



The WAM Programme Statistics 2020



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The WAM Programme Statistics 2020



An Roinn Gnóthaí Fostaíochta
agus Coimirce Sóisialaí
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and Social Protection

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ahead
creating inclusive environments in education
and employment for people with disabilities

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Introduction

This publication features an analysis of The WAM Programme from 2012 – 2018.

The Willing, Able, Mentoring (WAM) Programme is an initiative of AHEAD established in 2005 and is currently funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP).

The central objective of The WAM Programme is to widen access to mainstream employment for graduates with disabilities while working with, supporting, and building the capacity of employers to create a more inclusive workplace.

Participating employers collaborate with WAM to offer graduates with disabilities a full time, paid, and mentored graduate internship for a minimum of 6 months. Graduates are required to have the education and core competencies necessary to complete the role that is offered by the employer. All roles with WAM are 'ring-fenced' by the employer; this means that the role an employer is offering is only being advertised to graduates with disabilities through WAM.

WAM internships - or placements - offer experience in real life work settings. This experience has proven to identify the issues facing both employers and graduates in the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.

Through WAM, both the employer and graduate are supported to ensure practical work-orientated solutions with a focus on inclusive work practices.

The demographic of graduates applying for roles with WAM can range from a newly qualified graduate fresh out of college looking for their first work experience opportunity, to an experienced graduate who may have acquired their disability and therefore may require additional support into re-entering the workplace.

**SINCE THE WAM PROGRAMME ESTABLISHMENT IN 2005,
IT HAS PLACED A TOTAL OF 471 GRADUATES AS OF MARCH 2020**

Survey & Analysis of Data

A questionnaire was circulated in both in December 2017 and December 2019 to graduates who completed a placement with a WAM employer between 2012 and 2018. Graduates who were invited to complete the questionnaire had completed their initial WAM placement final finish date at least 12 months previous.

— **QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE RATE** **79%**

In addition to a questionnaire circulated to placed graduates, WAM analysed application data and also data from workplace needs assessments that we carried out with graduates placed with WAM employers from 2012 – 2018 inclusive.

— **TOTAL APPLICATIONS ANALYSED** **1,917**
— **TOTAL NEEDS ASSESSMENTS ANALYSED** **204**

On Pages 4 to 13 you will find the key findings of this analysis.

80%

of WAM graduates secured employment as a direct result of their WAM placement

Employment Statistics

68% of those who responded were actively in employment at the time of completing the survey. However, to get an accurate reflection of what happened to graduates directly after their WAM placement, we asked respondents to indicate what happened within the first year of completing their WAM placement.

As depicted in the table below, 35% of graduates remained employed within the same WAM company, with 5% of these securing contact extensions. 28% of graduates secured employment elsewhere within 6 months, while 13% secured work after 6 months.

8% of graduates returned to study and only 9% were still looking for work opportunities. 3% fell into the 'Other' category; out of work for reasons such as ill health, travelling, becoming a parent, etc.

What happened after your WAM placement?	%
I am/was still working in the same company (permanent contract or contract for year or more)	30%
I got another job during my WAM placement which meant I left early	6%
My placement with the WAM company was extended for another few months	5%
I got a job in another company within 6 months	22%
I got a job within 6 - 12 months	8%
I got a job after 12 months	4%
I got another placement with WAM	5%
I was/am still looking for work opportunities	9%
I went back to study	8%
Other	3%

Applications Analysis

When a position is advertised on The WAM Programme, graduates with disabilities must apply through our WAMWorks database. They upload their CV and/or an application form to this platform. The WAM Team check each application to ensure eligibility before sending them to the employer for review/shortlisting

In the period 2012 - 2018, WAM processed a total of 1,917 applications across all placements offered. The graph below shows that the number of applications to the WAM Programme over this period has almost doubled.

