Employer Resource Handbook

SFU | WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING
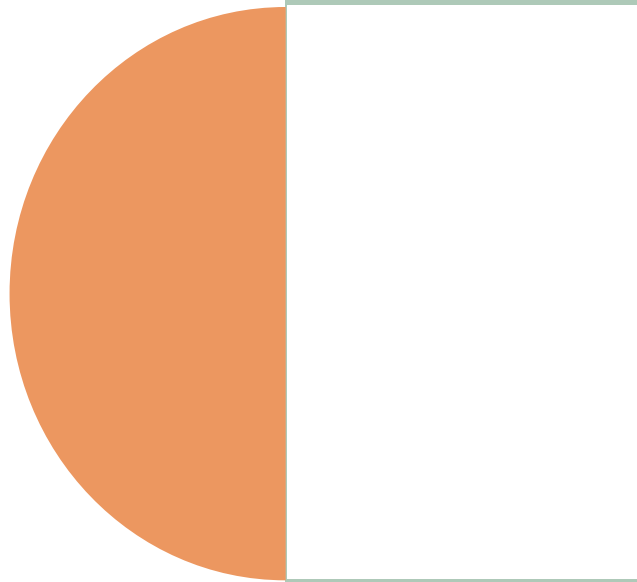
WIL ACCESSIBILITY

2021—2022

## Hiring students with disabilities

We acknowledge this document was developed on the Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the Tsleil-Waututh (səl ilw əta), Kwikwetlem (k ik əəə), Squamish (S wx wú7mesh Úxwumixw) and Musqueam (x məɵk əy ə) Nations.

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Introduction

Context

Approximately 9 percent of students currently at post-secondary institutions have some form of disability. Inclusive education remains a challenge in Canadian universities, particularly experiential learning approaches like Work Integrated Learning (WIL). Individuals with disabilities exiting university still face unemployment, underemployment, and low pay compared to their peers without disabilities. In a recent survey of Canadians with disabilities, **employment and job retention were identified as the most important accessibility issues to address.**

Attending post-secondary increases the likelihood of employment for all students, regardless of disability. However, **many opportunities for developing employment connections have not traditionally been accessible to students with disabilities.** WIL opportunities such as co-op terms, mentorship, job-shadowing, and internships are an opportunity to assess career choices and future support needs; and students with disabilities benefit from work-based learning activities as much as, if not more than, their non-disabled peers. There are **significant documented benefits of student participation in WIL including improved workplace competencies, enhanced self-efficacy, and increased post-graduation employment rates.**

While there are challenges in ensuring accessibility of work integrated learning experiences to all students, it is important to recognize that **students with disabilities have an equal right to work-based learning opportunities.**

Purpose

This Handbook aims to support SFU WIL employers who are invested in making workplace practices more inclusive, especially with students with disabilities in mind. This resource highlights how you can remove barriers to participation starting from recruitment to retention which can in turn help to attract the diverse team that allows growth for all. The benefits of addressing accessibility in the work setting are laid out here alongside a helpful visual dictionary of relevant terms. This is followed by tips and strategies that can be used for all work engagement stages. And towards the end, sample scripted tools are provided as well as some FAQs.

Our Commitment

The SFU WIL office will work closely with employers through this process and provide one-on-one support to your organization and the student(s) you hire. Please feel free to reach out to our project coordinator – Zoreen Nuraney at zoreen_nuraney@sfu.

SECTION 1

Accessibility and the Workplace

A. Benefits of accessible and inclusive workplaces

Establishing an inclusive workplace and committing to optimizing the work environment for all employees has positive impacts on the happiness and productivity of everyone on the team. Some of the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities include:

1. **Innovation and productivity**

Diversity in the workforce promotes innovation through unique ideas. Research demonstrates that diverse and inclusive workforces are 6 times more likely to innovate as well as 6 times more likely to effectively anticipate change.

   a. Hiring a diverse team gives you the potential to strengthen your organization through creating a team with complementary and diverse skill sets.
   b. Establishing a diverse workforce can improve the quality and robustness of services provided to your users and clients by reducing unconscious bias.

