

**NOVEMBER 2018**

# **DORSET UNIVERSITY HEALTHCARE**

## **IMPROVING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AROUND DISABILITY**

### **The organisation**

Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust serves 700,000 residents and employs 5,000 staff. It delivers a range of services including community, specialist learning disability, minor injuries units and the brain injury rehabilitation service.

### **Overview**

Collecting data about the nine protected characteristics is important. It allows line managers to better understand and actively support staff who may have a disability or long-term health condition. It also helps to create a culture where individuals feel encouraged and comfortable to be themselves at work.

In 2008, the trust had very low rates of disability declaration – with 92 per cent of staff choosing the ‘undefined’ or ‘undisclosed’ categories. By taking a long-term approach, the trust managed to significantly reduce that number. In 2018, just over 20 per cent chose the same categories.

In this case study, we explore the steps the trust took to improve the disability declaration rates of its staff.

### **Background**

In 2008, equality and diversity manager David Corbin came into post. Having previously worked on improving declaration rates in higher education, he was keen to review and understand the trust’s disclosure rates.

He found that the staff choosing undefined or undisclosed were across three areas: disability, sexual orientation and religion/belief. This was concerning for several reasons:

- For the board, it meant they did not have a clear understanding of the diversity of the workforce and were not able to analyse it in line with legal requirements.
- There were operational concerns around being able to offer support to staff, such as reasonable adjustments, and being able to understand the experience of disabled staff.
- It was also unknown whether low rates of disclosure reflected a culture which was not open to a diverse workforce or celebratory of the diversity of its staff.

## What the trust did

David encouraged the trust to build an approach to improving data collection around three key elements.

### 1. Engaging the board and embedding data collection into trust strategy

He began by establishing a robust and accurate data collection process. This included developing a disability equality scheme to be revised every three years, producing and publishing an annual progress report and monitoring data, and collecting statistical information on disabled staff, including staff experience.

Commitment to improving data also became an organisational equality objective and part of the trust's annual reporting.

### 2. Embedding continued conversations around data through an employee's journey

David identified that the trust's data was inaccurate for two reasons. Firstly, new applicants did not have to disclose protected characteristics in recruitment. Secondly, disability or health conditions develop over time and there was no mechanism for capturing this information.

David partnered with the recruitment team to encourage line managers to include personal circumstances and workplace support as part of the normal appraisal process.

### 3. Improving workplace culture for those with protected characteristics

David implemented a change to the declaration choices. The 'undefined' or 'unknown' categories were removed, although they kept 'prefer not to disclose'. He also encouraged the recruitment team to follow up on any applicants who had not declared or filled in any personal data.

Three support networks were established to improve the culture around celebrating diversity, especially neurodiversity, and organisational pride in having disabled members of staff.

## Challenges

Some of the key challenges the trust faced and the solutions they developed were:

**Widespread uncertainty among staff why data was being collected and what it was used for.**

- ✓ A new session on 'why we collect data' was introduced to the trust's equality and diversity training.
- ✓ A new staff resource was published which gave the rationale behind data collection and how it is linked to the Data Protection Act.
- ✓ The resource was issued via internal communications channels.

**There was evidence that managers thought they had to meet all costs for reasonable adjustments. This contributed to hesitancy to declare disability in the workforce.**

- ✓ Information on applying for reasonable adjustments became part of training.
- ✓ David provided information sessions on what reasonable adjustments look like, including real workplace examples and the positive outcomes for staff retention.
- ✓ He established a central point of contact for all staff applying for Access to Work support both for individuals and for managers seeking support.

## Achievements

By taking a sustained and organisation-wide approach to improving data declaration rates, there have been several successes:

- Declaration rates across disability status, religion or beliefs, marital status and sexual orientation have all increased.
- Ethnicity declaration is at 99.5 per cent.
- There has been a reduction in undisclosed or undefined data under disability by over 65 per cent over the past ten years.
- There is a more positive and celebratory culture with regards to disabled staff in the trust, with additional supportive networks.
- There has been a sustained year-on-year reduction in data marked as undisclosed or undefined in the disability category, by at least 5 per cent.
- There has been an increase in the take up of Access to Work funding.
- Staff with a disability have reported increased satisfaction.
- The trust has established closer working relationships with stakeholders, including Dorset Mental Health Forum, and Dorset Mind.



## Top tips

- ✓ Analyse organisational data and take appropriate action.
- ✓ Sell the agenda across the organisation and encourage everyone to take responsibility.
- ✓ Work with the communications team to promote the work being done across the organisation.
- ✓ Play the long game – change doesn't happen overnight.
- ✓ Celebrate your successes along the way.

## Further information



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