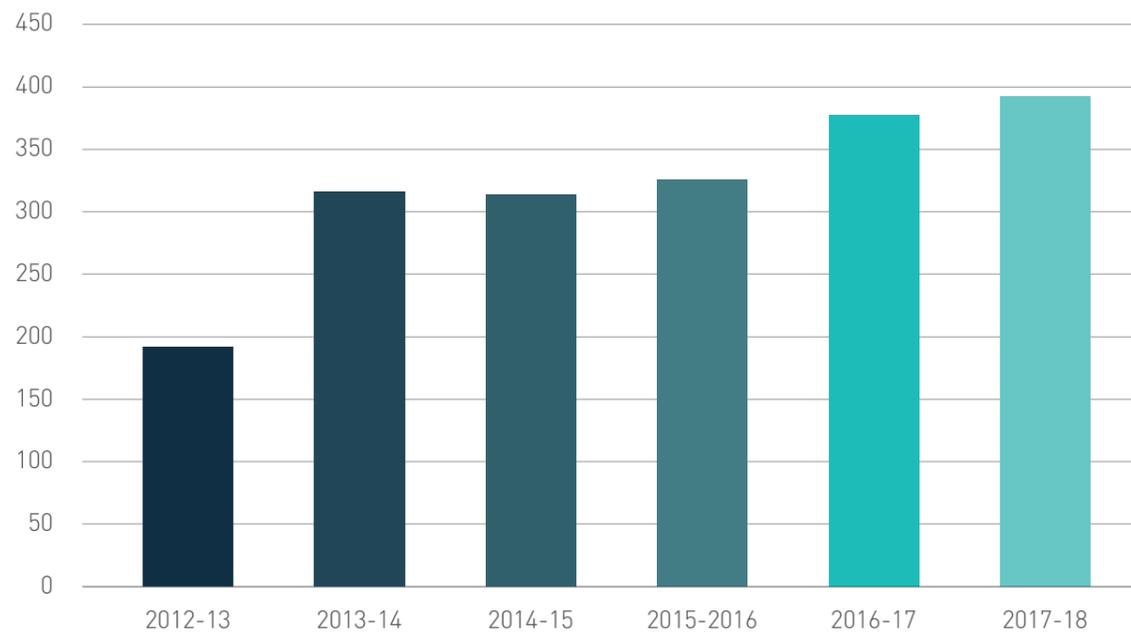


Figure 1 - Number of Applications to The WAM Programme

4 out of 5

applicants did not require any interview accommodations

Interview Accommodations

Graduates inform WAM of any interview accommodations they may have to ensure the recruitment process is fully accessible, thus enabling the graduate to perform at their best at this crucial stage. These interview accommodations are passed on to the employer in advance of their face-to-face interview. Out of the 1,917 applications analysed, 22% of graduates requested an accommodation or support at interview. 78% of applicants did not require any accommodations.

This highlights to us that almost 4 out of 5 candidates who attend a face-to-face interview have 'invisible' disabilities, which may not be obvious at first glance to the employer. For example, candidates who have mental health difficulties, dyslexia, or an ongoing illness such as cystic fibrosis generally do not have any requirements for a standard face-to-face interview.

Employers who participate on The WAM Programme are given the opportunity to partake in our disability awareness training for interviews on how to support a candidate who may require assistance or communication at an interview and to be aware of candidates presenting differently at interview even if they haven't disclosed any accommodations.

Type of Interview Accommodations

Of the 426 applicants who did request support or accommodation for the interview, the most common request was for an accessible room at 33%. The next highest request was for an accessible format at 22%. The third highest request was for an Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreter at 19%.

