribute to the embedding of the principles of diversity and equality in day to day practices with all customers, colleagues and partners.
- To contribute to raising general awareness across the department of the diversity and equality agenda through proactive communications including the development and sharing of good practice.
- To provide a forum for mutual support for staff to share ideas and experiences.

## To contribute to the organisation's inclusion and diversity agenda

You may wish to use the network to scrutinise the development of the organisation's diversity and inclusion strategy, commenting on policies, practices and procedures.

### Possible activities to support this aim include:

- Routinely receiving updates from the HR/diversity team and being prepared to give balanced feedback to proposed policy;
- Advising on recruitment and retention strategy where it relates to disabled people;
- Advising on training, development and promotion strategy where it relates to disabled people.

## To advise on policy development and ensure it is applied in practice

The network can be used as a sounding board for the organisation to ensure that its policy is working in practice.

### Possible activities to support this aim include:

- Collating information from disabled people about how policy operates in practice and sharing feedback with the HR/diversity team;
- Collating information from disabled people about how the recruitment and retention strategy is applied in practice;
- Collating information from disabled people about how the training, development and promotion strategy is applied in practice.

### To improve the work environment of disabled employees

The work environment is more than the sum of good policy, practice and procedure. There are many more subtle aspects that can make or break a good working environment. The DEN can provide clues about other barriers to a positive and inclusive culture.

#### Possible activities to support this aim include:

- Supporting the setting-up of 'listening groups' or focus groups of disabled people who are prepared to share their thoughts about 'how it feels to work here'.
- Collating information from disabled people about how the working environment feels in practice: are there common themes that the organisation may want to prioritise?

### To support disabled employees to develop their careers

Employee networks can be a vibrant way of helping disabled employees to talk to others about what they can do to develop their careers and overcome barriers created by low self esteem and lack of confidence. They can become a mechanism for employees to find good career-development role models.

### Case History

#### Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

At a conference held in London, the CPS Disabled Staff Network committee had the opportunity to engage with the members and to share the aims of the network:

- To reduce isolation of disabled staff;
- To put members in touch with other disabled staff within the department;
- To provide a confidential environment to discuss good and bad experiences with the service in order to establish good practice;
- To provide a point of contact for human resource, equality and diversity and policy departments.

In addition, the committee were able to share the well-defined objectives of the network:

- To increase awareness of disability issues in order to promote equality and diversity within the CPS through newsletters, articles, meetings and awareness days;
- To provide an avenue of support and assistance for staff with disabilities in the workplace;
- To engage in relevant training to gain knowledge in order to assist staff in solving issues;
- To hold quarterly meetings to discuss disability issues and progress of the group.



Citi disABILITY supported the HR team as they updated policies about disability. We were able to consult with our network members in order to provide input to the 'Manager's guide to disability', ensuring that it contained relevant information about managing an employee with a disability which reflected both the letter of the law but also the spirit of Citi's desire to be inclusive. The policy was expanded to include a section about managing people who have caring responsibilities for a disabled dependent as this set of employees has very different needs. This document is now available to managers via the web and it has also been advertised to all members of the disABILITY network via our quarterly newsletter.

Catherine Bennett,  
Risk Management,  
Citi



**Possible activities to support this aim include:**

- Setting-up personal development courses to tackle lack of confidence and low self-esteem;
- Offering career development using role models, mentoring and peer support schemes;
- Developing support structures for people who are newly diagnosed or facing particular challenges;
- Setting-up social events to encourage participation in the network.

**To ensure disabled employees can be as open about their disability as they want to be**

The first few years of having a disability can be challenging in terms of making sense of how you may have to do life differently. For someone acquiring a disability or long-term health condition for the first time, the DEN may be the first forum for meeting others who have a disability. The DEN can offer an important opportunity to staff who are less inclined to be open to colleagues or their line manager.

**Case History****BBC**

The BBC Disabled Staff Forum's mission statement is 'removing limitations on disabled people' – all of its six objectives relate, in one way or another, to the BBC's broader role to ensure honest and proportionate portrayal of disabled people in all its output:

- To encourage the career aspirations of disabled workers at the BBC;
- To encourage the BBC to include disabled people amongst its workforce to an extent that reflects levels of disability amongst the population of the United Kingdom;
- To encourage acceptance, inclusion and celebration of individual identities and cultures;
- To encourage inclusion, positive and constructive attitudes, behaviours and policies towards disabled people both within and beyond the BBC;
- To encourage honest, fair and multi-dimensional portrayal of disability by actors who are actually disabled;
- To encourage contact, support and friendship among disabled workers at the BBC.



**Possible activities to support this aim include:**

- Featuring stories about disabled people in the workplace in the organisation's newsletter;
- Encouraging disabled senior executives from within the organisation or from outside to speak at events.

**To encourage the recruitment and retention of talented disabled employees**

The existence of a DEN sends out positive messages to non disabled employees. Over time, it adds to the sense that the organisation is serious in its intention to recruit, retain and develop its disabled employees. This, in turn, can impact, in subtle ways, on the organisation's wish to recruit disabled workers.

**Possible activities to support this aim include:**

- Disseminating information about promotion and recruitment of disabled people through the network's communication channels;
- Encouraging key managers to sponsor and participate in the DEN events.

**To network with other groups and share good practice**

The DEN will often want to connect with other equality strands and it is sensible to do so. We all have multiple identities and the members are likely to gain from networking with members of other networks.

**Possible activities to support this aim include:**

- Meeting and talking with the co-ordinators of the other networks to share information;
- Promoting the organisation as a leader in diversity and inclusion.

**Case History****UBS**

UBS use a variety of ways to engage employees and encourage their participation in creating cultural change. Awareness days, regular diversity employee network events and news stories celebrate UBS achievements. In particular, UBS have found that guest speakers have been a great success, providing inspiration to many across the organisation.



## Establish clear success criteria and milestones

Having clear aims and objectives is a good indicator that the DEN will deliver for the organisation and disabled people. And it is likely that you will have developed the aims and objectives through discussion with other colleagues. However, even with those aims and objectives, how will you truly know the DEN has been successful?

