



Association for Higher Education Access & Disability

DEMYSTIFYING DISABILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Practical Guidelines for
Managers & Supervisors



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Introduction

AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) is an independent non profit organization working to promote full access to and participation in further/higher education and employment for students and graduates with disabilities. The aim of AHEAD is to change attitudes and mind-sets about students and graduates with disabilities and to encourage professionals involved in education and employment to see their ability. AHEAD's principles are firmly rooted in a rights philosophy, recognizing the rights of people with disabilities to an education - including further and higher education - and career development.

The WAM (Willing, Able Mentoring) Programme is an initiative of AHEAD, funded by FÁS, which seeks to promote access to the mainstream labour market for graduates with disabilities/specific learning difficulties through the method of a structured mentored work placement programme. WAM facilitates, monitors, supports and evaluates work placements for graduates with disabilities in a number of major mainstream employers. These opportunities offer graduates the chance to gain work experience relative to their qualifications while employers get the chance to assess their recruitment and employment policies in relation to people with disabilities. WAM supports employers and graduates with disabilities through the recruitment and employment phase and in doing so, ensures that both sides have the support and confidence to engage in a learning experience together. In collaborating with employers the WAM programme works toward the development of internal best practice policies in the recruitment and employment of people with disabilities. For more information on the WAM Programme refer to the WAM section of the AHEAD website at http://www.ahead.ie/employment_wamprogramme.php

This booklet is a product of the AHEAD WAM Programme and is one in a series of WAM 'tips and tools' aimed at supporting organisations who recognise the business advantage of a genuinely inclusive work environment. The intention is to complement rather than replace internal

company policies, add value and strengthen existing mainstream practise.

All of the information provided in this booklet is based on the learning accrued while placing graduates with disabilities in mainstream employers as part of the WAM Programme.

The primary motivation for this booklet is to provide practical guidelines for organisations on tackling everyday issues that arise in the recruitment and management of people with disabilities. It is intended as an instrument for managers, supervisors and related personnel to equip them to respond appropriately to such concerns as:

- » How can a manager deal with what he/she does not know?
- » How does a manager find out if a performance issue is disability related or not?
- » How does a supervisor go about assessing and accommodating a need while maintaining productivity levels?
- » What can I ask at interview?
- » Supporting mental health issues in the workplace.

These are a sample of some of the many questions that are consistently raised by employers. This booklet is designed around a selected number of structured Q&A scenarios in an attempt to give an adequate response to such frequently asked questions regarding the recruitment and management of people with disabilities (**Section A**).

As some of the information provided in Section A touches on the role of needs assessment in addressing workplace issues related to disability, it was felt that including an outline of the model used by WAM may shed further light, and provide practical guidelines, on how the process actually works in identifying accommodations for people with disabilities in the workplace. Therefore, **Section B** outlines and describes the process of needs assessment and disability management as used by the WAM Programme in placing graduates with disabilities in mainstream employers.

In our engagement with employers, WAM found that a lack of information or experience regarding disabilities can quickly turn to fear. Many managers and supervisors stated that they would have benefited from having some form of disability related information prior to taking a person on. Although we are keen to stress (and always do) that **every** individual's needs and requirements will be different, general disability information sheets have been drawn up in order to offer some information on a range of broad disability types and how they may have an impact in the workplace. These information sheets also identify examples of reasonable accommodations in the workplace. Thus, **Section C** offers a range of general information sheets and advice by broad disability category.

It is important at this point to reiterate; individuals with similar impairments or conditions will have unique requirements and needs. The same accommodations do **NOT** always apply to the same conditions.

For further information on these or any other disability management issues in the workplace please contact AHEAD [www.ahead.ie]

Section A

Q&A

**We don't seem to
get applications
from graduates
with disabilities!**

Although we are “an equal opportunities employer” and say so on all our job advertisements, we never seem to get applications from graduates with disabilities? (Talent Acquisition Rep)

Firstly, how do you know you are not receiving applications from graduates with disabilities? In some cases applicants with disabilities may not disclose information about an impairment, difficulty or medical condition on an application form or CV. This point is particularly relevant if a person has a non-visible disability such as a mental health issue or a specific learning difficulty as they may go through the application and interview process without mentioning anything if they believe it will not impact on job performance.

The most important thing is that you have the capacity to recruit and employ qualified people with disabilities; that your policies and procedures are **NOT** inadvertently excluding applicants with disabilities.

Employers must have the capacity to recruit the right person for the job – whether that person has an impairment or not. This ability should not rely on an ad hoc add-on structure- it should be ingrained into mainstream HR practice. Creating an inclusive work environment should also ensure retention of staff who may acquire a disability. By ensuring that the recruitment and selection process is accessible for all, employers can tap into a broader base of people in order to search for the best candidate for the job.

The following are points to remember in striving to create inclusive recruitment and employment policies and procedures;

Advertisements (language)

Without intending to, job advertisement language can be perceived to be inclusive or exclusive – depending on the words used. For example statements often found in vacancy adverts which emphasise the ideal candidate as being able to ‘work under pressure’ or ‘be energetic and dynamic’ may go some way to dissuading people with certain types of disability from applying. Alternative statements outlining the ideal candidate as someone who can ‘work to deadlines’ and ‘bring ideas and creativity’ could potentially serve the same purpose while also not putting off people with disabilities. Analyse the language used in your vacancy advertisements for these types of inadvertent connotations.

It is also worth noting that graduates with disabilities often do not take standard paths to employment i.e. milk rounds, recruitment companies etc, instead relying on personal contacts and associated organisations. Employers looking to recruit people with disabilities should also consider using alternative routes of communication for job vacancy advertisements. Sending job vacancy advertisements to target groups such as disability

organisations may assist in reaching a wider applicant base. Disability organisations and their members and communities are often very tight-knit, so employing or providing a placement for someone with a disability can lead to applications from other people with disabilities – do not underestimate the usefulness of word of mouth.

The Importance of Job Specifications

A clearly defined job specification has a dual role to play in ensuring inclusive recruitment and selection.

Firstly, it is a vital part of the recruitment and selection process as it offers employers a way of measuring the abilities of applicants based on those required for the vacant role. A detailed spec allows the employer to explore questions regarding work tasks and environment at interview and therefore facilitates more objective decision making in the skills match process between applicant and job. Where some employers like to have their job specs to be as general as possible in order to draw a bigger application base, it might be a good idea to have a more detailed version for those who are being called for interview. The job specification is intended to provide a framework within which the interviewer can make a sound

judgement about the candidate's ability to do the job – thus the more defined it is, the easier it should be to measure the abilities of a person with, or without, an impairment or condition.

Secondly, it informs the potential candidate with a disability of the actual tasks and environment of the job thus enabling him/her to make a decision as to whether to apply for the role.

Competency Based Interviewing

The central tenet of this approach is that interviewing should focus solely on the ability of the person to do the job. Competency based interviewing attempts to match the skills of the person with the skills required – therefore focusing only on ability NOT disability. Asking a person with a disability to demonstrate how they would meet certain aspects of the role is absolutely fine – once it is asked of all candidates for that role. If a core skill required is analytical research skills and a person applying has a visual impairment, their route to the information may be different but it is their analytical research skills which should be assessed NOT how they will access the information - which should be explained by the applicant. The interviewer's responsibility is to assess the research abilities of the applicant with the impairment – in line with the assessment of all other applicants for the role. Remember, identifying the capabilities of interviewees with disabilities is done through job related questions-not disability related ones.

Having the line manager on the interview panel is good practice as this person will have a thorough knowledge of the work environment in terms of physical space and tasks involved – a detailed knowledge of the role on offer and therefore potentially a better matching process. Avoid over-cautious views of people with disabilities as 'risks' – people with disabilities often have to monitor and care for their health very closely and therefore can be more health conscious than the average employee. Nonetheless, you cannot rule out risk for anyone.

Reasonable Accommodations

Under Employment Equality legislation employers are obliged to take appropriate measures to enable a person who has a disability to access and participate in employment or undertake training – unless these measures would result in a disproportionate burden for the employer. An applicant with a disability can be considered fully competent and capable of undertaking the duties of the role, if the person would be fully competent with a reasonable accommodation in place. However, an employer is not expected to employ someone who is not competent or capable of doing the job. The assessment of applications from people who have disabilities should occur AFTER a reasonable accommodation has been taken into account. [\[Source utilised: Equality Authority, The Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004\]](#)

Accommodations can vary from the use of a sign language interpreter at interview to time off for medical appointments to accessibility audits. However, the most common form of reasonable accommodation is assistive technology (AT). There is a wide range of AT available which enables particularly people with visual impairments, specific learning difficulties and physical impairments to undertake computer based work through the use of hardware and/or software based assistance. The array of AT available, like most technology, is expanding at a rapid rate. HR departments should be aware of the general AT available, however it is not expected that they be experts in the area. The emphasis should be on the applicant to explain what AT they may require and how it enables them to undertake the duties of the role on offer. From the employers perspective consultation with the applicant and possibly disability/ AT organisations should provide the answers to any queries you may have.

Note: An AHEAD produced DVD is available, entitled Challenging Assumptions, which provides further information and advice in inclusive recruitment and selection.

key points to consider;

1 Send job vacancies through alternative advertisement routes.

2 Recognise the importance of a detailed and defined job spec which outlines ALL the core tasks of a role.

3 Practice competency based interviewing which assesses and hires to the job spec focusing on what is required, not how it is done.

4 Be aware of and have a flexible view of what a reasonable accommodation is and can be – although assistive technology is the most common, they can vary.

