



NCBI

**Working for People
with Sight Loss**

NCBI's Guide for Jobseekers



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Being employed is important for much more than only financial stability. Employment boosts your health and happiness. Being a contributing member of society is an important aspect to modern daily life. This guide aims to offer you advice to help you get the job that you want.



Katie's Story

“ My name is Katie. When I was only 6 months old, I was diagnosed with having a malignant tumour on my retina. Following surgery, I had no sight in my left eye and low vision in my right eye. I have lived with low vision all of my life and wanted to just get on with life.

I am originally from Tipperary but moved to Dublin to do a course in general nursing. Due to my sight loss, I struggled with all of the expectations of the course, so I decided to change my career path slightly. I moved to Scotland and did a course in mental health nursing. For the past three years, I have been working as a nurse in a mental health hospital. I have just taken up a similar role in a hospital in Dublin. I love the job I am doing. It took me a bit longer to get there but it was worth it.

For the first few months on the job, I was nervous and wondered if I would be able to manage but I was really fortunate to work with a very friendly and supportive team. Because of them, I felt my confidence improve and I now know that all the studying and hard work was worth it. ”

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 including our pre-employment programme and workplace partnership programme.

- **One to one support**

NCBI can provide you with one to one support on any or all aspects of employment preparation or readiness. If you are concerned or need training on any aspect relating to employment, NCBI have a team throughout the country that can assist. For example, if you are concerned about how you will access information, either in print or on PC, or how you will get around in work, NCBI will give you the skills and confidence to address these issues.



- **Peer support**

If you are wondering how other people are managing in employment and how have they overcome obstacles in the workplace, NCBI has a database of people with vision impairment who are willing to offer peer support to others in a similar situation. We can link you either in person, by phone or email – whichever you choose.

- **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's 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 also increasing disability awareness in employing individuals with sight loss amongst our workplace partners. NCBI's Employment Team in conjunction with partners from all sectors seek to provide 8 week placement opportunities.

Clare Kennelly's Story

“ My name is Clare and I am from Cork. At the age of 19, during my second year of college, I was diagnosed with an eye condition called Stargardts. I took a break from university and for five years worked and travelled around North and South America and Spain. I learned to speak Spanish. I was told that Stargardts was a degenerative condition, so I wanted to see as much of the world as possible while I still had good vision. I then returned to university where I continued my studies in sociology and Spanish. After my degree, I completed a Higher Diploma in Education. I did substitute teaching for a number of years and part-time teaching. With a wealth of teaching experience, I finally got a full-time job in the Cork College of Commerce.

I would have liked to think that attitudes have changed somewhat towards employing people with disabilities but the statistics do not show this. Seeing my students with disabilities struggle to get employment encouraged me to do something about it. I believe that gaining employment should not be down to luck. So, I set up Inclusive Cork where I work as a Disability Business Inclusion Trainer and Consultant. Employers benefit from disability confidence training. There is a lot of fear around employing people with any sort of disability. The disability awareness training that I provide encourages employers to open their minds and change their language around recruitment process, in policies and everyday workplace.

The advice that I would give to people who are blind and vision impaired seeking employment would be:

1. Be clear and realistic when writing your CV about what you can do.
2. Get on LinkedIn. Get your name out there. All connections you can make within the world of work will be to your benefit.
3. Know the supports you need to do your job. Don't expect your line manager to know all the assistive technologies available. Bring your solutions with you.
4. Consider remote working. It is the future of work.

