
Interviewing disabled people

A guide to help employers prepare for interviews
with disabled people



Disabled people are a fabulous untapped talent pool of loyal and committed employees. They bring a perspective that can help transform a business' culture, customer relations and performance for the better.

Introduction

The main purpose of any recruitment process is to find out whether an applicant has the skills and capability to undertake the “inherent or essential requirements” of the job.

The information in this section has been developed to help employers to prepare for interviews with disabled people.

Firstly though you must ensure your application process is accessible including the availability of application forms and other material in accessible formats, a website that is accessible and a point of contact for any questions relating to reasonable adjustments and your disability employment policy.

In many cases you may not need to modify your current interviewing practices. In other cases an applicant may not disclose their disability at the time of application to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to be shortlisted.

However it is recommended that all applicants proceeding to interview, not just those who advise they have a disability, are asked whether they require any adjustments/ assistance to participate in the interview.

For some disabled people an interview may not be the best way to demonstrate their skills. Some may be nervous about interviews, particularly if they have been unemployed for some time.

Disabled people may have the skills to perform the job but not interview well. If this is the case there are alternatives to consider including offering work for a contractual period or you may consider an alternative means of assessing an applicant’s suitability such as a work trial or the person may have a support person attend with them.

Interview preparation

If a candidate advises their disability prior to their interview ask them what adjustments they may need for the interview. For example a person with vision impairment may need detailed instructions and extra time to find the building.

Your building and interview room needs to be accessible and if any paper work needs to be completed during the interview make sure there are alternate ways of completing the documents.

Types of questions

Members of recruitment and selection panels need to be disability aware and confident.

Ask the same questions that you would of a person without disability.

Ensure the questions are around the inherent requirements or job essentials, for example:

Behavioural interview questions that are framed around the job essentials are an effective recruitment tool that allows applicants to demonstrate where they gained their skills and abilities, regardless of the context.

For example, asking “tell me about a time where you’ve solved a problem for a difficult customer” instead of “describe your call centre experience” will allow an applicant to demonstrate they have the skills required for a customer service role.

What questions can I ask a person about their disability?

The only questions an employer can ask about a disability or injury relate to:

- Any adjustments required to ensure a fair and equitable interview/selection process
- How the person will perform the inherent requirements of a job
- Any adjustments that may be required to complete the inherent requirements of the job.

Any other questions about an individual's disability are inappropriate, including questions about:

- How the individual acquired their disability
- Specific details of the individual's disability.
- How the disability will impact ability to perform aspects of the role

General interview etiquette

- Don't patronise disabled people. Treat adults as adults.
- Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions such as "see you later" to a person with vision impairment.
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Be prepared for your offer to be refused.
- Use a normal tone of voice when extending a welcome. Do not raise your voice unless asked.
- Speak directly to the disabled person, rather than through a companion, interpreter or aid if they are present.
- Allow sufficient time for an applicant to respond to questions.
- Never pretend to understand if you don't. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will guide your communication.

Interviewing people with physical impairment

- Offer to shake hands even if they have limited hand use or wear an artificial limb. A left-hand shake is acceptable.
- Never lean on a person's wheelchair as the chair is their personal space.

Interviewing people with vision impairment

- Allow a person with a vision impairment to take your arm near the elbow to guide them rather than propel them.
- Always identify yourself and others who may be with you.

Interviewing people who are hard of hearing

- To gain attention, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand.
- Look directly at the person.
- For those that can read lips, face the light and keep your mouth clear when speaking.
- Be aware of the impact of background noise for those who are hard of hearing.

Interviewing people with intellectual disability

- Speak in a straightforward manner and check understanding.
- Be patient and wait for the person to finish what they are saying.
- Don't pretend to understand the person if you don't. Ask them to repeat what they have just said or to say it in another way (using different words for instance).

Managing personal information

There is no legal obligation for an employee to share personal information about their disability unless it is likely to impact their performance in a role. However explain your workplaces' diversity policies to assure applicants that you actively encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds, that you are disability confident and have an inclusive culture which encourages people to share personal information to ensure they have the best possible chance to succeed. Of course, this has to be the case in reality.

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