

Barriers to Employment: What disabled candidates say

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January 2020

Introduction

This independent research was carried out by Enactus UCL on behalf of Evenbreak, to understand the barriers to employment faced by disabled people, from their perspective. The Enactus team designed a questionnaire and distributed it to disabled people through a number of channels, including the UCL Disability Network and candidates registered on the Evenbreak job board. In addition to gathering data, the aim was to give the community a way to voice their personal experience.

Over 700 responses (709) were received, enabling significant conclusions to be drawn from the data gathered. The demographic analysis of respondents was captured, and is reported in Appendix A.

Questions were asked on a range of subjects regarding the barriers that respondents face when looking for employment. The results identified a number of problematic areas which can be grouped into three main themes:

1. Lack of confidence in employers

- 1.1 Finding a disability-friendly employer
- 1.2 Understanding from employers

2. Confidence in recruitment processes

- 2.1 Job adverts
- 2.2 CV/Experience
- 2.3 Face-to-face interviews
- 2.4 Lack of interest from employers

3. Lack of self-confidence

- 3.1 Lack of confidence in self
- 3.2 Worry about how employers perceive them

The research offers useful insight into the lived experience of disabled people when looking for work. Their voices can and should inform better practice around ensuring access to employment is available for everyone.

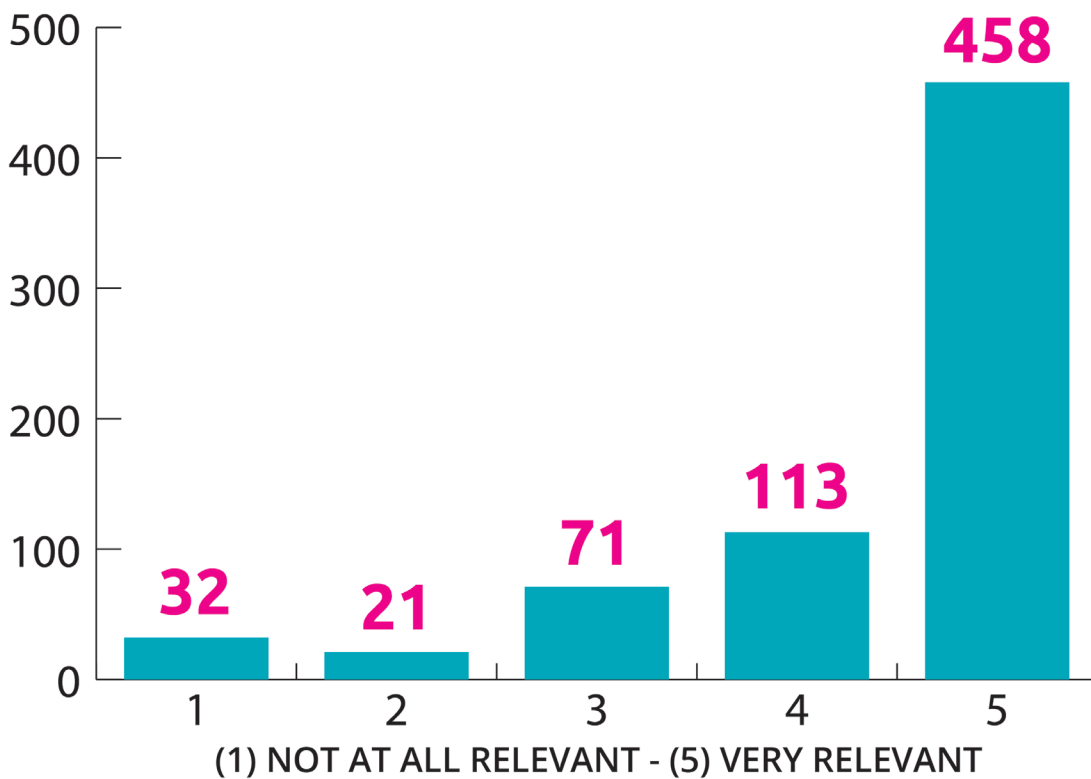
1. Lack of Confidence in Employers

1.1 Finding a disability-friendly employer

The most significant issue reported by disabled job seekers when finding work is identifying employers that they feel confident to apply to. 82% of respondents reported that the most pressing problem to them was finding a truly disability-friendly employer. 15% of respondents say they exclusively apply to those employers known to be disability-friendly.

