

How to tell Employers about your Disability

A Guide to Disclosure



 ahead

creating inclusive environments in education
and employment for people with disabilities

About AHEAD

AHEAD is an independent non-profit organisation working to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities. The focus of our work is on further education and training, higher education, and graduate employment.

www.ahead.ie

About GetAHEAD

GetAHEAD is an initiative of AHEAD that started in 2005. At the heart of the programme, GetAHEAD works to up-skill students and graduates with disabilities. This includes publications, facilitating events and by providing training events and valuable information covering a wide range of topics and resources, including our GetAHEAD Blog.

GetAHEAD also has the [WAMWorks Database](#) where students and graduates with disabilities can register to receive notifications of all events, workshops

www.ahead.ie/getahead

About The WAM Programme

The Willing, Able, Mentoring (WAM) Programme works with employers to offer jobs exclusively for graduates with disabilities that are full time, paid and mentored. WAM provides support to both the employer and graduate at every stage of the recruitment process and during their placement.

www.ahead.ie/wam

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An Roinn Coimírce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection



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Note on Language

People with Disabilities and Disabled People

In this publication, the terms “persons with disabilities” and “disabled people” are used interchangeably. AHEAD recognises that different terminology is prevalent and culturally dominant in different regions and spaces, and we respect the right of individuals and communities to self-determine.

The term “disabled people” is recognised by many within the disability rights movement in Europe to align with the social and human rights model of disability, as it is considered to impute that people with an impairment are disabled by barriers in the environment and society. However, we also recognise that others prefer the term “persons with disabilities” to impute that they are first and foremost human beings entitled to human rights.

This reflects the language used in the UNCRPD. Finally, we recognise that some people do not identify as being disabled.

The interchanging language in this publication is intended to be inclusive and respectful of all.

Disclosure

We recognise the term disclosure can mean different things to different people and its meaning changes by the context. Disclosure is often defined as 'the act of making something known' that may have been previously private or a secret. From our engagement with students and graduates with disabilities, they feel the word 'disclosure' can be perceived as negative, which may not align with how they feel about sharing their disability or identity with an employer.

Using the word disclosure has particular connotations in the legal framework, therefore for this publication, when we use the word disclosure in the context of a work environment, we define it as: *'informing or telling someone about your disability'*.

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Section 1

Introduction

Introduction

Disclosure is often cited as one of the most complex aspects of having a disability, especially in relation to employment. Whether you should disclose is often a complex and difficult decision. Even if your disability is visible, you may still have to choose whether you let the visible part of your disability be your disclosure or if you want to communicate more information.

From our experience in AHEAD, there is often a disconnect between employers and disabled graduates when it comes to the subject of disclosure. Employers will often want to have as much information as soon as possible. Whereas graduates may be wary of providing this information for fear of discrimination or that there may be a lack of awareness by the employer.

Therefore, the decision to disclose or not is often made by weighing up the benefits of reasonable accommodation, workplace considerations and awareness against the cost of labelling and potential discrimination or being treated differently in the recruitment process and in the workplace.

To support you in considering whether or not to share information about your disability, AHEAD has put this booklet together. Here, we will guide you through some background information on disclosure, information on the law and our suggested approach to disclosure with some examples and information about reasonable accommodation.

Section 2

An Approach to Disclosure

An Approach to Disclosure

For students and graduates thinking about how, or if and when to disclose, it is a personal choice and should be well considered. It is helpful to look at some of the factors that sometimes enable or discourages disclosure.

Personal factors

Type of disability

Self-identity

Personality

Previous experiences of disclosing

Environmental factors

Colleagues and managers

Organisational culture

Physical or hybrid work environment

Awareness or education of disability issues in the workplace

Systemic factors

Employment equality legalisation

Company or organisational policies and procedures

Transport and infrastructure

Supports and grants available on both local & national level

Action Plan for Disclosing

Below is an action plan which may support you in making the decision to disclose your disability, be it for the recruitment process or when you are in the workplace. Go through each of these questions one at a time and then use the template to try out the approach on yourself.



Why



Think about **why** you want to, or would, disclose. It may be because...

- I want them to know
- I need a piece of assistive technology to support me
- I need an accessible building or room
- I use Irish Sign Language and require an interpreter
- I will bring a personal assistant
- I need time off for medical appointments
- They need to know medical information in case something happens.

Reasons can become apparent depending on where you are at in your employment journey. It may be before you enter a recruitment process or perhaps it may be in the workplace as you become familiar with your environment, or if your environment or disability changes.

What



What will you disclose?

Think about your answer to the first question: Depending on your **why** it will shape your **what**. Keep in mind that when you ask for something like a reasonable accommodation, you will need to give some background and explain why you are requesting it. Your aim should be to give **relevant, useful information** specific to the context. The more specific and straightforward you are, the easier it is for everyone.

“I need x piece of technology because I have dyslexia. X allows me to produce written work with good grammar and spelling.”

“I require extra time in the online assessment as I have limited mobility in my right arm which may affect the speed in which I complete the assessment.”

If you don't know what's most useful to tell someone, it's ok to say that and be willing to have a conversation about it.

When



When will you disclose?

Depending on your answers to the why and what, this may give you an indication of **when** the right time is to share information about your disability and accommodations. For example, you may want to disclose before the interview because you may need something to take part in the interview process.

There is no legal obligation on an employee, or potential employee, to disclose they have a disability and no reference to when disclosure should take place. It's entirely a personal choice.

However, there is a specific obligation on an employee under health and safety law to disclose if their disability or condition could expose them or another person (s) to danger or risks of danger.

You will also need to consider that if the employer has no knowledge or awareness of your disability, they cannot provide reasonable accommodation as they do not know and cannot respond accordingly.

Who



Who will you disclose to or who do you need to disclose to?

Again, thinking about your previous answers, this may help decide **who** the most appropriate person or people are. If you are looking for a reasonable accommodation, it is important to disclose to someone who will help put those accommodations in place. This could be the person who is arranging the interviews, your line manager or in the case of public bodies, it may be the access or disability officer.

You may also need to disclose to your team you are working with so they can best support you in the work environment. For example, you are hard-of-hearing, and you prefer to communicate via instant messaging rather than on the phone or face to face with your colleagues.

How

How will you disclose?

After you have pieced together your why, what, when and to whom, the last piece is to decide how you want to disclose. You could disclose by email, or verbally at a meeting with your manager or to the interview panel.

However, if you are looking for a reasonable accommodation, follow up any verbal conversation with an email so there is a written record and clarity on all sides.

Action Plan Template



Action Plan Template

Using the Action Plan approach above, use this form below. Disclosure will be looked at and approached differently for each situation, so use this form each time you are considering disclosure.

Why	
What	
When	
Who	
How	

Case Studies – Action Plan Examples

Both Sarah and Tom below are fictional characters, whose experiences are drawn from a variety of scenarios AHEAD has encountered in the past.



Sarah

Sarah is a recent graduate who has Cystic Fibrosis was offered a 12-month contract with an employer. This was Sarah's first time working in an office. Sarah did not disclose to her employer she had a disability therefore didn't request any reasonable accommodations. Sarah travelled to the office daily by using public transport and walking which meant her commute each way was approximately 90 minutes. However, shortly after Sarah started work, the combination of the commute and the efforts of a full working day were going to take their toll on her general well-being. Even though Sarah could do a full day's work, her disability meant that a lot of energy was used in the commute. As a result, she couldn't keep pace with workloads and was always trying to play catch-up to get on top of tasks and deadlines.

Here is how Sarah used the form above to help decide in disclosing her disability to the employer.

Why

To request accommodations that might benefit her such as options for remote working or flexibility in working hours.

What

Disclose that she has a disability called Cystic Fibrosis and wants some flexibility for her to perform effectively in the job.

When

She thinks her scheduled weekly one-to-one meeting would be a good time to discuss this with her manager.

Who

Discuss first with her manager and find out who else she needs to disclose to. This may be the HR Department.

How

Chat with manager during weekly one-to-one and then follow up with an email including other people who need to know such as HR Department.



Tom

Tom has a mental health condition and has some gaps on his CV when he applied for a position as a trainer with a youth work organisation. Tom had worked in this area in the past, but because of the impact of his disability, he had not worked for a year prior to applying for the position.

Tom was invited for interview and immediately started to worry about whether to tell the interview panel about his disability but felt it would be a bad mark against him. Tom could get around the absence from work as he has done some travelling and could suggest it was for a longer time than it was. Tom never really resolved the disclosure issue as he was afraid it would go against him if he did not tell them and then they found out, or if he had to go for a medical, then it would all come out.

Throughout the interview he did not know what to tell them and in the end, did not tell the interview panel. Tom felt he had been distracted by this interior dialogue throughout the interview instead of focusing on the answers to the questions and as a result did not do a good interview.

Tom used this form to think about how he could explain the gaps in his CV in future interviews.

Why To explain gaps in his CV

What Explain that he had to take a year off to get well because of his disability

When Either during the interview if prompted or later in the process if it came up.

Who The interview panel or HR or the medical assessment as part of the role.

How Depending on the situation, it could be verbally or noted down in an email or on the form for his medical questionnaire.

Section 3

The Law

The Law

It's useful for you to be aware of certain key pieces of legalisation relating to disability and employment and statutory organisations who can assist you with more information on your rights.

Please note, this section is not intended to be a legal document and is taken from various sources, such as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

Employment Equality Acts (1998 – 2015)

This is the key piece of legislation that relates to disability in the workplace, which employers must abide by. It promotes equality, prohibits discrimination across nine grounds; obligates employers and services to provide reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities; and allows for a broad range of positive action measures.

Who does it apply to?

The Employment Equality Acts cover full-time, part time, and temporary employees, public and private sector employment, vocational training bodies, employment agencies, trade unions, professional and trade bodies. The Acts also extend in certain circumstances to self-employed people, partners in partnerships, and State and local authority officeholders.

What can't employers discriminate against?

Employers may not discriminate against employees or potential employees based on any of the nine grounds. Disability is listed as one of the nine grounds.

This includes advertising, equal pay, access to employment, vocational training and work experience, terms and conditions of employment, promotion or re-grading, classification of posts, dismissal, and collective agreements.

What do employers have to do for people with disabilities?

An employer is obliged to take 'appropriate measures' commonly referred to as reasonable accommodation, to enable a person who has a disability

- to have access to employment
- to participate or advance in employment; or
- to undertake training

However, these measures must not impose a disproportionate burden on the employer.

What are appropriate measures or reasonable accommodations?

Reasonable accommodation is effective and practical measures the employer takes to enable people with disabilities to participate in employment such as

- the adaptation of premises and equipment
- patterns of working time
- distribution of tasks
- the provision of training or integration resources

The above is not an exhaustive list and there are further measures that could be taken; however, the employer is not obliged to provide something that the person would ordinarily provide for themselves, such as hearing aids or glasses.

What is a disproportionate burden?

In determining whether the measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer, it would have to consider:

- the financial and other costs entailed
- the scale and financial resources of the employer's business
- the possibility of obtaining public funding or other assistance

What disabilities does it cover?

The Employment Equality Act does not have a list of disabilities named under the law, instead, it comprises some broader statements that cover a wide range of disabilities. This can include physical, sensory, intellectual, learning, cognitive or emotional disabilities and a range of medical conditions.

Section 2 of the Employment Equality Acts defines disability as:

- a.** “the total or partial absence of a person’s bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of the person’s body,
- b.** the presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness,
- c.** the malfunction, malformation, or disfigurement of a part of a person’s body,
- d.** a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or
- e.** a condition, illness or disease which affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions, or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour,

and shall be taken to include a disability which exists at present, or which previously existed but no longer exists, or which may exist in the future, or which is imputed to a person.”

Disability Act 2005

The Disability Act 2005 requires Government departments and public bodies to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities by supporting access to services and facilities and public service employment. Under this law, public sector bodies must have a minimum of 3% of people with disabilities employed in the public sector, increasing to a minimum of 6% in 2025 and monitored by the National Disability Authority (NDA). It states that public bodies must collect data on employees and especially employees with disabilities annually¹. There is no set method required on how public bodies collect this information but employees themselves must identify themselves as having a disability.

1 National Disability Authority – [Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Public Sector](#)

The Disability Act 2005 sets out the following definition for disability:

“a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business, or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health, or intellectual impairment.

The NDA advises the term “substantial restriction”, is in relation to existing barriers such as

- inaccessible written, spoken, and digital communications
- lack of access to public transport services
- inaccessible public spaces

These substantial restrictions can prevent persons with disabilities from accessing and retaining employment opportunities and participating in mainstream society.

UNCRPD

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is an international human rights treaty, which exists to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all disabled persons. The Irish Government signed the Convention in 2007 and ratified it in March 2018. Article 27 (1) of the UNCRPD recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others. Article 27 of the UNCRPD further requires States Parties to safeguard and promote the realisation of the right to work of persons with disabilities by taking appropriate steps to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)

The IHREC is an independent public body that accounts to the Oireachtas, with a mandate established under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (IHREC Act 2014).

The IHREC provides information about your rights under equality and human rights law in Ireland and some options you may have if you believe that you have experienced discrimination, or that your rights have been breached.

Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)

The WRC is an independent, statutory body which was established under the Workplace Relations Act 2015 (No. 16 of 2015).

The WRC provides information on employment rights to the public through their telephone and online information service as well as produce booklets, guides and code of practices relating to all aspects of employment. The WRC is also responsible for receiving complaints of workplace discrimination under the Employment Equality Acts which must be within 6 months.