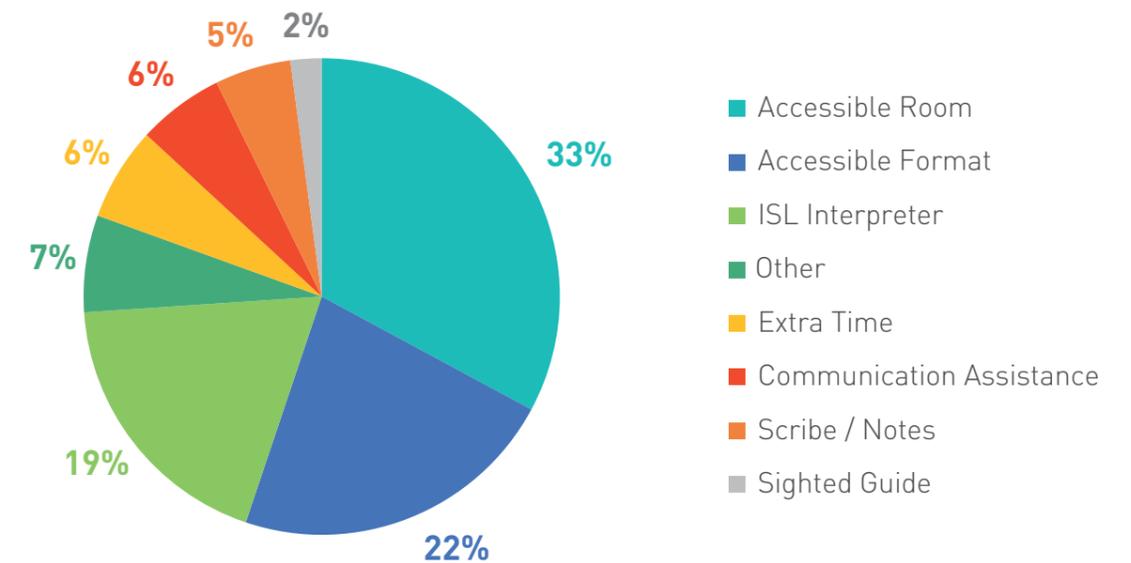


Figure 2 - Types of Interview Accommodations

Needs Assessments Analysis

An analysis was carried out of all needs assessments completed between the years 2012 – 2018. A total of 204 assessments were analysed by categorising each individual accommodation into relevant categories.

Workplace Accommodations

The majority of workplace accommodations recommended in the needs assessment were in relation to work tasks at 67%. The second highest type of accommodations recommended was hardware at 14%, followed by time off for medical appointments at 11%, assistive technology software at 6% and other at 2%.

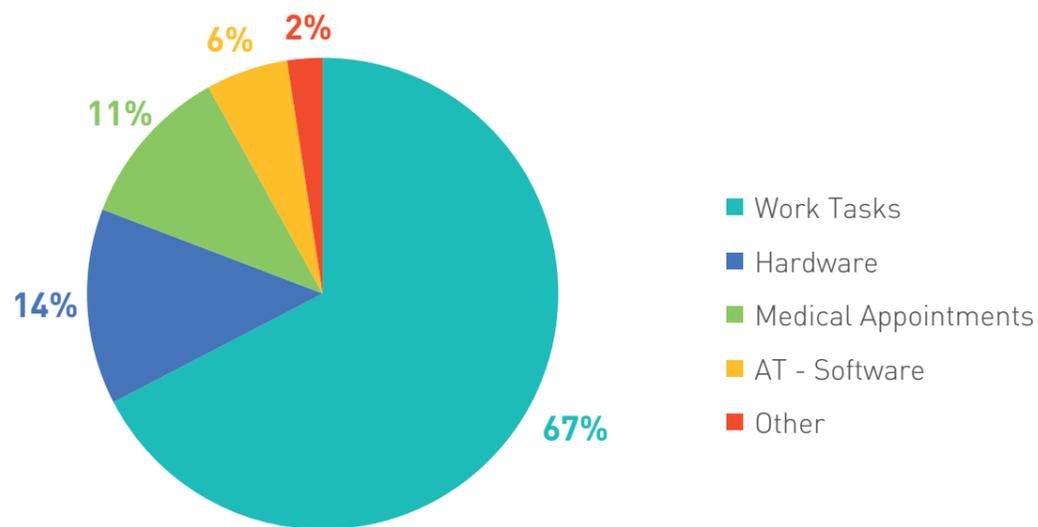


Figure 3 - Types of Workplace Accommodations

A full numerical and category breakdown of how many times a particular item was listed as a recommendation in the 204 WAM needs assessments analysed can be found on the next page.

Breakdown of Workplace Accommodations

	Total
Work Tasks	
Structure / Clear Instructions / Guidance / Regular Feedback	107
Verbal Instructions	21
Written Instructions	39
Electronic Formats	28
Minimal Stress / Mentoring	24
Proofreading / No Minute Taking	59
Templates / Acronyms	33
Training	48
Extra Time	49
Workstation Adjustments (Desk Location, Ergonomics etc.)	51
Other (Regular Breaks, Style of Communication etc.)	43
AT - Software	
TextHelp - Read Write Gold	12
JAWS	9
Dragon Dictate	9
Zoomtext	7
Other	5
Hardware	
Headset	18
Monitor	14
Keyboard	8
Adjustable Desk	4
Chair	20
Building Modifications (safety rails, door handle adjustments)	8
Scanner	4
Handheld Device (tablet, magnifier etc.)	5
Other (footrest, partitions etc.)	19
Medical	
Time off for Medical Appointments	83
Other	
Reduced hours	3
ISL Interpreter / Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS)	6
Car Parking Space	9

Cost of Disability

From the analysis, it was noted that 33%, 67 out of 204 needs assessments, recommended a piece of technology, hardware or items that carried a monetary cost from WAM's perspective.