5 Be aware of the range of FÁS grants available to assist in the provision of reasonable accommodations.

6 An awareness of the needs assessment process which can assist in identifying accommodations if required - for new recruits with disabilities or current employees who acquire a disability. **[For information on Needs Assessment please refer to Section B of this booklet].**

7 Flexible working hours offer benefits to all.

8 Have an adaptable induction training structure which ensures learning for different types of learners.

9 Consider a mentoring/buddy system which can assist the integration process and maximise potential of staff from an earlier stage.

**What can I ask in
order to make a
good recruitment
decision?**

I have just been informed that I will be interviewing a candidate with a visual impairment later in the week for an IT support role in our company. I have been in HR for 7 years but have never interviewed a candidate with a visual impairment. I do not know the extent of the impairment and have been told by my colleagues not to focus on it and to only assess the abilities of the candidate. With this in mind, how do I assess, at interview, whether (and how) the applicant will be able to perform the duties of this role; particularly those that involve looking at and analysing onscreen software programs? What can I ask?' (HR Representative)

You can ask anything once it is related to the job on offer **AND** you are asking all applicants the same set of questions.

Take note of the core tasks on the job specification and ask how the applicant could match these specifications. Due to their experience with a visual impairment the applicant is best placed to advise on how these tasks can be done, with or without the aid of **assistive technology** (AT). You **ARE NOT** expected to know everything about visual impairments and assistive technology but you **ARE** expected to give the applicant the chance to demonstrate skills/abilities that could meet the core tasks with the aid of assistive technology and equipment. The applicant should be the expert on the use of any AT required and you should be the expert on

all aspects of the job available. However, some preparatory work may be required in terms of making yourself aware of what AT is available and what it can do, as well as ensuring that you have considered how a person with a visual impairment could undertake the core tasks of the role in the particular work environment.

However do remember that a candidate who is visually impaired may find it difficult to respond to eye-to-eye contact – do not use this as assessment criteria. Otherwise interview as you normally would.

The interview should focus on whether the person fits the job requirements i.e. can they meet all the core tasks. With regard to core tasks, the applicant may have a unique approach to **HOW** tasks are done but the most important thing to assess in the interview is that they **CAN** actually be achieved. For example if one of the core aspects of the job is analysing onscreen software programmes, a person with a visual impairment may require magnification or screen reading hardware/software in order to access this onscreen data. Nonetheless, once the person can access the information, the most important thing to measure is the ability to analyse these programmes. It is permissible to ask an applicant with a visual impairment – as you would all applicants – to explain how they will meet specific core duties of the role. Although the method or route to the information may be different – the skill being assessed remains the same.

Assessing the abilities of people with impairments at interview is the same as any other interview – the only exception being that the candidate may have to

show that they can deliver on some of the core tasks with the aid of AT or another accommodation. Equality legislation deems that applications from candidates with disabilities must be measured with the presumption of that accommodation in place – it is only then that their applications should be measured alongside other candidates for the role. On the other hand they may not require anything. Towards the end of every interview, each candidate should be asked if they require any reasonable accommodations in order to do the job i.e. 'Is there any way that we as an organisation can accommodate you to enable you to perform your duties to the best of your abilities?' This question should cover all alternative individual needs whether impairment related or not.

At interview stage detailed and defined job specifications are very important as they can outline core tasks, work environment etc. and therefore enable a thorough assessment of the abilities of all applicants, with and without impairments, as they should be able to facilitate all the necessary job related questions. Do not underestimate the importance of the work environment in seeking a good job-skills match – as it can inform the key communication skills required. It may also be good HR practice to ensure that the line manager(s) involved in the job are on the interview panel as they should have detailed knowledge of the core tasks, work environment and how the work is done – this awareness of the physical and social environment of the specific workplace could be very important in identifying suitable accommodations.

It is also worth noting that if this applicant is successful then


induction/training/learning methods may also have to be adapted to suit someone who can't access documents/powerpoints etc in their general format. Also remember, in some cases orientation to the working environment may need to take place prior to the commencement of employment. The National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI) can be contacted to provide support in this orientation process.

[For more general information on visual impairments and potential accommodations in the workplace please refer to Section C5 of this booklet]

keys points to consider;

- 1 Abilities can be assessed at interview by asking job related questions.
- 2 However these questions must be asked of all applicants for the job.
- 3 Detailed and defined job specifications are a very important element as they can dictate questions asked at interview and therefore the thoroughness of the assessment of abilities. Do not underestimate the importance of the work environment in seeking a good job-skills match – as it can inform the key communication skills required.
- 4 The most important thing is to find out whether the applicant can match the requirements of the job specification. It is then up to the applicant to demonstrate their skills and abilities with the core tasks of the job in mind.
- 5 Training/induction methods may have to be altered slightly for new recruits with visual impairments in order to ensure learning and/or orientation around the area and building.
- 6 Ensure all interviewers have received disability and diversity awareness training.

**I can't afford to use
a sign language
interpreter all
the time!**



A graduate who requires the use of a Sign Language Interpreter (SLI) has applied for one of our available posts. He has proceeded to the interview stage and arrangements for the use of an interpreter have been made so he will have one for the interview. However, I was wondering how this situation might work out should we decide that he is the best candidate for the job. Will he require a SLI onsite all the time? Communication with colleagues will take up some of the role and unfortunately, as far as I'm aware, nobody on that team can sign.

(Company Graduate Recruitment Associate)



Prior to assessing this person's application at interview, you may have to outline whether communication is a core element of the job and if so, does it have to be verbal i.e. telesales/customer service? A job analysis may need to be undertaken to outline exactly what the core competencies for the role are. If one of them requires having effective communication skills then it is up to the applicant to demonstrate these i.e. how will he carry them out with or without a reasonable accommodation. However the same question must be asked of all applicants.

Once you have outlined your core tasks then it is up to all applicants to show that they can meet them – the fact that this person is being called for interview obviously means that they meet the initial requirements. **The applicant with the hearing impairment is the best person to explain how they would approach required communication tasks – if the person can meet the requirements then the method should usually not be an issue.**

A discussion of how daily communication will occur may ensue in which you can ask about what they think would be the best method (i.e. email, text, written or the use of specialised assistive technology) for these daily interactions. People who sign have to communicate with those who don't in their day-to-day lives so it shouldn't be a major problem for the applicant to explain.

You are **NOT** expected to have an interpreter onsite all the time. However the candidate will need one for induction if successful in applying and also may require one for big meetings, reviews etc. There is a Job Interview Interpreter grant available for employers from FÁS in order to provide funding for sign language interpreters at interview. Confirmed arrangements on preferred methods of communication should possibly be made during induction with a SLI and other team members present. Our experience on the WAM Programme would indicate that it is worth having an interpreter onsite full-time for the first 1-3 weeks in order to establish (and slowly phase out) the most effective communication routes for when the interpreter is not there.

It is also worth noting that there are a lot of people with hearing impairments who do not sign and use lip-reading and verbal speech to communicate effectively in the workplace.

[For more general information on hearing impairments and potential accommodations in the workplace please refer to Section C1 of this booklet]

key points to consider;

1

Know the core competencies for the role, right down to types of communication required.

2

Conduct a job analysis which takes in the physical, social and day-to-day task environment in order to identify and outline core tasks and competencies where needed.

3

It is up to the applicant with a hearing impairment to meet the employer's specification **BUT** the same questions must be asked to all applicants.

4

People who sign communicate with those who don't in their everyday lives so this shouldn't present a major challenge for them.


5

You are not expected to have an interpreter onsite all the time.

6


Having an interpreter onsite full-time for the induction and training period (1-3 weeks) should facilitate discussions and arrangements between the person with a hearing impairment and work colleagues and managers as to what will be the best method of communication when the interpreter leaves.

**How can I deal with
what I don't know?**



I have recently taken a graduate on a work experience programme for graduates with disabilities. I don't know the nature of the disability and I am aware that the person is not obliged to inform me. I was introduced to the graduate during our induction programme and therefore I think the impairment isn't anything physical or at least it isn't obvious. How can I ensure health and safety procedures are being followed if I don't know what potential issues might arise? How can I be expected to deal with what I don't know?

(Staff Officer)



To put it simply, you can't and should not have to deal with what you don't know.

Meet with the graduate and discuss if there is anything they need in order to make the experience as positive as possible – present the opportunity for them to discuss any needs and identify any accommodations they may require. If any potential impacts of a disability/condition on the workplace or work performance do arise then it might be a good idea to go through a structured needs assessment process. This should assist in identifying appropriate accommodations with the core tasks and health and safety standards of the role in mind. It will also give the graduate the opportunity to bring up anything that they feel may impact on their job performance **[For more information on Needs Assessment see Section B of this booklet]**.

The most important thing is that you go through a structured process which gives the graduate a chance to identify any accommodations or health and safety needs they may have – and that you keep a signed record of this process.

The graduate may not tell you what the disability is but could still outline the **impact of it** and accommodations they require in order to undertake any of the tasks associated with the role they are about to take on e.g. flexible working hours, a structured routine of daily tasks, note-taker/tape recorder for meetings, proof-reading of reports etc. Knowing the title of a disability is of limited value – the most important information relies on an awareness of what the person needs in order to do the job safely and successfully. That is all the information you require and questions asked should relate to retrieving this type of information. Once this process has taken place – where the graduate has been given a chance to outline any potential impacts on performance and you have highlighted your obligations as a staff officer (i.e. an enabled and safe team) – they should be treated the same as all other staff members.

Remember: risk is part of every day life and while it can be catered for to some degree, it cannot be ruled out for anyone!!

key points to consider;

1

You should not be expected to deal with what you do not know. Managers, HR and staff officers can only work with information provided.

2

Outline your obligations as a staff officer and give the graduate the chance to provide any information that they feel is required in terms of doing the job safely and successfully.

3

The most important information in this situation is knowing whether there will be any impact on job performance or the workplace in general.