Most employers claim to be 'equal opportunity employers', but the experience of disabled candidates paints a different picture. Even those employers who have active diversity policies tend to focus on gender and race rather than disability. Candidates report regularly being rejected at the point their impairment becomes apparent. It is difficult to predict which employers will be positive about employing disabled people.

1.1 FINDING DISABILITY-FRIENDLY EMPLOYERS



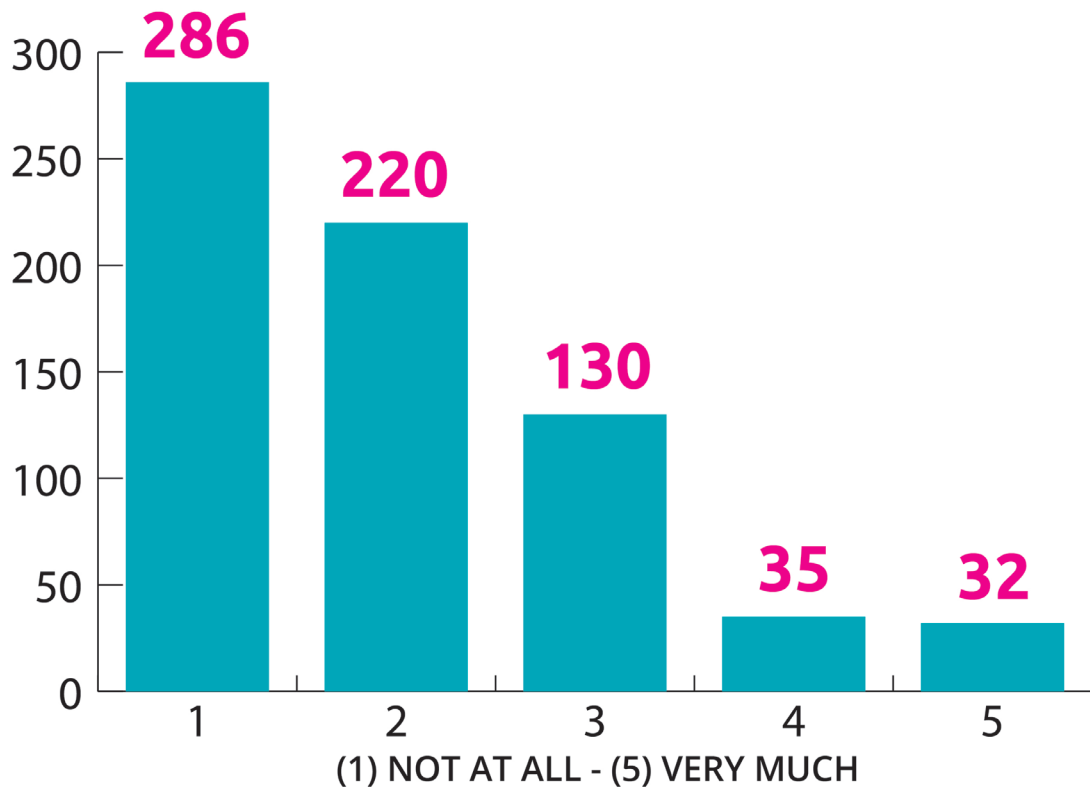
“I don't know how to find employers who will take me seriously”

1.2 Understanding from employers

506 respondents (71%) rated employers poorly with regard to understanding and empathising with the issues they encounter because their disability.

Response to the question 'To what extent do you feel that employers understand the issues you encounter because of your disability?':

1.2 EMPATHY FROM EMPLOYERS



“I shouldn't have to cover up part of who I am”

