

Employing people with learning disabilities

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A handbook for employers

Susan Hemmings and Jenny Morris



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Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
1 What this guide is about and why it might be useful to you as an employer	1
2 Recruitment	2
Advertising	2
Approaches from supported employment agencies	3
Application forms	4
Job descriptions and person specifications	5
Shortlisting and interviewing	6
Group interviews	10
Practical tests or assessments 'on the job'	11
Work experience	11
Recruitment: checklist	11
3 Induction and initial training	13
Helping a new employee with learning disabilities to fit into a workplace	15
Confidentiality	17
Induction and training: checklist	17
4 The job	19
A note about health and safety	20
Aids and equipment	20
Making information and communication accessible	21
Support provided by other workers and line managers	22
Support from an employment support worker	24
Changes to the job	25
Changes to procedures	26
Changes to the hours of work	27
The job: checklist	29
5 Management and day-to-day supervision	30
Team building and nurturing good working relationships	32
Learning from people with learning disabilities	34
Management and supervision: checklist	35
6 Appraisal and performance monitoring	37
Appraisal and performance monitoring: checklist	39

7 Helping people progress in employment	40
Helping people progress in employment: checklist	41
8 Dealing with problems	42
Disciplinary procedures	44
Harassment and bullying	44
Dealing with problems: checklist	45
9 Checklists	46
Recruitment	46
Good practice in interviewing people with learning disabilities	46
Induction and training	47
The job	48
Management and supervision	48
Appraisal and performance monitoring	50
Helping people progress in employment	50
Dealing with problems	50
Key information 1: The business case for employing people with learning disabilities	52
Key information 2: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and people with learning disabilities	54
Key information 3: What is a learning disability?	55
Key information 4: What assistance is available to employers to help them employ people with learning disabilities?	56
Key information 5: CHANGE	60
Key information 6: How people with learning disabilities were involved in putting this guide together	61

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- JobBase, Buckinghamshire
- Linked Employment, Chelmsford, Essex
- Mencap Pathway: West Yorkshire and Hertfordshire
- Papworth Trust, Cambridge
- Sabre Employment Agency, Deptford, London
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council Supported Employment Agency.

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- Gillian Clayton
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- William Westbrook
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1 What this guide is about and why it might be useful to you as an employer

This guide shares the experiences of employers who have successfully employed people with learning disabilities.

The information and advice contained in the guide come entirely from the experiences of 26 employers who we interviewed. It is therefore based on the practical realities of employing people with learning disabilities and not on 'wishful thinking'.

Each chapter of the guide deals with an important aspect of being an employer – from recruitment through to disciplinary procedures.

Examples are given to illustrate ways in which employees with learning disabilities can make a positive contribution and what action is required to make this happen. We also quote managers and work colleagues, as well as people with learning disabilities themselves.

Each chapter concludes with a checklist of 'tips' for employers, taken from the information given to us by employers about how they went about things.

We have put background information, such as the business case for employing people with learning disabilities and information about the Disability Discrimination Act, in Key information 1–6. This is also where you will find information about sources of advice and support for employers.

2 Recruitment

Opening up your recruitment processes to people with learning disabilities will enable you to tap into a valuable source of potential employees. A public commitment to equality of opportunity means a positive public image. All stages of the recruitment process are covered by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (see Key information 2).

Advertising

If you advertise a post, it is important to make it clear that you can provide the information about the post in accessible formats. This is an obligation under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. CHANGE can help you to put vacancy information into formats accessible to people with learning disabilities (see Key information 5 for information about CHANGE).

It is also helpful to make it clear that you welcome applications from disabled people, for example by stating clearly in the advert, 'We welcome applications from disabled people'. The 'two ticks' disability symbol is a recognition given by the Government's employment service to employers who have committed themselves to achieving good practice in the recruitment and employment of disabled people. Further information about this is available from Jobcentre Plus (see Key information 4 for contact details).

However, the usual advertising outlets may not reach people with learning disabilities. They will be more likely to see an advert if you do the following.

- Place it with your local Jobcentre or Jobcentre Plus, making it clear that you welcome applications from disabled people, including people with learning disabilities. Vacancies can be placed by ringing 0845 601 2001.
- Send it to local education and training providers.
- Send it to any local employment support agencies (see Key information 4 for how to find such agencies).

- Place it with local disability organisations (you can find out about such organisations from your local Council for Voluntary Service whose contact details will be in the business section of your local phone book).
- Place it in national disability newspapers, such as *Disability Now* (0207 619 7336) or on the website www.Jobability.com.
- Place it with your local Connexions service. This used to be called the Careers Advisory Service and contact details will be in the business section of your local telephone book.

Approaches from supported employment agencies

Information about supported employment agencies is in Key information 4. These agencies often approach companies to ask whether they would be willing to consider employing a person with learning disabilities. They will usually already have a person with learning disabilities in mind when they make this approach. The support agency will have assessed the person's abilities and interests and will have done some work to 'match' the person to type of employment. This can be a very valuable service to an employer, as it increases the likelihood that the candidate will be suitable.



Example

Mark, an Employment Training Adviser, approached AMF Bowling about Vicky, who was doing the World of Work course provided by Wigan Supported Employment Service. AMF Manager, Paul, said:

I couldn't picture someone with a learning disability dealing with customers and the hazards here. But Mark won me over. Vicky had a lot to offer. Certificates, she's really nice, a good personality, someone with a lot of potential. I felt she could be an asset to me. I felt she would be ideal here.

“I love this job. It's all down to Mark [the Employment Training Adviser from Wigan Supported Employment Service], helping me get back into work. I'd recommend them to anyone ... It's brought me out of my shell and given me spending power – I meet new people. I had no confidence before.”

(Alan, Night-shift Worker at Morrison's)

Application forms

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, employers are required to make adjustments to application forms and the way they use them, so that disabled people are not put at a disadvantage. For example, in order to make an application process accessible to someone with a learning disability, it may be necessary to:

- provide an application form in large print, in plain English (i.e. without using jargon or complicated language), using pictures, or on tape
- allow a candidate to submit an application on tape or to provide the information over the telephone.

CHANGE can help you to provide an application form in a format suitable for people with learning disabilities (see Key information 5 for information about CHANGE).

It is good practice to state on the application form that you have a duty as an employer to make any adjustments required because of someone's disability or health. This will reassure candidates that you are aware of your duties under the Disability Discrimination Act. It is also

good practice to ask applicants if they have any particular requirements to enable them to participate in an interview.

Job descriptions and person specifications

It is helpful for everyone if job descriptions and person specifications are in clear language. Organisations often use jargon in their job descriptions and this may need to be turned into plain English.

Example

Douglas Armstrong was appointed as a Director of Thera Trust, an organisation that provides services for people with learning disabilities. He and his Personal Assistant rewrote the job description in language that he could understand.

Job description for Service Director of Thera Trust (rewording in italics):

- 1 Raise the profile of Thera Trust and represent the organisation externally.
To meet with people outside Thera Trust and tell them about the Trust.
- 2 Support the design and implementation of the new organisation.
To work with the other directors to develop the Trust.
- 3 Actively participate in the establishment of the new Trust Board and Senior Management Team.
To work with the other directors as a member of the Senior Management Team.
- 4 Establish and chair a consultative group of people using services.
To set up and run a small group of users of the Trust's services to act as advisers about how service users feel about the services.
- 5 Monitor and evaluate all aspects of the quality of services.
To look at and check on the quality of the services.
- 6 Evaluate the organisation's progress against strategic targets.
To check the progress of the Trust towards its planned targets.
- 7 Executive member of the Board.
To work with other Board members as an executive member of the Board.

An employment support agency may help to put both job descriptions and person specifications into a format suitable for a particular applicant. CHANGE can also help with turning both job descriptions and person specifications into plain English with pictures.

The essential characteristics/minimum criteria incorporated in a person specification should not include qualifications and experiences that are not necessary in order to do the job. If they were to be included, this

might be contravening the Disability Discrimination Act. For example, people with learning disabilities are less likely to hold a driver's licence and, if this were specified as an essential characteristic but was not actually necessary to do the job, this would be discriminating against potential applicants. Similarly, if you required a certain level of educational qualification – which was not actually essential to enable someone to do the job – this would be discriminatory. If in doubt, contact the helpline at the Disability Rights Commission or the Employers' Forum on Disability (contact details are in Key information 2 and 4).

Shortlisting and interviewing

It is important to avoid asking for evidence of qualifications or experience that is not necessary to do the job. If you did not shortlist or appoint someone with a learning disability for a job because they did not have qualifications or experience that did not directly relate to the job, then this would count as unlawful discrimination.



Many people with learning disabilities are capable of working but have little or no employment history. This can be because they have previously faced discrimination when applying for jobs, or have been forced out of a job because of harassment or a failure to make reasonable adjustments. They may also have experienced financial disincentives to come off benefits if the jobs open to them did not pay enough. Many people with learning disabilities will also have spent time doing things that prepare them for employment such as training courses or voluntary work.

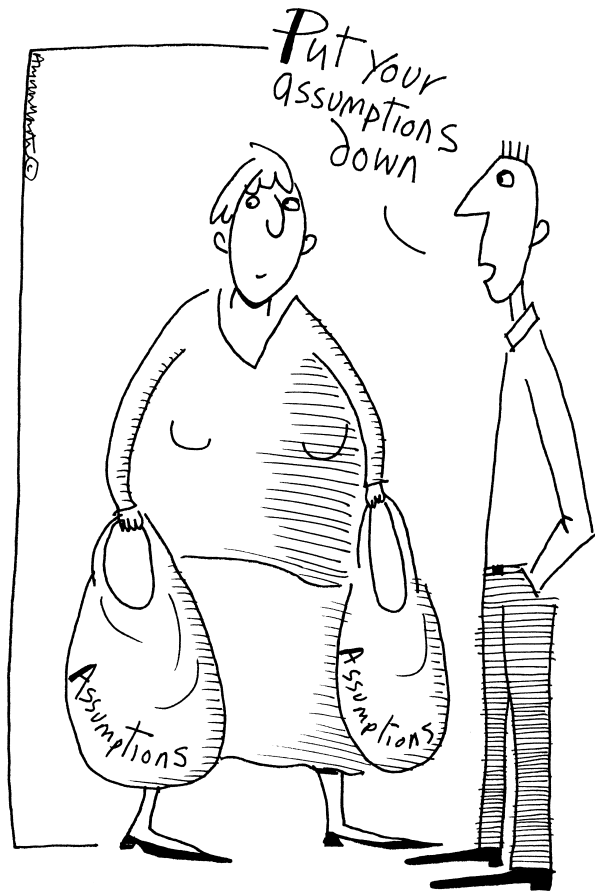
However, people with learning disabilities often have experiences that are relevant to the job they are applying for. They may have acquired relevant skills when doing work experience or voluntary work, for example.