4

Make sure you outline and emphasize your health and safety standards to the graduate and that they have no issues with the policies and procedures. Best practice in health and safety would indicate that this should be done for all staff.

5


Document all processes undertaken.

Health & Safety – a workplace example



A new member of staff has recently joined our project team. During our introductory meeting, he mentioned that he has epilepsy. As I wasn't part of the interview panel I was not aware of this. I am the coordinator of a project team and I'm slightly worried about any health and safety implications should a seizure occur. Should work colleagues be made aware?'

(Project Co-ordinator)



Firstly, equip yourself with the required information. Sit down with the new staff member and talk through any potential impacts of the condition in the workplace. Use this first meeting to assess, in general, whether the individual's condition is under control and if there could be any potential impacts while operating in the specific work environment. An employer is obliged to ensure a safe working environment for all staff and for this reason you may want to discuss;

- » the likelihood of seizures occurring in the workplace;
- » particular triggers if there are any;
- » what should be done in the event that a seizure does occur.

If there is a chance that a seizure may occur at work then health and safety should be informed in order to ensure a safe working environment for the new recruit. Health and safety officers should be trained (including first aid) on how to respond should the employee have a seizure. If the employee is comfortable, you could also help him talk to some staff/work colleagues about epilepsy or how to respond appropriately should a seizure occur for those who may be involved. Generally a short rest is all that is required, after which he should be able to resume work.

If you feel a more thorough approach is required in order to make sure the work environment is as safe as possible you could conduct a Needs Assessment in order to identify appropriate adjustments/accommodations should they be required **[For further information on Needs Assessment please refer to Section B of this booklet]**. This process should allow you to assess any risks involved i.e. if the job involves working with machinery, any safety equipment/guards that may be required, while also outlining an agreed procedure to follow should a seizure occur in the workplace. Keep a signed (by line manager and employee) record of the structured process that you have gone through in order to identify any reasonable accommodations/health and safety requirements and set out review dates.

It is important to remember that the majority of people with epilepsy have their condition under control, rarely experience seizures, are able to undertake most tasks and require very little in the way of accommodations. There are often preconceived notions that epilepsy will lead to additional health, safety and insurance concerns but this is usually not the case. Generally

employees with the condition will require nothing other than possibly flexible working hours and awareness amongst work colleagues and health and safety personnel of how to respond should a seizure occur. Once the person with epilepsy is employed and accommodations have been agreed (including health and safety procedures in the event of a seizure/fire etc.) then they should be treated exactly the same as all other employees.

Epilepsy is often treated with medication so flexibility around working hours may be required due to the potential side-effects of regular medication use. Although most people associate seizures with flashing lights or VDU use, in reality only a very small proportion of people with epilepsy have photosensitive epilepsy (sensitive to flashing/flickering lights) so the use of computers should not be a problem - unless otherwise stated by the employee of course. Organisations such as Brainwave (www.epilepsy.ie) can provide further guidelines on the condition in general. Their downloadable leaflet, [Employers Guide to Epilepsy](#), may be of use, particularly in relation to examples of job accommodations for people with epilepsy.

key points to consider;

1

Equip yourself with the relevant information – sit down and discuss potential impacts with the new recruit. If required, utilise a needs assessment process to identify the health and safety requirements involved and subsequently suitable accommodations.

2

Discuss how to maintain safety for the new staff member and work colleagues including the possibility of making some colleagues (including health and safety officers) aware of how to respond should a seizure occur. An awareness of seizure triggers may be discussed here also.

3

Acknowledge and facilitate the impact of medication if required e.g. tiredness and flexible working hours.

4

Document and sign all processes gone through i.e. needs assessment, reasonable accommodations, health and safety response to seizures etc.

5

Once accommodated and both parties have agreed arrangements – the staff member with epilepsy is subject to the same performance and behavioural standards and policies as all other staff members.

**Is the performance
issue disability
related or not?**

I am currently having some performance issues with a staff member who has experienced mental health issues in the past. About a year ago this particular person was diagnosed with bipolar depression, after which he spent approximately 9 months out of work. On returning to the team a shorter working week was arranged with a view to eventually working gradually towards a full-time week. Initially there seemed to be no problems, however in the last month there have been significant downturns in punctuality and productivity despite the shorter working week. In attempting to address this situation how do I discern whether the productivity issues are disability related or not? *(Floor Manager)*

The simple fact is you are unlikely to discover whether the issues are disability related or not unless the staff member approaches you and voluntarily communicates the information.

If this does not occur then you can't be expected to know anything about the issue without having an open discussion with the staff member. If performance levels are deteriorating/not up to the required standard, normal HR practice would be to have a performance review

with the person. The same should apply here. Clearly identify what you consider to be the main issue and make sure that the person is aware of it. Look at the review as a chance to collaboratively come up with solutions.

Take note of the language used while describing behaviour/performance issues. Remember to **judge the behaviour/performance, not the person** i.e. 'when you do this...' or 'when you don't meet deadlines' Give time for the person to discuss any issues that might be affecting performance or any adjustments that can be made to improve it. There may be a requirement for a Needs Assessment in order to identify any reasonable accommodations or adjustments that may be made so that the staff member can meet the performance levels required. The needs assessment process can provide a structured way of identifying appropriate accommodations while taking into account the opinions and experience of the person with the impairment/condition and the core tasks of the job **[reference Section B of this booklet for further details on needs assessment]**.

A reasonable accommodation refers to any action, adjustment, arrangement or equipment that minimizes any substantial disadvantage brought about by an impairment or condition. Equality legislation now places an obligation on employers to provide reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities accessing or advancing in work or training. Potential accommodations here may involve a more routine daily work structure, flexible working hours, shift work, an

acknowledgement of the impact of medication that may have to be taken etc. However, it must be remembered that all people whether with the same, different, or no disability, have unique needs and requirements.

If a review and needs assessment occur in which accommodations are outlined, agreed and put in place, the next step is to construct an action plan which should have short-term performance goals, a review date and both manager and staff member signatures built into it. This should enable a review of the impact of accommodations made and facilitate further actions if required. For example if a later starting time (to accommodate the impact of medication) and a daily routine that is consistent and structured are agreed upon – the action plan with short term goals will allow scheduled reviews of the situation as it is progressing.

In fact it is also worth noting that an action plan could be outlined and agreed even if there was no requirement for a needs assessment or any form of reasonable accommodation - as this allows agreed reviews to take place at future dates in order to assess progress.

[For further information on mental health issues and potential accommodations in the workplace, please refer to Section C2 of this booklet]

key points to consider;

1

You are not expected to be an expert on disability. There are a number of organisations such as Shine or Aware that have expertise on specific mental health issues.

2

Apply normal practices but at performance review offer the space for the staff member to identify anything that may be impacting on performance levels.


3

Be aware of the concept of reasonable accommodations and the needs assessment process.


4

Construct an action plan with in-built goals and a review date.

Productivity, health and the fluctuating symptoms of a disability



A relatively new member of my team has Multiple Sclerosis. For the past two months he has been performing fine without the need for any accommodations. However, last week this particular person came to see me and said he was experiencing a downturn in the effects of the condition and would need to take a few days off to see a consultant. This downturn seemed to coincide with a significant increase in the workload of our team as we have been very busy for the last 3 weeks. I am aware that this person does want to return to work next week and our busy period won't let up for at least another month. With this in mind, I was wondering what accommodations could be discussed so that both productivity and the person's health are maintained. *(Team Leader)*



Types of MS and its impacts are unique to each individual person, there is no typical form. Every person with MS will experience fluctuations differently. So, when the staff member returns you should sit down, have a low-key discussion and attempt to tease out the impact of this particular situation. Remember the downturn in the condition may not be related to the workload – it could be something outside of the work environment. Stress levels can play an important role in the fluctuating of MS. Take note of the advice that comes from his meetings with the consultant as this should have a bearing on his work readiness.

If the staff member is immediately ready for work in some form, a needs assessment should be conducted in order to see if there are any reasonable accommodations he may require in order to meet the core tasks of his role, taking account of the current busy period **[for further information on the needs assessment process please refer to Section B]**. A phasing back into the role bit by bit may be required. Discuss the tasks that need to be done in detail and what may be required to do these tasks successfully and safely. There may be one particular task that is causing trouble; a reduction in this task and an increase in others could offer advantages for employee and employer. Remember the person did pass your recruitment process and therefore was deemed competent for the job. Develop an action plan once accommodations have been arranged, with short term goals and agree review dates.

It can take time to manage MS symptoms in the workplace - particularly if it is a new job so this could be a process of discovery to some extent. It is for this reason that an action plan with initial short-term goals and review dates should be utilised. Consultation with organisations such as MS Ireland can also provide general information on the condition. Prolonged periods of stress that can occur when dealing with the demands of a new job can themselves lead to a cyclical deterioration in the condition where downturns lead to further stress and further stress to further downturns. It is essentially up to the staff member with the condition to closely monitor their own health during these busy periods but as team leader you

can reassure the person that if there are any further issues then he should come to you straight away. It is important that you state that the staff member's health is the most important thing and he can't be productive without being healthy.

The following are just a few things to note in relation to MS in the workplace;

- » Fatigue: MS fatigue is not like normal levels of tiredness and trying to work through it may only serve to exacerbate the problem.
- » Physical exertion during work may be an issue (walking or standing for long periods).
- » Monitor stress levels closely.
- » Long commuting times to and from work can also be exerting.
- » Possible accommodations include;
 - » Flexible working hours
 - » Rearrangement of certain tasks
 - » Parking privileges
 - » Increased break/rest periods
 - » Accessible Building
 - » Ergonomic Work Station
 - » Equipment that may assist/enhance work performance

key points to consider;

1

Equip yourself with as much information as possible from the people involved i.e. staff member and consultant. If required, conduct a needs assessment process, identify anything required to undertake the tasks of the job safely and successfully.

