

Some people are disabled, get over it!



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Paul Deemer head of diversity and inclusion at NHS Employers highlights the importance of challenging cultural and attitudinal barriers that stop so many people with disabilities in the workplace fulfilling their true potential each day.

I love a good slogan – don't you? The Stonewall slogan 'Some people are gay, get over It' when it was launched a few years ago was thought by some to be too brazen or in your face. I remember talking to people at the time and them saying things to me like "I'm worried it's going to put people off the whole LGBT and diversity agenda" or "Don't you think some people might be offended by it?". I disagreed and still disagree to this day. For me, it was a great example of what I would call being bold and just being brave enough to put yourself out there, challenging people to challenge their own thinking and face up to some of the discomfort that we now know people actually need if they are going to shift that thinking. Some people are gay..so get over it!

The fight for LGBT equality in the workplace continues, and the NHS continues to champion the voice of our LGBT staff as part of that fight. But we are also trying to champion the cause of other less heard groups and voices. Currently this involves us supporting and educating the system around the whole area of disability and introducing a new system-wide measurement tool to do this, the [NHS Workforce Disability Equality Standard](#).

The shift of focus onto disability specifically has been an interesting one for me personally as it has shown me once again how important it is that we remind ourselves of the fights and struggles that many people with disabilities have encountered over the last 30 years at least and even beyond. In the same way that the Stonewall campaign took inspiration from the memory of the Stonewall riots in America in 1969, the most vocal in the current disability movement take inspiration from those who campaigned in the 1980s and 1990s on the slogan of 'Nothing about us without us'. But it has also shown me that I think we need to step beyond that sloganeering and begin to really challenge those cultural and attitudinal barriers that stop so many people with disabilities in the workplace fulfilling their true potential each day.

The way to do this is multi-faceted. First, I think we need to recognise and celebrate those people and organisations who are confident enough to speak up and speak out about the rights of disabled people in the workplace. People like those celebrated in the [Shaw Trust Disabled Power 100 list](#) and organisations like [Purple Space](#) and the [Business Disability Forum](#). Also, within the NHS, the growing numbers of disabled staff networks emerging across the country and the dedicated individuals who organise and facilitate these groups. Plus, the thousands of staff with

disabilities who quietly and diligently just get on with doing their work day in and day out, serving the British public.

Secondly, we need to create safe spaces and platforms for those networks and individuals to be heard within their organisations. The networks are a good and necessary thing, but we then need to allow the leaders and other staff within the organisation to hear the voices and hear the stories of the members of those networks.

Thirdly and most importantly, we need to question and scrutinise the decision makers and policy makers themselves within the systems within which we work. We need to challenge them as to whether the systems and processes that they have engineered and which they oversee are both inclusive and accessible. We also need to ensure that we have the capacity, capability and confidence to make the often small [reasonable adjustments](#) that people with disabilities need, in order to make their working lives easier. This should be a challenge to all managers and leaders within every strata of our organisations.

The disabled community is a broad church and incorporates a wide range of different needs and adaptations if they are to truly feel part of our organisations as clients, customers or as employees. We know in the NHS that around 20 per cent of our staff classify themselves as having a disability of some sort. One fifth of our workforce! In an era of workforce shortages and increasing healthcare demands, this is not something we can ignore. To use a good slogan (because you know I like them), this is more than an elephant in the room – this is an elephant on your sofa! So hear this please, some people are disabled, get over it!

Find out more about [disability in the NHS](#) and the [NHS Workforce Disability Equality Standard](#).

This blog was published to support [International Day of People with Disabilities](#)