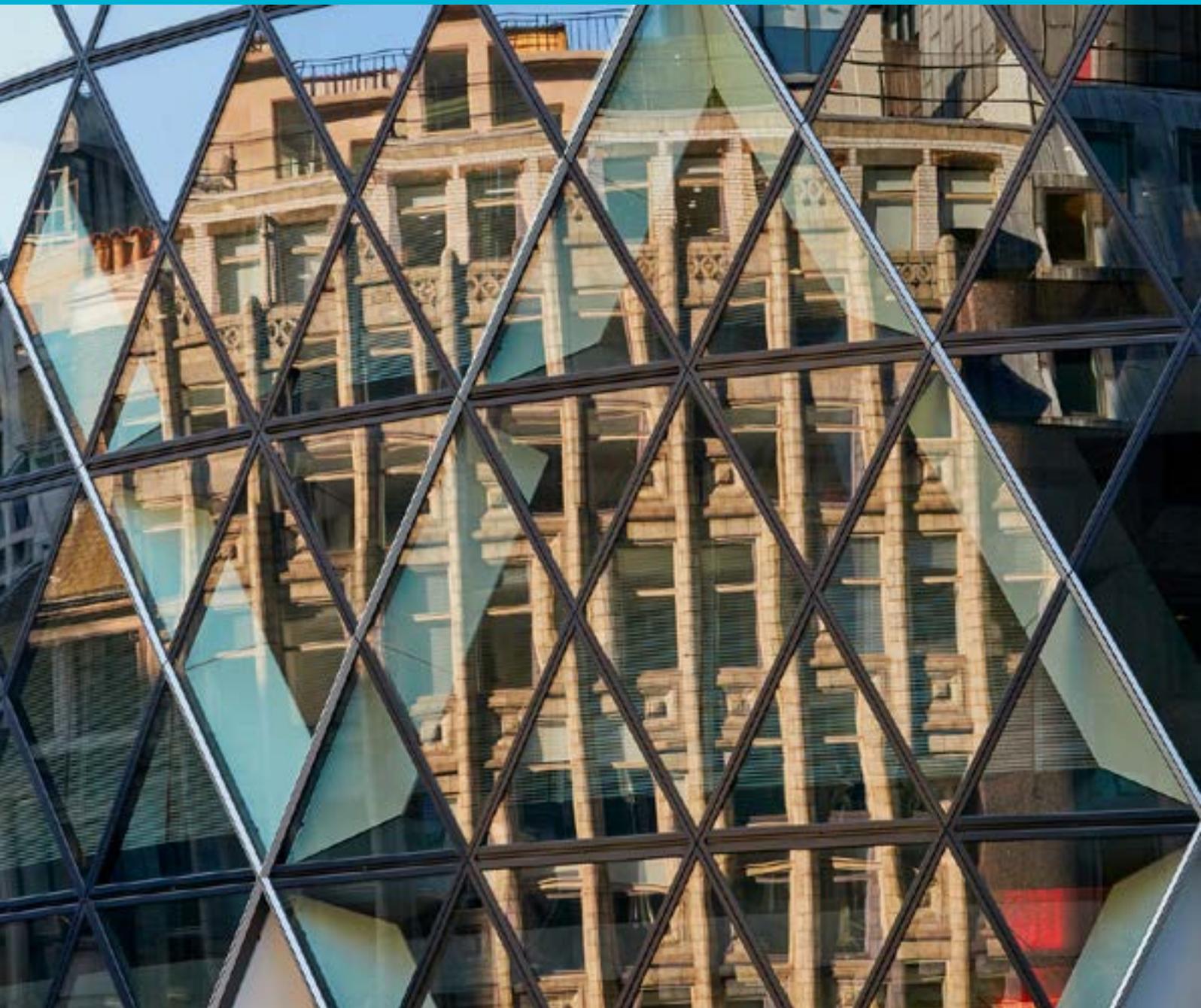


Imperial College  
London

# Breaking Down Barriers

## Employer responses to student questions



**Careers Service**  
[www.imperial.ac.uk/careers](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers)

## Employer responses to questions from disabled students

As part of the 'Breaking down Barriers' event, that Imperial runs in collaboration with the LSE, students were able to submit questions to the diversity positive employers involved. The event itself was unfortunately cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however our partner organisations were good enough to still respond to the questions remotely.

