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Building Employer Confidence

Introduction guide

Building employer confidence to recruit and retain employees with communication access requirements

About the project

Scope is the lead organisation for “Building employer confidence to recruit and retain employees with communication access requirements. It is made possible by an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building project funded by the Department of Social Services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This project aims to build the knowledge, skills, and confidence of employers to successfully recruit and retain employees with communication access requirements.

Background

A person with communication access requirements has difficulty with one or more of the following:

- understanding spoken information
- understanding or producing written information
- expressing information and ideas.

This can impact on their ability to:

- form professional relationships in the workplace
- participate in social aspects of work.

Did you know that 1 in 7 Australians have communication access requirements at some point in their lives?¹

¹ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015)

People can have communication access requirements due to a number of factors, including:

- intellectual disability
- physical disability
- sensory disability for example - Deaf, hard of hearing, Blind
- neurodiversity for example - autism, ADHD
- difficulty reading or writing for example - dyslexia, dysgraphia
- neurological conditions for example - stroke, acquired brain injury.

You can learn more about communication access on the [Scope website](#).

Findings from the Discovery Phase

We spoke with employees with communication access requirements and their employers. They told us about the barriers and solutions they have experienced in the workplace.

Employees with communication access requirements told us:

- they feel nervous about the assumptions and preconceptions that recruiters and managers may have about their skills
- they have trouble finding meaningful job opportunities.
- they feel their employment can sometimes be ‘tokenistic’.

Employers told us:

- they don't know what communication access requirements are
- they are not sure how to recruit candidates with communication access requirements
- they are not sure how to support employees who have communication access requirements.

The employment life cycle starts with the attraction and recruitment phases, then onboarding, retention and development phases, and concludes when an employee is offboarded. There are different barriers that exist at each stage. Let's look at these stages in more detail.

Attraction

Issues that exist prior to recruitment can include unconscious bias in job design and advertisements. Attraction processes can also be inflexible and inaccessible. People with communication access requirements indicated they would be encouraged to apply for a job if the organisation clearly communicates that adjustments are available for all employees.

Employers identified a need for disability equity and awareness training to encourage positive attitudes and promote inclusion in the workplace. While employers were keen to recruit a diverse workforce, they told us they lack the confidence, skills and knowledge to implement this.

Here are some general suggestions to implement at the attraction stage:

- Update advertising and recruitment processes to be more inviting for people with communication access requirements. Consider adding 'all applicants welcome' in job ads.
- Implement or undertake training to learn what communication access requirements are and what strategies can be helpful.
- Provide encouragement and support to hiring managers.

Recruitment

Job interviews can be nerve-wracking, particularly for people with communication access requirements who may have difficulty understanding complex language or getting their message across. They told us they are concerned about how employers might perceive them in interviews and the impact of unconscious biases.

A manager's perception of workplace adjustments being 'extra work' or 'too hard', or assumptions around the candidate's capabilities, can be a barrier to offering interviews to people with communication access requirements. Once an interview is offered, inaccessible practices, such as limiting the time available during interviews, can make it difficult for a candidate with communication access requirements to adequately communicate their abilities.

Here are some general suggestions to implement at the recruitment stage:

- Ask candidates if they require any adjustments prior to the interview.
- Offer to send interview questions ahead of time, so that the candidate can prepare and program their responses.
- Allow extra time during the interview.
- Consider alternative modes of assessing candidates' skills and capabilities.
- Ask the candidate what their preferred method of communication is – for example, phone calls, text messages or emails.
- Structure the interview as suggested by [Voice at the Table](#).

Onboarding

Employers identified this stage of the employment life cycle as the one in which they felt least confident supporting people who have communication access requirements. Hiring managers may feel unsure about how to initiate and carry out safe, productive conversations about access requirements and adjustments. Information about available adjustments is often not discussed or communicated in an accessible way.

At this stage of the employment life cycle, employees with communication access requirements can encounter difficulties with:

- understanding onboarding forms
- asking for support from their managers
- feeling a sense of belonging in their team and developing good working relationships with their colleagues.

Development and Retention

Development and retention of employees with communication access requirements can be affected by the attitudes of managers and colleagues. Employees told us that they feel their positions can be seen as tokenistic, and they are not offered meaningful tasks or provided with career pathway opportunities. It can be daunting for an employee with communication access requirements to advocate for themselves or give feedback to management.

Here are some general suggestions to implement at the Development and Retention stage:

- Ensure that the hiring manager feels confident supporting an employee who has communication access requirements.
- Regularly check in with the employee about their workload and responsibilities, giving the employer and employee opportunities to give feedback.
- Ensure that the employee is encouraged to request adjustments.
- Continue to educate the employee's colleagues about their preferred communication methods.
- Ensure that employees with communication access requirements have equal opportunities to progress their career.

Offboarding

Employers told us they often lack clear, accessible processes for:

- finding out why an employee with communication access requirements chooses to leave the organisation
- acting on this information.

Here are some general suggestions to implement at the offboarding stage:

- Ask the employee how they would like to provide feedback about their employment.
- Offer the employee an exit interview, clearly explaining the purpose of this interview.
- Send the interview questions ahead of time.
- Allow additional time during the interview.

In response to the feedback we received from employers and employees, we have developed an eLearning module and some downloadable handouts and activities. We hope that these resources will support employers to further develop their confidence and skills in recruiting and retaining people with communication access requirements. Please proceed to the eLearning module and Resource Hub to learn more.

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Scope's Building Employer Confidence is made possible by an Information and Linkages Capacity Building Project funded by the Department of Social Services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This training has been co-designed with the valuable input of people with communication access requirements, pilot organisations and our valued partner, Thriving Communities Australia. Contributions from co-designers have directly influenced its design, ensuring it is informed, inclusive and reflective of diverse experiences. We recognise and appreciate the personal stories shared in shaping this impactful learning experience.