Employerability

(noun)

The ability of employers to welcome disabled people as equal and valued employees, and support their growth development and inclusion in the workplace.

Compare to ‘employability’ the perceived ability of a disabled person to be employed by an employer.
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Introduction
Who is **disabled** and what is **disability**?

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as: someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

This may include:

- A physical impairment
- A sensory impairment
- A mental health condition
- A learning difficulty such as dyslexia or dyspraxia
- Learning disability
- Any other disability or impairment
- Diagnosed as HIV positive, or with cancer, multiple sclerosis or other long term chronic condition.

When we discuss disability and supporting and attracting disabled employees, we are talking about anyone who has an impairment or condition and may face additional barriers to work or stigma and discrimination because of a perceived difference.
“This is a great example how technology can ensure #DigitalInclusion and #DisabilityInclusion. It is key for technology companies and other businesses to engage with Disabled People’s Organisations to ensure that we get our approach right and evolve to a more equal and just society.”

Michael Vermeersch
Digital Inclusion Lead at Microsoft
How to use this toolkit

This toolkit has been created by disabled people and informed by employer’s experiences in our internship programme. You can become a more inclusive organisation and a proactive ally by following the three steps below:

1: Define your model

Take a proactive approach to avoid disability exclusion and actively remove barriers to inclusion. This will ensure you are better placed to attract, and facilitate the full participation of disabled people in your organisation.

This toolkit uses solutions based on the Social Model of Disability. The Social Model is centred around the concept that people are disabled by the barriers they experience in society, rather than by their impairment.

Barriers can be identified as:

- **Physical environment:** Such as inaccessible buildings with stairs and no ramps or lack of tactile markings for identifying spaces or objects.

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People’s attitudes: Such as viewing disabled people as objects of charity or inspiration rather than equal members of society.

Communication: Barriers can arise when text is too small or videos don’t include written captions.

Organisational: Disabled people being excluded by the way things are organised, like meetings, events, or services.

The Social Model differs from the Medical Model, which says disability is caused by impairments that need to be treated, managed or cured.

This toolkit will help you to identify the barriers present in your organisation and create solutions to remove them.
2: Listen to lived experience

Just as no two people are exactly alike, no two disabled people are exactly alike. Personal experiences differ and the context of various employment environments may result in barriers presenting themselves in different ways. Therefore, it is vital to consider disabled people’s lived experience rather than assuming what is needed when seeking solutions to employment barriers. This will ensure that your employment contexts meet access needs.

The guidance in this toolkit has been informed by the lived experience of disabled professionals. You may have some existing knowledge of barriers which you could use and you could speak to existing disabled staff for their views. You may need to bring in external help to provide options and guidance for you to make an informed decision. However, the important part is to refrain from making assumptions about what is needed, as this will likely turn out to be unhelpful and could waste your organisation time and money.
3: **Apply and Evolve**

Once you have defined your approach and are listening to lived experience you will need to apply the learning in this toolkit and watch your practice evolve. The journey to inclusion is an evolution, improving with the more knowledge we gain, experience we have and the better environments we create.

**This toolkit will give you increased knowledge of services and funding to support reasonable adjustments at work. It also includes resources to help make your company policies and recruitment process more inclusive for all and reduce the fear of ‘getting it wrong’.**
Disabled people are twice as likely to be unemployed.

Glasgow Disability Alliance
Where to begin:

a list of resources
Where to begin: a list of resources

There are resources available to help you to address barriers in your organisation, we have provided a list of some quick checklists and more detailed documents below:

- Access All Areas Initial checklist - this checklist is to help you identify where the barriers in your organisation may be. You can also request a full access audit from a local access panel or Disabled Peoples Organisation.
- Inclusion Scotland’s Accessible Social media guide.
- Real Inclusion written Formatting guide and Checklist.
- Use the Hemingway App to check how readable your writing is.
- Guides on writing in Plain English are available from the Plain English Campaign website.

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Where to begin: a list of resources

- Inclusion Scotland’s Guidance on **Accessible and Effective Remote Working**.

- **Access to Work** is a discretionary grant scheme, provided by the government, that provides personalised support to disabled people who are in paid employment. Employers cannot apply for Access to Work on a staff members behalf. The application must be submitted by the staff member. If a staff member submits an application before they have been employed for 6 weeks you may not have to make any contribution as an employer.

