



## THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS IN PROMOTING THE EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE FROM DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

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## Summary

**Target population:** Employers participating in a privately funded return-to-work programme (“Ready for Work”)

**Country:** United Kingdom

**Methodology:** Qualitative methods

### Abstract

**Objectives:** To increase knowledge on (1) how companies participating in the “Ready for Work” programme support or employ people facing barriers to work, (2) what provision they have in place to promote the health and well-being of disadvantaged groups, and (3) who or what influences the decisions they take in relation to supporting disadvantaged groups and health and well-being provisions.

**Methods:** (1) Telephone interviews with representatives of 13 companies, (2) one focus group with 3 employers, and (3) a qualitative online survey completed by 7 employers.

**Results:** Companies included in the analyses are partners of specialist agencies. The specific provisions offered by companies to support disadvantaged groups include corporate parenting and flexible work arrangements. Human resources directors play a decisive role in relation to supporting disadvantaged groups and well-being provisions. Major factors influencing recruitment and well-being provisions for disadvantaged groups are brand reputation, legislation/directives and competitors’ strategies.

**Conclusions:** Socially disadvantaged groups require intense and continuous support in improving their employability. Legislation is fundamental for enforcing high social protection standards. Additional company-led provisions, initiatives and activities can boost the positive effect of legal requirements by taking into account individual needs and difficulties of people with social disadvantages.

## 1. Introduction

Businesses exist to create profits for owners and shareholders by creating jobs, selling products and services and providing business for other businesses. As a result, they have a range of economic, social and environmental impacts that affect individuals and groups – as employees, as neighbours and as consumers. As employers, they play an obvious and direct role in employment; what they do and how they do it has the potential not only to improve health but also reduce health inequalities, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups in society.

The UK, and EU approach to engaging employers in employment initiatives that target people in the lowest social gradients, or ‘disadvantaged groups’, has to date largely been based on voluntary principles falling under ‘corporate social responsibility (CSR)’ policy. For the majority of businesses, employability programmes will usually begin as CSR driven activities, even if in time they become mainstreamed into core recruitment and HR practice.

At EU policy level, the EC published its latest strategy on CSR in 2011 which spelled out its position on “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society”<sup>1</sup>. It defines CSR as actions by companies over and above their legal obligations towards society and the environment. To fully meet their social responsibility, enterprises “should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders”<sup>2</sup>. The strategy also states that certain regulatory measures create an environment more conducive to enterprises voluntarily meeting their social responsibility, although these at present are limited and tend to be concentrated on environmental impacts. At national level, only 15 EU Member States have national policy frameworks to promote CSR with the UK perceived to be one of the most advanced.

Over the past five years there has been evolution, assimilation and general acceptance of a number of international frameworks that provide clarity for businesses as well as providing direction for policy makers. These include the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Global Report Initiative’s (GRI) G4 Guidelines as well as the International Integrated Report Council’s (IIRC) Framework published in December 2013.

There has also been a strengthening of reporting requirements both at national (in the UK) and more recently at EU level (which will come into force in April 2017)<sup>3</sup>, on companies in relation to non-financial information such as environmental, social and employee, human rights and diversity matters. On the other hand, the UK government response to its call for

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<sup>1</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0681:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_STATEMENT-14-29\\_en.htm?locale=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-14-29_en.htm?locale=en)

views on corporate responsibility<sup>4</sup> has indicated that the exact approach businesses take varies and is influenced by factors such as business size, sector and location.

## Research aims

It is within this context that we embarked upon a small study to understand from a sample of companies within the BITC membership, and beyond, the following:

1. How they support or employ people facing barriers to work;
2. What provision they have in place to promote the health and well-being of disadvantaged groups;
3. Who or what influences the decisions they take in relation to supporting disadvantaged groups and health and well-being provision.

## 2. Methods

We used a range of methods to gather information from our companies – telephone interviews, a focus group and an online survey.

### 2.1 Telephone interviews

#### Sample of employers

We used purposive sampling to target Human Resources and Corporate Social Responsibility Directors in companies within Business in the Community's membership that in our view, demonstrated one or both of the following:

- a good track record or interest in relation to health and well-being and/or the employability of disadvantaged groups;
- a high volume of entry-level jobs.

It was harder than anticipated, and therefore took longer, to set up the telephone interviews. This was due to a lack of response to initial inquiries and the limited availability of senior professionals within the companies. We initially aimed to interview professionals from 20 companies, but it was only possible in the end to secure interviews with 13.

We also found that in several instances, the person who had been put forward to be interviewed did not have the knowledge to answer all the questions and so we had to set up further interviews with colleagues in HR or CSR. This was not anticipated and was due to the breadth of issues we needed to cover, which, depending on the structure of the company, did not always sit within one area of responsibility.

The company characteristics are presented in table 1.

**Table 1 – Companies participating in the telephone interviews.**

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/corporate-responsibility-call-for-views>

	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Turnover</b>	<b>No. of employees</b>	<b>Operations</b>
1	Pharmaceutical	£22.4bn	108,000	Europe, North Africa, China
2	Infrastructure Services	£10bn	35,000	Europe, Africa, Asia, Middle East, Australasia, North and South America
3	Construction and Facilities Management	£15bn	40,000	UK
4	Utilities	£23.9bn	38,000	UK
5	Public Services Provider	£2.3bn	21,000	UK
6	Retail	£763m	20,000	UK
7	Facilities Management and Support Services	£7.6bn	500,000	Europe, Asia, North and South America, Australasia
8	Retail	£25.6m	157,000	UK
9	Facilities Management	£2bn	63,000	UK
10	Facilities Management	£250m	8000	UK
11	Support Services	£4.9bn	120,000	Europe, Middle East, Asia Pacific, North America
12	Retail	£90m	800	UK
13	Environmental Services	£24bn	320,000	Europe, North and South America, Middle East, China
<b>Total</b>		<b>£140.4bn</b>	<b>1,430,800</b>	

### Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed by the Work Inclusion team in BITC, tested with one company and further refined. A copy of the interview guide can be found at appendix 4. We used the following definition of 'disadvantaged groups' and explained this to participants at the start of each interview<sup>5</sup>:

*"People who are homeless, lone parents, have been in care, have caring responsibilities, ex-offenders, live with physical or mental disabilities, possess few qualifications and skills, are long-term unemployed. This list is not exhaustive, and individuals can often face a combination of the above circumstances, amongst others."*

To help ensure that the interview was as useful as possible, we sent the interview guide out to participants in advance to help them prepare.