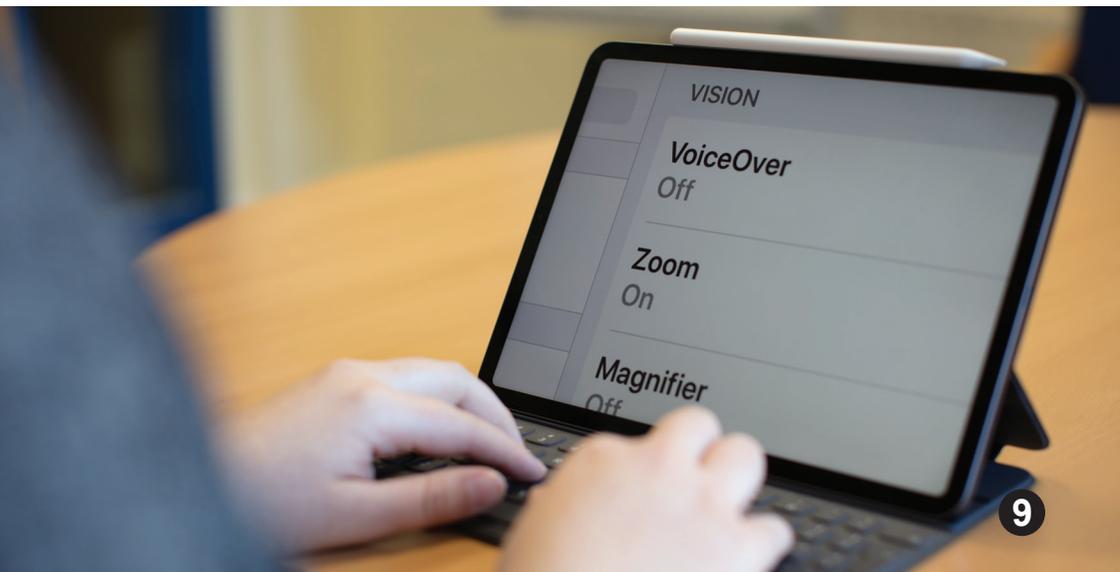
I believe that in today's society with the way that technology is changing the way we work, 9-5 working days are not the future for people with disabilities. People who are blind and vision impaired have to navigate a world that is not built for them on a daily basis. Sometimes travelling on public transport can make work unsustainable. ”

Making adjustments

Technology has opened up employment opportunities for people who are blind or vision impaired because it is an excellent way of reading and writing at work. The technology that you might need will depend on the level of vision that you have. Magnification software on your computer can enlarge everything on your computer screen and screen reading software reads aloud what is on your computer screen. Adapted scanners can scan printed material onto a computer.

NCBI's technology service can advise and demonstrate a range of technology and give you an opportunity to try out the technology hands-on. We can also provide you with training and support with using the technology that you choose.

The Workplace Adaptation Grant, funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, offers a grant to cover the cost of technology that you might need. 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 employers can make

Employers can make simple and inexpensive adjustments to workplace that will enable you to do a job. These might include:

- Use of additional lighting for certain up-close tasks
- Use of email and voice mail as methods of communication instead of hand written notes
- Use of larger print for documents and other communications
- Tactile raised dots called bump-ons on equipment to help identify controls
- Assigning colleagues to help you to read printed and handwritten materials that cannot be converted electronically

Tina Lowe's Story

“ I lost my sight at the age of 27 due to viral meningitis, which I contracted while living in Spain where I taught English. I returned to Ireland to undergo brain surgery. Following this, I had to relearn how to live without sight. I decided to go to Roslyn Park College to learn how to use computers as a blind person. I then went to University College Dublin and got my degree in languages and my Masters in Equality Studies. I gradually began to regain confidence and developed a determination to succeed.

I was about six months out of college when I got a job in AHEAD, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability. I was absolutely delighted starting work. I thought I would never get a job again after my sight loss. My employer was great and I was quite confident a month or so after starting because of the support that was available for me. I really excelled in the role. I worked in AHEAD for 4 years and then applied to University College Dublin to work as the Disability Officer. I changed my role to Campus Accessibility Officer, which was the job that I always had a huge interest in since becoming blind. I have been working in this role since 2010 in the Access and Lifelong Learning Centre.

My advice to any person who is blind or vision impaired is to go for a job that they are passionate about and that they will be able to do with reasonable accommodations. I think it is very important to educate yourself as much as you can and to go for practical career advice with NCBI. I also believe that it is very important to be as knowledgeable as possible in using assistive technologies. I think that being positive and having a good mental attitude and an open empathic approach will help both a blind or vision impaired person and the potential employer. ”

How and when to tell your employer about your vision impairment

You do not have to tell a prospective employer about your vision impairment unless it will significantly impact on your ability to do the job. It comes down to a case-by-case basis and the level of comfort you feel with disclosing this information. Some people choose to wait until after the recruitment process while others tell the employer straight away. There are no rules around this, do whatever you are comfortable with.

