

The Employer's Guide to Supported Employment

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Abstract. In 2010, 14.7 per cent of the general population of Ireland was jobless and 37 per cent of people with disabilities aged 15–64 were employed with a quarter of these were in part-time jobs. High unemployment increased barriers to employment for people with disabilities with a 48 per cent increase in the numbers applying for jobs. Highly qualified unemployed were taking on low to medium skilled jobs and accessing Government employment schemes and training programmes. It was difficult to access employers who were positive towards people with disabilities. A STEP Supported Employment project analysed barriers to mainstream employment. When faced with many barriers it was decided to create a project to access employers directly and seek a partner who had access to a large number of employers.

In April of 2010 IrishJobs.ie was approached by Mary O Halloran from STEP SE. Mary had brought together a number of similar agencies and asked IrishJobs.ie if they would be interested in building a resource to encourage and support employers to hire people with disabilities. IrishJobs.ie is a leading national e-recruitment company

Irishjobs.ie was approached as e-recruitment methods were mostly complex to navigate and 80% of vacancies are advertised online. The hope was by making the information more visible and more accessible employers who are interested in finding out more about hiring people with disabilities will get the guidance they require. Of course, it may also be that employers who had not thought about hiring people with a disability will consider it once they find out more via the Guide.

A team was put together from other disability organisations & irishjobs.ie to identify the obstacles for people with disabilities to e-recruitment and a guide was developed to demonstrate the benefits of employing people with disabilities. IrishJobs.ie was very enthusiastic about this project. Since this IrishJobs.ie has provided backing for the National Job Shadow events with the IASE.

All content on the Guide has come from Supported Employment Agencies. The expertise of IrishJobs.ie came in the design and presentation of the content. Before the Guide was launched it was reviewed and approved by a number of agencies involved

STEP Supported Employment a service of Saint John of God Community Services Ltd, worked alongside IrishJobs.ie, other IASE members and Service Users to develop this user-friendly Guide.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of the Employer's Guide to Supported Employment (the Guide) is to provide potential employers with an online step-by-step accessible instructions and guidance to attract and recruit people

with disabilities. Employers can click in and out of the subject matters or areas of interest and will be guided to where they can find support if it is not contained in the Guide.

The Guide provides employers of people with disabilities step-by-step standards to manage and retain people with disabilities and support the capacity to increase the number of people with disabilities into employment. It is a concise "at your fingertips" tool for Employers to make changes to their policies and

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procedures if needed to include employees with disabilities so they can access the same choices and information as their non-disabled colleagues. The Guide focuses on inclusion and aims to reduce fears regarding costs to make reasonable accommodations.

The Guide is also for employers who independently employ people with disabilities to guide them to relevant services for guidance, support and information and advice. It also leans towards people who are returning to work following an injury or illness and guides the employer towards a successful return and reintegration. It provides processes of what to do in situations that can arise from the time a job is created through to managing performance to end of employment. It provides sample situations and reasonable accommodations for employers to make well-informed decisions. There are tips and real life situations presented to the readers. The Guide aims to provide practical and useful information ranging from guidelines on writing job descriptions, to interviewing advice and to assistance on how to access Supported Employment services throughout Ireland.

There are three categories on the site; recruitment, day-to-day management and resources. Recruitment deals with how to actually recruit somebody with a disability. There is information on writing job advertisement, job descriptions, interviewing tips and advice and where they employer can go for help at any stage. The day-to-day section examines standard Human Resource issues in the context of disability. Training, induction, managing performance, disciplinary and grievances are all addressed.

Employers will find a thorough list of all the resources they need to hire a person with a disability, from a section on grants and schemes to Assistive Technology and Frequently Asked Questions. In addition to these sections employers can watch a series of videos (provided by the IASE) of interviews with employers explaining how and why they have hiring people with disabilities and we hear from people with disabilities themselves about what being employed means to them. The Guide explains reasonable accommodations and how they can be applied, expected outcomes and where they can access grants if they do need to spend money. It also includes accessibility, bullying in the workplace, employment related grants and incentives, managing people with disabilities and disability awareness training. Enable Ireland contributed the section on Assistive Technology and AHEAD in Blackrock Dublin provided the section on Disclosure.

The Guide contains information needed to support employers is brought together and in one place. Content

is built around employers needs with content from Supported Employment Agencies. IrishJobs.ie provided the expertise in design and accessibility.

2. Chapter one

2.1. Recruitment and selection

Employers are informed of the barriers people with disabilities face in the job market. Barrier free is explained regarding candidates with disabilities so they have the same opportunities as those without disabilities and are given opportunity to say why they should be considered for the job. Employers are also informed of use of recruitment and selection procedures that are friendly towards people with a disability and how to move away from using complex language and systems to advertise vacancies.

As application forms remain a popular form of short-listing candidates for interview an application form in an accessible format was designed for the employer that takes disabilities into consideration. The uniformity of application forms can disadvantage people with disabilities who may be excellent candidates but not have standard educational qualifications or may have gaps in their work history.