- The **Equality Act 2010** defines a disability as a physical or a mental condition which has a substantial and long-term impact on someone’s ability to do normal day to day activities. The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** has some useful guidance on how to comply with equality law and implement good practice.
Part 1:

Recruitment
Part 1: Recruitment

Disabled people can experience a variety of barriers and like the social model identifies these can be physical, attitudinal, communications or organisational. Therefore, it makes sense to remove the barriers we can identify before recruitment starts.

In order to gain a better understanding of the general accessibility in your organisation, we recommend going through the Access All Areas Initial checklist. This will give you a starting point to identify and implement some simple changes to improve accessibility before recruitment starts.

**Job description:**

Make your job description as clear as possible, avoid the use of jargon and use plain English. There are apps such as the Hemingway App which can help you determine how “readable” your document is. This is a benefit to everyone; the applicant will have a better idea of what is expected and in turn you are more likely to have applicants who really fit the role.

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Consider how language included in your job adverts may unintentionally deter disabled people. The list below covers some of the commonly listed points and includes possible alternatives for you to review:

**Drivers License**

This may disadvantage disabled people who are visually impaired, take certain medication or other impairments that mean driving a car isn’t an option. There also can be a financial barrier for many people who have been unemployed or on a lower income. If there is not a genuine occupational requirement for a drivers license then we advise highlighting the need to travel in a less specific way such as “willingness to travel”.

**Verbal communication skills**

This is commonly listed in person specifications but may unintentionally deter people with speech impairments or those who communicate via alternate means such as Deaf British Sign Language users. Reasonable adjustments in the workplace can support people for whom expectations around verbal communication can present barriers. We would recommend changing this to be more general “strong communication skills” which gives the candidate the opportunity to discuss examples without the specific emphasis on verbal.

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Listening skills

This can also unintentionally deter someone with a hearing impairment or those who communicate via alternate means such as Deaf British Sign Language users. You could replace this with something like “Able to encourage and respond to the contributions of others”

A keen eye for detail

This use of wording could deter someone with a visual impairment. If it is important that a candidate is able to demonstrate this skill, we would recommend using “strong attention to detail” instead.

Able to cope under pressure

It is important that if a role includes a varying work schedule, competing demands and a fast pace that the individual should be able to demonstrate that they can prioritise and delegate effectively. However, the words “cope under pressure” can potentially lead people with mental health impairments or autistic people to rule themselves out of applying. It can be helpful to be more specific about the pressures, and reflect this by saying things like “managing deadlines”, “prioritising”, “time management”, etc.

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Part 1: Recruitment

- **Specific levels of education**

  You can open up your recruitment to a wide range of disabled people who have not obtained the formal education you would usually look for in applicants. There can be barriers in education that leave talented disabled people disadvantaged and potentially with lower grades or degree classifications than their peers. Also, some may become disabled later in life and need to change their career direction. By being broader with the educational requirements disabled applicants can demonstrate their strengths and transferable skills for the role.

- **Position must be office based**

  Many jobs don’t necessarily need to be office based. You could consider whether the role could be solely home based/remote, office based or a mix of both. Adding this information into the role description, rather than waiting for an individual to ask, will attract a wider talent pool, including disabled people. Due to Covid-19 regulations many businesses had to change to working from home almost overnight. Time, effort and money, were not the biggest barriers to addressing these matters but a willingness to change.

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“Overall, I was very impressed by the quality of the candidates. We interviewed more individuals than we usually would in the recruitment process due to the high standard. They all had most of the key skills, knowledge, or interests we were looking for and everyone we did interview was really prepared. It was extremely difficult to choose between the final selection we interviewed. The whole process made me question the way we’ve recruited in the past, especially around the language we use in recruitment adverts and where we place adverts. I think we’ve been missing out on meeting some great potential candidates.”

John McVie
Media Centre Manager at STV
Application forms:

Application forms should be clear about what is expected of the applicant. It can be helpful to give clear instructions on what information they need to give, how much detail they need to go into, approximate word count per answer etc. Sometimes people are unsure of how much to write and don’t fully sell themselves as a result.

Many application packs include text boxes and images which can make it inaccessible for people who use screen readers. A screen reader allows people who are blind or visually impaired to use their computer. The technology reads out loud what is on the screen.

The screen reading software may not be able to pick up information in text boxes or identify images so ideally where practical include a plain text version of any recruitment documents. Plain Text is any text, text file or document containing only text. A plain text file cannot have any bond text, different fonts, large text, text boxes, images or any other special text formatting.