Applying for a job

When making a job application, you could make your application online or by email or you could request assistance from the HR department to fill out the form.



Geraldine Cussen's Story

“ My name is Geraldine. I have retinitis pigmentosa. I was born with this eye condition but in the last few years my sight deteriorated hugely. I worked in administration and secretarial work all of my life but when my sight began to reduce more and more, I knew that I needed to change jobs. So I applied for a job with NCBI. I am now the manager of NCBI's shop in Navan.

I use a clip on magnifier which helps me to see the numbers on the till more easily. I also manage the shops Facebook page and I am in the process trying out magnification software that might help me to use a computer. Working for NCBI has made it easy for me to achieve more in my role because as an organisation NCBI is familiar with the needs of people with sight loss and how to make adjustments. I have been working for NCBI for 5 years now and have enjoyed every minute of it and have never looked back. ”

Ability tests

If you need to take an ability test, you could:

- Ask to use the appropriate assistive technology to read it and fill it in.
- Ask that you have some extra time to fill out the test.
- Ask that someone read the test aloud to you and write down your answers.

Interview tips

At an interview you might like to:

- Make sure you know what the essential job functions of the role are, so that you can explain how you will be able to carry out those functions and what technologies or other simple adjustments you might need.
- Ensure that the responses you give to the questions that you are asked focus on your abilities.
- Explain the simple and inexpensive ways the employer can help.

Tony Murray's Story

“ I lost all of my sight at the age of two due to childhood eye cancer. I currently work in the Central Bank of Ireland in a Senior Solution Architect role. This is a lead role within the technology division, and involves designing high-demand strategically aligned computer systems. I love my job. The only adjustment I require to perform my role is the installation of screen reading software package on my laptop. This allows me to gain full access to the PC and perform alongside my colleagues.

In my view, technology has significantly opened up access to both education and employment for people who are blind and vision impaired. I believe that there is a responsibility on people who are blind and vision impaired who are seeking employment to push hard in terms of job applications. This involves possessing and presenting the appropriate skillsets so that they can stand out from other candidates when it comes to the hiring process. I think that resilience is a key attribute, which people who are blind and vision impaired need to cultivate throughout the job seeking process. I applied for many jobs throughout my adult life, and only got to where I am now through sheer determination.

I believe that employers should work towards thinking outside the box, ridding themselves of any misconceptions they have about the ability of job candidates who are blind or vision impaired. Within the Central Bank, I work as part of a Bank Ability Network consisting of people dedicated to the promotion of a culture of diversity and inclusion. The Bank Ability Network has been instrumental in the establishment of policies and practices to ensure that all job applicants to the bank have the same opportunities to demonstrate their abilities throughout the hiring process.”



Banc Ceannais na hÉireann
Central Bank of Ireland

Eurosystem

Getting a job offer

If you get offered the job, a range of NCBI's services can help you to become familiar and comfortable within your role in work. Some of these include:

- Awareness training can be provided for employers and colleagues to encourage a greater understanding of sight loss in the workplace.
- Workplace assessments can be carried out to ensure the safety and accessibility of the work environment for you.
- A technology assessment can be done to find technological aids that will help you to carry out your job to the best of your ability.
- Assistance can be given with mobility skills where we can help you to learn the safest route for your journey to and from work.

Who to ask for help

As a person with sight loss in the workplace, some challenges that you will face will be related to your vision whereas others will be problems that everybody experiences when starting a new job. You should bring any issues or queries up with your line manager or the HR department. If you don't find the answer you are looking for or get the help you need, contact NCBI for further assistance.

Leslie Scott's Story

“ My name is Leslie. Since the age of 4, I have had no sight in one eye. I have been working in Dublin for many years and in 2016 I became Assistant Director in a company called Extern.