These monetary items varied from building adaptations such as moving swipe card access to a lower level on the wall for wheelchair users or loosening the hinges on fire doors to make it easier to push or pull open for someone with mobility difficulties. Hardware items included a smaller keyboard, footrest, a chair with adjustable armrests, and a larger monitor. In relation to the provision of Irish Sign Language interpreters, the frequency varied from the nature of the work involved and in discussion with the deaf graduate as to how often they would require one.

Employers reported that some things were readily available to all employees, such as a larger monitor, footrest etc. In addition, building modifications were often carried out by in-house facility staff and did not require outsourcing contractors to complete the work and therefore did not carry a cost. For some employers, licences for assistive technology were already in place due to previous graduates being placed in the organisation.

Therefore, it is difficult to provide an accurate costing on the average cost of hiring a graduate with a disability.

**2 out
of 3**

**of accommodations
do not incur any
cost to the employer**

Disclosure

Disclosure is cited as one of the most challenging aspects of having a disability. It's complex and influenced by a number of factors such as self-identity, personality, type of disability, context and previous experience. It presents a major concern within the recruitment process for both employers and graduates with disabilities. There can be a disparity between employers and employees on the subject with the former preferring to have as much information as possible as soon as possible and the latter weary of the impact of providing such information.

When a graduate is placed with a WAM employer, disclosure is discussed between the graduate and the AHEAD needs assessor as part of the WAM needs assessment process.

Of the 204 needs assessments analysed, 91% of graduates chose to disclose to their disability or disabilities to their line manager, mentor and to the HR department. 6% of graduates partially disclosed. Partial disclosure is when a graduate only wants to disclose to their manager or perhaps only disclose one of their disabilities. 3% of graduates chose not to disclose at all.

97% OF WAM GRADUATES DISCLOSE THEIR DISABILITY ON WAM PLACEMENTS

From the survey that was circulated to graduates placed with WAM employers between 2012 – 2018, we asked them whether they felt more confident in disclosing their disability to employers after their WAM placement. 66% stated they were more confident in disclosing their disability to new employers while 23% said no. 11% said they weren't sure and when asked to provide additional information, respondents stated it depended on the employer and their willingness to facilitate them as employees with disabilities.



66%

**of WAM graduates
are more confident
in disclosing
their disability
to mainstream
employers after their
WAM placement**

Graduate's Experiences

In the survey, we asked graduates a number of questions in relation to their WAM placement experience and to provide us additional comments should they wish to share. Please note, to preserve anonymity of the graduates, specific names of employers, managers and mentors have been removed.

Rating of their WAM Placement

- “WAM Placement has completely turned my life around and I’m forever grateful.”
- “The quality of the placement and the type of work was very important to my success. I feel extremely lucky with the people I worked with and my manager. Before this placement I was not confident that I could work in the mainstream but I no longer worry about my ability to cope in this regard. Disclosure is still a difficult topic for me to broach. I wish that this was covered more in the initial placement. But nevertheless, this was an extremely beneficial programme and has helped me take the first steps towards independence.”
- “Extremely beneficial opportunity to acquire experience of mainstream employment, which I believe was critical in securing subsequent employment. Prior to the WAM placement, multiple and repeated attempts to secure employment were unsuccessful.”
- “Thank you WAM. It’s was truly a great experience. The end of a long journey after getting the experience and confidence I needed to land a job in finance at [company]. And the salary is good!”

Confidence in their Ability

- “From this placement I had the confidence to apply for a traineeship in a legal law firm. I am one off until I am a trained solicitor. Thanks for everything.”
- “WAM changed my life. Without WAM I would not have gained the experience and confidence to do the job I do.”
- “Placement got me back on my feet and into employment which I have continued in for the last three years. Gained great confidence to return to the workforce and learned how to manage my disability.”
- “On completion of my WAM placement I decided to apply to the [company] Graduate Programme and thankfully got accepted. I would argue that without the positive experience on the WAM programme – I would never have been afforded the opportunity to get into such a graduate programme. It gave me such a boost in confidence and allowed me to prove to myself and others that I was very capable of succeeding in a full time role. I feel that the programme was a real stepping stone for me, and provided me with the chance to kick-start my career.”