For each of the Network's aims and objectives ensure some consideration is given to developing success criteria and key milestones.

### Example

#### **Aim: Improve the work environment of disabled employees**

What are the considerations in really 'working up' the aim?

Only by asking the following is it possible to guarantee success;

- 1 how will we know that the DEN has been successful with this aim?
- 2 what will the environment look like/feel like?
- 3 what qualitative and quantitative measures can we put in place to achieve this aim?
- 4 what might we see that is different when the DEN has been successful in this aim?

### Case History

#### **Lloyds TSB**

A significant example of where the disabled staff network has supported the business is in getting the 'reasonable adjustments' process right. The process has been in place for a number of years and Lloyds TSB formed a working party to ensure it remained effective. Whilst many of the discussions centred around the usual business issues involved in delivering a process (such as finance, resource and technology) Lloyds TSB were also able to ask members of Access to come along and share their experiences as the 'end-users'. Their impact was considerable and their views invaluable.

Access collates staff feedback and, if they identify a potential barrier, they have a formal channel to pass this back to the central diversity team. Access gives members a 'collective voice', and can maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of members, and it can make a real difference. For example, one member was having difficulty getting hold of subtitled training DVDs. The issue was fed back to the central team who uncovered a hitch in the communications process affecting several alternative format communications. The issue was quickly resolved and the process to get the right formats to the right people at the right time was restored.

**Aim: Ensure the organisation becomes disability confident**

Again, what are the considerations in really 'working up' the aim?

Get some colleagues to share their thoughts on the following:

- 1 how can the DEN contribute to this process?
- 2 what does working for a 'disability confident' organisation feel like?
- 3 how will disabled employees know that the organisation is striving to improve its policy and practice regarding the employment of disabled people?

**Case History****BBC**

The BBC Disabled Staff Forum gets involved in key strategic decisions that require significant financial sign-off such as in the procurement of IT services or in the refurbishment of buildings. One of the members of the core group regularly liaises with the property division ensuring that resolution to difficult decisions are made as swiftly and as easily as possible.

**Aim: Ensure the organisation factors disability into all its procurement processes**

For a DEN to be helpful in this aim some time needs to be spent thinking through all the implications of getting this right. Some questions you may want to ask are:

- 1 what might the organisation be doing to ensure all its key suppliers are aware of their responsibilities under the DDA – and how can the DEN encourage colleagues to push suppliers to go one step further?
- 2 how can outsourced functions such as occupational health services or IT suppliers be routinely tested to ensure they are making the right considerations in terms of disability?
- 3 how does a DEN positively encourage busy colleagues to take the needs of disabled colleagues seriously – and at the right time – when outsourcing major contracts to suppliers?

Disabled Employee Networks that think through, deliberately and systematically, these type of questions are more likely to be effective despite limited time and resources. Focusing on key areas for a period of time is often a useful way of working – spotlighting key priorities, working with colleagues responsible for delivery and, crucially, developing a shared understanding of timelines to complete tasks.

Providing encouragement and sourcing examples of where other organisations have made progress is often seen as a helpful and supportive act – the Employers' Forum on Disability is a good source of information and advice on how organisations can make real and systemic change.

### Case History

#### Merrill Lynch

For Merrill Lynch, an important measure of success of the network is that in just one year, its membership is now the second highest of all the Professional Networks in its offices. It is at 8% of the London employee population.

They put their success down to five core factors:

- The participation of the members in providing honest feedback and showing genuine interest in the development of the network;
- The energy of the diversity and recruitment teams supporting the network;
- The quality of the presentations provided by external experts on the range of disabilities and health conditions that affect people at work and the solutions available;
- The collaboration with other internal networks in sharing ideas and promoting events amongst their memberships;
- The commitment of the steering committee.

## Secure top-level commitment

Getting top-level commitment can often be the turning-point in garnering support from every part of the organisation. This process can be made considerably easier by securing a senior champion.

### Find a champion

Most DENs find that having a senior member of the executive or board as an identifiable champion proves incredibly helpful, especially in the early days. Indeed, the recruitment of such a champion is often the single most important step in the development of the DEN. It can turn 'commitment' into secure, resourced, integrated support.

A champion or sponsor or ambassador (different organisations use different terms) for the role can make it easier to:

- Secure resources;
- Encourage other senior staff to get involved;
- Problem solve;
- Motivate other stakeholders to get things done.

Maximise the contribution of your champion by using their messages of support and quotes in news releases, marketing literature, the website and organisation newsletters.

To demonstrate top-level commitment, ensure the champion has a visible presence. Invite them to key events.

Make sure you keep them informed of ongoing activity. Send them regular updates and ask for their input and ideas. You may not be able to draw on their time too much, but their name and profile may be just what you need.

### Should the champion be disabled themselves?

Although there is much to be said for ensuring that the activities of the DEN are largely led by disabled people themselves, there is nothing intrinsically right or wrong in having disabled employees as the senior business champion. Indeed, there may be no such role models in the organisation – that may be one of the reasons why you are setting up a DEN in the first place.

However, organisations with a well-respected disabled senior executive may be able to secure their agreement to become the champion – some suggest this is when the DEN starts to become credible.

The key is to remember the purpose for having a champion – it is often their seniority and name that can persuade the 'doubters' of the business case for employing disabled people, which can often be other senior employees. Because of their position the senior champion can often give powerful and influential messages about the organisation's vision when it comes to diversity and human difference. They can often break through cultural blocks.

## Case History

### BT

In addition to a network, each diversity strand in BT also has a Champion whose responsibility is to provide a focal point for discussion around the potential of and, sometimes, the issues faced by members of that minority group.

The Champion also works with the network to maximise the positive impact their members can create by giving them an opportunity to present their unique perspectives to the business where it can be built into, for example, its product development or marketing strategy. They also provide leadership on diversity issues, connecting BT's networks and business so that they work closely together to create solutions in the attraction, recruitment and retention of talent as well as in how the business brings its products and services to its equally diverse customers.

The Champion also has an important role to play in celebrating success. Acknowledging the efforts of people who are advocates of inclusion at work and in their communities is a great opportunity for any organisation to recognise success and talent both at the personal and business level.

