

# Employing people with disability

## Refer to this resource:

- ▶ to create inclusive and accessible recruitment and selection processes.

People with disability, like all employees, bring a range of skills and abilities to the workplace. Employing people with disability can strengthen an organisation through a more diverse, inclusive and stable workforce, and lower workplace health and safety costs.<sup>1</sup>

## A diverse workforce

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* makes disability discrimination unlawful and promotes equal rights, opportunity and access for people with disability, including in relation to employment.

With one-in-five Queenslanders living with disability, you may not realise that some of your current employees or co-workers have an undisclosed disability. In addition, trauma, illness, age or other reasons can change the disability status of employees.

People with disability are underutilised in the labour market. By marketing jobs to disability networks and providers, you can find additional applicants with the knowledge and skills for your vacancies, and you may find the right person for the job.

All business owners, employers, interview panels, from organisations big and small, play an important role in making Queensland a state where everyone can take up employment opportunities. The Queensland Government is leading the way by setting a target of people with disability making up eight per cent of Queensland Public Sector workforce by 2022.

The tips below highlight ways to increase employment opportunities for people with disability in your workplace.

## Creating an inclusive and accessible workplace

- ▶ Develop a disability action plan to identify opportunities to employ people with disability, improve accessibility and remove barriers in your workplace and for your customers. Or consider organisational membership with the Australian Network on Disability (AND) and adopt their Employment Charter for the Employment of People with Disability. AND is a not-for-profit organisation resourced by its members to advance the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of business. AND helps its members and clients to welcome people with disability as employees, customers and suppliers. Visit: [www.and.org.au](http://www.and.org.au)
- ▶ Encourage all staff to become disability aware. This will help when employing people and providing great customer service to people with disability.<sup>2</sup> Increase staff awareness of the accessibility features of your workplace, that is, the locations of accessible parking and toilets, ramp/lift access or workplace adjustments that can be made. (See Resources 4 and 5 in this series for information on creating disability awareness and action plans.)
- ▶ Ensure your website provides information in multiple formats. On your website, include your disability action plan as well as stories

of people with disability who are working for you and a statement about how your company is working towards creating a more inclusive and accessible workplace. Ensure your company's website complies with contemporary accessibility guidelines as outlined at: [www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20](http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20)

## Inclusive recruitment

- ▶ Check the job description before advertising a position. Does it reflect the essential requirements of the role? Or is there flexibility in some of the requirements for a person with disability to fill it successfully?
- ▶ Consider including one or more of the following statements in any advertising material if applicable:
  - *We are committed to ensuring our organisation reflects the diversity of the community and welcome applications from Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, people of all ages, people with neurodiversity, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people from the LGBTIQ+ community.*
  - *We are an equal opportunities employer who will provide reasonable adjustments for people with neurodiversity and people with disability. You are welcome to contact us to discuss any additional support you need from application onwards.*<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ When advertising the position online, ensure the advertisement is available in accessible formats, for example, Word or RTF as well as PDF versions, so it can be read by people using text-to-audio software.
- ▶ Advertise vacant roles through Disability Employment Service providers. These can be found at: [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au)

## Shortlisting

- ▶ Ask all shortlisted candidates proceeding to the next step of the selection process whether they require any adjustments or assistance to participate in the process, regardless of whether they have disclosed any specific needs in their application. For example, 'What adjustments or assistance can we provide to support you to participate in the next part of the selection

process?' This question covers getting to the location, being escorted to the interview room and having an accessible process.

- ▶ People with disability often have their own equipment and assistive technology they can use in the process.

## Tips for an inclusive interview

- ▶ Consider using an accessible selection process. A standard written application and interview may not be the best way for all candidates to tell you about their experience and skills. Alternatives could include submitting a YouTube video or demonstrating skills in a work sample.
- ▶ Consider including the following for all applicants, which will also support people with neurodiversity:
  - allow perusal time prior to an interview during which a person can view the questions and make notes to prepare their answers
  - check on the preferred setting for an interview – while coffee shop interviews may help some people to relax, others may be able to focus better in a quiet space without interruptions.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ See Resource 2 for tips on greeting and communicating with people with disability.

## What questions can I ask a person about their disability?

- ▶ The only questions an employer can **lawfully** ask about a disability or injury relate to:
  - any adjustments required to ensure a fair and equitable interview and selection process
  - how the person will perform the inherent requirements of a job
  - any adjustments that may be required to complete the inherent requirements of the job.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Employers should wait until after they have made a job offer to discuss workplace adjustments that are not relevant to the interview. However, if these adjustments are linked to the job function, then it is legal to ask during the interview.<sup>5</sup> In this case, ensure equal time is provided to all interviewees to answer the interview questions, after which interviewers may ask additional questions about what adjustments may be needed.

- ▶ Some questions about an individual's disability are inappropriate, including questions about:
  - how the individual acquired their disability
  - specific details of the individual's disability
  - how the disability will impact on the ability to perform aspects of the role.

