



NCBI

Working for People
with Sight Loss

A Guide for Employers



**Employing a person
with sight loss**

Introduction

It makes good business sense to employ people who are blind and vision impaired. They represent a significant untapped resource in the labour pool, and with the right accommodations and supports are capable of doing most jobs.

Shockingly, **less than 1 in 4 people** with sight loss are actively participating in the labour force and therefore NCBI is seeking corporate engagement partnerships to better support people who are blind and vision impaired of working age to reach their full potential.



NCBI's Employment Service

NCBI's Employment Service provides one-to-one support, workplace assessments and advocacy services to prepare and empower people with sight loss to gain and retain meaningful employment. It also offers programmes to support entry into the workforce.

NCBI's Pre-employment Programme

NCBI's Pre-employment Programme is a unique six week programme, providing up to date and relevant training and information on the job market for people with sight loss. Offered both in person and online, the course is run in collaboration with NCBI's Workplace Partner Programme, with sessions focusing on goal setting, CV writing and interview skills.

Workplace Partner Programme

NCBI Workplace Partner Programme aims to provide people of working age who have sight loss with industry based work experience, to prepare them for entry, or re-entry into the workforce. The Workplace Partner Programme aims to increase confidence, and provide meaningful work experience for job seekers, whilst additionally increasing disability awareness to our workplace partners in employing individuals with sight loss.

NCBI's Employment Team in conjunction with our workplace partners provides 8 week placement opportunities. NCBI proactively works alongside our workplace partners both prior to and during the placement.

We are currently seeking further Workplace Partners to join the programme. Let us know if you can partner with us.

Employing a person with sight loss

When employing a person who is blind or vision impaired, do not make assumptions about what they can and cannot do - ask them. The individual themselves is the best judge of what their abilities are and what they can and cannot accomplish. If you don't do this, you could be missing out on an ideal candidate for the position.



Katie Dunne, HR team in the Central Bank

“ Within the Central Bank, we are committed to diversity and inclusion, as highlighted by our Diversity and Inclusion vision and overall Central Bank Strategy 2019-2021. We want to be an inclusive employer that has a diverse workforce, truly reflecting society within Ireland. To enable us to do this, adopting an inclusive recruitment process is essential.

We strive to ensure that all potential employees have an opportunity to present the best version of themselves throughout their recruitment journey with us. With the help of our employee led network ‘BankAbility’ who support and enable colleagues with a disability; we have set out to ensure this is the case by revising our recruitment process to support any individual’s requested accommodations.

This includes small changes like providing extra time for assessment centres, the use of laptops for written exercises, appropriate interview location and room set up and detailed interview invites about what to expect with supporting material for all applicants. These small alterations in the mainstream recruitment process will gradually contribute to an inclusive candidate-centric recruitment journey.

NCBI's support has been invaluable throughout the induction of our new joiners especially their input and expertise in conducting individual needs assessments within our building prior to our new joiners commencing.

Internally, we have a number of people supporting people starting in the Bank, with HR and the Environmental Health and Safety team who worked collaboratively with NCBI, to ensure a smooth transition into the Bank for the person. Having the support and guidance from the NCBI from the outset was critical to ensure each employee had a positive experience in a supportive environment, when beginning their career with the Central Bank. ”



Banc Ceannais na hÉireann
Central Bank of Ireland

Eurosystem

Adjustments and technology which improve access to employment

The Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2004 requires employers to make reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability. The accommodations required varies from person to person. Ask the person with sight loss what they need — they are the experts on how to manage their vision impairment.

Technology significantly improves access to employment for many people who are blind and vision impaired. In many cases, grants are available to cover the cost of the technology the person needs.

Assistive technology

Assistive technology can offer employees with sight loss an excellent way of reading and writing at work. Assistive technology can magnify text or images making them easier to see, enlarge text on computer screens or laptops and read aloud what is on the screen. Adapted scanners can also scan printed material onto a computer.

Choosing assistive technology

NCBI's technology service can advise and demonstrate a range of technology and give the opportunity for employees to try out the technology hands-on. Through NCBI, the employee can be provided with training and support with using this equipment.

