



Guide to Recruiting Individuals with Learning Disabilities into the Workplace

Introduction

The employment rate for disabled people stands at 45.7% against an overall employment rate of 78%, and yet fewer than 6% of people with a learning disability are in work. This makes them the most excluded group from the workforce, despite over 68% of people stating that they want to work. This also means that people with learning disabilities have the lowest employment rate of any single disadvantaged group of people in the UK.

One of the primary reasons for this low employment rate is that employers unintentionally exclude people with learning disabilities through their recruitment practices. For example, an employer will usually hold a competency-based interview asking a series of hypothetical questions and this is likely to prevent an individual with learning disabilities demonstrating what they can do.

The alternative approach of getting to know the individual through different recruitment processes can deliver more reliable results and positive outcomes for the employer and the employee.

Many examples from across the UK and internationally demonstrate that with the right support people with a learning disability, including those with more severe learning disabilities, can secure and keep paid jobs and be valued by their employers. The excellent results of [DFN Project Search](#) and [Project Choice](#) demonstrate the range of jobs that people can do.

About this Document

Purpose of this document

For some employers, recruiting and employing people with a learning disability will be a new experience. This short guide will outline effective practice in recruiting someone with a learning disability to be an active and valued member of the workforce. Working with a good supported-employment agency will help employers navigate the process and provide support and practical guidance along the way.

Employment is good for us. Having a job can improve our health and wellbeing, give us a valued role in society, enables us to earn an income and offers a chance to play an active social and economic role. However, only 5.6% of people with a learning disability have a paid job.

Definition of good employment support

The definition of good employment support from the National Occupational Standards is high quality, personalised support for people with disabilities and/or other disadvantages which enables them to seek and access employment in the open labour market. It is a "place and train" approach that does not rely on long periods of pre-vocational training or a basic level of qualification or experience.

Prior to employment this includes:

- Using vocational profiles - to match a person's skills and interests to a job
- Job Searching with support from a job coach if necessary
- Working interviews - understanding reasonable adjustments

Support for retaining employment includes:

- Job/task analysis
- Job coaching
- In work support - identifying natural support in the workplace
- Ongoing monitoring and support - employer and employee

Good Supported Employment

Fundamental to supported employment is the belief that everyone can work, with the right job and the right support. Providers of supported employment should be able to offer a nil rejection policy, meaning everyone should have the opportunity to work and contribute to society. Individuals should have the opportunity to earn equitable wages and other employment related benefits.

Good supported employment should enable the following outcomes:

- Social and economic inclusion
- Enhanced self-esteem
- Development of new skills
- Increased quality of life where people are treated fairly and with respect

Supported employment should enable someone to obtain a real job where:

- The job is valued by managers and colleagues
- The job helps the person meet their life goals and aspirations
- The job has similar hours and times at work as other employees, with the same working conditions

Getting the Right Job

Prior to an individual applying for a job, it is important to know what previous experience a person may have had, if any of the world of work. This information is best obtained through a person centred process called vocational profiling.

Vocational Profiling

This is a process of "getting to know" the person to identify their aspirations, learning needs, individual skills, former experiences and job preferences. It can involve inputs from those who know the person well, but it is conducted from a "zero rejection" stand-point.

The profile informs practical job finding and helps to achieve a good job match for the job seeker that suits their skills and preferences. Many people have not had work experience or have never had a job and will need support to make informed choices about career opportunities.

Vocational profile templates and video guide:

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/person-centred-planning/vocational-profile.htm>

Summary vocational profile template:

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/SiteAssets/Files/Summary%20Vocational%20Profile%20-%20Editable.pdf>

Job Searching

Job searching is the steps involved in finding a person's preferred job through contact with employers. It includes all aspects of identifying suitable jobs and potential employers, a job coach may approach employers on behalf of a job seeker, obtaining a job and, where necessary, negotiating reasonable adjustments.

Job descriptions are sometimes vague, and person specifications can focus on academic ability and experience as opposed to the actual skills required. As a result, individuals think that they would not be able to do the job on offer and therefore would not apply for the job.

Enabling People to Apply for Jobs

Current recruitment processes can be discriminatory. There are several ways to make the recruitment processes better for people with learning disabilities. Online applications can exclude people with learning disabilities and employers need to be flexible in how candidates apply, such as offering alternative application formats, make job descriptions and application forms easier to read by using clear, simple language. Have clear descriptions of the job and tasks that need to be done and do not ask for qualifications that are not related to the tasks of the job. Also, ensuring accessible information is available in places where individuals will see it to enable them to consider applying for a job.

Traditional interviews can be overwhelming for a person with additional needs. Allow more time, provide questions prior to the interview and supported interviews. One alternative to a traditional interview is a working interview.

Working Interviews & Work Trials - Understanding Reasonable Adjustments

Both working interviews and work trials are viewed as reasonable adjustments to the recruitment and selection process, they rarely cost anything and can actually benefit the whole workplace. They allow individuals to demonstrate their skills as opposed to talking about them in a formal interview:

- Working interviews give the person an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in the workplace. The employer can observe and evaluate the applicant using the same criteria as they use to judge a traditional interview performance. The employer should enter into the arrangement with the understanding that if the job applicant completes the working interview successfully, they will be offered the job.