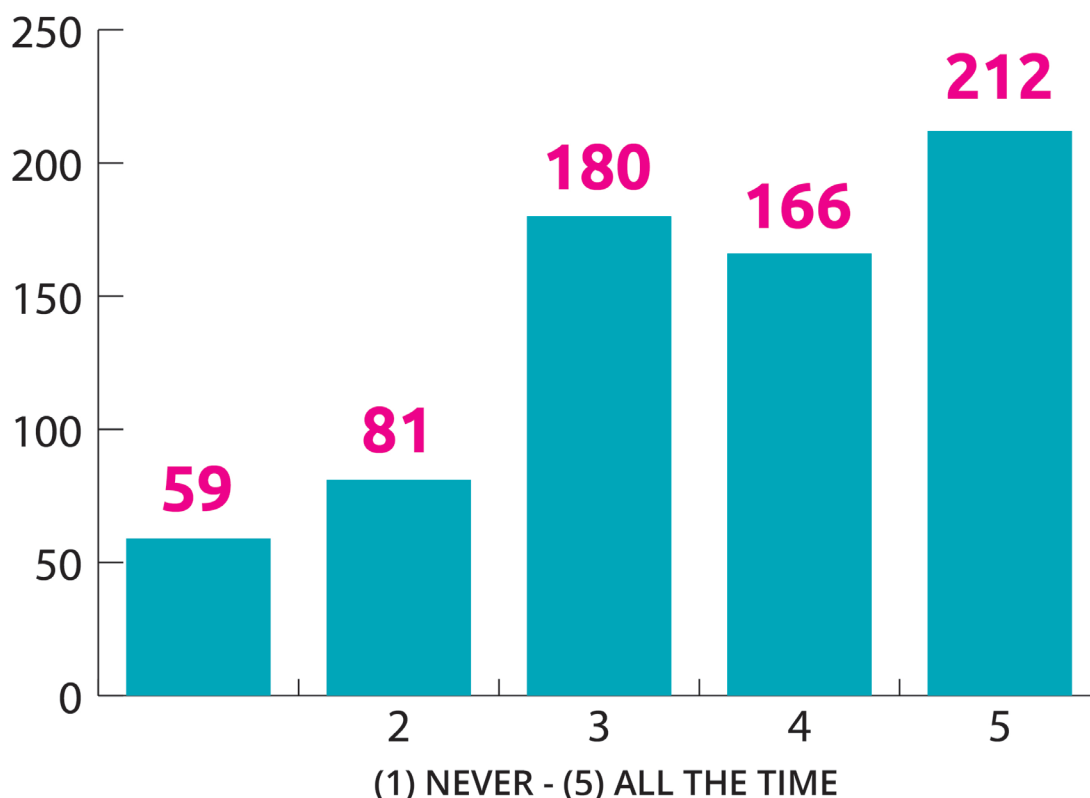
2. Confidence in the Recruitment Process

Many aspects of the recruitment process were seen as barriers, so these have been grouped together.

2.1 Job adverts

A major issue within the recruitment process appears to be the lack of information in job advertisements regarding available adjustments for the applicant, or workplace policies regarding disabled employees. Almost 80% of respondents said this occurred regularly or always.

2.1 LACK OF INFORMATION



Respondents who expanded on their answer mentioned that often the 'reasonable adjustments' required by law are put on the applicant or employee. They are expected to find ways to make the situation work, even though the law makes the employer responsible. A lack of experience concerning adjustments for disabled people by HR teams creates difficulties, even when an employer may be willing to offer additional support.

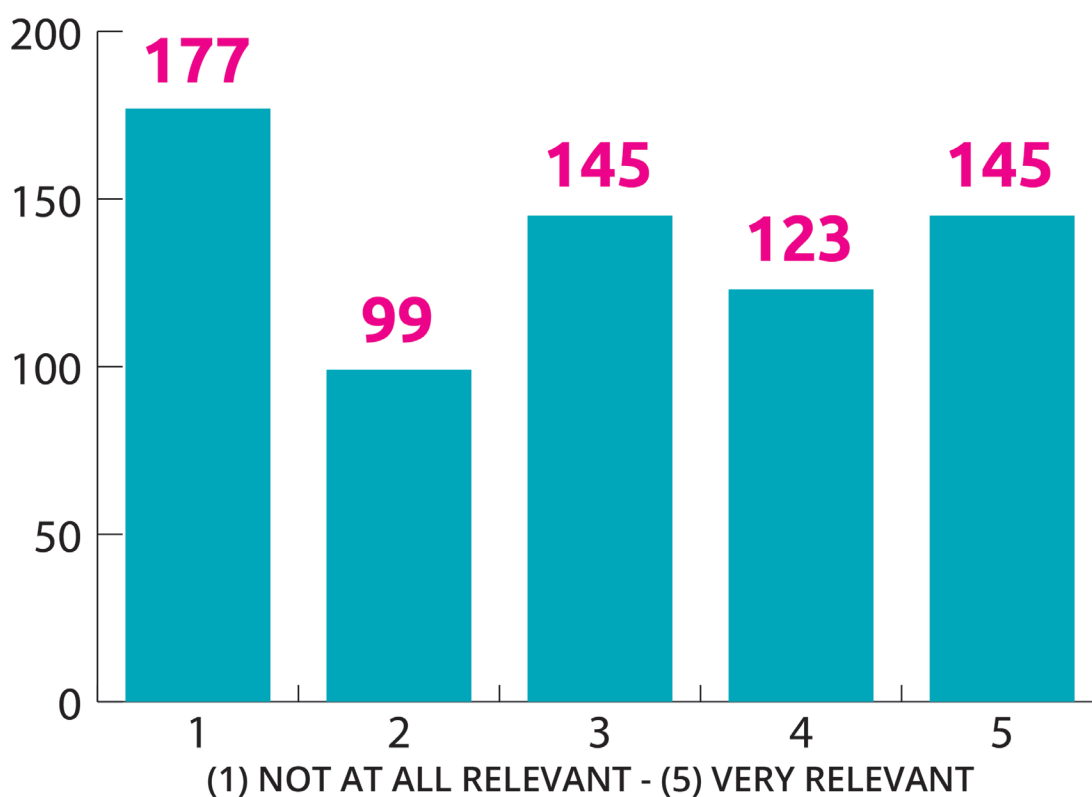
"I agonise about whether to disclose my disability."

2.2 CV/Lack of experience

More than a third of respondents felt that a real or perceived lack of work experience had reduced their competitiveness in the job market.

When asked to elaborate on their response, respondents pointed to career gaps due to ill health related to their disability. Many disabled job seekers felt that employers did not give them a fair shot to prove their abilities after noticing a gap in their CVs. A lack of experience is frequently viewed as a lack of commitment instead of as a result of their disability. Despite possessing the required job qualifications and plenty of volunteering experience, not having recent paid employment represents a significant barrier for disabled job applicants.

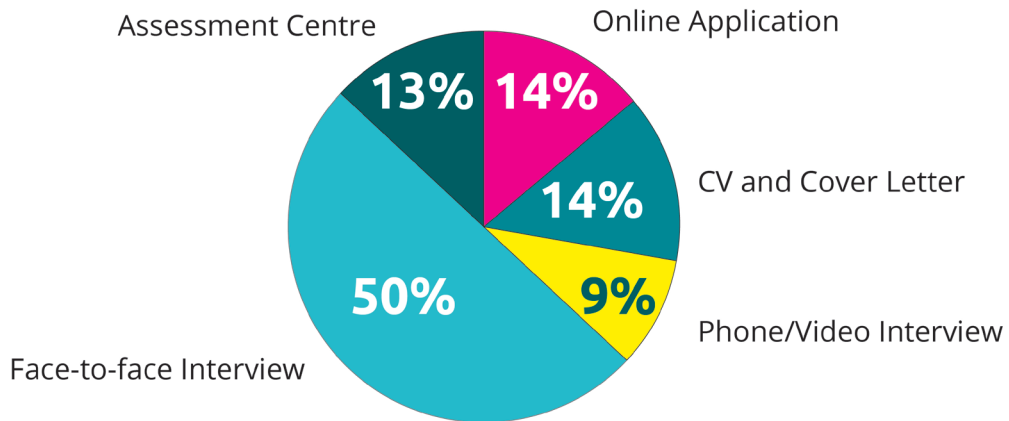
2.2 LACK OF EXPERIENCE



“I wish employers focused on my talent rather than my disability”

2.3 Face-to-face interviews

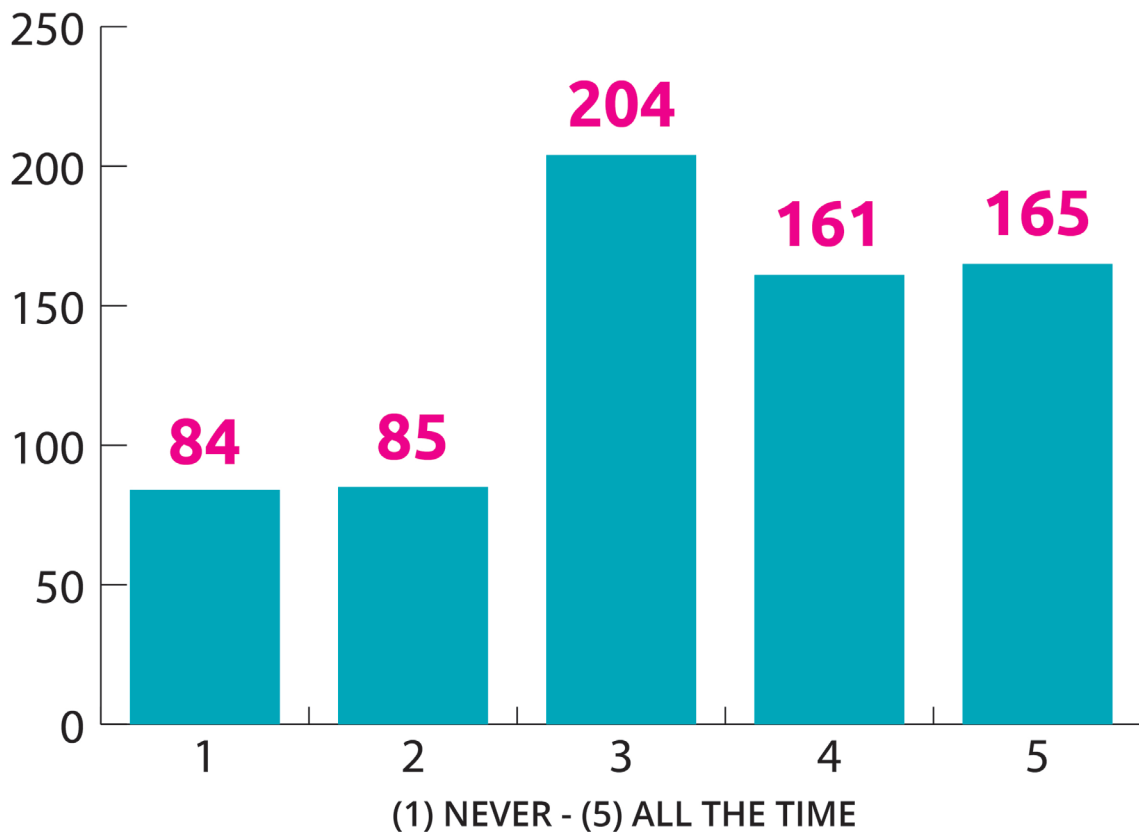
Half of respondents felt they faced the most barriers when it came to in-person interviews.



2.4 Lack of interest from interviewers

Respondents recorded a noticeable lack of interest from interviewers. Only a quarter of respondents felt they had never or rarely encountered this issue, while the other three quarters said it regularly represented an issue.

2.4 LACK OF INTEREST FROM THE INTERVIEWER

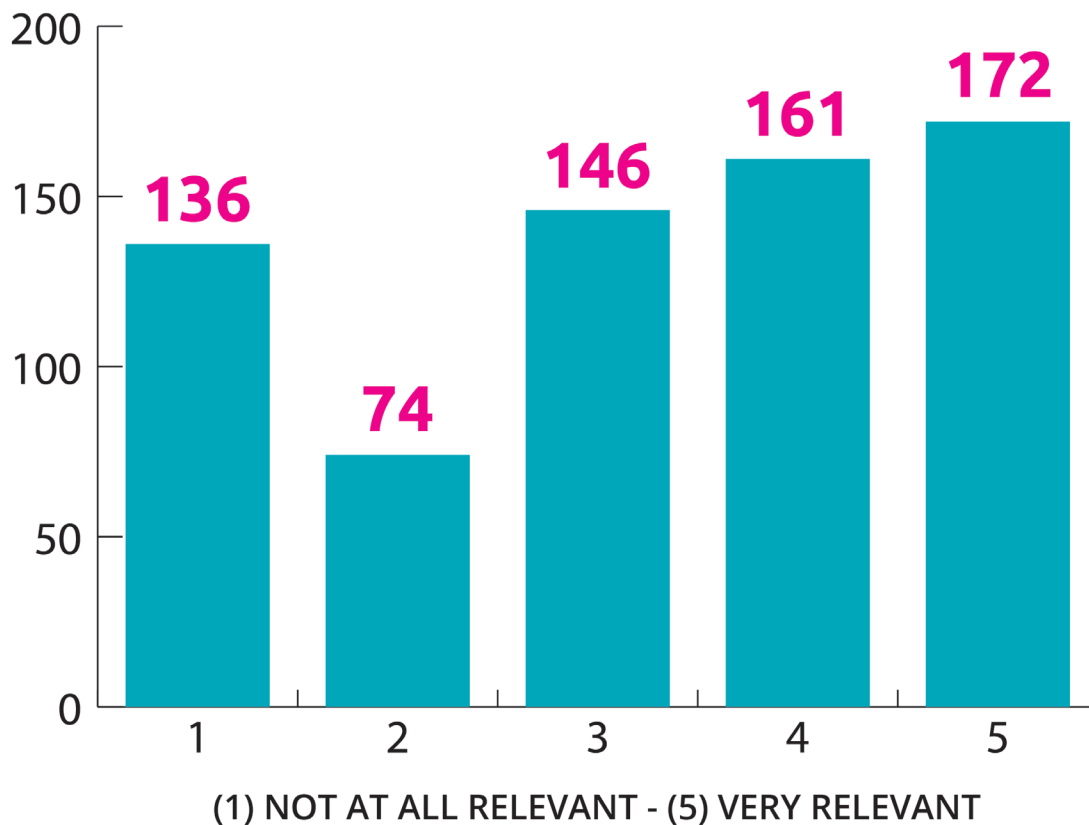


3. Lack of Self-confidence

3.1 Lack of confidence in self

Almost half of respondents (48%) felt that a lack of confidence represents a significant barrier to them, with a further 21% reporting that they are moderately affected by it.

3.1 LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN SELF

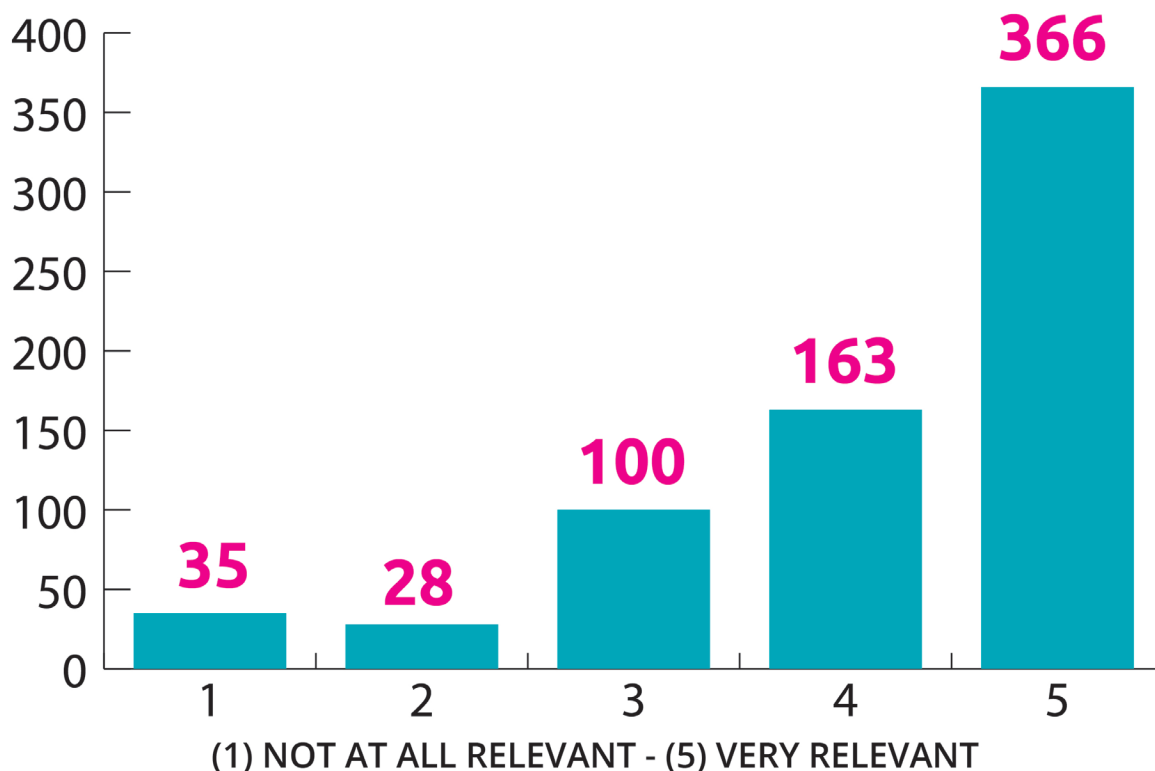


“I often start applications but get too scared to submit them”

3.2 Worry about how employers will perceive them

More than two thirds of respondents (76%) report that worrying about how employers would perceive them impeded their job search significantly. One respondent elaborated, outlining that 'second-guessing myself means I often start applications but get too scared to complete/submit them'.

3.2 WORRYING ABOUT HOW EMPLOYERS PERCEIVE YOU



“I never felt disabled until I started searching for a new job.”

CONCLUSION

One of the enduring mantras in the world of disability is “nothing about us, without us”. This makes perfect sense – why would non-disabled people try to second-guess what works for disabled people? It’s the reason Evenbreak only employs disabled people, and it’s the reason Evenbreak commissioned this research.

Sometimes employers are, understandably, wary of pro-actively attracting disabled candidates until they are certain they have everything in place. Whilst a laudable intention, the reality is that this is the wrong way around. Disabled people themselves are, by definition, the absolute experts in identifying the barriers that disable them. And also experts on how to reduce or remove those barriers.

The purpose of this research, carried out on Evenbreak’s behalf by Enactus UCL, was to help employers learn the real barriers to accessing disabled candidates, so that they can be effectively addressed.

The overwhelming consensus from the disabled people who participated in the project is that the main issues are around confidence. In order for employers to attract disabled candidates, those candidates need to have:

1. Confidence in the employer (i.e. knowing they will recognise my talent first, rather than see me as a ‘problem’ or a ‘charity case’)
2. Confidence in the recruitment process (i.e. knowing my skills will be fairly assessed without bias)
3. Confidence in self (i.e. knowing that with the right support, I could do this job)

Broad questions this research asks of employers include:

- How do people in your organisation view disabled candidates? As a potential pool of talent, or as a source of problems? Do recruitment and hiring managers fully understand the business case for employing disabled people?
- How might disabled candidates view your organisation? As a great, inclusive place to work, where they can thrive? How would they know? What do you need to do to ensure disabled candidates feel confident to apply?
- How inclusive is your recruitment process? Can you be sure that disabled candidates wouldn’t be unfairly discriminated against, and would only be assessed on their relevant skills?
- How can you involve disabled people to inform better practice in the future?

Now the barriers disabled people face when looking for work are known, it is time to remove them to ensure that you can access all the available talent. You can be confident that working with Evenbreak will help.

Appendix A - Demography of Participants

Age		Gender		Ethnicity	
Under 18	0.5%	Female	54%	White	82%
18 – 24	8%	Male	44%	Black	5%
25 – 34	14%	Prefer not to say	1%	Asian	6%
35 – 44	20.5%	Non-binary	1%	Mixed	4%
45 – 54	32%			Other	1%
55 – 64	23%				
65+	2%				

Level of Education		Employment Status	
No schooling	2%	Employed full-time	18%
GCSEs	15%	Employed part-time	14.5%
A Levels/equivalent	14%	Self-employed	6%
Technical/vocational/trade qualification	19%	Unemployed, looking for work	35%
Bachelor's degree	29%	Unemployed, not looking for work	5%
Master's degree	17%	Student	4.5%
Doctoral degree	2%	Homemaker	1%
Other	2%	Retired	2%
		Unable to work	9%
		Other	3%

Impairment		Visible/Invisible Impairment	
Physical	40%	Visible	41%
Intellectual	3%	Invisible	30%
Mental	7%	It can depend	29%
Sensory	8%		
Multiple/other	42%		

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Enactus UCL for carrying out the research and analysing the findings, particularly Felicia Rankl, Olivia Gibson, Bea Thompson and Hasan Choudhary.

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