2. **Committed employees**
   a. In terms of turnover, organizations that hire individuals with disabilities tend to have lower turnover rates, thus reducing hiring and training costs.
   b. In a survey of employers, over 86% of individuals with disabilities rated average or better on attendance and performance (compared to colleagues without disabilities).

3. **Happy employees**
   a. Establishing a diverse and inclusive workplace contributes to creating overall a more positive work environment; and research shows that teams with satisfied employees have lower turnover.

B. Understanding Accessibility

Accessible employers commit to removing barriers in hiring practices, management processes, and workplace culture. There are many steps that employers can take to incorporate accessibility practices every step along the way, from the first day a job posting is shared, to working with long term employees.

Thinking like an accessible employer:

- All disabilities are experienced differently.
- The process of implementing accommodations will vary for each individual and must be done in a respectful and collaborative manner.
- Some organizations will already have practices and policies in place that can be learned about by speaking to the Human Resources department. If this is not available in your organization, there are steps that you can take to create an accessibility plan and policy.
- To further develop accessibility practices within your organization, there are various resources that can be employed including this Employer's Toolkit.

Thinking like a Business Leader:

Watch this video to hear how the President's group of BC, believes that hiring people with disabilities is good for business:

Accommodate students with disabilities in the workplace

- Workplace accommodations will vary depending on the situation but are frequently inexpensive and simple to implement. See this Workplace Accommodation Guide for more information. See Section 2 below for tip sheets to reference.

C. Accessibility Dictionary

Click on the Accessibility Terms image link below to view an interactable glossary.
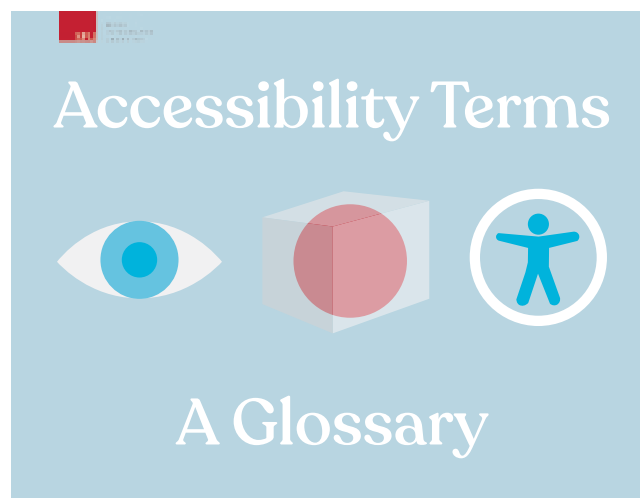
Transcript for the Accessibility Terms Glossary

Tips And Strategies For Employers

Practicing accessible hiring is not a hard, expensive or time-intensive task; it is simply a matter of removing barriers to allow people's strengths to surface.

The following section will focus on a 5-part journey for Employers to navigate from Recruitment to Retention.

From Recruitment to Retention
An Employer's Journey

1	2	3	4	5
Recruiting	**Interviewing**	**Hiring & On-Boarding**	**Providing Accommodations**	**Supporting Retention**
Use welcoming and inclusive language	Plan and communicate expectations in advance; offer varied formats; and avoid personal questions.	Be proactive and create an accommodation plan; and assign a mentor.	Level the playing field and ensure employees have what they need to perform the essential duties.	Ensure your communication is inclusive; provide regular check-ins; and review the accommodation plan.

A. Recruiting Students with Disabilities

The moment you advertise a job position, candidates will form their first impression of you and your organization, so why not demonstrate your values and open the conversation around accommodation from the onset? Check out the following tips to get you started, followed by an example:

1.Post your position with inclusivity in mind, re:

How to write inclusive job postings

- List the **essential requirements** and outline the actual skills needed to perform the job
- Use **simple language** to ensure job details are clear and unambiguous
- **Communicate in advance** if you are administering a test to assess skill or ability
- Include a statement about your **commitment to inclusion**
- Advertise your posting in **multiple formats** and accept different **submission methods**
- Offer **contact details** for questions and accommodation around applying

Example of welcoming and inclusive language in a job description:

SFU WIL is committed to growing its team in ways that reflect our diverse community. We strongly encourage applications from equity-deserving groups including from students with disabilities, Indigenous students, students who are members of visible minorities or LGBTQ+ community. We encourage candidates who may benefit from accommodation during the application or interview process to reach out directly for individual support via email at: accessible_wil@sfu.ca or telephone at: 604-123-4567.

