**Diversity, accessibility and inclusion: ﻿﻿How to find the right employer for you**

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The words diversity, accessibility and inclusion can mean many different things to different people. For graduate jobseekers with a disability, these words in a job ad can be an important clue as to whether an employer is more skilled than average at being an inclusive recruiter.

While many employers are working to meet the accessibility needs of all potential staff, unfortunately not everyone invests equally yet - and in some circumstances you as a graduate with disability will need to be a part of paving the way.

This doesn’t have to be hard work. It can be as simple as presenting accessibility solutions which work for you, have supported you in completing university and will help to make you a strong candidate and employee against your peers.

**Finding the right employer**

Understanding the mindset and open-mindedness of an organisation is an important way to work out if an employer has invested time and resources ensuring they are more accessible than their competitors. Employers who have invested in this are showing an understanding of the value of a strong workforce that is representative of the society it serves.

This does not mean you should only apply for jobs with employers who use inclusive terms or are deliberately openly accessible, but it may be an indication of a workplace where it is easier to bring your whole self to work.

A practical example of a real job advertisement is Victoria’s Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), which has the following at the bottom of every job advertisement for the tertiary institution:

*“RMIT is a Disability Confident Recruitment Team and we are happy to adjust the recruitment process for your accessibility requirements. Please contact us at**xxx@rmit.edu.au**telling us your preferred type of communication and we will be in touch as soon as possible to discuss your requirements."*

*“RMIT is an equal opportunity employer committed to being a child safe organisation. We are dedicated to attracting, retaining and developing our people regardless of gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and age."*

While this type of statement is not seen all the time, the frequency of this is improving, particularly with larger employers seeking the best talent for their organisation.

**Helping employers to understand they are already accessible**

Employers who have not had a lot of direct experience with applicants with disability may be surprised to find out they are already accessible - or can easily be made accessible, with some guidance.

This is where your experience as a person living with disability comes in handy. You know what works for you, what you need to be able to compete on an equal playing field and what your skillset is.

Although there is no legal requirement to discuss your disability - unless you are unable to perform the role safely - it can often be easier to be up-front with an employer in the first instance and let them know about your accessibility needs and/or disability.

It may mean you call or email the employer before sending an application to understand their position on accessibility and inclusiveness.

If you are phoning an employer prior to submitting your application, the conversation may go something like this: (remember to use the contact person’s name included on the job ad or find out from reception staff).

*“Hi, I am really interested in the graphic designer role and know my skillset would be a great match with the job. Your job advertisement states intermediate photography and videography skills are needed. Can you tell me a little bit more about your requirements for that skill set? OK thanks, I have skills in (state your skills), and proven experience to successfully fulfil these job requirements. I use a wheelchair for mobility so have some accessibility needs. Is your building wheelchair accessible?”*

If the answer is yes, let them know you will be submitting a job application and tell them you hope to have the opportunity to meet with them at an interview. If the answer is no, as the premises are not accessible this is an ideal opportunity to connect the employer with JobAccess ([www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au/?utm_source=gradconnection&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=gradconnection0621)) to discuss workplace modification possibilities. In the interim, you may suggest they hold interviews in an accessible location.

Another example of discussing your skills and necessary accommodations may go like this:

*“Good afternoon. I saw the role for a graduate engineer advertised. I have a degree in Engineering, three years in the field working part-time and as an intern. I am really keen to gain work in this sector. I have an eye condition resulting in low vision and have found installing some simple software accommodates this and enables me to do the work to a high standard.” Can you tell me a bit more about what’s involved in the recruitment process so we can talk through my accessibility needs?”*

You are clearly stating the need and asking the question. The response will be another good indicator of the willingness of the employer to engage a person with disability.

Some employers may ask more questions to understand your needs; others may seem uncertain or unwilling to engage in the conversation. For employers who are unwilling to engage in the conversation, there are options starting with self-advocacy and escalating to seeking a legal remedy.

**Not discussing your personal needs**

Not everyone will be comfortable discussing their personal accessibility needs and /or disability. The choice to do so is completely personal, unless you are unable to do a job safely and/or meet the role requirements.

It’s worth remembering that it is increasingly common practice for employees to discuss their inclusive work needs such as flexible working arrangements for family responsibilities. It’s highly likely you will not be the only applicant advocating for flexible work arrangements and inclusion.

If you don’t advocate for yourself regarding the workplace adjustments and flexible work arrangements you need, there is the real risk that your skills may not be seen at their best and you may not be giving yourself a fair chance at being the best employee you are capable of being.

TIPS:

* Ask your University if they offer USEP ([University Specialist Employment Partnerships](https://www.usep.com.au/?utm_source=gradconnection&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=gradconnection0621)). You may be eligible to register for graduate recruitment services to help you find the right employer for you.
* Look for inclusive language in job ads and / or specific statements about adjustments or inclusion in the recruitment process
* Get in contact with a potential employer before applying for a role to discuss your suitability, skills, and simple solutions for how your disability can be accommodated in the recruitment process.

Acknowledgements

* The [National Disability Coordination Officer (N](https://ndco.cds.org.au/?utm_source=gradconnection&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=gradconnection0621)DCO)