

THE NEED FOR EMPLOYMENT

Most people with a physical disability would like to be in employment. For adults this would usually mean retaining their current job for as long as possible, or else finding a new job which is more suitable for the disabled person. Younger disabled people will usually require training for their chosen career supplemented - where appropriate - with job coaching and/or mentoring and possibly engagement with potential employers; some of these interventions will not be appropriate for older disabled people who require a career move or return to employment.

A variety of forms of employment is needed – from which people can choose, depending on their level of disability:

‘mainstream’ employment - with or without special provision (eg flexible working hours, allowances for time or a slower pace, recognition of job).

employment in a social firm or sheltered environment – either full time or for a fixed number of hours per week, or more flexibility (for people with conditions which make it impossible for them to work at certain times).

self-employment – either as individuals (eg in their own business or ‘teleworking’) or as a collective of disabled people (eg to provide an advocacy or disability rights service; to provide services in care homes; to deliver self-management programmes; or to assist in a conduct- assessment of the needs of disabled individuals).

Considerations of particular importance to disabled people

1. *Maintaining and increasing self confidence and self esteem.* It is important therefore that employment opportunities are not demeaning or exploitative since this will lead to demoralisation, increased dependency and possibly ill-health.
2. *Social inclusion.* There is a danger – particularly in ‘mainstream’ jobs – of being employed but not included: in other words a danger of social isolation. It is most important to provide the environment and support needed to achieve emotional well-being for every disabled employee.
3. *Acceptance as a worthwhile member of Society, without embarrassment or being seen as ‘different’.* Sensitive adjustments to the nature of the job and to the working environment may be necessary to achieve this. (See also item 6).
4. *Autonomy.* Autonomy is closely interwoven with good health and self-esteem. Many disabled people working in a sheltered environment with disabled colleagues are better able to develop confidence, gain independence and to contribute to the organisation as a whole than they would be in ‘mainstream’ employment.

5. *Normalisation.* It is important not to impose concepts of ‘normalisation’ on others. Many disabled people enjoy working/being with colleagues who are similarly disabled.
6. *Cognitive impairment.* There are many things which people with a cognitive impairment cannot do. People with learning disabilities in particular need the support of others in certain aspects of their work if they are not to be “set up to fail”. Employers (and fellow employees) therefore need to think creatively about how a disabled person can most effectively be employed.

Actions required

1. Careful consideration of the range of employment opportunities which should be available for people with different and varying degrees of disability.
2. Creation of new job opportunities in a variety of settings – including new forms of mainstream jobs and more opportunities for sheltered employment and working at home. Examples might include new forms of employment in care homes, counselling other disabled people, involvement with Information and Communication Technology (eg websites, discussion groups), helpline operators.