2

Map out an action plan with agreed short-term goals and review dates.

3

Be flexible as this could be a process of discovery about symptoms and appropriate accommodations in the workplace for the person with the condition.

4

It could be the case that only one aspect of the job is causing trouble so go through tasks thoroughly in terms of identifying accommodations.

5

It is up to the person to closely monitor his own health.


6

Be a source of reassurance as stress can fuel downturns in the condition.


7

A healthy staff member is a productive staff member
– the two go hand in hand.

Accommodating a mental health issue and maintaining productivity



A member of my team told me that she has recently been diagnosed with a mental health issue during an initial performance review meeting. In recent times colleagues had noticed a slight change in her usual behaviour combined with a noticeable decrease in terms of individual output. During the meeting, she did not go into any details in relation to the issue, instead referring to a diagnosis of depression and reiterating that she really wanted to stay in her current position. This person has been a valued member of staff for the last 2 years so we really do not want to be in a position where we have to let her go. How should we approach this situation in terms of possible accommodations, health and safety and productivity maintenance? (Staff Supervisor)



The first point to note is that you seem to be approaching the matter in the right way in seeking to find ways to accommodate this valuable staff member so that productivity can be returned and retention secured.

Adopt a consultative approach. It might be worth stating initially that under Irish legislation, employers are obliged to (a) go through a process of reasonably accommodating an employee who acquires a disability and (b) maintain adequate health and safety standards for their entire workforce. These two points will have to be considered as the issue is worked through.

Explore the issue of reduced productivity from both the supervisor and employee perspective. Explain the noted decrease in productivity and enquire as to whether there is anything impacting on performance. Ask the staff member whether there are any accommodations that may assist with this situation. This process should give her the opportunity to become part of the solution. If stress is an issue, a proactive employer approach could include training in techniques for managing stress, access to an onsite counselor if obtainable or the availability of de-stressors throughout the working week i.e. gym or yoga sessions. It is worth noting that this is a recent diagnosis so it may take a bit of time for the staff member to identify exact requirements.

Good practice would indicate that you may need to conduct an assessment of needs process involving the line manager and the staff member in question. The purpose of the Needs Assessment (NA) is to offer a comprehensive, structured process through which appropriate

accommodations may be identified for the staff member so that they can satisfactorily and safely undertake the tasks associated with their role. Outline and explain the purpose and method of the needs assessment to the staff member before commencing with the process. Throughout the NA always be conscious of confidentiality i.e. where information brought up through the process will be used, stored and subject to data protection provisions. **[See Section B of this booklet for further details on the Needs Assessment process].**

Following the needs assessment, set out an action plan with an in-built review date – signed by both parties, so that the new situation can be reviewed after a set period of time and then altered if needs be. This process allows the manager to assess the impact of the different reasonable accommodations on job performance and, if required, identify where certain tasks may need further adaptation.

Remember this is a new situation for both employee and manager and so may take some working through. To some extent it may be a process of discovery for both parties. If there are initial issues with accommodations, a review of the needs assessment may be required. However, once accommodations are agreed, put in place and working – then the staff member is subject to the same performance and behaviour policies and procedures as all other staff.

If the person is taking medication regularly or periodically consideration should be given during the needs assessment to aspects such as;

- » Provision of space/time in which to take medication
- » Acknowledge and facilitate effects of medication, if required. As noted, this is a recent diagnosis so it may take time for the staff member to adjust to any side effects. Side-effects may require an altering of working hours or schedule but this will need to be discussed as the situation progresses.
- » If medication causes drowsiness or fatigue then this may need to be looked at from a productivity and health and safety perspective and could require the changing of shifts, start times etc.
- » In some cases, water needs to be taken at regular intervals
- » Ensure there is a safe place for the individual to store their medication while in the workplace.

Although people with mental health issues require very little in the way of accommodations – there are some considerations that may still need to be taken into account in employment.

These include;

Flexible Working Hours

A flexible working schedule will allow the employee to identify when they will be most productive.

Routine

In relation to work schedules, some people with mental health issues can struggle with constantly changing work tasks. In this situation, a secure routine of daily tasks can yield the most productive results. Consultation around any task changes is recommended.

Medication

Employees with mental health issues who are taking medication may require a private space and time in which to take them. Keep an honest, open dialogue in relation to any side-effects of medication. Potential side-effects may need to be discussed in order to identify any impact on productivity. This could mean the altering of working hours or tasks undertaken. Side-effects can include drowsiness, restlessness, fatigue and weakness.

Mentoring

Mentoring can be particularly effective in circumstances where flexible working policies may need to be reinforced by some form of person-centred supportive relationship. Mental health issues in the workplace can be supported by developing and linking medical supports (appropriate medical leave accommodations, acknowledgement of medication and its effects) with social supports (mentoring, buddy system).

Stress: A Pro-Active Approach

A pro-active employer approach should focus on the importance of physical and mental well-being in the workplace for all staff. Organizational strategies for reducing stress and ensuring mental health include training sessions on techniques for managing stress, access to an on-site counselor if available and the opportunity to take part in de-stressing throughout the working week i.e. yoga or gym sessions.

[For further information on mental health issues and potential accommodations in the workplace, please refer to Section C2 of this booklet]

key points to consider;

- 1 Utilise and document the needs assessment process in order to identify and agree reasonable accommodations in line with the tasks of the job.
- 2 Set out an action plan with short-term goals and review dates in order to monitor the situation as it progresses.
- 3 Apply normal health and safety procedures and standards.
- 4 Acknowledge and facilitate the use of medication (including side effects), if being taken.
- 5 It must be remembered that the continuum of mental health issues varies to an enormous degree and even those that may have a similar diagnosis will have different needs. Mental health issues can range from stress and anxiety to bipolar depression and schizophrenia. Individuals with similar mental health issues will have unique requirements and needs so the same accommodations do **NOT** apply to the same conditions.
- 6 Take a proactive approach and strive for a workplace which emphasises the importance of good health - physical and mental.
- 7 Provide training in stress management techniques and general disability awareness throughout the organisation.
- 8 Disability related organisations are important sources of advice regarding particular conditions i.e. AWARE and Shine.

a summary of key points

- » When managing people with disabilities in the workplace – do not deviate from standard policies and procedures.
- » Where an issue arises, address it as soon as possible.
- » Apply normal practice in terms of performance levels or behavioural standards that constitute a performance review.
- » At performance review stage be open to the idea that the issues may be disability related (however they may not!).
- » At performance review provide the space for the staff member to identify anything that may be affecting performance/productivity or behaviour.
- » If it is disability related offer the space for the person to identify accommodations

they may require in order to do the job or certain aspects of it – a Needs Assessment could assist if both sides are uncertain.

- » The Needs Assessment is a process for identifying any workplace accommodations that may be required, taking into account both the person's impairment/condition and the core tasks of the job (it is not part of any stage of the recruitment process). Document the entire process including meetings and outcomes i.e. accommodations identified and provided.
- » Following the assessment, outline a short term action plan with identified goals and a set review date. The purpose of the review is to ensure both parties are happy with adjustments made.
- » Record all processes in writing (signed forms).

Needs Assessment: A Model for Inclusion

The following section explains in detail the purpose and the process of a Needs Assessment. Needs Assessment is a key component of the WAM Work Placement Programme, used to identify any reasonable accommodations required by participating graduates prior to being placed on the programme.

An Introduction to Needs Assessment

What is a Needs Assessment?

A Needs Assessment is a structured process which identifies any accommodations/adjustments an employee may require, if any, in order to undertake all/some core aspects of a job - safely and successfully. It is a systematic procedure for the collection of information upon which to base a judgement about the support requirements of an individual. A needs assessment is never part of the recruitment process and should only be used after the offer of a job has been made. A needs assessment is not designed to 'prepare' an employer/company to take on a person with a disability. It is there to support the HR and management function in addressing the support and accommodation needs of current employees and new recruits.

The concept of 'reasonable accommodation' is enshrined in law both in terms of the recruitment and retention of staff and in terms of the provision of goods and services. The key Acts to be complied with are the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2004 (EEA) and the Equal Status Act 2000 & 2004 (ESA).

While an employer, under employment equality legislation, is not expected to employ a person who is not competent or capable of doing a job, employers are obliged to take appropriate measures to enable a person who has a disability to access and participate in employment or undertake training. The law provides that a person with a disability is fully competent and capable of undertaking any duties if

the person would be fully competent and capable where reasonable accommodations are provided by the employer - unless these measures would result in a disproportionate burden on the employer. [Equality Authority, Employment Equality Acts, 1998 & 2004, www.equality.ie, FAQs].

Reasonable accommodations can vary from something as simple as a device to hold a book open, to the use of a sign language interpreter. The most common form of reasonable accommodation in the workplace is the use of assistive technology. There is a wide range of assistive technology available which enables people with specific learning difficulties, physical impairments and visual impairments to undertake computer based work through the use of hardware and/or software based assistance. It is recommended that HR departments have an understanding of assistive technology, its availability and what it can do. HR personnel cannot be expected to be experts in assistive technology, but they need to be aware of its general uses and where to source it. The range of assistive technology available, like most technology, is continually expanding and offering new approaches to the way we think about the workplace. For example many electronic functions such as the use of power-point presentations, air conditioning, lighting can now be controlled from a central control panel. Sometimes all that is required to get around a problem is understanding, flexibility and a bit of creative thinking.