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<sup>5</sup> Definition developed by BITC with reference to Work Programme 'early access' eligibility criteria ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/306484/wp-pg-chapter-2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306484/wp-pg-chapter-2.pdf)) and BITC's own eligibility criteria for its Ready for Work programme (<http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/ready-work/get-involved/refer-someone-our-programmes>).

## 2.2 Focus Group

### Aim of the focus group

We wanted to corroborate some of the findings from the telephone interviews and understand more about the following:

- Who and/or what drives activities and behaviour in relation to the employability/employment of people from disadvantaged groups;
- Who and/or what influences the decisions made in relation to the provision of health and well-being provision for all staff and for people from disadvantaged groups in particular.

### Topic Guide

The topic guide was developed by the Work Inclusion team within BITC and refined by colleagues with specific experience of running focus groups. A copy of the topic guide can be found at appendix 2.

### Participants

For the UK focus group, we targeted BITC member companies from retail, construction, manufacturing and support services sectors. Unfortunately on the day, despite 5 companies signing up, only 3 were represented; two major retailers and one medium-sized food manufacturer. We think this was due to the time and travel commitments required, and on the day, more business critical priorities took over.

Details of the companies who took part can be found in table 2. The group was held in November 2013.

**Table 2: participants in UK focus group**

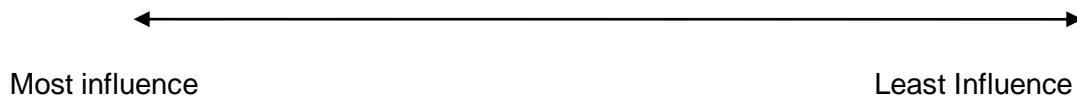
	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Turnover</b>	<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>Operations</b>
1	Retail	£10.3bn	70,000	Europe, Middle East, Russia, Australasia
2	Manufacturing	£760m	6,800	UK
3	Retail	£8.4bn	56,000	UK
<b>Total</b>		<b>£19.46bn</b>	<b>132,800</b>	

## 2.3 Online survey

A feature of the focus group was a ranking exercise for participants to undertake, devised internally by BITC staff. This involved participants placing post-it notes, on which were written different influencers, for example 'CEO', 'labour market conditions', 'legislation', on a wall chart with a very simple scale of influence – see figure 1. A copy of the format for this exercise can be found in the topic guide at appendix 2.

In practice, we had found the ranking exercise useful for stimulating discussion but that it had limited value in enabling us to compare and contrast answers as we had not used a scale to differentiate levels of influence.

**Figure 1. Scale used in the ranking exercise.**



We also wanted to organise a focus group with non-UK-based companies and so we joined forces with a similar organisation to BITC, CSR Europe<sup>6</sup>, who approached their membership on our behalf. Unfortunately, we were not able to recruit a sufficient number to be confident to proceed.

Following the decision to abandon setting up a focus group non-UK-based companies, we decided to target the CSR Europe members with an online survey instead and to follow up with the companies who had taken part in the UK focus group to ask them to complete the survey as well.

We developed the questions for the online survey using the learnings from the ranking exercise developed for the focus groups. The survey was further refined by colleagues at CSR Europe, who perform similar work to BITC. They sent the survey out to 70 companies within their membership our behalf. We estimated that the survey took around 10 minutes to complete.

The survey was live for 1 month, and CSR Europe sent targeted emails 3 times in that period, following up with direct emails to companies that had shown interest in joining the focus group before the decision was taken to conduct an online survey instead. This resulted in 5 companies completing the survey. In one instance, 3 individuals from the same company completed the survey and so we took the answers from the most senior respondent and discarded the other two. Details of the companies who completed the survey are in table 3 below.

For this reason, it was decided to follow up with the participants of the UK focus group and ask them to complete the survey, too. To this end, tailored emails were sent by BITC and a further 2 companies completed the survey, resulting in 7 responses in total. A copy of the survey can be found at appendix 3.

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<sup>6</sup> CSR Europe is a membership organisation promoting corporate social responsibility. [www.csreurope.org](http://www.csreurope.org)

**Table 3 – companies who completed the online survey**

	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Turnover</b>	<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>Operations</b>
1	Media, Marketing and PR	€10,000,000 - €50,000,000	<100	Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia Pacific, North and South America
2	Support Services	€50,000,000 - €1,000,000,000	5,001 - 10,000	Europe, North and South America, Asia
3	IT - hardware, software and services	>€1,000,000,000	>10,000	Europe, North and South America, Asia Pacific, Africa
4	Retail	£10.3bn	>10,000	Europe, Middle East, Russia, Australasia
5	Industrials and engineering	€50,000,000 - €1,000,000,000	1,001-5,000	Europe, Asia Pacific, North America
6	Industrials and engineering	>€1,000,000,000	>10,000	Europe, Middle East, Asia, Africa, North and South America
7	Retail	£8.4bn	>10,000	UK

## 2.4 Analysis

### Telephone interviews

As we did not have access to the appropriate technology to record telephone interviews, notes were taken simultaneously by the interviewer during each interview, and any points that were unclear in the write up were followed up with the individual concerned. The notes were then reviewed and coded by the interviewer with data transferred to an Excel spreadsheet. A second review of the notes and coding was performed by the Work Inclusion Director from BITC to ensure consistency and to identify elements that the interviewer may have missed.

### Focus Group

The focus group session was recorded and fully transcribed. The transcribed notes were reviewed and coded by hand. The ranking exercise conducted during the focus group resulted in the production of a large paper-based graph, which was photographed and then copied into an Excel document. As mentioned above, we found this to have little value other than to help stimulate discussion, but have included the results in appendix 2. The transcript was used to contextualise the results from the ranking exercise.

### Online Survey

The survey responses were collated using the tools within SurveyMonkey™ and then entered into a spreadsheet for the purpose of creating graphs to further aid analysis. Particular attention was paid to the responses given in relation to the people/organisations

that were classed as 'highly' or 'somewhat' influential and those that were classed as 'not very influential' or 'irrelevant'.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 How do companies support or employ people facing barriers to work?

##### Partnering with specialist agencies

The majority of the companies we interviewed on the telephone were working with at least one agency with specialist knowledge and focus on particular barriers to work, in order to ensure that they were reaching out to the most disadvantaged people with their recruitment or employability programmes.

A strong theme coming out of the interviews was the inadequacy of mainstream agencies (Jobcentre Plus and Remploy were mentioned specifically) in meeting the specific needs of companies in relation to targeting specific groups of people. The main reasons cited was the target-driven culture of Government sponsored agencies and lack of specialist knowledge in relation to particular barriers to work.

