

SMALL FIRMS DISMISSIVE OF DDA

Over half of all small business owners (52 per cent) consider the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) to be largely irrelevant, according to new research sponsored by Lloyds TSB Business. Even more revealing is the fact that this rises to sixty per cent amongst firms already subject to the legislation.

The report, prepared by the Small Enterprise Research Team at the Open University, shows that only four per cent of firms surveyed think that the DDA has a positive impact. Furthermore, at a time of concern over a rising tide of red tape, one in five (18 per cent) think it is expensive or troublesome to implement, while a further 15 per cent say it creates another layer of administration.

The extension of the Act in October to include firms employing less than twenty is also causing concern amongst small businesses. Over half (55 per cent) agree that the extension is ethical, but claim that it puts too much of a burden on business. Sixteen per cent believe the extension to be unnecessary, while one in ten (11 per cent) think it is an empty gesture that will be impossible to monitor if implemented. The last two views are most widely held by those in the 55 - 64 year old age group with 40 per cent citing them compared with only 10 per cent of those aged 35 - 44.

Stephen Pegge, head of communications for Lloyds TSB Business, says: "Despite their reservations over the actual legislation, our research shows that small firms are not fundamentally opposed to employing people with disabilities. In fact, a quarter already have a formal disabilities policy and just under half say that they would consider having one.

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SMALL FIRMS DISMISSIVE OF DDA.../2

Stephen Pegge continues: "What small firms are seemingly opposed to is the thought of more regulation, alongside the cost of administration and compliance. Many feel that running their own business is hard enough, and that the DDA only adds to their burden."

This reluctance is further evidenced by the fact that, even amongst larger firms, already covered by the DDA for some time, those with a formal policy towards the employment of people with disabilities are in the minority. Just over a third (36 per cent) have such policies in place.

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Notes to editors:

The research was conducted amongst small firms with up to 50 employees.

The research was carried out for Lloyds TSB by the Small Enterprise Research Team at the Open University Business School. The report is based on responses from a panel of over 350 small businesses within Britain drawn mainly from the manufacturing, business services and retail/distribution sectors of the economy.

The Small Enterprise Research Report (£30) is available to order from the SerTEAM website (www.serteam.co.uk) or contact telephone number: 01908 655831.

Case studies are available by contacting the Lloyds TSB Press Office.

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