Disability Guide for Employers

Contents

Foreword

Dramatically, and with great transformational speed, the world of work has changed fundamentally since March 2020. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and specifically the public health restrictions on where and how many of us worked, combined with prolonged inactivity created as a side effect of furlough schemes, has distorted the labour market as society sought to return to a degree of 'normality'.

There have of course been some benefits reflecting 'new ways of working' with the rise of remote and adoption of hybrid working. But it is now also evident that many of the inequalities recognised in the workplace have become worse since the pandemic, and none more so than disabled workers or disabled people seeking work. Proportionally, they have faced higher rates of unemployment and redundancies than non-disabled people. This cannot be right and certainly does not reflect the ambition of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter and its Members and Supporters.

In a recent report by the Work Foundation it was noted that just 52.7% of disabled people are in employment, compared with 81% of non-disabled people. The Work Foundation suggests that a key driver of the disability employment gap is workplace inflexibility. Pre-pandemic, many employers were reluctant to allow remote or hybrid working, even as a reasonable adjustment for disabled workers. The pandemic led to compulsory remote working for most desk-based workers, and we are now witnessing employers embracing change in this aspect of work. Frustratingly however, all too often the ambitions and perspectives of disabled people haven't been a part of conversations about our changing working lives.

The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter has therefore been absolutely delighted to be able to work with Breakthrough UK and more specifically their panel of disabled people who have been able to share their lived experiences first hand. Their testimony points to both the practical actions that good employers can take, but also and perhaps more importantly, the cultural and attitudinal values that need to be embedded across all employers. This agenda is a clear priority for the Good Employment Charter, not only to ensure opportunity for all, but also to recognise that employers who embrace a broad range of diversity in their workforce benefit from a wider scope of skills and are as result, more productive.

This document can't provide all the answers, and several pieces of helpful guidance, toolkits and other online resources can be found at the end of the guide. What this document aims to do is to share real insights and stories that impact real lives. It is intended to open eyes and understanding – provide shared perspectives and ultimately lead to change. The Charter wants its members and supporters to be in that vanguard of that change and this report will hopefully be the catalyst for better practice across Greater Manchester.

Ian MacArthur
Director, Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter

About this Guide

This document has been co-produced with a panel of d/Deaf and disabled people, Breakthrough UK - a disabled people's user led organisation - and the Good Employment Charter team. Six panel members were interviewed about their experiences of barriers in employment, which provided the content for this document. They were paid for their time and expertise, both in interviews and group meetings.

The guide is intended to provide employers with good practice advice on how to make the employment experience inclusive, equitable and fulfilling for d/Deaf and disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.

The guide includes quotes from people with lived experience of barriers in employment, as well as lots of practical examples of how barriers can be removed.

As the types of barriers people face can be so varied, and depend very much on the job role, location, organisation culture etc, we have not provided examples for everything.

It is not a 'one size fits all' approach, and different arrangements will be needed depending on a person's requirements and the nature of their role.

The most important thing to remember is that if employers are unsure about how to address a barrier, they should ask the person themselves what would help.

They can also take advice from organisations that work with d/Deaf and disabled people who also have experience in how to make practical changes that can make a big difference.

Remember d/Deaf and disabled people and employers want the same thing – to be able to get the job done well and have a motivated, high-performing team to work with. This guide helps you to achieve that.
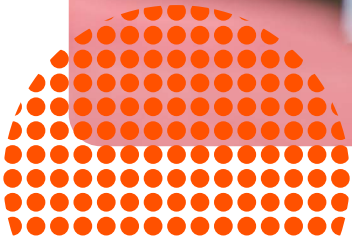
Top Tips from the Breakthrough Lived Experience Panel - Summary

- Please don't make assumptions about d/Deaf and disabled people, our skills and capabilities.

- Most of us (80% of d/Deaf and disabled people), have invisible impairments.

- Always ask us what our access requirements are and make it easy for us to have open conversations about these.

- Making adjustments is often a case of doing things a bit differently - thinking creatively – rather than spending lots of money.

- The top adjustment d/Deaf and disabled people ask for is flexible working.

- Find out about and use the support networks available, especially the government's Access to Work scheme.

- Make sure your commitments in policies are carried out in practice.

- We are a valuable and committed asset.

Introduction

Terminology

Throughout this guide we use the words 'd/Deaf and disabled people' to mean people facing disabling societal barriers. This includes people with physical impairments, mental ill health/mental distress, deaf and Deaf people with BSL as first language, visually impaired / Blind people, people with a learning disability/difficulty, and neurodiverse people. It also includes those with long-term health conditions who may not identify as d/Deaf or disabled, but who still face barriers (adapted from the Disabled People's Organisations Forum England definition).

The Social Model of Disability

Breakthrough UK works to the barrier removal approach of the 'Social Model of Disability'. The Social Model was developed by d/Deaf and disabled people and is a route map for full inclusion. According to the social model, disability is caused by the way society is organised rather than by a person's impairment or difference. 'Disability' therefore becomes an experience of exclusion, of not being considered.

This practical approach focuses thinking on how to remove barriers that can restrict life choices for d/Deaf and disabled people so they can be equal and independent in society. This involves listening to and involving d/Deaf and disabled people in identifying the barriers they face and collaborating on finding solutions that work for them.

Context

According to the recent Family Resources Survey 1 there were 14.6 million d/Deaf and disabled people in the UK in 2020-2021. Government statistics published in January 2023 state that the employment rate for d/Deaf and disabled people was 52.6% in July to September 2022, compared to 82.5% for non-d/Deaf and disabled people.

Access Source

The employment rate for Deaf people is 65%, compared to 79% of people with no long-term health issue or disability. *Office of National Statistics, 2015 cited by Action on Hearing Loss N.D. Hearing Matters p.79. Available at:

Access Source

There are just over 84,000 registered blind and partially sighted people of working age in the UK. However, only one in four of those are in paid employment, and this number is falling. Only one in ten Blind people are in paid employment (2. Slade, J, Edwards, R, 2015. My Voice 2015).

Neurodiverse people have the lowest employment rate of all d/Deaf and disabled people (ONS annual population survey 2020).

The Law

The Equality Act 2010 protects anyone in the UK from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. These legal requirements are the basic minimum and good practice is to exceed them. There are 9 protected characteristics:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender Reassignment
4. Marriage and Civil Partnership
5. Pregnancy and Maternity
6. Race
7. Religion or Belief
8. Sex
9. Sexual Orientation

Discrimination can be direct, such as treating someone differently, or indirect, such as implementing a policy or way of working which has a negative impact on a person with a protected characteristic. By law an employer must make a reasonable adjustment for a d/Deaf and disabled worker if their condition puts them at a disadvantage in applying for or carrying out a job.

What are the barriers?

There are many barriers to employment facing d/Deaf and disabled people, such as a difficulty in gaining training and qualifications due to reasonable adjustments not being made in the school and further education system.

It can also be difficult for people to get the relevant experience because of unequal opportunities and discrimination in volunteering or unpaid work. For example, the Access to Work scheme does not provide support to d/Deaf and disabled people to access volunteering or unpaid roles, which means that people cannot get the support they need such as British Sign Language interpreters or travel to work support to assist them to develop the skills and experience needed for a paid job.

Job roles may not be made flexible, so that whilst d/Deaf and d/Deaf and disabled people may be able to do the role, the flexibility is not created to enable them to do this in practice. There are still attitudinal barriers too, assumptions about what people are capable of / want to do, or adjustments not being offered also create barriers.

As a result, many people find it challenging to gain meaningful, sustained employment and careers. And employers miss out on a huge pool of talent.

How to be an Inclusive Employer

If you are looking at employing, or already employ, a d/Deaf and/or disabled person, always ask them what adjustments would work for them rather than making assumptions. These adjustments may change during the person's employment so regular check-ins are crucial to ensure you are offering the right support. They might change because of a change in their impairment, a change in their job role, their working conditions or in the way that they identify.

