

# The WAM Programme

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Paid, Mentored, Graduate-Level Internships for  
People with Disabilities



# Who are AHEAD?

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AHEAD, founded in 1988, is an independent non-profit organisation working to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities.

# Introduction to The WAM Programme

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The Willing, Able, Mentoring (WAM) Programme is an initiative of AHEAD established in 2005 and is currently funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP).

The central objective 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 paid and mentored graduate internship for a minimum of 6 months. Graduates are required to have the education level and the core competencies to carry out the role that is offered by the employer.

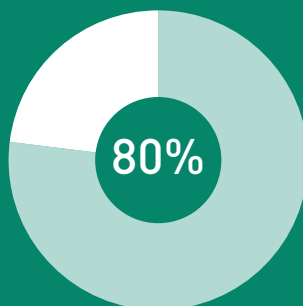
These internships, or placements, offer real life work settings to identify the issues facing both employers and graduates in the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities. Through WAM, both the employer and graduate are supported to ensure practical work-orientated solutions with a focus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

# Key Facts & Figures

470+

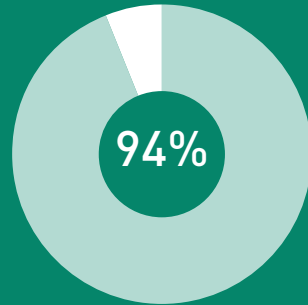
Over 470 placements secured since 2005

80% of graduates secure full time employment as a direct result of a WAM placement



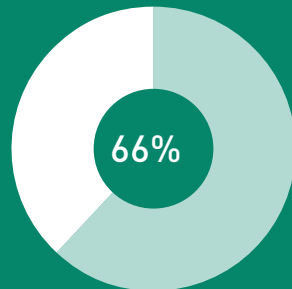
4 out of 5 candidates do not require any support at the interview stage

94% of graduates gained confidence in their ability to work in a mainstream environment



Over 2/3 of supports recommended by WAM do not incur a cost to the employer

66% of graduates are more confident in disclosing their disability to new employers as a result of their WAM placement



# Benefits for Graduates

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Graduates receive:

- Upskilling workshops
- Paid work experience
- The opportunity to demonstrate skills
- Career development
- A safe space to disclose
- A Comprehensive Needs Assessment to identify supports in the workplace
- Support of a mentor on site
- Training prior to internship
- Ongoing support from WAM throughout
- Advice on workplace supports
- Enrolment into WAM's online course
- Improved confidence

# Benefits for **Employers**

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Employers receive:

- Understanding of disability
- Disability proofing of HR and recruitment practices
- Access to our graduate database
- Training for HR staff and line managers on disability
- A safe space to ask questions
- A comprehensive Needs Assessment recommending supports to be put in place
- Advice on workplace supports and accommodations
- Free attendance to WAM employer networking events
- Enrolment into WAM's online courses
- WAM Mentoring Model applied
- Ongoing support from WAM throughout
- A WAM Leader award

# In their own words:



## WAM Graduates

“I would highly recommend any student who has struggled with their confidence, has

had setbacks or has a disability to undertake a WAM placement. It really gives you a fantastic entry level experience into the world of work and time to figure out your own strengths and skills in a supported environment which may not be available to you in general graduate programmes.”

“If wasn’t for WAM, I would still be on the equivalent of the Disability Allowance today”

“The WAM Programme has increased my confidence greatly. I am even applying to large law firms’ trainee solicitor programmes which prior to the six months work experience I would not even dare to contemplate”





## WAM Managers & Mentors

“I gained experience & confidence in working with people with disabilities. Going forward I would have a lot more knowledge on how to properly evaluate needs prior to a new person starting. It has added to my managerial experience”

“There are benefits to your immediate work area, in terms of getting a graduate with a relevant skill set, but there are also benefits beyond your own unit/branch in terms of challenging perceptions and bias and promoting equality which is important for any manager”

“I feel that our organisation benefited too. I would recommend every organisation to take part as it offers a chance to make a real difference to peoples’ lives by giving the graduate an opportunity to see how a workplace environment operates.”