“

I was honoured to be asked to be Business Sponsor for the network. I believe, aside from the humanity aspect, that it makes good business sense to ensure that all employees, regardless of disability or caring responsibilities, have no barriers to realising their talent and full potential.

The key to any network is to ensure that its objectives are aligned to that of the business. They need to be specific, relevant and, crucially, measured over time.

”

Michael Kirkwood,  
Country Officer UK,  
Citi



The chair of the BBC Disabled Staff Forum has the ear of the Director General and head of HR and as a result the Forum can express its concerns at the highest level.

People will accord to you the authority which you accord to yourself. Never think small and never be apologetic about asking for things on behalf of the group. But above all, be constructive. If you don't like what's being proposed have a well-argued alternative up your sleeve. Don't allow your network to become 'whinge-central'. And gather around you a well-motivated and talented group of people.

Geoff Adams-Spink,  
Chair, BBC Disabled Staff Forum



## Secure organisational support

However effective your high-level champion, it will be practically impossible to run a successful DEN without the commitment of other parts of the organisation including, among others, IT and marketing colleagues, those responsible for product design and certainly those responsible for customer services.

A DEN requires the commitment and engagement of a number of colleagues, many of whom will be undertaking tasks outside of their day job. The best way of securing and sustaining that commitment is to be very clear, from day one, of the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders. Crucially, it is important for someone in the organisation to 'own' the need to make these clear. That person could be the chair, the co-ordinator, the network manager or the senior champion.

A partnership approach to the setting up of the DEN works best. This is not always easy and may prove challenging depending on:

- the 'trigger' for the DENs establishment;
- the level of disability confidence in the organisation;
- the skills and competencies of the key stakeholders;
- the ease to which it has been possible to build transparent values.

### Case History

#### Motability Operations

The Disability Working Group wanted members to take the key messages from meetings and feed them back to their own business areas – to pollinate the rest of the business with news of the latest disability related initiatives occurring within the group and the company as a whole. Members of the network are sent a briefing document after each meeting to ensure that this message is consistent and clear. This process also empowers group members and raises their profiles within the business.



Since getting involved with the disAbility Network in 1997 (when I came to the then Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions), I have seen a notable and positive change in how the senior teams relate to our work. Crucially, the diversity and human resources teams not only acknowledge our role, and the value of our support to disabled people, but follow up actions in a timely fashion – it's a real win-win.

Janet Burton, Chair of disAbility Network,  
Department of Communities and Local  
Government





Sometimes networks will go through challenging periods. It may relate to mistrust of the leadership of the DEN. It may relate to mistrust of management. Typical causes include:

- unclear purposes of the DEN;
- unclear values;
- volunteers feeling undervalued (especially when dealing with any difficult experiences of individual disabled employees);
- employees in HR/diversity department feeling undervalued especially when working through an action plan of change;
- people stepping on each others' toes as a result of fuzzy boundaries about who was responsible for what in terms of the organisation becoming more disability confident.

If these challenges remain unchecked over time, they can damage the reputation of the DEN and ultimately the appetite of the organisation for accommodating disabled people as employees and as customers.

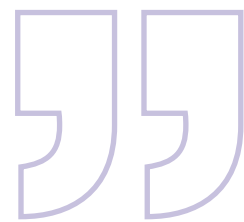
Be alert. If something feels wrong, then it probably is. Follow the systematic approach and remember the characteristics of a good network:

- a strong sense of purpose;
- a burning desire to find the win/win between stakeholder groups;
- a firm commitment to deal with controversial issues.

All of these things will be helped by having done the work to establish clear roles and responsibilities between key players.



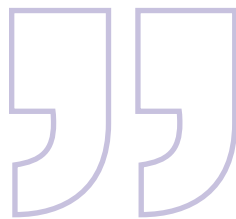
It is really important to mine the contributions of everyone involved in the network. Speak to others, listen to what they are telling you – we don't know what we don't know – and always have an open mind. Everyone will have something to offer and the mark of a successful network is one that can accommodate everyone's contribution.



Marie Ratcliff,  
Business Manager,  
Corporate Support  
Department, City of London Police



As a founder member of our forum set up and run by staff with disabilities – I've learned that the benefits of creating a network far outweigh the hard work involved. Six years on from our start-up the climate has changed significantly. My advice? Be proactive and strategic and get management support and back-up for your network. It's important, it can be done and it does make a real difference in bringing about change.



Margaret Eccleston,  
Secretary to the Charity  
Commission's Disability Forum

### Case History

#### Lloyds TSB

Being acknowledged and accepted by the business is the cornerstone of any successful staff network. Without business buy-in, a network will not truly permeate into the organisation. To get business buy-in, a network needs to have a clear purpose and be able to show where it fits in and how it adds value.

Lloyds TSB has developed a formal operating framework for their staff networks. Each year the networks work with the diversity team to produce a business case setting out their plans for the coming year and reiterating their purpose and aims. This framework helps the business to understand what to expect and where the networks can add value – imperative for ensuring their continued presence and success.

For a number of years each of the bank's networks was funded by different parts of the business. Some also sought out business sponsors to provide additional funds. Senior executives were often approached from a number of different angles to commit funds, and often did so on a 'first come first served' basis.

A full scale review of the banks networks was carried out in 2004 and the business agreed that if the organisation was truly serious about diversity, and about supporting the networks, then it should formally commit a central budget to them.

## Develop the business plan

### Structure of the DEN

In developing a structure for your DEN, remember that its desired outputs will be more likely if the DEN is 'embedded' in the organisation with legitimacy and some kind of formal status.

This may enhance credibility and legitimacy. Naturally it means working in closer partnership with the HR/diversity teams and can sometimes assist in securing budget allocation.

Either way, delivery will be easier with clear lines of communication and accountability. Some key questions to consider, when determining the DEN's structure include:

- Given the level of resources available, how many people need to take on responsibilities and what will they be?
- What are the benefits of informal and formal structures?
- How might it be possible to build a DEN so that everyone has the opportunity of engaging?
- How might it be possible to include employees who work across a network of locations, branches, offices? Is there merit in considering a regional structure? Is it best to develop a web-based or virtual network?
- If the organisation has a number of sites should the committee alternate its meetings between the head office and the regions?
- How can the organisation ensure that virtual or remote workers feel included?