The employer is given tips on minimum criteria as well as tools such as Easy Read, reduction of complex language or unnecessary words that over emphasise the soft skills needed and Assistive Technology. Recruitment advertising tips include the best places to advertise vacancies to attract people with disabilities, a list of Supported Employment agencies and websites for their local disability organisations and information on disability awareness training. The Guide explains how to use reasonable accommodations, assistive technology and reasonable accommodations when writing job descriptions, person specifications and job analysis.

The role of the Job Coach is explained to the employer as a free professional service to support them to write the specifications and undertake the job analysis; as well as the support they can access when supporting employees and colleagues and how support fades out as the employee is integrated into the workplace. There are sample questions the employer can use to test their use of essential and minimum criteria for jobs through job analysis. All candidates appreciate when a job advert or description is easy to read and includes all the information candidates need in order to apply. Describing a job like this is useful to

all applicants though also important for people with disabilities.

The Guide contains a structure to follow for job advertising with sample reasonable accommodations. This is followed by interviewing tips on what kind of questions an employer may ask and the legitimate work or job related questions if the person has a disability (Disclosure is covered throughout the Guide). The Guide covers information regarding accessible venues for interviewing and employment. This is followed up by explaining how Supported Employment operates, the services available, the 5-stages of Supported Employment and where employers can go for help.

3. Chapter 2

3.1. Day-to-day management

The Guide reminds the readers that on a daily basis an employer will recognise and respond to people with disabilities as customers, suppliers, shareholders and members of the community at large and it recommends best practice Human Resource policies to ensure all employees are supported to reach their full potential. The Guide covers accessible training and approved trainers who understand their legal duty to make reasonable accommodations. The employer is guided towards the first day on the job and induction checklist.

AHEAD, Blackrock Dublin wrote the section on Disclosure. It covers the issues employers and job seekers face and deals with responsibility, advantages and disadvantages and effective disclosure.

The Guide goes on to cover disability related absences and guidance on supporting people to return to work as soon as possible. It covers bullying and harassment and informs employers of the issues people with disabilities face in employment. It signals to employers the benefits of disability awareness training for work colleagues. Employers are given a checklist to use when considering their responsibility for the inclusion of people with disabilities and where to go for assistance.

Employers are guided how to use reasonable accommodations for managing performance and how they can meet their obligations under the Disability Act 2005. This section demonstrates to employers that they can support a barrier-free performance appraisal process and if on the job performance improvements are needed. There are examples of causes of diminished performance for employers to note and act upon. The Guide explores promotion and career advancement oppor-

tunities, disciplinary and grievances and resources to access. Employers are guided where to go to for help.

Under Frequently Asked Questions the employer is given direction to Supported Employment and who uses Supported Employment, what services are available free of charge to employers and employees, questions that may be asked, how to manage if other people employed by the company feel apprehensive about working with a person with a disability. It covers where to go for financial help, disclosure and non-disclosure, attracting and retaining candidates with disabilities, and how to go about making the work place disability friendly.

The Guide continues briefs on the Disability Act 2005, how the Employment acts 1998 and 2004 apply to an employer, the 3% minimum in section 47 of the Disabilities Act and how they apply to an employer.

4. Chapter 3

4.1. Resources

The Guide provides employers with information on grants, where to access them and a link to the provider's websites. It includes how different disabilities affect people in employment, a brief on the disability and useful links for the employer to contact for specific areas of expertise. Information courtesy of Enable Ireland presents a brief on assistive technology, types of equipment involved, who can help, the cost and where employers can find out what assistive technology they need and where to source funding. Easy-read is different from plain English or plain language and is jargon free. Employers have examples of when and how to use this style and particularly how to move from jargon to plain English.

The Guide links employers to useful references such as the National Disability Strategy available through the Department of Justice and Equality, the Governments National Development Plan 2007 – 2013 and leading towards 2016 and the National Action Plan for Social inclusion. Other Government run services such as the Social Protection, SOLAS, Local Employment Services, and Citizen's Information are also set up as direct links for employers to access. The Guide is due for an audit and review in October 2013. An emblem for employers to use to promote themselves as positive towards people with disabilities is work in progress and irishJobs.ie will be the first online company to directly promote that to their clients/employers.

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AHEAD, Association for Higher Education Access and Disability is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.

Kanchi is a not-for-profit disability organisation that works to change mind-sets and behaviours around disability. Kanchi works with decision makers and leaders to promote the Disability Business Case through unique, innovative and effective business initiatives. Caroline Casey, CEO and Kanchi team met to discuss the contents of the Guide.

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<http://www.irishjobs.ie/Microsites/FeaturedEmployer.aspx?Profile=employment-guide/>

Useful definitions

“Reasonable accommodation” means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The “disclosure of a disability” is a very personal choice and one which may have an important impact on a person’s social, educational or employment future. Deciding whether or not to disclose a disability requires a lot of consideration to ensure that the decision is an informed one.

Summary

The Guide is due to be audited October 2014 to keep it up-to-date, to ask employers, IrishJobs.ie and Supported Employment Agencies for feedback.

<http://www.irishjobs.ie/Microsites/FeaturedEmployer.aspx?Profile=employment-guide/>