Accessible recruitment checklist

B. Interviewing Students with Disabilities

The Human Rights Code has set clear guidelines that prohibit discrimination on the basis of 17 distinct characteristics including both mental and physical disability. With this in mind, your interview questions should be focused on determining whether the candidate is qualified and can perform the essential duties of the position.

As you know, interview performance and job performance use different skill sets. Being mindful about the way you set up your interview will hopefully open the space for all candidates to present their best selves; and by inquiring about the need for accommodations you address your duty to accommodate at the early stage of your potential relationship.

Planning your Interview

Before reaching out to your shortlisted candidates, keep in mind the importance of building trust with a future employer and ensure that you are prepared to:

- Provide all the details about the interview, re: Format? Total time? Interview panel? Location? Contact person for questions? Dress code?
- Remind candidates that accommodation requests are welcomed. The candidate themselves will likely be best placed to offer a solution for your consideration so don't hesitate to ask them!
- Consider a varied format to assess the candidate, re: verbal face-to-face, hands-on, online and/or phone.
- Maintain standardized questions and a set ranking approach
- Share the exact responsibilities of the job as well as the work hours and reporting mechanism

Questions to ask and avoid

Since your interview questions are a direct way to gain insight into the candidate's experiences, skills, abilities, and personality traits it is important not only to ask them, but to frame them in inclusive ways. In general, if you avoid personal questions related to a person's disability as well as abstract situational questions, you will be off to a great start! Here are some concrete examples:

Examples of Prohibited Questions

> !
> - "Do you have any disabilities or medical conditions?"
> - "How did you become disabled?"
> - "When was the last time you were hospitalized?"
> - "How often do you miss work for doctor's appointments?"
> - "How many sick days did you take last year?"
> - "Are you Canadian?"
> - "Where is your accent from?"
> - "Are you planning to start a family?"

Examples of Permissible Questions

- "Is there anything that may impact your ability to do the job?"
- "Are you eligible to work in Canada?"
- "Can you start at 7:30am and work overtime if necessary?"
- "Would you be willing to relocate if needed?"
- "Can you perform the essential functions of the job?"
- "Can you fulfill the physical requirements of the position?
- "Are you able to work full-time hours?"

Interview questions: What you can and cannot ask
How to conduct an inclusive interview. (Inclusive interview checklist)

How can you make your interview questions more accessible? (Reframe your interview questions to be more accessible)

C. Hiring Students with Disabilities

Sample Accomodation Plan

Your organization is responsible for: (TO BE EDITED)

- Eliminating barriers that prevent people from accessing, or being included in, the workplace;
- Minimizing the need for individual accommodation by regularly reviewing rules, policies, by-laws and practices to ensure that they are not discriminatory;
- Ensuring that all employees and job applicants are advised of their right to be accommodated;
- Dealing with requests for accommodation in a timely, confidential and sensitive manner;
- Providing individual accommodation to the point of undue hardship; and
- Ensuring that this policy is effectively implemented.

Supervisors are responsible for:

- Fostering an inclusive work environment by treating all employees and job applicants with respect and dignity;
- Identifying and eliminating barriers that prevent people from accessing, or being included in, the workplace;
- Dealing with requests for accommodation in a timely, confidential and sensitive manner;
- Informing individuals requiring accommodation what information they need to provide to be accommodated;
- Generating accommodation options based on the information provided about the individual's accommodation need(s)
- Involving individuals requiring accommodation in the search for accommodation;
- Initiating a discussion about accommodation when they are aware that an employee or job applicant may have a need for accommodation, but is unable, for any reason, to articulate that need.

Employees and job applicants are responsible for:

- Making their accommodation needs known. This does not require the disclosure of the specific cause of their needs but only the effects which create the need for accommodation.
- Helping to identify potential accommodation options;
- Providing documentation in support of their request for accommodation, including information about any restrictions or limitations; and
- Accepting an offer of accommodation that meets their needs, even if it is not their preferred accommodation option.