### Preparing to commence work

- ▶ Regardless of who the successful candidate is, and whether they have disclosed a disability, it is good practice to ask the person if any adjustments to the workplace are needed to perform the role. Questions to ask before they commence could include:
  - 'Will you need any special work arrangements so you can do your job?'
  - 'Will you need any changes to be made here in the workplace?'
  - 'Have you got ideas about good ways to do your job?'
  - 'Do you have ideas for making your workplace safe?'

While it is important to ask these questions, the candidate may not have the answers immediately as they may need more context about the workplace. If this is the case, the new supervisor may like to invite them for a walk-through of the workplace prior to starting work. This could be scheduled in the weeks leading up to the start date and can assist a person to settle in more easily.

Sometimes these questions may need to be answered with assistance from an occupational therapist, which can be arranged at no cost through JobAccess at [www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/available-support](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/available-support). Check with the individual as to whether they would like an assessor to help make suitable recommendations.

### Common workplace adjustments

- ▶ Many people with disability may need few adjustments, and many adjustments are simple and inexpensive. Everyone is different; the most important thing is to ask the person. Common types of adjustments include:
  - flexibility in working hours, such as working part-time or starting and finishing later

- allowing work from home, or another location, one or more days per week
- moving furniture, widening a doorway or providing a ramp
- redistributing some minor duties
- purchasing or modifying equipment, such as text-to-audio software for someone with vision impairment, an amplified phone for a person who is hard of hearing, or a digital recorder for someone who finds it difficult to take written notes.<sup>7</sup>

If equipment or physical changes are required, funding of up to \$30,000 may be available. Visit: [www.jobaccess.gov.au/service-providers/available-support](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au/service-providers/available-support)

### Commencing work

- ▶ Encourage staff and managers to become more disability aware with free online awareness training available at [www.disabilityawareness.com.au](http://www.disabilityawareness.com.au)
- ▶ As with all new employees, introduce the new person to staff and make them feel welcome. Information about a person's disability is confidential. Ask them what, if anything, they would like others in the workplace to know about them and their capabilities at work.
- ▶ Through the usual onboarding process, ensure the new starter has the information they need about the organisation and what is expected of them.
- ▶ Consider the individual's prior experience. Some people with neurodiversity or disability may have only ever been self-employed. If they have never worked for an employer before, take the time to explain aspects of the workplace others take for granted, such as timesheets, performance management, how to escalate an issue, and what they can and cannot ask for. As with all new starters, it may be helpful to assign a 'buddy' or mentor who they can meet with regularly, ask questions and explain the many unwritten rules of 'how we do things around here'.<sup>8</sup>

## Ongoing considerations

Ensure social activities are inclusive and accessible.  
As with all employees:

- ▶ ensure they are supported to do their job and development opportunities are equitable
- ▶ check-in from time-to-time to ask whether their needs are being met or if their circumstances have changed and adjustments are required
- ▶ ask what they need to function at their best and form relationships so these discussions are easier and more likely to happen
- ▶ value and support their perspectives and perhaps they can assist you to tap into new markets, customers and clients.

JobAccess, created by the Australian Government, is the national hub for workplace and employment information for people with disability, employers and service providers. The hub, at [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au), includes tools, resources and financial assistance to support workplaces in the employment of people with disability.

## References

1. Australian Safety and Compensation Council, 2007, Are People with Disability at Risk at Work? A Review of the Evidence, ASCC, Canberra, Du Paul University 2007 and Graffam J, Shinkfield A, Smith K and Polzin, U 2002, Employer benefits

and costs of employing a person with a disability, Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, vol. 17, no. 4, p. 251-263

2. Interviewing people with disability: [www.and.org.au/pages/interviewing-people-with-disability.html](http://www.and.org.au/pages/interviewing-people-with-disability.html)
3. Five questions about disability that employers can't ask in a job interview: <https://epicassist.org/5-questions-about-disability-that-employers-cant-ask-in-a-job-interview/>
4. Universal Music (2020). Creative Differences: A handbook for embracing neurodiversity in the creative industries: <https://umusic.co.uk/Creative-Differences-Handbook.pdf>
5. Five questions about disability that employers can't ask in a job interview: <https://epicassist.org/5-questions-about-disability-that-employers-cant-ask-in-a-job-interview/>
6. Interviewing people with disability: [www.and.org.au/pages/interviewing-people-with-disability.html](http://www.and.org.au/pages/interviewing-people-with-disability.html)
7. Workplace adjustment: [www.and.org.au/pages/examples.html](http://www.and.org.au/pages/examples.html)
8. Universal Music (2020). Creative Differences: A handbook for embracing neurodiversity in the creative industries: <https://umusic.co.uk/Creative-Differences-Handbook.pdf>

## For further information

*All Abilities Queensland: Opportunities for all*, is the state disability plan for a welcoming and inclusive Queensland. A state where people with disability are respected for their abilities and have equal access to opportunities and to contribute and participate in all that Queensland has to offer.

For more information and resources, visit: [www.allabilities.qld.gov.au](http://www.allabilities.qld.gov.au)

### Resources in this series include:

1. Creating inclusive and accessible events
2. Accessible and inclusive communication
3. Employing people with disability
4. Increasing disability awareness
5. Disability action plans and legislation
6. Increasing participation of people with disability on boards and committees
7. Accessible places and spaces