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Personal sacrifice and corporate cultures: Career progression for disabled staff in Higher Education

Abstract

Disabled people are underrepresented in higher education (HE), especially in senior posts. This paper reports research on the perspectives of career progression into leadership held by disabled staff in one post-1992 University. Findings indicated that some participants were already engaged in leadership or aspired to such roles, and reported positive experiences. However, participants also experienced barriers to progression, including a lack of awareness of equality and diversity among managers and colleagues, inadequate professional development opportunities and the competitive organisational culture of management that could impact on their health and work-life balance. We conclude that disabled staff in HE do not yet have equal opportunities for progression into leadership roles as their non-disabled peers. There is a need for a realignment of the culture of leadership and management to make it more compatible with the full inclusion of disabled staff in HE such that their unique contributions are valued.

Keywords

Leadership, disability, higher education, career progression, disabled staff.

Authors

for correspondence: *Stephanie Brewster (University of Wolverhampton)*

S.Brewster@wlv.ac.uk Faculty of Education, Health and Well-Being, University of Wolverhampton, Walsall Campus, Gorway Road, Walsall, WS1 3BD. Tel: 01902 321000. Fax: 01902 323110.

Neil Duncan (University of Wolverhampton) N.Duncan@wlv.ac.uk Faculty of Education, Health and Well-Being, University of Wolverhampton, Walsall Campus, Gorway Road, Walsall, WS1 3BD. Tel: 01902 321000. Fax: 01902 323110.

Mahmoud Emira (City and Guilds of London Institute) sir_mahmoud@hotmail.com Research & Analytics, 5-7 Giltspur Street, City and Guilds of London Institute, London, EC1A 9DD. Tel: 02072942891

Angela Clifford (University of Wolverhampton) angela.clifford@wlv.ac.uk Faculty of Education, Health and Well-Being, University of Wolverhampton, Walsall Campus, Gorway Road, Walsall, WS1 3BD. Tel: 01902 321000. Fax: 01902 323110

Affiliation of research setting

University of Wolverhampton.

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Compliance with ethical standards

The research on which this article is based was approved by the host University's Ethics Committee; guidelines for voluntary informed consent, the right to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality were adhered to throughout.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

Points of interest

- Disabled staff are under-represented in higher education, especially in leadership positions.
- Our research sought the views of disabled staff about their opportunities for career progression into leadership roles.
- Many of our participants were already engaged in leadership; as well as positive experiences, many reported barriers to progressing into leadership.
- Barriers included a lack of appropriate attitudes, support, training and development, the competitive corporate culture, and for some, the nature of their specific impairment.
- Our recommendations include a clearer support structure for disabled staff, investment in opportunities for professional development, improved awareness generally of equality and diversity.