

NCBI ON THE LOOK-OUT WORKPLACE PARTNERS



Assistive technology and training for people with sight loss enables them to be safe and independent in the workplace.

The National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) is always on the look-out for new companies to collaborate with its Workplace Partner Programme, which provides a two to eight-week workplace experience for people with sight loss to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Less than one in four people who are blind or visually impaired actively participate in the labour force, and this is often due to employers' misconceptions of how a candidate with sight loss could perform their duties.

However, with the right adaptations and support they are capable of doing most jobs, according to the NCBI. Grants are also available through the Workplace Adaptation Grants to help employers with the cost of these adaptations, which can include software such as Zoom Text or JAWS. The benefits can include greater employee loyalty through high retention rates and improved disability awareness among staff as myths and perceptions are debunked.

Furthermore, contrary to popular

belief, hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired does not significantly increase a company's risk when it comes to health and safety. NCBI can assist an employer in this regard and would advise the employer to evaluate each individual on their skills, knowledge and how sight loss affects them.

And the Council's Employment Service is always looking for new companies to collaborate with its Workplace Partner Programme, to provide a meaningful two to eight-week workplace experience. The aim is to increase the individual's confidence in obtaining full-time employment.

NCBI will proactively work alongside the organisations both before and during the placement, to increase their disability awareness and ensure a mutually-beneficial experience.

EMPLOYEE INDEPENDENCE

There is an enormous variation between individuals, even with the same eye condition. More often than not, reasonable accommodations can be made to reduce or eliminate the risk altogether.

This may include assistive technology, modification of employer policies and providing resources or materials in accessible formats and training, to enable the employee with sight loss to be safe and independent in the workplace.

Providing proper access to buildings

and facilities is one of the easiest ways to welcome people with disabilities into an organisation, whether they're employees or customers. At the very least buildings and facilities should comply with Part M 2010 of the building regulations.

This ensures individuals can safely and independently approach and gain access to the building, and also necessitates that elements of the building do not constitute an undue hazard for people with sight loss.

For more information on becoming an NCBI Workplace Partner email denis.daly@ncbi.ie

General points for consideration to enhance safety and accessibility for those with sight loss in the workplace:

- Audio announcements in lifts
- Signs clearly visible and easy to read for individuals with sight loss
- Braille and tactile signage
- Adequate colour contrast
- Adequate lighting and have measures been taken to reduce glare
- Hallways and bathrooms clear of obstructions
- Staff completed sighted-guide training
- Practice a buddy system and use it for evacuation purposes