

Including a staff member with Down syndrome in the workplace

This document outlines some feedback Down Syndrome Ireland has received from a company employing a person with Down syndrome in an office based job. This document is intended to give employers some ideas in relation to job roles, what supervision may be needed within the workplace for the employee, what support may be needed for the employers. Aoife Gaffney, National Employment & Projects Officer can provide assistance & support to employers.

What works:

- Close management on a daily basis
- List of specific tasks to do with a schedule to be followed
- Breakdown of tasks into individual steps
- Explaining every step, in detail
- Gradually giving more independence on the full task (in some cases, not all tasks).
- Providing constant feedback on work.
- Being observant of special signs, if the person needs a break or just wants to share a personal story.
- Giving time to talk through questions that may arise.
- Checking regularly how the person is doing.
- Encouraging completion of assigned tasks each day.

Types of work:

- General office support: support of all departments in delivering post, stocking materials, shredding and other general tasks.
- Marketing: Preparation of Promotional packs, support at events, stocking marketing material, preparing deliveries and internal reporting (see below).
- Internal Reporting or blogging: interviews staff and writes a blog together with the assistance of a staff member.
- Logistics department: moving goods and packing deliveries.
- Volunteer Department: putting up and removing outdoor flags; stewarding/welcoming volunteers on open days.
- Media Department: occasionally assists as reporter/ interviewer.

Some facts to take into consideration:

- Interdepartmental focus: while being assigned to one department, there is work in every department that can be done by the person, matching the skills the person has, with the needs of the department.
- Difficulties encountered during tasks might not always be communicated, which requires that staff are attentive to support needed.
- Office protocol and line management are sometimes difficult to understand. Ideas need to be discussed first within each department and with the direct manager, as the company works more efficiently when the structures are respected.
- The highly structured way of working can be beneficial for many tasks but can be challenging at times, when flexibility is required (prior discussion & explanation is essential).
- Interaction and variety are important to keep motivation levels and avoid boredom.
- Friendship between colleagues are highly valued, as well as an openness to sharing personal/family life stories and achievements.
- Positive feedback, feeling that the work done is important and that they are part of a team is key to work satisfaction and motivation.

Conclusion and recommendations

- We would recommend that companies who wish to employ an adult with special needs e.g. Down syndrome, receive adequate training in advance of accepting him/her, to ensure the best positive experience and outcome for both parties.
- Some thought should be given to the roles for the new member of the team. The work has to be real, the tasks taken on are tasks other would have to do if your new member of the office was not there.
- Everyone has to feel the initial time given in training and support has a genuine return to the company, the staff and the intern
- While more time has to be given to support the new team member, the benefits can all be clearly seen