# FASD IN THE WORKPLACE

A practical factsheet for Irish employers

**RECOGNISE THE POTENTIAL. UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGES. CREATE THE OPPORTUNITY.**

Employing someone living with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) can be positive and rewarding. With understanding, clear communication and practical support, people living with FASD can develop skills, contribute to teams and build meaningful careers.

FASD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. It is a spectrum: no two people have exactly the same profile, and support needs vary. A person may be confident and capable in one area while needing help with another.

## What might an employee experience?

**MEMORY & LEARNING**
May find it difficult to retain verbal instructions, remember procedures or learn several new steps at once.

**EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING**
May need support with planning, organising, prioritising, time management and task-switching.

**PROCESSING & COMMUNICATION**
May need extra time, clear language and direct explanations, especially when information is complex.

**SENSORY & EMOTIONAL REGULATION**
Noise, bright lights, busy spaces, unexpected changes or stress may affect concentration and regulation.

LOOK BEYOND THE DIAGNOSIS

People living with FASD have individual strengths, interests and ambitions. These may include creativity, practical skills, enthusiasm, visual learning, attention to detail in familiar tasks, empathy and a strong desire to contribute. Focus on the individual, not assumptions about the diagnosis.

## Recruitment: make the process accessible

- Use clear, straightforward language in job descriptions and application materials. Explain the actual duties and distinguish essential from desirable requirements.
- Explain the interview format in advance. Ask clear, direct questions, avoid several questions at once and allow additional processing time.
- Consider practical demonstrations or work-based assessments where appropriate. Offer reasonable adjustments for interviews and assessments.
- Give applicants an opportunity to discuss support needs. Difficulty performing in a conventional interview does not necessarily reflect ability to do the job.

## Induction: build confidence through clarity

- Provide a written or visual induction plan and introduce new tasks gradually. Demonstrate tasks rather than relying only on verbal explanations.
- Identify a named supervisor or workplace buddy, explain routines and safety procedures, and schedule regular check-ins.
- Repeat information without judgement and allow time to become familiar with routines. A quiet space may help if someone becomes overwhelmed.
- Be aware of masking: someone may work hard to hide difficulties or appear to be coping, which can be exhausting.

Remember: FASD is not an indication of a person's intelligence, motivation, commitment or potential.

### THE MANAGER'S QUICK CHECKLIST

- **Have I explained it clearly?** Use plain language and one instruction at a time.
- **Have I allowed time?** Pause so the person can process and respond.
- **Have I demonstrated the task?** Show the task as well as describing it.
- **Have I checked understanding?** Invite them to explain or show the next step.
- **Have I considered the environment?** Check noise, interruptions and sensory demands.
- **Have I asked what would help?** Agree practical adjustments with the employee.

# PRACTICAL SUPPORT THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Start with the person. Ask what helps. Agree adjustments together.

## Everyday workplace adjustments

### CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Give direct, specific instructions. Break tasks into steps. Follow verbal instructions in writing. Check understanding without making the employee feel tested.

### MEMORY & ORGANISATION

Use checklists, visual reminders, task planners and calendar prompts. Keep procedures easy to find. Explain changes to priorities.

### SENSORY ENVIRONMENT

Where practical, reduce unnecessary noise, adjust lighting, consider a quieter workspace and provide access to a calm break area.

### ROUTINE & FATIGUE

Consider predictable hours, advance notice of shift changes, regular breaks, flexible start times or a phased introduction where appropriate.

## When behaviour or performance becomes a concern

Behaviour may be influenced by neurological differences, processing difficulties, sensory overload, anxiety or emotional regulation - not necessarily deliberate non-compliance. Behaviour is communication. Explore what may be happening before reaching conclusions.

- Stay calm, give time to process and discuss concerns privately. Be clear about what happened and what is expected.
- Check whether instructions were understood, agreed adjustments are working and the environment or task can be changed.
- Some people may experience confabulation: gaps in memory may be unintentionally filled with information that is not accurate. This is not necessarily deliberate dishonesty.
- In formal meetings, use clear questions, avoid leading questions, provide information in writing and check understanding. Follow fair procedures and applicable representation rights.

## Privacy, dignity and individual choice

Not everyone will want to disclose a diagnosis. Do not pressure an employee to share personal medical information. Treat information confidentially, discuss support needs respectfully and involve the employee in decisions about adjustments. A person may be able to explain what helps them without disclosing their full medical history.

## Your responsibilities and possible supports in Ireland

### REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

The Employment Equality Acts 1998, as amended, include disability among the protected grounds. Section 16 addresses appropriate measures for employees and prospective employees with disabilities, unless providing them would impose a disproportionate burden. Consider requests individually and seek HR or legal advice where needed.

### WORK AND ACCESS

The Department of Social Protection's Work and Access programme may help eligible people and employers reduce workplace barriers. Supports can include workplace needs assessments, in-work support, equipment or workplace adaptations and disability inclusion training. Eligibility and approval criteria apply.

## BRING FASD AWARENESS INTO YOUR WORKPLACE

FASD Ireland provides awareness education and training for employers, HR professionals, managers and workplace teams. Contact us to discuss how we can help your organisation build understanding and create a more inclusive workplace.

FASD Hub Ireland: 065 670 3098 | Website: www.fasdireland.ie

Further information: FASD Ireland - Employers | Workplace Adjustments | Work and Access | IHREC | WRC

This factsheet provides general information, not legal or employment advice. Workplace adjustments should be discussed with the individual and considered in the context of the role, the person's needs and applicable law.