What will these adaptations cost?

The Workplace Adaptation Grant, funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, offers a grant to cover the cost of adaptations needed to accommodate a person with a disability in the workplace. NCBI's technology service can give you a quotation for the cost of a comprehensive range of equipment which you can apply for under this grant.

Other simple adjustments

Below is a list of other easy adaptations in the workplace that can assist employees with sight loss:

- Use voicemail or email instead of handwritten notes when sending messages between employees and supervisors and among colleagues.
- If the person has some vision, it might be helpful to use a thick felt tip marker to make handwritten notes and names on file folders easier to see.
- Dots of silicon on switches will enable an operator with sight loss to identify and align controls on a machine.
- Many people can find it difficult to see when there is glare or extreme variations in light level. Employees might like to add in additional lighting from desk lamps or adjustable blinds.
- For a job that requires measuring, weighing, or calculations, many different kinds of measuring and calculating devices that 'talk' are available from NCBI.

Kyran O'Mahoney's Story



“ My name is Kyran and I am the Chief Technology Officer in the NCBI. I have congenital nystagmus, which means I was born with a vision impairment that causes my eyes to jitter or move. I have about 20% vision.

My degree is in Computer Science and I studied in Griffith College Dublin. I chose to do Computer Science very simply because I knew that there were a lot of jobs in the field. At the time, I knew almost nothing about computers. I even had to ask a fellow student how to turn my computer on during my first lecture. After a week or two, I began to love the problem-solving aspect of computers and realised how adaptable computers can be for someone with a vision impairment.

During my time in Griffith College, I completed an internship in AIB working in IT Systems Support. I remember being so nervous starting in AIB because this was my first “real” job. AIB were fantastic in getting me what I needed to do my job. I was encouraged to apply for AIB’s graduate programme and was later offered a full-time position which I turned down to start my own company as a DJ. My parents loved that! So, I used my IT skills to set up a website and market my DJ’ing skills. I was working as a DJ 6 nights a week but eventually wanted to go back to a day job and put my degree to good use.

I re-joined AIB on a short-term contract and was made permanent after 3 months and within a year I was promoted to a management position. I stayed in AIB for 8 years and learnt a huge amount. My vision impairment was never a problem. Once I had the things I needed like a larger screen or help setting up my computer I was just another employee and focused on meeting my day to day tasks.

In 2014 I decided to move on from AIB and I got a job in Ryanair. They were a brilliant employer and gave me the technology that I needed. I was nervous to ask for what I needed but to them it was simple – what do you need to get your job done and they made it happen. I always loved that attitude in Ryanair. My vision impairment was never an issue for them either.

I worked with Ryanair for 1 year and I was headhunted to join Dunnes Stores as an IT Delivery Manager. Again, I had no problems due to my vision impairment. They asked me what I needed and they just had it ready for me on my first day. I spent almost 3 years in Dunnes Stores and I then moved to a software development company. This company made websites and smart phone applications and I had a great opportunity to make software accessible from the ground up. I led a team of software developers and it was amazing how eager they were to make their products work for people with a disability.

It was a very consumer focused company and with 20% of the world's population having some sort of disability, it makes financial sense to make all products fully accessible.

When I am interviewing, I personally never mention having low vision. Interviews are about demonstrating you are the right candidate for the job. If I am invited back for a second interview and I know they are interested I mention that I will need a slightly bigger screen or maybe some magnification software. I have never experienced a company that had an issue with a request for support.

With the speed in which technology is advancing the barriers for people who are blind or vision impaired are getting smaller and in most cases the barrier is completely gone. I firmly believe technology is the single biggest enabler for someone with a vision impairment.

When I heard about the Chief Technology Officer role in NCBI I was very excited. In NCBI, I have the opportunity to teach people how to make software and hardware accessible rather than just telling them how important it is. I first went into the field of technology to get a job and now I am in a position to be an advocate for technology and accessibility.

Using technology means having a vision impairment doesn't matter anymore when it comes to employment. In the end, it is not about your sight loss, it is about how good you are at doing your job. ”



Getting to work

Independent travel to a variety of destinations is usually possible for a person who is blind or vision impaired. People are often experienced at finding creative travel solutions. NCBI also offers training in independent and safe travel.