92% of graduates rated their WAM placement as good/excellent

94% gained confidence in their ability to work in mainstream

Understanding of Workplace Supports

One of the key elements to ensuring the success of the WAM placement is facilitating a comprehensive Needs Assessment. The purpose of the Needs Assessments is to identify what supports or accommodations the graduate may require in order to maximise their full potential in the workplace.

- “This was my first time in the workplace and one of the main things I learned was how my disability would affect me in mainstream work. The assessment in particular was very good here, highlighting things like emergency evacuation as I have difficulty with stairs. It focused on finding issues such as these and making positive interventions to lessen or remove this impact. This meant I finished my placement assured that my disability would not have a significant impact on me entering mainstream employment.”
- WAM allowed me to identify the assistive supports available which help in completing everyday tasks in the workplace. The WAM programme also allowed me to see the culture and additional supports that are available within the Civil Service, which has resulted in me taking up a permanent position within the Civil Service since 2017.”

Transferrable Skills

- “I had a fantastic experience, [company] set me up for success. My manager was a fantastic support in my getting used to the work place (it was my first professional job) and then helping find my next role and offering some guidance for further education. I would recommend the WAM placement to anyone who felt they could use some additional support in the transition from education to the workplace. In particular, [company], which has proven itself to set its WAM placements up for success in all elements of life.” “The WAM placement provided me with a stepping stone from college into the working world. The experience it gave me has proved invaluable for helping me obtain further employment and I cannot be more grateful for this.”
- “I have used this placement as an example of my experience during several interviews and I have been promoted twice since leaving the WAM placement so I think that is evidence of the benefit of these placements.”
- “Having a head start with WAM was what I needed to kick start my career, it was a great addition to my CV.”

87% felt they had a better understanding of what supports they needed in the workplace

86% felt they learned transferrable skills from education to the workplace

WAM Mentoring Model

When a graduate is successfully placed in a company, WAM asks the company to assign a Mentor to them. This mentor is usually a volunteer within the company and will fundamentally act as a sounding board for the graduate and helps with social integration into the workplace.

- A structured mentoring process is in place where the WAM team will provide training prior to the placement starting.
- “It really helped my confidence and in particular the mentor was essential in that development.”
- “My placement was very beneficial for my development. I am now very confident in my ability to work in a mainstream environment. My mentor and the team were so supportive and encourage all of my growth.”

83%

of graduates
benefited
from the WAM
Mentoring

Additional Quotes

- “I would highly recommend the WAM programme, as it allowed me to gain valuable experience in the medical devices industry and secure a permanent position with the company which I completed the WAM placement in. I am currently working with the company two and a half years which was not what I expected before starting my placement.”
- “I found the WAM programme excellent, they were there if I needed them but also weren’t pushy in asking all the time how things were going, if I needed anything etc. I just needed a bit of confidence and to get my foot in the door and WAM understood that and provided it to me. I’d recommend the WAM programme to anyone, and have done to a number of people I know.”
- “My WAM placement was a fantastic experience, which I will always attribute to getting me to where I am today. [Company] really ‘put their money where their mouth is’ in terms of accessibility, making all the adaptations I needed. The only reason I moved on was because I got an offer in an area I’m more interested in.”



The WAM Placement with the Department is providing an unrivaled opportunity to acquire necessary and desired professional work experience, fundamental for a recent graduate to enable career advancement and progression.

The WAM placement uniquely provides support during the transition to employment, simultaneously encouraging self-development, personal acceptance of responsibility, confirmation and evidence of personal ability to operate efficiently and effectively in “mainstream” employment.

The WAM Placement additionally provides an imperative medium for networking, facilitating potential for career progression and development.

Disability Profile

The categories of graduates with disabilities placed since the beginning of The WAM Programme is taken from the categories provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

Below is a chart which outlines the disability profile of 471 graduates placed on The WAM Programme. In some cases, graduates placed on WAM had more than one disability; WAM has recorded each disability into their relevant category rather than basing it on one primary disability.

In total, 80 or 17% graduates had more than one disability. In terms of multiple disabilities, most graduates had two disabilities however there were some cases of graduates having up to five different types of disabilities.

