A 'SYSTEMS ANALYSIS' APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING FACTORS AFFECTING THE JOB MARKET FOR OLDER AND DISABLED PEOPLE IN CORNWALL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK has an estimated labour force shortage of 3 million that is also reflected in Cornwall. Certain industry sectors that are central to Cornwall's economy, such as the hospitality and social care sector, have really big skills gaps. That means there are jobs, but not enough skilled applicants to fill them. That should be good news for everyone looking for a job, but it's not working out evenly.

We conducted a 'systems dynamics' analysis to find out how to close the skills gaps in Cornwall. In collaborative workshops, participants connected factors they thought helped and hindered an older or disabled person having a job. We also conducted a systematic review of all existing policies surrounding workplace inclusion for older and disabled people.

Our research shows that the employment system, as a social system, coupled with the unique geographical features of Cornwall, creates self-sustaining negative employment practices among most SMEs. These interact with each other and act as hurdles for the employment of disabled and older people in this region. Our system maps capture these hurdles and indicate that we need a portfolio of policies, regulations, and practices to tackle these self-sustaining issues.

CONTEXT

The employment rate for people with disabilities (52.3% employment rate, Q4 2020) compared to people without disabilities (81.1%) points to a large, persistent disability employment gap (28.8%, down from 33.7% in Q4 2013).

Similarly Cornwall has an ageing population – a trend we're expecting to see in the rest of the country. Some 37.72% of the UK is over 50, compared to 46.68% in Cornwall. This is 265,881 people (source ONS 2019) who could help support the skills gap.

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KEY MESSAGES

- Overcoming the negative attitudes/ misperceptions that businesses hold towards disabled and older people which reduce the rate of their employment is vital.

- SMEs can get into a cycle, whereby not being visibly inclusive lessens the perceived chance of employment by an older or disabled person, meaning they won't apply for a job, meaning the SME won't employ them and will continue to not be inclusive.

- Disabled and older people can contribute greatly to businesses but more inclusive recruitment policies are required.

RESEARCH AIMS

- To take a systems approach to examining the 'Inclusivity effect', which is the rate of recruitment of older and disabled people in Cornwall.

- To conduct research to reveal the factors that shape the employment profile of older and disabled people in Cornwall – and to see how those factors interact and influence the employment profile.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Business have misperceptions about older people that reduce the risk tolerance of businesses, which in turn reduces the rate of recruitment of older people:
  - lower performance
  - difficult to manage
  - poor health

- Business have misperceptions about disabled people that reduce the rate of disabled people's employment:
  - time off needed and productivity concerns
  - costs of making reasonable adjustments
  - disabled people being incapable
  - regulations around employment of disabled people.

- Businesses tend to rely on personal networks to find employees instead of using inclusive recruitment methods.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Inclusive recruitment methods are not being used in businesses because of misperceptions around the employability and productivity of disabled and older people.

- Older and disabled people are pushed out of the employment system into benefit dependency.

- Overcoming the misperceptions will improve the rate of recruitment in Cornwall, closing employment and skills gaps.

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