

# Able@Imperial Disability Awareness and Support Panel – 26 February 2021

Questions from the Teams chat + answers from the panel

**Lots of interesting thoughts there. A survey recently reported in the Financial Times found that 42 per cent of UK employers said the pandemic had made them more hesitant to employ disabled workers, stating concerns around supporting them properly. How can we reassure staff that they will be supported instead of being targeted as a burden, weak or disposable? And what do the panel have to say about the social model of disability?**

- EDIC operates along the social model of disability and you can see that through some of the interventions that we have, especially when it comes to dealing with neurodivergent members of staff and staff who seek support for workplace adjustments.
  - The one priority as we return to working on campus is to continue our ongoing efforts to ensure that managers in particular understand that we do have the resources in place to support staff and no one needs to feel that they are a burden.
  - We will also have a specific workstream looking at wellbeing as part of our return to campus work.
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**EDI training and awareness should be absolutely mandatory – while individuals may grumble, Sara is right – it is part of the job and of students to be aware of issues and support them. It makes us all better people. But this requires significant resource both in terms of staff and funding. With the volume of staff and students at College, and all the applications we receive, current resources are inadequate, do we have any indication that College will support this adequately?**

- It is recommended that the [EDI online course](#) is completed as a minimum requirement.
  - Further resourcing is being explored.
  - To ensure long-lasting change, training is only one strand of the approach that we need to take, and this has to be done in parallel to any work that is being done on Values in the College.
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**As a member of staff who is responsible for organising student admissions interviews, what can I do right now to ensure students with disabilities and differences are sufficiently supported?**

**As a member of staff in a department, we can only see what group of disability/difference the student has (i.e. not specific details, for example "this candidate is on the autism**

spectrum"). This makes it difficult to know how to provide tailored support. Is it appropriate to ask the candidate directly what reasonable adjustments they need?

- Do get in touch with the [Disability Advisory Service](#) for advice on supporting students
- Some advice from Maureen O'Brien, Head of the Disability Advisory Service (DAS): Generally, if an applicant has declared a disability and are invited to interview, they wouldn't mind if Admissions asked specific questions. The 'label' or the diagnosis doesn't necessarily provide the information required. Instead, Admissions could ask about how the interview will impact the applicant in terms of their disability and what reasonable adjustments (if any) can be put in place for the interview. For example, if the candidate has declared an autistic spectrum condition then there could a number of adjustments that person may request – a distraction-free interview space to reduce sensory overload, or another candidate may ask for more time to respond to questions citing a slower processing speed which is impacted further in an interview situation. Have the conversation with the applicant in plenty of time to work out what can be arranged to make the interview process more inclusive and accessible. Departmental Disability Officers (DDOs) could be contacted. Considerations about any Competency standards may also need to be explored if these form part of the interview process. DAS can also advise on queries on a case-by-case basis as they arise.

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**What we can do, if a member of the team declares a disability but just simply as a learning disability without details, and is not willing to say more? How can we get them to inform us of details so that we as managers can support them better?**

- You can't force anyone to share, but do signpost them to the [disability support pages](#) that are currently available and make sure there is a safe space to share for when they are ready to. To support this, EDIC has a page of [resources including a quick guide for managers on how to provide a safe and inclusive environment for neurodiverse staff](#).
- You don't need to know the details of their disability; you just need to ask them what barriers or challenges they are facing and what support they need.
- You can also encourage the individual to request a [work needs assessment](#) from EDIC (specifically for neurodivergence including dyslexia etc.) to suggest workplace adjustments that could help them, and this information will be shared with you.
- Individuals can also be referred to [Occupational Health](#) to help them and their managers understand the impact of health problems on work. The report, which is shared with managers, will include recommendations on workplace adjustments.

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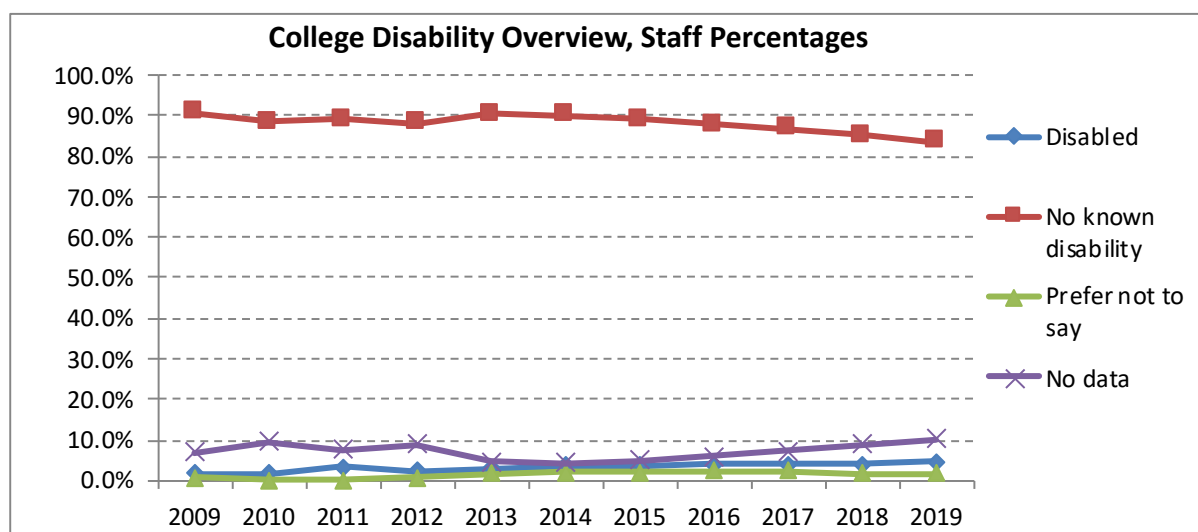
**The panel already discussed workplace adjustments and technologies that can help staff. How will this work when workplaces are moving towards hotdesking, shared spaces, semi-remote, flexible working etc - when a permanent, well-adjusted set-up may no longer be an option for many?**