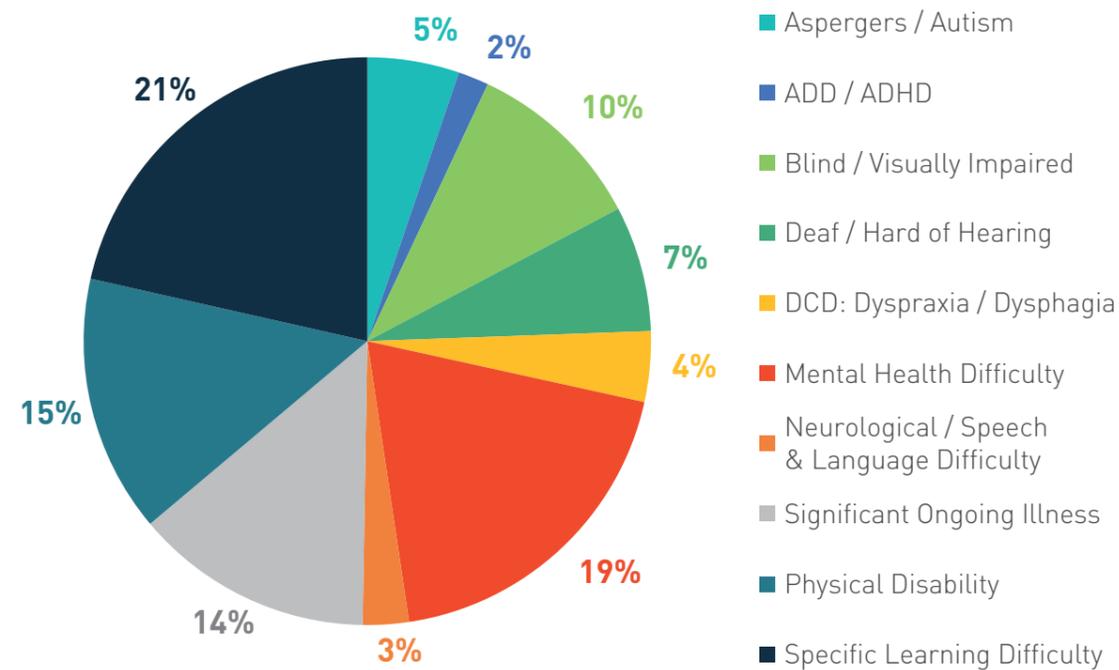


Figure 4 - Disability Profile of WAM Graduates

The highest cohort of placed graduates was those with a specific learning difficulty at 21%, with mental health difficulty placing second as 19%. The third highest is physical disability at 15%, significant ongoing illness at 14%. Blind/visually impaired represent 10% of our graduates, deaf/hard of hearing representing 7% and ASD representing 5%. Dyspraxia/dysphagia represented 4%, neurological/speech and language difficulty at 3% and then ADD/ADHD at 2%.