*"We recognise the traditional approach to recruitment and the traditional routes wouldn't necessarily reach care leavers and NEETs."*

*"The jobcentre is very structured in getting people off their books. For the workload they have, the training isn't there; they're not great at support and spotting the potential of individuals. That's why we work with so many other agencies."*

*"(We) use ELBA (East London Business Alliance)...who put far more effort into finding the right people (than jobcentre plus)."*

*"Using A4e (a private company contracted by the UK Government to deliver welfare services) and jobcentre plus doesn't necessarily make it easier to recruit for hard to reach groups."*

The specialist agencies the companies said they worked with include social housing providers, homeless agencies, probation, prisons, care leaver charities, poverty charities, community-based charities, charities for ex-offenders. As well as being able to deliver the right candidates for roles, the companies also valued the support such agencies provided for people once in work, for example helping sort out benefits issues or housing, which might otherwise impact on their ability to work.

##### Adaptations to standard recruitment procedures

Companies also said that a standard application/interview process often excluded people furthest from the labour market. They said that some applicants were put off by the technology of online application forms or else were not able to put forward strong enough applications because of issues relating to literacy or English as a second language, or because they were lacking in experience.

*“We used to use online applications but discovered 40% of applications were never finished, because of comprehension problems. Now we offer a form as well as online applications, and applications have increased as a result.”*

Alternative recruitment activity cited included open days held in the heart of deprived communities, ‘working interviews’ for those who would otherwise find a standard application process a barrier, whereby people would be paid for a day’s work and their suitability assessed for employment, and guaranteed interviews for those on work placements, who had already been selected for those placements on the basis of their barrier(s) to work.

However, several companies also said that the volume of applicants for their vacancies presented a problem, with automated sifting set up to cope with the sheer number of applicants (some companies were regularly dealing with over 1000 applications a month). One company used personality and behavioural questionnaires for every job to help screen people out, as well as requiring DBS checks for all jobs, even though this was not a legal requirement.

Another said that to cope with volume, they would reject people who lived a certain distance from the place of work, as they were unlikely to be able to travel to work easily on public transport. The opposite was true of another company; public transport to a rural site was poor so they provided a free bus service to encourage more applications from non-drivers.

### **3.2 What provision do companies in place to promote the health and well-being of employees from disadvantaged groups?**

#### **Dedicated support in the workplace**

*“Well-being in my view starts with getting the job right. Does an individual understand what they’re doing in that organisation? That’s where well-being starts from a mental health perspective...”*

All of the companies we interviewed cited good health and well-being as the most, or one of the most important issues in relation to performance, but also emphasised the need for dedicated support for people facing barriers to work recruited either directly or via partner agencies as they had experienced issues with absence and retention. For example, one company working with care leavers and young unemployed people felt that a common issue was unrealistic expectations about career progression, perhaps because they did not yet have the life experience to understand or appreciate that getting to the job they wanted might involve doing several others that they were not so keen on. Another company cited the example of a lone parent working who took unauthorised leave to look after her child because she did not have the coping skills to manage the situation in the right way. Another company referred to the support that young carers require:

*“The needs of young carers are often hidden. They need very close mentoring and coaching and to work in a large team.”*

In order to help disadvantaged people build settle in well, build confidence, set realistic goals and progress, the companies we spoke to suggested that the following interventions made a crucial difference:

- Workplace mentoring, particularly in the first few months.

- A thorough induction on starting work
- Flexible working
- Financial support, for example, season ticket loans
- A supportive line manager who knows how to spot and deal with stress
- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), that provide confidential counselling and advice on issues such as debt, family and workplace issues.
- Support for those working in small teams or isolated sites to help them feel part of the organisation.

*“The recruitment team have an all-encompassing role; they act as recruiters, mentors, coaches. If you don’t have that level of resource to manage apprentices and other hard to reach groups, then you are going to fail.”*

However, it was clear from the interviews that some companies provided more comprehensive training to line managers than others to ensure they were equipped to deal with stress in their teams. And whilst those companies that had EAP in place felt it was an important part of their overall wellbeing offering, all admitted that they struggled to get staff to use it. When we spoke to an EAP provider about this phenomenon, they suggested that the reasons for this included a lack of trust from staff around the confidentiality of the service, and also a sense among line managers that the service was not for them, but for people further down the chain.

### **Corporate Parenting**

When working with people from disadvantaged groups, several companies commented on the ‘extra mile’ they would have to go to in order to help those people succeed on their work placements or in the early days of employment. In some cases, that extra support was provided in conjunction with specialist charity partners; in others, it seemed that it was down to individual managers to identify and meet specific needs.

One company working with young offenders recognised that not being able to pay for lunch was a potential barrier for successful completion of apprenticeships and so ensured supervisors were able to reimburse lunch expenses. In some instances, team members would make lunch and share it with the young people. The company also realised that the young people did not have the knowledge or skills to eat healthily and so devised cooking lessons as part of their apprenticeship programme.

In another case, the manager of the employability scheme would often have to lend personal money to ensure that mobile phones were topped up or people had enough money to eat. This money was not always returned.

It was not clear from the interviews the extent to which ‘corporate parenting’ was due to the culture of the organisation or the commitment of a few individuals within a company.

*“We try not to do corporate parenting but we need to do some of it. We’re replacing the family to some extent.”*

## **Pay and benefits**

The interviewees indicated that in general, they try to ensure that their health and well-being offerings are open to all, but in most cases, some benefits that would have the greatest impact on individual health, for example, private medical insurance, routine medicals, private dental care, were usually reserved for senior managers and above.

With regards to specific support for people from disadvantaged groups, provision depended on the route that the individual came through; if it was through a dedicated recruitment pipeline, for example, for young unemployed people or ex-offenders, then support could be targeted at the individual level. There was a sense, however, that people with certain barriers should not be treated differently to the general work force as this could be divisive.

Several companies cited benefits that were accessible to all, but which they thought would have a more significant impact financially on people lower down the social gradient, for example, company loans and discount schemes. In one instance, remuneration for apprenticeship roles was set above the statutory minimum in order to ensure that people from disadvantaged groups, who were more likely to have no recourse to alternative financial support while in training (parents, overdrafts) were able to access and sustain apprenticeship opportunities.

Flexible working was also identified as an important benefit that allowed all staff to manage work-life balance and deal with crises, something that was considered as especially relevant to people with barriers to work who they felt were more likely to have chaotic lifestyles.