The questions in this document are separated into the following themes:

- Adjustments
- Disclosure
- Mental health
- Perceptions
- Recruitment processes
- Workplace culture

The picture of disability within careers is constantly evolving. Employers are increasingly recognising the benefits of a diverse workforce and a lot of graduate recruiters actively try to encourage more applications from this pool of talent. We are keen to assist disabled students at Imperial however we can. To discuss your career, the recruitment process, disclosure, reasonable adjustments, legal issues and other disability careers issues please contact us on [careers@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:careers@imperial.ac.uk) or [make an appointment for a Careers Consultation](#).

We are grateful to our colleagues at LSE Careers Service for their work and continued collaboration on this project, and also to our partner employers for their involvement and contributions in our work for disabled students. We hope that you find it interesting and useful.

**Imperial Careers Service**

## **Why should disabled graduates consider applying to your organisation in particular?**

### **KPMG**

At KPMG, we want to attract, retain and develop diverse talent to ensure that we are successful. This means recruiting from the widest possible pool of talent, removing barriers that can prevent our people from reaching their full potential, and fostering a fully inclusive environment which maximises collaboration and empowers everyone at KPMG to bring their whole selves to work.

At KPMG we work with people to create the right environment where we can work together to find the tools, ways of working and systems that enable you to maximise your performance and fully integrate into the team ethos that we have. We recognise that no two people with disabilities have the same needs or that you might not even know what those are in the workplace yet, so we believe in the power of conversation and working together to help you thrive.

### **NGDP**

A graduate with a disability should apply for the NGDP because Local Government is a fantastic place to work and provides a huge variety of experiences and challenges. Local Government is also a market leader in how it supports employees with disabilities and so you can be confident that the barriers you experience will not stop you from meeting potential.

### **Norton Rose Fulbright**

We know that considering where to apply is a big decision, and this is an even more important decision for disabled graduates. We carefully think about your whole journey from the application to your joining the firm. We always recommend speaking to a member of the graduate recruitment team if you require any adjustments or support during the application process, even if you're not sure what they might be. We have a workplace adjustments process in place which includes a workplace adjustments passport which employees, their manager and HR can complete together should the need arise. The passport facilitates the "portability" of adjustments (i.e. when an employee moves teams or when line managers change), which means employees don't have to repeatedly discuss adjustments or how their disability impacts them at work. It also helps structure a conversation between the employee and their manager about adjustments and support needs and provides a plan for when an employee is unwell or needs additional support because of their disability or condition.

## **Shell**

There's never been a more exciting time to work at Shell. Everyone here is helping solve one of the biggest challenges facing the world today: bringing the benefits of energy to everyone on the planet, whilst managing the risks of climate change. To power progress together, we need to attract and develop the brightest minds and make sure every voice is heard. Here are just some of the ways we're nurturing an inclusive environment – one where you can express your ideas, extend your skills and reach your potential.

We're creating a space where people with disabilities can excel through transparent recruitment process, workplace adjustments and ongoing support in their roles. When applying to any opportunity with Shell, feel free to let us know about your circumstances when you apply and we'll take it from there.

We're closing the gender gap – whether that's through action on equal pay or by enabling more women to reach senior roles in engineering and technology. We're striving to be a pioneer of an inclusive and diverse workplace, promoting equality for employees regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We consider ourselves a flexible employer and want to support you finding the right balance. We encourage you to discuss this with us in your application.

## **Adjustments**

**What adjustments can be put into place when undergoing recruiting for a job position, and once I am potentially working within your organisation?**

### **Cancer Research**

As an employer we will try our very best to be as flexible as possible during our recruitment process. If a candidate requires adjustments, we would speak to them to find out what they need to be able to confidently complete that particular assessment. As we know people needs will be different. This would be the same once you are working in the organisation. We would work with you to ensure you have all the resources you need to complete your day to day role successfully.

**Will it ever be possible for a disabled person to be interviewed in a more practical way? For example, removing some of the formalities or holding assessments over a period of days to see what they can bring to the role?**

## **GSK**

Our process is fairly set, however there have been examples where we can change any part of this for a student that requires it and can act in a more flexible way. There isn't a one size fits all approach to our assessments and the recruiters will ask if any changes will help the candidate to perform at their best.

