

# British Standard Institution (BSI) consultation: Draft symbol for non-visible disabilities

Submitted by Business Disability Forum, May 2020

## 1. About Business Disability Forum and our submission

1.1 Business Disability Forum is a not-for-profit membership organisation which exists to transform the life chances of disabled people. As a membership organisation working with over 300 businesses, we are uniquely equipped to do this by bringing business leaders, disabled people, and Government together to understand what needs to change to improve the life opportunities and experiences of disabled people in employment, economic growth, and society more widely.

1.2 Our submission focusses on the nature of the symbol itself, and we unpack some of the issues behind publishing an additional disability symbol.

## 2. The proposed symbol

2.1 The sunflower lanyard was developed for a specific purpose but is **not a representative symbol** of all people with a condition that is not immediately visible. For example, the lanyard or the sunflower itself is not often recognised or wearable by many people with conditions that are not immediately as seen by others in, for example, professional and senior business roles. Any newly commissioned symbol **must be representative of people in all life situations** who would feel that it is a symbol that represents them. In a survey Business Disability Forum ran in 2018-19, 43 per cent of respondents said they **would not want to wear or use something that highlights to others** they have a disability or condition that is not immediately visible.

2.2 The **cross is problematic** for two reasons:

(a) It has religious connotations and looks very much like a **religious symbol** (for the example, the Greek Christian cross) which will not be appropriate for people of different religious and belief systems and practices.

(b) If the cross is to indicate a 'medical' condition, this could have the effect of **'medicalising'** a condition that is not visible to others at a time when awareness is increasing to ensure employers and businesses do not treat every disability or conditions as a 'medical' issue.

2.3 It is not clear what function the heart plays in the symbol.

### 3. Inaccessibility of the symbol

The symbol itself is **inaccessible**. The sunflower petals' many lines will be difficult for some people, even people with conditions that are not immediately visible (particularly neurodivergent and other neurological conditions), to cognitively process and therefore comfortably see.

### 4. Confirmation on whether an additional symbol is needed

4.1 Business Disability Forum understands that the 'traditional' and 'wheelchair or mobility based' symbol for disability (of the wheelchair user) does not represent the nature of all disabilities; but neither does it cover all physical and mobility disabilities. However, it is a symbol that **is widely recognised** and, while people are becoming more aware of their rights under the disability and reasonable adjustment provision of the Equality Act 2010, educating people has shown how this symbol **covers a much wider range of people's various disabilities and conditions** than people in different situations (employees, service providers, employers, and the general public) had originally understood. This is hugely positive progress.

4.2 We would question whether an additional symbol is needed at all. This is particularly considering the very many efforts from service providers, policy makers, and businesses to initiate **education and awareness campaigns** for conditions that are not immediately visible to be given as the same attention and policy related priorities as physical and mobility related disabilities. Given this, it would be worth considering **educating people** about the diversity of situations that the current symbol covers rather than creating an additional symbol.

### 5. Reinforcing stigma

5.1 The symbol potentially reinforces the stigma people with disabilities and conditions that are not immediately visible experience. Business Disability Forum **questions the terminology of "hidden", "unseen" and "invisible"** disabilities for two main reasons:

(a) It defines someone's disability or condition **from the perspective of someone else** - i.e. the disability or conditions is 'unseen', 'hidden', or 'invisible' **to others**. People with such conditions would rarely describe their condition as 'unseen', 'hidden', or 'invisible' to themselves in their own lives; on the contrary, many conditions that others cannot immediately see are very much visible and unhidden in the lives of people who have them. This language – and efforts to **reinforce this language** – therefore endorses **defining of disabled people's lives by others**, instead of themselves. Policy makers should be educating the public, not endorsing this misunderstanding.

(b) As with physical and mobility related disabilities, the disability or condition itself might not be visible to others, but the symptoms can sometimes be (particularly with fluctuating conditions). Business Disability Forum have been running a campaign on disabled people's identity for the last year. During this time, disabled people spoke at our events about how, some days other people cannot see their conditions, and other days, the

symptoms worsened, meaning people could see the impact of the condition sometimes and not others. One example is of a working professional who has Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Other people cannot see his MS until, for example, it is a warm day and he has to use a stick to help him walk. Then his condition very much becomes visible to others. In this way, **'visible' and 'non-visible' are not as mutually exclusive** as many understand them to be (and this is part of education and awareness campaigns).

5.2 Section 4.1(b) above is primarily why people with conditions and disabilities that are not immediately visible experience a huge amount of **stigma and abuse** deriving from misunderstanding of the nature of their condition. Education is, therefore, potentially more important than creating a new symbol; particularly as there are still conditions that would not be covered by either the existing disability symbol or the proposed 'non-visible' disabilities symbol.

## 6. Conclusion

6.1 The symbol has the effect of doing two things:

- (a) Further **polarises** 'visible' and 'non-visible' disabilities and conditions.
- (b) Offers an **inaccessible and un-inclusive** image which does not represent the wide range of experiences and life situations of people with disabilities and conditions that are not immediately visible.

6.2 The sunflower lanyard (and other similar initiatives) works well within the context it was meant for - i.e. to show a service provider that an individual may need additional help or support when using or ending with a service (such as a train station or supermarket). This does not, however, mean that the sunflower itself is a representative and recognisable symbol by everyone who the symbol is proposed to be for.

## 7. Contact for further information

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