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Reasonable adjustments at interview:

It is ok to ask questions, it is the first instinct when facing a situation unknown to most of us. When recruiting, as standard practice you should pro-actively provide information about accessibility (e.g., of the venue or interview process), and ask all candidates if there are any adjustments which would make the process more accessible for them. Give additional contact details for candidates to have an informal discussion. Be clear that information will be used in a supportive manner and will not influence shortlisting. Phrase this as a positive measure, not one which implies anything negative for the candidate – e.g., “adjustments which will help ensure a fair interview” rather than “any special needs”.

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Part 1: Recruitment

This allows candidates to provide you with the information you need to remove any barriers without candidates feeling that their request is a burden for you. If you have perceived a barrier for a person then ask if something could be done that would help. Focus on identifying and addressing barriers, rather than medical information. Asking detailed personal questions about an individual’s medical condition could risk being perceived as impolite and intrusive and it is not necessary. It is important not to assume anything, you will find out by asking and it is for the individual to define what, if any assistance they need and what would be helpful.

**Remember to allow time for reasonable adjustments - some adjustments can take more time than you think.**
Examples of reasonable adjustments candidates may request for interview:

- **Interview questions in advance**
  Candidates with a variety of impairment/s such as autism, mental health conditions, dyslexia, may make this request to allow time to process the information ahead of the interview. Our recommendation is to supply the questions a short while (up to 1 hour) before the interview so as to not create expectations of having a fully pre-prepared answer, which could put the candidate at an unfair advantage.

- **An interview time later in the day**
  This may help candidates who take specific medications which can cause drowsiness in the morning. Also someone with an impairment/health condition that can have an impact on energy in the morning.
Part 1: Recruitment

- **Extra time for their interview and/or including any tests**
  This may help candidates with speech impairments, hearing impairments or specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia.

- **Communications support**
  Such as a British Sign Language Interpreter, Palantypist or Stenographer (speech to text reporters). The candidate may be able to apply to **Access to Work** to help with the cost of this. Candidates may also ask to be accompanied at the interview by a companion or support worker, to help interpret or rephrase information.
Part 2: Employment
Part 2: Employment

We can remove barriers through reasonable adjustments. Making reasonable adjustments is simply about doing whatever you can reasonably do to make sure that you attract the best candidates for jobs, and make the best arrangements for employees to do a good job.

For example, a staff member is unable to start work at 9.00 a.m. due to their health condition and medication impacting them in the morning. A reasonable adjustment would be to allow flexible working arrangements, so they are able to start work later in the morning.

If you know or are made aware of an employee’s impairment and that there could be barriers at work, we recommend that you arrange a conversation as soon as possible to discuss reasonable adjustments. You should not try to get someone to disclose their health condition or impairment or ask unnecessary questions that invade their privacy.

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Part 2: Employment

Through our experience supporting employers to discuss reasonable adjustments as part of our We Can Work Internship programme, we have developed an In Work Support meeting template. This document can act as a live record of adjustments agreed between the manager and employee.

We recommend that it is reviewed at regular intervals (e.g. every 6 months, or sooner if there is a change to the role or condition or impairment) to check that the information is still relevant, and the reasonable adjustments are effective. New and current disabled staff can complete this document.

How to have an ‘In Work Support’ meeting

In Work Support meetings are held between a staff member, their manager and possibly a representative from Human Resources. To identify reasonable adjustments and agree a plan for implementing them. Ideally this would take place at the start of employment or once you become aware of someone’s impairment.

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So how do you get the most out of the meeting?

1. **Listen to your staff, they often know what they need.**

   It's important to remember that disabled people are the experts in their own experience. They will have ideas on what support will help them get the job done. Try not to make any assumptions about what might help and be open minded on possible support. It may be helpful to ask a staff member to go through the In Work Support document before the meeting and make a note of any barriers and reasonable adjustments they want to discuss.

2. **Remember barriers may exist outside of the office but still affect work.**

   Understand that barriers to work may exist outside of the workplace, for example someone's access to care and support at home or travel to and from the workplace. As well as barriers to access the office such as intercom entry systems or lack of an accessible lift.
3. **Be flexible and plan reviews.**

It may not initially be obvious what reasonable adjustment is required. New disabled employees may not be familiar with their new role or aware of what assistive technology or equipment may be available to support them in the workplace. Therefore, it is helpful to be flexible with any support agreed, review often and make changes as necessary.

4. **Use the financial support available.**

One scheme you may or may not be aware of is **Access to Work**, administered by the Department of Work and Pensions to help disabled people start and maintain paid employment. Disabled people can apply to the scheme to address specific barriers faced in the workplace. The assessment process determines the types of support that might be needed and often a workplace assessment will be offered to discuss any barriers and suggest potential solutions. There is a [factsheet for employers](https://access-to-work.dwp.gov.uk) available on the Access to Work website, we recommend you look at this.

