

a guide to work for people with learning disabilities...



celebrating diversity in the workplace



This guide to work will provide answers to the most frequently asked questions about getting a job. It has been compiled by SAY It's Workable - a team of eight adults with learning disabilities who design and lead their own employment campaign. SAY It's Workable is a unique initiative established as a result of recommendations in 'The Same As You?' (SAY) National Review of services for people with learning disabilities. SAY It's Workable have consulted with People First (Scotland) on this project. People First is an independent national self-advocacy organisation for people with learning disabilities in Scotland.

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The SAY It's Workable Team



Jacqueline Blair - Working makes me feel independent. It's a reason to get out of bed in the morning! It's definitely changed my life.



Alison Lonie - Working has given me the chance to meet new people. It's given me confidence, and boosted my self-esteem.



Kenny Richards - Working gives me the chance to express myself and to get wages. It lets employers see who I am.



Gary Handyside - Having a job has made me feel part of the community. It has made me feel important. It's made a difference to my bank account as well!

Audrey Frame - People see me in a different light because I have a job. It's a good experience. It shows people what I can do.



Willie Taylor - Having a job is very important to me. I did a good interview! I've met new work colleagues and made new friends.



Susan Mitchell - I've learnt new skills and increased my abilities. Working makes me proud. It's a great achievement.



Sarah Muller - I like learning new things. Having a job makes me feel good about myself. Earning money is good!



How do I find a job?



Think about the skills and experience you have - things you are good at, things you enjoy doing. Then think about jobs where you could use those skills. You can also:



discuss it with your support worker/keyworker



ask friends and family if they know of any companies looking for people



look in the newspapers



go to job centres



write a letter saying a bit about yourself, and send it to employers you would like to work for and see if they have any vacancies



contact one of the organisations in the Fife EmployAbility Network brochure



Will I need qualifications or work experience?

Not all jobs need qualifications. Any previous experience you have will be useful. Employers look for people who are willing to work hard and are reliable. It's important that you are keen to work.



Who can help me to find a job?

There are many organisations who can help you find work. You can find out about them in the Fife Employability Network booklet which is available in Opportunity Centres throughout Fife. One of these organisations is Fife EmployAbility Team, and you can find out about the support they can provide on page 8.

What do Job Centres do?

Job Centres are now called Jobcentre Plus. Anyone who wants to find work can go there. Fife employers advertise job vacancies in Jobcentre Plus. Information on job vacancies is kept on computer, which you can look at if you're interested in finding work. Disability Employment Advisors in Jobcentre Plus can give advice on work opportunities.



Steven Black
Green Towns, Cupar

"I do the filing, photocopying and help with the mail. I enjoy what I'm doing. It's given me an opportunity and a reason to get up in the morning. Working makes me feel good. It's made a difference to my life. It's changed me. I feel proud to say to people I have a job."

"Steven's part of the team here - he's fitted in quite well. He's been with us for seven years now - he's almost the longest serving member of staff we have! He's good for the office and we get a very positive reaction to him working here. I know that Steven gets a lot of self-esteem from coming here. There's no doubt it's been good for him, and therefore it's been good for our business."

Alexander Green - business partner



Billy Stewart
Asda, Kirkcaldy

"I work here three days a week. It's alright working here - I make the most of it. I travel into work myself on the bus. It's good getting paid. I put the money in the bank and I can do what I want with it. I'm proud of myself for having a job."

"Billy gets on fine working here. He's brilliant. I don't treat him any differently to anyone else. Working with someone with a learning disability didn't worry me. The staff get on alright with Billy. I've never had any negative responses to him. Employers should give people a chance and see what they can do."

Dawn Brady - colleague

Types of work



What choices do I have?

You can choose to work in a number of different ways. The following list provides you with some choices for working.

Voluntary work

Voluntary work is work which is unpaid and where your employer would be a charity such as Barnardos. If you haven't worked before it's a good way to learn about different types of work. It also shows employers what you can do and may help you find paid employment.

Less than 16 hours a week

You can work for less than 16 hours a week. Some people work for only a few hours a week if it suits them and their employer. If you are on disability benefits this is called Permitted Work.

16 hours or more a week

If you are able, you can work for 16 hours or more a week. There are ways you can be supported to do this, such as Workstep or New Deal for Disabled People.



Can I choose which days and hours I work?

You can look for a job that fits in with the hours and days you want to work. This may take some time. It may be easier to find work if you are prepared to work when it suits the employer. Some employers may be flexible and willing to discuss the best option for you both.

What if I don't get the job I go for?

Many people don't get the jobs they go for and this may happen to you too. You have to keep on trying. We all get knockbacks - this happens to everyone.

Once you manage to get work you must let your Social Security Office know, even if the work is unpaid. See Money and Benefits on page 10.

Fife EmployAbility Team is one of the organisations that can help you decide which is the best work choice for you. See Support in employment by Fife EmployAbility Team on page 8.

Preparing for work

What is a CV?

A Curriculum Vitae (CV) is a document which you can give to an employer with details of your name, address, age and contact details, such as your telephone number. You can also include information on your work experiences, if you've worked before, and your skills and interests. A CV should be typed. A CV is about you, and is your chance to let the employer know what you're good at.

What is a reference?

A reference is information about you which is given to any employer. It can help the employer decide if you would be suitable for a job. People who know you well give references and they are called referees. A member of your family can not be a referee.

Who should I ask to be my referee?

You should ask someone who has known you for a long time such as a friend, a keyworker or a Social Worker if you have one. If you have experience of work, you should ask your previous employer to be a referee.



What is a job interview?

When an employer has a job available, they hold an interview with the people who apply for the job. It helps the employer to decide who to employ. The employer will ask you about your interests, your skills, what work you have done before and why you want to work.



What should I do in an interview?

You should always go to an interview dressed smartly. You should make an effort to listen carefully, speak clearly, look at the people speaking to you, be friendly and SMILE! This makes a good impression on the employer and increases your chances of being offered a job. You are also allowed to ask questions at the end of the interview, so be prepared.

Support in employment by Fife EmployAbility Team



Will I get any support when I'm working?

There are organisations who can support you if you want to find work. You can find out about them in the Fife Employability Network booklet (see page 4). The following information is about the support you can get from Fife EmployAbility Team.

You can find Fife EmployAbility Team's contact details on the back page of this brochure.

What happens when I contact Fife EmployAbility Team?

A Disability Employment Co-ordinator (DEC) from the team will help you to develop a Vocational Profile and a CV. The DEC will give you information about the different choices you have for working and can give you advice on benefits. The DEC will also help you in your search for a job - helping you to contact employers to find out if they can offer you a job.

What is a Vocational Profile?

A Vocational Profile (VP) is a document giving information about you. It will help you to think about the type of work you are interested in, any training which could help you, and where you feel you would need support to find and keep a job. It provides information on your hobbies or interests, previous work experience and any special skills.

What happens when I find work?

The DEC can support you with travel, and at the job interview. Once you start work, they can give you job coaching support.

What is job coaching?







Job coaching is when a DEC comes with you to your place of work. They can be with you on your first day to introduce you to people. They can work alongside you to help you to learn the job. Your employer will also give you support to learn the job. You should also have a work supervisor. A work supervisor makes sure that everyone is doing their job properly and may help you if you are having problems at work.

Will an employer be put off if I take longer to learn the job?

The DEC will help you to discuss any worries you may have about the work with your employer. The employer will know that it may take you longer to learn the job or that there may be some jobs you cannot do. Your employer will be interested in what you can do - not what you can't do.

What will happen on my first day at work?

You will get an induction when you first start work. This is when your employer makes sure that you know:

-  when you start and finish work
-  who your work colleagues will be
-  how to ensure you work safely
-  how to work as part of a team
-  what you will be expected to wear: you may need to wear a uniform
-  safety in the building: this will cover things like what to do if there is a fire drill, and where the fire exits are.

Your employer will also show you round the building, so that you know where everything is, such as the toilets and canteen areas.



Money and Benefits



Does working affect my benefits?

It depends on which benefits you get, how many hours you are working and how much money you earn. If you are hoping to find paid work, you could get advice from Fife Employability Team, or the Benefits Agency.



How much money will I get?

This depends on the hours you are working and your hourly rate of pay. Your hourly rate is the amount of money you will get for each hour that you work.

What is the minimum wage?

This is an amount of money that the Government has decided people should be getting paid for all work. Some people will be paid more than the minimum wage but people should not be getting paid less than the minimum wage. You can find out what the minimum wage is from Jobcentre Plus.

Will I need my own bank account?

Most people who work have their own bank account. It's a good way to save your wages if you want to. Your family or carer could help you to open an account.

What should I do if I am asked to work more hours?

If your employer wanted you to work more hours all the time, this would mean that you would be earning more money. It would be a good idea to speak about this with either your family or support worker. You could also contact Fife EmployAbility Team for advice. If it was only to help out because your employer was busy you could arrange to get some time off on another day. This would mean that your wage would stay the same.

The Social Security Office should always be informed of any changes to your circumstances, such as starting work, if you are getting benefits as a result of your disability.



Andrew Bernard
Fishers, Cupar

"It's very good working here. I get on very well with the rest of the staff. You get a laugh and a joke with them all. They're very good workmates - we all help each other out. The best thing about having a job is the money! It also gets me out of the house. People with learning disabilities should have jobs. It gives you experience. It helps me to make friends. Having a job has made a difference to me - now I can say 'I can do that!'"

"Andrew's full of enthusiasm. He's very capable of doing things - there are no problems with his production rates and quality. Everybody accepts him. I wish everyone had as much enthusiasm as Andrew. I think everybody should have at least an opportunity or a chance to show what they can do."

Ron Bernard - colleague



Pamela Turnbull
South Parks Resource
Centre, Glenrothes

"The best thing about having a job is that I'm out of the house and I'm making a wee bit of money for myself. I get to meet new people. I've got more confident, cos I used to be really quiet. People just see me normally - working like anyone else. Employers should at least interview people with disabilities, and then see what they can do."

"Pamela gets on well with the rest of the staff. She's very hard-working and committed. She's a valuable employee for us. Pamela's disability didn't concern me at all. As she settled in she really came out of herself. It's been a really positive experience. Pamela's got a lot out of working here - she's developed and her confidence has greatly increased. Pamela's treated the same as the other employees - we don't make any allowances for her."

Sandra Rae - colleague

Working conditions



Would I get a break?

This will depend on how many hours you work. Every workplace is different. This can be arranged with your employer before you start working.



Will I be entitled to holidays?

You will be entitled to holidays. The amount of holidays you get will depend on how many hours you work.



How do I know what the job will be like?

You don't. Everyone worries that they won't be able to do a job. You may be able to try out a job as a work placement for a few weeks to see if you like it, or you can just go for it, and do the job.



What if I don't like my job once I'm in it?

It would be up to you to decide whether you wanted to stay, or leave your job. It would be a good idea to speak to your employer to explain why you were unhappy and to see if there is anything they could do about it.



What will happen if I'm always late for work?

Your employer will want to know why you are late. You may get a warning. If you continued to be late after getting a warning, you may lose your job.



Will I be safe in my job?

Your employer is responsible for making sure that you are safe as a result of the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act. You are responsible for your own safety and should always make sure you carry out your job in a safe way.

What if I have an appointment on the day I'm working?

Most employers will allow you to have time off for an important appointment, such as a hospital appointment, but it is better to make appointments for a day or time when you are not working.

New colleagues



Will I get on with other people OK?

Your employer should introduce you to your new colleagues on your first day. This will help you to get to know people and to feel part of the team. Be yourself, be friendly and try to enjoy your work. Don't chat too much though - remember you've got a job to do!



Will they understand me if I have a speech problem?

It can be difficult for some people to understand if you have a speech problem. They will have to take their time to get to know you and understand you better. Slow your speech down and don't be embarrassed if you have to repeat yourself. Your colleagues shouldn't feel embarrassed to tell you if they don't understand you.

Would I get invited to staff nights out?

You should be invited to staff nights out and any other occasions that the staff go to as a team.

Who do I go to if I have any questions about my job?

You should ask your work colleagues or supervisor. You'll probably have someone working with you to begin with who can answer any questions you might have.



What if another employee hassles or bullies me?

Bullying should not be allowed to happen. Speak to your work supervisor and they should be able to help you. Speaking to your family or a friend will also help.



What if people don't like me?

There will be people in work who you get on with better than others. The best you can do is make an effort to be friendly and happy, and to do your job well.




Transport




How would I get to my work?

It is your responsibility to get yourself to work - it is not up to your employer. You could travel by



public transport, or get a taxi, 

or perhaps a support worker or someone from your family would be able to drive you. 



What if I need help with travelling?

There are organisations who could help you to use public transport to get to your work. This is called self-travel - learning to travel by yourself. Find out about this from Fife EmployAbility Team. (see page 8)

How do I find out the times of buses?

You can get a bus timetable from the bus station, or from one of the staff at the bus station. There is also a travel line which provides transport information. The number is 0870 608 2608.

sly
it's workable



Mark Jackson
Dean Park Hotel

"I like working here. I like being busy and occupied. I get on fine with the rest of the team - they're good workmates. It lets me meet other people. It's made a difference to my life - it's given me some extra money and good confidence. I'm very proud of doing some work and having a job. If other people with disabilities got the chance to have a job, I think they would enjoy it."

"Everybody likes Mark. He's integrated well within the workforce. He's very keen and very glad to be here. He's a very capable employee. Having a job has been a great boost to Mark himself. Getting out to have a job has made him feel really independent. He's part of the establishment now. I think companies underestimate people with disabilities."

Marie Robertson - colleague

Disability issues

Do I need to tell people about my disability?

It is important that your employer knows if your disability has an effect on your work eg, if you can't read very well, the employer will make sure that you are always told how to do things in person. Otherwise, it's up to you what you tell people.



What if I need personal care at work (eg going to the toilet)?

It is important that your employer knows about the support you will need before you start work. The support you get may depend on the amount of hours you are working. It may be possible to make arrangements for care support. Fife EmployAbility Team could give you more advice on how to get the support you need to start work (see page 8).



Would having epilepsy prevent me from working?

Not necessarily. If an employer is aware of your epilepsy they can make sure that your colleagues would know what to do if you had a seizure.



Where could I keep medication?

Most employers will provide you with a locker where you could keep all your personal items, including medication.



I'm a wheelchair user and there are stairs in my workplace. What do I do?

Most buildings should be accessible to wheelchair users - it's the law. However, if there are difficulties, your employer could try to make sure that arrangements are made, such as ramps or stair lifts put in place before you start work.

If the information in this booklet has encouraged you to consider employment, you can contact Fife EmployAbility Team.

Fife EmployAbility Team can provide you with information and advice on employment issues in relation to people with disabilities.

Fife EmployAbility Team can also provide Disability Awareness Training to employers.





For more information contact:

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Disability Employment Coordinator

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