

## **How You See me, How You Don't:**

**A specification and workflow for the production of an interface to create a new, low-friction customisable CV to make the workplace more accessible to autistic people**

**A Green Paper from Mycelium**

**(<https://wordpress.com/page/rogueinterrobang.com/236>)**

Coordinated by Mycelium and produced as part of Aaron Swartz Day 2017

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### **Note from the authors**

The ideas within it are intended to be worked upon and developed, to produce a digital tool that improves individuals' lives and makes workplaces more inclusive and effective.

Everything here can be developed and modified freely provided that what is built upon it remains open. It should be an overriding principle of all such development that autistic voices override all others. In particular, the authors request that the terminology used to refer to autistic people be retained in accordance with the notes contained here. Thank you.

## **Call to action**

Calls to action usually come at the end, but that is a really bad place for them. We want you to read this document knowing what it is we are asking from you. Which is this.

- Developers – we are looking for anyone who might be interested in taking this forward and who has the skills to do so to work on turning this specification into an app.
- Employers – we would love you to agree to pilot this.
- Members of the autistic community – we would love you to be involved with the pilot also, telling everyone involved in development what works and more important what doesn't.
- Anyone else – please spread this as far afield as you can so that more people have a chance to be involved.

## **Abstract**

In the UK, only 16% of autistic adults are in employment. This figure is a result of the inaccessibility of workplaces, and the inaccessibility of the recruitment procedures that allow access into those work places.

Yet we live in a time when the challenges facing businesses, organizations, and society are changing at a pace we have never seen before, and with a potential reach of impact we have never seen before. Never has society more needed to use all its available resources, and never has it more needed different, and better ways of thinking. It is accepted again and again that diverse workplaces make better decisions, are more adaptable, and are more likely to meet challenges more effectively, yet barriers to diversity in the workplace remain stubbornly high. This paper outlines a solution to one of these barriers – the accessibility of recruitment and retention for autistic people.

## **Introductory Notes**

Terminology and assumptions. This paper uses the phrasing “autistic person” as opposed to “person with autism” or “person on the autism spectrum” and does not use “functioning labels”. In both cases this reflects the usage of the autistic people who were central to drawing up the document as well as the preferred usage of the autistic community from which the idea for the paper emerged. Others may refer to themselves using other language as is their right. The purpose of this paper is to enable the greater autonomy and flourishing of autistic people in the workplace and in that spirit the use of other terminology by those outside the autistic community is discouraged.

This paper is largely underpinned by the social model of disability, which sees many of the roots of people’s disabled lives as the result of obstacles created by the way society – in this case the world of work – has been structured, and which sees it as the primary role of advocacy to restructure society so as to remove as many of those barriers as possible.

The approach here is to be upfront about accommodations you might need. This is not to suggest that this approach is best for everyone. What you disclose, to whom, and when, is entirely your business. But many autistic people know that in order for employment to work for them in the long term their needs have to be met. This tool provides a way of doing that at minimal cost in terms of executive function and emotional labour.

## Outline

The purpose is to create a customisable CV that

- Minimises the executive function that needs to be spent on applying for jobs for autistic people (and so maximises the resources available to be used in work)
- Presents peoples' skills to employers in a way that is most useful to employers, and suggests ways of interviewing applicants that will enable them best to demonstrate those skills.
- Ensures that autistic applicants understand the skills that an employer actually requires (and does not have to interpret socially coded presentations of these needs); and ensures that employers understand exactly what accommodations autistic workers need in order to be able to do the job that needs to be done.
- Uses this information to create a commitment to provide accommodations, and a plan for doing so, once someone has been hired.

This is achieved by implementing a tool that integrates the following elements:

- A database for people to
  - Enter skills they possess, in language that is most meaningful to them;
  - Tag (potentially multiple times) those skills with the terms employers most frequently use (through a “translation” interface that “decodes” the terms most frequently used in job specifications;
  - Provide examples of those skills;
  - Explain any accommodations they may need in order to be able best to use those skills;
  - Identify the method through which they would best be able to demonstrate those skills for selection purposes;
  - State preferred communication method – this would be pulled through to all communication with the employer;
  - Enter a list of potential referees, along with the person's relation to them; and
  - Do all of these things only once – with the option to update as often as needed, but without the need to customise as customisation is “pulled” from the employer's side.
- An employer portal to create a customised job specification that will interact with this database to produce a CV tailored to the position by
  - Allowing employers to specify those skills essential to the position;
  - Encouraging employers to think about the way in which skills are used in order to carry out the job by
    - Illustrating ways in which autistic applicants may be disadvantaged and
    - Suggesting alternative ways that the same skill might be used to produce the same results without those disadvantages;
  - Enabling employers to rewrite the required skills so as to explain exactly what they need (in the light of the above suggestions);
  - Enabling employers to consider possible accommodations in advance;
  - Allowing the addition of free text questions that ask applicants for task-specific information not covered elsewhere such as qualifications or specialised skills.

