
Employers Journey with WAM: The first steps to inclusive employment

Last year, The WAM Programme at AHEAD welcomed a number of new employers to the programme. To get an idea of how they started on their journey, we asked the companies to submit a story of their journey to ensuring graduates with disabilities can succeed and here two of the employers describe their experiences.

Central Bank



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The **Central Bank of Ireland** is committed to delivering a fulfilling workplace for all employees, where everyone feels included and valued irrespective of their differences.

As an organisation, we aim to provide everyone with an opportunity to compete fairly for jobs. We make accommodations for applicants at all stages of our recruitment process. This ensures that each candidate can show the best version of themselves. As part of our commitment, we ensure our building is accessible and that our ways of working are inclusive for all our people.

Employees from diverse backgrounds, with a range of experiences, knowledge and thinking styles, allow us to deliver our public service mission.

We continuously look for ways to incorporate diversity and inclusion initiatives into how we recruit new staff. The WAM Programme, via AHEAD, in particular, has been successful for us.

How we got involved

We first learned of The WAM Programme, and the worthwhile work of AHEAD, at the WorkABLE Future 2018, 'Make Inclusion Happen' event. Our resourcing team grabbed the chance to follow up with the WAM team. Our internal BankAbility Network aims to support and enable colleagues impacted by disability, and promote disability awareness. They joined our HR team at the Building The Future careers fair in Citi. Here we met some fantastic prospective employees, highlighted our employment opportunities, conducted mock interviews and hosted a CV clinic.

Following this event, we advertised three positions as part of The WAM Programme. We received high quality applications and we invited ten people for interview. Members of our BankAbility Network, our HR team and management conducted the interviews, guided and supported by WAM. We were delighted to make three appointments. The new staff joined our Asset Management Supervision, Banking Supervision and Human Resources divisions, each for nine months.

The ongoing support and encouragement from AHEAD helped ensure a smooth induction for our new team members. Training for mentors was conducted and we worked with our Environmental Health and Safety team to ensure our building and ways of working were inclusive and appropriate.

In addition to the three placements, we also advertised two WAM placements on our 2019 Graduate Programme and as a result, hired two people who will start in September 2019. Prior to the interview and assessment centre, Caroline McGrotty, WAM Co-ordinator with AHEAD, supported us by conducting an internal workshop on disability awareness training and best practice interview techniques.

Impact on Future Policy

Being a diverse and inclusive employer, where all our people are valued and have the opportunity to reach their potential, will continue to be a priority. Our 2019-2021 strategy commits to attracting and retaining people of all abilities, empowering them to reach their full potential in an inclusive culture. To support this, we are currently revising our recruitment process to ensure each stage is inclusive and accessible for all prospective staff. We recently conducted internal workshops with members of our Diversity & Inclusion networks. We add this to knowledge gained from external workshops, enhancing expertise on how to attract and select a diverse pool of talent.

The Central Bank benefits from the support and sponsorship of members of senior management for inclusion. Our dedicated employee-led BankAbility Network further enhances our ability to be a diverse and inclusive employer. Attracting diverse talent and delivering a fulfilling workplace for all colleagues is the 'right' thing to do, the smart thing to do, and helps to ensure that we are representative of the people of Ireland, in line with our public service mandate.

Testimonial from a WAM participant

'Since beginning my role in the Central Bank through the WAM programme my confidence both professionally and personally has improved immensely. The bank is an incredibly open and inclusive environment where I feel that my daily contributions really do make a difference. Having such fantastic support from my line manager, immediate team, directorate and across the organisation makes me proud to be a Central Bank employee' - Sean Keogh, HR associate



Central Bank stand at Building the Future 2018

Irish Life



Irish Life launched our Diversity & Inclusion (d&I) strategy in 2017 and one of the main focuses under our 'Value and Support Each other' work stream was to tap into an unexplored talent pool; that being people living with disabilities. The WAM programme was recommended to Irish Life by Seónaid Ó Murchadha who was working with Employer Disability Information at the time. Representatives from Irish Life attended a breakfast meeting by The WAM Programme in March 2018 to gain more information of how to start the partnership with WAM and AHEAD.

How we got involved

Being part of our wider D&I strategy, partnering with AHEAD for the WAM programme was championed by our 'Value & Support Each other' work stream leads - Damien Rafferty (Customer Service Exec Manager) and Carol Leonard (Senior Portfolio Manager) - who proposed the idea to the D&I committee for full commitment. From there, line managers, potential mentors and HR were engaged to identify roles, carry out the recruitment process and introduce our new employees. Prior to advertising any positions with WAM, we met with members of the WAM team on several occasions, attended Disability Awareness Training and Building the Future Careers Fair in May 2018. At the careers fair, we were extremely surprised at the calibre and experience of graduates who were looking for work.

After Building the Future, Irish Life advertised a number of roles across the businesses, including positions on the Irish Life Graduate IT Programme (2 year contract) and three roles in Customer Service operations for 9 months (2 in Dublin and 1 in Dundalk). The calibre of candidates was very high and the number of offers increased throughout the process. In total, 5 offers were made to graduates who came through The WAM Programme.

Irish Life availed of further training from AHEAD, particularly around the selection and recruitment process. This gave staff an opportunity to ask questions directly to AHEAD and gain some practical tips. The WAM team are very pleasant to deal with, and were very patient and understanding throughout the whole induction process. They actively encourage you to ask questions to learn from them and are very supportive throughout the whole experience. While we were unaware of the specific support needs at the offer stage, the needs assessment is an extremely useful part of the recruitment process. This allows line managers to understand what support is necessary to create a positive experience for the graduate, the line manager and the wider teams. In addition, the mentoring aspect of WAM has allowed Irish Life to give some existing employees some development in this area.

Impact on Future Policy

At Irish Life, we have completed a review of our entire recruitment process from job advertising to induction to ensure that our processes are inclusive and attracting all types of candidates. Some changes were subtle; like language in a job advert; and others will require more attention. All recommended changes will be implemented throughout 2019.

For Irish Life, I think the key learning over the past year is that the biggest barrier is our own perception or unconscious bias. The focus needs to shift from disability to ability. At Irish Life we value the partnership we have with AHEAD and feel fully supported on this journey.



Thank you to [Central Bank](#) and [Irish Life](#) for sharing their journey to becoming a more inclusive employer. Find out more about [The WAM Programme](#).



Compiled by Caroline McGrotty, Employment Manager

AHEAD

[@aheadireland](#)

Caroline McGrotty holds a Bachelor degree in Deaf Studies from Trinity College Dublin and a diploma in Irish Sign Language Teaching (TCD). She also has a higher certificate in Equality Studies from UCD. Caroline has over ten years' experience of working and volunteering with various organisations within the Deaf community. She is currently Vice Chair on the board of Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) and the WAM Programme Manager for AHEAD.