D.   Making Workplace Accommodations

Once you have hired the successful candidate, should they require accommodations, your duty to accommodate kicks in. Remember, accommodations are reasonable adjustments made in the workplace that level the playing field and allow individuals with disabilities to fully perform the essential duties of a position.

Common workplace accommodations for individuals with *invisible* disabilities

Flexible Scheduling	• Adjusting start times or end times, i.e.) to accommodate effects of medication, energy levels, or medical appointments • Adjusting break schedule i.e.) smaller breaks more frequently throughout the day instead of one long lunch break)
Communication modifications	• Adjusting delivery methods for instructions and feedback, i.e.) requesting written communication over verbal and vice-versa • Scheduling brief weekly check-in meetings with supervisor
Technology	• Installing computer software that supports reading and comprehension • Allowing the use of recording devices in meetings to provide playback of information discussed at meetings • Implementing the use of an online scheduler to keep track of project deadlines and tasks
Work station changes	• Changing location/modifying workplace setting, i.e.) to avoid overly bright lights and distracting noise • Reduce clutter and scents in shared workspaces

SFU WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS TIPSHEET

As an employer, it is your responsibility to make a comfortable work environment for everyone. These accomodations are simple tasks you can do to help employees with disabilities achieve their full potential.

ACCESSIBLE SPACE

- Place equipment or tools where they can be easily reached by all

- Provide ramps to help access elevated areas or entryways

- Ensure employee knows locations of elevators or escalators

TECHNOLOGY

- Provide technology on your employee's work computer to allow them to perform tasks more efficiently.

- Connect with Neil Square Society or WorkBC Assistive Technology Services to host tutorials on using assistive technology.

DECREASING DISTRACTION

AUDITORY DISTRACTIONS

- Provide a noise canceling headset

- Provide a white noise machine

- Relocate work space to a quieter area

VISUAL DISTRACTIONS

- Install space enclosures

- Reduce clutter in the employee's environment

- Relocate work space to a less busy area

SERVICES

- Assign a mentor to help with integrating into the work culture of the company easier

- Provide a job coach to help with learning the best methods to carry out tasks at work

- Provide a job assistant for certain tasks that may be difficult for employees with disabilities

JOB RESTRUCTURING

- Direct marginal functions to other employees, allowing your employee with a disability to focus on the essential functions of the job

- Change how, when, or where specific functions are done

- Provide a checklist that states the order in which tasks need to be completed in

TIME MANAGEMENT

- Modify work schedules by considering when employees need treatment or rest periods

- Notify your employee of deadlines farther in advance

- Provide organizational tools such as a calendar to remind your employee of deadlines

Coroda. (n.d.). "Title I Technical Assistance Manual"., Job Accommodation Network. (n.d.). "The JAN Workplace Accommodation Toolkit"., Office of Disability Rights. (n.d.). "Types of Reasonable Accommodation"., Statistics Canada. (2019). "Workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in Canada, 2017"., Thompson Rivers University. (n.d.). "Optimizing Access: Working Towards Employment Accessibility"., Universty of Guelph. (2019). "Academic Accommodations Translated into Employment Settings".

E.   Employee Retention

Communicating Accessibly

Adopt inclusive disability-related language as outlined in the [Presidents Group resources](#), re:

• Be inclusive in your conversations
• Use a person-first approach
• Frame a disability…as something a person has rather what they are
• Use direct language for sensory conditions
• Avoid language that suggests weakness
• Always ask the person to ensure accuracy
• Do not use disability-related terms as insults
• Apologize for mistakes and move on

- Ensure all material has been reviewed through your computer program's accessibility checker
- Review how the accommodations are working out.
- Plan regular check-ins

SECTION 3

Frequently Asked Questions & Myths

1. **Why types of jobs can students with disabilities do?**

   Similar to any employee, people with disabilities each have their own academic background, skills, and strengths. Employers should look at the requirements of position and consider how the abilities and educational background of students can be used to fulfill the requirements of any given position.

2. **Are people with disabilities reliable employees?**

   Yes. Studies show that people with disabilities have lower absenteeism and stay with employers longer than their non-disabled colleagues.

3. **Does hiring people with disabilities increase safety incidents at my workplace?**

   No. Studies show that people with disabilities have a 40% lower safety incident rate and 78% lower overall costs associated with accidents.