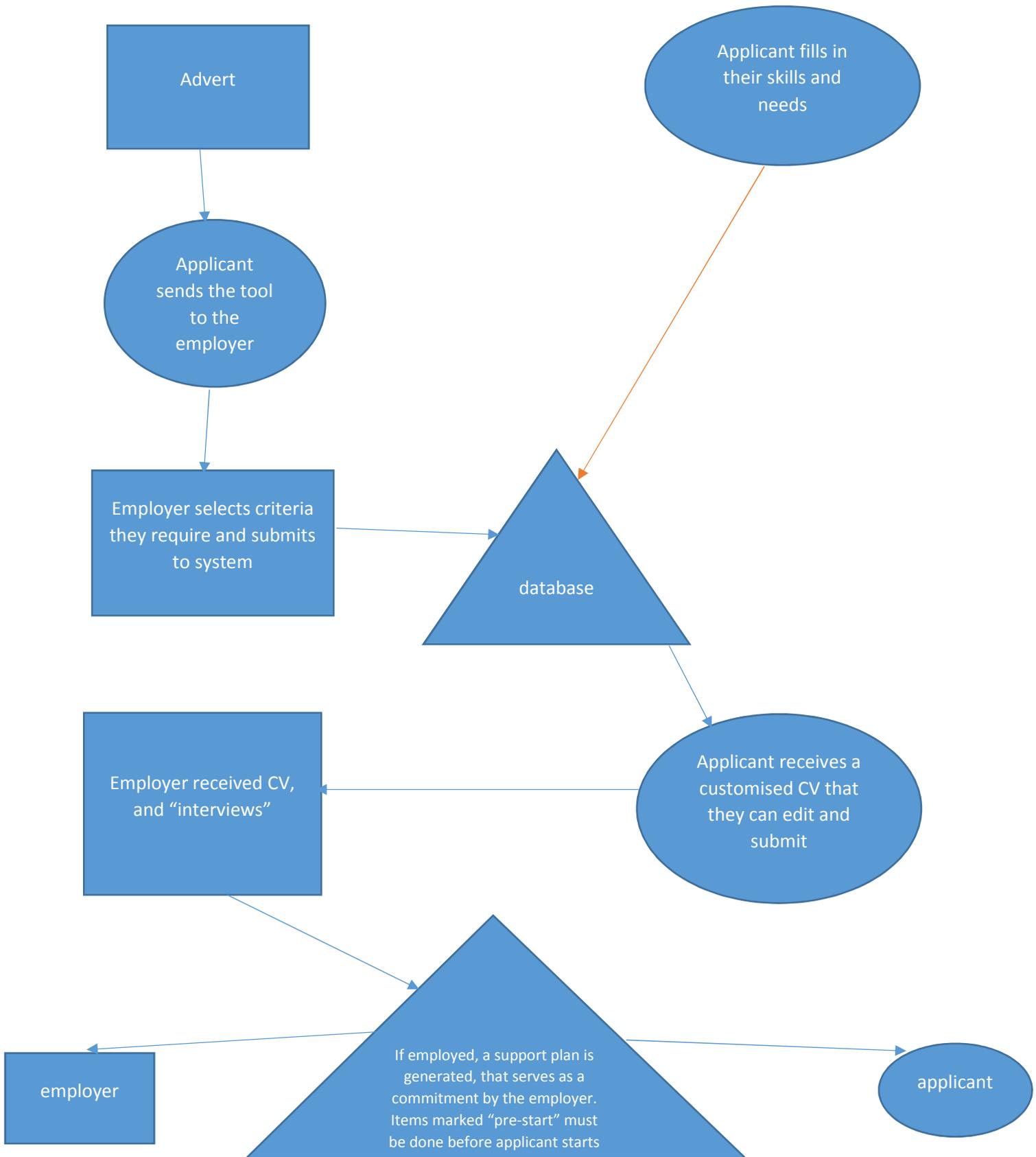
- An editing and submitting process that requires the minimum of effort but allows the maximum of autonomy so that an applicant can make changes to the customised CV produced by the interface including adding accommodations needed as a result of seeing the specific details of the job specification, and can choose not to request accommodations at any stage of the process should they wish to proceed in that way (the basic principle should be followed that if a request is made and agreed to it should be binding upon the person who has made the request, but that a request “not made” can be made subsequently), but so that it is anticipated they will need to make few changes if any (other than responding to the minimal number of specific questions)
- An engine that combines these other elements into documents, specifically:
  - A clear, customised job specification for applicants that makes clear what skills are required, the context in which they are required, and the different ways they could be used in order to achieve the desired results;
  - A customised CV for employers that clearly provides evidence of the skills requested, answers to specific questions, guidance on the best way to assess each skill, and any requests for accommodations that might be needed in relation to the skills specified or generally in the workplace;
  - A support plan, generated once the applicant has been appointed. This would consist of the accommodations outlined in the CV.