## **3.3 What influences company behaviour in relation to the employability/employment of people from disadvantaged groups and the provision of health and well-being support for those employees?**

### **3.3.1 Employability/employment of people from disadvantaged groups**

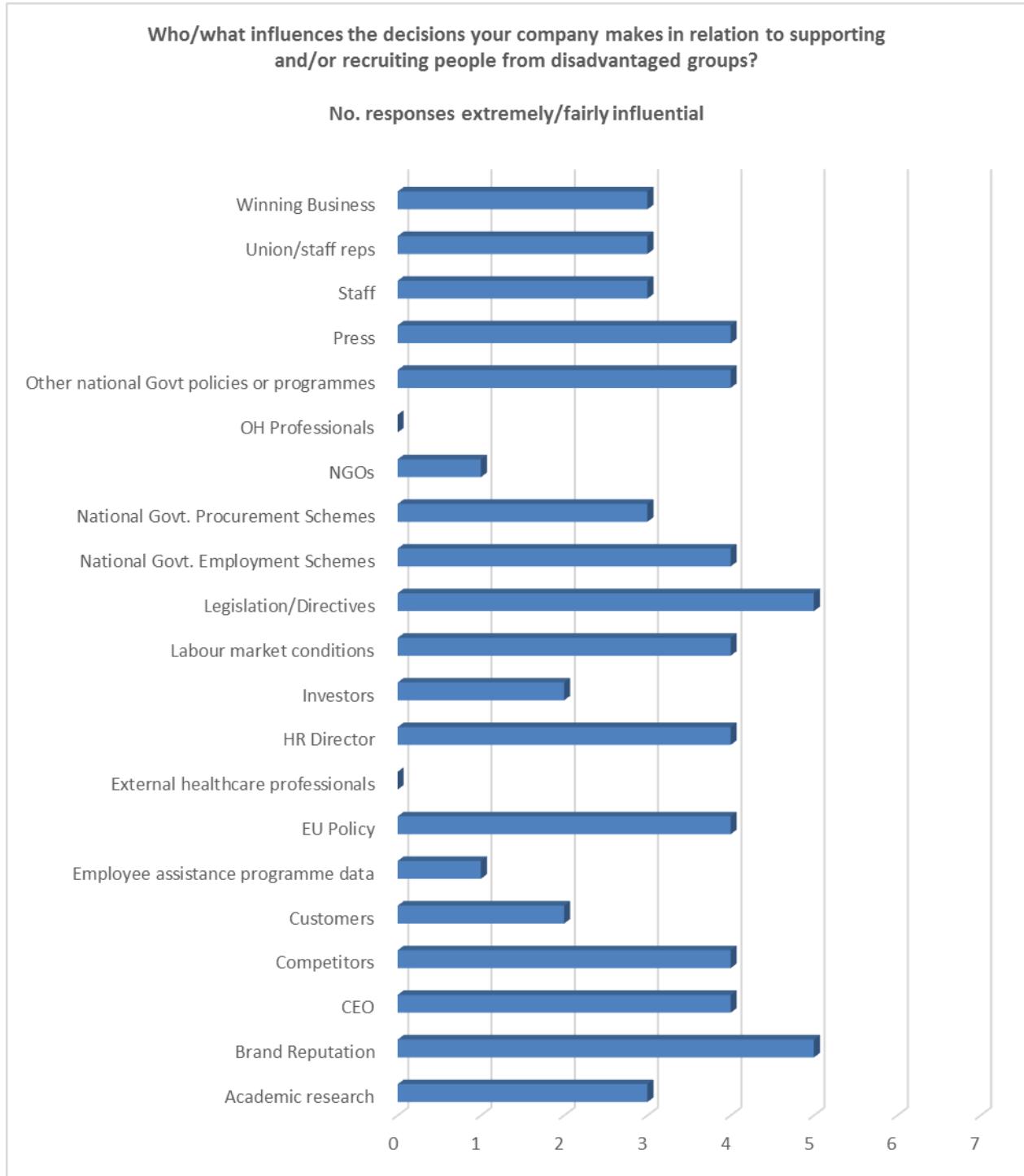
The results of the online survey showed that for the companies concerned, there was no factor that had a more significant influence over all the others, although when the results for 'extremely influential' and 'fairly influential' were combined, it showed that *external* factors were more influential than *internal* factors. Specifically, brand reputation and legislation/directives (5 out of 7), followed by competitors, EU policy, labour market conditions, national government employment schemes, other national government programmes and press (4 out of 7), although CEOs and HR directors scored the same. These results are illustrated in figure 2.

While not conclusive, the focus group discussion, and some of the learnings from the telephone interviews, can help in understanding some of the considerations companies make in respect to some of these factors; some factors were not discussed in great depth or at all.

#### **Brand Reputation**

There was a sense that the main driver behind activities supporting people from disadvantaged groups was social justice, 'the right thing to do', although it was recognised that there could be positive effects on a company's reputation.

*"I think our primary motive...is under a CSR banner so it's a belief that it's the right thing to do. Realistically, there are some good branding benefits that come out of that but...for us it's about having that engagement in our local community."*



**Figure 2. Results of the online survey.**

### **National government employment schemes**

The companies in the focus group said that they were often wary of government employment schemes. The wariness seemed to be down to several factors – the complexity of government employment and training schemes, bad publicity linked to particular schemes and ministerial changes.

*“With apprenticeships, traineeships, work quotas, I think we initially always are a bit nervous and say ‘is this one going to work, how long is it going on for, are they going to reform it, are they going to replace it?’.”*

*“I think if there was a bit more clarity sometimes around what they are trying to achieve and then making it easier for businesses to adopt some of the initiatives then I think they would carry more [influence].”*

However, despite this wariness, the companies did report engagement with Government schemes, for example offering apprenticeships that enabled them to draw down training funds.

### **National government procurement schemes**

Companies that tender for public infrastructure contracts are usually required to demonstrate in their bids how they will create employment/training opportunities in the local community. A good track record in this area and evidence of good partnership-working with community organisations is essential to be in the running for a contract win.

*“We try to put a 10% target on recruiting from disadvantaged groups on most of our contracts.”*

*“Social mobility is part of our diversity programme, we have signed the Government Charter on Social Mobility.”*

### **Winning business**

In addition to pressure that Governments can place on companies looking to win bids, some of the companies we spoke to talked about the direct influence that other clients placed on them through their supply chain. For example, one company had become involved with a particular disadvantaged group as a result of pressure by one of its major clients, an investment bank. In another case, the influence was not as direct, but the company concerned had to develop a CSR policy as a requirement of doing business with a major client.

### **Staff**

The level of influence that staff have on what their company does in relation to disadvantaged groups was largely dependent on the culture of the company. Companies that described themselves as being ‘democratic’ or ‘paternalistic’, for example, family-run or ‘household-name’ businesses, would consult staff on the issues that mattered most to them, or else allow staff across their business units the freedom to support local causes. In all instances, the value in terms of increased engagement of involving staff in the employability activity in some shape or form was recognised.

