

# Case study: Business Disability Forum conduct disability review for British Embassy in Madrid



Business Disability Forum (BDF) was recently commissioned by the UK Embassy in Madrid to conduct a Whole Systems Disability Review of the Embassy and its network of Consulates in Spain. The review covered the ten criteria of BDF's Disability Standard, BDF's management tool designed to help organisations measure and improve disability performance across all functions.

The ten criteria of the Disability Standard are listed below:

<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Products and Services</b>
<b>Know-how</b>	<b>Suppliers and Partners</b>
<b>Adjustments</b>	<b>Communication</b>
<b>Recruitment</b>	<b>Premises</b>
<b>Retention</b>	<b>ICT</b>

Led by Brendan Roach, Senior Disability Consultant and Helen Macfarlane, Principal Consultant at BDF, the review was initiated as a result of the UK Embassy's Staff Survey Action Plan. From this, the Embassy in Madrid undertook a Diversity Review to establish the extent to which its systems, processes and policies in Spain were inclusive, with a specific focus on disability.

## Purpose of the review

The key purpose of BDF's work was to help the UK Embassy better understand how disability impacts on each area of the organisation, to identify where improvements can be made and to inform the content of a Disability Action Plan.

The methodology was selected to ensure a thorough understanding of the Spain Network and how its operations might impact on disabled people.

## Analysis

Adopting qualitative research methods, the review entailed the following elements:

- A desktop review of disability-related policies and guidance and documentation.
- A review of written submissions from eight nominated operational leads.
- A review of the disability survey responses from 65 employees at the UK Embassy. The survey gave the opportunity for staff to anonymously give their views on their experience of working for the Spain Network either as disabled employees themselves or managers of disabled employees.

- Interviews with 11 operational leads.
- A teleconference with staff from the wider consular network and an interview with the Acting Consular Regional Operations Manager for Catalonia, Aragon, Balearic Islands and Andorra.

## Findings

The review found that a great deal of positive work takes place throughout the Spain Network. In terms of commitment to disability best practice for example, inclusivity is high on the agenda. This is demonstrated by Daniel Pruce, Deputy Head of Mission at the UK Embassy in Spain and Senior Sponsor of the Foreign Commonwealth Office disabled employee network, Enable.

In his role as Senior Disability Sponsor, Daniel has ensured that discussions around disability and the way in which it affects business remain a core part of the organisation. To bring the topic of disability to the fore, Daniel has talked openly about his own experiences of having epilepsy, and gave a presentation at the global, not-for-profit initiative, Ted Talks. A video of the presentation can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vquKZxZIGew>

Commenting on the review and the Embassy's wider approach to disability, Daniel said:

“BDF offered us invaluable guidance on how to become a genuinely “unconsciously inclusive” organisation. They reviewed every aspect of our activity and engaged with staff right across our network. Their thorough report gave us a sound basis to help us all work with greater disability confidence.”

## The Barcelona Counter

As part of the review, BDF evaluated policies regarding physical accessibility of the Spain Network's premises. After assessing these policies and interacting with employees from a number of departments, BDF found that knowledge of physical barriers across the estate is good.

One challenge concerned the physical accessibility of the Barcelona Consulate General office. Employees at the Barcelona Consulate were aware that the reception desk was too high for customers who used a wheelchair; meaning customers would often be unable to reach the desk and clearly see the receptionists serving them. As a result, the receptionists would have to move to the front of the counter to serve customers.

When presenting the final report to the FCO, BDF highlighted the Barcelona Consulate premises as an example of how often straightforward adjustments can significantly improve an organisation's ability to meet the needs of disabled customers.

Following the review and discussions with colleagues in Spain, the FCO installed a brand new wheelchair-accessible counter at the British Consulate General in Barcelona.

See photo below of Barcelona Consulate employees and Simon Manley – the UK Ambassador to Spain:



Speaking about the installation of the accessible counter, Brendan Roach, Senior Disability Consultant said:

“Disability-smart organisations understand the accessibility of their estate and where barriers exist, implement a strategy to remove or overcome them.

“We were delighted to hear about the improvements to the Consulate in Barcelona. These changes will improve the experiences of disabled customers and employees alike and is a very tangible demonstration of the FCO’s commitment to being inclusive.”

## Conclusion

In commissioning this whole-systems review, the Spain Network has communicated a strong, positive message to its workforce that it wishes to take steps to understand and remove disability-related barriers to employees and customers with a disability or long-term injury or health condition.

As a result of this review, BDF developed a detailed disability action plan for the Spain Network with direct recommendations on how to adopt disability best practice as part of a whole organisational approach. The recommendations were practical and evidence-based from BDF's experience working for over twenty years with other Civil Service departments and a range of public and private sector businesses. BDF is confident that implementing these actions will improve the experience of disabled employees whilst at the same time bringing benefits to the organisation, such as: improved productivity, employee engagement, and enhanced reputation as an inclusive and disability-smart organisation.

For more information about BDF's consultancy packages, visit:

<http://www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/advice-and-publications/consultancy/>

For more information about the UK Embassy in Madrid, visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-madrid>

For more information about the Foreign Commonwealth Office, visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>

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[www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk](http://www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk)

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