- What are the options for international organisations and overseas networks?

### Roles and responsibilities

In terms of how the work gets done, it will be important to think through who does what? Consider the level of interaction required between the network co-ordinator, other volunteers involved and the network managers or HR professionals.

Networks may also require an amount of administrative support for certain tasks. It can really help to ensure that accurate and up to date contact can be made with the members as well as undertaking other activities such as event management.

The grid overleaf is not designed to be a definitive guide to the roles of key players but provides a framework for the roles that are required to establish or refresh a DEN.

## Framework of roles and responsibilities

Members	Co-ordinators and other Steering Group members (may come from any department in the organisation)	Network Managers (Human Resource/ Diversity personnel)	Ambassadors or Champions
Participate	Draw up the business plan for Network	Set overall diversity strategic plan for the organisation.	Provide leadership support to the network
Engage	Ensure it supports the strategic intent of the organisation	Ensure Policy, Practice and Procedure is in line with current thinking of existing disabled employees drawn from the Disabled Network, and other means	Champion the concept across the organisation
Support the purpose, aims and objectives	Develop the constitution	Implement strategic plan	Display real interest and a desire to be kept apprised of developments
Provide informal support and encouragement to other members	Shape the activities	Ensure organisation complies with equality legislation	Attend and speak at key events
	Monitor progress	Provide advice and support to line managers	Challenge other senior executives to promote the values of the network
	Measure success		
	Report on progress		
	Ensure a partnership with HR/Diversity department is nurtured		

## Proposed activities

When determining the activities of the DEN it is important to go back to its original aims and purposes although these can change over time.

If the network is primarily about the promotion of disability as an important aspect of a diverse workforce then the core activities will be promotional ones such as events or seminars.

If the network is primarily about improving recruitment practices then the core activity may be to establish a working group to look at what is and is not working and develop an action plan to improve.

If the DEN is about support for disabled employees then the core activities will include some that assist disabled employees to develop personal strategies for success.

## Case History

### Accenture

When Rob Williams was transferred to Accenture from Barclays, together with 700 of his colleagues, in 2004, he wanted to build on his experience in helping Barclays to set up their own Disability Network.

He joined the committee of Accenture's emerging network – Accent on Enablement, one of several employee networks – and went about assisting the task of improving the visibility of disability across the company. Rob is now the Network Lead for Accent on Enablement.

The objectives of Accent on Enablement are 'to educate the Accenture population on disability issues and to provide appropriate support for employees with all types of disabilities or support requirements, thereby enhancing Accenture's ability to attract, retain and promote employees regardless of disability'.

Recognising early that it would be important to focus on a few key areas, the Enablement network prioritised its plans:

- Extend the pilot career progression/personal development course for disabled employees.
- Participate in the Employers' Forum 'Disability Standard' allowing them to benchmark against other organisations and identify areas for improvement;
- Increase membership from 40 to 100.
- Increase the number of events and communications it delivers.



Spend some time looking at the ‘triggers’ behind the network. Is it primarily a network of and for disabled employees to share information and support including how to progress their career? Is it to help diversity managers look for evidence about the actual experiences of your disabled employees? Is it a forum for staff who are the parents of a disabled child who want to help the organisation improve its track record on work-life balance policies and procedures? Is it to help the organisation ensure its customer service policies are appropriate and well informed.

The chances are it will be a mixture of at least some of these and other ‘triggers’, none of which is more right than another. But the mix and weighting of priorities will determine the direction of travel and it is essential to maintain consensus as you build your portfolio of activities.

Paul Zickel, Chair,  
Civil Service Disability Network, and  
Department for Children, Schools and Families



## Resource and budget requirements

The two major resources in running a network are people and time. Thinking through ways of attracting good volunteers to the network is very important – as is thinking of ways you can reward members through their work appraisals and other incentives.

The success of many networks is down to the hard work – in addition to their normal duties – of a small number of willing volunteers. Sometimes this work can be unrecognised although some organisations now choose to acknowledge this activity in performance reviews. Similarly, some organisations allow network members with specific responsibilities time off to dedicate to the group.

Many organisations provide funds for established networks with sound business plans and well structured committees. The funds can meet the costs of events, external consultancy support, speaker expenses, travel and communications.

## Membership requirements

The network will need to consider the merits of exclusive or inclusive membership. Exclusive networks are networks in which the members all have personal experience of living with a disability, inclusive networks are those which welcome everyone with an interest. There are pros and cons to both.

In exclusive networks, disabled people who feel uncomfortable about openly declaring their disability may be more inclined to attend meetings. Meetings can encourage more open discussion of personal experiences.

On the other hand, some colleagues may see this as insular or divisive. Indeed, an exclusive network may run counter to the overall aims and purposes of the DEN, especially if the primary aim is to help the organisation to be more disability confident.

In inclusive networks, activities are more likely to broaden participants' understanding of disability discrimination. By enabling non-disabled colleagues to access information and support, they can foster real commitment for change as disabled and non-disabled employees work alongside each other.



One compromise could be to have some activities exclusive and others inclusive. This will help to ensure that all stakeholders can continue to sponsor and champion the group.

Either way, it is essential to think through ways of encouraging disabled people to participate as chairs, co-chairs or in other positions on the committee.

## Confidentiality policies

Related to the issue of exclusivity is the need to consider confidentiality policies. For many often complex reasons, some people may not feel comfortable in joining the network unless there are guarantees that they will not be identified outside the group as having a disability.

There are various ways that networks can foster a safe environment by, for example: setting out a confidentiality policy; holding some meetings externally; using closed/anonymous e-mail lists; omitting named individuals from minutes; and setting up an internet group e-mail or external website.

## Case History

### PricewaterhouseCoopers

When first planning to establish a PwC disability network, it was decided to try and adopt as structured an approach to the project as possible, even if that meant there could be a long period between the first meeting and the launch of the network across the firm.

