



# tapestry

## HSC Disability Staff Network

### **Tapestry Minutes**

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 12-2 pm

Zoom video call

#### **1. Welcome**

Siobhan McGrath (Chair) welcomed members to the first Tapestry Zoom meeting and welcomed new members.

#### **2. Minutes and Matters Arising**

All members agreed the minutes of the last meeting.

#### **3. Tapestry Action Plan**

Katherine updated members on progress against the 2019-20 action plan and presented the draft action plan for 2020-21. Overall members were happy with the proposed actions, however had some suggestions for some of the actions:

**Theme 1: Promote the Network:** members agreed that whilst it was important to promote the network at Senior team

meetings it is also important to promote the network at middle management and team level as well. Several members volunteered to deliver presentations at team and senior management meetings.

Website: there were several suggestions for updates to the website including:

- A list or a link to all the relevant documents and policies from HR that affect staff
- New articles to keep momentum and interest high (such as COVID-19 & disability)
- New section on experiences of working during COVID-19

**Actions:**

- **Katherine to amend 2020-21 action plan to include the above points**

**Theme 2: Raising Awareness of Disability:** Action 5 to be changed from a “focus group” to “online chat options.”

Action 7 “focus on hidden disabilities”, there was a suggestion to focus on the issue of face masks to raise awareness of the fact that people with certain hidden disabilities may be exempt from wearing them. Two members shared their experiences of face masks in the workplace and advised that it has become very difficult for them to communicate as they rely on mouth patterns and lip reading to communicate with colleagues. This has caused them to become isolated in the workplace. The use of visors instead of face masks likewise creates problems due to fogging up and light reflecting. Members agreed that the rules of exemption have not been made clear and that a communication from SMT or HR is needed to let managers know what the rules are so they can manage their staff accordingly. The Equality Unit will contact HR to raise the

concerns outlined by Tapestry members in relation to face masks. It was also agreed that HR should have direct contact and engagement with a member of Tapestry so that they can hear the issues first hand.

**Actions:**

- **Katherine to amend action 5 to reflect online chat options**
- **Equality Unit to contact HR in relation to new mandatory face covering rules.**

**Theme 3: HSC as an employer of choice:** Members were in agreement with all proposed actions under theme 3.

<b>4. Tapestry Engagement Feedback</b>
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Katherine shared the results of the engagement with Tapestry members on their experience of working in the current COVID-19 pandemic. Members felt that it was a fair reflection of the issues.

Members discussed engaging with line managers and mentors whilst working from home. One member advised that it has been challenging as they need very clear instructions and it is difficult when trying to prioritise tasks without constant access to your manager. However, they also advised that all necessary reasonable adjustments have been put in place and they have access to their employment support officer and mentor whenever they need them.

Another member advised that it was very difficult to engage with other staff but also hard to get staff to engage with Tapestry as it can be seen as a 'distraction' from everyday work

and that it is not relevant to them. It was agreed that it is more difficult to maintain interest at the moment.

## **5. Disability Action Plan Updates**

- **Awareness Days**

Sandra gave an overview of the findings emerging from a staff survey on the Fibromyalgia and Mental Health Awareness Days which were held in 2019-20.

She advised that the results of the survey showed that mental health once again came out on top as an area of interest to staff, closely followed by deafness. There was a short discussion on whether these themes should be considered as both topics have been covered in previous awareness days. However, group members agreed that there are now different issues for both people who have mental health conditions and those who are deaf or hard of hearing with regards to the pandemic and staff have still chosen these as the two themes they are most interested in.

Sandra advised that the timings and presentation of the information will be different for these days and more information will be shared in due course.

- **Placement Scheme**

Katherine delivered an update on the scheme. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation a decision was made to temporarily suspend the Disability Placement scheme in March. After speaking with placement managers and employment support officers it was decided that it would not be feasible or safe to continue the office-based placements due to managers and staff working from home and the safety concerns for participants who may have health issues.

After speaking with the PaLS managers and employment support officers for those who were based in the warehouses for their placements it was decided that these placements could be re-started provided all the necessary safety measures were carried out. One of the participants has since re-started, two others have opted out.

Consideration is also being given to going ahead with the 2020-21 Scheme on a warehouse only placements basis for this year. The Equality Unit are liaising with Supported Employment Solutions to work out the logistics but hope that these placements may commence in January 2021.

Katherine advised that at least three of the 2019-20 placement participants have been successful at interview and have been placed on the Regional Band 3 Administrator waiting list.

- **Carers**

The Equality Unit has made contact with HR to raise awareness of the specific information needs of staff who care for an elderly person or a person with a disability in relation to working under COVID-19. The Unit has also recommended to HR that they engage directly with staff who are carers on their experience and health and wellbeing needs.

- **Disability Champions Network Meeting**

The Champions met in May 2020 and considered the findings from the engagement with staff who have a disability on working under COVID-19 as well as work on recruitment agencies.

<b>Any Other Business</b>
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There was a suggestion that a break should be scheduled for all future meetings as 2 hours on a video call is a long time. This was agreed.

<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>
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Date of next meeting: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020, 12-2pm: Zoom videoconferencing. Joining details will be shared before the meeting.

If you require the agenda or papers in an alternative format, please contact [tapestry.network@hscni.net](mailto:tapestry.network@hscni.net).