



**VOX SCOTLAND consultation response to;**

**Increasing the Employment of Disabled People in the Public Sector - Consultation.**

Meaningful employment for people with lived experience of mental ill health can be very rewarding and beneficial. It can address issues such as, financial insecurity, loneliness and can be central to improving the quality of life for people, reducing the likelihood of developing mental health problems, and supporting recovery. VOX support the Scottish Government's published A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People – Action Plan. With its commitments, to improve the lives of disabled people, and people with long term health conditions.

Who we are

VOX is a national mental health service user/ lived experience led organization based within Scotland which aims to give a voice to people with experience of mental health conditions (past or present). VOX has both group and individual

membership. We aim to drive policy and practice, facilitate partnership working and strengthen the voice of people who have or have had a mental health problem. We aim to do this by using a range of innovative and accessible consultation methods to involve our members.

### Why are we Responding?

“Meaningful Employment” has been a recurring theme for our members over the years. VOX Members welcome the Scottish Governments Action Plan, commitment no 28;

“We will reduce barriers to employment for disabled people and to seek to reduce at least by half, the employment gap between disabled people and the rest of the working age population. .

We are aware that work across a range of policy areas is required to pull together a coordinated approach.

### What we did

We asked our member for their views and experiences of being employed by the public sector and ran two focus groups on ein Glasgow and one in Dundee.

11 people participated in the Dundee focus group and 8 people in the Glasgow focus group.

50% of the participants worked or had worked for the public sector.

We also reviewed the range of themes which have arisen from previous member meetings and from previously conducted workshops and focus groups.

## Key Issues

What our members feel should be done... VOX members feel the following are ways to improve levels of employment in the public sector for people with lived experience of mental ill health.

- National health services and local authorities should be developing posts that support an individual's strengths and assets rather than trying to fit people into a box. This requires a cultural change in the traditional approach of HR departments. Whilst we know that when disabled people are in employment they can access resources such as CBT and Occupational Therapy, there is a fear by employees that these are routes to unemployment. If they don't work the result is having to leave work. (These tend to be very short term interventions which might not be flexible enough to support the person in remaining in post).
- Public sector employers need to be aware that not all people with mental ill health identify or see themselves as disabled. Many of the recruitment forms and policies such as reasonable adjustments are geared towards physical disabilities rather than mental health problems or conditions that can fluctuate such as in the case of mild-moderate mental health conditions.

- Work and Volunteering: People should have opportunities to have flexible working, engage in meaningful activities, and should have continued opportunities to be involved in their community.
- For many people Volunteering is a key support for their mental wellbeing and social contact however they can be put off due to fear of being deemed fit for work or having their benefits re-assessed. It is important that both national and local government are promoting volunteering not just as a stepping stone to employment but of having excellent wellbeing value that does not have to lead to a more formal work arrangement.
- Regarding setting targets the majority of our members were against this, as there is a general feeling that it might lead some public employers to view it as a tick box exercise rather than an important cultural shift towards employment for all. There was however a suggestion that having a robust monitoring system to measure how the cultural change message was disseminated through a public body from Board level to front line staff might give a clearer picture of progress.
- Members feel that there is still a lot of underlying stigma in work place environments. Public sector employers need to do more to work with Anti stigma/discrimination campaigns and third sector organisations as they make it easier for people with mental health problems to open up about their mental health problem (which may help reduce a sense of loneliness).

The national anti-stigma campaign See Me found that 48% of people think that fear of losing their job would make someone unlikely to disclose their mental health condition

The employment rate of disabled people in 2015 was 45.6% compared to 79.4% for those not classified as disabled, excluding those who did not state their health situation.

Reviews have highlighted that schemes such as access to work are limited in their impact for those with mental health conditions. (Sayce, L 2011)

In 2015/16 28.8% of 16-18 year olds with mental health conditions were not in employment, education or training compared with 6.9% of non-disabled people.

We need to develop a society where supporting people and finding the most suitable way for them to remain in suitable employment becomes a priority.

## References

- See Me, 2015 You Gov poll.
- Sayce, L (2011), 'Getting in , staying in and getting on: Disability employment support fit for the future'. Department of work and pensions.