The following are just some examples of workplace supports/accommodations:

- » Accessible work locations, e.g. automatic doors, level flooring etc.
- » Flexible working arrangements e.g. flexitime
- » Material in alternative formats e.g. electronic materials, tape, Braille etc.
- » Magnification Hardware/Software
- » Screen Reading software e.g. JAWS
- » Voice recognition software e.g. Read & Write Gold, Texthelp etc.
- » Sign Language Interpreter
- » Time off for medical appointments

When is a Needs Assessment Required?

Essentially a needs assessment is a process to be put in place where a person has disclosed a disability and the company wants to ensure that they receive the supports and accommodations they may need to do their job. A needs assessment may therefore occur as a result of;

- » a request for a workplace support/adjustment from an employee or new recruit
- » following a performance review in which a need for a support was identified
- » where an employee acquires a disability

- » where disability related health and safety risks are anticipated in the workplace that need to be addressed
- » where a role/job spec changes in relation to a staff member with a disability.

Who should do it?

Best practice would indicate that the needs assessor should be someone who has an understanding of the impact of disability and a knowledge of supporting and accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace. In addition, the needs assessor should have knowledge of the specific working environment and culture.

The AHEAD Model of Needs Assessment

The AHEAD model of Needs Assessment was developed as a process to be used by employers taking part in the Willing Able Mentoring Programme. Every graduate placed in a company undertook an assessment of need prior to placement commencement. This model of Needs Assessment is a consultative and transparent process which involves tripartite communication between a designated assessor, the staff member with a disability and, on behalf of the employer, usually the participating manager/supervisor. The Needs Assessment involves a process of exploring the impact of disability, the details and tasks of the job, the job environment and an identification of the most appropriate accommodation

options that would enable the person to carry out the job effectively. Each of the three processes include the completion of a form (NA₁, NA₂ or NA₃), and result in a documented and comprehensive assessment. The information collected is provided by all three sources (graduate placed, manager/supervisor and assessor). While each form is completed individually, combined they represent the whole process. Therefore, engagement by all parties involved in the process is critical to a successful outcome.

The AHEAD model of Needs Assessment is one of many variations of assessment of need in the workplace. It is an evolving tool and therefore should be utilized as a starting point and adapted to suit individual procedures, requirements and specific workplace environs.

Needs Assessment consists of the following three inter-dependent processes:

NA 1 is completed by the staff member/new recruit with a disability and returned to the appointed assessor:

The process includes providing:

- » Personal information including educational details.
- » Details of past supports in education, the graduate is an expert in his/her own disability and knows what works for him/her..
- » Details of supports in any relevant previous work context.

- » An exploration of the employee's understanding of the impact of their disability in relation to the current role.

NA 2 is completed by the relevant manager/supervisor and returned to the appointed assessor:

The process includes providing:

- » The manager/supervisor details.
- » Detailed job specific information including;
 - » core tasks (Emailing, report writing, travelling).
 - » style of work (team, alone, mixture.).
 - » nature of work (routine, varied).
- » Details specific to the work environment including;
 - » type of location (shared office, open plan, busy/quiet).
 - » accessible nature of location (toilets, canteen, recreational areas etc.).

NA 3 is a process carried out by the needs assessor as a result of matching the person with the tasks and environment of the job and identifying tasks/areas of work where accommodations would be required to enable the person to carry out the work tasks. A copy is returned to both the participating staff member/recruit and participating manager/supervisor.

The process includes:

- » The needs assessor conducts a collaborative one-on-one conversation with the staff member/new recruit using the information provided on

the NA₁ form and NA₂ form together with the initial job specification. The meeting explores the impact of disability if any and the accommodation options that would best suit the particular work environment.

- » The NA₃ Form is then completed outlining and recommending workplace supports, where required. All three parties (staff member, manager/supervisor and needs assessor) must understand and agree to the accommodations recommended and sign off on the NA₃ form. In the interests of transparency the staff member and employer/company are aware of the contents of all three NA forms.
- » Transparency must be embedded into the structure of any Needs Assessment process but of equal importance is the maintenance of the confidential nature of the process*.

Upon Completion of Needs Assessment:

- » Once recommended supports are approved every effort should be made to facilitate their implementation.
- » Completed forms should be sent to the relevant personnel* so that any potential work based supports can be put in place quickly, in order to ensure the person can do their job effectively.. Forms NA₁, NA₂ and NA₃ should be kept on file in case a review of the process is required and the content subject to data protection provisions.

***Confidentiality:** Needs Assessment

is a confidential process and all information gathered in relation to this process is subject to data protection. Therefore, it is important to note that NA₁, NA₂ & NA₃ forms need to be treated as confidential files with limited access. Best practice would indicate that staff/employees that have access to the information contained therein be clearly identified and that the staff member, manager/supervisor and needs assessor are informed of the confidential boundaries prior to engaging in the needs assessment process.

NOTE: The offer of a reasonable accommodation(s) is subject to the capacity of the employer/company to reasonably provide the accommodation(s)/support(s) identified by the NA process – so that the implementation of these supports does not represent a ‘disproportionate burden’ for the employer under the terms of the Equality Acts 2000 & 2004. Examples of what is and what is not a disproportionate burden can be found on the equality tribunal website.

Disability Information Sheets

Introduction

Managers and supervisors are not expected to be experts in a diverse range of disabilities and how they may impact in the workplace. However WAM has found that a lack of information and experience in working with people with disabilities can lead to fears and concerns about what might be required in order to recruit, employ and manage a person with a disability. It is these fears, founded on a lack of experience, which can form the attitudinal barriers which distance people with disabilities – and, more importantly, abilities - from the mainstream labour market.

Despite advocating the point that every individual has unique needs and requirements, even if they have similar impairments or conditions, managers engaging in the WAM placement process still felt that having some general disability information would prove beneficial in easing fears and ensuring the right preparations are being made. As a result of this engagement with managers on the ground, the following section is aimed at providing some general disability specific information.

The purpose of these information sheets is to offer some general information and advice as it pertains to six different disability types;

C1: Hearing Impairment/Deaf

C2: Mental Health Issues

C3: Physical Impairment

C4: Specific Learning Differences:
(a) Dyslexia and (b) Aspergers Syndrome

C5: Visual Impairment/Blind

These types of disability are by no means representative of the range of disabilities out there but rather reflect the experience of WAM over the last number of years while placing graduates with disabilities in mainstream employers.

Each information sheet offers some general facts about the related impairment/condition, how they may have an impact in the workplace and some suggestions on how these general impacts may be accommodated. It is important to remember that these sheets should not be used as a substitute for a needs assessment in order to identify appropriate reasonable accommodations in the workplace. The intention of these information sheets is to provide some broad information to supplement the more specific issues addressed throughout the Q&A scenarios in Section A.

For further information on these or any other disability management issues in the workplace please contact AHEAD [www.ahead.ie]



C1: Hearing Impairment/Deaf Information Sheet

Some general facts about deafness and hearing impairments:

- » The term deaf generally refers to a hearing loss greater than 90dB (profound hearing loss). Rarely is a person completely deaf, and a hearing loss could fall anywhere along the continuum from totally deaf to hearing (Cornell University, 2002).
- » Understanding speech and communication in general is often the key issue for a hearing impaired or deaf individual. Many people who are deaf use sign language. In Ireland this is Irish Sign Language (ISL) – English is usually a second language.
- » A person with a hearing impairment usually communicates using a combination of strategies that rely on the person's remaining degree of hearing ability, which can be enhanced by a hearing aid or an 'assistive listening device' (Cornell University, 2002).
- » Often people with hearing impairments will use lip reading techniques to understand more of what is being said. A person with excellent lip reading skills can often only "see" about half of what is being said and will fill in some of the blanks.

Here are some basic tips for communicating with a hearing impaired or deaf employee.

- » Ask the person what is the best way for you to communicate with them, including how to gain their attention for example, waving, tapping their shoulder etc.
- » Always face the deaf person when speaking with him/her. Speak clearly maintaining eye contact and don't cover or obstruct your mouth in anyway.
- » Be prepared to repeat and rephrase information if necessary.
- » Don't slow down your speech or speak in a louder voice as this may interfere with hearing aids or loop systems.
- » Be aware of environmental distractions and background noise. Position yourself in good lighting and avoid glare.
- » Rearrange seating in room to ensure good sight lines.
- » Have pen and paper ready if necessary or alternatively use a laptop.

- » Encourage the person to ask questions if the communication is unclear.
- » If you are finding it difficult to understand what a person is saying, it is ok to ask them to repeat it or even to write it down.
- » Be aware of any Assistive Technology that is being used.
- » If the person is using a sign language interpreter to facilitate communication maintain eye contact with the person who is hearing impaired and speak directly to them, not the interpreter.

Deaf awareness training for the team could help provide awareness around how to communicate best with their deaf colleague. The team may also benefit from basic sign language lessons.

Ensure that the person is located in a well lit office, with minimum background noise. The work station should be set up in such a way that the persons back is not to a door or to the rest of the office. This will help reduce isolation and the employee will be able to see colleagues approaching.

Tips for group meetings

- » Consider the layout of the room, lighting and background noise.
- » Provide an interpreter if required.
- » Let the deaf person choose appropriate seating to best see speaker or interpreter.
- » Provide notes prior to the meeting if possible and/or a note taker.
- » Ensure that one person speaks at a time and that the person with the hearing impairment knows who is speaking.

- » Do not talk with your back to the audience, for example if writing on a board, flip chart etc.
- » Incorporate visual aids into the meeting/presentation.
- » Make sure key information is understood by debriefing after the meeting.

(Adapted from Working with A Deaf Person, NTID)

What reasonable accommodations will a hearing impaired employee require?

