



# The WAM Programme Statistics 2023

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**An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí**  
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# **The WAM Programme Statistics 2023**

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# Introduction

The Willing, Able, Mentoring (WAM) Programme is an initiative of AHEAD established in 2005 and is funded by the Department of Social Protection (DSP). The central aim of WAM is to widen access to mainstream employment for graduates with disabilities while working with, supporting, and building the capacity of employers to create a more inclusive workplace.

Participating employers collaborate with WAM to offer graduates with disabilities a full time, paid, and mentored graduate internship for a minimum of 6 months. Graduates are required to have the education and core competencies necessary to complete the role that is offered by the employer. All roles with WAM are 'ring-fenced' by the employer; this means that the role an employer is offering is exclusively advertised to graduates with disabilities through The WAM Programme.

WAM internships, or placements, offer experience in real life work settings. This experience has proven to identify the issues facing both employers and graduates in the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities. Through WAM, both the employer and graduate are supported to ensure practical work-orientated solutions with a focus on inclusive work practices.

The demographic of graduates applying for roles with WAM can range from a newly qualified graduate fresh out of college looking for their first work experience opportunity, to an experienced graduate who may have acquired their disability and therefore may require additional support re-entering the workplace.

**Since The WAM Programme was established in 2005,  
619 graduates have been placed as of March 2023.**

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# Methodology

This report is mixed methods, primarily informed by quantitative data from various datasets within The WAM Programme and from surveys distributed to WAM graduates who completed a placement in addition to purposive sampling. The survey also enabled participants to contribute qualitative data to better understand the narratives and experiences of WAM graduates. To preserve the anonymity of graduates, specific names of employers, managers or mentors have been removed.

Firstly, 3,665 applications made to positions advertised with The WAM Programme between April 2012 to March 2023 were analysed for total numbers of applications and the type of reasonable accommodations requested by graduates during employers' recruitment process.

Data from 460 workplace needs assessments carried out by AHEAD with graduates from April 2012 – March 2023 were analysed for the type of reasonable accommodations recommended to employers and the level of disability disclosure information provided to the WAM employer by graduates.

Furthermore, a number of surveys were circulated to 335 graduates who completed a WAM placement between 2012 and 2021. Graduates were invited to complete the questionnaire only if they had completed their WAM placement at least 12 months previous. In addition to the surveys, employment transition rates of graduates who did not complete the survey and which were known to The WAM Programme were also included in the analysis. The total number of employment transition rates analysed was 238.

Finally, various datasets containing the type of placements offered by employers from 2012 to 2023 and the disability profile of 619 graduates who secured a placement with a WAM employer from the inception of The WAM Programme in 2005 to March 2023 were analysed. Details of these datasets and analysis are presented further on in this report.



**81%**

**of WAM graduates  
secured employment as  
a direct result of their  
WAM placement**



# Employment Transition Rates

In compiling the employment transition rates, the surveys circulated asked two specific questions; their current employment status and what occurred within the first 12 months after their WAM placement.

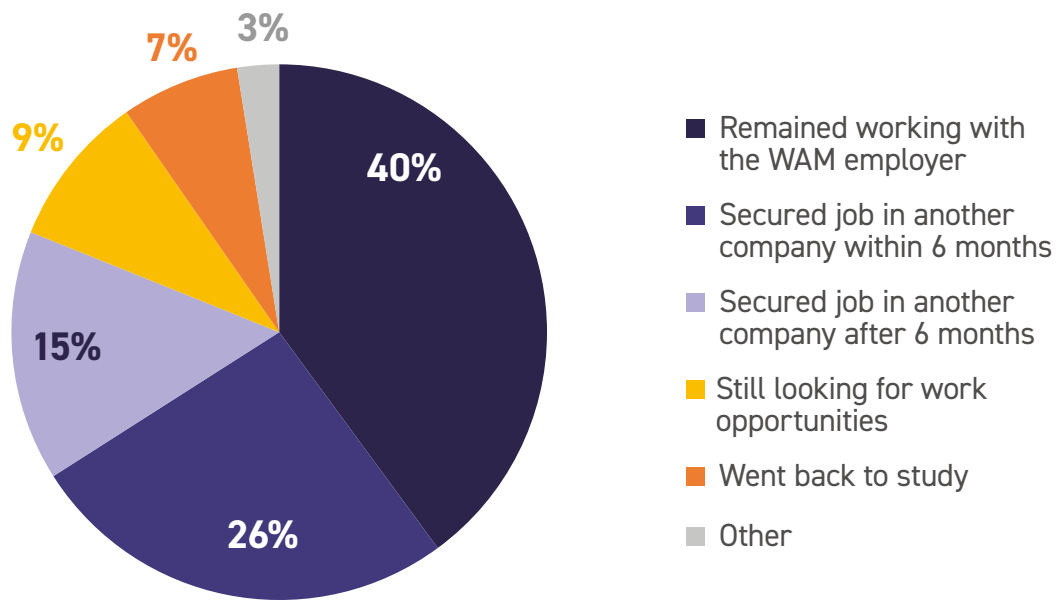
Out of 335 graduates, 174 graduates (52%) responded to the survey and a further 64 graduates (19%) were included in analysis as their employment transition rates for the year following their placements were known to the WAM Team. The employment status and progression rates of 97 graduates (29%) remain unknown. At the time of completing the survey and the analysis, 78% (n=185) were currently employed, however 81% (n=193) secured employment as a direct result of their WAM placement.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, 40% (n=95) of graduates remained employed with the same company either on an extension of contract, contract for a year or more, or on a permanent contract. 26% (n=62) of graduates secured employment elsewhere within 6 months, while 15% (n=36) secured alternative employment after 6 months.

7% (n=17) of graduates returned to study and 9% (n=22) were still looking for work opportunities 12 months after their WAM placement ended. 3% (n=6) fell into the 'Other' category; out of work for reasons such as ill health, travelling, career break or assumed caring responsibilities, etc.

**81% of WAM graduates secured employment as a direct result of their WAM placement.**

---



**Figure 1 - Employment Transition Rates of WAM Graduates (2012 - 2021)**



**“...it was a game changer for me. It opened my life to a world of possibilities in my career and my disability has never been an issue the supports and the understanding for them have made my life the one it is now. And finally, the WAM Programme gave me a life and a career. This is the best opportunity in my opinion for anyone who struggled as I did when I finished college and didn’t know how or where to go. WAM programme gave me a voice and the confidence to use my degree in a place where I excelled.”**

# Accommodations in Recruitment

At the time of applying for a role with a WAM employer, graduates inform WAM of any reasonable accommodations they may need to reduce any disadvantage in the recruitment process which will enable the graduate to perform at their best during this crucial stage. These accommodations are passed on to the employer alongside their application for the role.

All employers who participate in The WAM Programme are given the opportunity to partake in disability awareness training for interviews. In this training, they receive advice on how to support a candidate who may require assistance or communication aids at an interview. They also receive general information and awareness of candidates presenting at interview even if they haven't requested any accommodations.

Since the last published statistics on [The WAM Programme \(2020\)](#)<sup>1</sup>, WAM have now been collecting accommodations from applicants not just for a traditional in-person interview, but for a variety of recruitment processes such as psychometric testing, group assessments, phone screening and virtual interviews.

These are now discussed using the following headings:

- [Traditional Interviews](#)
- [Virtual Interviews](#)
- [Testing and Screening](#)

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<sup>1</sup> AHEAD (2020), *The WAM Programme Statistics 2020*. AHEAD Educational Press: Dublin.

