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Disability case settled against PSNI and Honeycomb Jobs Ltd

The PSNI has reviewed its procedures for recruiting people with disabilities after a disability discrimination case was settled by a man with autism, ADHD and Tourette's syndrome. He had unsuccessfully applied for an administrative post with the PSNI via a recruitment campaign conducted by Honeycomb Jobs Ltd and was supported in taking his case by the Equality Commission.

Honeycomb Jobs Ltd and the PSNI each paid the man £6,250 without admission of liability.

The man had disclosed that he had autism on his application form. No one followed up on this until he had successfully completed two parts of the three-stage recruitment process.

The third stage was a group interview and report. The man and his father made several phone calls to Honeycomb Jobs Ltd to let them know that, because of his autism, the man would have severe difficulties effectively communicating within the planned group interview. His father tried to arrange reasonable adjustments to allow his son to show that he met the relevant competencies for the job.

While the man was given extra time to read the pre-briefing (which he did not need) and an extra ten minutes and a word processor to write up what was discussed, he did not believe that effective reasonable adjustments were made at the group interview itself, which meant that due to his disability he was not able to actively participate. He completed the written report and scored well in all areas of the overall selection process with the exception of the group interview.

The man said: "I worked hard to overcome my educational difficulties and am now qualified to foundation degree level but I'm still aware of my verbal communication difficulties. Because of this I avoided looking for a job until recently, when I took up a voluntary post with a local charity. I was able to do a good job there with some allowances for my disabilities and it gave me the confidence to apply for the PSNI role.

"It is important that employers listen and take steps to ensure that people with disabilities are given appropriate support to allow them to compete fairly with others without a disability and ultimately the possibility of achieving a good job.

"The result of this experience unfortunately has taken its toll. It has had an impact on

my condition, self-confidence, and my trust in employers that they can act fairly with the disabled community.”

Mary Kitson, Senior Legal Officer, Equality Commission, said: “One of the main reasons we support cases like this is to drive change and improvement in employment practices. We welcome the PSNI’s and Honeycomb Jobs Ltd’s agreement to review their recruitment practices to ensure that applicants with disabilities are given a more level playing field.

“Employers must plan for the possibility of applicants with disabilities at every stage of a recruitment exercise. This includes exercises such as this one with a large number of posts to be filled and a generic job description.

“The Disability Discrimination Act puts a duty on employers to remove or change aspects of selection processes that can act as barriers to disabled applicants. In this case, where the applicant had advised he would require help with the group interview, consideration should have been given to how reasonable adjustments could be made.

“If someone discloses a disability on the application form, the recruiter should be contacting the applicant to find out what they need to allow them to compete. Any reasonable adjustment should be tailored specifically to meet an applicant’s particular needs.

“Only 37.5% of disabled people in Northern Ireland are in employment, the lowest rate of any region in the UK, and all employers have a role to play in improving this statistic. People with disabilities are entitled to compete for jobs and financial independence alongside all other candidates and it is the employer’s responsibility to make sure this happens fairly.”

Notes on settlement

- Honeycomb Jobs Ltd and the PSNI confirmed their commitment to the principle of equality of opportunity in employment.
- Both undertook to liaise with the Equality Commission to review their Equal Opportunities, disability policies practices and procedures applicable to a recruitment exercise to ensure they are effective and conform to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Further information

- [Recruiting people with disabilities \(The Reasonable Adjustment Duty, Good Practice and Positive Action\)](#)
- [Employing people with Autism: a brief guide for employers \(pdf\)](#)

