

## Employment Programme Research

### History

Our employment programme started with the Beauty in all it's Forms hairdressing assistant training in partnership with Alfaparf Milano in 2016. It was broadened in 2018, when the role of Employment Officer became a full time position, and since earlier this year, we have a team of three full time people nationally and a further three people working for individual branches part time. Despite the hiatus during the pandemic, as of May 2024 we have supported 251 people with Down syndrome to find paid work.

DSI research suggested that prior to 2018, approximately 6% of our adult members with Down syndrome were in paid employment. However, from discussions with members, we know that long-term unpaid 'work placements' are common, and that many people may not be working in an area that utilises their skills or interests. We estimate that the programme has increased the number of members in paid employment to around 13%, in areas including:

- Hospitality: hotels, cafes, restaurants, bars
- Office Admin: construction, insurance companies
- Hairdressing & Barbers
- Retail: clothing, food, opticians
- Pharma & Manufacturing
- Leisure: leisure centres, gyms, swimming pools

While we are excited by the success of the programme, we chose to undertake some research with employers to:

- Explore patterns of employment
- Find out which supports are most useful.
- See if this varies in different industries.
- Explore costs and benefits from employer perspective.
- Use results to inform and encourage future employment partnerships.

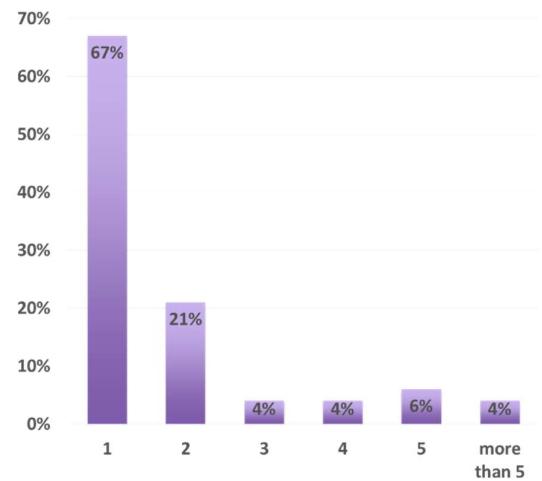
This research was completed in February and March 2024. A survey was developed based on previous feedback and engagement from employers and sent to 104 companies. 52 of these responded, from a range of sectors as described above. An analysis of the results follows below.

### **Patterns of employment**

#### **Number of employees with Down syndrome**

The majority of the employers only have one employee with Down syndrome, as seen below. The employers below with more than 5 employees were representatives of large companies, such as Specsavers Opticians and iNua hotel group, so those employees are spread across different locations.

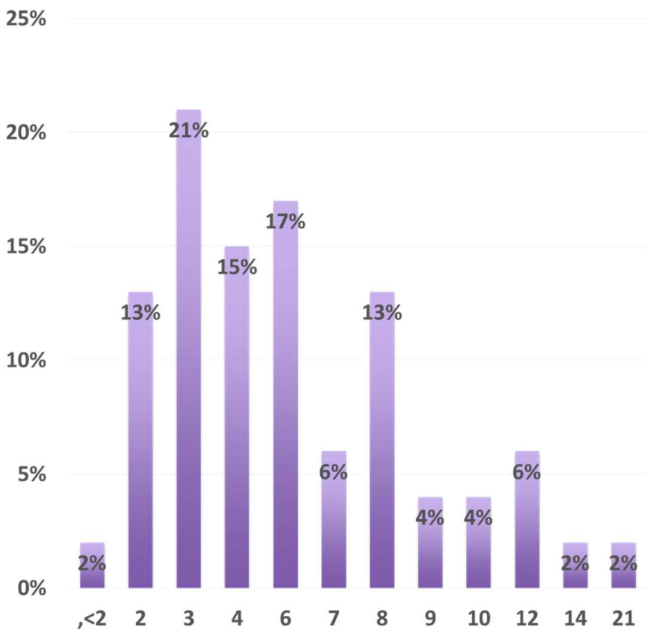
The individual nature of the jobs is important, as it highlights our goal of supporting people to find an individual solution which meets their needs and interests.



**Working hours**

As can be seen in the table below, the majority of people work relatively few hours, for various reasons, including:

- Meeting the needs of the business.
- Employee request or preference
- Gradually increasing hours
- Short shifts (2-4 hours a day) for several days suits employee best



## Progression

One of our concerns was lack of progression in work. However, only two employers reported that they were not anticipating progression. All others were expecting the employee with Down syndrome to progress in terms of additional hours (65%), additional tasks (63%), additional responsibilities (51%) and additional training (35%). We fully acknowledge that it may be easier to progress in some settings than others, so this response was very encouraging.