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Some types of support available through Access to work may require medical evidence from a doctor or health professional, for example travel support. If a disabled employee isn’t able to use public transport to get to and from the workplace, Access to Work may grant a taxi budget for travelling to and from the usual place of work.

Some other kinds of support we have seen awarded through the scheme include:

- Personal Assistance (a paid person to provide practical assistance for a disabled employee at work).

- Specific software such as:
  - **Texthelp** Read and Write to support people with dyslexia and those who need help with reading, writing and spelling.
  - **Zoomtext**, an advanced screen magnification program that enlarges and enhances everything on the computer screen.
  - **Dragon Naturally Speaking** speech recognition software.

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Part 2: Employment

- Equipment such as voice recorders or screen magnifiers.

- Specialised chairs and desks for wheelchair users, people with chronic pain or other impairments.

- Adapted keyboards and computer mice.

- Mental health service support documents/ mind samh etc...
Part 3:
Progression and promotion
1 in 5 of the working age population are disabled
2% of the working age population become disabled every year.

It is important to understand that although you may not be aware there will likely be disabled people already in your organisation. You want to retain that knowledge and skill and ensure that the individuals have the opportunity to explore any adjustments which may support them in their role. Here are three things to consider when it comes to progression and promotion for disabled people in your organisation:

Don’t become us and them, become we?

How does your organisation define and present disability and disabled people? Disability should be included as an equality and diversity topic and discussed positively. Here is one way you can reflect on your approach and make proactive and positive steps to how you define disabled people.

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Diversity survey task:

You are looking to discover the diversity of candidates you attract or the internal mix of your current workforce. You develop what you believe to be a reflective statement or question to get this information. You may create something like:

We want to support our team and we would like to know if you come under any of the following groups.
Do you have a disability?

What is your disability?

There are ways in which this statement is helpful, but there are also ways that it can be disempowering for those you are trying to attract.

**Consider:** language, avoid disempowering language in your introduction and highlight the benefits this knowledge will give your organisation. Be honest about your intentions and rational for asking and honest about your current knowledge. See below:

‘We recognise the benefits a diverse workforce brings and are committed to actively creating a more inclusive workplace. To help us to get our approach right and reflect the diverse experiences in our organisation your support is greatly appreciated.’
Part 3: Progression and promotion

Do you define as disabled under equalities act
(add simple definition here)

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don’t know.

Do you have any of the following impairments or conditions? (could be listed from the ones identified in the equalities act)

☐ A physical impairment
☐ A sensory impairment
☐ A mental health condition
☐ A learning difficulty such as dyslexia or dyspraxia
☐ Learning disability
☐ Any other disability or impairment
☐ Diagnosed as HIV positive, or with cancer, multiple sclerosis or other long term chronic condition.

In this way you will capture those who self-define as disabled but also those who, bring diversity of experience and valuable knowledge to the discussion but don’t necessarily define as disabled. Note the change in power and provision of valuable information, the employees may have access to insight which could greatly benefit you as an employer.

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Part 3: Progression and promotion

Opportunity for development

How often do you ask how accessible a training course is? You can inspire change by requesting from your providers inclusive services. When you commission training, organisational or personnel development services ask what are the accessibility options? Send the options out to your team and ask if anyone requires an adjustment to fully participate.

Over 400,000 people a year leave work due to an impairment or work limiting condition.
Part 3: Progression and promotion

- **Making reasonable adjustments for colleagues is everyone’s professional duty.**

  We often discuss reasonable adjustments in a one directional way, as an organisation or manager making the reasonable adjustment for employees. But we won’t get to equal unless disabled people have the opportunity and same rights in management and executive positions to fully engage and participate. There are two things to think about here:

  - Commitment to inclusion needs to be top down and bottom up, we need to make opportunities for people in any role to express their requirements without fear of recourse or lack of trust. Not using terms such as vulnerable to describe disabled people as a homogenous group will help along with championing lived experience led training and services.

  - Get understanding and information out about reasonable adjustments to everyone in the organisation. This will aid peoples ability to be more inclusive colleagues, combat stigma and challenge misconceptions about disability and adjustments.
“Inclusion Scotland have helped to shift my perspective on access and inclusion for the better. We are doing lots at Adobe with Adobe for all and sessions such as this from a Disabled Peoples Organisation are really enhancing our understanding and implementation.”

Anja Salinger-Carsley
Senior Manager,
DME Enterprise Support EMEA at Adobe