

The job seekers' guide to finding a great disability employment service



How to use this guide

This guide helps job seekers decide whether an employment service is likely to help them get a good job. It tells you what is important to look for in an employment service, and shows you how to rate a particular service through its staff member's answers to ten questions.

As a job seeker, you can ask the employment service the ten questions in this booklet yourself. Or, if you don't feel comfortable doing this, you could get your parent, carer or advocate to ask them on your behalf.

To find out whether an employment service is likely to help you, follow these steps:

1. Take this booklet with you when you meet with a prospective employment service.
2. Explain to the staff member that you would like to ask them ten questions to find out what kind of approach they would take to help you find a job.
3. Ask the staff member the ten questions in this booklet (or get someone to ask them for you).
4. Use the table provided on each page to give the employment service a score for their answers.
5. Copy the scores from each page into the table on page 83, and add them up to get the total score.
6. Use the scorecard at the back of this booklet to rate how suitable the employment service is for you and your job seeking.

1. Who do you find jobs for?

<i>Can you show me that you have found long-term employment for people like me?</i>	
Evidence* of working with high-needs job seekers	No evidence
10 points	0 points

**Evidence could be photos, phone calls to similar job seekers or their carers, written praise for the service from employers and/or job seekers (also known as testimonials or references).*

Why this question is important

Disability employment services are supposed to help all kinds of people find jobs. But they are under pressure to get lots of people into jobs quickly so they don't lose their funding. Some employment services might avoid working with job seekers who have higher needs. Instead, they focus on people who they can get into jobs quickly and easily.

Alternatively, they might go for easy options to get you a job quickly – even if it's not what you are looking for. For example, an employment service might suggest that someone who needs extra support is only able to work 0 to 8 hours per week. This means you could be placed in sheltered employment, rather than receiving support to find a better job with more hours.

Look for an employment service with a zero-exclusion policy. Such a policy serves clients on a first-in, first-served basis. No one is in the too-hard basket.

Tip: If you're not sure whether the disability employment service will be able to help you, ask if you can speak with other job seekers using the service who have needs like yours.

2. How do you assess me?

<i>Can you tell me how you find out what work I am suited to? Do you use form assessments?</i>		
No assessment	Asset-based assessment	Deficit-based assessment
Instead: informal chat about your interests and skills	Formal assessment that focuses on what you can offer (your assets)	Formal assessment that focuses on things you can't do (or find difficult)
10 points	5 points	0 points

Why this question is important

In employment, what you *can't do* doesn't matter. The things you *can* do (your assets) are much more important. Disability employment services should match job opportunities to your ability and your goals.

People with disability have generally been assessed to bits. Government agencies often use formal *deficit-based assessments* (these show what's wrong with people or what they can't do). If the person helping you to find work only knows what's wrong with you, not what you can do, they start with a negative picture. They are likely to have low expectations, which limits your job options. *Asset-based assessments* (formal assessments that show what you can do) are more positive.

But better than any formal assessment is an informal chat between the job seeker and a qualified employment specialist. Staff who talk with you to find out your interests, skills and experience – and who get to know you as a person – are far more likely to find you a job that is a good fit. This approach helps you to work together to put your best foot forward.

3. Will I get consistent service?

<i>Will my employment consultant generally be the person I work with throughout the entire job-seeking process?</i>	
Yes	No
10 points	2 points

Why this question is important

People with a disability are often shuffled between different staff members at their employment service. This happens especially when staff have large caseloads or are not well supported. But people with a disability need consistency.

The chances of you finding and keeping an award-wage job in open employment increase by 50 per cent to 80 per cent when the same person supports you throughout your job-seeking process. This includes:

- getting to know you and your interests, skills and dreams
- helping you set your goals
- providing training or guiding you to relevant training
- practising interviews and writing resumés with you
- applying for work and attending interviews with you
- providing support in your new workplace as needed

Remember: You're most likely to find and keep a good job through an employment service that provides consistent staffing.

4. Will your staff work effectively with me to find a job?

<i>a) What is the caseload size of the staff member who would work with me? (How many other clients do the work with?)</i>					
Caseload	Up to 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	More than 50
Points	10 points	8 points	6 points	4 points	2 points

Why this question is important

A staff member with a lower caseload is more likely to get to know you, and find out your skills, interests and goals. This makes it easier to find a job that is a good fit for you. If the person who listens to your dreams and helps you develop skills is also the person who finds your employment and supports you to stay there, you're more likely to keep that job.