*“When people are bringing and mentoring these people as they come into the business (disadvantaged people), it’s a huge engagement for them to watch these people grow and the feedback on that has been massive, so that’s a huge driver.”*

*“If there’s something that someone in the business feels passionate that they want to do, most cases we’ll support it whatever it might be...”*

Most of the companies that we spoke to cited employability programmes as a useful engagement tool for staff, particularly for those who could become directly involved through volunteering. Engagement as a business benefit might be an indirect influencer on what companies decided to do but it does not seem to be a primary driver.

### **CEOs**

The influence of the CEO of a company was not as important as other factors in determining what is delivered, but discussions with companies indicated that the level of influence depends on the personality and style of each individual leader. It seems that some chief executives feel passionately about certain issues and want to use their position to make an impact, whereas others are happy to be advised on options while holding the right of veto. External agencies, in particular NGOs, can also influence the issues that chief executives want to prioritise if they have access to them through charity boards.

*“Because our MD (Managing Director) has such a forceful personality he possibly carries more influence than some of his predecessors.”*

*“I would say that the CSR agenda was the initial thing, obviously we need the CEO to get behind it but it wouldn’t have necessarily come from the CEO.”*

*“I think it is a bit about being in a large business like ours, our board members and our MD will sit on a number of groups and forums and if I’m honest, quite a lot of times the activity comes from an output of one of those meetings.”*

### **Press**

Companies in the UK were wary of the effect that bad publicity could have on their reputation, particularly in relation to the provision of unpaid work experience or helping particular groups, for example, ex-offenders. It is possible that this concern is limited to the UK context, where a particularly sensationalist newspaper culture exists.

*“We actually experienced a fair amount of negative press where we couldn’t pay people to work because it would mess up their benefits, so now we’re ‘sweatshop employers’. If it had really hit the papers, we’d have had to probably pull the whole thing.”*

*“It sounded better as an internship when we thought of it two years ago, now it sounds as if we’re exploiting people because of the press.”*

### **3.3.2 Health and well-being activities and provision**

The results of the survey showed that for those companies taking part, the key influencers in relation to health and well-being provision more likely to be *internal*. The scores against factors respondents felt were ‘extremely influential’ placed the CEO as the most influential driver (5 out of 7), followed by the HR Director (4 out of 5). When combining these scores with those in the ‘fairly influential’ category, CEOs and HR Directors appeared to carry equal

influence (7 out of 7), followed by brand reputation, labour market conditions, and staff (6 out of 7). The results can be seen in figure 3.

Again, the insights from the telephone interviews and the focus groups can help to explain some of these results.

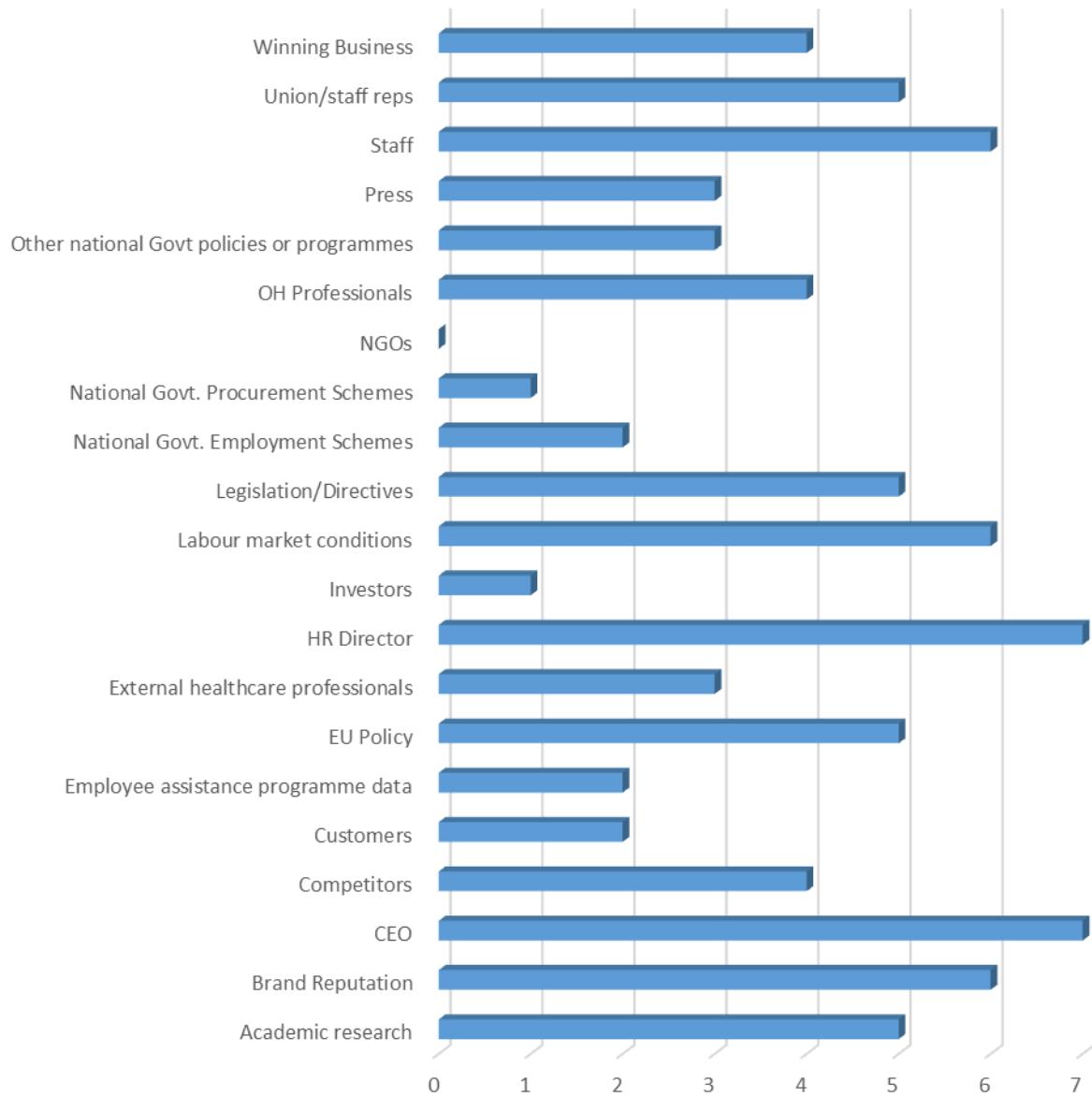
### **CEO/HR Director**

The focus group participants felt that the HR Director in particular held the biggest influence over health and well-being provision, over and above the CEO, although they acknowledged that the HR director would have to get the buy-in of the CEO before implementing a policy or activity, which was not always easy to get. To help achieve buy-in, HR directors would look to academic research or their competitors to help build their case.