- Work trials, in the context of people with disabilities are time limited placements in real jobs. They allow the job seeker to learn more about what they are good at and what they want to do and enable employers to find out more about what the person can do. The job applicant should be supported in the work trial by a trained job coach.

If the recruitment process insists on an interview, it should be kept as short and informal as possible, and the job applicant should be supported appropriately during the interview. There should be an opportunity to see the questions that will be asked to allow the job applicant to prepare and rehearse their answers. **Preferably the interview should be a formality after a successful working interview.**

One Page Profiles

A one page profile is a good way of capturing key information in a brief document to share with an employer and work colleagues. It can provide information about any support that might be needed by the individual. A one page profile captures all the important information about a person on a single sheet of paper under three simple headings: what people appreciate about me, what's important to me and how best to support me.

One page profile template:

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/SiteAssets/Files/Helpful%20Tools%20Printable/AONEPA~1.PDF>

Job Carving

Job carving is used where the person can successfully undertake the majority of tasks in their job role but there may be an element of their duties which they are not able to complete. There are times where it may not always be possible to find a candidate that can complete all the tasks involved in doing a particular job. Job carving is considered as a reasonable adjustment. It may be that the candidate is capable of completing a high percentage of the job tasks and the employer negotiates job duties across a team so that tasks are shared or adjusted as required.

Further Examples of Reasonable Adjustments

- Changes to standard procedures – filing systems can be colour coded
- Information documents could be put into easy read
- Operating processes could be issued in the form of photographs or Easy Read
- Health and safety procedures could be explained through a tour of the building or made available in Easy Read format

- Job carving - creating, modifying or customising a job so it is suitable for a particular individual, while simultaneously meeting the employer's needs
- Flexible working patterns and allowing additional time to complete certain tasks
- Aids and equipment in the workplace

Values of Supported Employment

Supported employment values recognise that employment is a valued social role and becoming employed can help reverse societal devaluation, with wider positive consequences for the person. Fundamental to this is an understanding of the positive contribution people with disabilities can make in the workplace and that people with disabilities are often regarded as of less value than others in society, resulting in poor life outcomes.

Supported employment draws on the social model of disability recognising that disability is the product of the physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers present within society leading to discrimination. The removal of discrimination requires a change of approach and thinking in the way in which society is organised, in this case removing barriers to employment.

The underpinning values include:

- It should be a 'real job':
 - Wages are paid at the going rate for the job, with the same terms and conditions as all other employees
 - The job helps the person to meet their life goals and aspirations
 - The role is valued by managers and colleagues
 - The job has similar hours and times at work as other employees, with safe working conditions.
- Understand the 'zero rejection' philosophy of supported employment and that everyone can work, with the right job and the right support.
- Supported employment does not adhere to a work readiness model. It is about getting people into competitive employment first with training and support on the job: a 'place then train' approach.
- People should be presented with a variety of experiences, options and support to achieve their career aspirations. Support is built around an individual, promoting choice and career satisfaction. All options assume successful employability.
- Ideally there should be partnership between the person, their family carers, employers, community supports and the provider of supported employment.
- People should be fully included and supported to be full and active members of their workforces and wider communities, both socially and economically.

Supported employment recognises that not many people stay in the same job for the whole of their working lives and people with disabilities and/or disadvantages are no different in having to adapt to changing labour markets and wanting to improve their working lives. Supported employment should encourage the career development of individuals by promoting training opportunities and seeking options for increased responsibility by offering time unlimited support.

BASE Diagram

The British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) states that good, supported employment can best be illustrated as follows:



The Supported Employment Model

- Work with employers to understand their business needs and to help them understand the benefits of a diverse workforce.
- Support individuals to identify jobs they are interested in through vocational profiling
- Understand and agree what support the individual might need
- Match their skills and interests to the job
- The employer gets the right worker for the job and the individual gets the right job.
- Opportunity to progress

Top Recruitment Tips

Just because someone has a learning disability it doesn't mean they cannot do the job as well as anyone else. They just need a chance to show that they can do it.

- Use a supported employment agency to help identify suitable candidates who are well matched to the needs of the job you have available.
- If possible have an 'in house' job coach to provide support
- Consider alternative recruitment and selection processes such as 'working interviews'.
- Ask the job coach for support and training for staff before the person starts. This will help to ensure all the staff are on-board and ready to support if needed.
- Recognise that having a person with a learning disability in the team can positively affect staff team members.
- Offer information in easy read formats avoiding jargon and complicated words.
- Be prepared to make adjustments to tasks and work processes, as long as it's practical to do so.
- Some managers and mentors may already have experience of people with a learning disability in their lives and can be of help when recruiting people with a learning disability into a company.
- Understand that everyone is different with different support needs.