The firm set up a small focus group initially tasked with looking at lessons to be learned from its other – already established – people networks and from other major employers with disability networks.

One key best practice message appeared to be that the firm should consult with as many of its disabled staff as possible in advance of formally launching the network. Accordingly, their initial internal communications throughout the firm invited staff to attend one of a series of group meetings held around the country to discuss the possibility of establishing a disability network. As a result of these discussion group meetings, over 160 staff had an opportunity both to put forward their views on how a network might best help PwC become more disability-confident and to confirm their desire to be involved from the outset.



## Market the network to employees and communicate across the organisation

Thinking about the reasons why people may want to join is an important activity in itself. Marketing the benefits of joining a DEN must be done in the context of a genuine understanding of the day to day experience of having a disability at work. For example, those who are newly diagnosed with a long term health condition may be feeling depressed about their personal circumstances and unable to see what use it would be to meet with others who may not have the same particular disability as themselves.

It is therefore essential to think through the right type of communication channels and right type of materials. The effective marketing of the DEN can assist key workers in securing the support of a range of other employees.

### Case History

#### Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

DisNet is the network aimed at providing a formal channel for communication with other disabled staff. It also acts as a channel of communication with management to help develop and promote diversity and equality policies. The activities of the Defra networks have support from the highest level and Helen Ghosh, Defra's Permanent Secretary and Diversity Champion, has encouraged managers to support staff involvement. Tackling inequality is at the very heart of Defra's work. Defra is committed to creating an environment where everyone feels valued and where the workforce achieves their full potential.

### Case History

#### Barclays

Reach is Barclays employee network for disabled colleagues and provides a forum for ideas, networking, self-development, socialising and promoting change as well as being the collective voice of disabled people in Barclays.

Barclays vision is to create an inclusive culture where colleagues respect and value people of all backgrounds.

Reach helps Barclays realise this vision by supporting and integrating colleagues with disabilities and helping to provide them with the tools and confidence to get the most from their career. Reach is run by colleagues for colleagues and has Regional Leaders throughout the UK to co-ordinate events on a local basis.

Events have included social activities, skills based workshops (CV writing, influencing skills etc) and forums to identify issues which are then fed into CEO John Varley's disability listening group.



Treating and valuing our people as individuals is vital to the success of our diversity and business strategy. We are firmly committed to understanding and responding to the needs of our people with disabilities. Fair and equitable treatment is simply the right thing to do. Valuing diversity increases employee engagement, commitment and loyalty, positively impacting on the business. Our ability to empathise with both clients and colleagues will contribute to our success as the professional services firm of choice.



Sarah Churchman,  
Director of Diversity and Inclusion,  
PricewaterhouseCoopers

Raising excitement and interest in the DEN while promoting the strategic intent of the organisation is a win/win. There will be a number of ways that this can be done depending on the resources available.

## Marketing and communication

Here are some examples of ways in which the DEN can be marketed across the organisation:

- A launch event hosted by the champion and using the build-up to prime all employees and support services;
- Interviews, articles, adverts and news items in employee newsletters, in-house magazines, email briefings, payslip messages, staff induction/recruitment packs, employee noticeboards, intranet/internet etc;
- Briefings perhaps by the champion to gain and retain the support of senior managers;
- Leaflets and other briefing material about disability and diversity and how it contributes to business success may be distributed to the workforce;
- Other marketing tools such as posters, mugs, mouse-mats and pens.

Specific attention may need to be given to attracting disabled employees to

engage with the network. In addition to the above, this might include:

- a dedicated internet e-mail group and/or website;
- media coverage in the HR trade press;
- a presence at the organisation's job fairs.

### Activities for disabled members

Clearly these are key if the DEN is going to be seen as effective by disabled staff. There are a number of activities that a network can undertake to ensure that its disabled members are being supported including:

- Advice on disclosing impairment to a line manager;
- Advice on where to seek external support or help with managing a new impairment;
- Personal development training;
- Advice about access or adjustment issues;
- Help on preparing for promotion and overcoming potential objections;
- Advice on how to deal with difficult line-managers.

In all of the above, consider what the network can do and when it is right to refer elsewhere. It is important to ensure inappropriate support or advice is not given by the network and that it does not stray into areas where network members do not have the necessary skills and experience.

### Case History

#### Lloyds TSB

When Access, the Lloyds TSB network, introduced a Yahoo email group they hoped it would be a useful way for members to get in contact. But they didn't anticipate it also becoming one of their most valuable tools to influence the working environment!

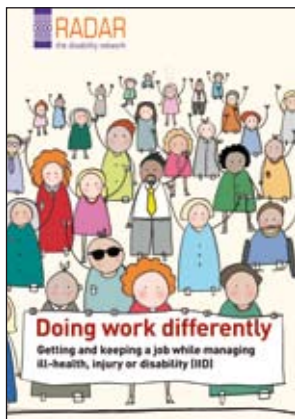
Members are able to contact Access when and where it is convenient for them. They are far more likely to tell someone about problems when they are current rather than waiting for a survey. Some members also find it easier to talk to other disabled staff about issues.

Access put a strong focus on career development and one of the key ways they do this is through their website and newsletters, where they feature testimonials and signpost members to the wealth of training and development support available through the bank's corporate university.

In particular, they promote the personal development programme for disabled staff – a great way to help members get out of a rut, kick-start their careers and switch on to development issues.

“

When you acquire a disability for the first time it is often a very lonely experience. People need time to make sense of how they feel about their impairment and whether they want to identify with others. Others who may have had their disability for a long time may not wish to meet with and network with others, simply because they share the same, or different disability. Be patient with potential members and make sure you build a programme that really does match the experiences of disabled people at work – that the barriers to inclusion are usually about attitudes, policy, practice and procedure as well as the physical environment. Barriers at work have little to do with a medical condition.



And make sure your human resource department has plenty of copies of *Doing Work Differently*. (Produced by RADAR, *Doing Work Differently* is written by disabled people for disabled people wanting to secure and remain in employment).