*“HR people have the plot about ways to engage people with the business, ways to impact on productivity and therefore they are the key drivers.”*

**Who/what influences the decisions your company makes in relation to health and well-being provision?**

**No. responses extremely/fairly influential**



**Figure 3. Results from the online survey.**

## **Legislation/directives**

It is not surprising that legislation and EU directives were considered to be key influencers as companies must comply. Telephone and focus group participants reported the most monitoring and evaluation activity in relation to areas which are controlled by legislation, for example, health and safety and discrimination on grounds of race, religion, sexuality, gender, disability etc. It seemed that legislation in this regard had enabled health and well-being foundations to be laid, on top of which companies could build a broader offering.

*“I think a lot of health traditionally was born out of health and safety...before it moved into well-being aspects and for me...I think policy leads the way in a large way.”*

## **Staff**

The companies we spoke to suggested that what they provide in terms of health and well-being benefits, for example, private healthcare, health MOTs, confidential helplines, is critical to recruitment and retention. Participants indicated that considerations around the cost effectiveness or health impacts of particular initiatives were sometimes secondary to staff engagement and the impact removing an initiative might have on morale.

*“[If something is] not being used...just having it there the perception ‘it’s there for me, the company’s doing something for me’...it’s important because that engagement piece impacts how people feel and your feeling is ultimately your well-being.”*

*“This is what we do to attract you in, because you want that health accessory...I think some people want it because they think they should have it.”*

The fact that in some cases, perception seemed to be a primary driver of provision rather than impact, might explain the lack of formal monitoring and reporting the companies we spoke to were able to cite.

## **Academic research**

Focus group participants said that more focus is given to academic research in relation to health and well-being, sometimes because HR specialists require greater knowledge about a particular subject or because those specialists need to be able to influence their CEO or Director in order to agree to a specific action. In the case of the latter, academic research can lend more credibility or ‘proof’ to a proposal.

*“Health and well-being is something that people in organisations are not experts on and they want experts to tell them what is right for them to do.”*

*“I still think it goes back to the research piece, I don’t think businesses fully drive this thing.”*

*“I get articles and I drive them in front of people who could be influenced by these things.”*

## **Government policies**

The research suggests that for the companies involved in this study, government policies influence what they do in relation to health and well-being in terms of what manages to permeate public consciousness. For example, one manager referenced the UK-Government

‘5-a-day’ public health campaign<sup>7</sup>, which provided information about the importance of eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

### **Customers**

While not directly influencing what was provided, the retail companies in our focus group said that they felt it was important for their companies to be able to promote themselves as part of their brand as a good place to work, as it was recognised that this would impact sales.

*“We strive more from a brand perspective to help our customers understand how great a place we are to work. It’s a big message we put out and I think there’s more and more focus on that right now.”*

*“We seem to externally promote ourselves as a great place to work rather than the stuff we do that benefits [disadvantaged people].”*

### **Competitors**

There was an interesting discussion in the focus group around the nature of ‘competitors’ in relation to this particular issue. Participants felt that competition in relation to health and well-being helped them to strive towards best practice. Competitors were not necessarily limited to their own sectors, but rather the companies who were considered to be ‘best in class.’ They also talked about how, unlike in other commercial situations, there was a willingness to share best practice with competitors.

*“I think the list of competitors is slightly different...commercially the competitors are around the same product but for this it’s who does this well.”*

## **4. Conclusion**

The research described in this paper was designed to increase knowledge in relation to how companies support or employ people facing barriers to work and what influences the decisions they take in this regard.

In order to reach disadvantaged groups, the majority of companies that we spoke to said that what worked best was partnering with specialist agencies, usually non-profit, as they provided unique expertise as well as a better route through which to reach certain groups, for example, ex-offenders. Most also put in place processes in addition to standard recruitment procedures to make sure that opportunities were accessible. Furthermore, the companies we spoke to were cautious about engaging with government initiatives or providers because of the bad publicity they sometimes attracted and because they did not always meet the specific needs of businesses.

With regards to the health and well-being of disadvantaged groups, there was a recognition across all the businesses that we spoke to that employees from disadvantaged groups often required additional support in the workplace. This was easier to provide where individuals had been recruited through a specialist programme outside of mainstream recruitment channels. In these instances, responsibility for health and well-being usually rested with the

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<sup>7</sup> National Health Service website, 18.06.14: <http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/5aday/pages/5adayhome.aspx>

corporate responsibility team, who were responsible for the programmes that recruited people from specific groups.

This study has shown that for the seven companies who completed the online survey, there were a range of factors influencing decisions made in relation to employing people from disadvantaged groups, although broadly speaking it would seem that the decisions are more likely to be externally-led. Furthermore, despite the caution voiced around the value of government programmes (for example, welfare-to-work programmes), they do hold some level of influence over how companies support disadvantaged groups.

How companies recruit and support people from disadvantaged groups also depends on the culture of the organisation and the structure. Of the companies we spoke to, the ones that reported a more 'paternalistic' culture seemed more likely to 'go the extra mile' to support people from disadvantaged groups. Companies that were quite federalised in structure, or with a locally-led CSR programme, reported difficulty in taking programmes to scale as ownership for HR or CSR was disparate.

Decisions made in relation to health and well-being seem to be, for the companies we surveyed, at least, internally-led, with the Human Resources Director and CEO holding the most influence. There was general agreement that health and safety legislation in the UK was a major driver of the policies and processes in place, and most reporting, if any, was done in relation to obligations under this law.

However, some decisions were driven by competitors, for example, the provision of private healthcare as a way to attract as well as retain staff. This was usually only available to employees at management level and above, and therefore this particular activity may act to reinforce health inequalities across the social gradient.

As the work with disadvantaged groups seemed to sit mainly within the CSR departments of the companies we spoke to, the insight gained into how to ensure those employees thrived at work may not be shared with the people making the decisions on how to manage and support the health and well-being of all staff, when it is likely that this insight could be applicable to other people in the work-force, particularly those in low-paid work.

Finally, the companies we investigated did not view the employability work with which they were engaged in the context of promoting health equity, but rather recognised the benefits to be gained in terms of individual prosperity, social mobility and capital, and benefits to the company in terms of reduced costs, winning business, staff engagement and enhanced brand reputation.