A significant percentage of Breakthrough UK's staff are d/Deaf and disabled people and Breakthrough asks every member of staff in the organisation whether they require any new reasonable adjustments to their job role at least every 6 weeks, regardless of how they identify.

Equal Opportunities Policy

Having an Equal Opportunities Policy in the workplace sets out how an organisation will eliminate and prevent unfair treatment at work and demonstrates their commitment to fairness. Although not required by law, a written Equal Opportunities Policy is strongly encouraged to ensure an employer complies with the Equality Act 2010.

Disability Confident Award

The Disability Confident Award is a voluntary, government scheme designed to encourage employers to retain and recruit d/Deaf and disabled people and those with health conditions. There are 3 levels in this scheme- Disability Confident Committed (Level 1), Disability Confident Employer (Level 2) and Disability Confident Leader (Level 3). Every employer starts off at Level 1 and works their way up the levels. By being involved in this scheme an organisation demonstrates their commitment to supporting d/Deaf and disabled people into and during employment and the logo can be displayed on an organisation's website, social media, communication and marketing.

As there are different levels to this scheme it's important that an employer doesn't just remain at Level 1. Commitment requires actively working towards, achieving and sustaining the highest standards of the Award, making level 3 the goal.

It is really important that employers who use the disability confident scheme ensure they have ways of making sure that the commitments they make are evidenced in practice. Involving staff who face barriers in this process is crucial to ensure that you are doing the right things.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Training and Unconscious Bias

A good employer arranges regular, mandatory training for all employees around equality, diversity and inclusion ('EDI'). Training raises awareness of issues such as unfair treatment and discrimination which many people may not realise their colleagues are facing. This also enables staff to identify any intersectional barriers colleagues may be facing – e.g., a lone parent who is also a d/Deaf person experiencing racial discrimination.

Unconscious bias refers to the assumptions or false beliefs we hold about others which are outside of our conscious awareness. They may be based on our past experiences or based on stereotypes and are something we all have. It's not enough to say that you won't treat a particular person differently or unfairly as we don't know necessarily that we are doing this (i.e. it's 'unconscious'). All staff should be provided with regular unconscious bias training- this is especially important for those with people management roles and for those involved in the recruitment process.

Organisations which have good training in place report a happier work environment, increased productivity, and higher retention rates.

Use of language

Many people are unaware that certain words or phrases carry bias or can be offensive to d/Deaf and disabled people. The UK government has created a guide on how to use inclusive language which advises:

Collective Terms and Labels

- Use 'd/Deaf and disabled people' and not 'the d/Deaf and disabled' or 'people with disabilities'. This is the preferred term of the d/Deaf and Disabled People's Movement in the UK.

- Many d/Deaf people consider themselves part of the 'Deaf community' and use a capital D when describing themselves as Deaf to emphasise their Deaf identity.

- Avoid medical labels such as 'Epileptic' as these can reinforce the stereotypes of d/Deaf and disabled people as patients or as being 'unwell'.

- Consider not only using the term 'd/Deaf and disabled people' in communications as not everyone identifies with this term. Alternative terms include 'people with health conditions or impairments' or 'people with lived experience of disability' or 'autistic people'.

- Respect people's self-identification.

Positive Language

- Portray d/Deaf and disabled people as active citizens. Show d/Deaf and disabled people achieving, being role models.

- Do not use negative phrases or words such as 'suffers from' which suggests a sense of helplessness or that the d/Deaf and disabled person is a victim, needing pity.

- Think about the implications of the terms you use. For example, referring to a person as being 'confined to a wheelchair' is negative, in fact the person's wheelchair enables independence.

Everyday Phrases

- Most d/Deaf and disabled people are happy to use the same everyday terms as non-d/Deaf and disabled people such as 'going for a walk' or 'it's nice to see you'.

- Slang phrases referring to impairments should not be used, for example 'blind drunk' or 'mental'.

In Greater Manchester, guidance documents on inclusive language have been co-produced by different communities of experience working with GM Equality Alliance. This is reviewed and updated regularly and can be found **here.**

Inclusive language should be used by all staff on all correspondence and documents and on an organisation's website. Regular reviews should be undertaken to ensure the wording remains appropriate as preferred language can change. Some terms which were acceptable a few years ago are unacceptable now and may result in negative attention.

A long history of othering d/Deaf and disabled people has had damaging consequences. You should always give a d/Deaf or disabled person – all people! - time to speak and never try and finish their sentence for them- this is not 'helping' them but disempowering them and patronising. Everyone should be spoken to in the same tone and addressed directly (including when they have an interpreter or advocate with them).

Melissa– "I have a speech impediment as part of my disability. I once had a colleague talk over me to another one saying 'Melissa meant this' when I was trying to talk. It made me feel disempowered that they didn't let me speak for myself".

Identity

Not every person with an impairment or health condition identifies as having one, sometimes due to the stigma attached to this. Unfortunately, there is still hostility and discrimination towards d/Deaf and disabled people out there in society so many prefer to keep this aspect of themselves private. Self-identification should be respected.

Never disclose someone's impairment or health condition without their consent. If the person has told their colleagues about this themselves, do not refer to this to identify them. For example, do not use 'deaf Sarah' but simply 'Sarah'.

Nearly 80% of d/Deaf and disabled people have a hidden impairment. It's important to always ask people what they need and not make assumptions.

Designing Jobs to be Flexible

A flexible job is crucial to many d/Deaf and disabled people and is the most required adjustment. Flexible work refers not only to the working hours of the role but also the location of the role and the way it is done. Most jobs can be undertaken flexibly nowadays as modern technology means we can be connected anywhere. Allowing d/Deaf and disabled people the opportunity to work remotely and to manage their working hours, helps them work on days when their condition presents more of a challenge or when personal assistance plans fail at the last minute. d/Deaf and disabled people may be caring for other people and / or have children so flexible working can also support them to manage those challenges.

A truly flexible approach allows a person to work what times they want and at a location of their choice without giving prior notice. None of us have foresight regarding our health, or barriers outside of our control, and having restrictions on flexible work may mean a d/Deaf and disabled person cannot stay in employment. A good employer recognises that provided the outputs are achieved in the desired timeframe, it should not matter when or where a person works.

Melissa- "Although I love my job, I think it's a shame I've not been able to have a different career because of my disability. I've had to work as a freelance writer as there were no other options for me due to the design of jobs or employers not giving me a chance. Ideally, I would like to have a more secure job and income."

Workplace Set Up and Accessibility

An inclusive workplace accommodates a full range of access requirements, making it easy for people to have a good day at work and carry out their roles.

Consider the following:

- How will your employees get around the workplace?

- Where will they sit? d/Deaf people may prefer to sit with the wall directly behind them so no one can surprise them from behind. Others may prefer to sit in a room with soft lighting; on a desk close to the toilets/exit/quiet room/their supervisor or on ground level.

- What kind of software, equipment or stationary do they require?

- Can all employees access all facilities with ease? (e.g. Toilets, kitchen, the kettle/boiler, stationary room, meeting rooms, reception etc)?

- Do they use a workplace Personal Assistant and is your workplace set up to support that?

- Are workplace systems accessible (CRM systems, data capture / recording systems, apps / technology for working together, workplace rules and requirements, internal meetings and events)?

Photos - An Organisation's Public Face

If an organisation's website, social media or other marketing and communications does not show photos of a diverse range of d/Deaf and disabled employees, it does not indicate that they are represented in the workplace and may dissuade a d/Deaf and disabled person from applying for a role there. What kind of photos are on your marketing and social media? Who do these represent? How often do you update them?