**When interviewers ask what adjustments the candidate requires, there are difficulties in having to decide the extent of adjustments to request. For instance, if a change from the standard process will discredit one's candidacy or whether to downplay a request to ensure ease of comparison with other candidates. In the case of conditions that do not require specific adjustments (apart from asking for an awareness/understanding), can you suggest adjustments that it would be reasonable to request?**

## **J.P. Morgan**

We do our best to accommodate as many adjustments as possible when it comes to Interviews and Assessment Centres. We take time to explain the Assessment Centre layout and provide a brief overview of what will be required with each exercise. We do this so that the students will be able to clearly understand what sort of adjustments they might need to complete the exercises successfully. Other than asking for a general awareness, candidates can request many reasonable adjustments such as extra time, a separate interview room to the rest of the group, taking breaks as and when they need, live speech captioning services and providing written responses instead of video responses in particular interview rounds. If a candidate makes a request that we are unfortunately unable to accommodate, we will work closely with the candidate to develop an alternative plan that suits them and that they are happy with. Making a request for reasonable adjustments does not discredit one's candidacy and we keep these requests on a need to know basis.

**What practical measures do you put in place to support your employees with unpredictable illnesses? For example, employees with chronic pain or migraines.**

## **Shell**

- Reasonable workplace adjustments can be agreed informally with line manager or more formally through a consultation with Health experts.

- We have Workplace Accessibility Services which offer a range of workplace adjustments and additional equipment such as chairs, keyboards, desk lights.
- 24/7 access to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- All employees have access to an online GP (Babylon)
- Shell Healthcare plan with BUPA provides eligible employees with private medical cover, with the opportunity to add immediate family to the plan.

## **Disclosure**

**So that I can have a productive discussion about making my tasks at work around my disability, how should I disclose my disability to my employer or manager?**

### **Accenture**

Disability can be disclosed to HR advisors who will ensure that the right adjustments are made for an individual to succeed. Accenture offers tools and advice on how to communicate a disability to a manager and work with them to help you thrive.

**When would you prefer a disability to be made known by an applicant?**

### **Cisco Systems**

Why wait - we love our employees to bring their whole selves to work.

**Many employers endorse and enforce a disclosure policy regarding disabilities during the application process. However, I find this opens disabled applicants up to unintentional and intentional discriminatory hiring practices. How do you suggest we find a balance between unemployment and surprising potential employers after we've been hired?**

### **GSK**

We often encourage students who have a disability to mention it during the process (if they are comfortable in doing so) as it means we can adjust the assessments for them to meet their needs and requirements to ensure they perform at their best.

If a candidate does not want to disclose then this is very understandable and there would be no problem in them mentioning any adjustments, they require after being hired – and our internal workplace adjustments team would be able to work closely with them to help with this.

## **When would you prefer a disability to be made known by an applicant?**

### **KPMG**

There is a section in the application form for you to tell us about any disability, long-term health condition and/or adjustment you may need. Each applicant is unique and we encourage you to speak to us to inform us of your specific requirements. If you are unsure if you require any adjustments, we encourage you to get in contact with our Student Recruitment team so that we can discuss options with you.

We have made a various adjustment to our recruitment process in the past. Some examples of reasons why candidates have needed support in the application process, include but are not limited to: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disability, extenuating circumstances, stammer, stutter, anxiety and depression. We have made adjustments for candidates which include but are not limited to: Extra time, larger fonts, coloured backgrounds for screens or print, increased volume during presentations, a scribe, smaller assessment room, positioning of candidate in the room (e.g. near the front, close to a door), pre assessment chat regarding the running of the day.

## **Mental Health**

### **What is a good way to handle anxiety in the job search in general and in an interview?**

#### **Accenture**

- Focus on what you can control.
- Ensure that you connect with your friends and family regularly to share about the situation.
- Be open and honest in communication with employers if experiencing anxiety.

## **What do you, as an employer, do to overcome stigma that is associated with mental health issues? What does your organisation do to ensure your employees mental health wellbeing?**

### **Cancer Research**

We are lucky enough to have a dedicated Wellbeing team who works to ensure we are able to offer our employees the support they need in some great ways. We have multiple mental health first aiders who are also on hand to have conversations & offer advice to those that need in whilst also doing their day to day job. We have onsite free yoga classes most weeks, internal training for managers and a full wellbeing hub with tips for improving mental health plus links to some external resources.

