

A man with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored striped button-down shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up. He is looking out of a large window towards the left. The background is a bright, slightly hazy sky. The lighting is soft, coming from the window, creating a contemplative mood.

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Advice for Employers on Recruitment
of Graduates with Disabilities

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The aim of this booklet is to offer effective ideas for positive recruitment & selection of graduates with a disability, based on an in-depth understanding both of disability, and of the perspective of potential employers.

Ann Heelan

Ahead

INTRODUCTION

AHEAD, founded in 1988, is the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability. We are an independent, non-profit organisation that promotes full access to and participation in higher education and employment for students and graduates with disabilities.

AHEAD operates as a national centre of expertise on inclusion across education and employment and is the leading source of information on the participation rates of students with disabilities in Higher Education.

AHEAD coordinates two projects in relation to employment:

WAM (Willing Able Mentoring)

WAM is a work placement programme which aims to promote access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities, and to build the capacity of employers to integrate disability into the mainstream workplace. WAM has a unique approach to improving inclusive workplace strategies – simultaneously developing the potential of graduates with disabilities and of employers.

Get AHEAD

Get AHEAD is a network which aims to improve work preparation and employment opportunities for graduates with disabilities who are looking for work now or in the future.

Recruitment and selection is a complex process for all involved – whether you are a hiring manager or a graduate with a disability. Job seekers with a disability have to consider the possible or perceived impact their disability may have whilst seeking and maintaining employment. Hiring Managers and HR personnel are concerned with job requirements and getting the best person for the job, but may have preconceived ideas about how a candidate with a disability might present and the challenges this may bring.

From an employer perspective, WAM instills confidence and shares knowledge, thus providing a safe space for learning while promoting the recruitment of graduates with disabilities.

The WAM project has for over 8 years now worked effectively - not just with graduates with a disability, but also with employers and hiring managers across a variety of disciplines - building confidence all the way through the recruitment process. WAM is proactive in all of its dealings with employers and the higher education sector, working to ensure that diversity and the transition for graduates with disabilities into employment remains high on the agenda. This year alone 300+ managers, HR and diversity representatives, higher education staff and career placement personnel have engaged with WAM in learning activities.

Where the learning has come from

All involved in the WAM placements complete a survey which allows us to gain valuable perspective. This is not a performance review of individuals involved, but rather an evaluation of the programme itself. This process is the source of much of our learning, and therefore plays a key role in informing this and other publications. Over the past 8 years, approximately 609 evaluations have been conducted with those involved in WAM placements. This process is ongoing.

Learning about Recruitment and Selection

WAM provides a framework for employers, continually answering their queries about recruitment practices. WAM has in essence become the 'go-to' place for employers on matters pertaining to placement, internship and employment of students and graduates with a disability. This has resulted in some key learnings which we aim to share in this publication. WAM has also engaged with graduates who are working through this process and gained a unique insight into their journey.

The following guidelines are valuable tips and advice which participating WAM managers found useful in enabling them to make sound and objective decisions during the recruitment and selection process.

The graduate perspective aims to add a positive voice to the dialogue. These guidelines are intended to add value to existing internal recruitment and selection policies and should not be regarded as stand-alone.

The areas covered are:

1. [The Importance of Language](#)
2. [The Job Specification](#)
3. [Competency Based Interview Approach](#)
4. [Testing](#)
5. [Accommodations/Supports](#)
6. [Consider the Scenic Route - Alternatives to Qualifications](#)
7. [Disclosure of Disability](#)



“Deaf people can do anything but hear. My advice is for employers to listen to people with disabilities in relation to what suitable accommodations they require to support them in the workplace - because they know best.”

LIANNE QUIGLEY

WAM Graduate in 2006 with Bank of Ireland
Currently working in Northern Trust

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Language is a powerful tool. In relation to disability it is important that employers understand the impact of language used in job applications and advertisements on job-seekers with disabilities. Managers consistently report to us that people with disabilities do not apply for jobs in their companies. Given their inclusive policies, many managers do not understand why. An examination of job advertising campaigns may give some clues.

Inclusive company recruitment policies ensure that the language used in job advertisements does not give a negative message to the prospective graduate with a disability, suggesting he/she is not suitable for the position. Without intending to, language can be perceived to be inclusive or exclusive based on the words chosen.