4. **How do I find qualified candidates?**

Employers should ensure that job descriptions are written in an accessible manner and demonstrate your willingness to hire students with disabilities. Additionally, it is important to ensure that your website meets accessibility requirements. For more information about how to utilize accessible recruitment strategies, click here.

5. **How do I interview a candidate with a disability?**

Similar to any interview, the focus of the interview should be on the qualifications of the candidate and their ability to perform the essential job requirements. For example, you can ask "How would you perform this task?" Additionally, employers might consider adopting inclusive interview practices such as providing information about the interview format in advance of the interview.

To learn more about accessible and appropriately worded interview questions, click here.

6. **How do I create an inclusive and welcoming workplace?**

The following pages contain some necessary actions and recommendations to consider:

1. Employer expectations
2. Create an inclusive and accessible workplace

7. **How do I accommodate an individual with disabilities? Is it difficult or expensive?**

Many accommodations are simple and inexpensive. For example, some common accommodations include: establishing flexible work hours, providing a quiet workspace, and providing assistive technologies. Here is a link discussing some more common accommodations.

In the case that accommodations are required, employers should work collaboratively with the employee to develop and agree upon an accommodation plan. The written accommodation plan document provides a formal way of recording accommodations that an employer will provide.

8. **Can people with disabilities work in positions requiring physical labour?**

Individuals with physical mobility-related concerns comprise less than 1 in 10 people with disabilities and not all mobility-related disabilities prevent individuals from working in positions requiring physical labour. Employers must assess the essential requirements of a position, the ability of the individual, and accommodations that may enable the employee to fulfill the requirements of the position. In some cases, there may be no available accommodations that would allow for the fulfillment of the position requirements but as long as accommodations have been thoroughly explored, the employer's duty to accommodate is fulfilled.

9. **Is it true that people with disabilities cannot be terminated once they are hired?**

Legislation in Canada and the US state that employers have a responsibility to provide adequate accommodations and cannot fire employees for disability-related reasons. In the case that adequate accommodations are possible, employees with disabilities are held to the same performance standards as other employers and steps can be taken to address concerns regarding performance including discussing the problem, exploring solutions, and terminating employment if necessary. In some cases, there may be no available accommodations that allow employees to fulfill the necessary job requirements.

Resources Links

University of Guelph Frequently Asked Questions (by employers hiring students with disabilities)	https://www.recruitguelph.ca/cecs/employers-institutions/hiring-students-disabilities/faqs	(University of Guelph, 2020)
Business Case for Hiring Students with Disabilities	https://www.recruitguelph.ca/cecs/employers-institutions/hiring-students-disabilities/making-business-case	(University of Guelph, n.d.)
Funding Opportunities for Hiring Students with Disabilities	https://www.recruitguelph.ca/cecs/employers-institutions/hiring-students-disabilities/hiring-incentives	(University of Guelph, n.d.)

Student Management Strategies	https://www.recruitguelph.ca/cecs/employers-institutions/hiring-students-disabilities/managing-students	(University of Guelph, n.d.)
Accommodations Info	https://www.recruitguelph.ca/cecs/employers-institutions/hiring-students-disabilities/accommodations	(University of Guelph, n.d.)
Accommodation Strategies for Students with Mental Health Related Disabilities	https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/managing-workplace-issues/accommodation-strategies	(Canada Life, n.d.)
Terminology & Etiquette	https://www.recruitguelph.ca/cecs/employers-institutions/hiring-students-disabilities/terminology-etiquette	(University of Guelph, n.d.)
Debunking Myths	https://www.recruitguelph.ca/cecs/employers-institutions/hiring-students-disabilities/debunking-myths	(University of Guelph, n.d.)
Accommodation Strategies for Students with Mental Health Related Disabilities	https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/managing-workplace-issues/accommodation-strategies	(Canada Life, n.d.)

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Canadian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.) Developing a Workplace Accomodation Policy [PDF]. Retrieved from: https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/template-developing-workplace-accommodation-policy

Laurier Inspiring Lives

Mental Health Works

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Job Accomodation Network (JAN)

University of Guelph: Interviewing