## **Can people with depression and/or anxiety be welcomed into a competitive and a high-powered workplace that may exist in commercial firms?**

### **KPMG**

We welcome all applicants. At KPMG, we believe a healthy and safe environment is central to our working life and we're passionate about our responsibility for our employees' wellbeing.

There are support resources available in many forms at KPMG to support all our employees. For example, our WorkAbility network is KPMG's employee network for Disability Inclusion. The network offers support and guidance for employees and signposts to external sources of information and support.

It supports our colleagues, clients and members of our communities with disabilities by providing an accessible environment where we can all feel included.

We also give our people access to:

- BeWell, our employee assistance programme - a 24/7 confidential support service for information, counselling and practical advice on any of life's daily challenges
- An Occupational Health service for fast, effective help with any health problems our people have that may affect their ability to carry out their work
- Your Health Gateway – an online portal helping us make small changes that make a big difference

- Private medical insurance
- Remote GP service offering 24/7 access to GP consultations and health information via a smartphone or computer
- Study leave, if studying for a professional qualification/accreditation

## Perceptions

**How fair is the hiring process really? If two candidates were the same, would the employer naturally pick someone who isn't disabled as they think they will be a more reliable employee?**

### **GSK**

Lots of employers, including GSK of course, really value the benefits a diverse workforce can bring so I don't believe an employer would favour a nondisabled candidate in this way. Candidates with disabilities can have unique skills and have often overcome challenges that can help them be a great asset to organisations.

**What are the challenges that the disabled employees are facing in the financial industry? What do you think that you can do to improve this situation?**

### **J.P. Morgan**

We don't see challenges faced by disabled employees as being particular to a certain industry. We put an emphasis on treating employees as individuals and giving all candidates and employees the same access to opportunity whichever area of the bank they are in. However, we do see two things as critical to supporting the careers of employees with disabilities. Firstly, research shows that candidates with disabilities (most notably neurodiverse conditions) will self-select out of certain industries because they believe they will not fit the mould. We engage in a number of initiatives to give this community insight into our industry and firm, the opportunities within it and role models who can demonstrate how they have used their unique talents within the firm. Secondly, physical adjustments within the workspace are important but we also focus on creating a culture of trust and openness so that all employees can have honest conversations with their managers and colleagues about their needs and are not treated as special or different.

## How do you think about the cost-benefit analysis of hiring someone with a disability?

### **Norton Rose Fulbright**

Encouraging applications from a diverse pool of talent is good for business. It helps us increase the number of high-quality applicants, creates a workforce that reflects the diverse needs of our clients by bringing in additional perspectives and skills to the business.

The costs of making adjustments to support disabled employees are often low, or sometimes non-existent. We have also found that adjustments put in place for one employee often benefit their colleagues and the workplace.

## Are disabilities ever valued in your organisation?

### **Shell**

- Yes, we have a strong reputation (both internally and externally) of being an inclusive and progressive employer. We mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities each year with celebratory and educational events.
- We aim to reflect the community in which we live and work. This means being diverse and wholly inclusive of all people, regardless of background, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, disability, gender or any other attribute or choice.
- We value the diversity of thought, style, skills and life experiences of our employees.
- We have a enable employee network, which recognises the fact that we all have different abilities and supports individuals, line managers, and the wider business in the UK in matters related to disabilities and impairments. They provide a forum for sharing experiences, raising knowledge and understanding of disabilities and having an open dialogue about adjustments required to fulfil their full potential.

## Recruitment processes

### Do employers ever hire someone because of their disability? (i.e. to fill disability quotas)

### **Cisco Systems**

We don't do this - the focus is on hiring the person with the right skills for the role and a good cultural fit to Cisco.

**Do you think mass screening tests using AI, coincidentally screen against disabilities as well? Dyslexic brains function differently with different strengths, even with extra time. If the tests are designed for someone without dyslexia, will someone with dyslexia be able to demonstrate their true potential?**

### **KPMG**

Our online assessments are designed to identify your strengths and potential and determine if you are suitable for the role you have applied to. They have been designed to ensure candidates are assessed appropriately, against the strengths that we know are key to a successful career at KPMG. Should any candidate feel that due to a disability or long-term health condition they are unable to complete an aspect of our assessment process, we ask that they get in touch to discuss this with us.

