



# Guide to Promoting Inclusive Employment: Supporting People with an Intellectual Disability

Based on the experience and learning from the Houses of  
the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service



An tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí  
Public Appointments Service



Tithe an  
Oireachtas  
Houses of the  
Oireachtas



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# Foreword

This Guide aims to support Civil and Public Service departments and organisations to become inclusive employers of people with an intellectual disability. It was commissioned jointly by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service and is based on their experience of employing graduates of the Oireachtas Work Learning Programme (OWL) Programme. The OWL Programme began in 2018 as a supported employment initiative for ten people with an intellectual disability. It was delivered within the Houses of the Oireachtas Service in partnership with KARE and WALK (two voluntary bodies that provide services and supports to adults with an intellectual disability). With the support of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, this programme has led to the employment of six OWL graduates from the first intake of OWL trainees – four in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and two in the Public Appointments Service.

Our Public Service 2020 has identified the importance of achieving greater equality of opportunity, gender balance, diversity and inclusion across its workforce and ensuring that the Civil and Public Service is generally representative of the communities it serves. This includes people with an intellectual disability where employment is only 17.3% of those aged 20 to 64, compared to 61.4% of the overall population. The OWL Programme provides an opportunity for employment in the Civil and Public Service for those with an intellectual disability by increasing their skills through work placements in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. Employers and OWL graduates will continue to be supported by the KARE and WALK supported employment services. Through this guide we aim to promote the value to organisations of participating in the OWL Programme, either to provide work placements to OWL trainees or to provide employment to OWL graduates.

The Government has committed to increasing, from 3% to 6%, the number of employees with a disability in all government departments by the end of 2024. The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, which administers our national Parliament, recognises the benefits of increasing diversity in the parliamentary workplace. The OWL Programme lends itself to promoting a more integrated and diverse working environment with a wide range of benefits for the organisation and the trainees. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service is committed to continuing to support the OWL Programme to provide work placement opportunities to people with an intellectual disability in an inclusive work environment conducive to ongoing learning and development.

The commitment of the Public Appointments Service to equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) is integral to our Corporate Strategy, NUA 2022, and embodied in our ED&I Strategy 2020-2022. Our vision for ED&I is that the Irish public sector is acknowledged as a thriving workplace that has embraced equality, diversity and inclusion and which is energised by the contribution of employees from all sectors of society leading to more responsive and inclusive policies, programmes and services. In this context, we are very keen to support the OWL Programme. We also recognise the important leadership role we can play, as both a public service recruiter and employer, with regard to the implementation of inclusive workplace policies and practices.

This guide is a resource for everyone working in the public sector to assist us in our efforts to become more inclusive organisations. By sharing our experience of the OWL Programme, we in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service hope to support you in your efforts to evolve your practices to become inclusive organisations and to assist you in recruiting and offering employment opportunities to people with an intellectual disability.

We wish to acknowledge our appreciation to Dr. Alison Doyle for her advice and expertise in providing this guide as a valuable resource to assist us in our efforts to become a more inclusive Civil and Public Service.

**Houses of the Oireachtas Service**  
**Public Appointments Service**

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# About this guide

As the Civil and Public Service aims to be an employer of choice, it is essential that it embraces diversity in the workplace and harnesses the benefits that this brings for individuals, organisations and society. This guide is based on the experience of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service of employing Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Programme graduates, supported by KARE and WALK (two voluntary bodies that provide services and supports to adults with an intellectual disability). It draws on learnings from the OWL Programme and aims to engage Civil and Public Service employers with a view to promoting employment of people with an intellectual disability in inclusive workplaces.

The OWL Programme is an applied learning, development and socialisation programme for adults with an intellectual disability which was launched as a pilot programme by the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghail TD in September 2018. The Houses of the Oireachtas is the first Parliament in the world to host a programme of this kind. It is facilitated by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service in collaboration with two sponsor organisations, KARE and WALK. The programme is also supported by the Adult Education Service run by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board and by the Health Service Executive. Following the successful completion of the first OWL Programme, the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, at its meeting on 14 May 2019, approved the continuation and further development of the OWL Programme.

**“We in turn also learned from them. They each brought their own skills and experience and added greatly to the work that is done here every day. Their individual personalities and the determination they have already shown in their lives up to now served them well.”**

**Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghail TD**

The goal of the OWL Programme is to provide trainees with the skills, knowledge and ability to gain meaningful paid employment. It offers a unique opportunity to gain practical work experience and for trainees to be accredited for their learning over an 11-month period. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service undertook to raise awareness of the OWL Programme and to identify possible avenues to access employment in the Civil and Public Service. Following discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, sanction was given to provide OWL graduates with the opportunity to apply for a defined number of Clerical Officer and Catering Assistant roles through an internal recruitment campaign. Six OWL graduates from the first intake of trainees were successfully recruited and have now taken up posts within the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service.

<sup>1</sup> KARE works individually with service users and their families to support them in developing their skills and abilities so that they can live the life of their choice. This support includes lifelong learning, living options, work and careers. KARE operates a Supported Employment Programme supporting people with an intellectual disability to gain and maintain the job of their choice in the open labour market.

<sup>2</sup> WALK’s mission is to be leaders in a movement for change, empowering people with disabilities to live self-determined lives in an equal and inclusive society. WALK has developed and piloted different innovative Supported Employment Programmes aimed at increasing the rate of employment for people with an intellectual disability.

# Purpose of this guide

This guide aims to promote employment of people with an intellectual disability in inclusive workplaces, with a particular focus on the Civil and Public Service.

## Using this guide can help employers to:

- Appoint the right person for the job, irrespective of difference.
- Provide equal, accessible and supportive employment opportunities.
- Be confident about managing and supporting colleagues with an intellectual disability through the process of recruitment, training, development and induction into the team.
- Understand, identify and reduce barriers in the work environment that may prevent a colleague with an intellectual disability from fulfilling the tasks inherent to their role, and from achieving their potential, ambitions and aspirations.
- Identify and implement appropriate adjustments in the work environment – whether they be human, physical or technological.
- Promote an inclusive workplace ethos.

Inclusive practices benefit everyone in the work environment. Advice and guidance provided in this document may equally apply to all employees.



# The OWL Story

The Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Programme was an initiative of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission and officially launched by the Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Feargháil TD, on the 25 September 2018. The programme had senior management support and was led by a team from HR, Communications and Superintendent Units. Prospective trainees were identified through KARE and WALK (two voluntary bodies that provide services and supports to adults with an intellectual disability) who followed similar processes for advertising the opportunity to their service users and selecting candidates for interview. Information evenings were held by both organisations, who worked with the local HSE Guidance Officer to identify any potential candidates who might apply for the programme. Applicants took part in formal interviews with the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and were inducted into the training programme.

The OWL Programme maximises the opportunity for trainees to experience several areas of work learning in units in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, and to undertake formalised training through the City of Dublin Education and Training Board with the purpose of achieving a Level 3 QQI qualification. Development and delivery of the programme is supported by a Steering Group involving the various partners as well as Human Resources and Senior and Unit Managers from the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

## 30%

### Formalised Learning

A recognised qualification provided by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board

## 20%

### Informal Learning and Workplace Socialisation

Involves Mentoring, Coaching, Work Shadowing and Role related training

## 50%

### Application of Learning and Knowledge

Involves Practice, Repetition and Applied Knowledge and Learning

Two on-site Co-ordinators, provided by WALK and KARE and funded by the HSE, provide support on a full-time basis throughout the programme and engage in securing trainees paid employment. Trainees also benefit from coaching, mentoring and active learning. This includes learning social skills in the workplace as well as gaining confidence in their role.