Phil Friend, Partner, Minty and Friend,  
Associate of Employers' Forum on  
Disability and Chair of RADAR

”

## Develop support and succession plans for the network co-ordinators

Network chairpersons, committee members, co-ordinators and managers often work tirelessly to achieve wins for disabled employees and the employer. This can be a great way of developing skills and confidence and can add to mentoring and leadership skills but it will bring challenges too. It is therefore important for the DEN to consider the need to develop support mechanisms for the key players.

Support mechanisms might include:

- Specific training and support in, for example, project management, event management and presentation skills;
- Ring-fencing time to devote to DEN activities. Discuss what 'feels fair' to the chair/co-ordinator and to the organisation.
- Recognising the effect of DEN activities on the competencies of those involved and building those into performance appraisal mechanisms. Again, discuss what 'feels fair' to the chair/co-ordinator and to the organisation.

### Succession planning

Nobody is indispensable. Indeed, in any job, we have a duty to ensure that our contributions remain helpful and don't get stale. We have a duty to notice when we have done everything we can in a process of change and when we should move on, feeling good about our legacy while creating the space for others to take our work forward.

Over time, a DEN should take a look at what the right structures might be to support succession planning. For example, some DENs have rules about the length of time within which employees may be a volunteer, chairperson or co-ordinator.

Consider how to nurture authentic and genuine representation. It may be helpful to adopt shadow, vice-chair or co-chair arrangements.

### Case History

#### Citi

The Citi disABILITY network has a formal structure of two co-chairs supported by a steering committee of 12 people. Each of those 12 people align themselves to a specific area such as arranging events, managing the budget, communications and so on. Co-chairs typically serve for 12-18 months with each new co-chair working alongside an experienced partner for at least 6 months before that co-chair stands down.

In October 2007 when the then chair stated her intention to stand down, her replacement was already a strong and committed member of the steering committee. It was clear she had the skills and energy to take on the co-chair role. When the network was set up a significant amount of time was spent on developing job descriptions with clear roles and responsibilities; this provided the new co-chair with the necessary information to understand the responsibilities and typical time commitments required by the co-chair.

“

For anyone starting out as a network co-ordinator, I would recommend that they develop clear boundaries between their role, and that of the role of Human Resources staff. For example, when an employee has been newly diagnosed with a disability, the network can provide valuable support by introducing them to colleagues in a similar situation and in helping the employee understand policies, processes and practical solutions to individual needs. However, it is necessary to delineate those things that the network can support with and those things that are best done by the Human Resource function.

”

Catherine Bennett,  
Risk Management,  
Citi

“

I had the pleasure of heading-up the over-arching Civil Service Disability Network for four years. I had set it up and nurtured its development and brought together the network-leads from across government departments. After four years I chose to stand down as it needed fresh leadership and a new direction. It isn't always easy to move away from something you have put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into – but it is proper to do so. I am proud to be associated with the growth of a vibrant network of public sector networks.

”

Paul Willgoss, Chair of the Health and Safety Executive Disabled Employee Network and formally chair of the CSDN

### Case History

#### Jobcentre Plus

JCP felt it was important to ensure that those who invest their time in the network above and beyond the member level are given recognition from a strategic level down to local level. In order to formalise the recognition, JCP have incorporated 'network roles' into staff 'key work objectives' which are agreed between staff members and their line manager. This has proven useful for progression and identifying potential successors for roles within the network, as it forms a record of the roles staff have played especially where they have 'acted up' performing roles associated with higher grades.



## Maintain, develop and review the network

Without attendance to a basic maintenance plan, all the hard work that is put into establishing a DEN can easily go to waste. The network should be reviewed every 12 months.

Like ensuring a car goes through its annual MOT, the DEN will benefit from being monitored and measured in its progress to ensure it continues to flourish in future years.

DENs may want to develop series of feedback mechanisms so that the DEN doesn't veer off course. For example, to:

- Use feedback mechanisms to hear directly from members;
- Every now and then consult with members more formally about what they see as its value;
- Conduct a regular annual review with the committee and the organisation. Consider the use of an external consultant to audit its success;
- Provide an opportunity for champions and HR experts to feedback;
- Give other employees the opportunity to feedback – maybe by email, memo or intranet survey;
- Measure the numbers of disabled employees and others involved;
- Publicise the results.

### Case History

#### Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

Given that attendance at CPS Disabled Staff Network meetings, at one stage, was not high (with sometimes only between 8 – 25 members out of 8,400 staff), a fresh look at member engagement was initiated when extra resources were secured. This was used to develop a large publicity campaign with new posters and promotional materials, a revised branding for the network and a conference.





The Home Office Disability Support Network (HODS) plays a crucial role in the Home Office and Agencies supporting disabled staff and advising managers. Our input into policy formulation and development is key to ensuring and maintaining a fair and inclusive workplace for all.



Sue Saunders, Co-ordinator,  
Home Office Disability Support Network

### Case History

#### BT

BT worked collaboratively with its 10 people networks to review their governance structures and to simplify this into one single, agreed governance structure and election process. The benefits of this approach have been felt across the networks; governance is much more transparent and less ambiguous.

Committee members report they have more time to focus on their core agenda and the networks have a growing reputation for professionalism. The networks also produce 'business' plans and objectives each year so that members not only have a clear perspective on what will be achieved on their behalf but are able to play an active role in determining it. New Chairs and Committee members are elected into post by the whole membership of the network in a smooth and independent process, ensuring that nominations are drawn from the widest pool of talent and are demonstrably fair and open.

These posts are now hotly contested with people seeing the potential to create real opportunities for their members whilst also developing on a personal level.

Maintain, develop and review the network

## Conclusion

### Conclusion

### Having a plan

This Guide was put together by talking to individuals who have set up purposeful Disabled Employee Networks – to the benefit of disabled employees and the organisations for whom they work.

All of them were keen to offer their experiences so that others going down the same path need not reinvent the wheel. In fact, the majority had at some time or another sought advice from other organisations to find out what works and what doesn't.