- The advice from EDIC would be to try and place individuals at the centre of any decisions around workplace adjustments that may be impacted or affected by the College's plans for staff eventual return to campuses.
- We're likely to have a mix of flexible and fixed spaces going forward. The concerns you have raised will be considered by the return to campus group and one of the workstreams is going to look at space utilisation. We will ensure that we undertake an equalities impact assessment to ensure that we have given due consideration to the concerns you and other members of ABLE have raised.

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**What proportion of College staff have disclosed a disability or impairment? Do we know the figure, and if so how has it changed in recent years?**

- 5.1% (as of February 2021) have declared that they have a disability/impairment. This figure has generally increased over the years.
- We would encourage all staff to [declare their personal details](#), including whether they have a disability/impairment. Even if you do not wish to declare, we would still encourage you to respond on ICIS and select the "Prefer not to say" option.
- You may be interested in reading the [Royal Society Disability in STEM Report](#) for comparison.



Below data as of 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021:

Faculty – just those declaring a disability

	1 February 2021
Central College	7.5%
Business School	5.9%
Engineering	4.1%
FoNS	4.8%
Medicine	4.1%

	Percentage of Total Staff			
	Disabled	No known disability	Prefer not to say	No data
Academic Staff	2.8%	88.7%	2.1%	6.3%
Research Staff	3.1%	79.5%	2.0%	15.4%
L&T Staff	5.6%	85.2%	0.8%	8.4%
Professional Services	7.2%	81.8%	2.0%	9.0%
Technical Services	5.9%	83.5%	2.0%	8.6%
Operational Services	6.7%	88.1%	1.1%	4.2%
<b>College total</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>82.8%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>

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**And how are you going to educate the managers.... I can hear it - I've had COVID and I'm fine...**

- This is being worked on. We'll follow up with Occupational Health and update people as we know more.

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**Can we look at absence procedures and when this is triggered - absences for disabled people or people with mental health may be different and could be managed differently – i.e. not going down a disciplinary route as this can result in presenteeism instead (for fear of being disciplined)**

- We can have another look at this. The triggers are a start of the process and each case and each circumstance will be looked at carefully, including looking at any reasonable adjustments that may need to be made.

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**What steps are taken to ensure that workplace adjustments are appropriate for the individual?**

- It depends on the individual – workplace adjustments should be led by the individual. It's about reviewing the adjustments that have been put in place on a regular basis to see whether they are working or whether they need changing in any way
  - Individuals can fill out our [workplace adjustments form](#); on the same page you can also find guidance for managers and further resources to enable managers to more confidently support an individual with the right adjustments
  - We have dedicated specialists who are employed to ensure that certain workplace adjustments are appropriate for staff. Expert external support can be requested if there is a need.
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**In terms of inclusivity - how are we getting disabled/neurodivergent people into jobs when there are barriers at the outset e.g. wording on job description, ways in which interviews are conducted, working patterns available. There is data to support that disabled /neurodivergent people frequently apply for jobs which are far below their actual capabilities or talents.**

- As a Disability Confident Leader, Imperial will always offer interviews to disabled applicants who meet the minimum/essential criteria for the role
- We would recommend using the [Microsoft Accessibility Cognitive Features](#) and [Vision Features](#) to write job adverts, as well as [Textio](#). The HR Recruitment team also review wording of adverts
- We ask all candidates to flag in advance any adjustments we can make to help and provide training/support to line managers to think about their questions, to avoid anything abstract, and to help people by getting them to talk about examples/experience
- In the current climate, most people are being recruited to work flexibly—not just remote but also in terms of hours, and managers are considering this in terms of return to work
- Recent work in preparing the College's application for a Race Equality Charter mark has highlighted a number of issues with our recruitment processes, which will be addressed in the action plan. Many of these issues also impact on other protected characteristics, including disability. We will therefore be mindful to ensure that improvements made (e.g. in training and in being more proactive at seeking out talent) take a holistic view across the EDI landscape, so as to benefit all under-represented groups.