Evidence of Inclusivity in the Office Environment

When a new starter arrives at the office, there should be visible indicators of inclusivity in the workplace such as:

- All signs written in large black text and Braille. The simpler and clearer the signage, the better. You can also use pictures alongside words to make things clearer. You could also consider having the BSL sign language translation on these so that colleagues are able to communicate the sign with Deaf colleagues.

- Kitchen equipment to cater for all access requirements. Organisations such as the Royal National Institute for Blind People provide guidance on product accessibility. Consider labelling items in the kitchen in text and Braille so it is clear what can be used by everyone and what items are personal or colleagues' own. Make sure that kettles and all cupboards are within safe reach of wheelchair users and people of short stature.

- Evidence of staff social activities which are accessible for all colleagues - the way that staff activities and events are communicated must be accessible to everyone.

- Evidence of EDI training undertaken by all staff. Anti-discrimination policies displayed in public spaces.

- Names, job roles, photos, and bios of staff on a staff notice board- this will also be replicated in the induction pack and on an intranet in an accessible format. Having clear, large name signs at desks allows a new starter to easily understand who people are and what their role is.

- Inclusion posters such as phrases in BSL, how to ask for reasonable adjustments and what kind of adjustments are available to all employees.

Inclusion Officer

In larger organisations a nominated 'inclusion' officer will know exactly what grants, software or adjustments are available for someone with an impairment or health condition and can arrange any support requests before someone joins. They could also provide advice on what benefits may be claimable whilst in employment. An inclusion officer continually assesses policies and procedures to ensure an organisation is taking every available step to make the workplace accessible to all.

Waqar - "In my experiences it's only d/Deaf and disabled people who understand the issues faced by d/Deaf and disabled people."

Evidence of Staff Voice

If you request feedback from your employees, you must acknowledge this and act upon it in a prompt manner. Many employers have boards displayed in the office for 'you said, we did' which shows that they've considered the suggestions, what action they've taken or the reason they've been unable to implement it. Any information on notice boards in workplaces need to be available in other formats or online, especially if people are working remotely.

There should be a variety of feedback channels available which are always accessible by all staff- a physical feedback box, an email inbox, regular accessible staff surveys, discussion points in team meetings and in one to one's etc.

Opinions on how things are going can change, especially if the organisation is going through change / restructuring etc. Feedback should be requested on a regular basis. Many larger organisations have networks or forums for d/Deaf and disabled staff where they can collectively discuss ideas and suggestions. It is important that these forums or networks are linked into senior management and are engaged in future planning, not just when things have already happened.

Leadership

Leaders shape the culture of the organisation and set the example for the rest of the team. A good leader naturally displays qualities of inclusion, fairness and creates 'psychological safety' for those around them. Employees must feel they can make mistakes or raise concerns without fear of reprimand- happy work cultures celebrate failure and see this as a learning tool.

Good leaders recognise and acknowledge success, offer support whenever needed and demonstrate the core values of the organisation. Organisational values which emphasise inclusion, helping one another and creating a culture of openness can lay the foundation for this.

Where do your leaders work- are they visible and regularly present in the office or in team meetings? Do they regularly go around and speak to the team? Do they sit with other team members, or do they stay behind a closed door all day? Consider what kind of signals each of these actions give off.

Leaders must always call out bad behaviours and hold employees accountable for actions which don't align with the organisation's values. Employees should be able to hold their leaders accountable for their actions without fear of reprimand.

Promotion from Within

An inclusive employer helps all their employees with their career aspirations and goals; employees shouldn't have to leave to secure a pay rise or promotion. Our interests change as our career progresses- does your organisation allow employees to learn new skills or transfer to other areas of the business? By limiting roles to only 'those with experience' you are missing out on untapped, loyal talents within your own organisation who are keen to learn something new. Some employers allow their staff to 'work shadow' other teams to understand more about their job roles.

Monitoring career progression of your d/Deaf and disabled employees will ensure equal opportunities and inclusion for all.

Brian – "Deaf people are very good at concentrating and can excel academically as they don't have the distractions other workers do. Sadly, Deaf people are often passed up for promotion."
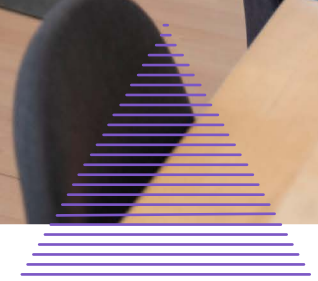
Advertising Roles

Digital exclusion is a challenge faced by many d/Deaf and disabled people as not everyone has access to the internet for a range of reasons. These include lack of accessible equipment, poorly designed websites, poverty, and digital skills gaps.

Therefore, it's important to advertise job roles in a variety of ways so that you reach more d/Deaf and disabled people. Some ideas are:

- Your own website.

- Local Jobcentres.

- On local notice boards in libraries, public places, community groups etc.

- Social media - Twitter, Facebook etc.

- Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn.

- Speciality job websites such as **DisabilityJob.co.uk**, **Evenbreak.co.uk** and **disabledworkers.org.uk**

- Government or charity programmes such as the **Intensive Personalised Employment Support programme, Employ Me**, or the **Autism at Work programme.**

- Using local organisations of and for d/Deaf and disabled people such as **Breakthrough UK**, **Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People**, **Manchester Deaf Centre**, **Manchester People First, Autizma**.

- Many local housing associations have employability teams who seek to secure jobs for their tenants at no cost to the employer.

- Asking to attend meetings of organisations working with d/Deaf and/or disabled people so you can talk about the roles you have and encourage people to apply.

Accessibility of Advert

To make a job advert accessible to d/Deaf and disabled people it should be available in many formats such as Braille, easy read, audio, British Sign Language video and audio, not just a word document. An unformatted word document in clear English is a great starting point for making or commissioning other formats. Having an up-to-date list of organisations who can prepare the various formats will ensure the process is smooth and do allow time to produce these when going out to recruit.

Inclusivity of Advert

The language used in the job advert is clear and easy to understand with no technical jargon unless necessary. Abbreviations should not be used, or if they must be used, they need to be clearly explained. Ensure that language used to describe what type of person you are looking for is inclusive. Gender-neutral language is best practice. Some words such as 'dynamic', 'strong', 'competitive', 'agile' and 'driven' can carry unconscious bias which might indicate that they are more suitable for a preferred gender, non-d/Deaf or disabled people or a younger candidate.

It is also important to ensure that adverts only ask for the necessary skills, expertise and knowledge for the role. For example, if the role requires someone to be able to drive (e.g., to transport other people or a delivery service) it would be appropriate to state that the person needs to have a driving licence. However, many jobs can be done in different ways, and Access to Work can provide support where travel is required as part of a person's role, so using a phrase like 'must be able to drive' could be excluding certain d/Deaf disabled people from applying.

Referencing that a person will need to make lots of telephone calls may put off a d/Deaf person or someone with a speech difference. If it is necessary to include this in the job advert, make it clear that you already have appropriate software available to assist and that adjustments are available. Staff may also be eligible for support via the government's Access to Work scheme for an interpreter or personal assistance to enable them to carry

out these tasks, where they are essential to the role.

Orla - "Being visually impaired, this 'requirement' has stopped me from applying for numerous jobs in the past."

Including the name, email address and text number of the hiring manager on the job advert will allow an applicant to clarify any details about the role before they decide to apply. It can also be very useful for d/Deaf people so that they can ask questions about the job via text. You might want to include a photo of the recruiting person on the advert as this helps put a name to a face.

Setting out the timeline of the application process within the job advert can put applicants at ease. They will know when to expect a response from their application, when the interview is likely to be, what kind of interview it will be and when they will know the outcome. It's good practice to state that an applicant has the option to request a virtual or in person interview should their application be successful.