To date, OWL trainees have gained valuable experience across a variety of roles in different units within the Houses of the Oireachtas Service including Committees, Library and Research Services, Salaries, Catering, Finance and the Superintendent's Section. Typical challenges for the trainees included travelling into the city centre independently, finding their way around a busy environment, meeting and working with many different people and engaging in tasks that they may not have previously encountered, such as data entry and email. Staff from the Houses of the Oireachtas Service in 19 units trained, mentored and worked with the ten trainees across three work experience rotations, which were designed to equip trainees with the qualification and skills required to engage in employment.

In 2019 the first cohort of ten trainees graduated from the OWL Programme. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service secured sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to run an internal campaign for OWL graduates that allowed for up to four full-time equivalent posts - three permanent Clerical Officer positions and one Catering Assistant role. This decision considered the open manner in which OWL trainees were recruited as well as the provision in the CPSA Code (Office of the Commission for Public Service Appointments) on the appointment of people with disabilities in the Civil Service.

Support for this approach was also based on the commitment to explore work placements as a route to employment for people with disabilities, as set out in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024. Six OWL graduates were successful in taking up part-time positions in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service which commenced in September / October 2019.

The results of the OWL Programme are a testament to its quality and importance: in its first year of operation eight of the ten graduates gained meaningful employment in the mainstream labour market, and two graduates continue to be supported to explore further career options. Feedback from staff evidences a heightened awareness of disability, improved morale and enhanced teamwork through sharing of stories and experiences, shared learning through working with partner organisations and increased levels of engagement to contribute to social responsibility. The Houses of the Oireachtas Service commenced a second OWL Programme in 2019 / 2020 in collaboration with other departments including the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. See Appendix 2 for further information on the structure and organisation of the OWL Programme and how it works.

# Meet the graduates

**Craig and Daniel** have secured employment with the Catering team in a government department.

**Liam** has accepted a position in a government department.

**Sarah** has gained employment in an administrative role in the Civil Service, following her hard work in Administrative and Finance units of a government department.

**Kenny** has obtained employment in the Civil Service in reception and administrative roles, following on from his experience and work at a Reception Desk in the public sector.

After completing three rotations in the Finance Unit of a department, **Andrew** has obtained employment in that section and will continue working towards his QQI Certificate course in Accounting.

Over the summer **Brendan** completed a work trial in a Dublin hotel and is now focused on pursuing an acting career.

**Dale** applied his experience from the OWL training programme and has gained employment within the hotel industry in Kildare.

**Clare** completed training rotations in the Restaurant, the Café, and the Superintendent's section. As well as gaining work experience Clare grew in confidence, learned to travel independently, and expanded her social network. In March 2019 Clare gained employment with a Dublin IT company working in the kitchen and canteen area. Due to her hard work, the company has extended Clare's contract.



# Creating inclusive workplaces

**Acknowledging the value of diversity among employees in the workplace is essential to creating inclusive environments. Providing the opportunities and supports for every individual to achieve their potential promotes equality, recognises human dignity and creates possibilities for new ways of thinking and working within an organisation.**

Research tells us that diverse workplaces are good for business, good for individuals, and build cohesive and stable social networks.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) in the workplace results in enhanced service delivery, increased creativity, innovation, and greater commitment from employees and employers. These qualities bring benefits for both the organisation and the individual, which include growth in confidence, enhanced skills, greater wellbeing, and access to opportunities. Engagement in the world of work also opens possibilities for greater participation, independence and access to economic and social resources that result in benefits to society.

However, people with disabilities experience barriers to accessing employment and these barriers are particularly evident for people with an intellectual disability. Census data from 2016 (Profile 9 - Health, Disability and Carers, CSO, 2017) indicates a labour force participation rate of 30.2% for people with disabilities, compared with 61.4% for the population overall. Of those with a disability aged 15 years and over, only 22.3% were working, compared with 53.4% of the overall population in that age group.

Furthermore, the most frequent difficulty expressed by people with an intellectual disability was 'working at a job or business or attending school or college', affecting 37,658 individuals (56.5%) (CSO, 2017). Within the labour force for people aged 20 – 64 years, the employment rate for people with an intellectual disability is 17.3%, the lowest participation rate of all disability types (NDA Factsheet 2: Employment, 2019).

Employers are increasingly recognising the importance of employing a diverse workforce and that adopting an inclusive mindset is essential to attract, retain and develop people with the skills they need. However, some groups remain under-represented in the jobs market meaning a loss of skills and talent to the economy and employers. Our Public Service 2020 provides a framework for development and innovation in Ireland's public service. It identified the importance of achieving greater equality of opportunity, gender balance, diversity and inclusion across its workforce, ensuring that the Civil and Public Service is generally representative of the communities that it serves. This includes people with an intellectual disability.

An inclusive society values the contribution of all its members. A primary factor contributing to social exclusion is economic inequality, and employers play a significant role in promoting social justice by making a commitment to equality and diversity. Importantly, promoting inclusion in employment benefits everyone and creates opportunities for all staff to gain new knowledge and skills, as outlined on the next page.

## Benefits of Inclusion

### Employer

- Social responsibility contribution
- Increased disability and health and safety awareness
- Increased diversity and improved morale
- Improvement to provision of reasonable accommodation and workplace adjustments
- Enhanced teamwork
- Increased employee engagement
- People management experience
- Coaching and mentoring experience

### Employee

- Workplace learning
- Formal qualifications and team building skills
- Workplace support – coaching and mentoring
- Applied workplace knowledge
- Increased confidence
- Access to reasonable accommodation workplace adjustments
- Workplace socialisation
- Assisted job search and career planning

According to the Inclusion@Work Index, inclusive teams are ten times more productive than non-inclusive counterparts (Diversity Council Australia, 2018). Furthermore, team members are more likely to feel secure and respected, benefit from increased job satisfaction, and are significantly more likely to engage in innovative work practices. Workplace diversity can reduce inequalities and promote sustainable and successful workplaces (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015).

As highlighted by the Business in the Community movement, there is a strong business case for diversity and inclusion and employers can play an important role in supporting social inclusion which benefits the organisation, society and the individual. Their Inclusive Employer resource sets out a blueprint for sustainable inclusive employment practice, based on a model of Intent, Implementation, and Impact. It includes many examples of good practice case studies from some of Ireland's leading companies <https://www.bitc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/BITC-Enclusive-EmployerWeb.pdf>

# My story... *Kenny*



I'm in [the Civil Service]. I'm on the reception. Because we have different interviews are on every day, like guards and firefighters and all that, I need to check them in and do all the paperwork. I have to have all the paperwork done.

## What was difficult at the beginning?

Knowing what to do and knowing the way to do it. How to conduct yourself. The manager gave me the tour round the place and told me what it actually was. But they said don't rush into things after the first day, you know what I mean? Take it step by step, you know yourself. Laoise is always on the phone if I need support or something.

## Do you think that the work experience and the OWL Programme really helped you to get that job?

Yeah, because it helped me to deal with the company. And how to deal with pressurised situations. Because you kind of have to build a relationship with the person. It's not hard to get to know them but it's like... You could say something to someone else and you wouldn't be able to say it to a different person ... you have to build up the relationship and the trust.

## What skills do you think OWL has given you?

Probably independence. I know what to do but I didn't have the confidence to do it. And now I know everybody by first name at this stage. But it also gave me... you get a different perspective being here. I like the job I'm in now.