## 5. Recommendations

It is not possible to make recommendations for policy or practice from such a small study, but nonetheless, we suggest that further investigation of the following would be beneficial in order to fully understand and build the case for employer engagement in tackling health inequalities:

- How companies engage with and the value they obtain from government-led employability/employment initiatives.
- The cost-benefit to society of employer-led initiatives that support the employability or employment of people from disadvantaged groups.

- The individual and public health impacts of employer-led initiatives to support the employability or employment of disadvantaged groups.
- How best to engage employers with schemes to increase health equity.

## **Appendix 1. Interview guide**

“To explore what employer interventions make a positive difference to those with barriers to work as they seek to gain and sustain ‘good work’ “

As part of a coalition of European organisations, Business in the Community has been tasked by the European Commission to speak to employers about health and wellbeing policies particularly in relation to disadvantaged groups.

Given your commitment to employing from a broad cross-section of the working public we are particularly interested in including your organisation in this research. As you know Business in the Community runs a number of campaigns supporting hard to reach groups (including care leavers, (ex) offenders and homeless people).

In the current economic situation where jobs are scarce; this research will help us to hone our thinking on how employers make it possible for disadvantaged groups to get into, and stay, in employment.

To carry out this research, we would like to consult approximately 20 employers. The consultation will be conducted through semi-structured telephone interviews, with three sections exploring:

1. How you recruit and the pool from which you draw your recruits
2. How you support the wellbeing of employees (and contracted staff)
3. The key interventions you think would make a significant difference to the wellbeing of people as they seek to gain and sustain good work

### **Business in the Community definition of disadvantaged groups:**

Are homeless, lone parents, have been in care, have caring responsibilities, ex-offenders, live with physical or mental disabilities, possess few qualifications and skills, are long-term unemployed. This list is not exhaustive, and individuals can often face a combination of the above circumstances, amongst others.

### **Section One**

- First section is about your recruitment process

1. How do you share information about your vacancies?
2. Can you talk me through your application process, how do people get to the table?
3. a) Have you ever faced challenges when trying to recruit for a) a particular geographic area b) a particular set of jobs?
  - b) In these instances how do you go above and beyond normal approaches above to fill these vacancies?

4. a) Do you provide opportunities for people who are not working for you to get an experience of the world of work? E.g. work placement, visit from graduates etc
- b) Can these people progress into jobs at the company? Who oversees this process and how are they linked to mainstream recruitment in your company?
5. Are you happy with your current recruitment approach, do you think it attracts a sufficiently diverse mix of people to the company? Do you envisage the company approach changing in the future? In what way?
6. Do you reach out to any disadvantaged groups in your recruitment practices, who are these groups and how are they targeted?

## **Section Two**

This section will explore how you support the health and well being of staff and how you manage staff retention

7. a) What policies and procedures do you think make the biggest difference to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of their employees? (e.g.s of where your approach sits above simple compliance)
- b) What benefits do you have in place to support health and wellbeing of employees?
8. What in your view, is the main reason people, particularly those from disadvantaged groups (or facing barriers to work), risk losing their job and fall out of work? How, in your view can this be avoided or addressed?
9. a) Do you identify any groups as needing particular support around their health and wellbeing in the workplace?
- b) How do you support these groups? What are the factors that help them to do their job well? Can you provide any examples?
10. Do you work with a recruitment agency to fill vacancies on a temporary or contract basis? If so, in your partnership agreement how do policies and procedures about 'wellbeing' feature, how do benefits feature?
11. Are there any opportunities that you make available to one group of employees that aren't open to other members of staff on different contracts? How is this decided?
12. Do you track health and wellbeing in the company? Can you tell me a bit about that? If so, do you report publicly on any health and wellbeing related targets/indicators?
13. How do you identify and assess an employee in distress?
14. How are line managers trained and supported to identify and manage health and well-being issues with their line reports?

## **Section Three**

This section explores what needs to happen in order to improve support for people (particularly from disadvantaged groups) to gain and sustain good work

15. What in your view has made the greatest difference to the health and wellbeing of your employees?
16. What is most useful thing government could do to support employers who promote health and wellbeing for their employees?
17. What can employees do to help themselves?
18. Finally are there any other companies whose wellbeing or care of employees inspires you?

## Appendix 2. Topic guide – Focus group session

### Format for Focus Group Session

Welcome – end of session one: 1hr 30 mins

Session two – close: 45 minutes

Break – 15 mins

#### 1. Welcome and introduction

- Brief background on Drivers, BITC's role in Drivers.
- Brief intro to this research project and role/purpose of the focus group. Outcomes. Purpose of today
  - i. Understand more about company motivations for supporting and employing people from disadvantaged groups.
  - ii. Understand more about the motivations for promoting the health and wellbeing of your staff, including those facing significant disadvantage
- Definition of disadvantaged groups (this will be included in participant briefing packs)
- Introduce BITC team and role of each
  - i. Cath – facilitator
  - ii. Anne – scribe / timekeeper
  - iii. Rebecca – scribe / facilitator support
- Confirm timings / break
- Housekeeping

#### 2. Company introductions (15 mins)

Each company to talk about:

- Brief outline of business
- Proportion of skilled/unskilled jobs
- Any specialist employability programmes
- Estimate of proportion of staff falling into one or more disadvantaged groups

### 3. Focus Group – part 1 Topic Guide

Open discussion, to lead off with one or two open questions: (20 mins)

- Why does your company actively support and recruit people from disadvantaged groups?
- What are your motivation/s for doing so and recruiting in this way?

#### **Prompt questions**

- What prompted you to start recruiting like this/set up your programme?
- Was there a specific trigger / incident (e.g SIB Visit!)
- Who was involved? Who began/initiated this type of recruitment programme?
- Are they your own programmes, or are you involved in supporting Govt schemes e.g. work placements/ apprenticeships
  - If Govt – how did you find out about the scheme or programme?
  - What attracted you to it?
- Who or what influences why you do it?
- Who why

Scribe NOTES	Note down motivations/influencers that we haven't already thought of on the coloured post-it notes (one for each person).
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**Group exercise** (5-10 mins; aim is to not let them think too long on it but just go with instinctive response)

Facilitator to say we'd like to look in a little more detail now about who and what influences you to recruit and employ people from disadvantaged groups.

Each participant will be given a batch of post-its (different colour for each person), each with a motivation/influencer on it (spend 5 minutes on this):

- Customers
- Investors
- Staff
- Staff reps/Union
- Occupational health
- EAP provider

- CEO / senior management
- Charity partner
- HR Director
- Competitors
- Academic research
- Healthcare professionals
- Press
- Winning business
- Brand reputation
- Government employment schemes
- Government procurement policies
- Government policy (but not necessarily legislation)
- Legislation/regulation
- To fill vacancies
- State of the economy
- Others mentioned in the opening session

Ask them to place their post-its where they think they best fit on the chart (see below).



**Discussion:** each participant to explain their choices – (10-15 mins if needed)

- Why did you place X above X?
- Point out any differences between people (if there are any), ask why they think this might be?

*Facilitator:* sum up any conclusions, obvious findings and ask group if they would agree with your summary (2 mins)

*Facilitator intro:* I'd now like you to think more about your existing employees rather than recruitment and how you support their health and wellbeing (2 mins),

Explain you'd like them to repeat the exercise they've just done but think about their internal policies and programmes to support the health and wellbeing of employees and why they have come about – what were the drivers? What influenced the way that they implemented them if they had choices?

**Repeat Group Exercise** – this time who and what are the most important influences of internal employee health and well-being programmes (5-10 mins) Participants can use additional post-its if there are 'new ones'

**Discussion:** ask people to explain choices – (10 mins)

- How do their choices/influences differ from when they did the exercise looking at recruitment?
- Why do they think this might be?
- Are company responses proactive or reactive – if so to what?
  - Did any of the things you do to support employee health come about because of a particular instance or event?
  - Did a particular person have a big impact?
- and does this change the influencers or motivations?

BREAK – (15 mins tea / coffee / comfort break)

#### 4. Focus Group – part 2 Topic Guide

Open discussion:

Intro: finished last session talking about internal health and wellbeing policies:

- What special provision, if any, is there for those from disadvantaged groups?
- Why is this?
- How does provision vary across the organisation e.g. by level of staff, type of contract? If it does why do they think this is?
- How important is it that you know that what you are doing to support disadvantaged groups and / or promote employee health and wellbeing is working?

- Thinking back to the beginning, how do you know / find out or measure the effect or benefits of what you do to support the employment of people from disadvantaged groups?
- Does knowing if your programmes are effective matter?

Final questions (if we feel like that we haven't managed to extract this :

- Do you think government policy or legislation (either at national or EU level) has had any influence on what your company does to support disadvantaged groups?
  - A)recruitment and employment
  - B) employee health and well being
- What do you think are the most effective things that work in encouraging other businesses to do more to employ and support people from disadvantaged groups?
  - Why do you think that is?
  - Do you think there is any kind of policy or legislation that would work in encouraging businesses to do more? Or do better?

## Appendix 3. Online survey

What motivates businesses to support disadvantaged people into work?

Copy of online survey used in research to support the DRIVERS case study “The role of employers in promoting the employability and employment of people from disadvantaged groups.”

Q.1 What is your job title?

Q.2 What is your email address?

Q3. What discipline do you work in? Please tick all that apply:

Q4. What sector does your business operate in?

Accountants and Consultants	Household and Personal Goods	Real Estate
Aerospace and Defence	Food and Drug Retailers	Retailers – Food and Drugs
Architects	Industrial and Engineering	Retailers – General
Automobiles and Parts	IT – Hardware, Software and Services	Surveyors
Chemicals	Legal	Telecommunications
Construction	Leisure & Hotels	Tobacco
Financial – Banks and Building Societies	Media, Marketing & PR	Transport
Financial – Insurance	Mining and Basic Resources	Utilities
Financial – Investment Services	Oil & Gas	
Food & Beverage Providers	Pharmaceuticals and Biotech	

Q5. What is your annual turnover?

€0 -
€1,000,000 - €10,000,000
€10,000,000 - €50,000,000
€50,000,000 - €100,000,000

€100,000,000 - €500,000,000
€500,000,000 - €1,000,000,000
> €1,000,000,000

Q6. How many employees do you have across your business?

<100
100 – 1,000
1,001 – 5,000
5,001 – 10,000
>10,000

Q7. Does your company provide training, work experience or other support to people from disadvantaged groups? Please give details.

Q8. Does your company actively recruit people from disadvantaged groups? If you answered yes, please give details.

Q9. Who influences the decisions your company makes in relation to supporting and/or recruiting people from disadvantaged groups? (please select one option per line)

	Extremely influential	Fairly influential	Not very influential	Irrelevant	Don't know
Chief Executive					
Customers					
Human Resources Director					
External healthcare professionals					
Investors					
Occupational Health professionals					
Staff					

Unions/Staff Representatives					
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Q10. What other factors influence the decisions your company makes in relation to supporting and/or recruiting people from disadvantaged groups? (please select one option per line).

	Extremely influential	Fairly influential	Not very influential	Irrelevant	Don't know
Academic Research					
Brand Reputation					
Competitors					
Employee Assistance Programme data					
EU Policy					
Labour Market Conditions					
Legislation/Directives					
NGOs					
National Government Employment Schemes					
National Government Procurement Schemes					
Other National Government Policies or Programmes					
Press					
Winning Business					

Q11. Who influences the decisions your company makes in relation to health and well-being policies and provision (e.g. healthcare, healthy eating programmes). Please select one option per line.

	Extremely influential	Fairly influential	Not very influential	Irrelevant	Don't know
Chief Executive					
Customers					
Human Resources Director					
External healthcare professionals					
Investors					
Occupational Health professionals					
Staff					
Unions/Staff Representatives					

Q12. What other factors influence the decisions your company makes in relation to health and well-being policies and provision (e.g. healthcare, healthy eating programmes). Please select one option per line.

	Extremely influential	Fairly influential	Not very influential	Irrelevant	Don't know
Academic Research					
Brand Reputation					
Competitors					
Employee Assistance Programme data					
EU Policy					
Labour Market Conditions					
Legislation/Directives					
NGOs					

National Government Employment Schemes					
National Government Procurement Schemes					
Other National Government Policies or Programmes					
Press					
Winning Business					

Q13. Do you have any health and well-being provision specifically for employees from disadvantaged backgrounds or which those employees particularly value (for example, interest-free loans, mentoring, healthcare)? Please give details.

Q14. What issues do your corporate responsibility programmes/activities cover? Select all that apply.

Building sustainable and enterprising communities
Diversity
Education and Young People
Responsible Leadership
Sustainable Production
Tackling Unemployment
Well-being in the Workplace

Q15. Please list the issue areas in order of importance/relevance to your company (click and drag each option).

Q16. Please tell us anything else you think might be relevant to the survey.



DRIVERS (2012-2015) is a research project funded by the EU's 7th Framework Programme. It aims to deepen understanding of the relationships between some of the key influences on health over the course of a person's life - early childhood, employment, and income and social protection - and to find solutions to improve health and reduce health inequalities.

The research is undertaken by a consortium including leading research centres and organisations representing the public health sector, civil society and businesses.