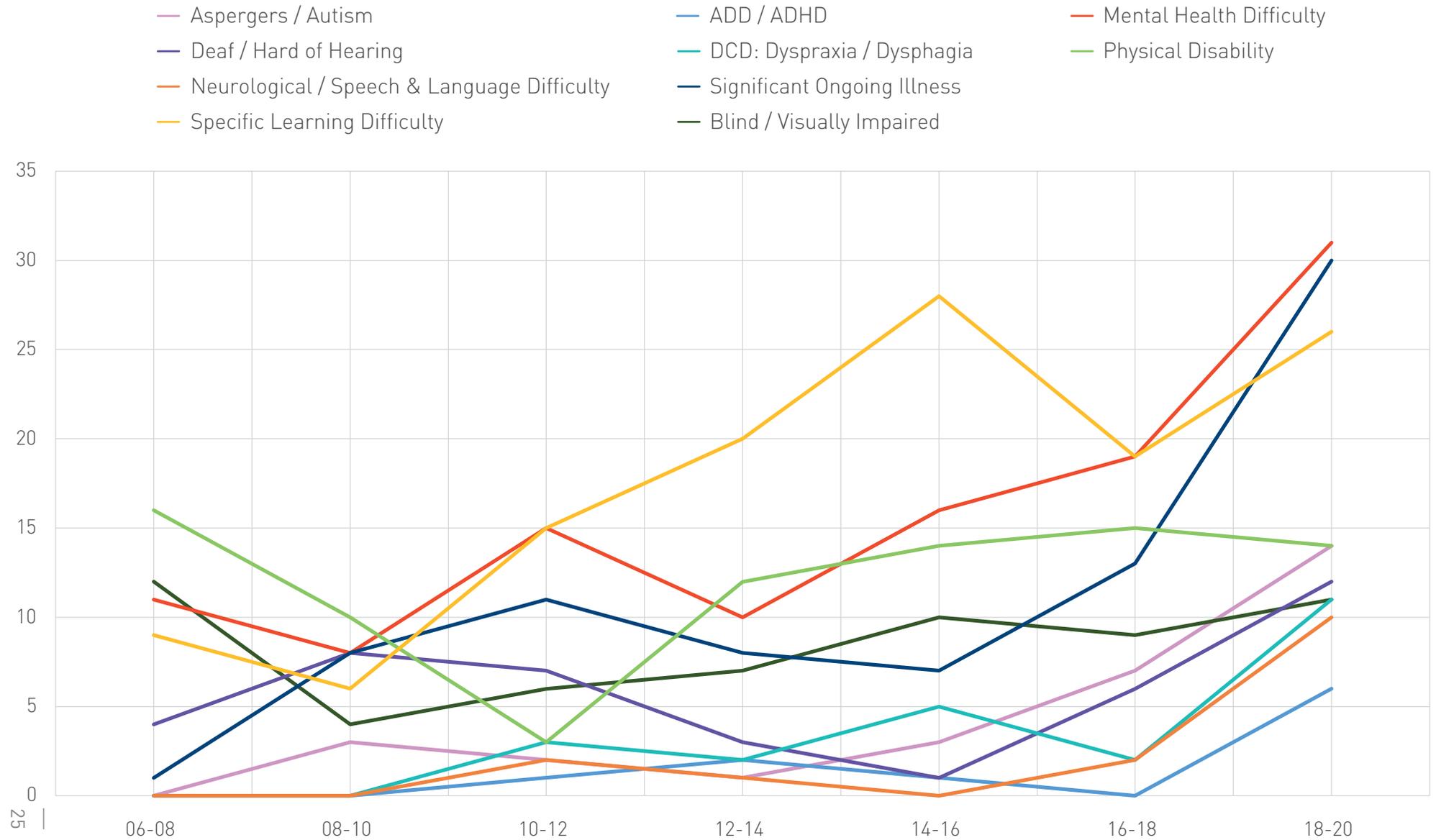
Year on Year Breakdown

The following graph outlines the trends in the disability profile. For the purposes of confidentiality, the trend below is represented on a 2-year basis, i.e. 2006 and 2007 are combined.

In the early years of The WAM Programme, the most common type of disability was predominantly physical disability whereas in more recent years, we are seeing an increase across disabilities such as mental health, significant ongoing illness and autism. Another significant point to note is that neurological/speech and language disorder, ADD/ADHD and DCD: Dyspraxia and Dysphagia were not represented in WAM for the first few years however this has changed quite significantly in the last 4 years of WAM.

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Figure 5 - Year on Year Disability Profile



Types of WAM Placements Available

A WAM placement is typically for a fixed contract period of 6 months however in some cases, placements may be for longer dependant on the employer. Below is a table of the placements and initial contract duration at the time of advertising.

Contract Length	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
3 - 6 months	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
6 months	33	48	50	49	52	56	62	80
6 - 12 months	0	0	4	0	2	2	12	4
Permanent	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	4
Graduate Programme	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	12
Total Advertised	33	49	56	50	54	60	81	101

Since 2017, WAM has seen an increase in employers offering longer term contracts, places on their graduate programmes and permanent positions. WAM have worked with these employers auditing their recruitment processes, particularly with the graduate programmes. Often in graduate programmes, there are several steps in the recruitment process such as group assessments, written or technical tests. Working with WAM employers on this, we are able to identify which aspects may present as a barrier for people with disabilities.

Disability & Illness Payments

If a graduate is in receipt of a disability or illness payment from the DEASP, WAM have an agreement whereby the payment is suspended or re-assessed for the duration of their placement. The graduate will not have to re-apply for their disability/illness payment and will be reassessed and re-instated upon completion of the placement.