A note of caution: Find out the total number of people the staff member works with. The caseload includes people who are:

- just registered
- looking for work, in any phase of their employment
- classified under a different title; for example, they might be in training

For example: 'I presently work with 20 job seekers' sounds good, but the staff member could also be working with others who are not classified as 'job seekers' right now, and supporting a further 20 people who have started work (that is, their actual caseload could be 41–50).

<i>b) Please describe your staff-training program</i>			
A lot of staff training	Infrequent staff training	Very little staff training	No staff training
20 points	10 points	5 points	0 points

Why this question is important

Staff at a disability employment service are expected to work hard. These workers need good support from their employers, and they need regular training so they can continue to give good service to people with a disability. Unfortunately, if the employment service provider doesn't support its workers enough or offer regular staff training, workers will leave. An employment service where staff are not supported, or where they don't stay very long, can't provide great service to you.

Watch out for no formal training program or training only when needed. This would indicate that the staff member isn't valued by the organisation and is unlikely to be employed beyond

the short term. If possible, you want a service where the same person can support you throughout the entire process.

5. Will you aim high on my behalf?

<p><i>For the last five people you put into a job, please tell me the number of hours (weekly average) that each worked?</i></p> <p>Total (max, 25; min 5)</p>			
More than 20 hours	16-20 hours	9-15 hours	1-8 hours
5 points	4 points	3 points	1 points

Why this question is important

People with a disability are rarely encouraged to ‘aim high’ with their goals. More often, people make it OK for them to aim low. However, it’s been shown many times that people with a disability can and do work for longer periods effectively and efficiently, and therefore earn more money, when they are given proper support.

Watch out for an employment specialist who says, ‘This is a foot in the door and hours will increase’. To find out if hours do generally increase, ask how many job seekers they placed into 8-hour-per-week positions have increased their working hours since then.

Score 1-5	
Client 1	
Client 2	
Client 3	
Client 4	
Client 5	
Total	

6. Do you need subsidies to get people jobs?

<i>For the last five people you placed into employment, how many times did you use a wage subsidy?</i>				
0 or 1 subsidy	2 subsidies	3 subsidies	4 subsidies	5 subsidies
10 points	8 points	6 points	4 points	2 points

What is a subsidy? It's the name used for the money that a government (or another organisation) pays to an employer to provide a position or offset its cost. If a job is subsidised, the government (or other organisation) is paying the employer to provide that position.

Why this question is important

Employment services often use money (subsidies) to encourage employers to hire a job seeker with a disability, instead of showing the employer how the job seeker will add value to their business. This approach is often not successful in the long term. Employment services achieve much better outcomes when they focus on finding a match between the job seeker and the job, and provide support after the job seeker starts work.

Wage subsidies have other downsides:

- When you're employed in a subsidised position, other people (employment agency staff, employers, new co-workers and the general community) tend to value the subsidy, not you as a person.
- Using a subsidy can give the impression that you might not get the job if there was no subsidy.
- It's harder to value yourself highly as a subsidised employee.

Watch out for statements like, 'This subsidised position will get your foot in the door and then we'll look for something else.' Ask your potential support worker how many of their job seekers found other positions after starting on a subsidised position. You don't want this subsidised position to become the job you're in for the long term.

7. How do you support me to stay in the program?

<i>What happens if a job seeker does not attend the service regularly enough?</i>		
Discuss why job seeker can't attend and help make a plan to improve attendance	Phone call and letter to job seeker	Letter to job seeker
10 points	4 points	2 points

Why this question is important

At many disability employment services job seekers are penalised if they don't show up to meetings or activities. Instead, it is better to provide a supportive system that engages you in the training and job-seeking program and, wherever possible, actively involves you in your job seeking.

You are looking for a provider that will 'go the extra mile' to engage with you and your job-seeking efforts. If you miss an appointment, does the service just send a form letter? How about a phone call, or maybe a visit to the person's home?

Tip: Ask to see feedback (praise, references or testimonials) about the employment service and the person who will be helping you, especially from people who have similar barriers to your own.