Many people who are deaf use Irish Sign Language (ISL) and this will be their first language. Others with hearing impairments may lip read or use assistive listening devices. Each individual is different and will require different accommodations. The best way to establish what accommodations may be required, if any, is to complete a **needs assessment** (see Section B for further information) prior to the commencement of the role. Employers need to determine the communication needs and preferences of the individual and then to provide the necessary communication assistance. This can involve thinking about communication in a different way, for example, written instructions via e-mail in place of verbal instructions. Employers should also think of the different communication situations that the employee will be in.

Reasonable accommodations that a person with a hearing impairment may require include:

- » Assistive listening devices e.g. amplified telephone handset for a worker to enable him/her to use the telephone
- » A hearing aid compatible phone
- » Text telephone
- » Induction loops, FM systems and infrared systems which are designed for group or audience situations
- » Portable amplification devices
- » Instant messaging software
- » Visual Alarms
- » Flashing ringers on telephones
- » Installation of assistive listening systems in auditoriums and meeting rooms

While these are some general examples of the types of accommodations that a person with a hearing impairment may require, accommodations will differ from one person to another. The best source of information in relation to a disability and any implications within the workplace is the person with the disability. They are the experts in their own lives so if you are unsure, just ask!

Sources used for this information sheet and further resources:

Cornell University (2002) *Working Effectively with Persons Who Are Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, or Deaf*. Employment and Disability Institute.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN). *Job accommodations for People with Hearing Loss* <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT) http://www.ntid.rit.edu/nce/emp_work.php

DeafHear – Services for Deaf & Hard of Hearing People
www.deafhear.ie

Irish Deaf Society
www.irishdeafsociety.ie



C₂: Mental Health Information Sheet

Some general facts about mental health issues:

- » 'Mental health impairments or 'mental illnesses' refer collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with distress and / or impaired functioning' (<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>).
- » One in four people will experience a mental health difficulty in their lifetime and according to the World Health Organisation it is one of the fastest growing health conditions in the world.
- » While many people will experience a mental health difficulty at some point in their lifetime, over two thirds will make a full recovery with treatment (www.shineonline.ie).
- » Mental health is a hidden disability; therefore disclosure and perceived stigmatisation have been identified as key issues for people either returning to work or who are experiencing difficulties while in work.
- » Work can often be a paradox for people with mental health difficulties. Factors at work can add to or cause mental health difficulties. Alternatively, work can be a way for people to cope, whilst also aiding with their recovery and reintegration into society (Mental Health & Employment: Promoting Social Inclusion in the Workforce).

The following are examples of common mental health conditions:

- » Depression
- » Anxiety and Phobias
- » Panic Disorder
- » Schizophrenia
- » Eating Disorders
- » Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)
- » Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Mental Health in the workplace

Mental health difficulties are a major cause of absences from work and it is estimated that at any given time, 1 in 14 people in Ireland suffer from depression (AWARE). Stress is also a major factor in the work place. Everybody can get stressed and some stress is normal but work

place stress can become harmful if not managed and can have negative impacts. It is crucial that employers recognise and acknowledge mental health in the workplace and develop inclusive policies and practices to help with the retention and recruitment of people with mental health conditions.

Mental health conditions affect individuals in different ways and in a work context can include the following:

- » Poor concentration and memory lapses
- » Difficulty interacting with others
- » Low self-confidence and self esteem
- » Difficulty adjusting to changes in the workplace.
- » Time management issues and difficulties with organizing information or work tasks.
- » A difficulty with maintaining stamina during the day.
- » Difficulty maintaining consistent attendance.

(Source: JAN Accommodation and Compliance Series)

Reasonable accommodations in the workplace:

Many of the difficulties that a person may encounter in the work place can be resolved with some careful planning and supervision. The key for managers and supervisors is patience and understanding. Routine, structure

and predictability are important and where flexibility is required, careful planning and clear direction is necessary. Providing a structured and well organised environment with minimum stress can help people with mental health conditions in the workplace.

Things to consider:

- » Provide clear and structured training and clear guidance of what is expected of the employee.
- » Provide written or visual instructions alongside verbal instructions.
- » Use clear, unambiguous language.
- » Try to create as calm an environment as possible.
- » Give regular feedback and encouragement.
- » Mentors can help with social integration into the workplace.

A huge variety of mental health conditions exist and people can be affected in different ways socially, physically and/or behaviourally. Accommodations for people with mental health conditions will therefore vary depending on the individual, but tend to be inexpensive and uncomplicated to put in place. The best way to establish what accommodations may be required is to complete a **needs assessment** (see Section B for further information) prior to the commencement of the role. When dealing with mental health in the workplace the key is to be flexible and understanding, whilst providing a work environment that promotes work-life balance policies and practices.

Creating a safe and open environment in which people feel comfortable disclosing will help with the management of mental health in the workplace.

The following are some examples of the types of accommodations that have been put in place by employers in the past:

- » Allow time off for medical appointments or flexible working hours to allow employees to work around appointments.
- » Allow employees to work from home where necessary.
- » Allow frequent rest breaks and time to take medication.
- » Provide a quiet room for rest or to administer medication.
- » Allow telephone call to doctors or other support groups if needed during the day.
- » Assign the employee to an understanding, sympathetic supervisor.
- » Give positive feedback, praise and encouragement.
- » Reduce distractions and provide a quiet workspace if necessary.
- » Break down large projects or job tasks into smaller parts.
- » Acknowledge side effects of taking medication such as drowsiness, restlessness, fatigue, weakness etc.
- » A flexible working schedule can allow the employee to identify when they will be most productive

and work during those hours.

- » In relation to workload, some people with mental health issues can struggle with constantly changing work tasks or office environment. In this situation, a secure routine of daily tasks can yield the most productive results.

Sources used for this information sheet and further resources:

Mental Health & Employment: Promoting Social Inclusion in the Workplace (2005)

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) *Job Accommodations for people with Mental Health Impairments*. Fact Sheet Series. <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>


Job Accommodation Network (JAN) *Employees with Mental Health Impairments*. Accommodations and compliance series. <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

EVE. *A handbook for Employers & Employees. Just Ask*. http://www.eve.ie/documents/EVEEmploymentHandbook_JustAsk.pdf

Mental Health Forum Report. *A Framework for the Training and Employment of People with Mental Health Difficulties*. <http://www.eve.ie/documents/FrameworkReport.pdf>

SHINE (National organisation for supporting people affected by mental health) www.shineonline.ie

Aware – Helping to Defeat Depression www.aware.ie



C₃: Physical Impairment Information Sheet

Some general facts about physical impairments:

- » The term physical impairment refers to a broad range of disabilities that can be either congenital or acquired during a person's lifetime through accident/injury or onset of a condition.
- » People with physical disabilities can include those who are wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties.
- » People may have physical impairments arising from a wide variety of conditions such as:
 - » Cerebral Palsy
 - » Muscular Dystrophy
 - » Spina Bifida
 - » Multiple Sclerosis
 - » Epilepsy
 - » Amputees
- » Some of these conditions can be hidden, for example, respiratory disorders and epilepsy, or more obvious such as cerebral palsy. Conditions can be stable or progressive and the severity of a condition can affect people in different ways, therefore no two people with the same disability will necessarily be affected or impacted in the same way.
- » Often people are aware that a person has a physical disability because they may use a wheelchair, however it will not be clear what their disability or condition is.

Tips for working with employees with physical disabilities:

- » Always ask the person first do they require assistance, never assume that they do. For example, do not automatically come up behind a wheelchair and start to push it.
- » Be prepared for people to say no, they do not require your help.
- » It is an invasion of space to lean or hang onto someone's wheelchair unless you know them.

- » When having a conversation for more than a few minutes, sit down if possible and speak to the person at eye level.
- » If you cannot understand what someone is saying, ask them to repeat it.
- » Be careful of the language that you use or what is commonly referred to as 'disability etiquette' i.e. using the terms wheelchair bound or someone who is 'suffering from'. The correct term is 'wheelchair user'.

Meeting and Interviewing People:

The major difficulties faced by people who are wheelchair users or mobility impaired relate to physical access and mobility.

- » If you are speaking to someone who looks 'different' avoid staring.
- » Resist the temptation of asking negative or intrusive questions, such as 'what's wrong with you?'
- » Be aware of the extra time it may take a person with a physical impairment to do or say something.
- » Avoid concentrating on a person's impairment but rather focus on the person's skills and abilities.
- » Remember you cannot always see a person's disability.

Accessibility in the workplace:

Accessibility is a very broad term covering all aspects of assuring that disabled people can participate and

have the same choices as the non-disabled (<http://web.worldbank.org>).

Bear in mind that physical accessibility is not only about wheelchair access, but about improving accessibility for people with a wide range of impairments (www.nda.ie). Try to think outside the usual access issues such as ramps and car parking spaces, for example, accessible signage and good lighting.

- » Did you know that the Disability Act 2005 requires that all buildings are made accessible by 2015 to comply with Part M of the Building Regulations.

Some good practice tips include:

Accessibility:

- » Designated car parking spaces for disabled drivers
- » Ramps or level entrances into buildings
- » Wheelchair accessible doors throughout premises, including lifts, toilets and emergency exits.
- » Corridors, rooms, canteens etc. should be spacious enough to accommodate all kinds of wheelchairs and their maneuvering.
- » Lifts to all floors
- » Clear and accessible signage throughout buildings.
- » Wheelchair accessible toilets and showers.
- » Tables, sinks and laboratory benches at a height suitable for all users

- » Flashing as well as auditory alarm systems.
- » Loop systems in large rooms or meeting rooms.
- » Minimise background noise from fans, equipment, heating and ventilation systems.
- » Leave adequate space for wheelchair users and guide dogs.
- » Flexibility around the location of meetings
- » Ensure that emergency evacuation procedures include employees who have limited mobility or who are hearing impaired.
- » Handrails on steps and ramps and in corridors.
- » Contrasting colours for people with visual impairments
- » Accessibility audits
(Adapted from, AHEAD Good Practice Guidelines for Supporting Students with Disabilities)

For more details guidelines on how to making buildings accessible see NDA's Building for Everyone – www.nda.ie

Universal Design and Accessibility:

What is Universal Design?