## Traditional Interviews

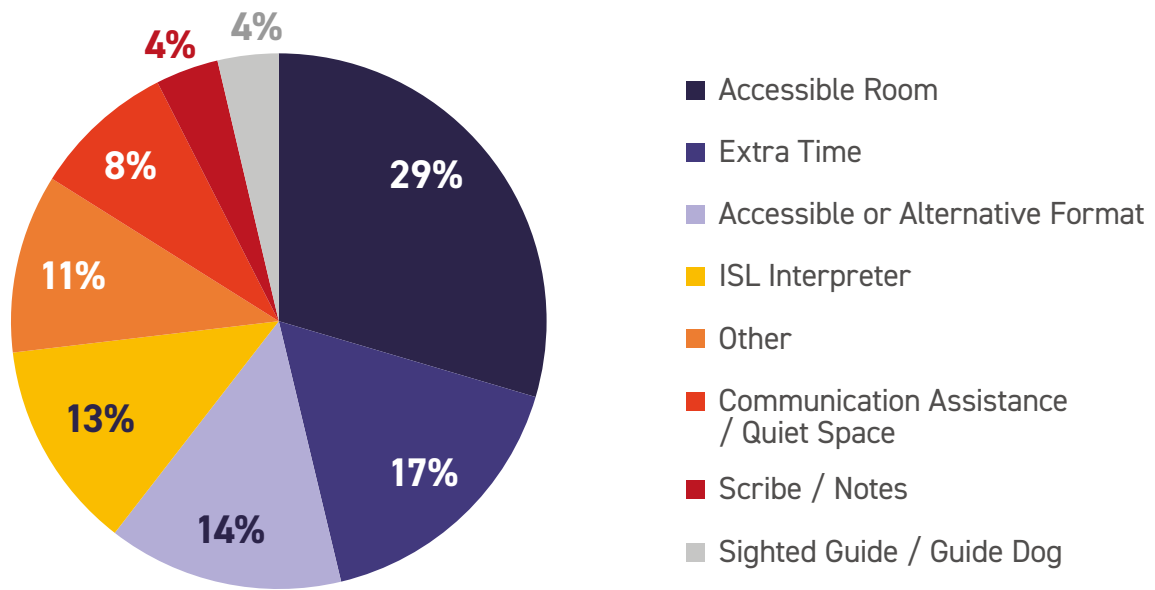
Out of the 3,665 applications analysed, 20% (n=750) of graduates informed the employer about an accommodation or shared additional information for a traditional in-person interview. 80% (n=2916) of applicants did not request or share any accommodations with employers.

This demonstrates that 80%, or 4 out of 5 candidates, who attend a traditional interview did not require any support or accommodations and therefore may have disabilities which are not necessarily visible or obvious to the employer. For example, candidates who have mental health difficulties, dyslexia, or an ongoing or chronic illness generally may not have any requirements for a traditional face-to-face interview, and thus, would not disclose a request for support to enable them to participate in the interview process fully.

### Breakdown of Accommodations for a Traditional /Interview

Of the 750 applicants who did request support or accommodation for a traditional interview, the most common request was for an accessible room at 29% (n=241). Extra time was requested by 17% (n=136); accessible or an alternative format by 14%(n=116); an Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreter by 13% (n=103).

Other requests (11%: n=103) included applicants sharing additional information about their disability and a copy of the questions in advance or preferences for interview times. Communication assistance and a quiet space at 8% (n=70); the use of a scribe and interview notes at 4% (n=31) and finally, a sighted guide or a guide dog also came in at 4% (n=30).



**Figure 2 - Traditional Interview Accommodations requested within The WAM Programme (2012-2022)**

**4 out  
of 5**

**applicants do  
not require any  
accommodations  
for a traditional  
interview**

**1 out  
of 7**

**applicants  
requested  
accommodations  
for virtual  
interviews**



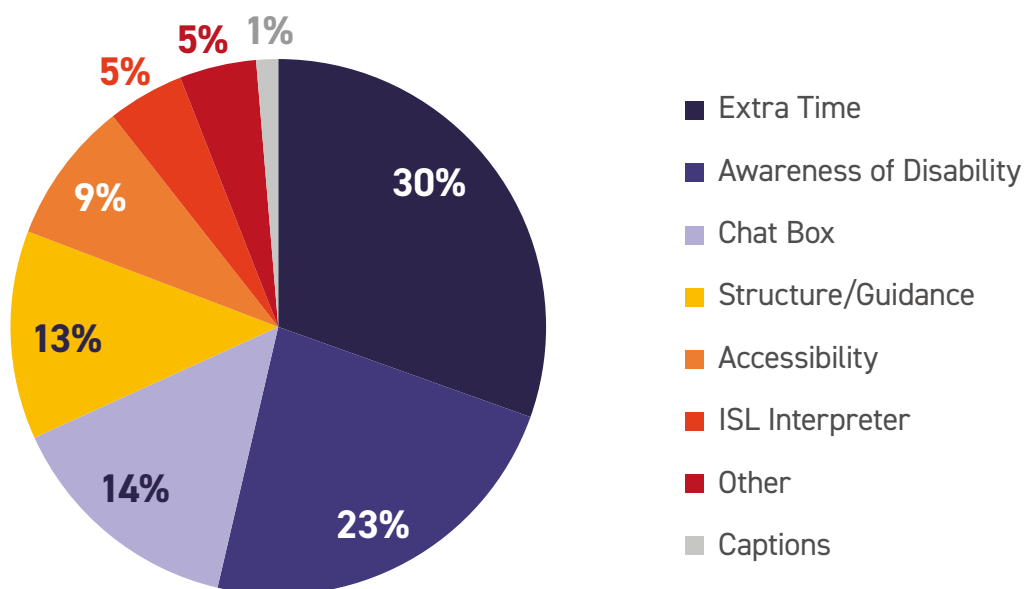
## Virtual Interviews

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2020, employers started to carry out virtual interviews using a variety of online video-conferencing platforms. Of 774 applications analysed since 2020, 15% (n=115) of graduates informed the employer about an accommodation or shared additional information for a virtual interview. 85% (n=659) of applicants did not share or request any accommodations for a virtual interview.

### Breakdown of Accommodations for a Virtual Interview

The primary accommodation requested for virtual interviews was for extra time (30%; n=46) followed by awareness of disability at 23% (n=35). 14% (n=22) of applicants requested to use the chat feature within the video conferencing platform to respond to questions, 13% (n=19) requested structure or guidance throughout the interview, and 9% (n=13) noted particular accessibility needs such as assistive technology or lip-reading.

The lowest requests were for ISL interpreters at 5% (n=7) as well as other requirements, such as eliminating background noise or being in a brightly lit room (5%; n=7). Finally, only 1% (n=2) of applicants requested the use of auto-generated captions for the interview.



**Figure 3 - Virtual Interview Accommodations requested within The WAM Programme (2020 - 2022)**

# Testing and Screening

From 2018, WAM started to work with employers on their graduate programmes and as a result, additional recruitment processes were put in place, such as the use of phone screening, psychometric tests, group assessments, technical tests, or roleplay exercises.

Of 479 applications to positions that had an element of testing and/or screening in the recruitment process, 33% (n=158) of applicants required support.

## Breakdown of Accommodations for Testing and Screening

Of the 158 applicants who asked for reasonable accommodations for testing, 76% (n=106) of candidates requested extra time to complete tests, 14% (n=20) of applicants noted concerns with the compatibility of their assistive technology working with psychometric testing software. Finally, 10% (n=14) requested an alternative or more accessible assessment or screening process.