Many employers use employment agencies or other types of recruitment support organisations. It is important that as the employer, you ensure that the agency is acting inclusively on your behalf. There are agencies that specialise in recruiting d/Deaf and disabled people into roles such as: **Disability Job Site or Evenbreak.**

Format of Application Forms / Documents

Application forms can be long and time consuming to complete and can put people off from applying. They can create barriers for many people for different reasons. Consider whether all the questions or information asked for is necessary. Other options include:

- **Sending a CV** - sometimes just a simple CV will suffice. The applicant will likely already have one ready to send over. There are tools which can be used to anonymise them.

- **Informal open days** - potential applicants can attend your workplace to learn more about your organisation, culture and the vacancies available. This gives you and your team a chance to meet them in an informal setting where all parties are relaxed. They can then apply for a job afterwards if they feel it would be the right fit.

- **Video introductions** - ask applicants to send a short video message about themselves which could be done using their smartphone.

- **An informal telephone call** - invite applicants to call or text for further information about the role and if they are interested after this, ask them to send over a CV. This may be appropriate if there is a short turnaround time in filling the vacancy and the applicant may not have time to submit a written application. It is also a good way to help d/Deaf and disabled applicants build confidence in applying for the role. Make sure that anyone doing these informal chats is aware of the organisations responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments and limits the conversation to someone's skills and abilities, not the impact of their impairment / health condition.

- **Do a paid work trial** - if appropriate for the person and the job you want them to do, you could ask the applicant to undertake a work trial. It's easy to teach skills and knowledge, you can't teach enthusiasm and a willingness to learn. This gives an applicant a fair chance to show what they are capable of, although may not be suitable for everyone or some job roles.

Be careful not to disregard a written application because of spelling mistakes. For some people, such as those born Deaf, their first language is Sign Language. You could accept applications in British Sign Language via WhatsApp or video which removes communication barriers for some people.

Make sure that when you offer applicants the opportunity to apply via a different method, that you have thought through a fair process for judging all applicants fairly, regardless of the format they submitted their application in.

If someone has applied using a BSL video, make sure you use a trained BSL interpreter to advise you what the applicant has said so that their application can be judged fairly.

Katrina - "I often need help filling out forms and applications. I would prefer to have either a video application or to just do a paid trial shift."

Melissa - "One of the best experiences I've had was a mixture of presentation, group work and an interview. It allowed me to show off my skills in different ways."

Waqar - "I like job adverts where they easily separate each of the criteria so I can understand where my skills fit."

Katrina - "I went to hand my CV out in person for a job role but was told 'we don't do them people', referring to my disability. It made me feel very upset."

Unless the vacancy must be urgently filled, it should remain open for as long as possible to allow for extra time for an applicant with an impairment or health condition to apply, with the deadline being clearly marked on the advert. Not everyone is able to complete an application form quickly and some may be disadvantaged by a short deadline or turnround time. (Allowing three weekends is a good benchmark.) Those involved for an interview should be given plenty of time to prepare.

Brian - "A Deaf person's first language will be sign language which has a different sentence structure to English."

Declaration

Including a statement on the job advert that all reasonable adjustments for virtual or face to face interviews will be supported will help to remove any concerns a person might have about disclosing their impairment or health condition at this initial stage. Individual access requirements can be ascertained once an interview is arranged.

Melissa - "Despite having done a law degree, until last year I wasn't aware that I could ask for help or adjustments during the interview process. If someone doesn't know their rights, they don't know what to ask for."

Interview Process

The interview process can be nerve wracking for most applicants but there are many ways that stresses can be reduced:

Offering Choice of in Person or Virtual Interviews

- Give the applicant the choice of an in person, telephone, or a virtual interview. Someone facing mobility barriers may prefer a virtual interview as it reduces the stress of having to travel. If the interview is online, ask an applicant if they would like captioning on the video and if they would like a practice run to familiarise themselves with the software being used for the interview.

- In-person interviews allow an applicant to read body language which can't be seen on screen. They can also ascertain what the journey to the workplace would be like and assess the working environment to see if it's the right fit.

- For virtual interviews, offer the applicant the choice of having their camera on or off unless it is an access requirement for someone in the meeting, e.g., to lip read. Someone with a visible difference, for example, may worry about being unfairly judged on their appearance. Although it's important to remember that interview panel members should have been trained on acceptance of visible difference. You could communicate this to the candidate before the interview, so they feel more confident about being seen by the panel.

- The dress code can be confirmed when sending out the interview invite.

Send Out the Interview Questions in Advance

- Seeing the interview questions in advance puts people at ease and takes away any element of surprise. You can also allow notes to be taken into the interview so that an interviewee has prompts for their answers.

- Ensure the format of these questions is appropriate for the applicant prior to sending these. (For example, does it need to be in larger text, Braille or on coloured paper?)

- If an interpreter or communicator is attending the interview, send them a copy of these questions in advance too.

- Try to make the questions as direct and specific as possible so it's clear what skills, knowledge or experience you are looking for. Long or multi-part questions are generally not good practice.

Make sure all communications to any d/Deaf and disabled applicants about the selection and interview process are done in their preferred format.

Melissa – "It's really helpful for me to see the interview questions in advance. This allows me to practice saying words and communicating a response. Part of my disability means that I can forget words. I've had some interviewers accuse me of being drunk in an interview because of my speech impediment."

Timing and Format of Interview

- Allow time to arrange for interpreters as this can take several weeks.

- Next day interviews are not accessible for most people so factor in plenty of notice for the interview date.

- Ask the applicant whether they have any access requirements for the interview room such as dimmed lighting or a particular kind of seating, for example.

- Advise the applicant how long the interview will be, what format it will take and what will be discussed (if this varies from the interview questions).

- Provide the option of having a break during the interview. This could either be at a set time or whenever the candidate feels one is needed.

- Always allow more time for interviewing a d/Deaf and disabled person, and especially so when there is an interpreter or communicator there translating answers, for example. Someone facing mobility barriers may

take more time getting to the interview so extra time can also allow for potential delays or for the interview to overrun.

- If you do not allow for extra time the interview may feel rushed and the applicant might feel they did not get a fair chance. The applicant should have time to respond to all the interview questions in full.

- At the end of the interview, remember to thank the applicant for their time and outline the next steps with a timeframe.

Orla – "If an employer doesn't already have suitable software to use during an interview or test, they can often download a free trial."

Profiles of Interviewers

Sending out photos and short bios of the interviewers can put applicants at ease and help them easily identify the interviewers on arrival. The bios need not be work related but a few sentences on their hobbies and interests outside of work.

Waqar – "I'd like to know who is interviewing me in advance, such as a short bio on the interviewer in advance and a photo of them. I think would make me feel more at ease going to the interview as it would have broken the ice in advance."

Interpreters, Communicators and Personal Assistants

- British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters can rarely be booked at short notice and waiting times are usually several weeks minimum. It's worth having a good relationship with an interpreter so they can get to know your organisation, understand job roles and the culture should the applicant have any questions.

- A Deaf applicant may already have a preferred interpreter they would like to use for interviews. Check what their preference is and offer to reimburse any interpreter or communicator the applicant books themselves. Access to Work can pay for BSL interpreters, lip speakers or other communication support at job interviews. The person themselves has to apply for this:

Access more information

- BSL is not universal throughout the UK and there are many regional dialects. If you are booking an interpreter for the interview allow 15-30 minutes before the start for the interpreter and applicant to meet so they can understand each other's signs. If this is not done, the interpreter may misinterpret a sign which could cause a detriment to the applicant's interview.

- When interviewing someone with an interpreter, speak directly to the interviewee. Do not direct questions to the interpreter. Keeping your mouth area visible and free from obstructions will allow for lipreading.

- Confirm with the applicant when arranging the interview how they would like the room set up and where there would prefer the interpreter to be sat.

- Tell the applicant and interpreter how they will know if there is a fire alarm and what the evacuation process is. Many meeting rooms may not have a flashing light to denote an alarm has gone off.

- If the applicant is bringing a personal assistant check in advance whether they will be accompanying them in the interview room. Someone may say no initially but might get nervous before the interview starts and change their mind, so it's a good idea to ask again on the day. If you do not ask them a second time on the day, they may be too nervous to request this themselves which might impact their ability and confidence during the interview.

- It's best to have somewhere accessible nearby for the applicant (and any interpreter) to sit during this break- it may feel uncomfortable for them to remain in the interview room with the interviewers whilst they are on a break.

- Allow time and space for the applicant and an interpreter to meet afterwards in private to discuss how the interview went.

Brian – "If an interpreter is not properly qualified, they are liable to misinterpret the question which could cost a Deaf person the job as the Deaf person would be answering the question wrongly."

Plan of the Interview Location and Room

- By sending over a plan of the workplace in advance, an applicant can understand where they will be going on the day, where they check in, the accessibility, where the facilities are and where they will be sat before the interview. If you know where your applicant is travelling from, you could also send suggested public transport routes and times. If you have a choice of venues to interview from, choose an accessible venue close to good public transport links with on-site parking.

- Make sure that entry systems like buzzers, keypads etc are accessible. Or you could arrange for someone to meet the person at the entrance to assist with getting into the building as this could help remove anxiety about getting into the building before the interview starts.

- If parking is available on site, advise in advance where this is and if there is any cost.

- If parking is not available on site, provide information on where an applicant can park including where they can find accessible parking spaces. It's also helpful to provide information on parking charges and on any free parking close by, if there is any.

- Ensure any accessible (blue badge) places in an organisation's car park are available for use.

- If the applicant is attending with a guide/support dog or animal and your workplace has animals, check with the applicant if these need to be removed. Ensure water is available for the applicant's animal and that they know where it can go to the toilet.

- Have pens and paper, or other note taking device (ask the applicant what they would like) during the interview in case the applicant would like to make notes.

Unconscious Bias Training

Any staff member involved in the recruitment process should undertake regular unconscious bias training. Although we may genuinely believe we're being fair and non-discriminatory, the idea of unconscious bias is that we don't realise we aren't. Training should be undertaken and renewed on a regular basis by all hiring managers and those reviewing applications (minimum every 6 months).

There are many software tools available, such as MeVitae, which use computational linguistics to remove details on a CV or cover letter which might indicate ethnicity, marital status, gender and disability (amongst others). Software is more accurate than relying on your talent team and will save you time.

Make sure that interviewers do not ask d/Deaf and disabled people about their impairment or health condition and its impact on their ability to do the role, this is potentially discriminatory. It is very important that staff focus on asking about the skills, experience and knowledge needed for the role.

Melissa – "I've been asked in interviews about my disability or whether I can walk. Interviewers should have an understanding of someone's disability already before they meet them."

Waqar – "I wish there was a third party who I could tell information to about my disability and they could explain it to my employers. This would be good for those who feel shy about talking about their conditions."

Candidate Feedback

Both good and bad feedback is always important and helps us grow. Feedback is best when it's in a positive, constructive manner. A 'sandwich approach' works well - provide praise on strengths, feedback on development areas, followed by praise again. Be mindful that this may be someone's first job interview and it may have taken a lot of courage to apply for the role and attend the interview.

People prefer to receive feedback in different ways so ask the applicant at the end of the interview how they would like this- by phone, in an email, virtual call or by letter.

Katrina – "It can knock my confidence when I don't get a job, especially when they don't give me feedback why."

Preparing for Their First Day

Access to Work

Access to Work is a government grant scheme to help pay for practical support for d/Deaf and disabled people in the workplace such as support workers, BSL interpreters and taxi fares for people who do not drive and cannot use public transport. It does not cover reasonable adjustments which an employer is responsible for making. Check what access requirements or support requirements a new starter has at the earliest possible stage so you can have plenty of time to arrange these together for their first day.

A good employer should be very knowledgeable on the support a new starter can access - it shouldn't be up to the new starter to find this out.

Employment Contract

- Ensure the statement of main terms is sent to the new starter well in advance of start date and in an accessible format. It is not good practice to present someone with a document they cannot access. On their first day, there should be chance to go through the document and check the details with the person. You will then need to provide them with a full employment contract, again in their preferred format, and ensure that they understand it. Your nominated inclusion officer could meet with them in advance and check they are happy with the contract.

- If the employment contract needs to be translated into Braille, this may take longer to send out to the new starter. Some local disabled people's organisations, and charities such as the RNIB, offer this service – contact them as soon as the offer has been accepted to get the process started and understand the timeframe. Keep the applicant updated at all stages so they can understand the timeframes and any potential delays.

- d/Deaf and disabled people are often passed up for promotion and can get stuck in entry level jobs regardless of their potential, skills and experience. Make sure that you clearly explain how their performance will be managed, how they will be supported and trained, and what options there may be for career development in the organisation.

- Be mindful not to presume what someone's aspirations are - some employees may want to simply stay in the role they applied for, and some may wish to progress further. People that have experienced barriers or discrimination in other jobs may just want focus on settling in and getting to grips with their new job, before being ready to think about training, development and career progression. Talk to the person openly about what concerns or issues they have faced before so that these can be tackled to make their introduction to their new role as smooth and stress-free as possible.

Induction Plan

Creating an induction plan sets out what a person can expect before they start their role and during the first days and weeks doing the job. This should include:

- Where their workstation will be.

- Who they will be working with- this could include photos, names and short bios about their hobbies and interests.

- A diagram of the organisation showing all the different roles you have and who people report to.

- What kind of tasks they will do in their first week and who can support them.

- What equipment they will get, how this works and any passwords.

- The name of inclusion officer and/ or the person who looks after the Access to Work Scheme.

- Details of any upcoming social events.

- Where the toilets are.
- What kitchen facilities there are.
- Where there is a quiet space.
- What happens at lunch or break times?
- Where they can keep belongings.

This induction plan should be more than just the contents of the staff handbook which sets out policies and procedures. An induction plan is a great way to show off your culture and what it's like to work for your organisation. It is also a good way to get new staff used to how things work, see what work others do, and start to get an idea of what will be expected of them and how their performance will be assessed and managed.

This induction plan should ideally be sent to a new starter in an accessible format before their first day so they have time to read and digest it. Although these plans tend to be written, you could also consider alternatives such as an audio recording or a short video from their line manager introducing themselves and explaining the induction process. You can ask for the new starter's preference when they accept the job offer so you have time to plan.

Induction plans can often require people to read a lot of policies and procedures. For some jobs, this will be necessary, so in that case make sure the format of the documents is accessible to the person. For some jobs though, the person won't need to know lots of complex details, so consider providing key points in a simpler format or using pictures to help explain what is required or needs to be understood by the person. Make sure that the person can ask questions and discuss this information to make sure that everything is clear.

Workspace Setup

Interpreters, Personal Assistants and Communicators

Confirm with the new starter what the access requirements are for an interpreter, communicator or personal assistant. How long will they be required for (for example, a day, the first week or the first month) and is there adequate seating, equipment, parking, and kitchen facilities arranged for them? Is the organisation paying them directly and claiming the money back from Access to Work, or will they be appointed directly by the person or an agency? Do you have a written policy for working with support workers and interpreters and a shared understanding of who they are accountable to and what to do if the person steps outside of the enabling boundaries of their role?

Where will the new starter be located?

- Check whether the new starter has a preference on where they are sat if in an office-based role, and arrange this prior to the start date. A plan of the office can be sent in advance so a person can choose a specific location.

- If there is a workstation location in the workplace that the person prefers for access reasons, but there is already a person located there, it is up to the employer to facilitate the other person to relocate so that they can meet the requirements of the new staff member.

Hot-desking / multiple working locations

Many employers now use hot-desking systems or allow people to work from different office locations. Your d/Deaf and disabled staff should have the same amount of flexibility to do this as other staff. If your staff can work from multiple locations, think about how you can make those locations accessible to the person, so they have the same amount of flexibility as other staff.

If a person requires certain equipment or workstation arrangement to meet their access requirements, you could exempt them from any requirement to hot-desk and reserve a workstation for their sole use. This means they do not have to readjust equipment or other arrangements each time they come to work.

Working from Home / Remotely

Some people prefer to work from home, some can find it more difficult than being in the workplace, and some people like a mixture of the two. Talk to your new staff member about what arrangement they would like so you can work on how this can be put in place whilst still getting the job done.

If a d/Deaf and disabled staff member works from home, you will need to ensure that their home-based workstation is accessible and safe in the same way you would if they were in the workplace.

It is also important to agree ways of communicating what's going on in the workplace and making sure the d/Deaf or disabled person feels connected to their team, especially if they are home working because of their access requirements and most other staff are in the workplace most of the time. It is vital that d/Deaf and disabled staff do not feel isolated and left out.

Company Whilst Working Remotely

Working alone remotely can become isolating for some employees. Some people connect with team mates online by having their camera on together during the day- this means they can see each other on screen and chat if needed but are able to work on their own.

For others, they may wish to use websites like FocusMate or Work Buddies Online which pair you up with a strangers to work together online. After you have introduced yourselves to one another you are put on mute so there are no distractions during your focus time.

Everyone has different preferences to how they work, and some may prefer to work alone. Always ask what a person's preference is rather than assuming this.

Fire Alarms

Ensure the new starter knows what happens in the event of a fire and that colleagues are aware of the evacuation process for the new starter too. It is a good idea to have a practice fire alarm in the first fortnight of a new starter commencing employment so all staff can feel confident of the evacuation process- you do not want an emergency to be the first time if you are evacuating someone using a wheelchair from a tall building.

Fire alarm signals should be in visible places and with flashing lights.

Personal Evacuation Plans

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that everyone can evacuate the workplace in the event of a fire. It can be useful to develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan or PEEP with a d/Deaf or disabled staff member so that you can agree what action will be taken to ensure their safe evacuation. However, not every d/Deaf or disabled person will need such a plan - it is important not to make assumptions.

What kind of stationary, equipment and software do they require to do the job?

Ensure the new starter has all the correct stationary for their requirements and obtain the requirements before their start date so it is ready to use from day one. (Details can be ascertained when sending out the offer letter.) If software is being used, make sure other staff members know how to use this so they can assist if this malfunctions or provide training.

Check in with the new starter regularly to ensure the equipment is working, helpful and whether any additional things are required.

Waqar – "One employer sent me some green papers notepads and a green-hued laptop overlay before I even started which made me feel supported."

Security

Make sure that any security procedures you have for getting into the building, or moving around the building, are accessible and inclusive. For example, door entry systems that rely on someone hearing a person speak at the other end would not be accessible for a d/Deaf person so you could arrange for them to text a colleague to gain entry to the building.

Parking

Check that there is parking available for the new starter (if they have their own transport), and that there is an allocated space close to the accessible building entrance.

Getting to and from work and travelling for work

Some people will use public transport to get to work or will be relying on family or friends to get them to work. They may also require adjustments in relation to any travel they have to do for their job. It is a good idea to talk to them about their journey so that you are aware of their travel arrangements and can ensure they know where to go and are safe. Access to Work can provide support with travel to work and for when people need to travel for their job.

Management Support

We all have different ways we like to be managed- some enjoy close support whilst others may feel this approach is 'micromanaging'. When onboarding a new starter, ask them what their preferred approach is and follow this. This will ensure you get the best out of your new team member and start off on a good relationship.

Training on tasks

Good training is the foundation to an employee being able to carry out their job to the best of their ability. Many employers fail to tailor this to their employees and do not ask their preferred method of learning new skills. This can be difficult for some neurodivergent people who learn better from 'doing' rather than watching. By offering training in a variety of formats, and having this available at all times as a referral point, an employer can be inclusive to those with an impairment and health conditions.

Waqar – "Sometimes I've told employers what tasks I struggle with in interviews but then they forget this when I'm actually in the role. The best practice would be to ask someone how they struggle when they get in to a role and ask what support they've had in the past."

Team Integration

Disability Inclusion Training

Ensure all staff have undergone Disability Inclusion Training and Deaf Awareness Training. Gestures such as saying hello to a Deaf person in British Sign Language (BSL) on their first day can make them feel welcome and settled easily. Disability Inclusion Training focuses on taking action to remove barriers d/Deaf and disabled people may face whereas Deaf Awareness Training has a stronger focus on Deaf culture, language, communication and etiquette when working with d/Deaf people.

Staff training should be renewed on a regular basis and assessed to see if it is still fit for purpose.

Brian - "It made a big difference to me when I started a role once where all the staff had undergone Deaf Awareness Training and knew how to sign some phrases to me."

Buddy System

A buddy system is where a staff member is assigned to 'look after' a new starter during their induction period to help them settle into their new role and get to grips with tasks. Sometimes this person is within their team, sometimes it is someone outside of their team.

Always ask a new starter whether they would like to be assigned a buddy and, if so, whether they would prefer someone in their team or someone outside of their team. The person's line manager should never be their buddy as they may not feel comfortable asking questions as they fear the line manager may think they cannot do the job. The benefit of a buddy outside of the team is that a person may feel they can open up to them more freely.

If a buddy is requested, ensure the new starter understands what to expect from them. For example, is this just someone to ask questions or is this someone they can sit with at lunch? How long will the pairing last for?

Katrina- "One of the reasons I want a job is so that I can meet people and make new friends. It's important for me to feel part of a team in a job."

Availability Signs for Workstations

When someone is new to a workplace, they may find it challenging to know when they can approach other staff members. Some employers use a 'sign' system whereby they have a sign on their workstation to say if they are available or busy. This sign can be a word or could be a colour system such as red (busy), amber (working but available for important questions) or green (available).

If signs are used, they must be a mode which is recognisable and instantly available for all employees, such as wording for those who are colourblind; Braille or large print for those with visual impairments; and easy to see from anywhere in the office for those with mobility impairments.

If your staff work remotely, make sure that this system is replicated in your remote working arrangements, as people can feel even less able to contact colleagues for help if they are not located with them physically.

Team Social Activities / Staff Well-Being Activities

We spend a lot of time at work and it's important we get on with one another. Team social activities and well-being activities are a great way of getting to know colleagues on a more personal level. Are your team social events / well-being activities inclusive of all staff? A person facing mobility barriers may not want to take part in a team walk for example, or someone who dislikes noisy / busy environments may not find a party / pub visit inclusive.

If these will be held outside of the organisation's premises, check in advance that the venue is accessible for any d/Deaf and disabled employees and have the venue confirm this in writing. Whenever possible do a site visit and go through a brief checklist, as many organisations believe themselves to be accessible when they are not. Local disabled people's organisations will often know about accessible venues in your area.

Check what support any employee may require for getting to and from this venue and arrange this well in advance. Make sure that you check with staff that these activities are appropriate and inclusive.

It's common for some larger organisations to have social committees to look after events. It's important that anyone can join these and that the committee members change every 3-6 months. This stops any repetition with the same style of events being organised and avoids any 'cliquey' groups forming.

An employer can use staff surveys or suggestion boxes (real and virtual) to ask for activity suggestions. These can be discussed at team meetings and then organised by any social committee (if present).

Brian – "d/Deaf and disabled people can often be excluded from social activities where these are only advertised in the office through 'word of mouth' and also when the activities occur without a BSL interpreter."

Hosting Events

If you are hosting external events which your employees will be attending, check what the accessibility is like before booking any venue.

Continual Support and Inclusion During Employment

Employers understand that, to do their best work and to thrive in the job they have been recruited to, people need ongoing support and they need to feel valued in their role. To enable a d/Deaf and/or disabled employee to achieve and progress once they are settled into their role, an employer can:

- Set clear objectives and targets for the job role and ensure these are understood. Let the person know what the process will be if they don't hit these and how their line manager can support them in achieving them. There might be further reasonable adjustments needed for the person to perform well and feel confident in what they are doing.

- d/Deaf and disabled people are often overlooked when promotion or career development opportunities come up. It is very important not to make assumptions about what a d/Deaf and disabled person can or may want to do. It is also important to consider what additional training, mentoring, shadowing, and other support you could offer to a d/Deaf and disabled staff member to enable them to make the most of any opportunities that do come up.

Waqar - "I like to receive regular feedback so I know how well I'm doing and any development areas, sometimes employers only focus on the negatives."

Ensure the right management style is being used- for example does your employee like weekly face to face one to ones or do they prefer a monthly feedback email? What one person likes may cause another to feel anxious and stressed.

- Obtain regular feedback on what they as an employee are doing well and what can be improved. When feedback is received, ensure this is acted upon promptly. Employees should be able to provide feedback in a variety of ways, so they feel comfortable and safe to do so.

- Ensure communication channels are open so that the person feels supported and confident to talk about things that could be done to help them deliver their role well. It's also important to provide feedback about what is going well and what needs to improve. Always think about whether any reasonable adjustments are needed to support the person better.

- Regularly review the patterns of work and location of work to ensure this helps the employee work their best. Don't assume what worked one month will work the next.

- Call out discrimination from other members of staff at all levels.

Katrina - "What advice would I give employers? Don't judge us instantly, you don't know what we're capable of- we're just normal people at the end of the day."

Traffic light system for prioritising tasks

Using a traffic light system for tasks may help some employees understand what work to complete first. 'Red' indicates that the work is urgent and needed that day; 'amber' means there is more flexibility, but the work is important; and green indicates a longer time frame. The timeframes allocated to each colour will depend on the organisation; a different set of colours could be used for daily tasks as opposed to weekly or monthly ones. If all the tasks are to be done in a day, an employee will need to know which order- using 'red' for all of them will not work. If these colour systems are being used, the meanings of the colours should be universal throughout the organisation.

Not everyone will find this method helpful or accessible, some may find it patronising. It's important to find out how a person likes to work and simply offer this as a time management tool rather than a mandatory way of working.

Waqar – "If a role has repetitive weekly tasks, it can be difficult for a neurodiverse person to understand which to prioritise. A traffic light system would be very helpful."

Disability Related Leave

If an employee requires time off for a medical appointment which is connected to their impairment or health condition, this may be classed as a 'reasonable adjustment' and protected under the Equality Act 2010. A good employer will cover this type of absence already under their absence policy and will offer paid time off for employees to attend medical appointments. This is sometimes called 'disability-related leave'.

Disability-related sickness absence

Many employers use a 'trigger system' which flags when an employee has had a certain amount of sick leave and that absence management procedures need to start. This can include a 'back to work interview' where people are asked to account for their level of absence.

Processes like this are generic and may be discriminatory to some d/Deaf and disabled people if applied in a blanket way. You could discount some, or all, of the sickness absence related to a person's disability towards any trigger points and / or you could also increase the number of absences that will trigger a review. You can also record all types of disability absence separately to other sickness absence.

Some people may find it helpful to have a phased return to their job after a longer period of absence, and it's always important to consider what reasonable adjustments could assist the person to carry on their job, especially if they have a progressive condition or one that can fluctuate over time.

You could reallocate some parts of the persons' job to other members of the team for a short period to allow the person to settle back into work. It is important to ensure that team members are supported to deal with this positively as otherwise the d/Deaf disabled person can feel undermined or resented by their team and colleagues.

If there is a culture of flexible working in the organisation there should be no issue making any of these reasonable adjustments which support a d/Deaf and disabled member who needs to take time off because of their disability or health condition.
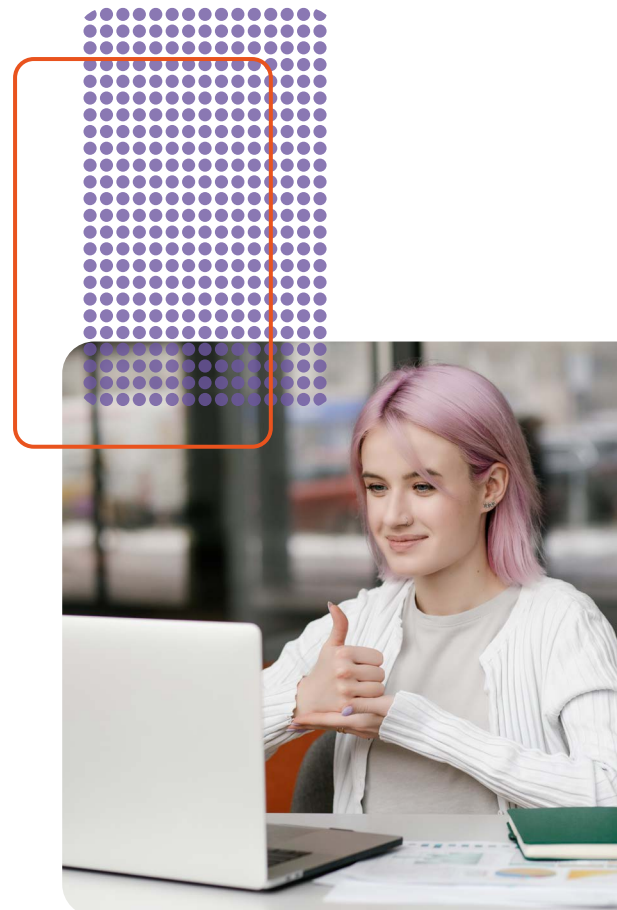
Ending the employment relationship

At some point the employment relationship will end. This might be because someone finds a job elsewhere or wants to do something different. It can also be because of organisational changes. It is important to make this part of the process as positive and inclusive as possible.

If it is the person's choice to leave their job, an exit conversation would be a good idea. It should be used as an opportunity for you to learn about whether the reasonable adjustments you made were effective, and whether there was anything you could have done differently. These conversations should help you make positive changes in your workplace so that other d/Deaf and disabled people will want to work for you.

Sometimes, organisations have to reduce the size of their workforce by making redundancies and / or restructuring their organisation. It is important to ensure that d/Deaf and disabled people are treated fairly in any restructure or redundancy process.

The person might benefit from coaching, shadowing, work tasters or job trials so that they have the best chance of succeeding if they must compete for jobs. Make sure all communications about these processes are inclusive and accessible.

Make sure that whatever criteria you set for deciding on redundancies are fair and non-discriminatory.

If your organisation has provided good training and support to managers about unconscious bias, this should help you to ensure that any restructure or redundancy process is as fair as possible.
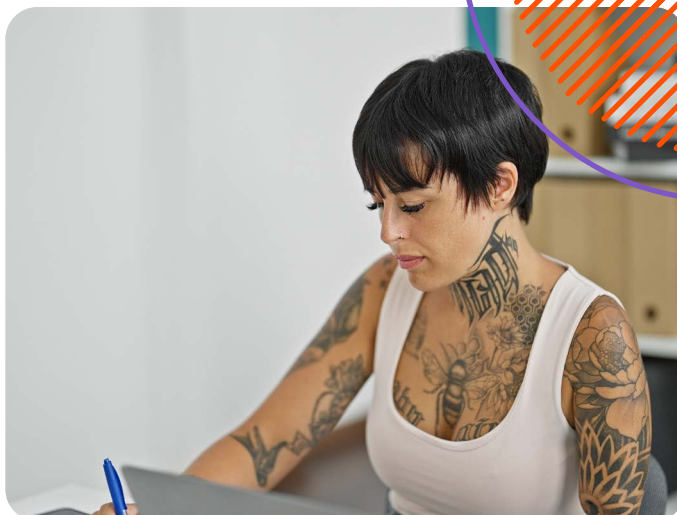
Employer Checklist

This checklist can be used as a reference tool during the recruitment process:

Inclusivity

☐ We understand our obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

☐ We always ask about reasonable adjustments on a regular basis to all staff and do not question any requests.

☐ All reasonable adjustment requests are acted upon quickly and feedback is sought afterwards from the employee to check everything is ok.

☐ We are part of the Disability Confident Scheme and aiming for level 3.

☐ All hiring managers have undergone unconscious bias and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training within the last 6 months.

☐ All team members undergo EDI and Deaf Awareness training as part of the onboarding process.

☐ EDI training is renewed regularly for all employees.

☐ Language used within the organisation is inclusive and non-discriminatory.

☐ All job roles can be undertaken on a flexible basis (unless this is a manual job).

☐ Flexible work can be requested from day 1 by all employees.

☐ Employees can work remotely whenever it suits them.

☐ Our workplace is accessible for all employees including an allocated accessible parking space, accessible toilets on each floor, working lifts and accessible kitchen with accessible appliances.

☐ We have equipment and software to accommodate those with additional needs.

☐ All signs are written in large text as well as Braille.

☐ Our website is fully accessible for d/Deaf and disabled people, and people with health conditions and we obtain regular feedback on this from users.

☐ Our website shows diversity and demonstrates our commitment to hiring d/Deaf and disabled people, and people with health conditions.

☐ Our office environment demonstrates our commitment to EDI.

☐ We have a nominated EDI or inclusion officer who is knowledgeable on Access to Work, reasonable adjustments, and other possible grants available to d/Deaf and disabled people at work.

☐ We have a suggestions box in the office and evidence that staff voices are heard and actioned upon.

☐ Our leaders are good role models and set a great example of inclusion.

☐ Employees are accountable to one another and call out bad behaviours or discrimination.

☐ Discrimination concerns are treated seriously and dealt with promptly.

☐ We remember that many impairments are invisible.

☐ Organisational policies are regularly reviewed to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion as best practice develops.

Advertising Vacancies

☐ We advertise roles on a variety of platforms.

☐ Our job adverts are in an accessible format.

- [ ] Our job adverts are written in clear, gender-neutral language with no technical jargon or abbreviations.

- [ ] We keep vacancies open for as long as possible to give applicants a fair chance at applying.

- [ ] We consider applications on merit and not on spelling or grammar.

- [ ] We consider the most appropriate method of application for each role and use the simplest, most accessible option, catering for all candidates.

- [ ] The hiring manager's details are listed on the job advert if an applicant has questions.

- [ ] The timescale for the application is listed on the job advert.

- [ ] The interview method is stated on the advert and confirms a candidate has a choice of in person, virtual or telephone interviews.

Interview Process

- [ ] Candidates have been offered an interview in their preferred format.

- [ ] Not everyone feels comfortable on camera and candidates are permitted to have this off during a virtual interview unless it is an access requirement for a member of the panel to lipread.

- [ ] Interview questions are sent out well in advance of the interview and in a format requested by the candidate.

- [ ] Photos and bios of the interviewers are sent to the candidate in advance.

- [ ] The candidate is given as much notice as possible of the interview date.

- [ ] The candidate is told of the content and format of the interview well in advance of the interview itself.

- [ ] The candidate has been asked what reasonable adjustments they need before the interview and is asked again the day before.

- [ ] A longer time slot is allocated for the interview, especially if there is an interpreter, communicator, or Personal Assistant (PA) attending.

- [ ] The interpreter, communicator or PA is sent the interview questions in advance.

- [ ] The candidate is asked again on the day whether they would like their PA in the interview room.

- [ ] The candidate is asked whether they would like a break during the interview and has the option to request this at any point during the interview itself.

- [ ] The interview room is accessible and is set up according to the candidate's request.

- [ ] The candidate is sent clear instructions on how to find the interview location, including a plan of the building, information of public transport routes and is allocated a parking space in the organisation's car park (if driving).

- [ ] There is parking available for the interpreter, communicator, or PA.

- [ ] The candidate is asked their preference for a BSL interpreter, and this is arranged as soon as possible.

- [ ] If the interpreter or communicator is not known to the candidate, they are allowed 15-30 minutes to meet alone in advance of the interview and again for 15-30 minutes afterwards.

- [ ] The candidate is asked whether they require any support getting to and from the interview.

- [ ] If a support animal is attending the interview, there is no conflict with other animals which may be on site.

- [ ] Interview questions are directed at the candidate and not the interpreter, communicator or PA.

- [ ] Interviewers speak clearly and without obstructing their mouths.

- [ ] Interviewers do not try and finish a candidate's sentence or answer.

- ☐ The interview is not rushed, and the candidate is given the opportunity to answer all questions.

- ☐ The candidate is told during the interview when to expect a response.

- ☐ Feedback provided is in a constructive and positive manner.

The first days and weeks in the job

- ☐ The new starter is asked what adjustments would work for them in the role and these are set up in advance of the start date.

- ☐ The organisation has accessed the Access to Work scheme on behalf of the candidate in advance of the start date.

- ☐ The employment contract is sent out in advance of the start date and in an accessible format.

- ☐ The employment contract sets out a clear progression path.

- ☐ An induction plan is sent in advance of the start date which sets out what to expect from the first week in the role.

- ☐ The new starter is asked about their communication support requirements before their start date and this is arranged in advance.

- ☐ The new starter is asked where they would like to sit and what their preferred workstation set up is.

- ☐ All equipment the candidate needs is procured and ready to use in advance of the start date.

- ☐ There is space for the interpreter, communicator or PA to sit in the office, when one is required by the new starter.

- ☐ All employees have undergone disability inclusion training and deaf awareness training.

- ☐ The new starter knows when they can approach other colleagues to ask for help, such as using workstation signs to denote availability.

- ☐ The candidate is asked how they like to be managed and supported, such as the regularity of one-to-one meetings.

- ☐ The candidate is asked about their preferred hours and location of working and this is accommodated.

Team Integration

- ☐ Ensure all staff have undergone Disability Inclusion Training and Deaf Awareness training.

- ☐ Staff training should be renewed on a regular basis and assessed to see if it is still fit for purpose.

- ☐ Always ask a new starter whether they would like to be assigned a buddy and, if so, whether they would prefer someone in their team or someone outside of their team.

- ☐ Consider using workstation availability signs so people know where to get help from in their team.

- ☐ Make sure any team activities, socials or well-being activities are inclusive for all staff.

Ongoing Support

- ☐ The employee knows what their targets and objectives are.

- ☐ Any performance management processes are inclusive and fair, and reasonable adjustments are reviewed and discussed on a regular basis to make sure they are effective.

- ☐ The organisation understands an employee's career aspirations and helps them achieve these.

- ☐ Regular feedback is obtained from employees to genuinely understand what the organisations doing well and anything which needs to change.

- The organisation treats every employee as an individual and never makes assumptions about their requirements.

- Successes are always celebrated, however small.

- Failures are also celebrated and seen as an opportunity to learn. The organisation promotes a culture of psychological safety.

- Make sure absence management procedures are inclusive, fair and supportive.

Ending the employment relationship

- When a person leaves, have an exit conversation with them about what the employer did well and what could be done better to make the workplace more inclusive.

- This conversation should be done by someone other than the person's manager, unless requested otherwise.

- Make sure that any redundancy or restructure process is fair, equitable and as supportive as possible.

- Consider if d/Deaf and disabled staff or prospective staff would benefit from coaching, mentoring, job shadowing, or work tasters, so that they can better compete for roles.

Helpful Resources

For more information, please click the link below that directs you to further guidance from our resources.

Click Here for Resources

gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk