

CAN-ASC-1.1 Draft Standard on Employment: Worktopia Network Recommendations

[Worktopia](#) is a national network with a shared goal to change the odds of employment success for neurodivergent people. Membership includes representatives from across the employment ecosystem.

Through social media and emails to members, Worktopia organizers invited email feedback on the draft Standards to inform our submission. As well, a virtual conversation on Zoom with several members took place on October 4th. This submission synthesizes member feedback into four recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Highlight and Amplify Systemic Approaches using Universal Design Principles

Language used in the standards to describe processes specific to a person with a disability (accommodations, disclosure, disability management systems, and undue hardship) can be “othering” and have the unintended consequence of reinforcing unconscious biases.

Several sections in the standards refer to systemic approaches, including Section 1.2 Long Range Objective “to establish and maintain accessible, inclusive, barrier-free and discrimination-free employment for all people, irrespective of whether the worker lives with (a) disability(ies)”. Incorporating universal design into this objective and more broadly in the standards overall could be beneficial. We recommend enhancing the Long-range objective to be “The objective is for organizations to effectively manage the diverse spectrum of human needs through systemic, proactive approaches grounded in universal design that result in accessible, inclusive, barrier-free and discrimination-free employment for all people, irrespective of whether the worker lives with (a) disability(ies).”

Universal design (for workplaces) is defined in Section 4 as “the process of designing an environment that can be accessed, understood, and whose use can be maximized by all workers regardless of age, size, ability, or disability”. However, beyond the definition there is only one other reference to universal design in the draft Standards.

More emphasis on Universal Design approaches may better promote accessibility and inclusion. In their research paper, *Diamond in the rough? An “empty review” of research into “neurodiversity” and a road map for developing the inclusion agenda*¹, Doyle and McDowall (2022) suggest that:

“The neurodiversity paradigm is yet to make an evidence-informed impact on organizational practice. To advance practice whilst awaiting the development of specific research, we propose applying “Universal Design”; a set of principles about justice, flexibility and simplicity, currently aimed at increasing the accessibility of buildings and technology (The Centre for Universal Design, 1997) to HR processes. Our overarching premise is to ensure inclusive practice throughout the employment lifecycle to pre-empt (rather than remediate) exclusion and bias embedding activities”.

Recommendation 2

Promote Accountability by Including the Requirement to Appoint Accessibility Officers into Accessibility Legislation

Privacy legislation requires organizations to appoint someone who is responsible for their privacy management program as part of the legislation's accountability framework. The public's current awareness of privacy management is in part due to the appointment of a Privacy Officer in all organizations. Accessibility awareness and practice would elevate through the appointment of Accessibility Officers responsible for ensuring accessibility throughout organizations. We encourage Accessible Canada to consider recommending that legislation mandate the appointment of an Accessibility Officer in order to prompt a big shift forward in accessibility.

Recommendation 3

Consult Further on Extending Probationary Periods

We are concerned that Section 7.5 d), which seeks to "establish that the typical probationary period begins only when appropriate accommodations have been made", could have negative consequences. A longer probationary period may delay an employee's eligibility for the benefits available to them through the full employment contract, putting them at a disadvantage due to their disability. The aim of a probationary period is to bring an effective employee on board. People are most effective when appropriate accommodations are in place, so it is imperative that accommodations be addressed in a timely manner, and that employees not be penalized for performance limitations that could be addressed through appropriate accommodations.

Recommendation 4

Create Communication Products that are Easy to Understand and Action

The standards are not very accessible because they are long and the language is dense (complex and heavily packed with information). When sharing information on the standards broadly with the public, create communication products that are easy to understand and action.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Amy Lonsberry at info@worktopia.ca or 587-316-8383

¹ Nancy Doyle and Almuth McDowall. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal. Vol. 41 No 3, 2022 pp. 352-382. Emerald Publishing Limited 2040-7149. DOI 10.1108/EDI-06-2020-0172