# The WAM process for Graduates

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- 1 To be eligible, graduates must have a disability, specific learning difficulty or mental health difficulty
- 2 Have a minimum Level 6 NFQ qualification
- 3 Be work-ready and available for full time graduate-level work
- 4 Register on WAMWorks database at [www.ahead.ie/wamworks](http://www.ahead.ie/wamworks)
- 5 Apply for a WAM placement as they arise by submitting a CV or application form
- 6 If shortlisted, attend an interview with the employer
- 7 If successful, WAM carry out a Needs Assessment to determine what supports are required
- 8 Commence work placement with the employer
- 9 Receive ongoing support from the WAM team

# The WAM process for Employers

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- 1 Meet with the WAM Coordinator
- 2 Receive Disability Awareness Training
- 3 Identify and ring-fence graduate level roles
- 4 Review candidates - WAM undertakes all advertising and administration
- 5 Shortlist and conduct interviews
- 6 Offer successful candidate(s) a contract of employment
- 7 Receive a Needs Assessment carried out by the WAM Team
- 8 Conduct Pre-Placement Training & Mentor Training
- 9 Receive ongoing support from the WAM team

# The Needs Assessment

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One of the key elements to ensuring the success of the WAM placement is facilitating a comprehensive Needs Assessment. The purpose of the Needs Assessments is to identify what supports or accommodations the graduate may require in order to maximise their full potential in the workplace.

It is a structured, consultative and transparent process where a member of the WAM team in consultation with the graduate and the direct line manager looks at the impact of the disability versus the core competencies of the role.

The WAM team will produce a report which outlines recommendations for appropriate supports which is then given to the direct line manager and in some cases the HR department.

The majority of recommendations are usually around work tasks such as a written instructions, structure, proof-reading etc.

The Needs Assessment is mandatory for all graduates who commence a WAM placement.

# WAM Mentoring Model

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When a graduate is successfully placed in a company, WAM asks the company to assign a Mentor to them. This mentor is usually a volunteer within the company and will fundamentally act as a sounding board for the graduate and helps with social integration into the workplace.

Mentoring has benefits not just for the graduate but also for the company. Mentoring encourages personal development of staff as well as leadership and retention of staff. It is also a great way to learn about disability related issues through direct experience.

A structured mentoring process is in place where the WAM team will provide training prior to the placement starting. In addition to this training, the mentor will be enrolled onto the WAM Mentoring Model e-learning course.

# Ongoing support

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The WAM Programme team provides ongoing support throughout the placement for everyone involved, the graduate, the direct line manager and the mentor.

Everyone will be enrolled onto an e-learning course in addition to regular check-ins by the WAM team.

If needed, WAM provides disability awareness training to staff working with the WAM graduate.

If necessary WAM can carry out a revised needs assessment should any aspect of the job or the disability changes.

Graduates will be notified of any upskilling workshops related to employment, e.g. CV clinics and interview preparation.

Employers will be invited to WAM events throughout the year covering topics on disability and employment.

Employers will also get the opportunity to participate in AHEAD's annual careers fair aimed at students and graduates with disabilities, Building The Future.

# Where can I get more information?

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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)

## Graduates

Register on our WAMWorks database to be notified of any WAM placements and upskilling workshops

[www.ahead.ie/wamworks](http://www.ahead.ie/wamworks)

## Employers

If you are a new employer who is interested in offering paid, mentored, graduate internships please contact the WAM Coordinator at the contact details below.

## Contact Details

You can contact any member of the WAM team as follows:

T: +353 (0)1 716 8844

E: [wam@ahead.ie](mailto:wam@ahead.ie)

# The WAM Programme

The WAM Programme at AHEAD

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