Example

Chris Mears works as a Research Assistant on a project for the University of Bristol about the information needs of people with learning disabilities. His experience of helping out fellow students with learning disabilities on an IT course at college helped him to demonstrate that he was able to communicate with other people with learning disabilities – an essential part of the job he applied for.

It is very important not to make assumptions about someone's ability to perform a task. They will know the effect of their disability/impairment and they should be given the chance to demonstrate whether they can do the job. If you normally use psychometric testing, ensure that the person administering it is familiar with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. Whatever form of assessment you use, you should check out whether this is appropriate for an applicant with learning disabilities and, if not, use alternative methods. If you are uncertain, consult your local Disability Employment Adviser at Jobcentre Plus or employment support agency (see Key information 4).

Employment support agencies can help employers, as well as employees, prepare for an interview. This could be a valuable way of ensuring you meet your obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and also help you to effectively assess a candidate's suitability.



“We do preparation work with employers, making sure they know what a learning disability is and what it could mean, for example that it might take longer for someone to answer a question and that maybe questions need to be simplified. We can provide training as well as going in to talk to managers.”
(Tara Cahill, Mencap Pathway – employment support agency)

Local branches of large organisations can often look to their head office for assistance in making necessary adjustments. As one local personnel manager said:

“We can make all kinds of adjustments to interviews. We can contact head office and someone there can bring in someone who can sign, get us the right equipment or help with the right environment for an interview. You name it, we can adjust and adapt. If we needed something we didn’t have in store, head office would provide that for us for the interview.”

Local branches that have not had to make adjustments in the past may be unaware of the support that can be provided. If head offices do not currently provide such support, they need to know that local branches may be in need of such assistance.

Most adjustments required at interview are easily provided. Many of the employers we spoke to said they didn't really make any adjustments but, when prompted, could identify interview practices that made all the difference. For example, some provided support to help fill in a questionnaire, while others allowed a support worker to accompany the person with learning disabilities to the interview.

“We use a tickbox questionnaire. If someone needs help with this – as one of the employees with learning disabilities did – this isn't a problem.”

(Christine Becks, Manager, Lifespan Catering)

When a support worker accompanies an applicant to an interview, the questions will still be directed at the applicant but the support worker might:

- rephrase the way a question is asked so that the person can understand it better
- prompt the applicant to mention relevant experience
- just be there to give the applicant confidence.

All interviews depend on good communication skills. The following is a list of good practice suggestions that will help people with learning disabilities demonstrate their abilities at an interview.

- Speak clearly.
- Use short words, not jargon.
- Use short sentences.
- Reassure the interviewee that it's OK to say they don't understand a question and to ask you to say it differently.

- Ask questions about concrete experiences. For example, ‘What work did you do in the cafe?’
- Avoid using metaphors. For example, don’t say ‘We run a tight ship here’.
- Don’t ask complex questions. For example, don’t ask questions like ‘What is your greatest achievement to date?’ Instead ask something like ‘What were you best at in your previous job, or at college?’
- Don’t ask hypothetical questions. For example, ‘What would you do if the machine broke down?’ Instead ask something like ‘Did the photocopying machine ever break down at your last job? What did you do when it broke down?’
- If someone seems not to understand your question, try asking it in another way.
- Allow more time for the interview.
- Allow a support person to be present at the interview. This person may be there just to give the applicant more confidence. They may also help them to understand a question by rephrasing it, or by prompting the person with learning difficulties to talk about the things the interviewer wants to know about.
- Address your questions to the applicant, not the support person.

“In the planning of the interviews of people with learning disabilities for the post of Research Assistant, we thought very carefully about the language we would use in asking questions.”
(Joyce Howarth, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Group interviews

Sometimes, employers use group interviews or activities as part of the shortlisting and assessment process. Some people with learning disabilities will need support in order to participate. For example, they might need an instruction rephrased in plain English or repeated. This would count as a ‘reasonable adjustment’ to the recruitment process.

Practical tests or assessments ‘on the job’

Practical tests can be more appropriate for some people with learning disabilities, as this means they are given the chance to show they can do a job. Sometimes, job applicants are given a chance to try out the job and to see if they fit into the working environment.

“When Mencap Pathway approached us about employing Mark, we thought it would be best to just try it out to see if it worked.”
(Rachel Leach, Manager, Cineworld)

Work experience

Sometimes, an employment support agency or other organisation will place a person on work experience. This enables them to build up their confidence and experience. Work experience placements can lead to an offer of paid employment when an employer feels that the person has proved they can do the job.

Example

Bethan worked at Leigh Library in Wigan on a voluntary basis for nine months. She had intensive training by the Employment Training Adviser from Wigan Supported Employment Service and from the library staff. The Supported Employment Service worked with the library staff on writing a job description that allowed reasonable adjustments for Bethan. Library staff were advised on the best way to support her. She learnt how to do stock work and counter work. She became confident at dealing with fines and issuing new books, in an environment that is busy but where there is always a member of staff on hand to give any help. She became a valued member of staff and was offered a paid part-time post.

Recruitment: checklist

- Ensure that you advertise where people with learning disabilities are likely to see the advert.
- Respond positively to approaches by employment support agencies.
- Build relationships with local education and training providers.
- Ensure that your adverts, vacancy information and application forms are available in accessible formats.

Employing people with learning disabilities

- Accept applications in non-standard formats.
- Tell potential candidates that you welcome applications from disabled people and are aware of your obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Avoid asking for qualifications or experience that are not necessary to do the job.
- Adapt your assessment methods to enable people with learning disabilities to demonstrate their abilities.
- When interviewing, follow the communication tips given on pages 9–10.
- Seek training and/or assistance from a support agency or an organisation of people with learning disabilities to help you comply with the Disability Discrimination Act throughout your recruitment procedures and practice.

3 Induction and initial training

Like other aspects of employment, induction and training are covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. Many of the employers we spoke to said they considered any adjustments they had made to their induction or training to be part and parcel of being a good employer.

There are a number of ways in which an induction process can be made more accessible to a new employee with learning disabilities. You will want to consult with the person concerned and with their support worker, if they have one. Where an employment support service has been involved in the recruitment process, a support worker will often come into the workplace to find out what is involved in the job. They then work out the best way for the person with learning disabilities to be inducted into the job.

These are the kinds of things that help people with learning disabilities learn how to do a job:

- breaking the job down into separate tasks
- providing instructions in a format accessible to the person with learning disabilities
- checking that the person has understood and, if necessary, repeating instructions
- showing someone how to do a task
- checking that the person has understood and, if necessary, showing them again.

“Nick helped me learn how to build a website. He slowed things down to help me learn and he repeated things to check that I understood them.”

(Chris Mears, Research Assistant, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Example

One company, providing cleaning services for a large hospital, employs 350 staff and three are people with learning disabilities. One of them, David, has been employed as a Cleaning Assistant for five years. He sorts out the stockroom, unpacks supplies, stacks shelves and moves materials to where they are needed. He fills in for other areas when they are short-staffed.

When David first started, the manager wrote a daily programme of tasks for him. The support worker then turned it into language David could understand. David has difficulty remembering things, so he also wrote out key numbers, digital lock numbers and information about where things were kept.

Often, an induction period involves the new employee shadowing or being supported by a more experienced employee. This works particularly well for people with learning disabilities.

Example

A local manager at Cineworld juggled shifts around so that a new employee with learning disabilities had a consistent person who he could ask if he was uncertain about things. However, she said, 'I don't think I would do it differently for anyone else'.

“When someone with a learning disability starts work here, I put them with someone to work with so that they can learn from a more experienced person. I try to ensure that it's the same person on each shift. But I don't think I would do anything different for anyone else. It's just good practice.”

(Christine Becks, Manager, Lifespan Catering)

When induction involves off-the-job training and assessment, there are various adjustments that can easily be made. Examples include:

- putting people in smaller groups than is usual
- asking people questions rather than giving them a written test
- giving people longer to go through a training manual
- putting training material into accessible formats
- allowing a support worker to attend the training.

Disability Employment Advisers can provide advice about training, as can CHANGE (see Key information 4 and 5).

“Our Health and Safety booklet is provided in large print, using plain English with diagrams.”
(Wolverhampton City Council)

“When we have someone who has difficulties with reading and writing, we will do till training one to one with them. We’ve found that nine times out of ten they will pick it up and become more experienced as a result.”
(Vicky Hegarty, Personnel Manager, Allders Department Store)

Helping a new employee with learning disabilities to fit into a workplace

Often, a successful induction period will depend on how someone ‘fits in’ with the workplace and how they get on with their colleagues. There are things that an employer can do to help ease this process for someone with a learning disability.

“When Susan started work as an admin worker on the health promotion project I got photos of everybody in the office – and it’s quite a large office – and put their names and what their job was in a photo album. So when she met them she knew who she was meeting from the photo album. She said later that she had found this ever so helpful. She’s on a permanent contract now.”
(Joyce Howarth, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Most organisations have ‘unwritten rules’ about interaction between colleagues (like who makes the coffee, where people sit at breaks, when it’s OK to interrupt someone in their work). Some people will come into a workplace and pick these rules up quickly and easily; others will find it more difficult.

“It’s important not to assume that, just because someone has a learning disability, this means they can’t learn. And this is particularly important with unwritten rules of the workplace.”

“Sometimes people need things spelt out – because they wouldn’t otherwise pick them up themselves; sometimes they learn from other people’s behaviour. But the most important thing is to take a positive view that people can learn about these things and develop. Often good supervision is the key.”
(Val Williams, Researcher, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Example

When Paul started at Belmont Packaging, the manager allocated him a buddy, who took Paul to the canteen and involved him in things.

Sometimes a taken-for-granted workplace practice can put a person with learning disabilities at a disadvantage. It will be important in these circumstances to recognise that an adjustment is required, rather than blaming the person with learning disabilities for not being able to fit in.

Example

Philip works in a busy Tesco store. The staff use a bank of lockers to store their belongings each shift. They use whichever locker is available and thus have to remember which locker they have put their belongings in. This was not possible for Philip who needed to use the same locker each day. He was therefore given his own locker and key, which he keeps on him.



Confidentiality

It is important to respect an employee's right to confidentiality about their impairment and any needs relating to it. Everyone is entitled to personal information being kept private. People with learning disabilities often have very bad experiences of personal information being shared about them and this has sometimes resulted in harassment and abuse. A number of the employers we spoke to thought very carefully about what information they needed to know, how much needed to be shared with other employees and how to respect people's confidentiality.

Example

In one work situation, an employee with learning disabilities needed to take medication at certain times of the day. His work colleagues were informed that he needed to take a five-minute break at these times. They were not told why, as this would have been a breach of his confidentiality.

“I think being explicit about the need for confidentiality is really important, as well as role modelling respect for privacy. We have a very strong culture here of respecting people's confidentiality – there's never any prying or asking questions about people's personal information.”

(Joyce Howarth, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Induction and training: checklist

- Put written instructions into a format that is accessible to employees with learning disabilities. Ask a support agency or an organisation specialising in accessible communication to do this for you, or contact CHANGE.
- Make sure you give instructions at a pace that is suitable for the employee.
- Be prepared to repeat instructions.
- Make adjustments to your training methods to suit individual needs.
- Seek advice from the Disability Employment Adviser and CHANGE.

Employing people with learning disabilities

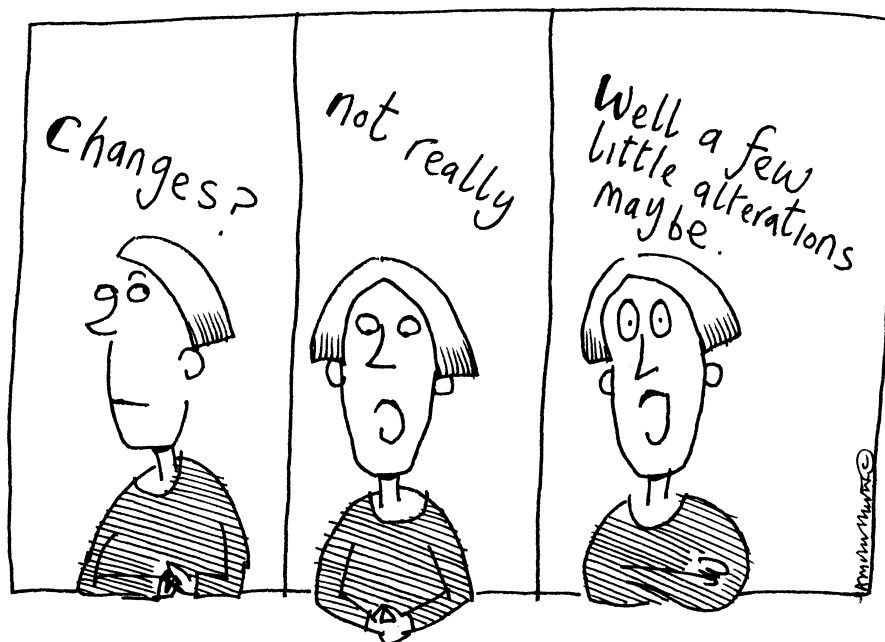
- Be aware of the 'unwritten rules' of your workplace and be prepared to explain these to a new employee with learning disabilities.
- Don't assume employees with learning disabilities will automatically pick up these 'unwritten rules'.
- Be aware that you may need to explain 'unwritten rules' more than once.
- Share only information that is necessary for other employees to know about an employee.
- Agree with the employee what and how information will be shared.

4 The job

All of us need support to enable us to do our jobs in the best possible way. People with learning disabilities are no different except that the type of support they need is sometimes more obvious. Having said that, they also rely on the natural day-to-day support of work colleagues that we all often take for granted. Most of the employers we spoke to said that they didn't really do anything different for their employees with learning disabilities. However, when pressed, they could identify specific things that enabled an employee with learning disabilities to be confident and competent in their work.

These adjustments fall into seven types:

- 1 aids and equipment
- 2 making information and communication accessible
- 3 support provided by other workers or by line managers
- 4 support from an employment support worker
- 5 changes to the job



- 6 changes to procedures
- 7 changes to the hours of work.

Sometimes these adjustments overlap – for example it may be a support worker who puts information into an accessible format.

A note about health and safety

None of the employers we spoke to identified any health and safety problems when employing people with learning disabilities. This reflects the Disability Rights Commission's experience that 'It is very rare that health and safety problems represent an insuperable obstacle'. They also say, 'Indeed it is often the case that, where an employer makes a reasonable adjustment to employ a disabled employee, health and safety is improved for all staff'.

Aids and equipment

Aids need not be complicated or very different from those that other workers use to help them do their job. For people with learning difficulties, they are often things that help them remember something.

Example

A person working as a gardener had a number of different tasks that took him to a number of different areas. He found this confusing. His support worker therefore drew up a map showing the different sections with numbers and colours according to the order his tasks had to be done.

Other times, a piece of equipment might be needed to help someone read or communicate. For example, some people require written information to be put on tape or they may require voice recognition software in order to use a computer. Sometimes, it will be a very simple piece of equipment that makes all the difference. It will be important not to make assumptions about what type of aid or equipment will help a particular individual. Start by finding out from the individual what their



particular need is and then seek specialist advice if necessary from, for example, an employment support agency or the local Disability Employment Adviser.

“One of the people we employed has dyslexia and I got a yellow filter for her, as this is the colour that helps her in reading. It’s a yellow piece of clear plastic that she places over the computer screen or over anything that she’s reading. As she put it, it stops the words jumping on the page.”

(Joyce Howarth, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Making information and communication accessible

The flow of information and good communication are essential to the efficient operation of any workplace. If the forms of communication used in a workplace put a person with learning disabilities at a substantial disadvantage, then the Disability Discrimination Act requires reasonable adjustments to be made.

Example

As a Director of the Thera Trust, Douglas Armstrong attends board meetings where the written reports discussed often use jargon and complicated language. He and his Personal Assistant help the organisation to use plain English. Here are some examples of words that are changed:

amended	changed
annually	each year
commitment	promise
compiled	put together
consider	think about
cost effective	good value for money
financially viable	possible within the money we have
hinder	slow down
subsequent	next
substantial	large, big
remuneration	pay
redeem	pay back, pay off

Support provided by other workers and line managers

The behaviour of work colleagues and line managers can be the crucial factor in whether someone with learning disabilities remains in employment. Negative and unhelpful attitudes will undermine a person's confidence and make it difficult for them to demonstrate their competence. However, the managers and co-workers we spoke to were very positive about working alongside or managing someone with a learning disability.

Support from line managers can take the form of giving instructions more than once, checking that someone has understood something and/or checking more frequently that they have carried out the task correctly.

Example

Edgar works for Sainsbury's. His Line Manager checks his understanding more than she does with anyone else, but she described him as needing no adjustment.

The most important form of support from colleagues and managers is often the use of clear, easy language, whether in written or verbal communication. This is something that everyone can benefit from.

“As a director of the company, Douglas has a standard of communication that the other directors work to. He has a word list that we can refer to, which helps us keep away from jargon. This communication style is continually being developed and improved and we try to keep this approach running through the whole organisation.”

(Jenny Garrigan, Director, Thera Trust)

Example

Chris Mears works as a Research Assistant at the University of Bristol. He works alongside other (non-disabled) researchers who are looking into the information needs of people with learning disabilities and how to provide information. His colleagues make sure that they use language that is easy for Chris to understand and that any written documents (like interview schedules) are also in plain English.

“They understand about my needs and they give me help if I need it. I was worried about using the phone but they helped me to do it to begin with and then I was absolutely fine about making phone calls.”

(Chris Mears, Research Assistant, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Sometimes a person may have a medical condition that requires a particular form of support. This also would count as an adjustment under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Example

One young woman with learning disabilities, who also has epilepsy, works for a city council. Her supervisor has been on a course about epilepsy and her work colleagues have been instructed as to what to do if she has a seizure. She also has a card with details of medication and what to do.

The development of natural support from work colleagues may need nurturing. This is something that an employment support worker, or a good manager, can do in the early days of someone's employment.

“We work alongside the person for the first few weeks until they are confident and competent to do the job. We help find natural supports within the working environment and help to nurture relationships between people. We gradually withdraw our support so that the individual becomes independent and the relationships and support network are natural – the same as anyone else has support from their colleagues in the workplace.”

(Karen Bateson, Linked Employment, Essex)

The implications of employing people with learning disabilities for day-to-day management and supervision are described in more detail in the next chapter.

Support from an employment support worker

Support workers can be provided by an employment support agency, arranged by the Disability Employment Adviser through Access to Work (see Key information 4) or employed by the organisation or the individual themselves. The support worker may work alongside the person during the initial period (as described above) or may continue to work with them. Their role is to enable the person to do the job and they may do this by, for example, helping with communication or breaking down the job into easily remembered tasks.

“Lorraine has a support worker who works alongside her. I think it's a good thing for the store as well as Lorraine – I don't think it's a big deal. I've got the confidence that the support worker is with her, not that I ignore her or take no responsibility for her. But she can get the independence of working on her own. The support worker comes to me with Lorraine and asks what she should be doing. We trained them both together ... It's obvious to the customer that there's someone there with Lorraine but she just sort of blends in.”

(Tracey Kern, Line Manager, Sainsbury's)

Example

Douglas Armstrong, who is a Director of Thera Trust, has a Personal Assistant who attends Board, Directors' and Senior Management Team meetings with him. She has supported him to ask the organisation to change the language they use in written reports. She helps him to prepare for meetings and to prompt people to use plain English. She also drives him to visit the different services run by the Trust, as these are spread out across six counties and Douglas does not drive.

Changes to the job

Many people with learning disabilities do the same job as their colleagues. However, some will require changes to the job because certain things are more difficult for them to do. These changes would count as 'reasonable adjustments' under the Disability Discrimination Act. The most common adjustments to a job are:

- allowing someone to take more time
- not requiring the person to do all parts of the job
- moving someone from one job to another, or one part of the organisation to another.

Example

One woman who works for a large supermarket chain found that the cold temperature in the fresh foods section increased her vulnerability to having an epileptic fit. She was therefore moved onto groceries.

Sometimes a person with learning disabilities will take longer to do a task than other employees. Allowing them to do this would count as a reasonable adjustment.

"The Quality Development Group is made up of highly enthusiastic members and we had to be careful to go at a pace that was appropriate for Douglas, as the Director responsible for quality, to be able to lead and own the process."

(Lindsay Wells, Director, Thera Trust)

Taking longer to do a task can sometimes save time in the long run.

Example

Emma's Line Manager at Sainsbury's says she is so methodical she tends not to make the mistakes that are common on checkouts, such as forgetting to give cashback when a customer has asked for it. She's also very good at picking up when an item has gone through twice. She may be a bit slower than other checkout operators but she very rarely makes mistakes.



Changes to procedures

Some organisations have procedures that are difficult for a person with learning disabilities to comply with. If the procedure is not an essential part of the job, then it will be important to vary it. This would count as an adjustment under the Disability Discrimination Act. For example, if a person with learning disabilities had found it difficult to use the clocking on and off system, it could be agreed that he should report to his supervisor who would keep the necessary records.

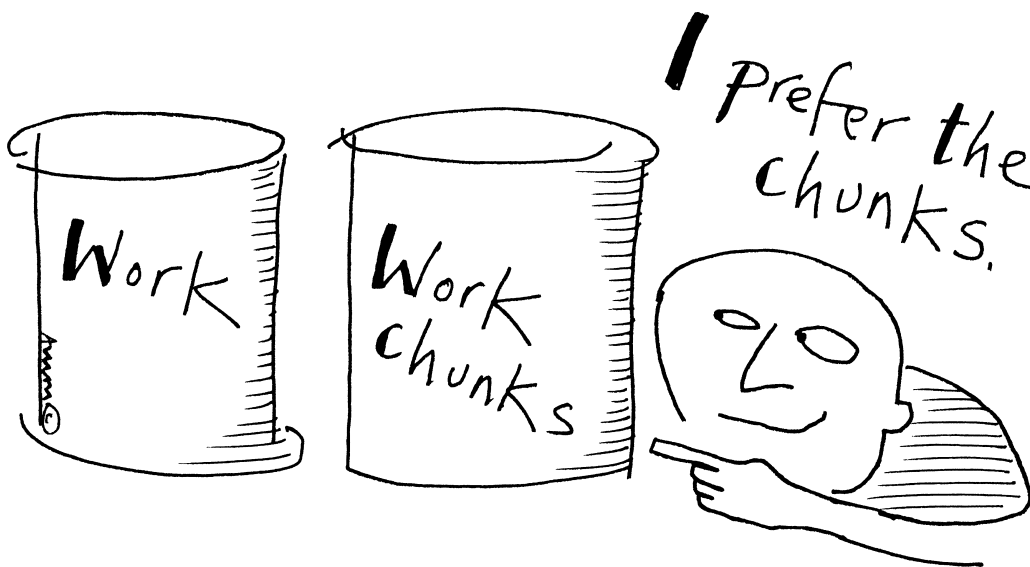
“Robert finds it difficult to clock in sometimes. He communicates using cards and he comes up to me and shows me the card saying he wants to clock in and that’s fine, I can do that for him.”

(Tim Wright, Assistant Manager, McDonald’s)

Some changes to procedures, made to enable a person with learning disabilities to do a job, are beneficial to others.

Example

Papers for board meetings at the Thera Trust are distributed two weeks beforehand so that Douglas, who is a member of the Board, has time to go through the papers with his Personal Assistant.



Changes to the hours of work

Some people with learning disabilities may find it difficult to work the same number or pattern of hours as other employees. There are generally three reasons for this.

- 1 Transport problems: this could be a lack of appropriate transport or, for example, difficulties in travelling in the rush hour.
- 2 The person may be financially worse off if they work over 16 hours and thereby lose their benefits.
- 3 The person may find it physically too tiring to work a full week.

Employing people with learning disabilities

Many employers make adjustments to people's working days to accommodate these kinds of issues. They generally see this as part of being a good employer. However, such adjustments are also required by the Disability Discrimination Act if the usual hours of work place a person with learning disabilities at a 'substantial disadvantage'.

Example

One man with learning disabilities was harrassed and verbally abused by schoolchildren when he caught the bus. His working hours were arranged so that he avoided the times when schoolchildren used the buses.

"The majority of our catering assistants do seven to eight hours a day. The two people with learning disabilities don't do full days but it's been agreed with them that they would slot in at the times when we are busier. It's a transport issue for them because they don't drive. It's not an easy place to get here by bus at 8.30 in the morning. One of the lads comes from a small village and there's only one bus."

(Christine Becks, Manager, Lifespan Catering)



The job: checklist

- Seek information from the employee with learning disabilities and their support worker or Disability Employment Adviser about what adjustments may be required to enable them to do the job.
- Consider whether your methods of communication, and language used, could be made simpler and easier to understand.
- Recognise the 'natural support' provided by work colleagues and nurture this.
- Look at your procedures to see whether they are difficult for an employee with learning disabilities to comply with.
- Recognise that changes to the job or hours of work may be required as part of making 'reasonable adjustments'.

5 Management and day-to-day supervision

Many managers and supervisors are very positive about their role of managing employees with learning disabilities. Some of those we spoke to were initially nervous about working with people with learning disabilities, but then found that good management is no different for this group of employees than for any other.

“When I became a manager and I knew I had to have responsibility for two people with learning disabilities I didn’t know whether I could do it but then I realised that it’s no different from managing other people. Like it’s really important that they feel they can come to you as the manager if they’ve got any problems, but it’s like that with any colleague. As a departmental manager people need to feel that they can come to me and talk to me and that’s exactly what I’m there for. That’s my job at the end of the day.

The experience of it has been great for me as a manager, the communication skills, the understanding skills and I think it’s also helped me to mature. I can work with anybody now I think. It’s helped me to grow as a person and in my job. The development of communication skills has given me more confidence in dealing with people. And learning to get the level of communication right has really increased my communication skills.”

(Tracey Kern, Line Manager, Sainsbury’s)

Example

Jackie has been working for a city council Parks and Countryside Department for many years and assists in running the In Bloom competition. She has her own office and her experience is highly valued. Like many employees, Jackie likes stability and does not deal well with change. Her manager says, ‘We do what we cannot to upset her stability by not giving her work in too big chunks – a series of bite-sized chunks suits her better. She knows what to do at each stage of the competition’.

When managers and supervisors provide the support that their workers need, people are likely to become loyal and valuable employees.

“Jackie’s an asset in that the knowledge she’s got about the project is quite extensive. She’s been here a long time. She organises all the schools, sends out material and has contact with people who enter their private gardens into the competition.”

(Administration and Support Manager, a city council)

A good manager will find out what people do well and what they need to do their job to the best of their ability.

Example

Stuart has worked at Toys R Us, a large and busy store, for three years. He is responsible for maintaining an aisle, putting unwanted goods back on the shelves, dealing with damaged goods, keeping the aisle tidy. He also does direct sales work and was recently nominated for a company award for this. Stuart’s supervisor, Gavin, says, ‘He is a reliable and good long-term employee. He knows his job well. He doesn’t use the till – but then not all our employees do – but he’s confident at using the tannoy, which many other employees won’t do.’ Stuart had difficulty putting things back on the right shelves because of his reading difficulties so Gavin moved him to a different aisle where it was easier.

“I soon found that David likes working with people. I found that if you gave him a job which he had to do by himself he didn’t like that, he felt pushed away. So I brought him back in and put him working with other people. And he loves it and he’s a good person to work with. Whereas Tim likes doing things by himself, particularly putting things in order – and he’s very good at it, better than most of the other catering assistants. So it’s a question of finding out what they like to do and what they’re good at.”

(Christine Becks, Manager, Lifespan Catering)

It is a good idea to provide managers and supervisors with disability equality training. They may also appreciate support and feedback in their role of managing people with learning disabilities. It helps if senior managers are aware of the issues that those managing people with learning disabilities are dealing with and are able to assist with any difficulties.



Team building and nurturing good working relationships

An important part of any manager's role is helping people to work together in harmony. These are some of the things that a manager or supervisor may have to address when a person with learning disabilities is a part of their team:

Management and day-to-day supervision

- When other employees are unused to people with learning disabilities, they may be uncertain about how to behave.
- They may also worry that an employee with learning disabilities will not be able to pull their weight, may work at a slower pace and may make things difficult for other employees.
- Some people with learning disabilities find that their behaviour towards others can be misinterpreted. Their impairment may mean they do not follow the usual social rules of behaviour, or they may be unused to social interaction.

An employment support agency may be able to help with these issues.

“If people in the workplace aren’t open to the idea of working with someone with a learning disability then that can create problems. It means that someone is going into a hostile workplace, it knocks their confidence, they can feel isolated and in the end they may not be able to do the job. But it’s other people’s attitudes which have created that situation.”

(Karen Bateson, Linked Employment, Essex)

Example

Kimla works in our main customer restaurant. She is a valued member of the team and she always works really really hard. Kimla is a fast learner and is very willing to take on new responsibilities. Part of Kimla’s learning disability is she says what everyone else is thinking. If you are unaware of her disabilities you could easily take offence. When a new employee starts we always have a chat with them about Kimla’s learning disabilities and advise them not to take offence. (Vicky Hegarty, Store Personnel Manager, Alders Department Stores)

In some situations, it is appropriate to accept that an employee with learning disabilities does less work than other employees. This is an adjustment that is part of the employer complying with the Disability Discrimination Act. It is important that other employees are aware that this has been agreed and that everyone is clear that other members of the team are not disadvantaged by this adjustment.

Example

Maureen is employed as a cleaner and has worked for a cleaning company for four years. There are some times when she does less work than other members of the team. Her supervisor said:

Any problems we have had have been sorted out by talking things through, sometimes with the support worker here. That has helped everyone to understand the situation better and iron out the problems between her and other team members if they occur.

A number of the managers we spoke to said that working alongside people with learning disabilities can help create positive attitudes towards diversity. Many managers and employees also said that employees with learning disabilities were a pleasure to work with.

“Some staff when they’re away on holiday you don’t miss them but when Emma’s not here we miss her.”

(Tracey Kern, Line Manager, Sainsbury’s)

Learning from people with learning disabilities

A number of employers we spoke to reported that enabling a person with learning disabilities to work for them had meant an improvement in their training, management and supervision generally. Some also said that the way a person with learning disabilities did their job had had positive lessons for other employees.

Example

Emma is very methodical and conscientious. She always makes sure that, when she starts her shift on the till at Sainsbury’s, she has spare till rolls, enough petrol vouchers and things like a cloth for wiping up spills. She does this because having everything properly organised and prepared for makes it easier for her to do her job. Other checkout workers have now started doing this as well and it means they have to make less calls to the supervisors to provide these things.



At Thera Trust, an organisation that provides services for people with learning disabilities, the recruitment of a person with learning disabilities as a director has meant that service users' perspectives are fully integrated into the organisation.

“Thera Trust always has the individual’s [i.e. people supported by its services] interest at the heart of all that it does. This is our philosophy but can only be implemented by it being led from the top – Douglas’s post. Douglas gives a perspective to the direction of the organisation that is beyond the ordinary considerations that an organisation like ours usually takes account of ... The impact on staff of having Douglas as their boss is huge.”

(Jenny Garrigan, Director, Thera Trust)

Management and supervision: checklist

- Think about training for managers and supervisors who have employees with learning disabilities in their departments or teams.
- Identify how you can support those who line manage people with learning disabilities and provide them with any necessary information they might need.

Employing people with learning disabilities

- If existing employees have adjusted to working with a co-worker with learning disabilities, think about how you might need to prepare a new employee for working with them.
- Recognise that sometimes the way in which a person with learning disabilities does a job may have lessons for the way other employees could better do their job.
- Recognise that, when instructing a person with learning disabilities, you may have to say something more than once.
- When considering what reasonable adjustments are required, include any adjustments that will help the person with learning disabilities work as part of a team.
- Ensure that work colleagues are aware of the adjustments required to enable a person with learning disabilities to do their job – for example, that they are aware of the need to use communication accessible to the employee.
- If you provide team-building activities, find out what the person with learning difficulties will require to be involved. And what will help other team members to involve the person with learning disabilities.
- Involve the support worker or agency, if there is one, to assist with team building and nurturing good working relationships.
- Ensure that work colleagues are aware that limited interaction or a reluctance to take part in out-of-work social activities is not misinterpreted as being unfriendly. People with learning disabilities may have limited experience of social interaction and/or may be worried about things like how would they get home from the pub. These barriers can be addressed if people are aware of them.
- If someone's behaviour is inappropriate, recognise that you may have to speak to them more than once before they change it. Don't assume they are deliberately behaving inappropriately. If possible, consult with the support agency.
- If other members of a team are concerned that a person with learning disabilities is not pulling their weight, get the team together to talk about it.

6 Appraisal and performance monitoring

Employees with learning disabilities will usually participate in the same appraisal or performance monitoring as other employees but adjustments may need to be made. These adjustments may be to the procedures used to appraise and monitor performance, or they may be required to assist a person with learning disabilities achieve the targets that have been set.

Example

One workplace holds work review meetings for each employee every six months. Employees with learning disabilities have an Employment Support Officer who attends the meeting and goes through the monitoring and review summary or development plan with the employee and supervisor. The form that is used has been rewritten in a plain English version.

It is common for employees to fill in self-appraisal forms as part of performance appraisals. In this situation, an appropriate reasonable adjustment is to arrange for someone to read out the questions and write down the person with learning disabilities' answers.

Sometimes an employment support agency can assist with appraisal and performance monitoring. The agency may do their own monitoring in the first few weeks or months of the job and/or they may assist the employer to make adjustments to their own systems and methods.

“We undertake a job performance checklist when the person with learning disabilities has started the job and then we look at how well they are doing every two weeks. We look at things like punctuality and appearance and address any issues. The appraisal process is down to the individual employer and should be done on the same basis as for non-disabled staff.”

(Tara Cahill, Mencap Pathway – employment support agency)

It will be important to consider if adjustments are required in order to enable a person with learning disabilities to achieve targets or goals. Such adjustments may be required under the Disability Discrimination Act. Examples of these have been included in the previous two chapters on the job and on management and supervision.

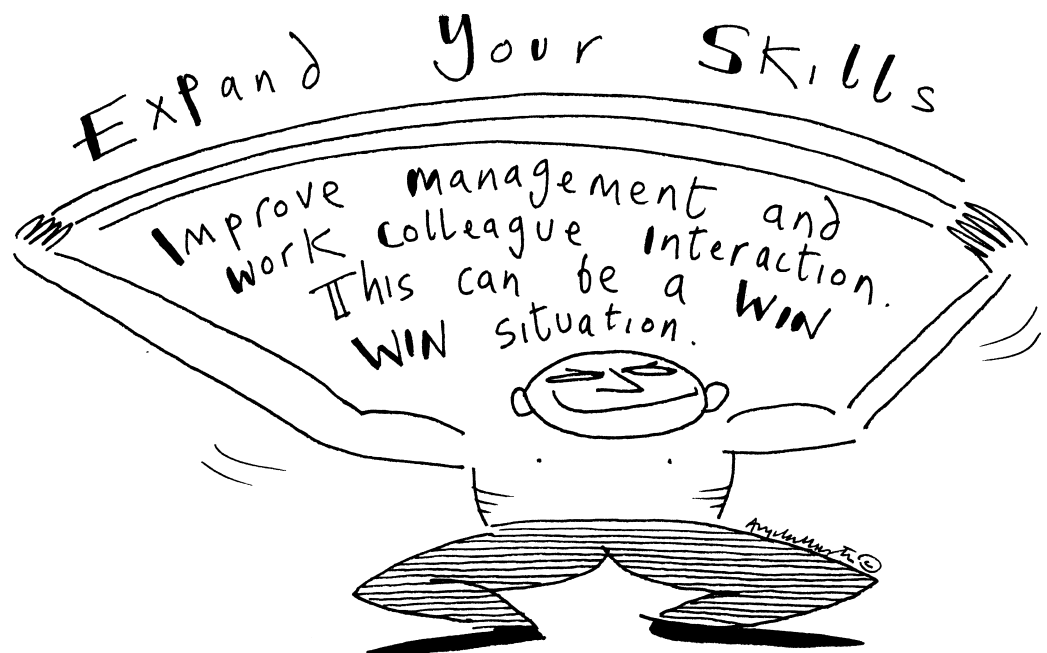
“If Robert wasn’t doing something properly we would point it out to him and perhaps show him how he should do it. If it was a persistent problem we might buddy him up with someone to help him do better.”

(Andy French, Manager, McDonald’s)

At the same time, if someone is not performing well at their job, it would be wrong not to tell them this and to give them the chance to improve.

“When Paul came to do voluntary work at CHANGE he said he wanted to do photocopying because he had done it before. He didn’t do it very well and was told to do it again. He said it was the first time he had been told he had made a mistake and had to correct it. He learnt from this and it increased his confidence. He’s now got a paid part-time job at CHANGE, helping to make information accessible.”

(Phillipa Bragman, Co-ordinator, CHANGE)



Appraisal and performance monitoring: checklist

- Think about what adjustments may be needed to your appraisal and performance monitoring procedures. For example:
 - 1 ask a support agency or other organisation to put any forms into plain English or other accessible formats
 - 2 allow an employee with learning disabilities to have a support worker or a colleague who acts as a 'natural support' with them during any appraisal interviews
 - 3 allow more time for an appraisal interview
 - 4 follow the tips on communicating given in the chapter on recruitment.
- Consider what adjustments may be needed to enable a person with learning disabilities to achieve targets or goals.
- Don't patronise people with learning disabilities by not telling them when they make a mistake. Instead, consider how to help them learn from their mistakes.

7 Helping people progress in employment

It is important not to make assumptions about what a person with learning disabilities is capable of doing or to assume that they cannot learn new things.

Example

All of Sainsbury's checkout tills were upgraded. The manager described the new system as quite a complicated system of menus and sub-menus to use. She said it was a slow process for everyone to pick up, particularly those who'd been there for years. But Emma, an employee with learning disabilities, picked it up really well and didn't have any more difficulty than anyone else did. The manager thinks that, if anything, Emma's careful methodical approach to things made it easier for her to pick up the new system.

Employees with learning disabilities should be given the same opportunities to participate in training and to progress in employment according to their abilities. Training and staff development are covered by the Disability Discrimination Act and many employers make adjustments to enable their employees with learning disabilities to benefit. Often the adjustments required are easily provided.

People's jobs may change because the organisation changes. When a person with learning disabilities is doing their job well, you will want to ensure that they can continue to use their abilities. It will also mean that the organisation benefits from the experience that someone has built up from being in a job.

Example

Douglas Armstrong was appointed as a Director of Thera Trust five years ago. Since then, the organisation has expanded and now provides support in their own homes and day services for more than 240 people with learning disabilities across six counties. When Douglas first started, he carried out quality inspections of these services himself (together with his personal assistant) but has now recruited five Quality Assessors (all people with learning disabilities, with personal assistants) who will carry out the inspections and report to a new post of Quality Manager. Douglas will prepare reports based on their inspections and present these to the Senior Management Team and the Board. With the expansion of the organisation, Douglas is increasingly involved in presenting tenders, inducting and training new staff and developing service user involvement.

“I liked learning how to do things in my job. I learnt how to set up a website, which I didn’t know how to do before. Now I want to have a different kind of job, using my IT skills but also I think I’m good at working with people, team work and things. And I want a well paid job. But it’s not just pay, I want to enjoy my work and have good friendships with people at work. I want to use the skills I got in this last job in learning how to relate to all sorts of people.”

(Chris Mears, Research Assistant, Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol)

Example

A cleaning job was created for Paul at Belmont Packaging partly because the company ‘wanted to do something for the community’, partly because there ‘was a job there to be done but no one to do it’. The manager is extremely pleased with Paul’s work and impressed with his ability and level of commitment. The factory is now very clean and tidy and Paul’s ideas for collecting up waste have been accepted. His job has now expanded into doing the garden borders around the factory and cleaning up outside. Paul loves his work and his contribution is valued by the company.

Helping people progress in employment: checklist

- Don’t assume an employee with learning disabilities doesn’t have ambitions or can’t progress in employment.
- Include employees with learning disabilities in training.
- Use the same personal development procedures for employees with learning disabilities as for other employees, making reasonable adjustments as required.



8 Dealing with problems

If your procedures for dealing with problems put an employee with learning disabilities at a disadvantage, then it will be necessary to make an adjustment to those procedures. For example, it may be necessary to give a person with learning disabilities more verbal warnings than other employees:

“Rose can be over-familiar with members of the public, and sometimes also puts her arm around the desk attendant in a way which isn’t appropriate. She doesn’t really distinguish between what’s acceptable and what’s not acceptable. We got advice from the support agency who advised us we must tell her directly that she must not do this. We had to do this several times whereas with a non-disabled person we might have issued an immediate warning.”

(A city council)

Good supervision is often the key to preventing problems escalating and you may want to refer back to the checklist in Chapter 5 on management and supervision to ensure that good practice is being achieved.



An important part of dealing with any problems will be, as it is for any employee, understanding what is causing the problem. Like anyone else, people with learning disabilities can start having problems at work when something is going on in their personal life that is upsetting them. In these situations, support agencies, managers or work colleagues can provide valuable support to prevent the situation undermining their capacity to do their job.

“If something’s going on in someone’s life that is distressing and her colleagues at work didn’t know, they might think her behaviour means that she’s being rude. Or she might not be particularly focused on what she’s doing because she’s got a huge problem that she needs some support to sort out. If this is the kind of thing facing an employee with learning disabilities we can inform the people who need to know, help build the bridges at work, keep the job going, maybe negotiate some time off and then go back in and work alongside that person. Just until they can refocus, it’s that kind of support that makes the difference.”

(Karen Bateson, Linked Employment, Essex)

Sometimes, work colleagues provide the support needed.

Example

David is a young man with learning disabilities, working in a large hospital. When his mother died, his work colleagues were very supportive of him and one woman in particular gave him some practical support. His manager and work colleagues recognised that, during his bereavement, it was not his learning disability that was causing problems but the situation he was dealing with outside work.

When an employment support agency is no longer providing ongoing support, it can sometimes still be called upon to become more involved if problems arise.

“Mark went through a bit of a rough patch with his cash handling and we checked out with the support agency about how to deal with this. But in fact we didn’t do anything different than what we would do with any other employee.”

(Rachel Leach, Manager, Cineworld)

Disciplinary procedures

When a disciplinary procedure has been invoked against an employee with learning disabilities, it will be important to make sure that any necessary reasonable adjustments are made to ensure they are fairly treated. Employers have an obligation under the Disability Discrimination Act to ensure that employees with learning disabilities are not put at a 'substantial disadvantage' as a result of existing procedures. The type of adjustments needed may be similar to those required during the recruitment process.

Harassment and bullying

Many people with learning disabilities have been bullied or harrassed and unfortunately this sometimes occurs in a workplace. The managers we spoke to emphasised how important it is to make it clear that bullying is unacceptable. They also thought it very important to create a situation where, if someone was being bullied, they felt able to talk to a manager about it.

"We make it clear that bullying is not acceptable in our store. We cover bullying at the store induction when we discuss equal opportunities. I believe an open, friendly personnel office and team is the way forward, so that people feel comfortable about coming in and talking to us about their feelings. You need to get to the bottom of any issues – sometimes things are said innocently. I feel it important to always liaise with the support worker.



We would always investigate any comments made by an employee or work placement student. If we believe the bullying was deliberate, we would follow the company grievance procedure. Bullying's just not acceptable.”
(Vicky Hegarty, Store Personnel Manager, Alders Department Stores)

Sometimes people with learning disabilities are unintentionally isolated within the workplace. If this isn't picked up and dealt with, it can affect their performance at work.

Dealing with problems: checklist

- Recognise that a person with learning disabilities may need to be asked more than once to do something differently.
- Check out that the person has understood what they are doing wrong before instituting any formal procedures.
- Try to identify the cause of any difficulties. Involve the employment support agency, if there is one.
- Think about what adjustments may be needed to your disciplinary procedures. For example:
 - 1 ask a support agency or other organisation to put any written information or forms into plain English or other accessible formats
 - 2 allow an employee with learning disabilities to have an advocate or support worker with them during any disciplinary interviews – this should be in addition to a union or staff representative
 - 3 allow more time for a disciplinary interview
 - 4 follow the tips on communicating given in the section on interviews in Chapter 2.
- Have a clear policy on bullying and harrassment.
- Ensure your employees know about the policy and what to do about bullying and harrassment.
- Ensure that anyone who is vulnerable to being bullied feels that there is someone they can tell.

9 Checklists

Recruitment

- Ensure that you advertise where people with learning disabilities are likely to see the advert.
- Respond positively to approaches by employment support agencies.
- Build relationships with local education and training providers.
- Ensure that your adverts, vacancy information and application forms are available in accessible formats.
- Accept applications in non-standard formats.
- Tell potential candidates that you welcome applications from disabled people and are aware of your obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Avoid asking for qualifications or experience that are not necessary to do the job.
- Adapt your assessment methods to enable people with learning disabilities to demonstrate their abilities.
- When interviewing, follow the communication tips given below.
- Seek training and/or assistance from a support agency or an organisation of people with learning disabilities to help you comply with the Disability Discrimination Act throughout your recruitment procedures and practice.

Good practice in interviewing people with learning disabilities

- Speak clearly.
- Use short words, not jargon.
- Use short sentences.

- Reassure the interviewee that it's OK to say they don't understand a question and to ask you to say it differently.
- Ask questions about concrete experiences. For example, 'What work did you do in the cafe?'
- Avoid using metaphors. For example, don't say 'We run a tight ship here'.
- Don't ask complex questions. For example, don't ask questions like 'What is your greatest achievement to date?' Instead ask something like 'What were you best at in your previous job, or at college?'
- Don't ask hypothetical questions. For example, 'What would you do if the machine broke down?' Instead ask something like 'Did the photocopying machine ever break down at your last job? What did you do when it broke down?'
- If someone seems not to understand your question, try asking it in another way.
- Allow more time for the interview.
- Allow a support person to be present at the interview. This person may be there just to give the applicant more confidence. They may also help them to understand a question by rephrasing it, or by prompting the person with learning difficulties to talk about the things the interviewer wants to know about.
- Address your questions to the applicant, not the support person.

Induction and training

- Put written instructions into a format that is accessible to employees with learning disabilities. Ask a support agency or an organisation specialising in accessible communication to do this for you, or contact CHANGE.
- Make sure you give instructions at a pace that is suitable for the employee.
- Be prepared to repeat instructions.

- Make adjustments to your training methods to suit individual needs.
- Seek advice from the Disability Employment Adviser and CHANGE.
- Be aware of the 'unwritten rules' of your workplace and be prepared to explain these to a new employee with learning disabilities.
- Don't assume employees with learning disabilities will automatically pick up these 'unwritten rules'.
- Be aware that you may need to explain 'unwritten rules' more than once.
- Share only information that is necessary for other employees to know about an employee.
- Agree with the employee what and how information will be shared.

The job

- Seek information from the employee with learning disabilities and their support worker or Disability Employment Adviser about what adjustments may be required to enable them to do the job.
- Consider whether your methods of communication, and language used, could be made simpler and easier to understand.
- Recognise the 'natural support' provided by work colleagues and nurture this.
- Look at your procedures to see whether they are difficult for an employee with learning disabilities to comply with.
- Recognise that changes to the job or hours of work may be required as part of making 'reasonable adjustments'.

Management and supervision

- Think about training for managers and supervisors who have people with learning disabilities in their departments or teams.
- Identify how you can support those who line manage people with learning disabilities and provide them with any necessary information they might need.

- If existing employees have adjusted to working with a co-worker with learning disabilities, think about how you might need to prepare a new employee for working with them.
- Recognise that sometimes the way in which a person with learning disabilities does a job may have lessons for the way other employees could better do their job.
- Recognise that, when instructing a person with learning disabilities, you may have to say something more than once.
- When considering what reasonable adjustments are required, include any adjustments that will help the person with learning disabilities work as part of a team.
- Ensure that work colleagues are aware of the adjustments required to enable a person with learning disabilities to do their job – for example, that they are aware of the need to use communication accessible to the employee.
- If you provide team-building activities, find out what the person with learning difficulties will require to be involved. And what will help other team members to involve the person with learning disabilities.
- Involve the support worker or agency, if there is one, to assist with team building and nurturing good working relationships.
- Ensure that work colleagues are aware that limited interaction or a reluctance to take part in out-of-work social activities is not misinterpreted as being unfriendly. People with learning disabilities may have limited experience of social interaction and/or may be worried about things like how they would get home from the pub. These barriers can be addressed if people are aware of them.
- If someone's behaviour is inappropriate, recognise that you may have to speak to them more than once before they change it. Don't assume they are deliberately behaving inappropriately. If possible, consult with the support agency.
- If other members of a team are concerned that a person with learning disabilities is not pulling their weight, get the team together to talk about it.

Appraisal and performance monitoring

- Think about what adjustments may be needed to your appraisal and performance monitoring procedures. For example:
 - 1 ask a support agency or other organisation to put any forms into plain English or other accessible formats
 - 2 allow an employee with learning disabilities to have a support worker or a colleague who acts as a 'natural support' with them during any appraisal interviews
 - 3 allow more time for an appraisal interview
 - 4 follow the tips on communicating given in the chapter on recruitment.
- Consider what adjustments may be needed to enable a person with learning disabilities to achieve targets or goals.
- Don't patronise people with learning disabilities by not telling them when they make a mistake. Instead, consider how to help them learn from their mistakes.

Helping people progress in employment

- Don't assume an employee with learning disabilities doesn't have ambitions or can't progress in employment.
- Include employees with learning disabilities in training.
- Use the same personal development procedures for employees with learning disabilities as for other employees, making reasonable adjustments as required.

Dealing with problems

- Recognise that a person with learning disabilities may need to be asked more than once to do something differently.

- Check out that the person has understood what they are doing wrong before instituting any formal procedures.
- Try to identify the cause of any difficulties. Involve the employment support agency, if there is one.
- Think about what adjustments may be needed to your disciplinary procedures. For example:
 - 1 ask a support agency or other organisation to put any written information or forms into plain English or other accessible formats
 - 2 allow an employee with learning disabilities to have an advocate or support worker with them during any disciplinary interviews – this should be in addition to a union or staff representative
 - 3 allow more time for a disciplinary interview
 - 4 follow the good practice in interviewing people with learning disabilities given above.
- Have a clear policy on bullying and harrassment.
- Ensure your employees know about the policy and what to do about bullying and harrassment.
- Ensure that anyone who is vulnerable to being bullied feels that there is someone they can tell.

Key information 1

The business case for employing people with learning disabilities

Research has found that disabled employees generally stay in the job for longer than their non-disabled counterparts. They have a strong commitment to work, as well as good punctuality records and low absentee rates. This was certainly the experience of the employers we consulted for this guide.

Most companies want to be good employers. The employers we interviewed considered their employment practices concerning people with learning disabilities to be part and parcel of their general aim to be good employers. The guide gives examples of how they achieved this.

As an employer, you will want to ensure you do not discriminate against disabled people. This guide sets out some of the adjustments that employers can and do make in order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. In the majority of cases, these are done at very low or no cost, yet they make all the difference to both employer and employee. A summary of employers' obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act is contained in Key information 2.

Employers also recognise that having a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community they serve is good public relations. Those we spoke to while compiling this guide emphasised that having people with learning disabilities in their workforce enhanced their public image.

We consulted a wide range of employers (large and small, public and private sector) in order to put this guide together. The practical experience of these employers has been that people with learning disabilities are very valuable employees, their businesses benefit from their input and their public image is enhanced.

“We employ Lorraine first and foremost for business reasons. Firstly, she fills a vacancy, at the end of the day she provides labour in the store which is being utilised. But also it’s good for the management and it’s good for colleagues [i.e. employees] to work in that situation. It expands their skills as well. It’s obviously good for PR. It’s good from an employment point of view that we are welcoming people into the business.”

(Hannah Blows, Human Resources Manager, Sainsbury’s)

A Human Resources Manager, working in a large clothing store, told us that, of five people with learning disabilities employed when the store first opened five years ago, four are still there. In a business with a high turnover of staff, this loyalty is valued.

“I’ve become financially independent by working here. I didn’t enjoy signing on, cashing giro, I didn’t like it. This suits me much better. I want to do a good job. That’s what’s important, that’s what a workplace should give you the opportunity to do.”

(Andrew Barlow, Booker’s Cash and Carry)

Key information 2

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and people with learning disabilities

People with learning disabilities are entitled to protection from discrimination in employment. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 says that it is unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person less favourably than someone else because of his or her disability, unless there is a good reason to do this. The Act also says that employers should make changes or adjustments to the workplace or the way a job is done if these would enable a disabled person to do a job. The legislation calls these 'reasonable adjustments' and examples of what these might be are given throughout this guide. Most are very simple and easy to make, and many of the employers we spoke to provided them without any difficulties.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) Helpline can provide information to employers regarding the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and can advise on very general DDA issues. The DRC cannot advise employers on specific DDA issues relating to a particular incident that has occurred in their workplace (see Key information 4 for organisations that might be able to help). The DRC's website sets out what employers' obligations are under the DDA. The website also gives examples of 'reasonable adjustments' and explains what other terms used in the legislation mean.

Telephone: 08457 622 633

Textphone: 08457 622 644

Fax: 08457 778 878

Post: DRC Helpline
FREEPOST
MID02164
Stratford upon Avon
CV37 9BR
Website: www.drc-gb.org

Key information 3

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is not an illness. It is a lifelong condition that affects intellectual and cognitive development. It is not the same as mental illness.

People with learning disabilities have a range of abilities. They all share the experience of finding it harder to learn things than most people without learning disabilities. They may find it harder to read, for example, or to use public transport. Or they may find social situations harder. This means that someone with a learning disability may need additional support or training in order to do a job. However, it's important not to make assumptions about what someone can or cannot do. We all have varying skills and abilities, and people with learning disabilities are no different.

It's also very important not to assume that people with learning disabilities cannot learn things. However, they may need more time, and they may need adjustments to the usual methods of training or induction into a job.

Key information 4

What assistance is available to employers to help them employ people with learning disabilities?

Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus Disability Support is a government service. It provides information and advice to employers to help them to promote good employment practices in the recruitment, retention, training and career development of disabled people. It is provided through Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) and Access to Work (see below). DEAs are employment specialists who are usually based in Jobcentre Plus offices or Jobcentres and who work in partnership with external organisations of and for disabled people.

DEAs can offer the following services to employers:

- Give you information about the Work Preparation programme. You may be able to offer a work experience placement to a disabled person, enabling them to try out working in a real working environment. Work placements are usually arranged through Jobcentre Plus Work Preparation Contractors and may last from a few days up to a maximum of 13 weeks.
- Tell you about the Job Introduction Scheme, which can provide a weekly grant towards the employment or training costs for the first few weeks of employing a disabled person.
- Provide advice on adopting the Disability Symbol, which has been developed so employers can show their commitment to good practice in the employment and retention of disabled people.
- Give information on Workstep, which enables people with more complex employment barriers to work effectively with the right support alongside non-disabled colleagues.
- Give you advice on job retention if you or your disabled employee are concerned about them losing their job because of disability.

You can find the contact details of your nearest Jobcentre Plus office in the business section of your phone book, under Jobcentre Plus, or from the website:

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/cms.asp?Page=/Home/Employers/DisabilityServiceshelpforEmployers

Access to Work

Access to Work is a government programme that provides advice, information and grants to disabled people and employers to help overcome work-related obstacles associated with disability. The programme can pay for a support worker or a piece of equipment, for example. Employers should contact their local Access to Work Business Centre whose details can be found from their local Jobcentre Plus office or on the website:

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/cms.asp?Page=/Home/Customers/HelpForDisabledPeople/AccessToWork

Access to Work can pay up to 100 per cent of the costs of equipment, adaptations or support required by someone who was previously unemployed and has been in a job for six weeks or under. If an application is made after they have been in the job for more than six weeks, Access to Work will normally pay only a proportion of the costs. It is therefore important to make early contact with Access to Work.

Supported employment agencies

These organisations work with disabled people, including people with learning disabilities, to help them prepare for and find work. They work closely with employers to 'match' the right person to the right job. Sometimes they help to break down tasks or instructions so that it is easier for an employee with learning disabilities to do the work. In other cases, they may work alongside the employee in the initial stages of employment. They also provide ongoing support to both employer and employee. There is no charge to the employer or employee for the services they provide.

Often, a support agency will approach a company. They will usually already have a disabled person or person with learning disabilities in mind when they make this approach. The support agency will have assessed the person's abilities and interests, and will have done some work to 'match' the person to type of employment. Most support agencies put a considerable amount of time and skills into getting to know the person, assessing their strengths and potential, and researching appropriate local employment opportunities. Some agencies run work-preparation courses or work with local colleges to help prepare people for work.

Example

Wigan Supported Employment Service has four full-time staff (Employment Training Advisers) working with people with learning disabilities. It has been running for ten years and the staff have considerable experience in this field and a good track record of successfully placing and supporting people in 'real jobs'. They run a 'World of Work' course, which is tailored to the needs of the individuals attending it and to the work they are being prepared for. The Employment Training Advisers spend a considerable amount of time getting to know the person with a learning disability, matching them with a suitable employer and job, and supporting them in employment. They continue their contact with employer and employee even after someone has settled well.

"There are three key elements to our service. The job match, getting the right job, in the right environment for the individual. Then getting the right support on the job to ensure the person is trained, confident and competent to do the job – not withdrawing too soon but not over-supporting. Then checking from time to time with employer and employee that things are going well and providing whatever support they might need to deal with any problems that come up."

(Kyla Aitken, Sabre Employment Agency)

To find out contact details of your nearest supported employment agency, you should contact:

The Association for Supported Employment

Telephone: 0772 935 6264

Website: www.afse.org.uk

Email: afse@onyxnet.co.uk

Mencap runs 32 locally supported employment services, called Pathway, in different parts of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. To find out if there is a Pathway service in your area, contact Rotherham Mencap on 01709 830956.

Papworth Trust is a large supported employment agency covering the East of England and North London.

Telephone: 01480 830341

Fax: 01480 830781

Website: www.papworth.org.uk

Email: info@papworth.org.uk

Employers' Forum on Disability

The Employers' Forum on Disability is recognised as the authoritative employers' voice on disability as it affects business. The Forum is a membership organisation offering advice, information and guidance through networking events, publications, briefings, its website and helpline.

Employers' Forum on Disability

Nutmeg House

60 Gainsford Street

London SE1 2NY

Telephone: 020 7403 3020

Text: 020 7403 0040

Fax: 020 7403 0404

Email: info@employers-forum.co.uk

Key information 5

CHANGE

CHANGE is a national organisation, which is run by disabled people. We campaign for equal rights for all people with learning disabilities including people with learning disabilities who are deaf or blind.

We make information accessible in easy words and pictures. We can make job descriptions, health and safety and other information accessible to people with learning disabilities.

The Rainbow Group at CHANGE is a group of trainers who have learning disabilities. We offer training about equal rights, good communication and how to involve and work with people with learning disabilities.

CHANGE can offer advice, make information accessible, or provide training to employers or other organisations all over the country.

All of the projects that we do in CHANGE are jointly run by people with learning disabilities and non-disabled people.

CHANGE can be contacted at:

Unit 19/20

Unity Business Centre

26 Roundhay Road

Leeds LS7 1AB

Telephone: 0113 243 0202

Minicom: 0113 243 2225

Fax: 0113 243 0220

Email: changepeople@btconnect.com

Website: www.changepeople.co.uk

Key information 6

How people with learning disabilities were involved in putting this guide together

People with learning difficulties were part of the team producing this guide. Two groups of consultants were involved, one working through CHANGE (in Leeds) and one working through People First (in Colchester). They had experience in working for a range of employers. They arranged several sessions to look at ideas about good employment practice, using different methods such as acting, pictures, diagrams and discussions.

Like any employees, they gained a range of skills and benefits from their work. In our early discussions, they particularly emphasised the importance of:

- getting money and the power of your wage cheque to change your whole life
- the relief of being more like other people and part of society
- feeling you are making something of yourself.

Like any employees, they also had their ups and downs, and did not expect everything at work to be easy. But they felt they were particularly keen to work for the respect of their employers and colleagues. They wanted their employers to know that they could do a good job, if they were given the opportunity and the right kind of support. They spoke of the importance of:

- a good and approachable line manager
- not being labelled, but having an employer who knows your needs
- having the opportunity to discuss any problems and improve your work
- being seen as basically equal to and the same as any other employee.

The two groups assisted in drawing up the criteria from which we then selected the employers we would interview. We were looking for employers who had some experience of both employing people with learning disabilities and of understanding the kind of support that might help them stay in post and work well. People from both groups then assisted with some of the interviews and reviewed the guide as it was drafted, making suggestions to improve it.

Information card 1

FIRST THOUGHTS ABOUT TAKING ON EMPLOYEES WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Many organisations, large and small, in all sectors, now successfully employ people with learning disabilities.

Where?

Supermarket chains, local authorities and health trusts, fast food outlets, horticultural nurseries, clothing and fashion outlets, cash and carries, the transport industry, universities and colleges, libraries, leisure services, manufacturing ... in fact, people with learning difficulties are working across the whole range of employment.

What kinds of jobs do they do?

The same range as everyone else. Many do straightforward jobs that are relatively easy to learn, like filing, shelf-stacking/replenishing and cleaning, while others interact directly with customers on the shop floor, or on the phones, serving food, running specific projects such as local competitions and events, and others have developed full careers to supervise others, even to management level.

Why should we do it?

It's good value: research shows people with learning disabilities generally stay in the job, are very committed, and have low absentee rates. It is often possible to make just a few simple and inexpensive changes to make sure it works. It is good for business: customers generally appreciate seeing a well-trained workforce which properly reflects the community. Employees generally also like working in a well-managed diverse workforce.

If you do not want to discriminate against disabled people generally in the workforce (which the law says you must not do) you will not want to discriminate against people with learning disabilities.

Emma's line manager at Sainsbury's says she is so methodical she tends not to make the mistakes which are common at the checkouts, such as forgetting to give cashback when a customer has asked for it. She is also very good at picking up when an item has gone through twice. She may be a bit slower than other checkout operators but she very rarely makes mistakes.

There is a good deal of experience to draw on

The report quotes from experienced employers and managers throughout. The checklists on pages 46–51 draw on their experiences.

There is plenty of support available to employers

Key information 4 of the report (page 56) explains where and how.

Information card 2

WHAT KINDS OF PREPARATION DO YOU NEED TO MAKE?

Most employers are surprised how little needs to be changed.

If there is:

- a stable and friendly line management
- a good attitude to equal opportunities in management and the workforce and some experience in good practice
- a willingness to listen to the employee and see what is needed, and
- a willingness to work with supporters when necessary

then the groundwork is already done.

You may want to check your obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act

Key information 2 (page 54) briefly explains employers' obligations, and how to find out more about this law. The handbook contains lots of examples of how to comply with the legislation.

What are some examples of changes you might make?

Many employers find they do not have to treat employees with learning disabilities any differently from their other workers, or if they do, the changes are easy, cheap and minimal.

“On staff inductions, we use a tick box questionnaire. If someone needs help with this, this isn't a problem.”

“They understand about my needs and they give me help if I need it. I was worried about using the phone but they helped me to do it to begin with and then I was absolutely fine.”

You might want to use a support agency; some people with learning disabilities use Employment Support Agencies to help them settle into their new jobs.

“We work alongside the person for the first few weeks until they are competent and confident to do the job. We help find natural supports within the working environment. We gradually withdraw our support so that the individual becomes independent, and the relationships and support network are natural – the same as anyone else has in the workplace.”

Thinking about where to get support

Many examples of how support works are found throughout the handbook. Key information 4 (page 56) explains the assistance available, and how to get it. This section also tells you about different employment programmes to help you, and about funding for equipment and support, if it is needed.

Information card 3

RECRUITING AND INTERVIEWING

All stages of the recruitment process are covered in the handbook (pages 2–12), with many examples of successful practice and information on:

- advertising
- working with employment agencies
- application forms
- job descriptions and person specifications
- tips on key issues like communication, support and adjustments.

Some key points

The usual advertising outlets you use may not reach this target group. You will need to advertise in places like Jobcentre Plus, local disability organisations and support agencies. The handbook tells you how to find your local agencies.

The usual application form may need to be changed – this may just mean a larger print size, but if more is needed the organisation CHANGE (details in Key information 5, page 60) can provide you with application forms in suitable formats. Job Centre Disability Employment Advisers can also help.

Job descriptions and person specifications may need to be put into simpler language and checked that they do not discriminate: there is advice on this on pages 5 and 6, with examples, and suggestions for help.

Relevant experience

The handbook gives you examples of different ways of valuing what people might bring to the job (see pages 6–8).

Interviews

You may want to set up the interview differently – many employers have become skilled at communicating with people with learning disabilities by speaking more simply and directly. Use short words, not jargon; ask questions about concrete experience; try asking a question in a different way if you do not get a response the first time; work skilfully with the support worker if there is one at the interview (see checklist on pages 11–12).

“In the planning of the interviews of people with learning disabilities for the post of research assistant, we thought very carefully about the language we would use.”

Think of ways you can work more flexibly: like using practical tests, or trying someone out on a work experience placement.

“When Mencap Pathway approached us about employing Mark, we thought it would be best to just try it out and see if it worked.”

Information card 4

MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION

Helping a new employee fit in: this will be an extension of your normal good practice. The handbook gives you lots of examples in Chapters 4 and 5.

- break the job down into separate tasks
- provide instructions in ways that the employee can understand
- set up a job buddy system where there is practical support in learning the job routine.

“Nick helped me to learn how to build a website. He slowed things down to help me learn and he repeated things to check that I understood them.”

A local manager at Cineworld juggled shifts around so that a new employee had a consistent person who he could ask if he was uncertain about anything. However, she said, “I don’t think I would do it differently for anyone else”.

Ensuring someone does the job well

Most employees get satisfaction out of doing a good job, and you will want the best from your employees. Having learning difficulties is not a bar to this. You will want to use your normal management skills, which include being sensitive to the individual needs and aptitudes of those working for you.

Make adjustments to the needs of the employee – information about reasonable adjustments is given throughout the handbook, and particularly on pages 32–33. Examples are:

- aids and equipment – for example, communication aids are sometimes needed, like pictures or colour codes, or aids for dyslexia, like colour filters
- extra support in the form of talking things over more often, and allowing more time
- being aware of transport issues – many people with learning disabilities do not drive
- regular and relevant supervision sessions tailored to the support needs of the employee.

Work with the skills of the employee and build on them

Good management and supervision is beneficial to both sides and can lead to satisfying progression of the employee’s career, as well as new skills for the managers:

Jackie has been working for a city council Parks and Countryside Department for many years and assists running the In Bloom competition. She has her own office and her experience is highly valued. Like many employees, Jackie likes stability and does not deal well with change. Her manager says: “We do what we can not to upset her stability by not giving her work in too big chunks – a series of bite-sized chunks suits her better. She knows what to do at each stage of the competition.”

Many managers interviewed in the guide say they have learnt from their employees with learning difficulties and so have colleagues, both in terms of how jobs can be done, and about the importance of diversity. You will find many ideas and much helpful information on management and supervision in the handbook (see the checklist on pages 35–36).

Information card 5

IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS

You are no more likely to have problems with people with learning disabilities than with any other employees, and you probably have all your procedures for problem solving and prevention set up already.

You may have to make minor adjustments to your procedures – for example, you may have to make more certain that someone has understood, and can remember, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, before you move to the formal warning stage.

Liaise with a support agency or Disability Employment Adviser – they have plenty of experience of how to deal with difficulties, and you can call them in even if they have stopped their regular visits.

Make sure you understand the full circumstances which may lie behind the difficulty: this might be bullying or discriminatory behaviour from colleagues, or something in their private lives; it may also have nothing to do with a learning disability:

David is a young man, working in a large hospital. When his mother died his work colleagues were very supportive of him and one woman in particular gave him some practical support. His manager and work colleagues recognised that, during his bereavement, it was not his learning disability which was causing the problems but the situation he was dealing with outside work.

“We make it clear that bullying is not acceptable in our store. We cover bullying during staff induction when we discuss equal opportunities. I believe an open friendly personnel office and team is the way forward so that people are comfortable about coming in and talking to us about their feelings. You need to get to the bottom of any issues – sometimes things are said innocently. I feel it is important always to liaise with the support worker.”

You will find information on dealing with problems on pages 42–45 of the handbook.