**How do you attempt to debias your recruiters and others involved in the hiring process?**

### **NGDP**

During the application process, Councils are not made aware that applicants may consider themselves to have a disability and so there is not opportunity to develop a bias. They are only made aware if the candidate chooses to share the information so as to arrange reasonable adjustments for the best fit interview.

Candidates are able to demonstrate their potential at the best fit interviews no matter what barriers they may experience. The application process as a whole – from initial online tests to best fit interviews – have been designed so that they are accessible as possible and eliminate to the greatest extent the potential for bias to impact which applicants progress to the next stage of the process.

**If students have anxieties around interviews, speaking with strangers and public speaking, how can they demonstrate that these won't negatively affect their work performance?**

### **Shell**

- We have a strong focus on building our people, both professionally and personally, for example, we run Toastmasters classes which focuses on improving public speaking skills in a fun and relaxed environment, and various on-the-job opportunities and Shell open University courses that help employees improve their public speaking/communication/confidence.

- Open/honest conversations and regular check in's with line managers, where clear expectations are set, and they will help you develop your skills and importantly, utilise your strengths.

## **Workplace culture**

The extremes of the workplace, for instance, stress, deadlines, organisational change, all pose pressures on employees. How can and do you support disabled employees who push themselves in times of pressure? The extremes of the workplace, for instance, stress, deadlines, organisational change, all pose pressures on employees. How can and do you support disabled employees who push themselves in times of pressure?

### **Cisco**

Leaders conduct regular check-ins with their employees and have an open door policy to discuss loves, loathes and needs, which is open to every employee. Additionally, we have a comprehensive wellbeing program and the opportunity for coaching to learn the core skills needed to manage and communicate effectively in a stressful environment.

## **How do you plan to ensure that inclusivity in the company culture is firm-wide?**

### **Accenture**

Currently, we have a senior executive working group looking to make changes to ensure the culture is more inclusive for people with disabilities. The employee network is also continuing to grow and strengthen its role in the firm.

## **How do you manage supporting people who don't fit into a stereotypical box, especially in a large organisation which may not be as personable?**

### **NGDP**

Local Authorities deliver a huge variety of services and this requires different people to deliver different tasks. This means Local Authorities need to support all different types of people and enable them to be the most effective member of staff.

## **How does your organisation attempt to break down any barriers affecting interactions between disabled and non-disabled employees?**

### **Norton Rose Fulbright**

We have nearly 50 employee networks across the firm globally, including a disability network and a mental health network in our London office. The networks share the aims of building awareness, providing development and networking opportunities, supporting the practice's business development, increasing our interaction with the community and helping the firm's position as an employer of choice. The disability network in London is sponsored by a senior member of the firm and co-chaired by two senior lawyers. The network has hosted a range of events and led many campaigns over the years to break down barriers, increase awareness and drive inclusion. As an example, for the past three years we have hosted a comedy night at the firm with stand-up comedians from "Abnormally Funny People". These comedy nights were not only hilarious in their own right, but also a unique opportunity to raise awareness about disability and inclusion.

The firm strives to create a culture where mental health is understood without stigma and where everyone responds effectively to mental health problems to reduce the overall incidence of mental health issues and improve the wellbeing of our people. Our mental health network, Mental Health First Aid Officers programme and our onsite counsellor are some of the resources in place to raise awareness and provide support to our people.

## **Do you think there is any unspoken resentment of the disabled people working at your business because people believe they are not qualified for the job?**

### **Norton Rose Fulbright**

In order to attract and recruit the most competent employees, we need to select from the broadest pool of candidates. By doing so, we harness a more diverse range of experiences, skills and perspectives. To retain the talent, we have worked hard to recruit, we must create a culture where all individuals, regardless of their disability, feel included and valued. Our graduate and experienced hire recruitment processes are aimed at attracting a broad range of talent to the firm. The recruitment team, and our interviewers, are all briefed regularly about our diversity and inclusion strategy and specifically on how unconscious bias can interrupt our ability to attract, recruit and retain diverse talent. We are confident that our policies and culture coupled with our attraction strategy create a working environment where everyone can perform to the best of their abilities.

Careers Service  
Level 5 Sherfield Building  
Imperial College London  
South Kensington Campus  
London, SW7 2AZ  
[careers@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:careers@imperial.ac.uk)

**Careers Service**  
[www.imperial.ac.uk/careers](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers)