

# Interviewing candidates with disabilities

By Susan Scott-Parker OBE

## Forward

This guidance is grounded in the reality of business and best corporate practice and in the principles that underpin the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – which promotes the full inclusion and fundamental human rights of persons with disabilities, in 181 countries.

Only best practice transforms legal obligation in any jurisdiction to sustainable business and societal benefit.

With these business-relevant resources we aim:

- To make it easier to employ people with disabilities fairly, on the basis of individual capability, talent and potential.
- To help engineer more effective, efficient, and equitable labour markets, which – because employers are positioned as valued service users and potential allies – enable significantly more people with disabilities to gain meaningful employment at all levels.
- To enable the business improvement which benefits both the business and people with disabilities.
- To create opportunities for businesses to become leaders in the transition to accessible and equitable workplaces and labour markets.
- To facilitate innovative solutions and focused collaboration between business leaders and leaders with disabilities.

This checklist, written in collaboration with Simon Brown from Sightsavers, is adapted from the open-source Employer Toolkit originally published by Inclusion Works, a consortium of international organisations of people with disabilities and non-governmental organisations, funded by UKAID.

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To access the Inclusion Works Toolkit - <https://inclusivefutures.org/disability-confident-employers-toolkit/>

## Interviewing candidates with disabilities

### Remember...

- Don't be daunted by lists of rights and wrongs. If in doubt, ask yourself how you would want to be treated, and always be willing to adapt to someone's individual preferences.
- Always start the conversation with high expectations, both of the candidate and of your organisation's ability to enable the candidate to realise their potential.

**When in doubt, relax and just ask the individual for guidance.**



## Communication and interpersonal skills matter

Communication skills are vital in developing relationships with anyone we meet. Common sense and courtesy tell us that we should:

- Send every candidate a friendly message reminding them of the date and time of the interview, and the names and titles of the people they will meet on the day.
- Exercise patience and listen attentively.
- Use a normal tone of voice when extending a verbal welcome.
- Do not attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are interviewing.
- Never ask "what happened to you?" or commend a candidate with a disability for their courage.
- Only address a candidate with a disability by their first name if you are addressing everyone with the same familiarity.
- Speak directly to the candidate if they are accompanied by an interpreter, job coach, support worker or personal assistant.
- Do not be embarrassed to use common expressions that could relate to someone's impairment, such as "see you later" or "I'll be running along, then."
- Always follow up afterwards. Show the candidate that you appreciate them taking the time to attend the interview. Should they not get the job, offer thoughtful and practical feedback that will enable them to do better next time. Invite feedback from the candidate regarding their experience of your recruitment process.

It is widely recognised that interviews do not, as a rule, accurately predict anyone's on-the-job performance or career potential. The skills required to interview well are rarely the skills required to do the job. Many candidates with disabilities will be particularly disadvantaged by over-reliance on this standard assessment process. Be flexible and consider offering extended on-the-job interviews, or offer a series of practical opportunities to demonstrate that the candidate has, in fact, got the skills, knowledge and abilities to do the job – rather than just talking about those skills in a traditional interview.



## When conducting the recruitment interview

### Some basic guidelines

- Never assume you know what assistance, if any, a candidate with a disability needs.
- Treat a candidate with a disability in the same manner and with the same respect and courtesy as you would anyone else.
- Describe the interview process and ask every candidate what you could do which would make it easier for them to demonstrate their potential to do the job.
- Be prepared to make adjustments, but do not make assumptions regarding what any candidate can or cannot do.
- Focus on the main tasks and requirements of the job and on the candidate's skills and career potential. Be prepared to be flexible regarding how things are done.
- Restrict questions about the effect of the candidate's disability to those that potentially affect their ability to do the job, such as "how could we help you be successful in this role?"
- Only ask questions about the candidate's life outside work if you would ask such questions of every other candidate.
- If someone has a limited work history, ask them to discuss their achievements outside of work, and what these reveal about a candidate's career potential.

### A few additional tips

- Treat adults as adults and give interviewees your complete attention.
- Do not make assumptions about the existence or absence of a disability – many people have disabilities that are not immediately apparent.
- Do not ask personal questions that are unrelated to the job requirements, such as "is your wife also disabled?"

- Use appropriate physical contact, such as a handshake, as you would with anyone else.
- The candidate may choose not to introduce a personal assistant or human aid (e.g. an interpreter). Take your lead from the candidate.
- Do not stare at or call attention to a candidate's disability.
- Know where accessible toilets, drinking fountains and other key facilities are located. Hold interviews in locations that are easily accessible. **See page 15** of this guide for some tips on how to create a welcoming, barrier-free interview experience for every candidate.

Remember that telephone and/or video interviews, and various online tests and forms, can unfairly disadvantage many candidates with disabilities. Communicate at every stage that you are happy to offer alternative routes for candidates who need this flexibility if they are to demonstrate their ability to do the job. Always ask candidates for detailed feedback on their experience.



## Interviewing people with mobility impairments

- Leaning on a wheelchair is like leaning on, or hanging onto, a person. A wheelchair is a user's personal space.
- If you are talking for more than a few moments to someone in a wheelchair, try to position yourself so you are at the same level. Ask the person if they would like you to sit down.
- Enable people who use crutches, canes or wheelchairs/mobility scooters to keep them within reach.
- Never touch or move crutches, canes or walking frames, or push a wheelchair, without the user's consent.
- Some wheelchair users may choose to transfer from their wheelchair into an office chair for the interview.
- Do not assume ramps solve everything – they may be too steep or too slippery. Check with the candidate.
- Unless you know it is easy to move around your premises in a wheelchair, offer to help – and do not be offended if that offer is refused. Many wheelchair users prefer to be as independent as possible.

## Interviewing people who are blind or have visual impairments

Be prepared to constantly challenge outdated assumptions regarding what people with visual impairments can and cannot do. Always ask: “how could we enable this person to thrive in this role – given their skills and aspirations and given the availability of such a wide range of effective tools, assistive devices and sophisticated technology?” Focus on the individual: “what could this person contribute if we are creative and keep an open mind?”

- Introduce yourself clearly and introduce any other people present, stating where in the room they are located.
- Before shaking hands, ask: “shall we shake hands?”
- Face the candidate and give them your undivided attention.
- Before offering assistance with navigating the candidate’s journey to and from the interview, ask them how you may help. If the candidate requests assistance, ask: “may I offer an arm?” rather than just taking their arm. You may then respectfully guide, rather than propel, the person.
- If you are guiding a candidate, tell them when steps, stairs, ramps or other obstacles occur – and whether they are going up or down.
- When offering a seat, guide the candidate’s hand to the back or arm of the chair, explaining beforehand that this is what you are going to do.
- If the interview takes places in a group setting, announce the names of every participant and ask people to identify themselves again when they speak.
- Tell the candidate if you decide to pause the interview, for example if you need to refer to your notes.
- Tell the candidate in advance when you will be moving from one part of the room to another, and let them know when the conversation is ending.
- Provide any written communication in an accessible format, having given the candidate the opportunity to tell you what format works best for them.

To illustrate how technology continues to enable everyone’s contribution, Microsoft’s Seeing AI is an app that helps people with low vision or who are blind. It can read out loud a handwritten note or currency, or scan a barcode and describe the product to the user. Just point a camera and the app will describe how many people it can see, estimate their age and gender and where they are in the image. Now available in 70 countries in English, it will soon expand to Dutch, French, German, Japanese and Spanish.

# Interviewing people who are deaf or hard of hearing

On the basis of the interview alone, do not make assumptions about the candidate's ability to find effective communication strategies on the job. People in work develop communication strategies with their managers and colleagues which will be far more effective than when they first meet you as a 'stranger' for an interview. Focus on the individual and ask yourself: "what could this person do if we were flexible and tapped into the wide range of effective tools, human aides and sophisticated technology that is now available?"

## Tips

### Before the interview

- Ask the candidate in advance to tell you how they communicate and to specify any assistance they may require at the interview.
- Print off interview questions and give them to the candidate in advance or just before you start, so that they can familiarise themselves with key words and phrases. This will reduce the risk of misunderstanding and make the interview easier for everyone.
- Have paper and pens available in case it becomes helpful for the candidate to write something down.
- Book a well-lit, quiet room so the candidate can pick up as many visual and auditory cues as possible.

### At the interview

- Check that the candidate is comfortable with how the communications are working and, if necessary, adjust the room layout.
- If the candidate lip-reads, maintain eye contact. Speak clearly and at a reasonable pace. Do not cover your mouth. Sit facing any direct light source (i.e. don't sit with your back to the window as this will cast your face into shadow).
- Remember that people who lip read usually don't catch each and every word. If you sense the need, pause and confirm that you have been understood.
- Do not speak until you have the attention of the candidate.
- Do not shout, but it may be appropriate to raise your voice slightly, perhaps one level, if needed.
- If you have not understood what the candidate is telling you, do not pretend you have. Apologise and ask them to repeat themselves.
- If the candidate cannot understand what you are saying, consider writing it down or using free speech-recognition apps (e.g. Siri for Apple phones, Otter or Live Transcribe) which turn speech into text. While the quality of such speech

recognition technology can vary from language to language, it can be extremely useful, particularly when English is the primary business language.



## What if the candidate uses communication support like speech recognition apps, captions or sign language interpreters?

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Captions are similar to subtitles on television and are used by people who are deaf or hard of hearing to access content delivered by the spoken word and sounds. Live captions translate speech to text as an event or interview take place, e.g. Siri for Apple phones, Otter, Live Transcribe and Microsoft Teams

Captions can be projected onto a screen, overlaid onto a presentation or projected onto individual phones and tablets.

### Tips

- If the candidate is a sign language user, check which sign language they will be using before you book an interpreter.
- Check whether the candidate has a preferred provider.
- If you already have a preferred provider, let the candidate know who it is (this helps you to check that the provider will be able to meet the candidate's needs).
- If you do not have a preferred provider, ask local organisations about the availability of sign language interpreters and related support services to help with interviews and on the job.
- Allow time before the interview begins to ensure that everything is working smoothly.
- Consider having an informal rehearsal before the interview, so that both you and the candidate can become comfortable with whichever communications methods have been agreed. This can be particularly useful if you are using technology or interpreters for the first time.
- You can book a remote live captioning or remote interpreting service anywhere in the world if you have reliable internet access. You will have to pay for this service.
- If a professional interpreter is available, do as a matter of course cover the cost of their fees and travel. If qualified interpreters are not available, be open to the

candidate bringing volunteer signers to the interview – perhaps advocates or family members.

A large panel of interviewers is daunting for any candidate. Keep the numbers facing the candidate to a minimum and consider enabling the applicant to meet interviewers one or two at a time, over a period of days.

### **When a qualified interpreter is present**

- The interpreter should sit beside the person conducting the interview, and across from the candidate.
- Speak to the candidate, not to the interpreter.
- Always maintain eye contact with the candidate, not the interpreter.
- The interpreter will be a few words behind the speaker, so allow for the extra time it will take for the candidate to respond.
- Remember that an interpreter's job is to translate, not to get involved in the interview in any other way. Always speak directly to the candidate.
- NB: if using an unqualified interpreter, these dynamics may shift. The support person may have a different understanding of these boundaries and may intervene on occasion. Focus nonetheless on the candidate's potential to do the job.
- If there are no qualified interpreters available, consider bypassing the standard interview and offer job trials to determine how communication works in practice. Job trials often provide a more accurate assessment of someone's ability to do any given job.
- Captions are not always appropriate for sign language users. Always ask the candidate what works best for them. And don't forget to 'pin' the remote interpreter when using virtual meeting rooms.

### **Assistive listening devices**

- Some people who are hard of hearing use assistive listening devices to help them hear and understand voices better than they can with just hearing aids. Such devices include a small microphone that can be clipped to the shirt or worn around the speaker's neck. These directly broadcast the speaker's voice into someone's hearing aid without distracting background noise.
- Some assistive listening devices can be used in a larger group setting when placed on a table in the middle of the conversation. Some assist people who are hard of hearing, but do not wear hearing aids.

- Be matter of fact when an applicant asks to use such a device in the interview. Do as requested and conduct the interview without undue reference to the technology.



## Interviewing people who are deafblind

While deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and sight impairments that affect how someone communicates, accesses information and gets around, remember that deafblind people are not always completely deaf and blind: most do have some residual hearing or sight, or both.

- A deafblind candidate may speak to you but may not hear your voice.
- Let the candidate know you are there. Approach them from the front and touch them lightly on the arm or shoulder to attract their attention.
- Many deafblind candidates need to be guided and will have their particular preferences as to how they wish this to be done.
- A deafblind candidate may be supported by a communicator, guide or interpreter. Remember to speak to the individual rather than to their assistant.
- Do not grab or push a candidate with deaf-blindness. Let them know you are offering to escort them by guiding their hand to your elbow.

Many of the pointers in these sections are applicable to candidates who are deaf or hard of hearing. They could also be applicable to candidates with visual impairments, depending on the individual. Always ask prior to the interview how the candidate prefers to communicate.



## Interviewing people with facial disfigurement

Some people are born with a disfigurement, while others acquire it through accident or illness. Disfigurement is usually only skin deep, but can be associated with facial paralysis and other impairments such as speech difficulties. Facial disfigurement certainly does not affect someone's intelligence.

- Most of the difficulties, indeed discrimination, that people with facial disfigurements experience stem from other people's negative attitudes and poor interpersonal skills.
- Make eye contact as you would with anyone else. Do not stare. Smile if and when you would smile for any other candidate.

- Listen carefully and do not let the candidate's appearance distract you.
- Avoid making judgements about the candidate's talents, skills or personality on the basis of their appearance.



## Interviewing people with intellectual disabilities

Many people born with intellectual disabilities live full and independent lives. Most can make their own choices with varying levels of support. Avoid making assumptions regarding anyone's potential contribution. Avoid asking candidates to demonstrate skills that are not actually required to do the job.

- Begin by assuming that the candidate will understand you.
- Do not assume you can predict from an initial impression what the candidate will or will not understand.
- Invite the candidate to briefly look around the work area as you informally explain something of the company's culture and the job role.
- Avoid jargon – keep your language straightforward. Explain what any acronyms mean before you use them.
- Consider providing the candidate with the questions they will be asked before the interview, so that they can prepare.
- Consider putting important information in writing in plain language, including your name and contact details as well as what has been discussed and agreed in the interview.
- Respect the candidate's right to have a support person present, but always talk directly with the candidate.
- Consider having an informal rehearsal before the interview, so that you and the candidate can become comfortable with whichever communication methods have been agreed.
- If extra time is needed to allow the candidate to collect their thoughts and express themselves, extend the length of the interview.
- Ask questions which require direct, simple answers and always check that the candidate has understood you.
- Abstract questions regarding how someone would respond to a situation or how they would do a task are not effective predictors of performance. Consider a more hands-on approach where the candidate can demonstrate how they would, in fact, do what is required.

- Consider offering work try-outs which give candidates who may not excel at interviews the chance to demonstrate that they can, in fact, do the job.
- Encourage the candidate to do well at the interview by making it clear that you are willing to make reasonable adjustments once they have started the job. This could include providing extra support during induction, should it be needed.



## Interviewing people with speech impairments

Be attentive, encouraging and patient, but do not patronise. Slow or unusual speech says nothing about someone's intelligence. Remember that good communication is not the same as speech fluency. People who stammer, for example, can have excellent engagement and communication skills, showing empathy, positive body language, an ability to read situations accurately, adapting tone and volume of voice appropriately, listening actively and writing well.

- Refrain from correcting or speaking for the candidate.
- Wait quietly while the candidate speaks and resist any temptation to finish their sentences.
- Speak as you usually would. Avoid speaking slowly or too simply unless you know that the candidate's vocabulary is limited.
- If you need more information, break down your questions to deal with individual points that require shorter answers.
- Give greater consideration to written as well as spoken information.
- Telephone interviews can seriously and unfairly disadvantage people with speech impairments.
- Remember that stammering is not caused by nervousness. The candidate may appear nervous, but bear in mind that the nervousness is a result of stammering, rather than the cause of it.
- Listen attentively: keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting.
- If you cannot understand what the candidate is trying to say, ask them to repeat themselves or, if appropriate, to answer in writing.
- If the candidate's speech is difficult to understand, summarise your understanding of what has been said at key points and ask them to confirm you have understood correctly.

## Interviewing neurodiverse candidates

The term 'neurodiversity' is usually used to describe a wide range of people with a wide range of neurological, developmental conditions such as autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia and dyslexia.

While we must avoid stereotypes and generalisations, these individuals may experience varying degrees of difficulty in understanding and interpreting other people's verbal and non-verbal behaviour, motivations and expectations, and can find social interaction confusing. Consider bypassing the interview and instead offering on-the-job try-outs or technical task-focused assessments. Remember that for some people with autism, a traditional interview can be the equivalent challenge of a flight of stairs for a wheelchair user.

- Avoid jokes, exaggerated language, metaphors, abstract or ambiguous statements.
- Try to keep sentences short, using more direct and specific language. Be clear and concise: many individuals will prefer closed rather than open questions.
- Repeat questions clearly and, if needed, in writing.
- Avoid getting distracted by any behaviour that doesn't affect the person's ability to do the job.



## Creating an accessible and welcoming interview experience

When planning interviews, remember that 'access' refers to how facilities and communications are managed, as well as to the design of buildings. It covers approaches, entrances, floor surfaces, lifts, signage, speaker platforms, lecterns, catering and toilets, as well as providing extra time, interpreters and communications support, electronic or Braille versions of notes, captioning, large-print programmes, easy-read versions of documents, auxiliary aids such as portable hearing loops and more.

Just giving someone more time, as a reasonable adjustment, to complete a test may not in itself ensure fair treatment. The test itself may be the problem, not how long each candidate is given to do it. Psychometric tests, for example, may be inaccessible online and will not have been validated on people with disabilities. Asking many candidates with disabilities to use their phones for complex tests or assessments can be the equivalent of asking a wheelchair user to climb stairs to an interview. Always offer different options that enable candidates to show you that they can do the job.

## Getting the basics right

- Check to ensure every step of the journey from arrival to the interview room to toilets, refreshment areas and leaving the venue is barrier-free for everyone. As a policy, simply avoid using venues for interviews which are inaccessible. Ask your national umbrella OPD for introductions to expert advisors.
- Ask every candidate to tell you in advance if they have access requirements, and advise reception and interviewers that these accommodations will be required. Ensure reception staff are alert and ready to anticipate the need to welcome candidates.
- Send detailed joining instructions, with an easy-to-read map. Include information regarding access by public transport and parking, and the names and job titles of people the candidate will meet in the interview.
- Send candidates in advance some insight into the types of questions they will be asked, and any tests that they will be asked to undertake. They can then alert you to any reasonable adjustments that they need you to make to the process.
- If you think there may be access problems, either give advance warning to candidates or, preferably, find a better venue.
- Make sure reception and security know you are expecting candidates with disabilities, and ask them to familiarise themselves with this guide's advice.
- Ensure there is room for people with visual or mobility impairments to move about easily as they progress from reception to the interview, and as they use toilets and other facilities.
- Minimise or remove background noise.
- Make sure parking arrangements are adequate, with spaces reserved for candidates who need to park close to the doors.
- Ensure accessible toilet facilities are clearly signed and that staff know where they are located.
- Everyone should be aware of the evacuation plan, including refuge point and evacuation procedure.

## Respectful communications

The best name to call people is the name they tell you to use!

Instead of...	Use
Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user – remember that the chair liberates the user’s mobility.
Abled bodied, normal	Non-disabled – ‘able bodied’ implicitly equates disability with physical impairment. Diversity is normal, and disability is intrinsic to that diversity.
Hidden disabilities	Non-visible disabilities
Cripple, invalid, handicapped, special, challenged, handicapable, diF-abled, spastic, differently abled, victim, crip	<p>Person with a disability or person with a named impairment e.g. person with cerebral palsy.</p> <p>Some individuals feel empowered by ‘identity first’ language and choose to be called ‘disabled persons’ - if an individual asks that you use identity first language to refer to them, respect their wishes, but when speaking broadly about the disability community use ‘persons with disabilities’ in line with the global standard outlined in the CRPD.</p> <p>Do not assume that the language a person uses to describe themselves is necessarily the language you should use to describe them - ask individuals how they would like others to refer to them.</p>
The deaf, the blind, the disabled	Avoid collective nouns that imply millions of diverse individuals belong to a uniform group. When referring to the

Instead of...	Use
	<p>disability community as a whole, use 'persons with disabilities'.</p> <p>The exception being 'the Deaf' with a capital D. This is the preferred term for many pre-lingually deaf people who use sign language and see themselves as a cultural minority that is distinct from a 'disability' community.</p>
<p>Neurodiversity – a term used to describe people with a wide range of neurological developmental conditions such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)</p>	<p>Person with dyslexia, person with ADHD, person with autism, etc.</p> <p>Some people prefer 'identify first' language and choose to describe themselves as 'dyslexic' or 'Autistic'. Always ask individuals how they prefer to be described.</p>
<p>Fits, spells, attacks</p>	<p>Seizures</p>
<p>'Suffers from' or 'is afflicted by' (e.g. asthma, hearing loss)</p>	<p>Has – for example 'has asthma', 'has cerebral palsy'.</p>
<p>Deaf and dumb, deaf-mute</p>	<p>A 'deaf person'. Or if appropriate, a 'sign language user'.</p>
<p>Dwarf, midget</p>	<p>Someone of short stature. Some prefer 'a Little Person', others prefer 'someone with restricted growth' (some individuals prefer the word 'dwarf'). Always ask individuals how they prefer to be described.</p>
<p>Facially deformed, ugly</p>	<p>Some campaigners for face equality prefer the term 'facial disfigurement', while others in the movement may prefer 'facial difference'.</p>

<b>Instead of...</b>	<b>Use</b>
Hearing impaired	A deaf person, person who is deaf or person who is hard of hearing or who is deafened.
Learning disability, retarded, slow learner, mental disability, special, intellectually handicapped, mentally retarded, developmentally delayed, sub-normal	Person with an intellectual disability
Mental patient, psycho, crazy, insane, a psychiatric case, mental	Person who has a mental health condition
Speech disorder, speech difficulties	Person with a speech impairment or who has a speech disability. Person who stammers, person who stutters.
The blind	<p>People with visual impairments, blind people, people who are blind or partially sighted.</p> <p>Remember many blind people have some residual vision.</p>

## THERE ARE 8 KINDS OF WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS



What must the employer do differently to recruit, employ & develop this person fairly, on the basis of their individual capability and potential?

- 1 Keep an open mind: Give the person the chance to contribute and treat them as you would wish to be treated.
- 2 'Think' differently: challenge assumptions: move from 'deaf people can't work in teams' to 'what could this deaf person do if we were flexible?'
- 3 Create an accessible & usable environment: access to premises, signage, lighting...
- 4 Tolerate processes which might take a bit longer to attract talent, to assess individual capability, adapt on-boarding, adapt training, ensure development programmes are accessible.
- 5 Change procedures & policies, bypass standard interviews, adapt medical related policies, permit flexitime, change procurement policies.
- 6 Train managers, colleagues, IT, facilities managers, procurement...
- 7 Remove barriers created by IT & Technology related policies and services; and enabling access to assistive devices e.g. voice activated software, captioning, braille keyboards...
- 8 Welcome human aides: job coaches, interpreters, personal assistants, readers.

## The bdi charter – a roadmap to consistent best practice worldwide

