

PAVING THE WAY TO
GREATNESS:
ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT DISABILITY AND
EMPLOYMENT



Trusted Solutions, Passionate People



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Introduction

It's easy to see why many people don't find much joy in working. Constant references to the Monday blues, the weekend seemingly being the only time worth discussing, and this idea that we should all 'work to live' instead of 'live to work'. Many of us enjoy making a mockery out of our jobs, which is all well and good... until we struggle to find work! **For many people with disabilities, job searching, finding and getting support and managing to stay in work with a team of people who understand additional needs and requirements can be really pretty tough.**

If you have a disability yourself and are looking to find work that is rewarding, fulfilling and enjoyable whilst getting all the support and help you need and deserve,



this guide may just be for you. Of course, it will be unable to cover everything for every disabled reader in Europe, so please do look on your Government's webpages to see what schemes, grants and adjustments may be available to you. But here, here is a good place to start!

This ebook will take readers on the do's and don'ts of the employment journey, from finding work and excelling in an interview, to the pros and cons of self-employment and how to stay in work, even if situations and abilities change.

Hopefully, by the end of reading, you will feel more clued-up and comfortable with the concepts of disability and employment, and ready to start, continue or change the direction of your own working life.

What's more, we've included a handy section at the end that's filled with employment resources. By country, it lists the schemes and organisations that can help you find your next role, as well as some good Europe-wide bodies to know about.

Finding a job



On average, around 50% of disabled people in European countries are unemployed. Wouldn't it be great if we could make this number smaller and more of us could find work that we loved? It seems a common thing to think that disability halts job opportunities completely and, although it may limit them, they definitely do not stop entirely. There is lots of guidance, support and training to help disabled people get into work, although admittedly there is still a fair way to go. Grants, loans and Government-backed schemes can help those of us with disabilities find employment, and stereotypes about people with disabilities are constantly being challenged and changed to ensure that everyone has a fair chance of getting, and keeping, a job.

The [NHS](#) in the UK puts it perfectly: **Whatever your physical or learning disability, you have a right to equality, fairness, respect and understanding at your workplace.** Employees and jobseekers with disabilities are legally protected against discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. You're legally entitled to fair treatment when it comes to recruitment, promotion and pay. It also means that employers must make their workplaces accessible to you.

Access to Work support is less about placing disabled individuals into specific work placements in the hope that they may acquire full time employment (although this is, of course, the ideal situation), but more that it is a process of several stages, ranging from assessing the needs of the disabled individual, to offering support once the individual has found a job.

GOV.UK also has details of the [“two ticks” scheme for disabled people](#). **Employers who adopt this initiative take a positive approach to disability, and offer interviews to all disabled applicants who meet the minimum job criteria.** Look out for the two ticks symbol on websites and job application forms across Europe. Also have a look at the [European Disability Forum](#), a great website to research your full European Disability rights, and they list some incredible jobs, too!

There are a number of factors that can help disabled individuals access work, ranging from institutes that solely offer employment opportunities to the disabled to Access to Work grants which have been rolled out through various countries within the EU.

In a paper released by the EU commission back in 2011 (click [here](#) to find out more), it states that Access to Work support is less about placing disabled individuals into specific work placements in the hope that they may acquire full time employment (although this is, of course, the ideal situation), but more that it is a process of several stages, ranging from assessing the needs of the disabled individual, to offering support once the individual has found a job.

The key aspects of a feasible Access to Work plan are predominantly outlined as follows;

- ▶ **Client Engagement:** in other words, assess on a case by case basis, exactly what an individual needs from their chosen career path. Ensuring that the right job is allocated to the right person – much like if an able bodied person was applying for jobs.
- ▶ **Vocational Profile:** creating a document which will critique all potential employers based on the client engagement assessment.
- ▶ **Job finding:** successfully matching the vocational profile with suitable jobs in which the client may wish to apply for, and that suits their unique access requirements.
- ▶ **Employer Engagement:** working closely with the employers to inform them of any aspects of the client and their access needs that they may need to be aware of ahead of time. Also making sure that client is ready and prepared for their interview.

- ▶ **On/Off job support:** by offering continual support to the disabled individual, the scheme will be better equipped to deal with any issues that may arise whilst in the world place. Liaison with the employer may also be highly advisable from time to time.

Within the report which outlined these guidelines, there are also a great number of case studies whereby an Access to Work scheme was deemed to be quite successful in various countries from around the EU and the EEA.

It's important to note that organisations such as Remploy in the UK, are just an extenuation of an Access to Work scheme and they more than likely follow the same structure as has been outlined above. It is satisfying to know that this structure is transferable and is upheld by the European Commission, rendering it viably active amongst all member states and ensuring access to work for the disabled community can be sought out right across Europe.



How to 'boss' an interview



Finding work can feel stressful for job seekers with disabilities, who often encounter prejudice during their search. **Preparation is the key to convincing employers that a disability doesn't affect performance.** This dynamic makes job interviews all the more crucial, because it's often the only chance to make a good impression. Smart applicants face these issues by researching a company beforehand, which helps them to prepare a list of potential questions that they can practice answering.

Almost all of the tips and advice given in this section are applicable to just about anyone – regardless of whether or not they personally have a disability. The points below might sound cliché, but they are absolutely true!

- **Confidence:** So, without further ado, the key in any interview is confidence! If you head into your interview oozing optimism and charm then you're more than likely going to make a fine impression on the interviewer(s). It's crucial that you find the right balance, however, as over confidence can come across as being overzealous and cocky – and nobody wants to be accused of being either of those things! So just relax, be yourself and let your personality shine through.
- **Your Disability:** Tip number two would definitely be to try not to focus too much on your disability. If you have a hidden disability, then by all means feel free to bring this up in the interview if you feel it is appropriate/necessary, but if your disability is a little more on the 'obvious' side then you

may want to shift the focus elsewhere, unless of course the interviewer has some specific questions. Remember: you're not obligated to answer anything about your disability that makes you feel uncomfortable, but answering appropriate questions may help your potential employer put adjustments in place to help you.

- **Know your CV:** It's more than likely that the person studying you is going to have studied your CV and Covering Letter extensively, so it goes without saying that you should also have answers for anything they might ask that relates to what you've written on your CV. Don't be caught short by including something on there just in an effort to buff yourself up as you'll soon come undone and look pretty foolish!
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions:** In keeping with the notion of confidence in the first point, it's also quite advisable to know when to ask questions of your own. This shows engagement and a keen interest in the position you're applying for and will be a welcome change to those who are interviewing you!
- **Know the location beforehand:** This last point is more specific for disabled applicants; know where your interview will be based, and the accessibility of the venue. Does it have accessible parking? Is there an accessible bathroom? Is there step-free access/a hearing loop/are guide dogs welcomed? These are all things your potential employer should inform you about; if they know that you have a disability, but if they don't, or they have forgotten, don't be afraid of contacting them before the interview to find out. You want the best chance of succeeding at interview, and prior knowledge about your environment will help you to do that. If nothing else, showing initiative is pretty impressive, too!

There's a wealth of advice on the internet on how to best prepare for an interview, like this great article on [Chron](#) that also touches upon the topic of 'knowing your rights' in an interview!

Businesses and Reasonable Adjustment

In the world of business, disability continues to be seen as quite a scary concept (not great for those of us who are disabled!!), but **a huge part of this fear of disability is due to the fact that organisations and businesses have been told, and are worried that, adapting their premises for a disabled employee or client will be hugely expensive.** That's true if we think about the installation of an elevator, but not at all true if the employee simply needs a larger parking space, or a height adjustable desk to work from.

To try and combat this situation of fear, and ensure that more disabled people continue to find, and stay in, work, businesses are being encouraged to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled employees. This basically means that, should an organisation interview a disabled person and want to employ them, they will be helped, financially and supportively, to make adjustments that will enable the new employee to access the building, use all resources and do their job to the best of their ability, but these adjustments will only be ones that the business can fairly afford to make.

A good example of a reasonable adjustment: An office building is situated over two floors. On the ground floor, there are desks for employees and one meeting room and on the first floor, there are two further meeting rooms and the director's office. There is a large step into the building and a large, spacious cubicle on the ground floor, but it has no accessibility features. The business wants to employ a wheelchair user to come and work in the office. It would be reasonable to ensure that the wheelchair user could get into the building, so a ramp must be installed that the wheelchair user can use independently. The large toilet cubicle would also have to have the correct accessibility features installed (such as grab rails and enough space for the wheelchair user to turn around), and the new employee must be able to get to their desk and into the meeting room on the ground floor with ease. If all of these things can be achieved, it is not a necessary, or reasonable, adjustment to install an elevator, as all meetings with the wheelchair user can take place downstairs, and the director can also have talks with the disabled employee on the ground floor, which is now totally accessible to the new worker's needs.





Reasonable adjustment is just a way of ensuring that both the disabled employee and the business get a fair deal in terms of access and inclusion.

Employers must make reasonable adjustments to make sure disabled workers (including contract workers, trainees, apprentices and business partners) aren't seriously disadvantaged when doing their jobs.

This includes:

- ▶ **Making reasonable adjustments during the recruitment and interview process.** Chatting with a Deaf applicant on Skype rather than over the phone so that they can lip read, for example.
- ▶ **Doing things differently to suit the individual needs of employees, where reasonable.** Allowing someone with social anxiety disorder to have their own desk instead of hot-desking is a good example.
- ▶ **Making physical changes,** like installing a ramp for a wheelchair user or an audio-visual fire alarm for a Deaf person
- ▶ **Allowing a disabled person to work somewhere else,** like on the ground floor for a wheelchair user as discussed in the above scenario.
- ▶ **Adapting equipment, where reasonable.** Providing a special keyboard for an employee with arthritis, for example.
- ▶ **Allowing employees with changing circumstances to their disability to make a phased return to work** – e.g. working flexible hours or part-time
- ▶ **Offering training opportunities** and pathways of progression to all.

Self-Employment – the Highs and Lows.



For some disabled people, the idea of going into an office from 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, might not suit their capabilities or even their character. Fortunately, there's been a real rise in self-employment across Europe, with many disabled people setting up their own businesses, training other workers in disability awareness, creating innovative technologies and designs, leading the way in accessible travel, giving talks at schools and universities across Europe, and even consulting on accessibility on a global scale.

Below you'll find some pros and cons of self-employment, in order to help you decide whether or not it might be for you.

Pros:

- ▶ **The freedom to fit work around your personal life** – you might have a family, be a caregiver to someone else, need to study alongside work, or thoroughly enjoy travel. With self-employment, your hours can often be extremely flexible, and your office can be from anywhere in the world (depending on your career pathway!)
- ▶ **Answering only to yourself and your clients** – you are your own boss! This is both liberating and a lot of pressure, as you are responsible for your deadlines, and might even be employing your own team who are dependent on your management.

- ▶ **Escaping the cost and pressure of commuting** – want to work from home a few days a week? You sure can! Yay!
- ▶ **Variety** – is the spice of life, as they say. You'll be working on a variety of projects, meeting new people all the time, and will gain skills so quickly from having to learn fast as a one man (or woman) band!
- ▶ **Success, it's all yours** – and this will either excite or terrify you, as failure will be all yours, too...

Cons:

- ▶ **Lack of employment security** – some months you might have three different projects on the go and not feel like you have a minute to spare. Other months you might be struggling to pay the bills. There are methods to cope with this, like having a 'float' of cash that you save from the good months to prepare for the bad ones, but the pressure is always real!
- ▶ **Lost earnings if you take a holiday** – unless you are a travel writer!
- ▶ **Losing the division between work and home time** – home working can also mean your home becomes an office, which is not always the best feeling when you are technically always on call and the working day sometimes does not finish until 10pm.
- ▶ **If you work alone, you can become isolated and jaded** – although you might not have to deal with the boredom of the same office day in, day out, you will have to make more of an effort to find time for social events and commit to attending, as otherwise, you may feel alone and friendships may suffer from your work pressures.

Self-employment can be so fulfilling, and might be especially beneficial for disabled people who are tired of inaccessible transport to work, daily commutes and a workplace that is not sufficiently catering for their additional requirements.

Staying in Work, and what to do if Circumstances change.

Okay, so you've got the job and you're well into the swing of working life. **But what happens if the circumstances of your disability change?**

How can you appropriately deal with these changes and still ensure that you retain your job that you've worked so hard to get?

- ▶ The first piece of advice would always be to **maintain full disclosure with your boss/manager**. Ensuring that he/she knows of any changes you may be facing is really important and they, as a work giver, must ensure that reasonable workplace adjustments have been made to accommodate your specific needs.

These reasonable adjustments must be assessed at the very outset of your employment – and with that, they must also be reassessed with any occurring changes to your own personal circumstances. The same rule applies if you are experiencing discrimination in the workplace, a good relationship with your line manager or the general director of the company you work for can really ease any trials and tribulations of the workplace.

- ▶ Another tip would be to always **consult your doctor about any changes to your disability that you're experiencing**. Of course, this point goes without saying from a personal perspective, but it also has a great amount of bearing from a professional stand point too as having medical advice from your GP or surgeon could make all the difference and would also go a some way towards protecting you should you find yourself



being unfairly dismissed from your job. If the sudden changes to your disability require some time off work in the short to medium term, then a letter from your doctor may make all the difference when it comes to ensuring you receive your sick pay.

- ▶ A third tip would be **to assess whether or not there are changes to your work station and working environment** that you can personally make that would enable you to cope better with any changes to your disability. In keeping with that, what can or have you noticed that would help your employers to help you in turn? It's worth bearing in mind that although your bosses may be all too happy to help if things change within your circumstances, they may well not

have the necessary training to spot areas that need addressing.

- ▶ Finally, it would be largely advisable to **check with your own governmental practices**, as legislation alters slightly from country to country. For example, some countries may offer grants to employers to help make those much needed adjustments. These funds may also be supplied to those who are in need of further adaptations if their disability changes whilst in employment. If you've developed a disability or health condition and can't work, you may be able to get Statutory Sick Pay. This is the minimum you're entitled to. Some employers have their own sick pay scheme which is more generous.



And for Employers...

When it comes to employment, sometimes employers need an extra helping hand, too! Here are five tips from [Enhance the UK](#) for anyone who is about to have an interview, or meeting, with a wheelchair user.

1. The correct venue is vital... Inviting a wheelchair user to a business meeting? Think about where might suit them. It'll need to be step-free, and if your office is on the 11th floor without a lift, the meeting will be a flop before it's begun!

2. Parking and Public transport... are also very important. Regardless of where you meet, make sure that there's accessible parking and/or an accessible tube station or bus stop nearby. If all else fails, offer the person an accessible taxi.

3. Accessible Bathrooms.... Everyone gets nervous before a meeting or interview, and there's NOTHING worse than being unable to relieve yourself because you can't even swing a cat in the tiny toilet cubicle.

4. Allow time... We live in a very fast world, where deals are made and meetings are over within minutes. Try and leave a bit more time in your diary for a disabled person. It's nothing to do



with sympathy; it will just allow them time to get a coffee, freshen up and settle without feeling it's a race!

5. Just ask!... Anything you're unsure of, just ask! Chances are, the wheelchair user will be able to tell you everything you need to know, so you can prepare for the perfect meeting. Good luck!

Aid, Schemes and Contacts for the World of Work.



This section has resources that will help you find a job. There are recruitment agencies and third sector bodies who may know about jobs, or government schemes that will find you employment. We've also listed them by country, and there are a few Europe wide resources at the end too.

Denmark

[BM Handicap](#) This website has a bundle of great resources including a wage subsidy scheme for disabled graduates, mentoring on the job, and personal assistance.

United Kingdom

[Remploy](#) - Employment opportunities for disabled people in the UK

France

[CAP Emploi](#) - Find help getting into work, with this organisation helping you with your CV, finding job opportunities, providing training, and giving help with diagnoses.

España

[FAMMA](#) is a Labour Integration Service, which provides job opportunities, training and more for disabled people in Madrid. You may also find a Labour Integration Service in your own municipality.

The Netherlands

[Target Group](#) This page details a Government scheme to get 100,000 disabled people into work. It notes how entering the 'Target Register' makes you eligible for the scheme.

Belgique

[Adapted Work Enterprises](#)

This page has a directory of 'ETAs', which are 'Adapted Work Enterprises'. These bodies create jobs for disabled people, and you may find work with them.

Portugal

[The Salvador Association](#) The Salvador Association has a few schemes to help disabled people find work, including orientation interviews as well as help sourcing opportunities.

Italia

[CategorieProtetteallavoro.it](#) This job search engine exclusively recruits people with protected characteristics such as disabled people.

Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz (DE, AU, CH)

[ArbeiterKammer](#) A lot of information about how disabled people can find work, including information about an integrative vocational training scheme.

[Sozial Ministerium](#) Information about three schemes in Austria that can help disabled people find work.

[MitSchaffe](#) A Swiss recruitment firm for people with mental or physical disabilities.

[Insieme](#) A large number of resources for disabled people in Switzerland searching for a job.

Norge

[NHF](#) Employment workshops for disabled people in Norway.

Sverige

[Sundsvall](#) Several great resources for disabled people looking for work in Sweden.

Ireland

[Link2Me.ie](#) is a jobs portal for people with intellectual disabilities.

[Welfare.ie](#) This Government webpage signposts useful resources which can help disabled people find work.

[European Disability Forum](#) - The European Disability Forum, a great place to find out more about your rights and get involved with the disability movement.

[EASPD](#) - EASPD, or the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities, is a non-profit NGO in the disability sector, promoting the views of over 12, 000 social services and their umbrella associations. There are over 80 million people with a disability throughout Europe. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems. They also have their own job opportunities listed on the site!

[European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) - Another great place to find out more about your working rights. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability and recognises the right of people with disabilities to benefit from measures to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community.

Looking for a job?

Many big businesses and charities alike across Europe will explicitly state that they are looking for applications from disabled people (whether we like it or not, many businesses now have a 'disability quota' to fill, meaning disabled applicants have a relatively good chance of employment for numerous organisations).

Hopefully, this ebook will have given you a greater understanding of disability and employment, and the confidence to get out there and grab work opportunities with both hands. Wishing you the best of luck on your working journey!

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