



The  
Advonet  
Group  
Providing Independent Advocacy



## The Advonet Group

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## A Guide to Inclusive Hiring

# Introduction

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Asking You is part of The Advonet Group, an organisation providing advocacy services based in Leeds. The Advonet Group have over 20 years expertise in delivering high quality advocacy and developing innovative user-led services.

Asking You is Advonet's learning disability service, supporting adults with learning disabilities across Leeds to have their voices heard and to live active, connected lives. The service leads projects, advocacy, day opportunities, community activities and events, all shaped and co-produced by people with learning disabilities. Asking You creates safe and inclusive spaces where people can build confidence, develop skills, form friendships and influence the services that affect their lives, helping ensure that people with learning disabilities are visible, valued and included across the city.

6% of people with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in employment (Department of Health and Social Care, 2025). Inclusive employment is mutually beneficial for people with learning disabilities and employers. It is reported that people with a learning disability stay in work longer, are sick less than non-disabled employees and are reliable employees (Cimera, 2009). Whilst employing people with learning disabilities does require research, forethought and planning this guide includes research, case studies on our own employment practices and adaptations you can make for your own business to ensure your employment is accessible.

At Asking You, with the support of funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and the Motability Foundation and grant funding from Leeds City Council, our projects team is 60% staffed by people with a learning disability and/or autism. We have co-produced our inclusive employment model with our staff and have created this booklet to support other organisations on this journey.

# Barriers to Employment for People with Learning Disabilities

Despite people with a learning disability having ambitions to be employed there are still many barriers to accessing meaningful employment (Giri, et al., 2021). These barriers include transport issues, lack of suitable employment, poor self-esteem for the individual and negative societal attitudes and discrimination towards people with learning disabilities (Giri, et al., 2021).

There can also be lower expectations of people with learning disabilities from professionals involved in their lives, which has led to a lack of preparation for work. (Valuing People, 2001<sup>4</sup>)

Barriers can be found at the application stage for many people with learning disabilities. For example, online aptitude testing may be inaccessible due to a lack of digital skills, the tests themselves not meeting the Accessible Information Standard or using Easy Read principles and concerns around not meeting the timing requirements due to a need for increased processing time.



# Benefits of Hiring People with Learning Disabilities

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## Benefits to individuals

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'Valuing People' (Department of Health, 2001) states that employment is a major aspiration for people with learning disabilities and an important route to social inclusion.

In our own staff team, we discuss our inclusivity and how we can continue to improve our employment model at each one-to-one.

Staff have told us that:

"It is great working with people like me. We can relate to each other and work together well. I feel understood by my team."

"I feel proud to be a trainer with a learning disability. I've been able to grow and build my confidence."

"I enjoy working in a team with other people with autism and learning disabilities. We learn from each other."

## Benefits to employers

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Employing people with learning disabilities has many benefits for employers. These can include:

Disabled people are shown to stay in jobs longer and have less absenteeism which leads to savings on recruitment and training costs (Cimera, et al., 2009).

A representative business supports the public image of being a fair and inclusive employer (Siperstein, et al., 2006).

Disabled people are known to have higher employer loyalty and commitment to the organisation (Cimera, et al., 2009).

# Hiring Practices for People with Learning Disabilities

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Hiring Practices for people with learning disabilities requires small tweaks to ensure the hiring process is accessible, fair and successful. This can include creating easy read job descriptions, applications, and monitoring forms. Communication can always be improved and should be consistent with all applicants. This can include follow-up calls to discuss roles and responsibilities, detailing what the hiring process is, and offering clear feedback at the end of the process.

In this section, we will discuss the application process, interview themselves, and provide feedback to candidates.

## Applications

Roles should be advertised in easy read where possible as this is a common communication tool for adults with learning disabilities. This ensures understanding of the role requirements and ascertains whether candidates have the necessary skills for the role at the application stage. This could also be accompanied with a short video explaining the role, the organisation and the application criteria. This would support with cementing candidates' understanding and prevent inappropriate applications.

Example Job Description  
Asking You: Peer Mentor Consultant



This is a job description for the role of a Peer Mentor Consultant. This job is working with Asking You on the LIFE project.

LIFE stands for Leeds Inclusion For Employment.

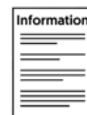
This document will tell you what your job will be if you are successful.

It will be used by you and your manager to see how well you are doing your job. Imogen Day will be your manager.

To find out more about the LIFE project please read the job advert.

If you need this document with a different coloured background please email [jobs@advonet.org.uk](mailto:jobs@advonet.org.uk) or call our team on 0113 244 0606

Example Job Description  
Asking You: Peer Mentor Consultant



**What is the Job?**

You will be an expert through lived experience.

You will be involving other people.

You will be helping with co-production.

You will be good at supporting others.

We will explain what these mean on the next page.

This is an example of an easy read role description.

It is important to advertise roles in places where people with learning disabilities are frequent. This could be a local day service, a self-advocacy organization for people with learning disabilities such as a People First group and using social media.

For example, in Leeds, people with learning disabilities receive a lot of their online information from Facebook pages and newsletters such as 'Through the Maze', which is designed to provide accessible information to people with learning disabilities about groups and events happening in their local area.

People with learning disabilities are unlikely to use job sites such as Indeed as these are not usually accessible or Easy Read.

For many people with disabilities, employers that are part of the Disability Confident Scheme can provide reassurance for applicants. The Disability Confident Scheme has three levels depending on the commitment your organisation is able to make. These commitments are as follows:

- Inclusive and accessible recruitment
- Communicating vacancies
- Offering an interview to disabled people
- Providing reasonable adjustments
- Supporting existing employees



## Interviews

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Formal panel style interviews can induce unnecessary anxieties and prevent candidates from being able to demonstrate their true potential. Group workshop style interviews can have a higher success rate. Workshops should be designed with activities that candidates are able to independently complete and demonstrate their suitability for the role.

If a workshop style interview is not appropriate for the role you are advertising, it is important to consider what reasonable adjustments you are able to offer at the interview stage. This could include:

- Supplying interview questions beforehand to allow candidates to prepare their answers
- Offering extra time to account for any additional processing time needed for the applicant
- Making it clear that support workers/carers are welcome to join the applicant whilst providing expectations that only answers given by the interviewee will be considered
- Offering a quiet space before the interview for the applicant to wait
- Offering short breaks if required
- Supplying questions in advance to applicants
- A video detailing the job role, application process and interview style

## Case Studies

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### Leeds Inclusion for Employment

As part of an employment project, the Asking You Projects Team needed to hire a Trainer and a Peer Support Mentor.

Initially; a formal interview was conducted for the Peer Support Mentor. This interview consisted of a panel of interviewers and the candidate. It was apparent that this made candidates uncomfortable, unduly nervous, and feeling scrutinised.

Whilst we were able to hire a mentor from this pool when we advertised the role due to a member of staff leaving, we decided to change the way we interviewed. This interview was instead conducted using our 'How to Train' course. Scoring criteria were developed to ensure the relevant experience and aptitude were assessed for the candidates on the course. Activities were created to evaluate candidates which were completed either independently or within a group setting. Using this interview model, we were able to ascertain the true potential of the candidates and evaluate their suitability for the role.

This method has been adopted as our standard for hiring people with lived experience of learning disabilities.

### Travelling with Confidence

Following on from the success of our workshop interviews with Leeds Inclusion for Employment we adopted the same approach for our next lived experience led project. A coordinator designed an accessible and inclusive interview process as a group workshop session. This approach felt far more aligned with the project's values and the kind of environment we aim to create for both staff and participants. This workshop ran for 3 hours including interactive activities and breaks which allowed plenty of time for candidates to settle in and take part at their own pace.

The group format offers a range of advantages compared to a formal interview panel. These were:

- Giving more time for candidates to think, process information and respond.
- Allowed interviewers to ascertain candidates' communication skills including how they interacted with each other and noting whether support or encouragement was offered to fellow candidates where appropriate.
- This interview style felt natural and incorporated into the type of teamwork and interpersonal interaction that the role itself involves.
- Created a real-life atmosphere of patience and respect.

Interactive activities ensured that the interview was engaging and enjoyable, allowing candidates to demonstrate their skills practically rather than solely relying on verbal responses. Written and paper-based tasks were also included to allow for different communication preferences and to assess reading comprehension.

“Delivering the workshop was a genuinely enjoyable experience. It was engaging, interactive, and it felt far more inclusive than a traditional interview setting. We prepared the room in advance and made sure candidates weren't left waiting or unsure of what to do. Breaks were offered regularly, and participants were encouraged to take time out whenever they needed - to get a drink, go to the toilet, or just have a short rest. The environment was calm, friendly, and flexible; it was clear that people felt more relaxed and able to be themselves. We also made a point of answering questions throughout, treating every question as equally important. The session flowed well, with enough time for everyone to complete their tasks and demonstrate their skills in different ways. Overall, it felt like an accessible, fair, and empowering way to recruit, one that truly reflected the inclusive principles at the heart of the Motability Project.”

Beth MacDonald, Project Coordinator

## Offering Roles

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Candidates should be informed of whether they were successful at the interview as soon as possible to prevent undue anxieties. It should be noted that communication preferences can be provided at the application stage and be adhered to. When providing interview feedback, it is important to be clear and use accessible language.

### Example

“We are not offering you the job. This is because we did not feel that you were able to show us that you could work well in a team.”

If possible, unsuccessful candidates could be offered the opportunity to improve their skills. This could be a voluntary position to improve their confidence and support their upskilling.



# Onboarding People with Learning Disabilities

## Inductions

Inductions should be thoroughly planned for. This includes creating a visual schedule for the employee to follow and goals to work towards. These should be planned both for short term goals such as completing induction training and long-term goals such as leading a training session with support. This allows the employee to visualise their targets, strive to meet them, and can support identifying and knowledge or training gaps to address early in the induction process.

## Policies and Procedures

Ideally, your policies and procedures should be in an easy read format. If this is not possible, the employee should be talked through the relevant policies and procedures and use visual media where appropriate. The LIFE Project has created the following in easy read:

- Anti-Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment Policy
- Grievance Policy
- How to Behave at Work
- Sexual Harassment Policy
- One-to-One forms
- All About Me
- Staff Handbook



## Reasonable Adjustments

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Under the Equality Act 2010 employers are required to make reasonable adjustments for employees with a disability. This can often seem daunting however it is a necessary step to ensure inclusivity, consistent performance and staff wellbeing.

Employers are able to make many necessary reasonable adjustments at little to no cost to the business or organization. Examples of these are:

- Offering flexible working patterns or hours
- Having a quiet space with low lighting
- Offering different communication methods such as 'read-aloud' or dictation software
- Hybrid working or working from home if possible, with their job role

## Access to Work

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The Access to Work scheme is designed to support disabled people to start or maintain employment. The scheme provides practical and financial support to people with long-term health conditions, mental health conditions, or people who have a disability. It goes beyond the requirements for reasonable adjustments as set out by the Equality Act 2010.

Examples of Access to Work support are as follows:

- Funding and training for specialist software
- Practical adaptations such as bespoke office chairs
- Funding for taxis to and from work
- Interpreters for communication needs
- Support workers
- Support to create a Mental Health Support Plan

To be eligible for Access to Work, a person must:

- Have a disability or health condition that mean they need an aid, adaptation or financial or human support to do their job
- Have a mental health condition and need support in work
- Be 16 or over
- Be in or about to start employment
- Live and work in England, Scotland or Wales
- You can get support from Access to Work and Employment Support Allowance if you are working less than 16 hours a week. Speak to your work coach for advice

## Costs

If the employee has been working at your organisation for more than 6 weeks at the time of their application, you will share the cost for any:

- Special aids and equipment
- Adaptations to premises or equipment

## Support for Employers

Employers may require support to ensure their employment practices for people with learning disabilities are suitable and effective.

The following could be helpful to you and your organisation:

- Partnership with a local learning disability organisation to develop a supported employment model.
- Seeking guidance and support from employers with lived experience employees.

- Seeking guidance and support from your local learning disability partnership board.
- Using established resources from local and national organisations such as MENCAP, Learning Disability England and the NDTi.

This document has been produced using funds from the National Lottery Community Fund.

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