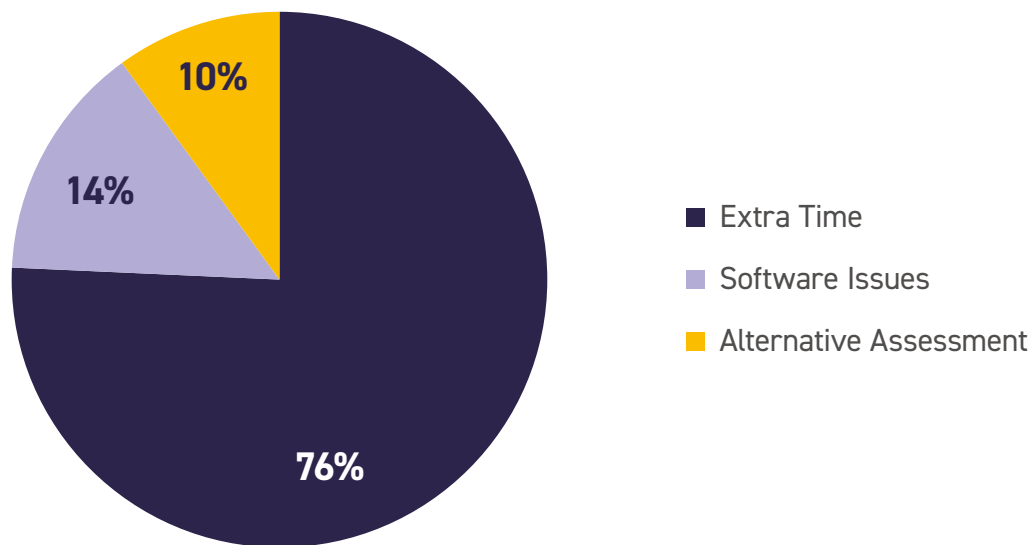


Figure 4 - Testing and Screening Accommodations requested within the WAM Programme (2018-2022).

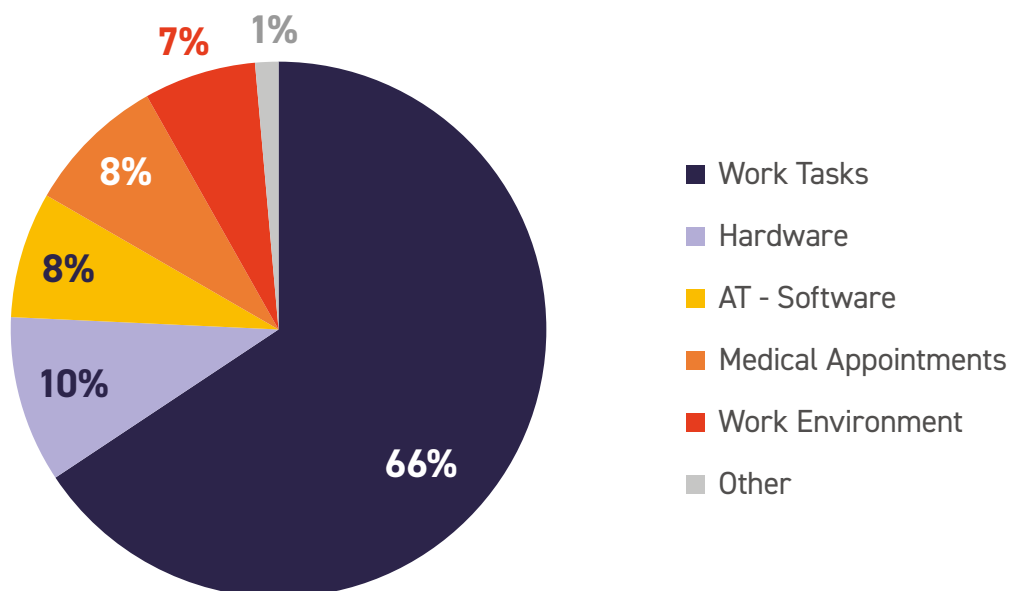
**1 out  
of 3**

**applicants required  
reasonable  
accommodations  
for testing and  
screening recruitment  
processes**

# Accommodations in the Workplace

As part of this report, workplace needs assessments completed by the WAM team between the years 2012 – 2022 were examined. A total of 460 needs assessments were analysed and each individual accommodation was categorised into one of six accommodation grouping.

The majority of workplace accommodations recommended in the needs assessment were in relation to work tasks at 66% (n=1494). The second highest were hardware accommodations (10%; n=229), followed by assistive technology (8%; n=173) and time off for medical appointments (8%; n=193). Finally, work environment accommodations were recommended 7% (n=154) of the time and other additional accommodations at 1% (n=32).



**Figure 5 - Workplace Accommodations requested within The WAM Programme (2012-2022)**



**66%**

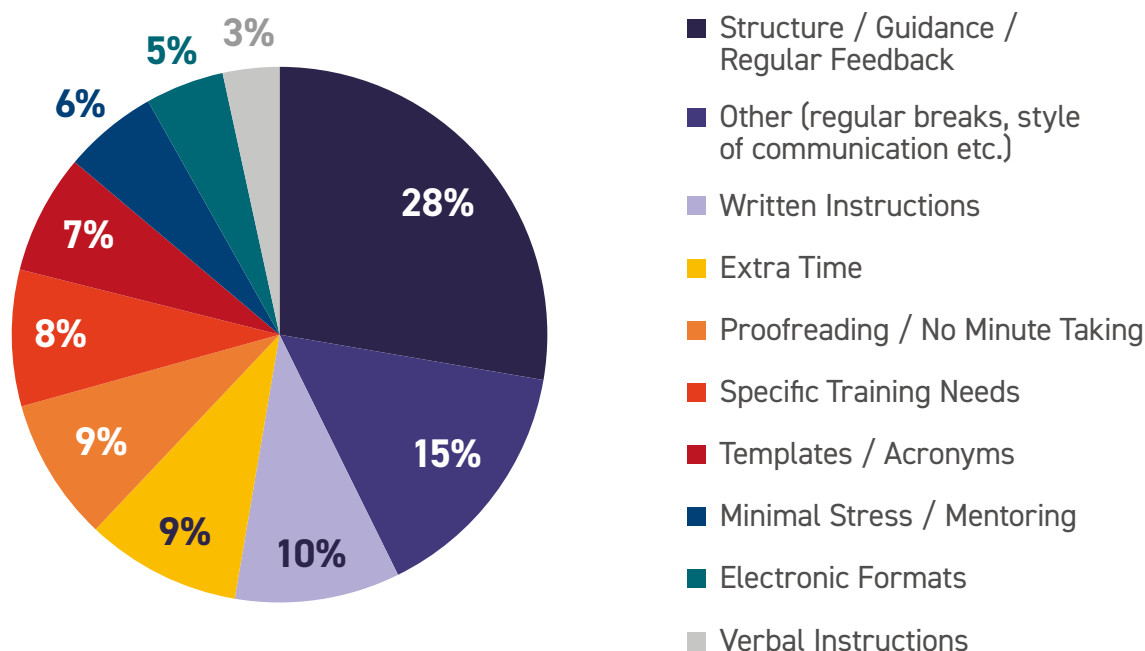
**of accommodations  
recommended  
by The WAM  
Programme were  
in relation to  
work tasks**

## Work Tasks

Two-thirds (66%, n=1494) of all accommodations recommended by the WAM team were related to work-tasks. It should be noted that these accommodations, while being the most common, do not incur any additional cost for the employer. Rather, they represent approaches to style of management, training, and communication needs, etc.

Within the work tasks category, 28% (n=414) of accommodations were in relation to the manager providing clear structure, guidance, and regular feedback. 15% (n=224) were in relation to allowing regular breaks or style of communication amongst team members, 10% (n=149) was a requirement for written instructions from their manager and 9% (n=140) required an awareness of extra time to complete tasks. Moreover, within this category, 9% (n=129) of graduates requested proof-reading or not taking official records of meetings.

A further 8% (n=123) required specific training recommendations, while 7% (n=108) requested templates for work or a list of commonly used acronyms in the workplace. Finally, 6% (n=85) requested minimal stress or specific support from the graduate's mentor, 5% (n=71) requested documents to be shared in an electronic format and 3% (n=51) preferred receiving verbal instructions.

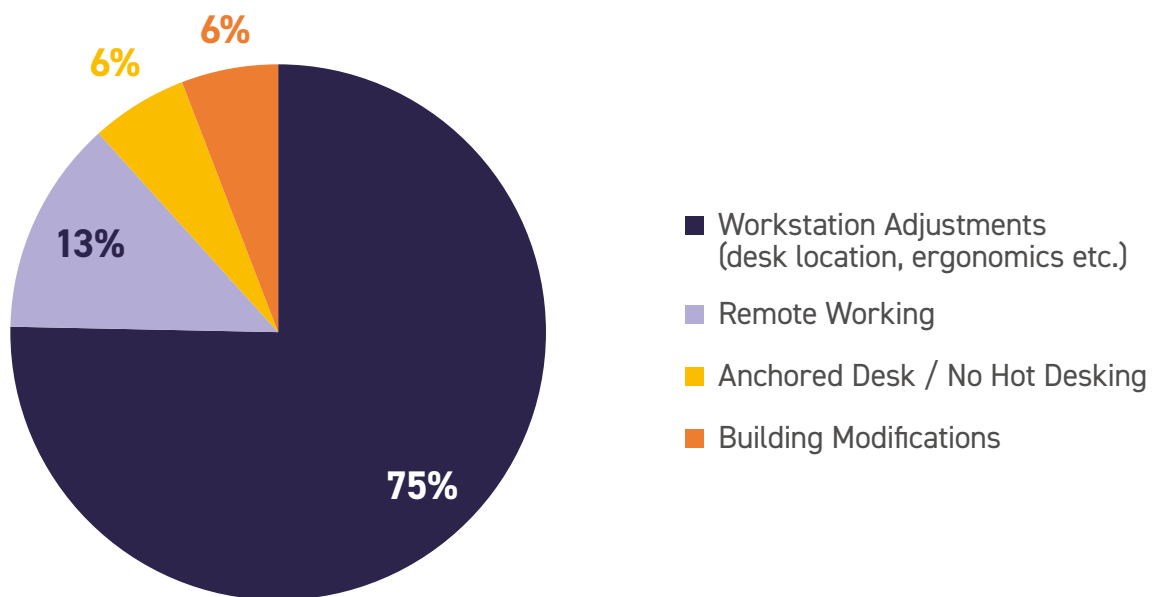


**Figure 6 - Work Tasks Accommodations requested within The WAM Programme (2012-2022)**

## Work Environment

This section examines specific references to adapting the work environment the graduate was going into or noted specific accommodations in relation to their style and pattern of work. As seen above, accommodations related to work environment accounted for 7% (n=154) of the total accommodations recommended for the workplace.

Of the requests for accommodations related to the work environment, 75% (n=116) recommended adjustments to the workstation, which included having a specific location in the office for their desk or having an ergonomic set-up. A further 13% (n=20) requested the option for remote working, 6% (n=9) recommended specific measures to make modifications to the building and 6% (n=9) recommended that the graduate have an assigned desk in instances where a hot-desking policy was in place within the organisation.



**Figure 7 - Work Environment Accommodations requested within The WAM Programme (2012-2022)**

## Remote Working

It wasn't until 2018 that WAM received requests from graduates to remote work due to their disability. In a three-year period between 2018 and 2020, just 3% (n= 3) of graduates requested remote working as an accommodation. Conversely, 97% (n=17) of requests made to remote work were made between the years 2021 and 2022. It is important to note that this data only reflects those graduates who made a specific request to remote work as a workplace accommodation.

Prior to 2020, many WAM employers did not have the capacity for staff to work remotely; however, this changed dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic where most employers were forced to work remotely due to the public health measures and guidance provided by the government at that time. When these public health measures started to ease in 2021, most WAM employers started to implement hybrid work policies, where they offered some form of remote working for all employees. As such, since 2021, the prevalence of remote working as a reasonable accommodation increased as graduates with disabilities requested the flexibility to work remotely more frequently than the standard hybrid work arrangements employers were willing to facilitate.

In 2021, 11% (n=5) of graduates placed that year requested remote work, and this increased to 17% (n=12) in 2022. In total, this equates to just under 14% (n=17) of graduates with disabilities requesting greater flexibility around remote-working due to their disability between 2021 and 2022.

**14% of graduates requested additional remote workdays  
above employers' standard hybrid working policies.**

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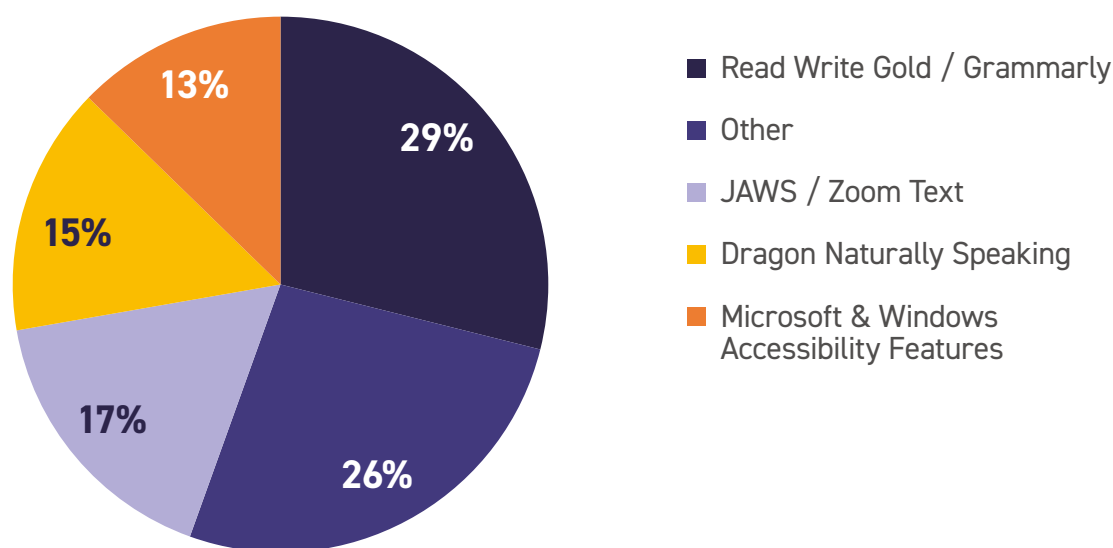


## Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology (AT) represented 8% (n=173) of the total accommodations recommended for the workplace.

Software to assist with spelling and grammar such as TextHelp, Read Write Gold and Grammarly was the most common type of AT requested by graduates and represented almost 29% (n=50). Other types of software such as LightKey, Google Transcribe or mobile applications represented 26% (n=46) of these requests, 17% (n=29) of graduates requested the use of JAWS or ZoomText and 15% (n=26) requested Dragon Naturally Speaking.

In recent years, as in-built accessibility features of Microsoft Office and Windows have improved, WAM has seen an increase in graduates and employers utilising these inbuilt features. From WAM's experience of working with employers, these in-built accessibility features typically do not incur any additional cost to the employer and minimises potential IT security issues which are often prevalent when installation of external software is required. Of graduates requesting AT, 13% (n=22) requested these inbuilt features.

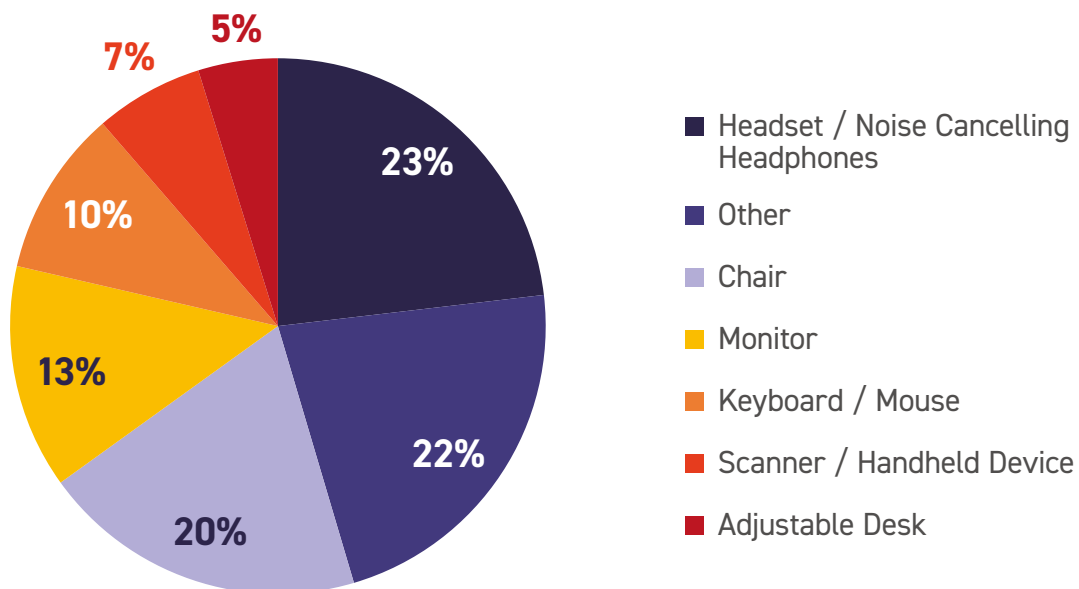


**Figure 8 - Assistive Technology Accommodations requested within The WAM Programme (2012-2022)**

## Hardware

Specific hardware needs represented 10% (n=229) of the total workplace accommodations.

Requests for hardware specific accommodations were headsets or noise cancelling headphones (23%; n=53); a specific type of ergonomic chair (20%; n=45); a specific type or size of monitor (13%; n=31); access to a keyboard or mouse (10%; n=23); a specific type of scanner or a handheld device (7%; n=15); and an adjustable desk (5%; n=11). Finally, the Other category (22%; n=51) included a request for a footrest, partitions, and a desk lamp amongst others.



**Figure 9 - Hardware Accommodations requested within The WAM Programme**

## Medical Appointments

Time off to attend medical appointments represented 8% (n=193) of the total workplace accommodations. This translates 42% (n=193) of 619 graduates with disabilities requesting time off to attend disability specific medical appointments. The frequency of medical appointments varied from as little as once per annum to once a fortnight, depending on the disability.

**42% of graduates requested time off to attend disability specific medical appointments.**

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## Other

Accommodations which did not feature in the above sections represented only 1% (n=32) of total workplace accommodations. These included slight adjustments or reduction in working hours, an ISL interpreter and access to a designated car parking space.

## **Cost of Disability Related Accommodations**

It was noted that 33%, 150 out of 460 needs assessments, recommended a piece of technology, hardware or items that may have resulted in an additional cost for the employer. These varied in nature and included requests to make adaptations to a building (e.g., moving swipe card access lower on the wall for wheelchair users or loosening the hinges on fire doors to make it easier to push or pull open for someone with mobility difficulties) as well as hardware specific requests (e.g., a smaller keyboard, a footrest, a chair with adjustable armrests, and a larger monitor). Requests for an ISL interpreters also varied in frequency depending on the type of the work and the individual preference of each deaf graduate.

Several employers reported that some things were readily available to all employees, such as a larger monitor or a footrest. In addition, building modifications were often carried out by in-house facility staff, thus not requiring external contractors, and ultimately removing additional cost to the employer. Furthermore, some employers already held licences for assistive technology and thus eliminated the need to repurchase these supports.

All considered, due to the individuality of each placement, it is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of the average cost associated with hiring a graduate with a disability. Notwithstanding this, the majority of the recommendations made by the WAM team did not result in any additional cost for the employer.

**2/3**

**of recommended  
accommodations  
did not incur  
any cost for the  
employer**



**“I had quite a bad health setback last year, and I found the initial assistance around disclosure made this situation a lot easier. Although it was a very unforeseen complication, [company] knowing something about my medical condition, I believe made my manager much more understanding when that happened and indeed since then with numerous hospital visits and going on new medication, which wasn’t an easy process. To be honest, this is what has allowed me to remain in full-time work over the past year.”**

# Disclosure

Disclosure is complex and influenced by several factors including self-identity, personality, type of disability, context, and previous experience. Moreover, disclosure presents a major concern within the recruitment process for both employers and graduates with disabilities. There is often a disparity between employers and employees on the subject with the former preferring to have access to as much information as soon as possible, while the latter often remains weary of the impact disclosure may have.

When a graduate is placed with a WAM employer, disclosure is confidentially discussed between the graduate and AHEAD staff as part of the WAM needs assessment process. Of the 460 needs assessments completed and analysed between 2012-2022, 94% (n=431) of graduates chose to completely disclose their disability or disabilities to their line manager, mentor and to the HR department. Conversely, 4% (n=21) of graduates partially disclosed (e.g., they may have only disclosed one of their disabilities) and 2% (n=8) of graduates chose not to disclose at all.

**98% of WAM graduates disclose their disability to their employer while on a WAM placement.**

---

In the survey circulated to WAM graduates, comfort surrounding disclosure was queried and graduates were asked how they felt about disclosing their disability to employers following their WAM placement. 69% (n=116) of respondents reported feeling more confident about disclosing their disability to new employers in the future. 21% (n=36) stated they did not feel more confident about disclosure. The remaining 10% (n=16) noted that they were unsure about how their placement experience impacted upon their likelihood to disclose. When asked to provide additional information, for some graduates, their willingness or inclination to disclose was dependent on the employer and, more specifically, the employer's willingness to facilitate them as employees with disabilities.

**69% of WAM graduates are more confident in disclosing their disability to mainstream employers after their WAM placement.**

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# WAM Graduates' Experiences

The survey asked graduates several questions in relation to their WAM placement experience. It also gave graduates the opportunity to share additional comments should they wish. Please note, to preserve anonymity of the graduates, specific names of employers, managers and mentors have been removed.

## Rating of their WAM Placement

Utilising a Likert scale, graduates were asked to rate their experience on a five-point scale, with one representing 'poor' and five representing 'excellent'. The response to this survey was overwhelmingly positive, with 27% (n=47) rating their placement experience as 'good' and 64% (n=111) rating their experience as 'excellent'.

### **91% of graduates rated their WAM placement as good or excellent.**

---

- “Extremely beneficial opportunity to acquire experience of mainstream employment, which I believe was critical in securing subsequent employment. Prior to the WAM placement, multiple and repeated attempts to secure employment were unsuccessful.”
- “Was a brilliant opportunity for me to gain experience in a leading company. Really grateful for the opportunity. “
- “The WAM placement genuinely changed my life, I was stuck on Disability and now I am back in the workforce in a field I am passionate about with a company that is supporting me. I gained so much confidence in speaking about having a disability and have even joined my company's disability support group.”
- “I had already been working for 20 years in the private sector, but I was unemployed for 3 years due to health issues and WAM helped me get back on my feet and start a new career in the public sector.”





