

This fact sheet outlines practical steps employers can take to make their recruitment processes more inclusive and to support people with learning disabilities once they are in work. But remember that you can access help too! See [Fact sheet 5: What support is available](#).

One of the greatest barriers for people with a learning disability is the recruitment process, including the following factors:

- online-only applications
- formal interviews
- unrelated qualification requirements.

These factors inhibit access to jobs that people with a learning disability may be perfectly capable of doing. Very few people with a learning disability get through the initial recruitment stage unless you make some adjustments right from the start.

This fact sheet provides some tips about reasonable adjustments that can make a big difference to someone with a learning disability and your ability to recruit the right person.

Advertisements

If you are using advertisements to recruit, it is good practice to publicly welcome applications from disabled people. Make it clear that you can provide the vacancy information in an accessible format such as large print (which people with a learning disability will find easier to read) or with illustrations. You can ask your local Jobcentre Plus to display your advert and ask them to make sure that disabled people will see it. You can also mail your vacancy bulletins to your local Mencap service .

Recruitment days

Jobcentre Plus or your local supported employment agency could also help you to organise a recruitment day where you can welcome people with a learning disability or any disability to come and find out about working for your organisation. Your staff should receive disability awareness training before any event you organise. Mencap or other supported employment agencies can provide this.

If you are a Disability Confident Employer, remember that your organisation is more likely to attract applicants with a learning disability if they see the Disability Confident logo on the advert.

Application forms

Many companies have an online-only application process, which creates an unnecessary barrier for many people with a learning disability. Furthermore, many application forms are lengthy and complicated which compounds the challenge. A reasonable adjustment would be to allow paper applications or the submission of a CV as an alternative. Sometimes, a person with a learning disability may need support to complete an application form. There should be an option to declare that support has been provided.

Selection

When selecting candidates for a job, do not rule out candidates who have little or no paid work experience. Many candidates with a learning disability may not have had the chance of paid work before but will have unpaid work experience.

Disability discrimination exception

Under the Equality Act, you can create and reserve roles specifically for disabled people. The independent employment advice and conciliation service, Acas, have guidance for employers on applying the law : ‘You can specifically advertise for and recruit a disabled person without the risk of disability discrimination . This can be a useful approach to help increase representation of disabled people in your workforce.’ Employers may be able to use this to hire more people with a learning disability. However, while you can create and reserve a role for a disabled person, you cannot discriminate between disabilities, meaning all disabled people should have equally weighted applications. You cannot treat people with a learning disability more favourably, unless you can evidence that there is either an occupational requirement for the post holder to have a learning disability or you are using positive action where another disabled candidate is otherwise of equal merit (1).

Interviews

Formal interviews are daunting to most people. Interviews can be particularly difficult for a candidate with a learning disability because they often play to their weaknesses and give the candidate little or no opportunity to demonstrate their strengths. Interviews are an artificial environment in which candidates are often asked hypothetical questions. This puts a candidate with a learning disability at a substantial disadvantage. Arguably, an interview is an ineffective test of a person’s ability to do a job, especially if the job requires practical skills.

As a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act, you could waive the interview process altogether. Instead, you could:

- Have a short, practical assessment in the workplace in which the candidate is shown the skills that the job requires and is asked to demonstrate their capacity to do the task – you should encourage the candidate to bring a supporter along if they need one.
- Offer a ‘work trial’ (also known as an ‘on the job’ or ‘working’ interview) of between one and eight weeks, depending on the person’s ability and the

complexity of the role. A work trial is similar to a work experience placement, except a paid job is guaranteed if the trial is successful. During the work trial, the person learns the skills required for the job and proves their ability to their potential employer. This can be with the support of a job coach. Funding may be available through Access to Work and Access to Work Plus.

If you must hold an interview, make the following adjustments so that the process is more inclusive. You could:

- Encourage/allow the candidate to bring a job coach/supporter to the interview if they would benefit from having one. This can help people to feel more confident.
- Let the candidate know what to expect in advance. For example, they should know how many people they will be meeting, how many questions they will be asked, the types of questions and how long the interview is likely to last.
- Make the interview as informal as possible.
- Consider whether you need a panel or whether the number of people interviewing could be reduced
- Make sure the candidate and their supporter have time to prepare in advance, particularly if there is an aptitude test. Provide additional time to sit the test and allow more time for the interview.
- Use plain English and make sure the person is following you. It is fine to ask, “do you understand the question?” and to offer to rephrase it if necessary. Avoid hypothetical questions like, “what would you do if...?” and ask questions that relate to the person’s direct experience instead like “can you tell me what you did at the library?”

On the job

Once you have decided to employ someone with a learning disability, there may be other things that an employee with a learning disability may need to do the job. Some people with a learning disability might benefit from a job coach to help them learn the job. Others may benefit from a daily task list that clearly shows what they need to do. The best thing is to speak to your employee and ask them what they would find useful.

Job coach

The provision of a job coach is one of the most significant benefits to an employer during the recruitment process and at the onset of employment. A job coach is an individual who is employed to help people with disabilities learn and perform their work duties, usually using a technique called Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI). TSI involves breaking down tasks into small chunks so people can learn through repetition. A job coach may work with individuals one-on-one and/or in a small group. In addition to working on skills related to performing specific job tasks, a job coach also helps with interpersonal skills necessary in the workplace. If a person with a learning disability is in paid work, or on a Supported Internship programme, a job coach can be paid for through Access to Work and/or Access to Work Plus, so this support is available at little or no cost to the employer. For more information on how to apply for this support, please see [Fact sheet 5: What support is available](#) and [Fact sheet 6: Financial support for workplace adjustments](#).

Job carving

One approach that often proves helpful in employing people with a learning disability is called 'job-carving'. Instead of fitting a person into a rigid job description, it can be much more effective to identify different tasks that a person with a learning disability can do and 'carve' out a job from these different tasks.

For example, this might involve freeing up the receptionist from doing the mail distribution or the office manager from stuffing envelopes and data entry. Removing these tasks from another employee's job frees up their time to concentrate on the more complex areas of their job role. All the tasks should be genuine business needs for the employer that the employee with a learning disability could usefully do.

In an office or administrative setting, examples of tasks which could be carved out of existing jobs might include:

- data entry
- sending out pay slips/post

- compiling information packs
- handing out the post
- photocopying for large mail-outs
- putting labels onto envelopes
- filing
- answering the phone and taking messages.

Sources:

1 Acas (2023), Recruitment: hiring someone, available online: <https://www.acas.org.uk/hiring-someone/using-protected-characteristics>

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