Universal Design refers to the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size or disability. (Disability Act, 2005)

Universal design is essentially the 'process of imbedding choice for all people in the things we design' whether they are accessible buildings, transport or websites (www.universaldesign.com). Adopting the principles of Universal Design is about the development of inclusive environments, so that they can be used by as many people as possible. It is good practice to adopt Universal Design principles in the design of new buildings, transport or websites, as often it is the barriers that are incorporated into building design or websites that prevent some people from accessing them. This will also reduce the need for add-ons or adjustments later.

Universal Design should be incorporated into:

- » Building guidelines
- » ICT guidelines i.e. accessible websites and web content
- » Products and services

For further information and resources see the Centre for Universal Design (<http://www.universaldesign.ie/>)

Reasonable Accommodations:

What reasonable accommodations will an employee with a physical disability require?

Physical disabilities affect people in different ways and there is a danger in generalizing due to the variety of conditions and impairments.

However, some people may have difficulties with the following:

- » Physical stamina and endurance or fatigue.
- » Walking long distances
- » Verbal communication may be affected i.e. slurred speech
- » Inaccessible buildings can create a barrier to people gaining access to certain parts of the building.
- » Manual dexterity and manipulation may be affected

Accommodation Ideas:

- » Chairs with back supports and foot rests
- » Chest high desks or height adjustable desks
- » Architect style table
- » Good circulation space is needed for wheelchair users at their work station.
- » Emergency Evacuation devices – to help remove individuals with mobility impairments from buildings.

- » Wheelchairs, scooters, or small vehicles available to use in certain areas where people need to walk for long periods of time.
- » Modifying workstations i.e. ergonomic chairs, foot-rests, headsets, alternative keyboards and mouse.
- » Assistive technology including hardware such as alternative keyboards and software such as Dragon Screen reading software.
- » Flexible working schedule or working from home.
- » Time off for medical appointments
- » General Disability Awareness training for staff.

While these are some general examples of accommodations that a person with a physical disability may require, accommodations will differ from one person to another. The best way to establish what accommodations may be required in the workplace, if any, is to complete a **needs assessment (see Section B for further details)** prior to the commencement of the role. Communication is vital and consultation with the employee at all times on what their needs are is paramount.

Remember communication is the key to resolving any difficulties!

Sources used for this information sheet and further resources:

California State University. *Succeeding together: People with disabilities in the workplace* available from <http://www.csun.edu/~sp20558/dis/em.html>

JAN (Job Accommodations Network) *Accommodations and Compliance Series: Employees Who Use Wheelchairs.*

NDA (2002) *Building For Everybody.*
www.nda.ie

Centre for Universal Design - <http://www.universaldesign.ie/>

JAN (Job Accommodations Network) www.jan.wvu.edu

The World Bank <http://web.worldbank.org>

Irish Wheelchair Association
www.iwa.ie

Enable Ireland
www.enableireland.ie

Brainwave – The Irish Epilepsy Association
www.epilepsy.ie

MS Ireland – The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland
www.ms-society.ie

The Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland
www.cfireland.ie

The Irish Association for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus
www.sbhi.ie

Central Remedial Clinic
www.crc.ie

Headway – Positive Change for People Affected by Brain Injury
www.headway.ie



C4: Specific Learning Differences

(a) Dyslexia Information Sheet

Some general facts about dyslexia:

- » At its simplest dyslexia means a difficulty with language. It is a specific learning difference which makes it hard for some people to learn to read, write and spell correctly (Dyslexia Association of Ireland).
- » Dyslexia is not linked to intelligence and people with dyslexia tend to have average to above average intelligence.
- » Individuals with dyslexia may experience difficulties with word recognition, aspects of reading comprehension, aspects of writing and/or spelling, short-term memory difficulties and/or organisation difficulties and occasionally with maths notation.
- » The extent to which dyslexia will affect a person at work will depend on the demands on the person and their ability to set up effective support systems (University of Southampton: Dyslexia and the Workplace).
- » People with dyslexia can be an asset to a company as often they see things that other people don't see due to lateral, holistic thinking and a creative approach to work.

Strengths and Difficulties associated with dyslexia in the workplace.

Strengths:

- » Good at ideas and innovative thinking
- » Good problem solver and lateral thinker
- » Creative in the way they make links and connections
- » Have excellent visual and spatial awareness
- » Good with practical tasks
- » Strong in the areas of art, music, design, architecture and engineering
- » Good communicators

- » Being able to see the 'big' picture
- » Unusually determined and hard working

Difficulties:

Written communication

- » Difficulties with reading and writing
- » Spelling and grammar errors

Verbal communication

- » Difficulty with remembering and following written and verbal instructions – 'hearing' memory may be weak.
- » Difficulty with hidden meanings in conversations.

Time and Work planning

- » Concentration difficulties/ distractions
- » Remembering appointments and deadlines
- » Organisation of work station and work flow.

Other areas that people with dyslexia may have difficulties in are

- » Directional difficulties
- » Reversing numbers
- » Short term memory problems – such as remembering names, numbers and places.
- » Accurately recording telephone message and minutes of meetings.
- » Writing memos, letters and reports

What reasonable accommodations will an employee with dyslexia require?

Many people who are Dyslexic will have already developed their own coping skills and will thrive in a dyslexic friendly workplace. The strategies and supports that a person may require in the workplace will vary and depend on the severity and nature of the dyslexia, the individuals own strengths and weaknesses and the type of work environment they are in. Every individual is different and no two people with the condition will be the same. The best way to establish what accommodations may be required, if any, is to complete a **needs assessment** (see Section B for further details) prior to the commencement of the role. When identifying accommodations and supports it is important to determine the nature of the individual's dyslexia, against the requirements of the job and its related tasks and competence requirements.

For example, a role that involves a large amount of report writing to tight deadlines will involve putting in place supports and strategies that will reduce the impact of this aspect of the employee's dyslexia, such as Assistive Technology.

Many of the accommodations/ supports that a person with dyslexia will require are inexpensive and uncomplicated to put in place. Best practice is for employers to create a dyslexic friendly workplace where minimum adjustments will then be required for individuals.

The British Dyslexic Association (BDA)

has outlined accommodation ideas for different areas of difficulties associated with dyslexia and the following is a summary of their suggestions (www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/adjustmentsp.html).

Reading:

People may have difficulties with visually discerning letters and numbers – characters may appear jumbled or reversed or entire words or sentences may be unrecognizable.

- » Use colour overlays on paper documents to help make the text easier to read.
- » Use a reading pen, which is a device that scans a word and provides an auditory feedback.
- » Highlight salient points in documents.
- » Use screen reading software such as Kurzweil 3000 and a scanner.
- » Provide material in a larger print, use a dyslexic friendly font such as Ariel or Verdana with a minimum font size of 12.
- » Provide printed material on coloured paper.
- » Set background colour scheme on the computer to suit the individual's preferences.
- » Give verbal rather than written instructions.
- » Give extra time for reading documents.

Writing:

- » Use assistive technology to help organize work such as Inspiration software.
- » Use speech to text software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking for writing reports and documents.
- » Other Assistive Technology such as Texthelp Read and Write Gold can assist with spelling, grammar and reading. Word prediction software may also be beneficial.
- » Use a Dictaphone to record meetings or ask a work colleague to take notes.
- » Proof read written documents and reports prior to submission.
- » Provide hard copies of a dictionary and thesaurus.

Verbal Communication:

- » Give written instructions alongside verbal ones.
- » Give instructions slowly, clearly and one at the time in a quiet place.
- » Write down key points on paper or allow the person to take their own notes and check them when finished to ensure key instructions have been understood.
- » Ask the person to repeat back verbal instructions to ensure the correct understanding.
- » Use a digital recorder to record important instructions.

Organisation and work planning:

- » Ensure that the employees workstation is kept tidy and uncluttered.
- » Use wall planners, to do lists and calendars and mark important deadlines or meetings.
- » Try to build up the persons organisational skills.
- » Provide the employee with a quiet private work space away from distractions to do intense work when required.
- » Allow the employee to work from home if needed.
- » Remind the person of important deadlines and review priorities regularly.
- » Encourage them to use their diaries and online calendars and reminder features.

Sources used for this information sheet and further resources:

British Dyslexic Association. [Reasonable Adjustments in the workplace](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/adjustmentsp.html)
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/adjustmentsp.html

Cornell University (2007) [Accommodations and Compliance Series: Employees with Learning Disabilities](#).
Employment and Disability Institute.

The Dyslexia Online Journal – www.dyslexia-adults.com/employer.html

AHEAD (2008) [Supporting Students with Dyslexia: Practical guidelines for institutions of further and higher education](#).

Dyslexia Association of Ireland
www.dyslexia.ie

(b) Asperger Syndrome Information Sheet

Some general facts about Asperger Syndrome (AS):

- » Asperger Syndrome is classed as an Autistic Spectrum Disorder and therefore is often described as a mild or 'high functioning' form of Autism.
- » People with AS will typically have average to above average intelligence but generally have poor social and communication skills which tend to be underdeveloped. There are three main areas that people can have difficulties in:
 - » Social communication
 - » Social interaction
 - » Social imagination
(National Autistic Society)
- » Other characteristics associated with AS are:
 - » Sensory difficulties where senses are oversensitive or underdeveloped. For example, being overly sensitive to sounds, tastes, smells and sights.
 - » Intense absorption in a particular topic or interest.
 - » A love of routine, structure and order.
 - » A high level of accuracy and attention to detail, meticulous, reliable, straightforward.
- » Interviews are often the biggest hurdle for people with AS to overcome in gaining employment, as they are based around communication skills.
- » Although there are common characteristics and difficulties associated with the condition, it is important to note that **every individual with Aspergers will be different** and people can have mild to more severe forms of the condition.