Consider how you use words, in particular using words which are unnecessary to the job and whose inclusion could be open to misinterpretation, especially by those with a disability.

For Example

'The ability to rapidly assimilate information'

How does one evaluate or measure 'rapidly' in this context?

The following phrases are taken from actual exchanges with managerial staff participating in the WAM Programme which help to demonstrate how messages are conveyed.

Good

Ability to write

Drive & Ambition

Tone of delivery

Use sound judgment

Work under pressure

Energetic and dynamic

Better

Ability to write/type

Determined & Ambitious

Style of delivery

Use *informed* judgment

Work to deadlines

Bring ideas and creativity

Medical vs. Social Model of Disability

Disability tends to be viewed from a medical rather than a social model perspective. People do not see the person, but only the impairment. It is important not to confuse illness with disability!

Medical - the focus is on the individual as the problem:

How would you define your disability? (Please indicate the severity of your condition e.g. the level of visual impairment).

Social - the focus is on society and its need to change in order to be inclusive:

Have you any specific requirements for the interview? (e.g. Irish Sign Language interpreter, level access, wheelchair access etc.)

Developing inclusive practices means that we stop viewing the individual as the problem. The interview process underpinning WAM is to clearly define the job and then search for the best skills match. Knowing the disability of an applicant does not necessarily assist with this process. The employer needs to find out to what extent, if any, a disability impacts on a person's ability to do the job. Often many questions are asked about a person's disability that do not relate to job performance or to supports required in the workplace. To this extent it is essential that an employer identifies the difference between essential and desirable requirements for the job.

Avoid the stereotypical

It is important not to assume that just because you may have worked with a person before who was deaf that all people who are deaf can be treated the same way or have exactly the same needs. Disability does not work in this way. Every person is different and is impacted by their disability differently.

"We knew the disability but we had very set ideas in our head, and that was one of our problems."
(Manager in participating company)



2 THE JOB SPECIFICATION

A clearly defined job specification is the critical first step in ensuring your recruitment and selection policies are inclusive and fair to people with disabilities. Designing competency based job specifications is good HR Practice and enables the company to make an objective decision about a person's suitability to do the job.

The process involves:

Identification of core skills required

Identification of core activities required

Matching the person's skills to the job

Identification of any technical solutions or reasonable accommodations required

Know the job:

What are the essential functions of the job to be carried out?

What are the general skills needed for the job?

And of equal importance:

What are the physical conditions of the job setting?

What are the social conditions of the job (work alone, work around others, work to deadlines)?