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*“Probably independence. I know what to do but I didn't have the confidence to do it. And now I know everybody by first name at this stage”*

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# Legal responsibilities and policy commitments

The legal responsibilities in relation to people with disabilities are set out in the Disability Act (2005), Employment Equality Acts (1998 – 2015) and Equal Status Acts (2000 – 2018). Public bodies also have a Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty to prevent discrimination, promote equality and protect the human rights of their employees and people to whom they provide services when carrying out the day-to-day work of the organisation (Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014). In addition, in 2019 Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Disability is defined under the Disability Act (2005) as:

**“a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment.”**

Further information on the legal definitions of disability are available on the website of the National Disability Authority (NDA) [www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie)

Although disability may be defined in different ways, including in law, the legislation makes it clear that discrimination in employment on the ground of disability is prohibited. Further information is available on the website of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) [www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie). The legislation also makes it clear that employers have a duty to provide ‘reasonable accommodation’ for people with a disability if there are any aspects of a job or the workplace environment which place them at a disadvantage, or make it difficult for them to function in their role. This applies to full-time, part-time and temporary employees, public and private sector employment, vocational training bodies, employment agencies, trade unions, and professional and trade bodies. Under employment and equality legislation, employers must take appropriate steps to make reasonable accommodation that meet the needs of people with disabilities, to ensure that they have equal opportunities when applying for work, that they are treated the same as co-workers, and that they have equal opportunities for promotion. Practical information on providing reasonable accommodation at work is available in Section 2 of this Guide.

Policy commitments in relation to disability are set out across a number of strategies. The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan includes a commitment to the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) 2015 – 2024, with the purpose of implementing six strategic priorities for people with disabilities:

- Build skills, capacity and independence
- Provide bridges and supports into work
- Ensure the work is paid
- Promote job retention and re-entry to work
- Provide co-ordinated and seamless support
- Engage employers

The CES sets out a target to increase public service employment of people with disabilities from 3% to 6% by the end of 2024. The Disability Act (2005) requires that Ministers establish a Monitoring Committee in their Departments, that public bodies submit a report on target compliance to their Departmental Monitoring Committee each year, and that this annual report is submitted to the NDA. Some public bodies achieved or exceeded the 3% target in 2017 and the NDA continue to work with the public sector to build capacity and ensure that this trend continues.

The CES also includes an intent to activate targeted public service competitions for people with disabilities through alternative recruitment channels. It stipulates that: ‘The use of internships and new recruitment avenues will be examined, along with the provision of special competitions restricted to qualified applicants with disabilities’ (p. 22), in order to meet the 6% employment quota by 2024.

An additional strand of the National Disability Strategy, the HSE Transforming Lives Programme (Value for Money & Policy Review of Disability Services in Ireland) sets out the New Directions Personal Support Services for Adults with Disabilities. This programme commits to the provision of supports within all communities, to ensure that people with disabilities may exercise freedom of choice in how they live, including accessing opportunities for employment.

<sup>3</sup> Report on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act on the Employment of People with Disabilities in the Public Sector (NDA, 2017).

## Sources of advice

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is an independent statutory body that provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of people with disabilities. The NDA has a role to assist the Minister for Justice and Equality in the co-ordination of disability policy. Their functions include research, developing codes of practice and monitoring the implementation of standards, codes and employment of persons with disabilities in the public service <https://www.nda.ie>

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) monitors human rights and equality law, policy and practice in the State and within public bodies and works with communities and civil society to report on real life experiences of human rights and equality. They provide comprehensive information on equality, discrimination and the law. They have published research about the experience of people with disabilities and provide useful information about reasonable accommodation <https://www.ihrec.ie/>

## Things to consider

Legal definitions may sound complicated but what really matters is focusing on the reasonable accommodation and adjustments that can be made to ensure that team members who have an intellectual disability have the right support, to do their job, to the best of their ability.

Most reasonable accommodation or workplace adjustments for people with disabilities are uncomplicated and simple to implement. The KARE and WALK Co-ordinators and Job Coaches are on hand to advise you.

# Reflections from OWL graduates

- ***I think to get some experience is probably the best thing in the OWL training programme.***
- ***Do it. You might learn more experience with the OWL training programme more than with anybody else.***
- ***Come in here with an open mind. There's no point having perceptions. And you learn more with an open mind more than you would if it was closed.***
- ***Well, I would say to always be professional.***
- ***I would say always be on time and always get to know each other more than you used to do.***
- ***I'll give you a tip about it, always show up on time.***

***Don't presume anything about what people can do.***



## My story... *Liam*

### If you could do anything, what would be your dream job?

A football manager. I support the team since I was a kid, so my dream job is to work for Man United, and I want to bring the football back that Sir Alex Ferguson used to play years ago.

Now I am working in Leinster House, so I am part of the Superintendent's section.

### What are you doing now?

I'm working in an office called Enquiries Office. I was actually working that team in the OWL Programme, so I kind of knew what I was doing. Well, in the OWL Programme I've done two rotations, so I worked in Questions Office ... and I didn't really like it, to be honest. It was just you have to do a lot of questions but you're staring at a computer all day. That's not for me.

See, I'm an active person. I like to move around. That's why working in Enquiries is a good option for me because I can move around ... my Job Coach knew that working in the Enquiries Office was a good option for me. I didn't find anything difficult. I was really trained in the Superintendent's section and it took me only a few days to realise, OK, that's an easy job for me to do.

And did you know who you could ask for help? Yes, so I asked my team leader, or most of the time I ask my Job Coach. At the time, she was my co-ordinator, but now she's my Job Coach. She's based in Leinster House as well, so she's from the same organisation that I'm in. So, technically she's a good woman to work with and she's always there for me.

### What work experience did you have before OWL?

Well, before I joined the OWL Programme I was already working in my local shop. I hated it. I didn't like the job and I said to myself I want to get a different job. I had two days to prepare for an interview and then I got the job at the end.

### What do you think the OWL training gave to you as a person?

It made me into more independent travelling to work. It made me more confident in my job and my wellbeing as well. I think it gave me a lot of confidence and speaking to the people who I work with. At the start I used to be afraid to talk to people but I felt more confident and I felt happy then in myself more.

### How do you get on with the people that you work with?

Very friendly and helpful. Well, in my job, we always do a lot of banter in my job. I think the staff make it easier to come into the environment. They make you feel welcome.

A large, stylized tree logo in a lighter shade of purple, positioned on the left side of the page. The tree has a thick trunk and several rounded branches, with two small leaf-like shapes on the left side.

# Becoming an inclusive employer

## Taking steps towards inclusive recruitment

“Inclusive work programmes and opportunities are vital if we are to harness the talent of people from all sections of society and a diverse workplace benefits us all”

**Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Feargháil TD, 2018**

Guidance in this section is based on the experience of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, the Public Appointments Service, WALK and KARE in supporting the transition of OWL graduates, recruited through an internal competition, to permanent positions within the Civil Service. It also builds on the experience of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, WALK and KARE in recruiting OWL trainees to participate on the OWL Programme. As a principle, the recruitment process aims to identify new team members who have the most suitable skills, qualities and experience needed for the roles that are advertised. The Public Appointments Service recruitment processes aim to ensure that candidates, including those with a disability, have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and full potential relevant to the competencies and specific role requirements when applying for a position through [publicjobs.ie](http://publicjobs.ie).

Departments and organisations within the Civil and Public Service continuously reflect on recruitment and employment practices to attract, appoint, retain and engage a diverse workforce to deliver public service objectives. Civil and Public Service employers aim to ensure that job roles are varied and meaningful, and supports are available to all employees who work on behalf of society.

## Inclusive recruitment approaches

Thinking inclusively begins at the point of identifying employment opportunities. For example, the Civil Service Clerical Officer and Catering Assistant roles, advertised for the internal competition open to OWL graduates, were defined in line with general competency frameworks for similar positions in the Civil Service. The recruitment process for these positions also followed the same steps as the recruitment process for similar positions in the Civil Service.

Consideration was given to ensuring that the language and role descriptions in the information booklets and application forms were accessible. In addition, adjustments were made to the interview approach, while remaining in line with the competency framework, to ensure interview questions were appropriate. Similar attention was given to accessibility when advertising the positions and information about the recruitment competition was disseminated with the support of KARE and WALK. As a result, interested candidates were able to access support from their Job Coach to prepare the application form and to engage in the interview process.

It is important to remember that sometimes it may be necessary to make adjustments throughout the recruitment process. This may include:

- Making it clear in the job specification that a department or organisation has an ethos and culture of inclusion and diversity and welcomes applications from people with disabilities.
- Providing a contact point for people who may have questions about the role and responsibilities, for example, the Disability Champion or Disability Liaison Officer in a department or organisation.
- Ensuring that the interview room is accessible for wheelchair users.
- Allowing a Job Coach or mentor to attend the interview.
- Adapting any selection activities, for example, by granting some additional time to process instructions or complete questions or tasks.
- Providing recruitment information in an accessible format by using plain language and easy-to-read formats.
- Encouraging candidates to prepare for the interview by practicing sample questions with their Job Coach or other supporter, as part of the interview preparation.

Some public sector organisations may be in a position to consider offering different recruitment pathways. For example, a short work trial may be considered as an appropriate mechanism for enabling someone to demonstrate their skills and strengths.

## Plain language

Using clear and uncomplicated language in verbal and written communication ensures that everyone can understand what is required both during the recruitment process, and at work. In general, when speaking it is good practice to:

- Speak clearly
- Check understanding by saying “Is there anything else you need to know?”
- Explain complex terms or tasks by saying “Let me explain...”
- Listen to what our colleagues have to say and respond with patience: “I am here to help you understand everything.”

Written information should use everyday language, and it is good practice to:

- Write it as we would say it.
- Avoid using jargon, abbreviations and acronyms.
- Use a sans serif font that is easy-to-read, such as Helvetica or Arial.
- Clearly explain the purpose of the documents.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs.

In line with best practice, plain language and easy-to-read approaches were incorporated by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service into all aspects of the recruitment process for the internal competition open to OWL graduates.

## Sources of advice on using plain language

Advice on the use of plain language can always be sought from the WALK and KARE Job Coaches. WALK offer a guide to preparing easy-to-read information including writing easy-to-read documents and choosing symbol sets and images <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/basic-page/1193/makeiteasyguide2011.pdf>.

NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, provide extensive guidelines on writing in plain language <https://www.nala.ie/publications/plain-english-guidelines-at-a-glance/>.

## Things to consider

Provide clarity around the core competencies, tasks and activities associated with or required for the position on offer. Ensure that this is communicated in recruitment documents to potential candidates and support workers. Specifics are needed here, for example, ‘be confident in responding to telephone and email queries’.

Don’t make assumptions about individual abilities or requirements. Some people may not require practical or physical adjustments, they may just need you to be patient and respectful.

Don’t ask questions about the nature of a specific disability during the recruitment process. However, candidates should be asked whether they need reasonable accommodation throughout the recruitment process.

Schedule a meeting with all relevant stakeholders to determine any workplace adjustments required, prior to the start date of the employee. Some adjustments, for example special equipment or technology, take time to organise.

# My story... Sarah

## What was your dream job? What would you have liked to do?

The fact is I would have actually like to have worked with pottery. You need a lot of equipment.

## Have you had a lot of work experience?

I've worked with so many different things, because I've actually worked in a small cafe. I have worked with flowers. I would have started in Tallaght Hospital, that would have been through WALK and that would have been first kind of programme, I guess that I started with.

## Where did you work during your OWL training?

Committees, and Salaries ... we kind of just trained in the job we were doing. Committees was basically an office and there would be a lot of meetings and things, but it would be to do with when the Senate was running. So, we would have to set up the meetings, my main job was to input those times into the computer, put down how many people were there. Salaries would be a lot of payslips and overtime I would have done. The names would be all there and then I would put in what percentage they would get ... Nothing was ever boring. Especially when you get the hang of it because then you also know that you're helping people. Once you get the hang of anything like that it just comes naturally to you. Then you can bring it to any job you go to.



## What happened after you accepted your job in PAS?

A few days before the actual day of starting here, we all actually had a tour, whoever got the job. We had a tour around the building, got to know more about what we would do. I met the manager and we also met some of the HR people as well.

## Are you enjoying your job?

I started last October. So it's been a few months anyway, and it just feels longer because I just kind of feel I belong here, like I've been here for a very long time, even though it's only really been a few months. People are very, very, very, very nice here.

## What kind of work do you have to do in PAS?

At the moment I've been importing people who do these competitions and therefore jobs that they're going for. So basically they go through different competitions for, say, if they were going for the Guards or being a nurse. What I can help with is go through the books and if people don't fill out their forms properly, things like that, it is a Fail. It just helps archive them a bit more. I actually find it really interesting ... I like to get different experiences.

## Did you have training to do the job you are doing now?

Yes, just as long as I really needed it, to be honest, most of the time I'm pretty good at memorising things, you know, once is usually enough. But if there were times where I needed to ask a question even halfway through when they're explaining it or saying they need to explain it again, if I missed something, they don't mind whatsoever.

## Are there people that you can ask for help?

Yes, there's a few to be honest. Everyone I get on with who I have met so far. There are at least two people so far that I've really got on with most, Amanda and Michael. I wasn't always confident enough to ask anybody those questions. I just really got more confident, and I'm doing things that are actual jobs.

## How often do you see the Job Coach?

Really just kind of when the people are working on something that's really important and are busy, and I maybe need the Job Coach's help more so then. Really, it's up to me. Like if I would like them to come in say something new is coming off and they might like the Job Coach to come in, or if I have a big training day. They are there for you and I've never known anyone not to be there. I've always had I guess people behind me, a good support system.

## What would you say to anybody who is thinking of starting the OWL Trainee Programme?

I guess I would say, first of all, enjoy and just relax and take every day as it comes. I had a few days that were quiet and some that were really extremely busy. So, you just have to take it as it comes and take your time. And if you have any problems, like all the people in the Dáil and even the work I'm doing now are actually extremely nice and friendly. So, I mean, if you had any problems whatever, they don't mind you asking.

# Enabling transition to employment

The OWL Programme aims to provides graduates with access to meaningful employment through a Supported Employment Model provided by WALK and KARE. The key focus is on assisting new employees to integrate into their new work environment as quickly as possible.

OWL graduates applied through an internal recruitment campaign for positions advertised through the Public Appointments Service. The positions, six Clerical Officer and Catering Assistant roles with defined part-time hours, were based in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and the Public Appointments Service. Successful candidates were matched with specific roles and inducted into the relevant organisation with the support of the Job Coach assigned to them by WALK and KARE.

## A framework for supported employment

The OWL Programme is premised upon the European Union Supported Employment (EUSE) Model, a holistic approach to supporting individuals in paid employment which emphasises individuality, respect, self-determination, informed choices, empowerment, flexibility, confidentiality, and accessibility. There are five integral elements to the EUSE Model:

**The OWL trainee or OWL graduate, when ready, is working independently.**

**The employer has a dedicated loyal employee who takes pride in their work and completes tasks to the best of their ability.**

**The employer is actively promoting the importance of an inclusive and diverse workforce which is more reflective of the differences in the society.**

**Positive ripple effect on staff, softening of attitudes and understanding of disability, more supportive and cohesive team-working approach.**

# 1

## Engagement

Supported Employment Services provide accessible information in an appropriate manner and support the individual to use the information and experiential learning to make informed choices. At the end of the engagement stage the individual makes an informed decision as to whether they wish to use supported employment.

# 2

## Vocational Profiling

This stage provides an insight into aspects of the individual's skills, abilities, strengths and weaknesses and provides a detailed profile of employment-related issues that will influence the remainder of the process. This process is about enabling people to make their own career choices.

# 3

## Job Finding

This stage is aimed at searching for employment opportunities and beginning to engage with employers with the job seekers involvement. Job finding uses several methods to assist with this namely: compiling a CV, responding to advertisements, cold calling, work experience and job sampling and developing employer contact and networks.

# 4

## Employer Engagement

This stage allows the employer, the job seeker and supported employment service to map out the job on offer. Areas discussed will include: core work routines, terms and conditions, workplace culture, support required and available and disclosure.

# 5

## On and Off the Job Support

The levels of support required will depend on the person's needs, abilities and employment situation. This is the key feature of Supported Employment and is present at all stages of the process. The levels of support should be planned and reviewed with co-workers, the employer and the individual. This support is available for all stakeholders, namely the individual, the employer and co-workers, and may happen on the job or off the job. Support needs adapt and change, taking into account the person's needs to promote their independence.

This EUSE framework informs the Supported Employment Model devised by WALK and KARE and implemented as part of the OWL Programme for both OWL trainees and OWL graduates.

# The OWL Supported Employment Model

For employers and OWL trainees / OWL graduates transitioning to employment

## 1 Job Coach connects with employer

Assess suitability of role/environment for trainee/graduate as a new colleague. Job carve meaningful work for the trainee/graduate by dissecting roles to identify suitable work that will suit the needs of the business and the new colleague. Gather details to produce a task analysis or the 'how to' steps.

## 2 First workplace visit

Informal warm friendly chat between the trainee/graduate with the employer – getting to know you, interest, career ambition. Show the trainee/graduate around the workplace and give them an opportunity to meet staff. Discuss duties, expectations of staff and organisational standards.

## 3 Agree next steps

Decide on a start date. Trainee/graduate may start with a small number of hours per week and increase incrementally as agreed with the employer.

## 4 A supported start

Trainee/graduate is supported in work by a Job Coach who assists with training, and where needed, will act as a bridge to help the person learn about the culture of the workplace.

## 5 Review and feedback

Job Coach checks in regularly and seeks feedback from all parties. There may be some challenges along the way. The employer is supported to be open and honest in providing feedback so that any difficulties can be overcome and addressed. KARE and WALK are active partners and will adjust support level to meet the need of the trainee/graduate in the workplace.

## 6 Moving towards natural supports

Job Coach agrees plan in relation to phasing back on support with the employer and the trainee/graduate. Agreed support plan is put in place. Encourage the development of natural supports within the workplace to allow the trainee/graduate to grow and flourish. The Job Coach can always be consulted as required and may come back to help the trainee/graduate with a new task or to get used to any changes in their role or within the team / section / department / organisation.

## 7 Employment and benefits

The trainee/graduate, when ready, is working independently. The employer has a dedicated loyal employee who takes pride in their work and completes tasks to the best of their ability. The employer is actively promoting the importance of an inclusive and diverse workforce which is more reflective of the differences in the society. Positive ripple effect on staff, softening of attitudes and understanding of disability, more supportive and cohesive team-working approach.

## My story... Craig

Before I went to OWL I didn't really know what I wanted to do in a job. The project let me try some new things.

It's the best thing I have done. I love being able to work up in Dublin and I love getting my wages.

I love working in the Dáil. Everybody is so friendly. My family are very proud of me.

There should be more projects like this to help people.



## Supporting colleagues with a disability

It is important to bear in mind that new colleagues may have been working in smaller environments, or it may be their first job, so they may be feeling nervous or overwhelmed. Everyone within each organisation can play a positive role here. It is essential that managers and staff interact with OWL employees in the same way that they would with any other staff member, giving due regard to the nature of the disability and the task being allocated to them.

Human Resources develop and implement strategies that promote and support the employment of individuals with disabilities. The Code of practice for the employment of people with disability in the Civil Service ensures that people are placed in jobs matched to skills and abilities, and not disadvantaged by their disability. At the heart of this approach is a commitment to maximising access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities, whilst enhancing the work within their Department or Office.

All Civil Service Departments and Offices are required to appoint a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) to assist and support staff with disabilities and their line managers by the provision of necessary information, appropriate contacts, guidance, suggestions and advice. Their role is to act as a point of contact for all stakeholders, assist with implementing best Human Resource practices in line with equality legislation, and promote awareness of disability throughout the organisation. Disability Champions work to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities, encouraging their participation in public life by promoting good practice across and within sections, departments, and teams. Office Managers also have a crucial role in encouraging positive and supportive attitudes and engagement, for example, by inviting new colleagues to informal 'meet and greet' sessions or social events. This is an ideal opportunity for everyone to find out more about new colleagues and their interests, and at the same time introduce other individuals who can provide support, such as a Buddy or Mentor who can share information about work practices such as breaks, dress code, and 'go to' people. The role of a staff buddy is to befriend and be a point of contact within the team, but it is also important for all Team Members to be the eyes and ears of inclusion.



## Ongoing support and advice

Not all staff will necessarily have experience in working with or supervising a person with an intellectual disability. WALK and KARE provide dedicated, full-time support to OWL trainees, graduates, and employers. During the OWL Programme, Co-ordinators are based on-site in Leinster House every day, including lunch breaks, and are contactable by phone or email. They are available to talk to managers or staff working with OWL trainees, at any time. WALK and KARE Job Coaches assist staff in managing new recruits in an open, supportive, and appropriate manner, and are available to provide advice and guidance to line managers, as required.

WALK, KARE, and Houses of the Oireachtas Service OWL Programme can be contacted at: owl@oireachtas.ie and by telephone at 6183000.

## Things to consider

Developing positive relationships is important for all employees. Try not to overwhelm with too much information or too many introductions all at once, or in the first hours or days.

Be clear about the new employee's role, job profile, and what they need to know about working in your section and department. Be sure to communicate this to the people who are involved in the training and recruitment of those individuals.

Decide who will act as the 'go to' person for on-the-job questions. Will this be an individual or the whole team? Be sure to communicate this to all parties.

The role of a buddy is to be a friend, to notice what is happening, to be a set of eyes and ears, and to help the person navigate themselves through the organisation.

It's OK to check for understanding, most people welcome an opportunity to tell you if they are unsure about what or how to do something.

# Providing reasonable accommodation

The Disability Act 2005 places a statutory obligation on public service providers to ensure that services and facilities are accessible to all people with disabilities. For example, the Dublin Bus Travel Assistance Scheme - funded by Transport for Ireland - is a free service available to people with a disability aged 18 years or older. Since its inception in 2008, the Travel Assistance Scheme has helped people with disabilities to gain the confidence and skills to use Dublin Bus, the Luas and DART on a daily basis.

Similarly, certain aspects of a job or workplace environment can represent a barrier for someone with a disability which can mean they are disadvantaged. As outlined in the section on legal responsibilities, employers have a duty to make 'reasonable accommodation' for people with a disability to help remove any disadvantage. Providing reasonable accommodation is essentially making adjustments to the work environment or the way the work is carried out, so that someone with a disability can do their job more effectively. Apart from a supportive ethos and culture in the workplace, providing reasonable accommodation is the single most important factor in enabling access to employment for many people with a disability.

## Examples of providing reasonable accommodation

Making adjustments to the workplace can include a wide range of adaptations including physical, sensory, administrative and communication practices. Importantly, these may be required by all members of the team at one time or another:

- Permitting flexible working hours; for example, adjusting hours so people don't have to travel to and from work during rush hour.
- Activating organisational procedures to implement one-to-one supervision, mentoring, or additional training.
- Scaffolded 'on-the-job training' provided through WALK and KARE Job Coaches.
- Changing a desk height or moving office furniture to improve access or to compensate for a noisy environment.
- Providing specific equipment such as ergonomic chairs or assistive software / hardware.
- Allowing time and space for processing large amounts of information in a pressured situation, or to develop practical skills.
- Providing information in accessible formats such as enlarged copies and written in plain language.

When the need for reasonable accommodation has been identified and agreed, it should be implemented as soon as possible. It is also a good idea to record and monitor the impact of the adjustments on a regular basis, to ensure that they are working. This is essential information for all team managers and should be shared with new line managers joining a section or department.

## Getting advice

Employers are not expected to be an expert in knowing what accommodation or adjustment will work best, so it is important to seek specialist advice where necessary. WALK and KARE Job Coaches working with organisations can be consulted at any time.

### Things to consider

Most reasonable adjustments are uncomplicated and simple to implement. The KARE and WALK Job Coaches are on hand to advise you.

Every employee is an individual. An adjustment for one person may not be appropriate for someone else.

Ask colleagues how they are getting on. Encourage them to talk openly about any work problems they are experiencing and to express what changes they think would help.

If there are unavoidable delays to sourcing specialist software and equipment, or executing structural changes to the physical environment, discuss the reasons for these with the employee, and offer reassurance. Identify temporary solutions with the assistance of WALK and KARE Job Coaches.

# Embracing inclusion

Getting to know new colleagues, formally and informally, is a key part of embracing inclusion. Starting a new job or in a new team, department or section can be stressful, so a good induction is crucial to helping people settle into a new environment, work team and role. Sometimes people worry about getting communication right and avoiding misunderstandings or causing stress and anxiety. A workplace mentor, champion or ‘buddy’ can play an important role in supporting an employee to understand and engage with their team and line manager.

At the conclusion of their training, OWL graduates create a personal profile to share with prospective employers called This Is Me. This document is a very useful resource for talking about support in employment, prior to starting the job. The information included in the personal profile is data that the OWL employee is happy to share with management and colleagues.

Prior to the arrival of an OWL graduate or OWL trainee as a new colleague in an organisation, it is useful to set up a briefing session involving WALK and KARE Job Coaches and personnel from the Houses of the Oireachtas Service involved with the OWL Programme. ‘Lunch and Learn’ information sharing sessions are a useful way of enabling staff to ask questions and circulating the This Is Me profile with the relevant section, department or team gives everyone an opportunity to ‘get to know’ new colleagues. Regular liaison between the Job Coach, the line manager and the Disability Champion or Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) within an organisation are recommended.

It is important to meet with the OWL graduate or OWL trainee and their Job Coach and discuss any adjustments they may need in their new job as a new colleague, so that these can be put in place before they start. If there is a delay in providing supports, it is important that the person knows and understands what still needs to be provided and put in place, why there is a delay, and when it is expected to be implemented.

Once the new team member has started employment and has a clearer sense of their day- to-day work a regular catch-up meeting can be scheduled to check that all supports are working well for everyone. Recording progress meetings is helpful where there may be changes in key staff within the department. Passing information to a person’s new manager, with their permission, if they move jobs in the future is also helpful. In addition, it is important to make sure that everyone is included in team meetings and invitations to social events.

## Understand the impact of words

The most important factor in communication is respect for the individual. The Special Olympics Organisation asked participants to explain the basic rules for communicating with a person with an intellectual disability. Being respectful in the language used and the way in which it is used is key.

The following language to be aware of and avoid was identified:

- Saying that someone is ‘suffering from’ a disability as it encourages a view of that person as a ‘victim’.
- Using categorising labels such as ‘the disabled’, ‘the deaf’, ‘the blind’.
- Labelling people by their disability, for example, ‘he is a dyslexic’.
- Describing people without a disability as ‘normal’.

## Being a good communicator

There are simple principles to bear in mind when thinking about how to communicate about disability at work.

- Focus on a person’s ability rather than their disability.
- Speak directly to the disabled person, rather than directing conversation to their mentor or Job Coach.
- If it is difficult to understand someone’s speech, it’s okay to ask them to repeat themselves. Don’t pretend to understand or finish someone’s sentences – be patient.
- Be respectful, talk to the person in the same way as everyone else. For example, it is not necessary to talk loudly or slowly.

Refer to the This Is Me profile that a new colleague may have shared with the team, and check with their Job Coach to see if they have particular likes or dislikes, or ways of working or doing things. Most importantly, don’t be afraid to ask new colleagues the same questions that would be asked of anyone else, whether that be ‘How is it going today?’ or ‘Do you need help with anything?’

## Offering help

- Don’t assume someone wants or needs help, they may have a particular way of doing things which is more manageable for them.
- As a basic courtesy ask before helping and wait until the offer of help is accepted. Make sure to listen to any questions asked, or a request for specific instructions.

## Things to consider

It is good to talk. Conversation is a natural part of working life. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. It is important that people are not defined by their disability.

Explain to OWL trainees and graduates the reason they are doing their work, how it helps the organisation and how their tasks fit within the team and department. Make sure colleagues know that their work is valued, and it is not a question of just finding them something to do.

Include everyone right from the beginning, as much as they want to be, or as much as they feel comfortable with.

# Sharing information and respecting confidentiality

An intellectual disability may not be visible. Talking about a disability can be a sensitive issue, but most people would prefer a genuine enquiry based on concern for their welfare. Asking people how they are getting on and showing an interest in their life and well-being, is a natural way to check on how they are managing at work.

The information included in the This Is Me personal profile is data that the OWL trainee or OWL graduate is happy to share with management and colleagues as they take up their new role. If a team member wants to discuss their disability or any associated difficulties, conversations should be conducted in private and in a place where the individual is comfortable. It is important to listen with empathy and respond with openness and common sense. This may be a conversation that leads into identifying the need for adjustments and support at work.



## Confidentiality and consent to share information

If an employee discloses and discusses their disability this should be treated as confidential. Consent to share information must always be sought, even if this seems to be a logical assumption based on reasonable accommodation requirements. If a member of the team agrees that information about their disability can be shared, discuss with them:

- Who will be told
- What they will be told
- By whom
- The reason for doing so

Where an issue of a potentially serious or sensitive nature is disclosed, specific obligations and procedures may apply in line with national protocols such as the HSE National Adult Safeguarding Policy (2019), and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons Procedure. Immediate advice on individual situations can be sought from WALK and KARE Co-ordinators and Job Coaches.

## Things to consider

A positive, open culture about health and well-being can increase an individual's trust and confidence to raise any issues at work.

Using everyday language can help to reduce any stigma an individual may feel about disclosing their disability or health condition.

Make sure an employee has given consent before sharing their details with anyone. This should include what can be shared and with whom.



# What can my organisation do?

## Becoming an OWL partner

Inclusion in employment is a responsibility shared by every individual working in the Civil and Public Service. This can be supported by diversity and inclusion networks, Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) and Disability Champions. The OWL Programme represents an opportunity for inclusive recruitment and selection within the Civil and Public Service for those with an intellectual disability.

The OWL Programme resumed in September 2019 with a second intake of trainees and continues to benefit from HSE funding for two on-site Co-ordinators in the Houses of the Oireachtas Service. It is hoped and anticipated that there will be further recruitment opportunities for the second and subsequent intake of trainees.

Continuity is an essential factor in creating inclusive workplaces into the future, and you can be part of that journey. As there are finite options for work placement and employment opportunities dictated by the size of each organisation, the Houses of the Oireachtas Service is actively seeking expressions of interest from Civil and Public Service offices to participate in the OWL Programme by providing work experience roles for OWL trainees or recruitment opportunities for OWL graduates.

If you are interested in becoming an OWL partner you can learn more from:

**Margaret Cawley**, Head of Human Resources, Houses of the Oireachtas

**Deirdre Toomey**, ED&I Lead, Public Appointments Service

**Peter Furlong**, Operations Manager, KARE

**Catherine Kelly**, Director of Services, WALK

For more information we would encourage you to email  
[owl@oireachtas.ie](mailto:owl@oireachtas.ie)

## My story... *Andrew*



### **If you could do anything, what would be your dream job?**

Working with numbers. But generally, any job there with numbers because I'm very good with Maths. My job there is to check invoices. They're sent over by letters, so I open them and when they have a letter that says Finance Unit, I register them online. I do that there by using Integra. That's the system they're using. It feels like to me it's a proper job but then I realised there I'm on work experience.

### **What skills do you think the OWL Programme has given you?**

Well, first and foremost it's given me confidence to work, and lastly, to express how I feel. They gave me a few guidelines there on the Integra software there I mentioned to you. I was given lots of instructions on different variations there of finance. How to just register an invoice. And then you're going to the next invoice and there's guidelines there on how to set up purchase suppliers and we would get a new supplier in there. You have all the details there and you have to enter the details there in the correct position.

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*“Well, first and foremost it's given me confidence to work, and lastly, to express how I feel”*

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# It starts with a conversation

“The OWL training programme is an example of how effective collaborations can achieve huge outcomes for young people with an intellectual disability and their families. The training programme supports these young people to learn the skills of employability in a safe and supportive environment.”

**WALK, Director of Services, Catherine Kelly**  
**KARE Operations Manager, Peter Furlong.**

“I’ve got quite a nice relationship with the staff from PAS as well as the link that we have between PAS and WALK, or PAS and KARE. So, that relationship is there, that if I have questions or same if they have questions, that the conversation can just flow with each other.”

**WALK KARE Job Coach**

“I give my OWLs an in-work mentor which I do with every new member of staff. So anybody that comes to work with me, I match them with somebody that I think might match their personality”

**Oireachtas Section Manager**

“It’s about reassuring them, that any challenges or problems can be sorted out. A point of contact where they can look for a bit of advice... I would see them pretty much every day they’re in. They would be absolutely aware that I am available to them.”

**Disability Liaison Officer**

“I’d recommend it to anyone. I’d recommend it to any department. There’s actually just no difference.

They’re just their work colleagues and that’s it, and that I think is a success.”

**Oireachtas Section Manager**

“I think the staff make it easier to come into the environment. They make you feel welcome. Put you at ease.”

**OWL graduate**

“This is Me, where the individual gets the chance to put on paper a description of themselves. And it’s their language, their words, the things that they want to disclose, the things they like, the things they don’t like. And it’s just a very short document that allows people to say, this is me, this is who I am.”

**WALK KARE Job Coach**

“I’ve come up with another one. A slogan saying, ‘Let’s make history together’. It’s because we’re all making history as the first ones on the scene.”

**OWL graduate**

“There has to be a link person ... imagine there wasn’t a Disability Champion role ... we’d be missing something, I think.”

**PAS Disability Champion**

“I think teams need to know that we... it is the support we give them; it is the learning journey that they have along the way. It is that we are there at a phone call if anyone needs support, anyone needs help.”

**WALK KARE Job Coach**

“Design the role first, find the people within the group of trainees coming in who can fit that, adjust as you go along.”

**Oireachtas Section Manager**

“The big trick though, the big thing for me that I’ve learned, is that people are really happy when they have meaningful work.”

**Oireachtas Section Manager**

## My story... *Daniel*



### **If you could do anything, what would be your dream job?**

My dream is to be able to work in the acting industry. My favourite actor is Vin Diesel. Because he does lots of really hard stunts and special effects.

### **Where are you working now?**

I'm based in the Members restaurant, so all the TDs come in, that's the place to go. I just set the tables. And then other than that I look after the tables and keep the tables clean and all ready for the people who come in. The usual time they come in is half twelve, so I have to get the things ready before half twelve. Some of my first rotation was the restaurant. And then my second rotation was the Enquiries... then it was the Facilities. So, Facilities is more like an office job, so you do the filing. I didn't like the Enquiries and the office job because you're sitting down most of the time. But the work that I'm doing now is more active ... You're up on your feet all the time. Well, at the start I found it a small bit hard because I'm not usually... I find it hard focusing sometimes. But as a matter of fact, you get used to it. So, it's all about the focus.

### **How has the OWL Programme helped you?**

Being on time. When I was doing the work experience I was never on time. And then I also learned to build up my confidence because usually I'm not good with people sometimes but I get used to that. I think to get some experience is probably the best thing in the OWL Programme ... to get the best out of the applicants.

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*“I also learned to build up my confidence because usually I'm not good with people”*

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# Appendix 1: Further Information and resources

## Further information about the OWL Programme and other useful resources

**The Houses of the Oireachtas Service** is the parliamentary administration which provides advice and support services to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission; the Houses of the Oireachtas (Dáil and Seanad) and their Committees; and Members (Deputies and Senators) of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Houses of the Oireachtas Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021 is committed to further developing the OWL (Oireachtas Work Learning) Programme, a work/training initiative created to meet the objectives of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015 –2024. It also provides special employment competitions restricted to qualified applicants with disabilities in order to meet and / or exceed the 6% employment target by 2024.

[https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/corporate/strategy/2019/2019-09-03\\_houses-of-the-oireachtas-commission-strategic-plan\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/corporate/strategy/2019/2019-09-03_houses-of-the-oireachtas-commission-strategic-plan_en.pdf)

**The Public Appointments Service (PAS)** is the centralised provider of recruitment, assessment and selection services for the Civil Service. PAS also provides recruitment and related human resource advisory services to Local Authorities, the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána and other public bodies, including for State Boards. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Strategy is a core element of the PAS Corporate Strategy 2020-2022. Further information on inclusion and accessibility initiatives for people with disabilities in recruitment and employment is available from the Disability Champion, via [edi@publicjobs.ie](mailto:edi@publicjobs.ie)

<https://www.publicjobs.ie/en/diversity-and-inclusion>

**WALK** aims to empower people with disabilities to live self-determined lives in an equal and inclusive society through projects which focus on employment, training and community living. WALK's mission is to be leaders in a movement for change, and in doing so they have developed and piloted various innovative supported employment programmes aimed at increasing the rate of employment for people with an intellectual disability. WALK operates a learning placement scheme in Tallaght General Hospital where the feedback from managers and staff is very positive.

<https://www.walk.ie/>

**KARE** was founded in 1967 and provides support to people who have an intellectual disability and their families, as valued members of their community. KARE operates a Supported Employment Programme supporting people with an intellectual disability to gain and maintain the paid job of their choice in the open labour market. KARE operates a work placement training programme in Naas Hospital which allows young people make an informed choice as to their future career.

<http://www.kare.ie/>

**HSE New Directions** is one of the key policy documents contained in the HSE Transforming Lives Programme (Value for Money & Policy Review of Disability Services in Ireland). It sets out an approach to day services that envisages all the supports available in communities that will be mobilised so that people with disabilities have the widest choice and options about how to live their lives and how to spend their time. It proposes that day services should take the form of individualised outcome-focused supports to allow adults using those services to live a life of their choosing in accordance with their own wishes, needs and aspirations.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/newdirections/>

**The Department of Education and Skills** provide recognition of the programme through SOLAS as a model of traineeship, and through the City of Dublin Education and Training Board, via funding for, and provision of, accredited training.

<https://www.education.ie>

**The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection** are responsible for elements of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015 - 2024, and together with the HSE, provide funding for WALK and KARE Job Coaches.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/4c7204-make-work-pay/>

**The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)** play a role in overseeing the implementation of disability policy within the People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017-2020, including the 'Code of practice for the employment of people with disability in the Civil Service'. The Department sanctioned the creation of an internal recruitment campaign for posts open to OWL graduates. DPER also provided funding for production of this resource guide via the Public Service Innovation Fund 2019.

<https://hr.per.gov.ie/disability/>

**The National Disability Authority (NDA)** on behalf of the State, promote and help secure the rights of people with disabilities. The NDA's responsibilities include policy development, research and advice on standards, including equality, diversity and inclusion policies in public service bodies.

[www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie)

**The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)** is Ireland's national human rights and equality institution. The Commission monitors human rights and equality law, policy and practice in the State and within public bodies and works with communities and civil society to monitor and report on real life experiences of human rights and equality.

<https://www.ihrec.ie/>

# The OWL Programme

## Appendix 2:

# Partnership for the OWL Programme



Two on-site Co-ordinators provided by WALK and KARE and funded by the HSE, provide support on a full-time basis throughout the programme, and engage in securing trainees paid employment. Trainees also benefit from coaching, mentoring and active learning, including the learning of social skills in the workplace as well as gaining confidence in their role. There are three strands to the OWL training programme:

- Three 14-week work rotations in a range of settings.
- Appropriate QQI accredited modules.
- 12-month local vocational training programme.

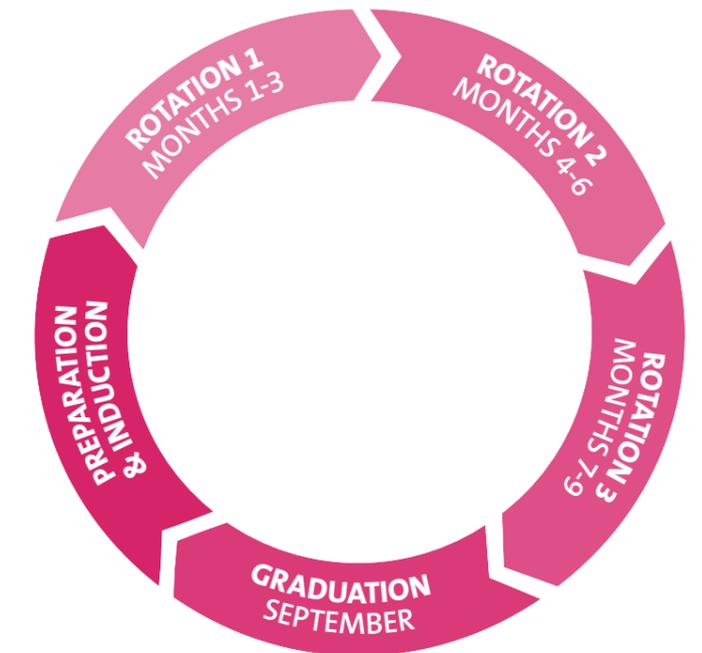
The OWL Programme takes place over 11 months and across three work placement rotations, with each trainee moving from one section to another to practice and apply new skills learned.

Sections involved in the pilot scheme included:

Committees, Library and Research, Salaries, Catering, Finance and Superintendents.

## Recruitment of trainees to the OWL Programme

WALK and KARE advertise the programme to suitable candidates within their services and hold an information evening for the individuals and their families. Applicants submit a completed application form and potential trainees are referred through WALK and KARE for shortlisting in line with the roles identified by the programme Co-ordinators. These applications are forwarded to the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and suitable applicants attend a formal 'supported' interview of 30 minutes and a practical assessment of 30 minutes.



## Examples of work placement rotations available through the OWL training programme in 2018 / 2019

### **Superintendent's Section**

Enquiries Office (reception area), signing people in and handing out badges. Sorting post into pigeon-holes and distributing post to Members and staff.

### **Questions Office**

Inputting questions into computer and data entry project work.

### **Committees**

Inputting of attendance sheets from Committees into a spreadsheet.

### **Facilities**

Stock taking paper for the printers in all sections. Filling up the cups at the water stations and filing invoices.

### **Salaries Section**

Inputting overtime into a spreadsheet. Stamping overtime sheets and envelopes. Labelling files and shredding.

### **One Stop Shop**

Bringing over the signing-in folders to enquiries.

### **Restaurant**

Food preparation and assisting with stocking fridges for lunch. Cleaning and preparation of the tables in the restaurant.

### **Finance Unit**

General clerical duties including data entry into spreadsheets.

### **Print Facility**

Making boxes and emptying shredding into bags. Sweeping and keeping the areas clean and tidy.

### **Coffee Dock**

Helping to stock the fridges and refilling of paper cups. Cleaning and filling of dishwasher.

### **Library and Research**

Arranging and filing papers daily, checking titles on statutory and non-statutory documents against the corresponding Dáil order paper.

## Providing diverse learning experiences

The purpose of the OWL Programme is to assist the participants in becoming work ready through a “hands on” learning and development programme. Prior to beginning the programme Co-ordinators identify individual strengths and areas of skill development for each trainee. They work with section staff to understand the needs and supports of each trainee, including reasonable accommodation or adaptations required to the work environment.

OWL trainees engage with a wide range of learning interventions, attending formal learning sessions each week, while informal training such as mentoring and coaching is carried out daily. This approach ensures that a wide range of learning abilities are catered for and maximises the learning opportunities for trainees. Learning sessions include review and understanding of operational information relevant to the Civil Service, for example, Official Secrecy and Integrity, Freedom of Information, Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, Acceptable Usage Policy for ICT, and Guidelines on Probation.

## Monitoring work experience rotations

Following each rotation, trainees are invited to provide feedback on their work experience, which informs the programme about areas for improvement such as: understanding the role of the section, awareness and understanding of expectations, suitability of roles and tasks and satisfaction with levels of support.

## Support for teams, section and department staff

Sometimes it can be difficult for staff to know what to do or how to respond in certain situations. WALK and KARE have two employment Co-ordinators on-site who assist the trainees and staff in working together. Using this model, the trainees learn the norms of work while staff learn a little more about the challenges facing those with an intellectual disability.

The OWL Programme provides induction sessions for section staff. WALK and KARE have prepared guidelines for staff working with OWL trainees so that both staff and trainees can maximise their time on the programme. These guidelines also apply to newly appointed OWL graduates. A comprehensive training manual is also available which details step-by-step procedures for setting up the programme, recruitment, orientation, induction, training, rotations, expectations (e.g. dress code, professional behaviour, hours of work), of Houses of the Oireachtas Services staff, programme progression, and graduation.

## Graduating from the OWL Programme

The programme aims to ensure that all trainees graduate and will be in paid employment, or sign-posted to appropriate progression opportunities, supported employment programmes or services. Upon completion of the learning programme, the trainees attend a graduation event to recognise their achievement and learning journeys.



Published April 2020