

LEISURE SECTOR UNITES TO LAUNCH EMPLOYABILITY LEISURE GUIDANCE

Thursday 31 March, 2022

Today (31st March) is the launch of EmployAbility Leisure, an initiative to create more accessible and inclusive training and workplaces for disabled people in the leisure sector.

To mark the launch, Aspire is releasing three Guides to support the industry to attract more disabled people to the sector workforce. Although 1 in 5 of the working-age population in the UK are classed as disabled, only 52% are employed compared to 81% of non-disabled people, and there are indications that the employment gap is far greater within the leisure sector workforce. It is recognized by many industry stakeholders that the fitness and leisure sector is often portrayed in narrow terms that lacks diversity and inclusivity.

The Guides have been produced by Aspire, a disability charity and community leisure operator, following its successful 'InstructAbility' programme which helped hundreds of disabled people become qualified fitness professionals. The guidelines for education providers and employers will support them to tackle some of the barriers that disabled people experience in accessing training and work in the sector.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Chloe Smith said:

"Everyone deserves the same opportunity to find fulfilling work in a job where they can progress, including in the health and fitness industry."

"Lack of accessibility and understanding of the support available can be a barrier to disabled people entering the workforce, and these Guides will provide further vital help for employers and employees to know what help they can get and how to access it."

The evidence-based guidance is a result of research with disabled people and those involved in leisure sector training, recruitment, and employment. The research was conducted by Professor Brett Smith from Durham University and Dr. Juliette Stebbings from the University of Portsmouth.

Guide A for disabled people, '*Training and working in the fitness and leisure sector*' is a guide to inform and inspire disabled people to start a career in the sector.

Guide B for training providers and awarding bodies, '*Training disabled learners in the fitness and leisure sector*' supports those delivering training to provide inclusive and accessible courses.

Guide C for employers, '*Employing disabled people in the fitness and leisure sector*' provides guidance about inclusion and how to become a disability confident employer and recruit and develop more disabled staff.

EmployAbility Leisure is backed by national organisations that have a strong desire and commitment to improve workforce diversity across the physical activity sector.

Hilary Farmiloe, EmployAbility Leisure Strategic Lead at Aspire said:

'We welcome the collective effort of industry leaders to continue to push the EmployAbility Leisure agenda and challenge our whole sector to build diverse workforces with disabled people represented across many roles and at all levels.'

The initiative is funded by Sport England, that has placed tackling inequalities at the heart of its 'Uniting the Movement' strategy. Sport England recognises how a diverse workforce can help reduce the participation gap between disabled and non-disabled people.

CIMSPA (the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity) will take an active role in raising standards of access and inclusion in training through their endorsement and quality assurance role.

ukactive's Everyone Can report – the first of its kind focusing on the facilitation and participation of disabled people within fitness and leisure – recommended that more advice is needed to attract disabled people into employment within the sector. ukactive will play a proactive role in promoting the

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EmployAbility Leisure guides as part of its Everyone Can agenda, which is a rolling programme to support inclusion and accessibility across the sector.

Activity Alliance, national charity, and the leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity, will actively promote the guides through its networks and will influence their partners and supporters to embed inclusive workforce development practices and achieve fairness for disabled people in sport and activity.

People who have already viewed the Guides have commented on the valuable information and practical approach of the guidance. There is real hope of stimulating long-lasting industry change with many organisations stating their intention to review and embed the guidance and to support other organisations to do the same.

Disabled fitness professionals, Vanessa Wallace and Lee Welch viewed Guide A for disabled people.

‘This Guide will give disabled people confidence to say, ‘I am employable and I want to be part of your workforce’. They can use the guidance as a microphone to raise their voice and learn about what they can request so they can work in this amazing industry. The fact that there is a similar Guide for training providers and employers means you can get together and start the conversation.’ Vanessa Wallace

‘The content in this Guide is fantastic. It talks about the qualifications, the level of entry and how you can progress. It also mentions funding and lots of things that you might not have thought about and it is based on the real experiences that myself and other disabled people have had when training and working in the sector.’ Lee Welch

Kelly Rodrigues, Learning and Assessment Product Team Manager at UKCoaching viewed Guide B for training providers and awarding organisations. She said:

‘We aim to provide accessible learning and assessment to as many people as possible, anything is possible with a solution mindset and with this comprehensive guidance, there is no excuse. Guide B goes beyond overarching principles, it provides coaches, tutors, assessors, coach educators, learning developers and many more with easy ‘how to’ tips and links to support you every step of the way. UK Coaching is really excited about the launch of this guidance, and we look forward to embedding it within the work we do and that of those organisations we support across the sector’.

Jennifer Huygen, Head of Policy and Strategic Partnerships at Community Leisure UK viewed Guide C for employers. She said:

‘I love the checklist right at the start of Guide C as it allows you to check and challenge your work. The sections about making job roles more accessible and the recommendations on workplace practices are important. If organisations implement all the guidance in these two sections, disabled people will benefit and the health and wellbeing of all their staff will be improved.

The Guides will be available to view and download from 11am on Thursday 31st March online at www.instructability.org.uk. There will also be a series of video interviews with disabled people, training providers and employers discussing the guidance.

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