In August 2017 I was unexpectedly diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa which meant I was losing my side vision in my right eye and I also have very little vision at night. In addition I have a cataract in the right eye further impacting on my vision loss. This all resulted in my losing my ability to drive, which I had been doing for 26 years, and an inability to use my computer. The ability to travel and use a computer were critical to my role as Assistant Director, so the immediate impact was severe.

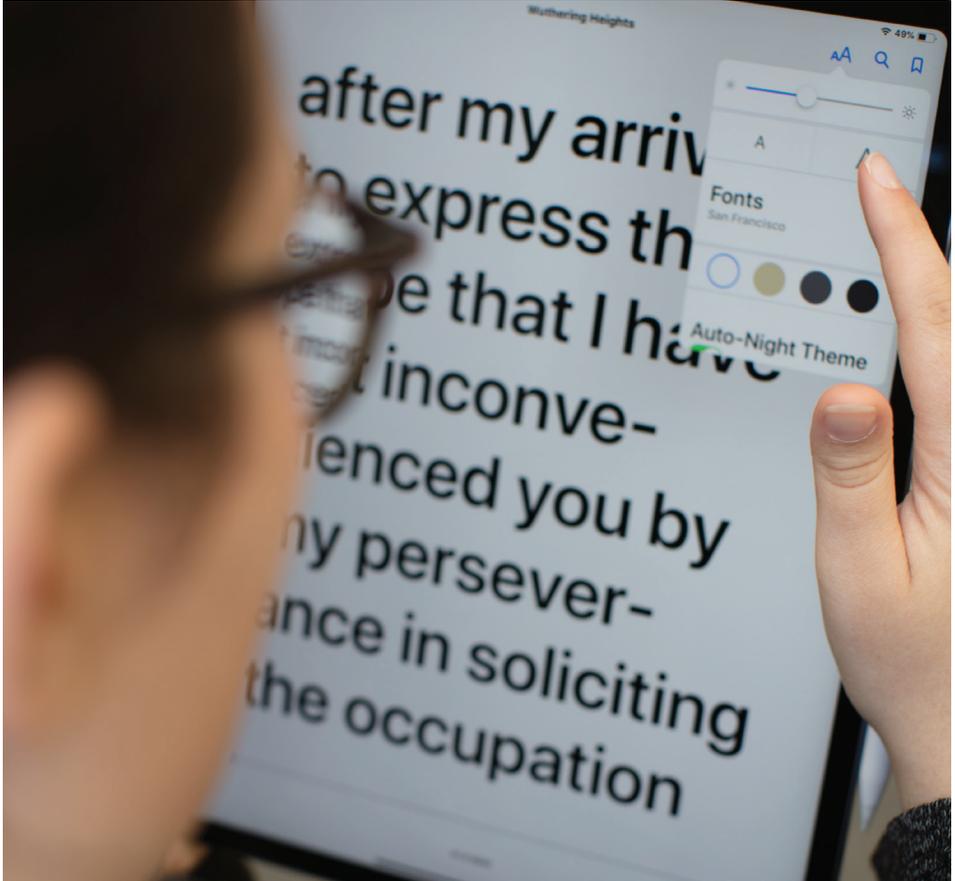
Initially I felt I can handle this, but then I went through a whole range of emotions. I was too busy being strong. I then began to get anxiety attacks and was out of work for nine weeks. I am so lucky to have such excellent employers. When I was out they kept in regular contact with me, sending messages of support. They have been exceptional. My employer has said to me “We’re in this together”, which is fantastic. In terms of my role at work, I am still the same person I always was and thankfully that is recognised by my employers and my peers. Following some small adjustments like assistive technology on my computer, I have retained my position at work.

I am grateful for the many strides in technology which enable people with sight loss to participate in the workplace, competently and confidently. Technology allows me to read and write. It is amazing what it can do.

NCBI has been exceptional too. I have used all the services which it put at my disposal and they have really stood to me so much. Mobility training, counselling, employment guidance and technology training, I have had it all and I am so glad. From suggesting the assistive technology my employers could have in place for me to the confidence they have given me, the NCBI has been incredibly helpful and supportive. ”

Your rights

You might also be interested to know that you are also protected by the law. The Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2004 require employers to make reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability.



Contact our Employment Service

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



**Working for People
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