



Colin's career in sports development

Profile

Colin is in his 60s, with a physical impairment due to a congenital condition.

At school, he was made to sit out during sports, and was never encouraged to be active. It wasn't until he was in his 30s, when he had to leave his job due to a change in his health, that Colin took up sport – and looked to sport as a potential line of work.

He went on to study sports science, and while at university, started volunteering with a local authority disability officer – taking on the role as a paid employee when the person left.

Since then, Colin has had a wide range of voluntary and paid roles, spanning a number of mainstream and disability sports. For example, he has set up and run sports groups and events for disabled people, helped develop adapted sports, trained coaches in adaptations to delivery, sat on EDI boards and advised on inclusive resources.

After over 30 years in sport, Colin is now semi-retired, but still works in the sport sector on a consultancy basis.



“People told me about a gap in the sports workforce in terms of disabled people – that there were not enough disabled people making decisions.”

Colin's journey





Reflections on 30 years in sport

When Colin looks back on his journey in the sport workforce, he can identify some key themes that shaped it. Colin's passion is for improving lives through sport, building children and young people's self-esteem, and breaking down barriers to inclusion on any basis, not only disability. But he encountered a perception around disability sport being seen as separate from, and different to, mainstream sport – which he believes limits opportunities for disabled people who want to work in mainstream sport.

Another key challenge that Colin observed is around career progression, due to short-term funding for positions, and roles being created to 'tick a box', without thought for structured progression pathways. Disabled employees can feel that their role is tokenistic, and that they are not genuinely encouraged to voice their opinions and share their lived experience.

A third factor characterising Colin's experience is the significant role of personal reputation, contacts and networking within sport. It's 'a small world', and he has sometimes found that 'who you know', or which organisations you are associated with, can be key – helpfully or unhelpfully – in accessing opportunities.



“If you stay within disability sport that's fine, but if you go for anything mainstream and you say 'disability sports development' then you don't tend to get interviews because they see it as something different.”

Barriers

- Employment of disabled people in 'token' roles.
- Lack of development and progression opportunities for disabled people.
- Organisations being afraid of the strength of disabled people's voices, if they are not really willing to make change happen.

Enablers

- Flexible working arrangements, such as working from home.
- Inclusive interview formats, with adjustments and support provided.
- Employers seeking to appraise a candidate's value holistically, considering their lived experience, qualifications and their passion for their work.



“Getting somebody an interview is only part of it, it's about how you develop your members of staff to take on senior positions or roles.”