Section 4

AHEAD's Experience and Research

AHEAD's Experience and Research

From our experience working with students and graduates, we know people with disabilities often make an informal or unconscious (or very conscious!) cost-benefit analysis of disclosing their disability. The good news is that, in AHEAD's Employer Attitude Survey to Disability in the Workplace in 2021², a very large majority of employers, 83%, believe hiring people with disabilities is of benefit to the organisation. 77% of employers believe hiring people with disabilities is a moral obligation and 75% believe it is important to help the business innovate!

Below is some research AHEAD has undertaken in recent years regarding experiences of disclosure with graduates and employers as well as highlighting other research by other organisations.

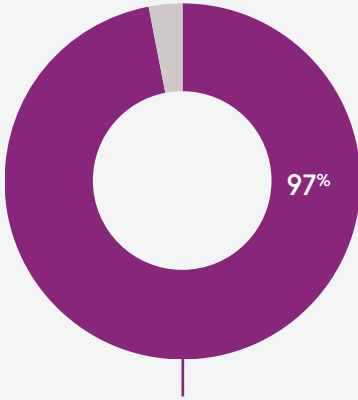
2 AHEAD (2021) – [Employer Attitudes Survey to Disability in the Workplace in Ireland.](#)

WAM Graduates' Experiences

In AHEAD's initiative The WAM programme, a work placement programme with employers, disclosure of disability is discussed between the graduate and the AHEAD needs assessor as part of the process. In The WAM Programme Statistics 2020³, 91% of graduates placed with a WAM employer chose to disclose their disability as part of the needs assessment process before they began work. A further 6% of graduates chose to partly disclose, which means they only wanted to disclose one or some of their disabilities to their WAM employer.

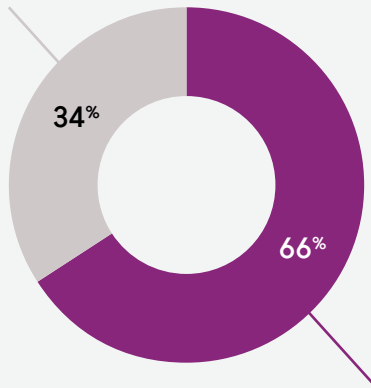
In disclosing in a mainstream work environment, 66% of graduates who completed a WAM placement, said they were more confident in disclosing their disability to an employer. However, 34% of graduates still did not feel comfortable or were unsure if they would disclose to a future employer. This disparity in the numbers of those graduates feeling comfortable disclosing with a WAM employer who has received training versus mainstream employers illustrates the impact of stigma around disability.

3 AHEAD (2020) - [The WAM Programme Statistics 2020](#)



97% of WAM graduates chose to disclose their disabilities with their WAM employer

34% of graduates who completed a WAM placement still did not feel comfortable or were unsure if they would disclose to a future employer



66% of graduates who completed a WAM placement said they were more confident in disclosing their disability to an employer

Disabled People Experiences

In AsIAM's report on Autism in the Workplace⁴, 80% of autistic people also said they would be likely to disclose their autism diagnosis if they were sure the employer or client would be supportive, however, the same percentage do not feel confident that employers, managers, colleagues, and clients know enough about autism to support them. Almost 6 in 10 (58%) autistic people also felt that requesting reasonable accommodations would worsen their chances of finding their preferred role.

MS Ireland also stated that one of the main reasons persons with Multiple Sclerosis did not disclose their disability to an employer was the “worry of discrimination”⁵.

In a survey over 650 participants, SeeChange reports that over 7 in 10 workers are concerned that disclosing a mental health issue could impact their job⁶.

4 AsIAM and Irish Jobs (2023)- [Autism in the Workplace Report](#)

5 MS Ireland (2019) - [Working with MS: Employment Resource for People with Multiple Sclerosis](#)

6 SeeChange (2021) – [Mental Health Matters – A Guide to Ending Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace.](#)

Employer's Disclosure Disconnect

In AHEAD's Employer Attitudes Survey, 83% of employers believe disclosure should be provided prior to the job offer. Almost half of employers believed it is a breach of trust if an applicant does not disclose their disability, despite the fact there is no legal obligation for a person with a disability to do so. Of the employers who were surveyed, only 35% proactively offered opportunities for candidates to disclose their disability, showing a disconnect between company policies and employer's attitudes towards disclosure.

When employers were asked why they wanted graduates to disclose, most responses included ensuring accommodations were put in place and to avoid misunderstandings (in allotting tasks), address any potential health and safety concerns and to ensure the relevant information and knowledge should a performance review or incident occur.

In an ideal world, both employers and graduates would start the discussion with an openness to understanding each other's perspective. An employer needs to understand the possible hesitancy from graduates to disclose and create opportunities for a graduate to feel secure enough to disclose and get the support they need.

Section 5

Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable Accommodation

Under the Employment Equality Acts, employers have an obligation to provide reasonable accommodation to enable people with disabilities to have access to employment, take part and advance in employment and undertaking training on the job.

There is no comprehensive list of reasonable accommodations as every disabled person is different and every job is different! Reasonable accommodations can also change throughout employment and it's important to review your own reasonable accommodations at work and think about new recruitment processes that are implemented by employers.

Below is a summary of the most common types of reasonable accommodations we have encountered from our experience engaging with graduates with disabilities on the AHEAD WAM Programme.

In Recruitment

Many employers are now doing various types of recruitment methods that are not a standard interview, such as online psychometric tests, group assessments, presentation skills assessment and business case assessments. It's important to reflect on your own disability and consider what the impact may be for each part of the recruitment process. For example, perhaps during a virtual interview you may not need any accommodations, however for an in-person interview you may require an accessible room.

Here are some examples below:

- Accessible room for an in-person interview if you have mobility difficulties.
- Captions enabled on the virtual interview video-calling platform if you are hard-of-hearing.
- Extra time when completing online assessments because of slower processing speeds.
- Questions provided before the interview if you have limited short-term memory.
- Requesting an individual or alternative assessment as opposed to a group assessment, because you may not perform to the best of your ability as you are autistic or deaf.

The above is not exhaustive or exclusive to a disability, many of the above can apply to all various types of disabilities.

In the Workplace

It is impossible to cover a comprehensive list of workplace accommodations, as there are many different types of jobs out there. Many employers now offer hybrid working policies for certain roles, which may mean the accommodations you once received in the past may have to be reconsidered because of this new way of working. For example, you may have needed a full day off in the past to attend medical appointments, factoring in travel time. However, if you are remote working on the day you have your medical appointment, this may mean you only need an hour or two.

Work Tasks

From WAM's experience of reasonable accommodations as part of the needs assessment process with graduates, over two-thirds of accommodations are in relation to work tasks and not necessarily about providing a piece of software or hardware. This can include:

- Instructions from manager received in writing or verbally
- Style of communication with the team and / or line manager
- Provided with templates for report writing
- Clear structure, explicit instructions, and regular feedback
- Materials in an accessible electronic format
- Extra time in completing tasks
- Adjusting workstation such as desk location in office

Assistive Technology

As technology is ever-changing, it's important to research and know what new technologies are available. Most operating systems now have in-built accessibility features such as magnifiers, colour contrast. Other applications like Microsoft 365 now come with accessibility features as standard such as Immersive Reader, Read Aloud, Dictate and Editor which is an enhanced spelling and grammar checker.

It's important to be mindful that assistive technology you may have used in the past may no longer be available or perhaps the company cannot install software as it presents as a security risk.

Why not visit AHEAD's AT Hive to find out more about technology that could assist you in the workplace www.ahead.ie/athive .

Reasonable Accommodation Fund

The Department of Social Protection has a Reasonable Accommodation Fund to support employers and employees with a disability to access, improve, or keep their employment by providing several grants. These include;

- [Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant](#)
- [Job Interview Interpreter Grant](#)
- [Personal Reader Grant](#)
- [Employee Retention Grant](#)

Go to www.gov.ie to find out more.

Section 6

Useful Links and Resources

Useful Links and Resources

WAMWorks Database

Join AHEAD's WAMWorks Database where students and graduates with disabilities can register their profile to receive notifications of job opportunities through The WAM Programme and GetAHEAD workshops and events.

www.ahead.ie/wamworks

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

IHREC provides a wealth of information on your rights under Irish equality legalisation. It provides detailed information on what the law says in relation to disability and reasonable accommodation.

www.ihrec.ie

Workplace Relations Commission

WRC provides services to both employers and employees, covering all aspects of the workplace relations environment. If you feel you have been discriminated on the basis of your disability in employment, you can refer your case to the WRC for investigation.

www.workplacerelations.ie

Department of Social Protection

DSP provides information on your entitlements to social welfare, benefits and the Reasonable Accommodation Fund for employees and employers.

www.welfare.ie

National Disability Authority

NDA is a statutory body responsible for monitoring public bodies under various pieces of legislation relating to disability in Ireland.

www.nda.ie



Thank you

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Note, this is the third edition of AHEAD's Disclosure Guide, with previous editions in 2009 and 2013.

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