Application and interview guidelines

When reviewing a candidate's application, an employer should not limit themselves to the idea that a candidate who is blind or vision impaired is completely different to sighted candidates. There may be certain expectations the job requires, such as driving, but flexibility is important. Consider the job position available and the specific requirements that **must** be filled. This way of thinking encourages the idea that a job is available to all, in spite of sight loss.

The application form

The application form can be the first barrier facing a suitable candidate. Below are simple adaptations that can make the form accessible:

- Offer the applicant an opportunity to fill out and submit the form by email or in larger print.
- Alternatively, offer to assist them with filling out the form.





Ability tests

If the selection process includes testing, ensure that it does not inadvertently discriminate against people who are blind and vision impaired.

Consult candidates with impaired vision or the NCBI in advance, so that necessary adjustments can be made for each individual candidate.

Óran O Neill's Story

“ I was born with severe short sightedness and my sight reduced further during my twenties and thirties. I was recently diagnosed with a rare form of retinitis pigmentosa. Before my sight deteriorated, my job as a sound engineer in RTÉ Television saw me involved in some of the shows that are household names, Primetime, Fair City and Reeling in The Years for example, and I loved it.



When my sight began to fail, I was desperately afraid of what the future was going to bring. I felt that I was lucky to be employed and was happy in my job, but I knew I would have to tell my employer about my vision impairment. My visit to the HR department was a supportive and encouraging experience. I had renewed hope after that, and decided to plough on even though I knew I had to change direction in work. I underwent career development assessment and I took on the running of day-to-day operations of my department, which was no problem to me with my adaptive technology.

By doing my job well, I hope I am letting everyone know that just because a person has a vision impairment, doesn't mean they aren't absolutely capable of doing a great job. I would like more and more people with sight loss to gain employment, because if we're not around, we're not seen and we're not heard, and employers won't learn that ability can massively outweigh disability.

Giving up was never an option for me. I love working and I love being productive. It's a basic right. Employment gives so much more to the employed person than cash in his or her pocket. I really believe that once employers educate themselves on the assistive technology, supports and grants that are available, they will stop seeing the disability, and start seeing people's abilities. ”

The interview

If the applicant is blind or vision impaired, consider what questions are appropriate to ask during an interview. For example:

- Focus on the person's qualifications to do the job with or without adjustments – not the person's vision impairment.
- If the interviewer has any doubts about a person's ability to do the job, ask the applicant how they would go about it.

Other ways to assist a candidate:

- When greeting a candidate, the employer should address the candidate by name and then introduce themselves and other people present in the room.
- Remember that the candidate may not be able to see an offered handshake.
- If you think the candidate needs assistance, ask what kind of assistance is required.
- When entering the interview room, it may be helpful to describe the setting to the candidate.
- Ensure the reception staff also know how to welcome and assist a visitor who is blind and vision impaired.

Paul McBrearty's Story

“ My name is Paul and I live in Ballina, Co Mayo. I have albinism and I use magnification software and larger print to enable me to read and use a computer. In the 1980's, I went to live the UK. I worked there for 19 years. But due to family circumstances, I returned to Ireland in 2004. Since my return I have not got any paid work. I have an Honours Degree in Business Studies and am currently undertaking an Accountancy Technicians course.

I feel that the recruitment process, particularly aptitude tests, can really put people with vision impairments at a disadvantage because companies are asking candidates to do a test using software, they are not familiar with and without the magnification software needed to see to read the test.

I want to work and don't want be treated differently. Once I have the software technology that I need, I am more than willing and able to work. I feel that employers need to give people an opportunity and see things from a different perspective.”

Contacting our Employment Service

As an employer, you can contact our Employment Service to arrange a meeting. If you are unsure about what direction to proceed with, simply ask. In the end, this will be beneficial to both you and the person with sight loss.



Contact our Employment Service at info@ncbi.ie or telephone **01 830 7033** where you will be redirected to your local or regional service.



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