8. Where do you look for the jobs that you find on my behalf?

<i>How and where do you find the jobs for your job seekers?</i>			
We match possible work, to the job seekers' wishes, skills and interests then go and find workplaces that might need those skills	We look for job vacancies and match these to job seekers	We only use established relationships with selected employers	We advertise locally but rely on job seekers doing their own job seeking
20 points	10 points	5 points	0 points

Why this question is important

When you need extra support, it's especially important to have a disability employment service that will first find out about your skills, interests and goals, and then find an appropriate job. The capacity and flexibility of job seekers with disability is often less than their non-disabled peers, so disability employment services need to look far and wide for suitable jobs. Beware of the traditional employment services that look for job vacancies first and then offer these to the registered job seeker who best fits the role.

Check: Does the service attempt to find their jobs through a range of methods?

9. Do you help me find support in the community?

<i>Do you support me to get assistance from other local community organisations for things like housing, recreation, education, etc.?</i>		
Support and encouragement to access other organisations	Pamphlets and brochures available on request	No assistance
10 points	5 points	0 points

Why this question is important

Work is part of a balanced life. It is just one of the many roles you have in your life. You might also be a family member, friend, partner, colleague, shopper, taxpayer, club member, and more. All of these roles are like strands in a web – a web of connections with your community.

Strong community connections are vital to a well-rounded life. You're more likely to stay in work when you know you're supported by family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. But, if you have a disability, it can be harder to get involved in your community – especially if you're unemployed. It's harder to do some things if you don't have much money, or you don't know what is available.

So, even though helping you to develop community connections is not the main function of a disability employment service, it is an important function, because having strong community connections helps you to get and keep a great job.

Remember: A balanced life includes participating in a variety of different roles: family member, friend, partner, worker, colleague, shopper, taxpayer, club member and so on.

10. How much post-placement support do you provide me in my job?

<i>Do you provide post-placement support? Is this support limited by time?</i>			
On-site or off-site, for as long as you need it	On-site, for a limited time	Phone call or message	No support provided
20 points	10 points	5 points	0 points

Why this question is important

Having support when starting a new job is really important for many people with a disability. This is recognised in the *Disability Services Act 1986*. Depending on the job and the skills you already have, a trained support person might work alongside you for a while as you get used to your new role and improve your skills. As you become more familiar with the work and the workplace, your support person would leave you to do more and more on your own, until you are ready to carry out the role without support.

Having someone support you can also help you manage changes – for example, changes to your health and wellbeing; or changes within the workplace, such as different duties or new co-workers. These changes are sometimes unpredictable and can be very stressful to manage without support.

A good employment service provider will commit to helping you in your new workplace for as long as you need them to. There are many ways they can provide this support, but usually it involves your support worker coming to your workplace to help you manage your needs on-site.

Beware of answers like: ‘Fred will probably only need a phone call.’ If this is true, that’s great! But what happens if it’s not?

Scoring the employment service

To find out whether the employment service is the right one for you, follow these steps to work out its score:

1. Copy the scores from each of the ten questions into the table below.
2. Add these numbers together to find out the total score (the highest total score is 145).
3. Check the score against the descriptions over the page to see if the prospective disability employment service is likely to help you find and keep a great job.

QUESTION	SCORE
1. Who do you find jobs for?	/10
2. How do you assess me?	/10
3. Will I get consistent service	/10
4. Will your staff work effectively with me to find a job?	
a) Caseload size	/10
b) Staff training	/10
5. Will you aim high on my behalf	/10
6. Do you need subsidies to get people jobs?	/10
7. How do you support me to stay in the program?	/10
8. Where do you look for the jobs that you find on me behalf?	/10
9. Do you help me find support in the community?	/10
10. How much post-placement support do you provide me in my job?	/10
TOTAL SCORE	/145

How did they score?

30 or less

This program is not likely to help people with a disability. If you do not have a disability that affects your life or your future employment, this program may be able to assist you.

60 to 80

This program may be able to assist people whose disability makes it difficult to find and keep a job, but only if they do not need much support.

81 to 100

This service is geared to assist people with a disability. It is likely to have highly skilled staff and provide good support. You will get opportunities to find a job that is meaningful and satisfying.

101 or more

This is gold-star service. You are very likely to find a job that suits your interests, skills and abilities, and that pays award wages in the open market.

Best of luck with your job seeking.

Martin Wren