The primary messages, in building a confident and successful network, are to:

- Create a sharp sense of purpose;
- Foster a burning desire to find the win/win between stakeholder groups;
- Nurture the commitment to deal with controversial issues and barriers – draw in people who display behaviours that encourage the celebration of human difference and have the tenacity to solve problems.

With those three values – and by following the Ultimate 10 Point Action Plan – you can create a DEN that provides meaningful activities to help disabled employees flourish at work and to enable the organisation to become 'disability confident'.

### It's a people thing

Living with ill-health, injury or disability is often challenging and sometimes upsetting. And yet if you talk to these people they stress how important it is for them to stay in work and how much they want to deliver in their job and for their organisation.

We came across individuals who work tirelessly to set up Disabled Employee Networks – encouraging people to join, putting on events and promoting the network. Yet it was the one-to-one dialogue which seemed to be of enormous help – working out what adjustment may be made, attitudinally or practically – finding the win/win for the person as well as the organisation.

It is this interaction – the sharing of personal stories, and anecdotes, about how to keep positive during a very difficult period, that is often the most important aspect of a Disabled Employee Network. It is certainly the one that co-ordinators find hard to quantify when describing outcomes.

Getting the adjustments you need is ultimately a people thing – and networks can help people ask positively and with confidence what would help them most to deliver at work.

# What next – who can help?

## Kate Nash Associates (KNA)

Kate Nash Associates is:

- promoting the expansion of DENs to help employers become disability confident;
- supporting organisations to learn from each other in the establishment of DENs; and
- helping them exploit the opportunities that already exist in their establishment.

KNA offer a hub of good practice advice, support and training in how to set up and establish vibrant networks of people that contribute to the organisation's aims.

KNA:

- publishes best practice information in the establishment of Employee Networks;
- provides bespoke consultancy and advice to organisations that run employee networks;
- brings Employee Network Co-ordinators together;
- provides mentoring services to key players involved in the establishment of Employee Networks;
- puts co-ordinators in touch with each other.

Tel 07904 018939  
Email [kate@katenashassociates.com](mailto:kate@katenashassociates.com)  
Web [www.katenashassociates.com](http://www.katenashassociates.com)

## Employers' Forum on Disability

Employers' Forum on Disability (EFD) is the authoritative voice on disability as it affects business. For over 15 years EFD has been making it easier for business to employ disabled people and serve disabled customers.

With over 400 members, from the public and private sectors, EFD recognises how sharing best practice is vital if business is to become disability confident. EFD enable business to do this with a number of products and services – a variety of events and easy to use publications such as the 'Line manager guide'. It also has a bi-annual benchmarking tool, the Employers' Forum Disability Standard, which looks at disability as it affects every area of a business – an invaluable yardstick to becoming disability-confident.

Nutmeg House  
60 Gainsford Street  
London SE1 2NY

Tel	020 7403 3020
Fax	020 7403 0404
Minicom	020 7403 0040
email	<a href="mailto:enquiries@efd.org.uk">enquiries@efd.org.uk</a>
web	<a href="http://www.efd.org.uk">www.efd.org.uk</a>

## The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)

RADAR is the leading disability rights campaigning organisation. It is a pan-disability umbrella body of 400 disability organisations of and for disabled people.

RADAR, through its Doing Life Differently programme, is building an ever larger pool of examples of how to 'do life differently' and sharing them through various networks including employee networks. RADAR advises policy makers and organisations on how to support disabled people in career development and progression and campaigns for improved independent living support: social care, health, housing support and independence.

RADAR welcomes Disabled Employee Networks into membership which includes subscription to its newsletter, New Bulletin, seven times a year. Network co-ordinators are advised to subscribe in order to hear how equalities legislation is evolving.

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250 City Road  
London EC1V 8AF

Tel	020 7250 3222
Fax	020 7250 0212
Minicom	020 7250 4119
email	<a href="mailto:radar@radar.org.uk">radar@radar.org.uk</a>
web	<a href="http://www.radar.org.uk">www.radar.org.uk</a>

## Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The Commission is working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society. EHRC covers race, gender and disability and also takes on responsibility for the other aspects of equality: age, sexual orientation and religion or belief, as well as human rights.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission helpline gives information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues. Helpline staff have been specially trained to provide this service. You can contact them by telephone, text phone, letter, email or fax. If you are contacting them by post about an issue for the first time, please do not send any documents with your letter. They will come back to you to let you know what documents they will need to see.

If you would like to contact the Commission in a language other than English, please do so by using any of the ways below and explain what language you would like to use. They will arrange to contact you in your language of choice as soon as possible.

Below you will find the helpline addresses and contact numbers available to you. If however you wish to submit an enquiry please use the web enquiry form.

The Helpline offices do not accept visitors and only provide a phone and correspondence service. They do not provide face to face advice.

### Phone numbers and addresses

#### England

Equality and Human Rights Commission  
Helpline  
Freepost RRLL-GHUX-CTRX  
Arndale House  
Arndale Centre  
Manchester  
M4 3EQ

England main number	0845 604 6610
England textphone	0845 604 6620
England fax	0845 604 6630

Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri 9:00 am-5:00 pm;  
Wed 9:00 am-8:00 pm (last call taken  
at 7:45pm)

#### Wales

Equality and Human Rights Commission  
Helpline Wales  
Freepost RRLR-UEYB-UYZL  
3rd Floor  
3 Callaghan Square  
Cardiff  
CF10 5BT

Wales main number	0845 604 8810
Wales textphone	0845 604 8820
Wales fax	0845 604 8830

Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri 9:00 am-5:00 pm;  
Wed 9:00 am-8:00 pm (last call taken  
at 7:45pm)

#### Scotland

Equality and Human Rights Commission  
Helpline Scotland  
Freepost RRLL-GYLB-UJTA  
The Optima Building  
58 Robertson Street  
Glasgow  
G2 8DU

Scotland Main	0845 604 5510
Scotland Textphone	0845 604 5520
Scotland Fax	0845 604 5530

Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri 9:00 am-5:00 pm;  
Wed 9:00 am-8:00 pm (last call taken  
at 7:45pm)

#### Call charges

Calls to 0845 numbers are charged at Local call rate tariff if you are using a BT landline. Call charges from other telephone operators and mobile networks will vary. To find out exactly how much you are paying for 0845 calls you should consult your telephone provider or their latest published tariffs.