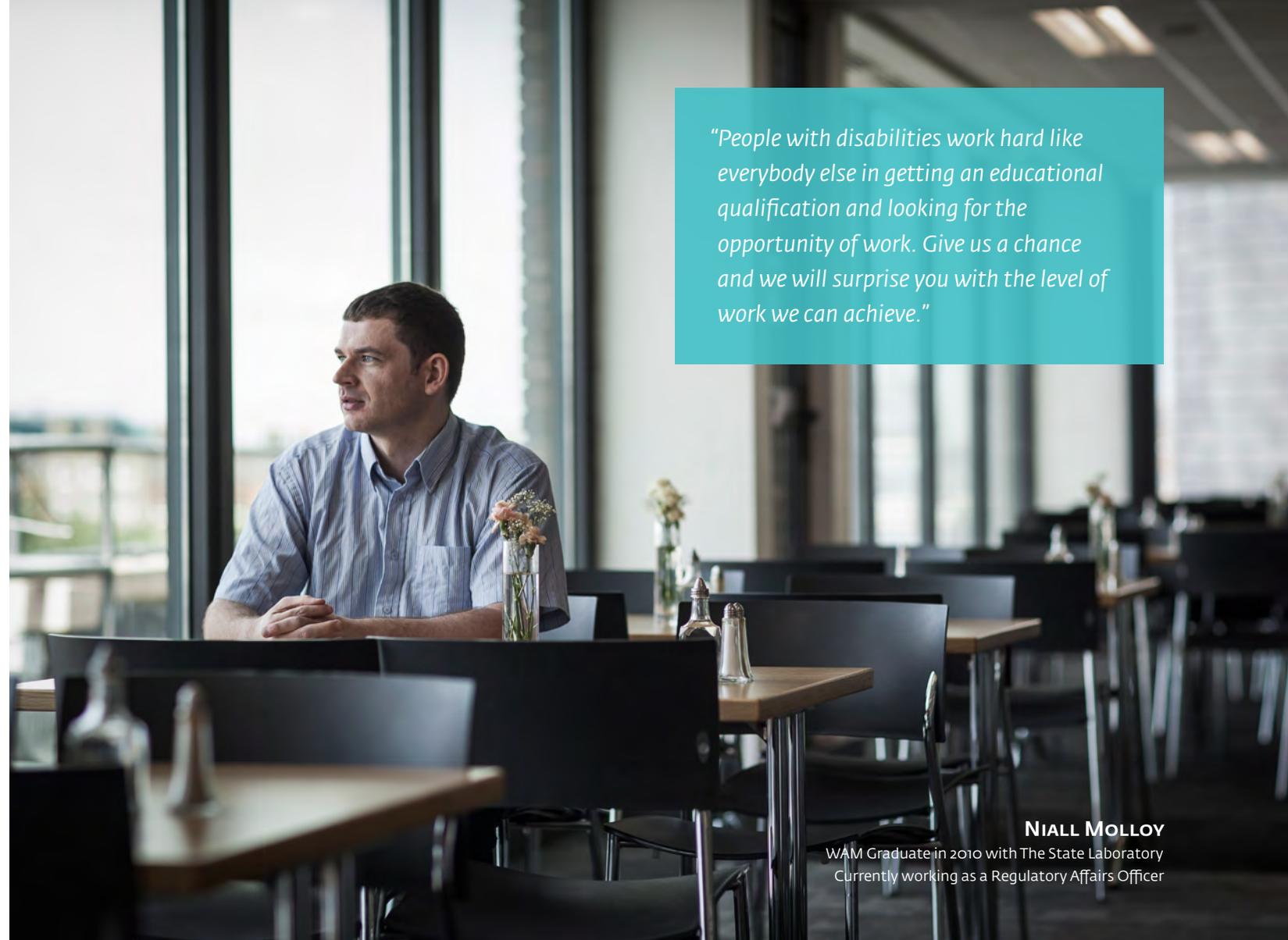
How to:

Job descriptions describe the job and NOT the individual who fills the job. A competency based job specification clearly outlines the essential skills, knowledge and characteristics required for a particular job. It is intended to provide a framework within which the interviewer can make a sound judgment about the candidate's ability to do the job – thus the more defined it is, the easier it should be to measure the abilities of a person, with or without a disability.

All job elements should be grouped into:

[Distinct areas of skill or ability contextualised to the particular job](#)

[Measurable actions which can be clearly judged e.g. has this person done this or not?](#)



“People with disabilities work hard like everybody else in getting an educational qualification and looking for the opportunity of work. Give us a chance and we will surprise you with the level of work we can achieve.”

NIALL MOLLOY

WAM Graduate in 2010 with The State Laboratory
Currently working as a Regulatory Affairs Officer

3 COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW APPROACH

The WAM Programme promotes a competency based interview approach. The central tenet of this approach is that the focus is on ability to do the job and not on the disability.

Asking a person with a disability to demonstrate how they would meet certain aspects of the role is absolutely fine once it is asked of all candidates for that role. For example, if a visually impaired candidate is being interviewed for a role where analytical and research skills are core elements, their route to the information may be different, but it is their analytical research skills which should be assessed and not *how* they accessed the research.

Remember, identifying the capabilities of interviewees with disabilities is done through job related questions – not disability related ones.

Points to consider

1. Abilities can be assessed at interview by asking job related questions.
2. However these questions must be asked of all applicants for the job.
3. Detailed and defined job specifications are a very important element as they can dictate questions asked at interview and therefore the thoroughness of the assessment of abilities. Do not underestimate the importance of the work environment in seeking a good job-skills match – it can inform the key communication skills required.

4. The most important thing is to find out whether the applicant can match the requirements of the job specification. It is then up to the applicant to demonstrate their skills and abilities with the core tasks of the job in mind.
5. Ensure all interviewers have received disability and diversity awareness training.



4 TESTING

Psychometric and/or ability testing are valuable tools during the recruitment and assessment process. However, if you are seeking to include and enable candidates with a disability you might need to consider the following:

Job analysis

It is essential that psychometric tests are selected based on a thorough job analysis that has identified the appropriate skills and abilities based on the actual requirements of the role. This ensures not just that candidates for a position are assessed on skills only relevant to the job, but also that candidates with a disability are only assessed against necessary requirements.

Testing Centre

It is a good idea to ensure that the centre is accessible for all candidates. This includes not just the physical space but also the information sent to candidates before and after the assessment process. Plans (practical and financial) may need to be made for personal assistants, assistance dogs, medication etc.

Candidates with a disability will perform better if they feel welcome and not at a disadvantage, most especially if they know that reasonable adjustments are all in place before attending.

Having a designated point of contact is a good idea, inviting disclosure in advance and facilitating the conversation about what may be required to ensure a positive experience and a level playing field for the candidate with a disability.

Testing procedure -consider:

- Are the tests being used flexible? Have you checked with the test developer?
- Can accommodations be made for candidates with a disability?
- If you are using online testing, is the software or site accessible?
- Is it possible for a candidate to use assistive technologies such as a screen reader/spell check/voice activated software?

Please be aware that while this is not an exhaustive list, for candidates with a disability who qualify for an accommodation, supports may include:

- Additional testing time (where tests are timed)
- A reader to read the test for the candidate and record responses
- Rest breaks
- A medical device in the room
- Assistive technologies including:
 - a trackball mouse or adapted keyboard
 - a recorder to record responses
 - enlarged font on a PC monitor
- A sign language interpreter

Results and outcomes – what are you trying to achieve?

Psychometric testing yields rich and important information - information that is invariably used to make decisions that can have a great impact upon people's lives. However, when you are considering psychometric testing, there are lot of important things that have to be considered - from the practical, to the personal, to the legal. Moreover, it is essential that the testing is only done by those that are competent and trained to international best practice standards.

In the area of psychometric testing for work and occupations, these training standards are set and maintained by the British Psychological Society (see www.psychtesting.org.uk) and the European

Federation of Psychologists' Associations (see www.efpa.eu).

The recognised training for people to complete is called "Test User: Occupational - Ability" and "Test User: Occupational - Personality". Once trained, it is possible to access tests from publishers and practice psychometric testing in a safe and professional manner. The link above to the British Psychological Society can be used to access a list of Verified Assessors who can provide such training.

As with any other type of assessment, psychometric tests often paint only part of the picture of a candidate's personality and abilities. Therefore, it is important that psychometric tests are used in conjunction with other forms of assessment in order to reach a meaningful understanding of a participant's abilities. Decisions based solely on psychometrics are not advised if you are seeking to have a truly diverse workforce.



"I am self-taught in web design and various programming languages... I believe that keeping a toe in the technological sector helped in my applications for work."

NIAMH FOLEY

WAM Graduate in 2009 with IBM
Currently finishing a Masters in
Applied Software Development

5 REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS/SUPPORTS

“This is the first time I have ever used a sign language interpreter at interview and it will never pose a problem for me in the future”
(HR Manager)

Under Employment Equality legislation, employers are obliged to take appropriate measures to enable a person who has a disability to access and participate in employment or undertake training – unless these measures would result in a disproportionate burden for the employer.

A candidate with a disability can be considered fully competent and capable of understanding the duties of the role, if reasonable accommodations are put in place.

A key part in identifying the correct reasonable accommodations and supports required is to conduct a needs assessment with the successful candidate. A needs assessment is a structured conversation primarily with the applicant so that all parties agree on what is a reasonable accommodation. Collaboration is key. The WAM Programme has developed a needs assessment process, which is conducted with every candidate who is starting a work placement and creates a recommendation document of what type of reasonable accommodations and supports, if any, should be put in place.

Accommodations can vary from time off for medical appointments, to the use of an Irish Sign Language interpreter for interview or training

to Assistive Technology (AT). However, please be aware that as technology is advancing at a rapid pace, the emphasis is on the candidate to explain what type of AT they require and how it will enable them to undertake the duties of the role on offer to ensure the appropriate technology is installed.

Technology can really make a difference - for all of us! We all love our gadgets but need to be mindful that for a candidate with a disability, it levels the playing field. It can be the critical difference when it comes to doing a job well.



6 CONSIDER THE SCENIC ROUTE - ALTERNATIVES TO QUALIFICATIONS

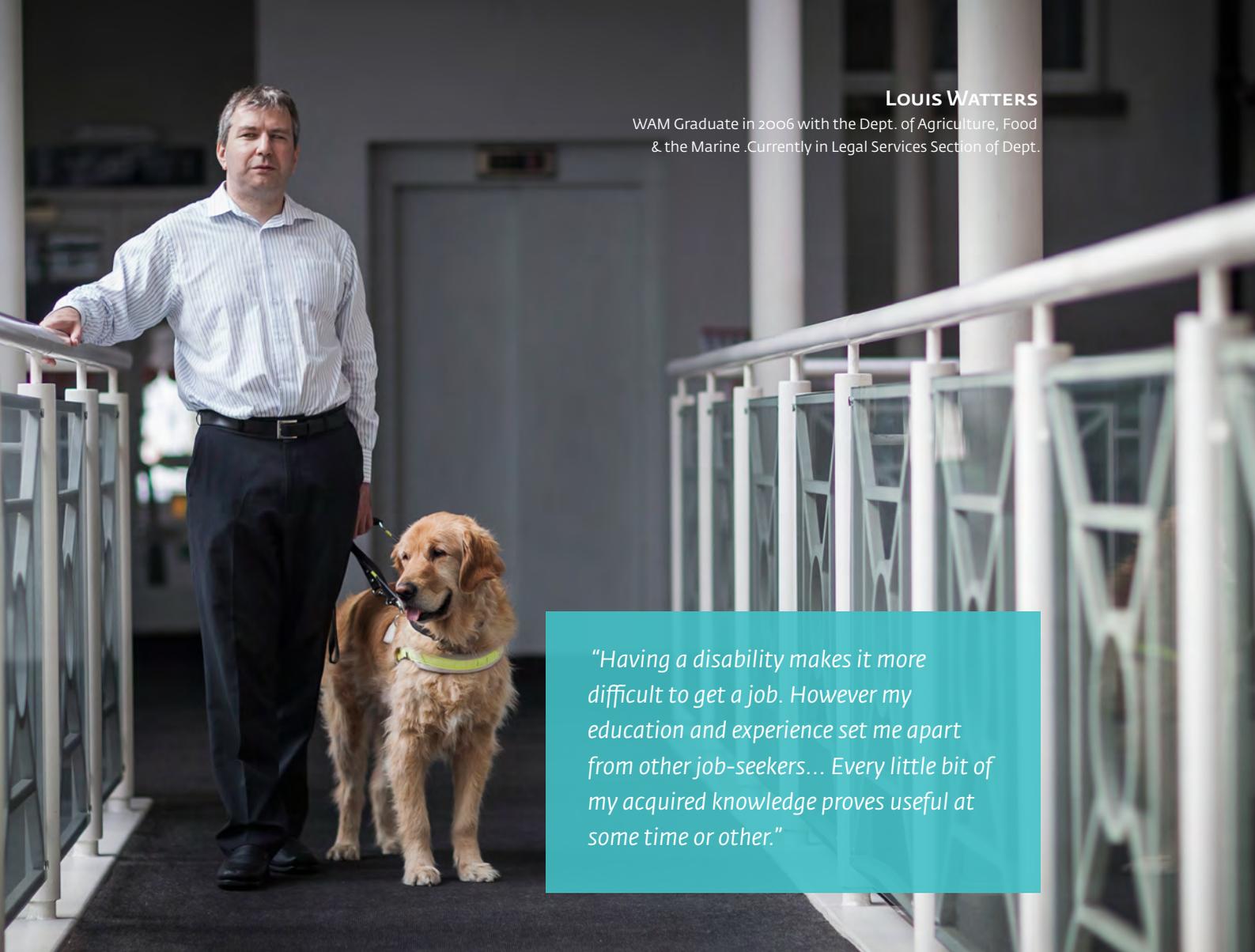
Many organisations set a minimum qualification entry requirement for job applicants. However, it is worth noting that some graduates with disabilities do not go through the standard mainstream schooling system but may, nonetheless, hold alternative qualifications that carry the same weight as an Ordinary Bachelor Degree (level 7) and therefore warrant consideration. Comprehensive details on the National Framework of Qualifications can be found by visiting www.nfq.ie.

It is worth considering those individuals who have built up skills and abilities outside of the formal education system. Increasingly, graduates with disabilities are very IT proficient due to the necessity to engage with AT from an early age.

Moreover, many have acquired excellent advocacy, communication, negotiation and organisational skills as such competencies are part and parcel of their daily lives.

A point to consider?

A graduate with a disability may have had different experiences of work, sports, clubs and societies than other graduates. Their story is not a typical story during the recruitment process, and whether this is picked up at application stage or in conversation at interview, it is worth remembering that because they present differently, it does not mean that they are any less capable. In fact, they may bring something positively different.



LOUIS WATTERS

WAM Graduate in 2006 with the Dept. of Agriculture, Food & the Marine .Currently in Legal Services Section of Dept.

“Having a disability makes it more difficult to get a job. However my education and experience set me apart from other job-seekers... Every little bit of my acquired knowledge proves useful at some time or other.”

7 DISCLOSURE OF DISABILITY

People with disabilities reserve the right to disclose their disability or not - this is an individual choice. Disclosure is when a person shares information about their disability and/or the impact of their disability. It can often be a very sensitive issue for all parties.

Below are some of the key points that employers have raised about the advantages of disclosure:

Disclosure:

Enables you to take control of the situation

Allows for an assessment of needs

Where required, allows for the provision of accommodations/supports

Non Disclosure:

May impact on the provision (or non provision) of required supports

May impact on selection, retention and progression opportunities

May impact on perceptions (misconceptions and assumptions about disability issues can prevent a person with a disability from getting a job)

However, if an individual chooses to disclose, they need to trust that it is to their benefit. The disclosure decision can be made easier for an individual in a supportive environment:

1. Identify the important information

Stop and think, what do you actually need to know? What you are probably most concerned about is how someone is going to do the job rather than the story of their disability. You may take control of the conversation if you feel you are being told more than you need to know. Keep in mind, the applicants may have little experience of discussing their disability in this context and think of you as the professional.

2. Be open – invite disclosure.

The sample question; ‘Do you require any specific supports or adjustments in order for you to...’ should be asked of all. Opportunities include; application forms, prior to attending interview, during the interview, at job offer, prior to receiving important training, performance plans, reviews etc. Where this question is being asked, it should be asked of all going through the process, especially prior to interview and during the interview.

3. Point of reference

Ensure all staff have access to practical information on how an employer can accommodate an applicant with a disability. Advertising a clear point of contact for applicants with a disability to discuss supports, answer any questions about the process and offer individualized support, can encourage disclosure.

4. Transparency is key

When disclosure occurs, it is very important that the person involved feels safe and that there is appropriate control of their private information. Considerations need to be given to how the information will be shared and stored. If you feel colleagues need to be made aware, discuss this with the individual concerned and agree on a process whereby all parties are comfortable. Transparency, collaboration, confidentiality and clarity are vital.

5. Awareness

HR and management staff should receive disability equality training. Staff should be mindful that there are a variety of supports available including equipment and technologies. This is a constantly developing field so expertise is not expected but

an awareness of the range available would be beneficial.

More importantly, while an individual knows how they work best, an employer understands the work environment, job related tasks and what needs to be achieved. Having an open conversation about how someone will do their job best will assist in meeting the unique needs of the company.



SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

AHEAD encourages companies to get the message across to people with disabilities that the organisation is committed to fair and inclusive practice and encourages applications for talented people with disabilities by removing barriers both physical and attitudinal to their employment.

We urge employers to be open-minded, to be flexible and to acknowledge that people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group of people but individuals with unique abilities and strengths.

Employers would benefit from thinking outside the box and looking again at how people with disabilities can fit into their organisation e.g. flexible working hours, part-time hours, working from the home etc.

AHEAD promotes a learning environment and encourages employers to continue to build their knowledge about what grants are available and what facilities and training courses are on offer to encourage them to employ people with disabilities.

OUR THANKS

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