Having this agreement with the DEASP is vital to allow graduates with disabilities to experience the world of work without fear of losing their payments which may have taken a lengthy period of time to get approved. Of those graduates who responded to the survey,

49% OF GRADUATES WERE IN RECEIPT OF A DISABILITY OR ILLNESS PAYMENT BEFORE THEY COMMENCED THEIR WAM PLACEMENT

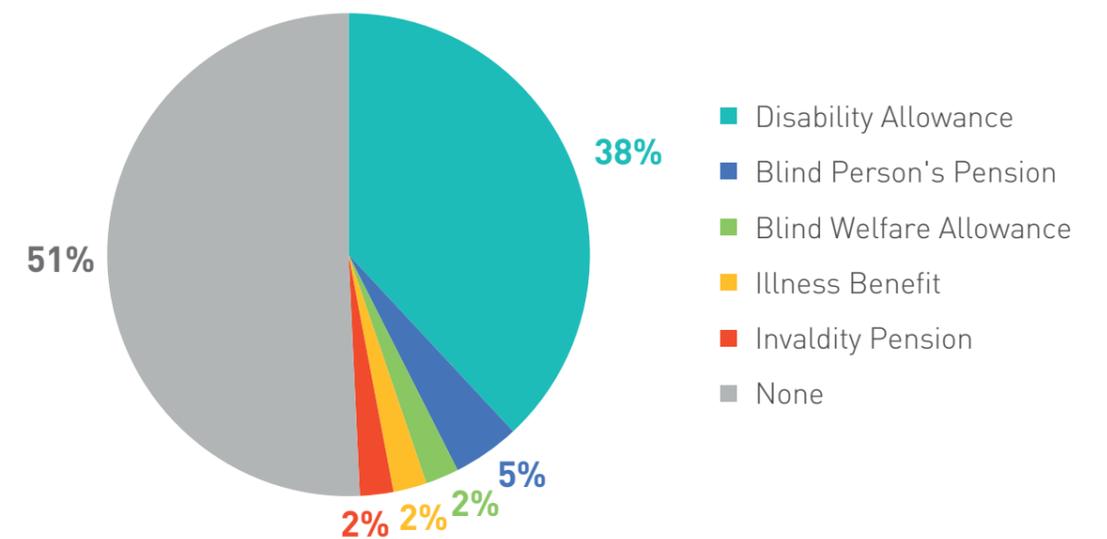


Figure 6 - Breakdown of Social Welfare Payments

Disability Allowance was the most common type of payment, with 38% of placed graduates in receipt of this. 5% were in receipt of Blind Person's Pension, and 2% were in receipt of Blind Welfare Allowance, Illness Benefit, and Invalidity Pension respectively.

71%

**of respondents
were no longer
in receipt of any
disability/illness
payments**

Summary

The WAM Programme has gone from strength to strength since its establishment in 2005 with over 470 paid work placements for graduates with disabilities until March 2020.

80% OF WAM GRADUATES SECURED EMPLOYMENT AS A DIRECT RESULT OF WAM

- In the recent findings, 80% of graduates move from their WAM placement into secured employment as a direct result while only 9% of graduates still seeking work opportunities. This highlights the importance of current and/or recent work experience as a stepping stone to secure employment opportunities.

4 OUT OF 5 APPLICANTS DO NOT REQUIRE ANY INTERVIEW ACCOMMODATIONS

- Of a total 1,971 applications to the programme analysed, only 22% of graduates require some form of support for the interview. This clearly shows that the majority of disabilities will not be present at interview nor will they require any visible identifiable need of support.

OVER TWO-THIRDS OF WORKPLACE SUPPORTS DO NOT INCUR ANY COST

- In the analysis of the needs assessments WAM have carried out, only one-third of workplace supports carried a monetary cost. This was typically for items such as hardware, software or adaptations to the work environment, some of which were readily available to all employees as standard.

WAM IS A SAFE SPACE TO DISCLOSE

- 97% of graduates disclosed their disability while on placement with a WAM employer while 66% of graduates were more confident in disclosing after their WAM placement.

94% OF GRADUATES GAINED CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY TO WORK IN MAINSTREAM

- From the responses to our survey, 94% of graduates gained confidence in their ability to work in a mainstream environment while 87% reported they had a better understanding of what workplace they needed in the future.

71% OF GRADUATES ARE NO LONGER IN RECEIPT OF DISABILITY/ILLNESS PAYMENTS

- 71% of respondents to the survey who were in receipt of disability or illness payments prior to their WAM placement, stated they were currently employed at the time of completing the survey and therefore no longer in receipt of disability or illness payments.

94%

**of graduates
gained confidence
in their ability
to work in the
mainstream**

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Thank you

Thank you to all those who participated in the survey and to the employers we have worked with over the years.

If you are interested in finding out more about The WAM Programme, please visit our website www.ahead.ie/wam



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