



Hayley Pells, Workshop Owner, Wales

Supporting those with complex needs into the workplace can appear to be challenging. For me, it sort of crept in. Working with human beings for any length of time introduces all kinds of life experience that one might not personally have lived but learning from those you are working with you can find many of the solutions may not be as unique as the problems that prompt them. I am sure this has been your experience too in both personal and professional instances, and you've probably made changes without considering them as being a "special thing" as they are just the common-sense thing to do at the time.

The time to overcome barriers into the workplace can often be less consuming than the avoidance of dealing with them! Making reasonable adjustments to the working environment or working arrangements needed by a disabled person so they can do the job as well as possible is protected by the Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments for disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, make sure employees are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs and this applies to all workers, including trainees, apprentices, contract workers and business partners. It is my belief that we will become much more aware of nonvisible challenges for a variety of reasons that could include (but not limited to):

- Recruitment crisis
- Mental health awareness
- Post pandemic impact
- Ageing workforce
- Career switching

Physical disabilities presented by employees at my own workshops

- Mobility – temporary impairment
- Mobility – permanent impairment

Non-visible disabilities presented by employees at my own workshops

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Hearing loss
- Insomnia
- Autism
- Respiratory conditions
- Epilepsy
- Learning disabilities
- Fatigue
- Chronic pain
- Lupus
- Depression
- Bereavement
- Terminal illness

Sometimes it is easier to adjust for overt conditions, they can be seen, and solutions are often easier to talk about. Unseen disabilities can be challenging. There can be stigma of having a disability in general, and this can make the discussion difficult. Sometimes the team member might not even be aware that they have a nonvisible disability, when employing young people in the automotive industry – you'd be surprised how many people have scooted under the radar during their academic life to end up with a later diagnosis when pursuing alternative education from that route.

Talking about health and body is incredibly personal, a vulnerable place to be so it is important that there isn't pressure to disclose information. Very few people will go through life without experiencing some form of trauma, loss, or health issue and a more inclusive workplace will help us grow, innovate, and develop of more empathetic culture.

Sometimes impairments can be short term, a long-term impairment is considered as such if it lasts for more than a year. Some are formally diagnosed, and some are not. Human beings, being the complex creatures that they are, can often have several conditions operating all at the same time! New FSB research shows that 51% of small business employers either currently employs, or in the last three years have employed, a disabled person or someone with a physical or mental health condition. It is likely that this figure is an under-estimate, due to the hidden nature of some disabilities and health conditions. The same research shows that small businesses are employing disabled people and people with long term health conditions at a higher rate than their larger counterparts and the report speculates that the agility of smaller firms, and their informality of hiring, can contribute to providing a supportive environment.

Strategies that helped in my workshops included

- Flexible working
- Phased returns to work
- Occupational Health services*
- Physiotherapy services*
- Counselling**
- Changes to work environment such as chairs, lifting equipment, types of hand tools

*In Wales, at the time of access, these services were self-referral and operating well, it was pre-pandemic.

** Counselling is a non-taxable benefit in kind, an important note for those completing their own tax returns or working with accountants unfamiliar with this area.

Some fun things to note, each challenge and solution listed has come from a technical member of staff operating on the workshop floor. Educating the customer base about inclusion was not something I thought I'd have to do – but ended up doing. And lastly, it was totally worth it as it is simply the right thing to do.

Other resources I have recommended to those who have asked:

- [Millions of Britons to be able to request flexible working on day one of employment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- [Access to Work factsheet for employers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- [Business Without Barriers | Federation of Small Businesses, FSB | FSB, The Federation of Small Businesses](https://www.fsb.org.uk)



INSTITUTE
OF THE **MOTOR**
INDUSTRY

Registered office

Fanshaws, Brickendon, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG13 8PQ

theimi.org.uk

+44(0)1992 511 521

hello@theimi.org.uk