Some tips for working with people with Asperger syndrome:

Many of the difficulties that a person with AS may encounter in the work place can be resolved with some careful planning and supervision. The key for managers and supervisors is patience and understanding. Routine, structure and predictability are important for someone with Asperger's and where flexibility is required, careful planning and clear direction is necessary. People with Asperger's thrive in a structured and well organised environment. The best way to establish what accommodations may be required is to complete a **needs assessment** (see Section B for further information) prior to the commencement of the role.

Things to consider:

- » Provide clear and structured training and clear guidance of what is expected of the employee.
- » Provide written or visual instructions alongside verbal instructions.
- » Use clear, unambiguous language - 'straight talk'.
- » Try to create as calm an environment as possible.
- » Give regular feedback and encouragement.
- » Mentors can help with the learning of unwritten social rules and office politics that often people with Aspergers do not pick up on.

People with AS may have difficulty learning new tasks or seemingly

relatively simple tasks, therefore they may need to learn tasks in a different way. It is crucial that supervisors and line managers have patience and understanding and look at the initial stages of training as an investment. Once learnt it will never be forgotten.

- » Break the job or work tasks into smaller parts.
- » Explain why the task is being done and how it relates to other tasks.
- » Use clear, unambiguous language which can only be interpreted in one way.

A person with Asperger Syndrome will work best where there is:

- » Clearly defined rules, expectations and roles.
- » Predictability and structure.
- » Clear and exact directions.
- » Flexibility e.g around deadlines.
- » Being able to work to their own schedule.
- » Minimal office politics.

It is important for supervisors and managers to look at potential difficulties before they become problems. If an employee is having a difficulty or is over anxious or upset, there is often a root cause. Therefore, getting to the heart of an issue or difficulty can help resolve issues before they become major problems. ([Berkshire Autistic Society](#))

Interaction in the workplace:

Asperger Syndrome is a hidden disability and therefore the difficulties people experience with social communication and interaction can sometimes lead to misunderstandings in the workplace or difficulties with other work colleagues.

- » People with Aspergers may have difficulties relating to other staff and are sometimes said to lack empathy.
- » Can come across as eccentric, withdrawn, disinterested or inappropriate behaviour.
- » May have difficulties initiating or ending conversations.
- » Find it difficult to make and maintain friendships and struggle with socialising.
- » Have difficulties reading social cues, body language or facial expressions.

For example, a person with Aspergers may find it difficult to maintain eye contact or 'gaze avoidance' and some people may think they are being rude or indifferent. It is important to be aware that it is not deliberate and often the person will not be aware of it themselves.

Having a 'say it straight' policy between the individual and their colleagues may help to reduce any misunderstandings in the workplace. It also might be useful for work colleagues to understand something around Asperger Syndrome and how it might effect their working relationship – however this depends on whether an individual chooses to disclose or not.

Sources used for this information sheet and further resources:


Robert Warman. *Support Into Employment Project: A Guide to Supporting Employees with Asperger Syndrome*. Berkshire Autistic Society.

Aspergers Association of New England www.aane.org

The National Autistic Society
www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=212

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
Employees with Asperger Syndrome. Accommodations and compliance series. <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

Aspire – The Asperger Syndrome Association of Ireland
www.aspire-irl.org



C5: Visual Impairment/ Blind Information Sheet

Some general facts about blindness and vision impairments:

- » Some people are born with no vision or significantly reduced vision. Others lose vision due to accidents or the natural aging process.
- » 80% of those who are legally blind have some degree of vision while 20% have none (National Federation of the Blind, UK).
- » Therefore, many people who are legally blind can complete some tasks using sight.
- » The difficulties and strategies that a person with a visual impairment may encounter in the work place will depend on the level of their visual impairment.
- » People who are blind and visually impaired will use blind techniques in place of sighted techniques, which they typically will have been trained in.
- » Many people with limited sight can get around independently, however some may require a mobility aid such as a cane or a guide dog.

Working with blind or visually impaired employees:

Focus on the persons' ability and start with the assumption that they are just as competent as you are and that they will meet your standards by using their alternative techniques. Every person with a visual impairment will be different and will have different needs, requiring different supports. The best source of information in relation to a disability and any implications within the workplace is the person with the disability. They are the experts in their own lives so if you are unsure, just ask!

Some simple tips:

- » Always announce your presence i.e. introduce yourself every time you meet a blind person to avoid confusion. For example, Hi Mary, its Joe here.
- » Similarly, always state that you are leaving the blind persons presence.
- » Always address the blind person by their name and when you wish to give any paperwork, documents or objects to the blind person place them directly into his or her hand.

- » Offer assistance where appropriate, always ask the person first, don't assume they will need your help.

When inviting a blind or visually impaired person into your office, e.g. for an interview.

- » Ask if he/she needs directions.
- » If the person is taking public transport give directions from the stop.
- » Are there disabled parking spaces available and are routes free from obstacles?
- » Offer assistance from the reception by asking them "would you like to take my arm"?
- » If they have a guide dog, the dog will follow you.
- » When you get to the office ask the person if you can put their hand on the back of the chair.
- » When conversing with a blind or visually impaired person, be yourself and don't worry about saying the wrong thing e.g 'would you like to take a look at the work area'.
- » It is ok to ask what reasonable accommodations may be required in the workplace.

(Adapted from Cornell University, 2000)

Guiding a person with a visual impairment:

The most common technique is the 'sighted guide technique'. This involves the person with a visual impairment holding on to the sighted persons arm. They then lead the person by walking slightly ahead.

How do I use the sighted guide technique?

- » Ask the person if they require assistance first, do not take the person by the arm.
- » Ask which side they would like to be guided on.
- » Offer your elbow to the person; make contact by touching your elbow to their elbow.
- » Give brief but clear verbal instructions as you move from one place to another.
- » Having guided a blind person to a particular location endeavour to inform him or her about their immediate surroundings.

(For further information on the sighted guide technique go to www.ncbi.ie)

Induction and Training:

New employees who are blind and visually impaired need the same introduction to a job and initial training as sighted colleagues.

However, you may find that your standard induction procedures may not address the needs of a visually impaired person and you may need to adapt these practices when training in your new employee.

For example:

- » How much visual material is involved in your induction process and how are you going to present this material in an alternative format to a person with a visual impairment?
- » Are power-point presentations involved in your induction or training and how can you present this material in an alternative way?
- » A person with a visual impairment will need additional time to orient themselves to the building and their office space and may require mobility training prior to starting in the role.
- » Mobility training may involve becoming familiar with a route from the persons home to and from the workplace and/or mobility to the canteen facilities, toilet areas and other recreational areas within the building.
- » If a blind person is a guide dog owner it can be very helpful if he or she is made familiar with the surrounding locality of the workplace. The Irish Guide

Dogs for the Blind can offer assistance and information about guide dogs in the workplace.

Making your training and induction materials as accessible and inclusive as possible will benefit all new employees and will require less individual adjustments.

Reasonable Accommodations:

What reasonable accommodations will a visually impaired employee require?

The effects of vision loss include the persons' ability to perform such everyday tasks as reading and writing. Therefore, a person with a visual impairment will have alternative ways to complete these tasks which usually involves some form of Assistive technology.

“accommodations reduce or eliminate workplace barriers and enable a qualified individual with a disability to have equal employment opportunity”

(American Foundation for the Blind)

Some reasonable accommodations that a person with a visual impairment may require:

- » Assistive technology;
 - » Software that will read out loud information on the computer screen such as JAWS.

- » Screen magnification software such as Lunar or hand held Magnifiers.
- » A closed circuit television system (CCTV) for reading printed materials.
- » Cassette or digital recorders.
- » An optical scanner that can scan printed material and 'read it' into a computer or voice synthesizer.
- » Written materials in alternative format, such as in large print, Braille, audio tape or C.D
- » Modification of employer policies to allow use of a guide dog in the workplace
- » A reader
- » An accessible website and internal network systems.

(Source: Adapted from <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/blindness.html>)

Most offices and workspaces will need minimum modification in order to remove any barriers for blind or visually impaired employees.

While these are some general examples of the types of accommodations that a person with a visual impairment may require, accommodations will differ from one person to another. The best way to establish what accommodations may be required, if any, is to complete a **needs assessment** prior to the commencement of the role (see Section B for further details).

Where can I seek expert advice or support?

There are many resources and technologies available to help you in the process of hiring a visually impaired employee and to support them in the workplace.

NCBI has a range of services it can offer to employers, including an employer advisor, who can provide advice on application procedures, interview and career advancement, and what adaptations and accommodations can be put in place to assist a person with a vision impairment in the workplace.

Sources used for this information sheet and further resources:

National Council for the Blind
Ireland (NCBI) www.ncbi.ie

National Federation of the
Blind (NFB) www.nfb.org

Royal National Institute of Blind
people (RNIB) www.rnib.ie

Workway – Sensory Disability [http://
www.workway.ie/best_practice/
sensory_disability.487.427.html](http://www.workway.ie/best_practice/sensory_disability.487.427.html)

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
*Job Accommodations for people
with Vision Impairments. Fact Sheet
Series.* <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
*Employees with Vision Impairments.
Accommodations and compliance
series.* <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

Cornell University (2000) *Working
Effectively with Persons Who Are Blind
or Visually Impaired.* Employment
and Disability Institute.

U.S Equal Employment Opportunity
Commission [http://www.eeoc.
gov/facts/blindness.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/blindness.html)

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind
www.guidedogs.ie