## Costs and benefits:

### Accommodations

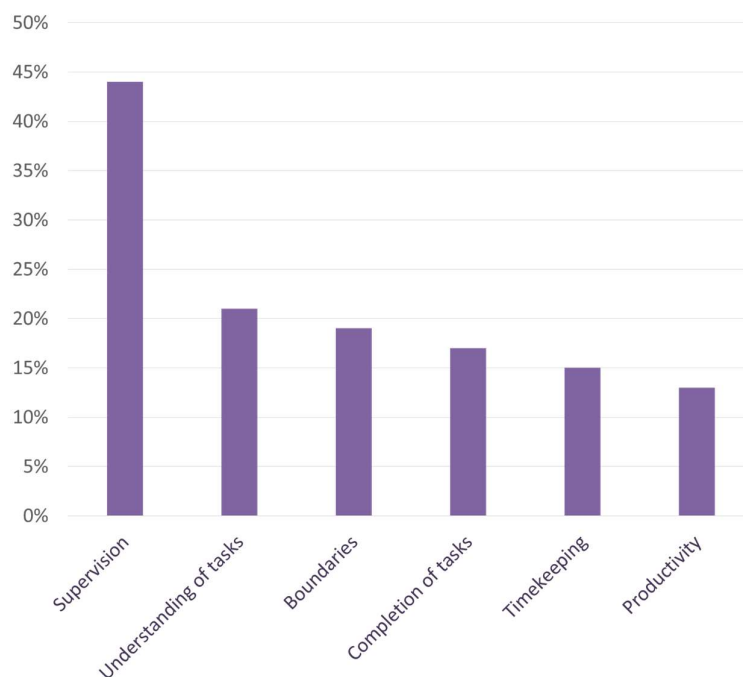
Most employers have made some changes to accommodate the new employee with Down syndrome. The most common are:

- Specified mentor/buddy system (79%)
- Easy read contract/adapted induction training (40%)
- Written task lists/picture instructions/visual workbook/visual signage (33%)
- Physical changes to working environment (10%)

For 82% of employers, these changes did not incur costs, although 14% reported minor costs and 4% reported significant costs.

## Challenges

Employers acknowledged some challenges involved with managing an employee with Down syndrome, however, many commented that these could occur with any employee, and that most challenges were relatively minor and easily resolved.



**Benefits:**

Some of the benefits associated with employing a person with Down syndrome were:

- Willingness of team to be inclusive (98%)
- Being seen as an inclusive employer (88%)
- Improved morale (80%)
- Better teamwork (67%)
- Meeting statutory targets (22%)

It was interesting to note that inclusivity was far more important to current employers than meeting statutory targets. At present, statutory targets only apply in the public sector, so this may reflect the fact that most jobs so far are in the private sector.

The comments in this section showed real positivity and appreciation of what people with Down syndrome bring to the work place, for example:

*'Great to have him, people love him!'*

*'High level of commitment and unparalleled loyalty!'*

*'Benefits the company in diverse and unique ways'*

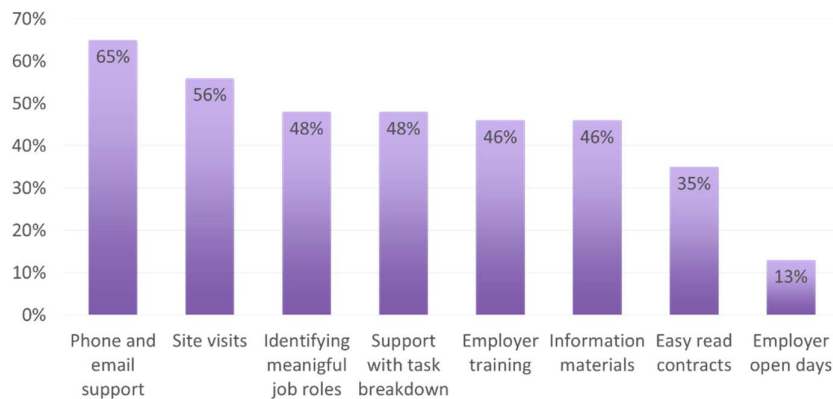
*'Commitment to team and colleagues'*

*'Enriches the wider work force'*

**Feedback on Employer programme:**

One of the key questions in the survey was to find out which aspects of the employment programme are valued most by employers, and whether this was different in different industries. No differences emerged. Top of the list was the value of phone and email support. Being able to engage quickly and informally to ask questions or raise issues is important to employers.

Overall, employers were enthusiastic about the programme, though some suggested raising awareness of the programme and facilitating information sharing, as it would be reassuring to find out what works well for other companies. Refresher training for employers and mentors was also mentioned.



### **Conclusions and Future directions**

From ongoing engagement and feedback, we think the following factors have been key to the success of the programme:

- Starting small, building up hours as employer and employee become more confident
- Working with large national employers to influence local jobs
- Accepting that sometimes an unpaid work placement needs to be facilitated to get the job over the line, but ensuring a clear timeline for either finishing up or progressing to paid employment
- Updating employer training with real life stories & examples
- Carving out clear and explicit job roles with an employer
- Supporting risk assessments in relevant environments
- Assisting with the interview & selection process
- Providing Down syndrome awareness training for staff teams, with refresher training on request
- Providing templates for easy read contracts, job descriptions, task lists, etc.
- Supporting employers with task analysis of more complex tasks
- Providing training and advice for mentors (this is not a job coach model – employers are encouraged to use internal processes and people to support the employee with Down syndrome)
- Keeping lines of communication open but informal: encouraging contact before something becomes a big issue

In terms of future directions, we would like to work closely with the further and higher education sectors both to develop industry specific training courses and to measure the broader outcomes of the programme.

We have presented the results of this research at an international forum, and look forward to working with other Down syndrome associations in the UK and Europe to share knowledge and experience, and to develop international partnerships.

The results outlined above have been achieved with a very small team of employees and our valuable branch network. Continuing to grow the team will enable us to reach more employers and provide more opportunities.

We would like to extend our appreciation, not just to the employers who participated in the research, but to all employers who have been open to working with us to make this programme a success. With your help, we are becoming a more inclusive society which values the talents and skills of people with Down syndrome and helps them reach their goals.

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