**91%**

**of graduates  
rated their WAM  
placement as  
good or excellent**

## Practical Experience in the Workplace

With relation to their specific workplace experience, graduates were asked if they gained practical experience in the workplace during their WAM placement. 95% (n=165) of graduates reported that it did, 3% (n=6) stated no, alluding to their not gaining workplace experience with 2% (n=3) answering 'unsure'.

### **95% of graduates felt they gained practical experience in the workplace.**

---

- “I have used this placement as an example of my experience during several interviews and I have been promoted twice since leaving the WAM placement, so I think that is evidence of the benefit of these placements.”
- “I really enjoyed my placement at [company], they were very helpful and supportive. I gained valuable experience working there.”
- “Very happy, got me into a good company and I was able to move to a higher paying role from the graduate one I entered into. Would recommend to all who qualify.”
- “On completion of my WAM placement, I decided to apply to the [company] Graduate Programme and thankfully got accepted. I would argue that without the positive experience on the WAM programme – I would never have been afforded the opportunity to get into such a graduate programme. It gave me such a boost in confidence and allowed me to prove to myself and others that I was very capable of succeeding in a full-time role. I feel that the programme was a real stepping stone for me and provided me with the chance to kick-start my career.”

## Transferrable Skills

Graduates were also asked to consider whether the skills they learned during education were transferable to the workplace. This question included both hard and soft skills, with a particular consideration of how these skills could be utilised and developed in the workplace. As a result, 87% (n=151) of graduates reported that they were able to transfer and develop their educational skills within the workplace. 9% (n=15) said no, while 4% (n=7) said they were unsure.

### **87% felt they learned transferrable skills from education to the workplace.**

---

- “I had a fantastic experience, [company] set me up for success. My manager was a fantastic support in my getting used to the workplace (it was my first professional job) and then helping find my next role and offering some guidance for further education. I would recommend the WAM placement to anyone who felt they could use some additional support in the transition from education to the workplace. In particular, [company], which has proven itself to set its WAM placements up for success in all elements of life.”
- “The WAM placement provided me with a stepping stone from college into the working world. The experience it gave me has proved invaluable for helping me obtain further employment and I cannot be more grateful for this.”
- “The WAM Programme is an amazing lifeline which is thrown to graduates with disabilities, and it gives crucial help in bridging the gap between successful study and success in the workplace for such graduates! It has been truly superb for me on both occasions I participated and boosted my career and self-esteem!!!”



**92%**

The infographic features a dark blue background. A white speech bubble with a dark blue border contains the text '92%'. Below the speech bubble is a large yellow rounded rectangle. Inside this rectangle, the text 'gained confidence in their ability to work in mainstream' is written in dark blue. A subtle pattern of concentric circles in shades of blue and green is visible behind the yellow rectangle.

**gained confidence  
in their ability  
to work in  
mainstream**

## Confidence in their Ability

Graduates were asked to reflect on whether they felt their placement helped them gain confidence in their ability to work within a mainstream environment, with 92% (n=160) reporting that they did gain confidence in their ability to work in mainstream environments. 3% (n=6) said no, while 4% (n= 7) said they were unsure.

- “From this placement, I had the confidence to apply for a traineeship in a legal law firm. I am one off until I am a trained solicitor. Thanks for everything.”
- “WAM changed my life. Without WAM I would not have gained the experience and confidence to do the job I do.”
- “...The [WAM] team were very supportive and liaised with management in every aspect. This helped me build a gentle confidence within my short time there. But I had a bit to go in terms of confidence owing to the nature of my disabilities. I can't thank the staff, particularly my mentor and management, along with the WAM team enough.

It stood to me in good stead when I unexpectedly left early from the WAM contract in order to take up permanent full-time employment in another department. The new role required a lot of adaptability and on the job learning. I really don't think I would have transitioned so well and have had that level of job readiness without having taken up the WAM placement....”

## Understanding of Workplace Supports

Focusing specifically on the availability of workplace supports, graduates were asked to reflect on their perceived knowledge of workplace accommodation prior to and after the completion of their respective placements. 88% (n=150) of graduates reported they had a better understanding of what types of supports they need within the workplace following the completion of their WAM placement. 8% (n=13) said no, while 5% (n=8) said they were unsure.

This is particularly important as it highlights The WAM Programme as an opportunity for graduates to try out reasonable accommodations outside of an educational context. Further, while many graduates would have received some accommodations during their education, many graduates remain unaware of the types of support available to them within the workplace despite reasonable accommodations being referenced in equality and employment legislation such as redistribution of tasks and time off for medical appointments.

- “This was my first time in the workplace and one of the main things I learned was how my disability would affect me in mainstream work. The assessment in particular was very good here, highlighting things like emergency evacuation as I have difficulty with stairs. It focused on finding issues such as these and making positive interventions to lessen or remove this impact. This meant I finished my placement assured that my disability would not have a significant impact on me entering mainstream employment.”
- “WAM allowed me to identify the assistive supports available which help in completing everyday tasks in the workplace. The WAM programme also allowed me to see the culture and additional supports that are available within the Civil Service, which has resulted in me taking up a permanent position within the Civil Service since 2017.”
- “I didn’t realise at the beginning how massively important this [needs assessment] process is. It identified issues would not have considered and made the process of disclosure of my medical needs so much easier.”



**88%**

**felt they  
had a better  
understanding  
of what supports  
they needed in the  
workplace**

## Remote Working

For graduates who availed of remote working or had the option to work remotely during their placement, they were asked to indicate whether they had benefited from remote working. 78% (n=38) reported they benefited, 18% (n=8) stated no, while 4% (n=2) said they were unsure.

### **78% of graduates felt remote working was of benefit to them.**

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- “I have had this since day one and it really lessens the impact of my medical condition on my work, which benefits both me and [company] because I can work away at home if I don’t feel able to come into the office.”
- “Game changer, remote working should be an option for all people with disabilities.”
- “For that particular placement, I was remote working all the time. It was invaluable to have that option and helped managing time/energy/stamina. Sometimes it backfires, though, so it’s about finding that balance.”



## WAM Mentoring Model

Finally, graduates were asked to reflect on their experience of the WAM Mentoring programme by indicating whether they felt they benefited from this relationship. Ultimately, 83% (n=140) of graduates reported a positive experience of the WAM Mentoring Model. 14% (n=23) answered no while 4% (n=6) stating they were unsure.

### **83% of graduates benefited from the WAM Mentoring Model.**

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- “Mentoring gave me great peace of mind.”
- “The best thing ever, it helped build my confidence.”
- “The mentoring is always excellent, and the mentors are always willing to help in any way and do always provide regular check ins and provide valuable guidance.”
- “My mentor [name] was truly great and so supportive along with the managers. She guided me and supported me through the important steps. I was introduced and went and met people inside and outside of the office to discuss the project and the supports they were involved in. [Name] was so kind and the conversation naturally flowed with her which took the pressure off me at the time. I could touch base with her whenever I needed to. The WAM Team sent on some useful information videos surrounding mentoring and expectations from the outset.”

## Additional Quotes

- “I found the WAM programme excellent, they were there if I needed them but also weren’t pushy in asking all the time how things were going, if I needed anything, etc. I just needed a bit of confidence and to get my foot in the door and WAM understood that and provided it to me. I’d recommend the WAM programme to anyone and have done to a number of people I know.”
- “My WAM placement was a fantastic experience, which I will always attribute to getting me to where I am today. [Company] really ‘put their money where their mouth is’ in terms of accessibility, making all the adaptations I needed. The only reason I moved on was because I got an offer in an area I’m more interested in.”
- “I would like to sincerely thank the WAM staff for the opportunity offered by WAM. As a person with a relatively mild (but significant) disability, I found it difficult to obtain second-round and third-round interviews for jobs in the Private Sector despite my qualifications and experience. Having experienced this challenge in the job market, I very much appreciate the opportunities offered by WAM.”
- “The WAM placement was a blessing for me, I can credit the WAM placement for my new career in the public sector. It really helped me find my feet again after battling chronic pain and unemployment for 3 years, which resulted in difficulty trying to find work again in the private sector. If it was not for the WAM programme, I would not be enjoying my 5th year working in the public sector so I’m entirely grateful for it.”



**“I really want to say a big thank you to all involved. Each one of us is fully capable and able but each of us need to find our path. Some are lost but once they find a pathway to participation, it will all unfold from there. Because, as Helen Keller is attributed with the quote, “Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much” (more).”**

# Disability Profile

In the early years of the WAM programme, the most common type of disability was physical disabilities. The analysis of disability profiles of WAM graduates over the years also noted that disabilities such as neurological/speech language difficulties, ADD/ADHD, and Dyspraxia/Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) were not represented in the WAM programme for the first few years<sup>2</sup>. However, this has changed significantly over the past four years as the demographic of graduates has continued to change<sup>3</sup>.

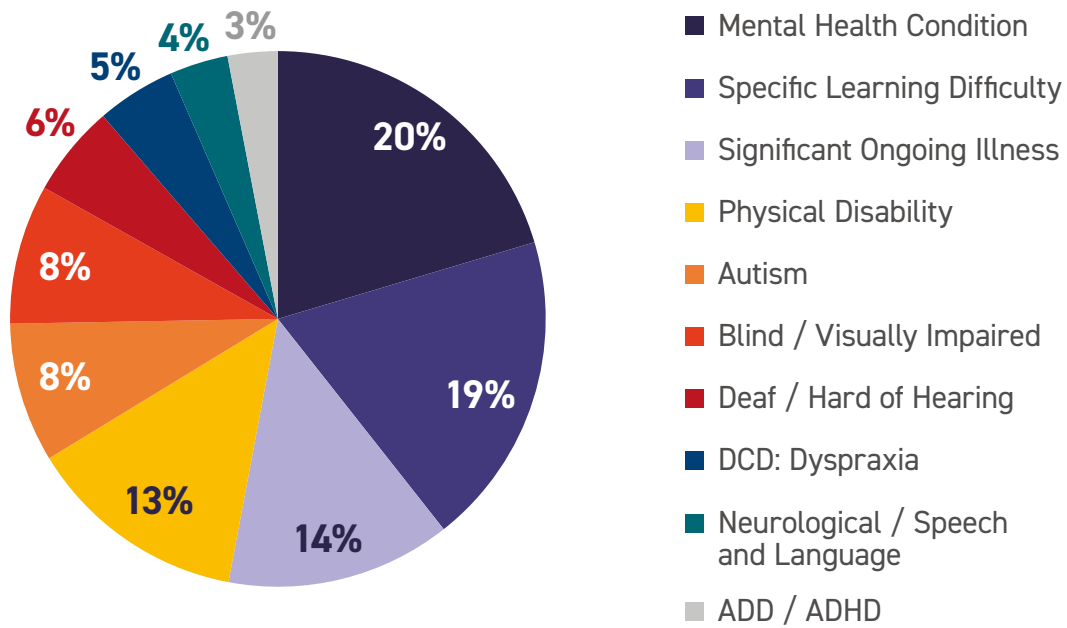
To date, the most common disability of placed WAM graduates is now a mental health condition (20%; n=160), followed by specific learning difficulty at 19% (n=151). The third highest category was represented by significant ongoing illness (14%; n=108) followed by physical disability at 13% (n=106). Autism represented 8% (n=67) as did blind/visually impaired (8%; n=67); deaf/hard of hearing represented 6% (n=44); dyspraxia represented 5% (n=38), neurological/speech and language difficulty at 4% (n=28) and finally ADD/ADHD represented 3% (n=24).

Figure 10 is a chart outlining the disability profile of 619 graduates placed on The WAM Programme since the development of the programme in 2005 to March 2023. The categories are taken from the categories provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

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<sup>2</sup> AHEAD (2020), *The WAM Programme Statistics 2020*. AHEAD Educational Press: Dublin

<sup>3</sup> AHEAD. (2023). *Students with Disabilities Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2021/22*. AHEAD Educational Press: Dublin.



**Figure 10 - Disability Profile of WAM Graduates (2005-2022)**

## Multiple Disabilities

In the first ten years of The WAM Programme, on average, 1 in every 10 graduates presented with multiple, or co-occurring, disabilities. However, in recent years, this figure has increased. In the last five years alone, 2018 – 2023, over 1 in 3 graduates disclosed multiple disabilities.

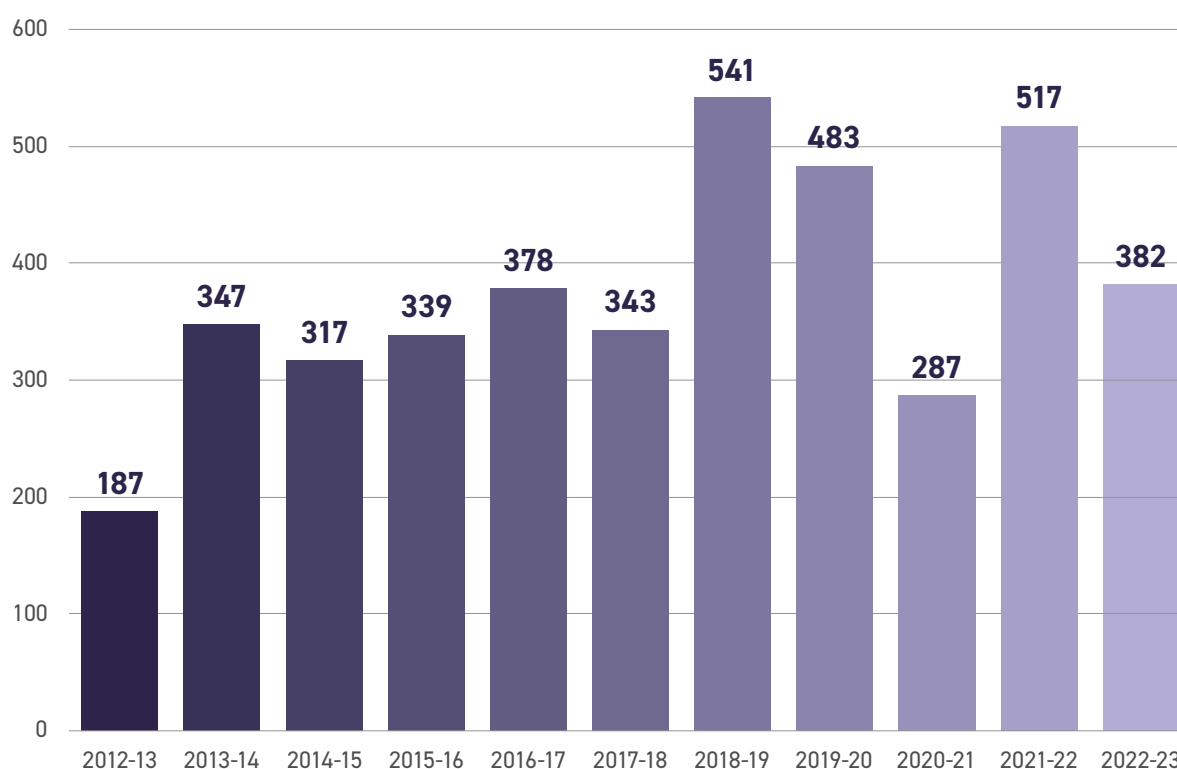
For the majority of graduates, many had varying types of co-occurring disabilities, in some cases, up to five different types of disabilities. However, there also remained others who reported multiple disabilities of the same type (e.g., co-occurring mental health conditions).

Cumulatively, since the beginning of The WAM Programme, 22% (n=135) of graduates reported having more than one disability.

# Applications to The WAM Programme

When a position is advertised on The WAM Programme, graduates with disabilities must apply through the AHEAD WAMWorks database. To do this, graduates must upload their CV or relevant application form on this platform and apply for a specific position advertised. Each application is then checked by the WAM team to ensure eligibility before it is sent to the employer for further review and shortlisting.

Between April 2012 and March 2023, WAM processed a total of 4,121 applications for 738 potential positions advertised within both the public and private sector.



**Figure 11 - Number of Applications to The WAM Programme (2012 - 2022)**

# Types of WAM Placements Available

All WAM placements must offer a minimum of a six-month contract. However, in some cases, employers may choose to offer lengthier WAM placements. Since 2017, there has been a significant increase in employers offering contracts for longer than six-months, with several also ring-fencing places exclusively for graduates with disabilities on their mainstream graduate programmes and, in some cases, offering permanent positions.

Figure 12 below provides further information on the length of placements available within the WAM programme since April 2012.

**Figure 12 - Types of WAM Placements Available (2012-2022)**

Contract Length	2012/ 13	2013/ 14	2014/ 15	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20	2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23
6 months	33	49	51	50	52	56	62	81	50	49	14
6-12 months	0	0	4	0	2	2	12	4	5	9	92
Permanent	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	4	2	4	3
Graduate Programme	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	12	6	7	13
Total Advertised	33	49	56	50	54	60	81	101	63	69	122

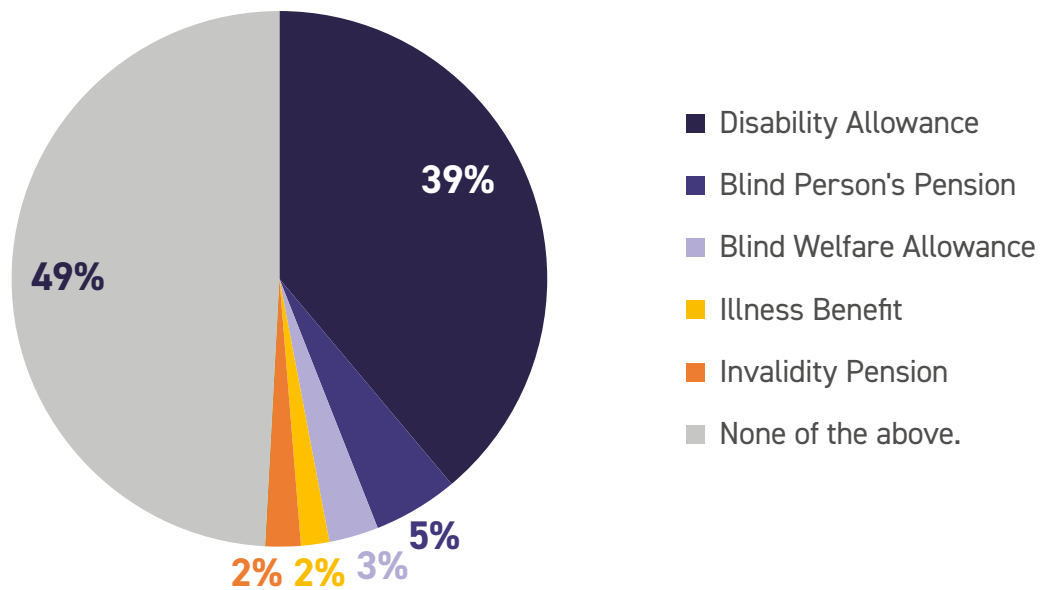
# Disability & Illness Payments

To facilitate graduates in receipt of disability or illness payments from the DSP, WAM has an agreement with the Department, whereby their payment is suspended or re-assessed for the duration of their placement. This agreement ensures that graduates will not have to re-apply for their disability or illness payment following the completion of their placement. Instead, individual payments will be reassessed and re-instated upon completion of each placement.

Having this agreement with the Department is vital to allow graduates with disabilities to experience the world of work without the fear of losing their payment and secondary benefits if the employment does not work out which is a real concern and barrier for those who are contemplating accessing and engaging with the labour market.

In the survey and purposive sampling analysis, it was found that Disability Allowance was the most common type of payment, with 39% (n=91) of graduates in receipt of this payment prior to commencing their WAM placement. 5% (n=12) had received Blind Person's Pension, and 3% (n=7) had received Blind Welfare Allowance with Illness Benefit, and Invalidity Pension both at 2% (n=4; n=5) respectively. 49% (n=115) stated they did not receive any of the above disability or illness payments.





**Figure 13 - Disability / illness payments received by WAM graduates prior to their placement (2012 - 2021).**

Of the graduates who were in receipt of a disability or illness payment prior to their WAM placement and were currently employed at the time of completing the survey and purposive sampling analysis, it was determined that 69% (n=88) of graduates were no longer in receipt of disability or illness payments.

**69% of graduates are no longer in receipt of disability/illness payments.**

# Key Takeaways

## **1 in 7 applicants required accommodations for a virtual interview while 1 in 3 required accommodations for testing and screening in the recruitment process**

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15% of applicants indicated that they would require additional accommodations for a virtual interview. In contrast, 20% of graduates requested accommodations for a traditional interview and 33% requested accommodations in the event of testing and screening.

## **Two-thirds of workplace supports did not incur any cost**

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Two-thirds of accommodations recommended to employers did not incur a cost to employers. Similarly, two-thirds of accommodations related to work tasks which included a range of practical and easy to implement changes to the workplace.

## **42% of graduates require time off to attend disability related medical appointments**

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Of the 460 graduate needs assessments analysed, 42% required time off to attend medical appointments related to their disability. The frequency of medical appointments varied from as little as once per annum to once a fortnight, depending on the nature of the disability.

## **1 in 3 graduates have multiple disabilities in the last 5 years**

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In the first ten years of the programme, only 1 in 10 graduates disclosed more than one disability. However, this has increased to over 1 in 3 in the last five years.

## **WAM is a safe space to disclose**

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98% of graduates disclosed their disability while on placement with a WAM employer and 69% of graduates were more confident in disclosing to a mainstream employer after their WAM placement. This supports the idea that the WAM Programme is a safe space providing graduates the opportunity to try out disclosure in a supported format.

## **92% of graduates gained confidence in their ability to work in mainstream environments**

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92% of graduates gained confidence in their ability to work in a mainstream environment, 95% stated their WAM placement gave them practical experience in the workplace while 88% reported they had a better understanding of what workplace supports they may need in the future.

## **69% of graduates are no longer in receipt of disability/illness payments**

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69% of respondents to the survey who were in receipt of disability or illness payments prior to their WAM placement stated they were currently employed at the time of completing the survey and therefore were no longer in receipt of disability or illness payments.

## **81% of WAM graduates secured employment as a direct result of WAM**

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In the recent findings, 81% of graduates secured employment as a direct result of their WAM placement, while only 9% of graduates were still seeking work opportunities one year after completion. This highlights the importance of recent work experience as a stepping stone to secure further employment opportunities.

# Thank you

Thank you to all of the WAM graduates who participated in the survey  
and to WAM employers we have worked with over the years.

If you are interested in finding out more about The WAM Programme,  
please visit our website [www.ahead.ie/wam](http://www.ahead.ie/wam).

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**Department of Social Protection**