**Direct Enquiries Limited**

The Nationwide Disabled Access Register provides access information for disabled people and accessibility details for parents with pushchairs.

Direct Enquiries Ltd  
Amber House  
Market Street  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1JB  
Tel 01344 360101  
Email customerservices@directenquiries.com  
Web www.directenquiries.com

**Disability Matters Limited**

DML offers a wide range of solutions, including vocational rehabilitation, expert witness and personal development training.

Disability Matters Limited  
Berkeley House  
Rectory Hall  
West Tytherley  
Salisbury SP5 1NF  
Tel 01794 341824  
Email info@disabilitymatters.com  
Web www.disabilitymatters.com

**Freeney Williams Limited**

Freeney Williams is one of the UK's leading consultancies in the field of disability and diversity.

Freeney Williams Limited  
37 Buckingham Road  
Brighton BN1 3RP  
Tel 01273 327715  
Fax 01273 327715  
Email enquiries@freeneywilliams.com  
Web www.freeneywilliams.com

**Future Inclusion Limited**

Future Inclusion specialises in helping organisations to develop strategies to employ and provide better service to people in parts of the community that they find it difficult to reach.

Future Inclusion Limited  
PO Box 5672  
Milton Keynes MK15 9WZ  
Tel +44 (0) 1908 665850  
Email mail@futureinclusion.com  
Web www.futureinclusion.com

**Goss Consultancy Ltd**

Goss Consultancy is one of the UK's leading providers of training and consultancy in all aspects of disability confidence. Goss Consultancy is an ISO 9001 Certified Company.

Nick Goss  
Goss Consultancy Ltd  
Ground Floor, Juniper Court  
Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3ET  
Tel 01442 877 117  
Email nick.goss@gossconsultancy.com  
Web www.gossconsultancy.com

### Minty and Friend

Minty & Friend provides consultancy and training services to both the private and public sector in relation to equal opportunities and diversity.

483 Green Lanes,  
London N13 4BS  
Tel 07793 111256  
Email [office@mintyandfriend.com](mailto:office@mintyandfriend.com)  
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Reasonable adjustments service –  
workplace disability adjustments

Unit 4G,  
Sundial Court,  
Barnsbury Lane,  
Tolworth, KT5 9RN  
Tel 020 8337 9122  
E [caseinfo@disability-adjustments.co.uk](mailto:caseinfo@disability-adjustments.co.uk)

### Dining with a Difference

Minty & Friend lead the highly acclaimed dining event, which provides a relaxed a social environment for senior executives to discuss disability and diversity.

Tel 07950 027959  
E [admin@diningwithadifference.com](mailto:admin@diningwithadifference.com)  
Web [www.diningwithadifference.com](http://www.diningwithadifference.com)

### My+ Consulting

Helen Cooke helps organisations understand and address the issues around disability by focusing on the potential that exists amongst disabled employees.

Helen Cooke  
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3 Clarence Court  
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Tel 01753 360018  
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web [www.myplusconsulting.com](http://www.myplusconsulting.com)

### Proudlock Associates

Proudlock Associates is a pan-disability and access consultancy service. It has a track record in working with large and diverse organisations supporting them with their disability/diversity agenda.

Proudlock Associates  
PO Box 55248  
London N22 9DY  
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This publication was made possible by a considerable number of people sharing their own experiences of Disabled Employee Networks, as well as their predictions of the future development of DENs.

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## Motability Operations



**Kate Nash OBE** has been an human rights activist for more than 20 years. She's kind of interesting though in that she's not a scary activist. In fact, her ability to persuade, cajole and encourage change of hearts and minds can appear imperceptible. Appear imperceptible! Make sense of that. But that is what Kate does best – makes sense of seemingly scary and complex ideas and situations. She made sense of her own situation when arthritis knocked her sideways in her teens and has been helping disabled people move forward with their lives ever since. Not only that. When it comes to disability, Kate is one of a handful of people that has the attention of the UK business sector. Her work with the Employers' Forum on Disability and Kate Nash Associates has helped enable a rich and ongoing connection between employers and disabled people.

Kate is a busy woman. She provides consultancy in how organisations can develop their disability strategies and sets up great networks – what she calls Ultimate People Networks. She is also Non-Executive Director of the Disability and Carers Service at the Department of Work and Pensions, Non-Executive Director at Remploy and political/diversity advisor to the Royal Mail and Direct Enquiries Ltd.

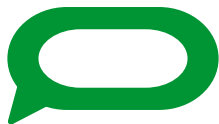
The very wonderful work on disabled employee networks is the latest stage in Kate's mission to make sure that disabled people are in a position to take a lead in the workplace, community and in their own lives.

Kate exists on fresh vegetables, Sauvignon Blanc, jewellery and not much sleep at all. In her spare time, she strives to see beauty in everything.



Drawing on research into 50 of the UK's existing networks of disabled employees, from across the public, private and not-for-profit sector, the **Disabled Employee Networks (DEN) – a practical guide** establishes the business case for a DEN and sets out the practical steps for establishing and maintaining one.

Using real case histories, it describes why DENs exist and how they might benefit your organisation. Most importantly, it demonstrates how to develop a systematic approach to developing a DEN – one that will both enrich the lives of the members and the business of the employer.



**kate nash associates**  
ultimate people networks

'Disabled Employee Networks are integral to an organisation achieving disability confidence. They enable the sharing of best practice. They empower disabled staff enabling them to air and share views. They allow non-disabled staff members to benefit from disabled employees' experience.'

This Guide offers practical advice, expert help and a systematic approach to creating your own DEN.'

Susan Scott-Parker OBE,  
Chief Executive,  
Employers' Forum on Disability



'Employee networks build confidence, knowledge and mutual support.'

There is huge learning about networks in organisations in the voluntary sector where disabled people share experiences and drive the agenda. This guide distills that, going to the heart of why and how to set up a network and make it effective in your organisation.'

Liz Sayce OBE,  
Chief Executive,  
RADAR