It is important to note that the above model contains a number of actions that are required on the employer’s behalf. Corresponding to this, the following two points are important:

- It is important for advocates to make the case for the value of this process to employers so that they will be willing to put in this effort. It is not felt that this case is fundamentally different from the case for any adjustment in the workplace.
- From a prospective employee’s point of view it is essential to know that a commitment to diversity is one that will be borne out in action rather than simply appearing in a mission statement. The damage from undelivered promises can be immense. For autistic individuals, who will often have a literal understanding of verbal communication, this damage can be even greater.

### Workflow

This illustrates how the tool would work in practice. Ovals represent actions from the applicant, rectangles those from the employer, and triangles those parts that are done by the software.



This workflow requires the development of

- A portal for applicants to enter information into a database
- A portal for employers to create a job specification customised so as to interact with the database
- An edit/submit interface for applicants to review the customised job specification and associated customised CV
- An interface through which employers can view and interact with (reject/interview/appoint) the CV
- Templates for job description, CV, and support plan
- Software that enables these parts to work together.

The iterations and discussions that led to this paper generated the following thoughts on the format of the first five of each of these sections.

### **Applicant portal**

This is how information enters the database. It should be designed so as to

- Minimises the call on executive function, following these principles
  - Enter information only once (but be able to tag multiply).
  - Be able to enter information in small chunks at any time.
  - Be able to edit/add to existing information very easily.
- Tags information in such a way that it can be most fully and most usefully extracted by the software that produces a CV from it that will help employers

These tables suggest the layouts the different screens needed for each portal should take. The instructions in each box combined with the information in the appendices should provide a sufficient basis for initial prototyping

**Table 1 Home**

|                     |
|---------------------|
| Enter skill         |
| Enter accommodation |
| Edit skill          |
| Edit accommodation  |

**Table 2 Enter Skills**

| <b>Skill</b>   | <b>examples</b>  | <b>Demonstrate by</b>  | <b>tags</b>  | <b>Accommodation</b>   |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Here you would enter information about a skill you possess | Here you would be able to explain that skill, give examples in text that illustrate how you have used it, and provide links to anywhere online that may illustrate, for example, a project you have been involved in (there could be an upload button for photos, reports, essays etc) | Rank in order as many of these as you would be happy with, indicating how you would like the prospective employer to assess your skill <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interview</li> <li>- Pre-prepared work</li> <li>- Task carried out at home</li> <li>- Task carried out on site</li> <li>- Materials provided here</li> </ul> | Here you would tag the categories under which you would like this skill to appear – that way, when an employer asks for the tagged skill, everything with that tag will be pulled together. You can tag as many times as possible. If an employer has requested more than one skill that you have used as a tag for something, it will appear under that skill ranked highest by the employer, with a note saying “also...” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Written communication</li> <li>- IT skills</li> </ul><br>After each there will be a “what does this mean?” button – if you click the button, it would explain in non-jargon what an employer is usually looking for when they reference that skill – e.g. “self-management” would say “This is about being able to complete tasks with deadlines, about being able to prioritise your workload, and being able to schedule different tasks in your diary so that each is completed when it needs to be” | Do you need any accommodations to help you fully use this skill. For example, under “spoken communication” you might note that if you are able to pre-prepare your script you excel at giving presentations, asking questions, or negotiating, but you can struggle with answering open questions or giving immediate answers. |

**Table 3 Enter Accommodation**

These are more general accommodations than the task-specific ones

| <b>Environment</b>  | <b>Task</b>  | <b>Accommodation</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| Are there particular environmental needs you have such as working alone, a lack of fluorescent lighting, avoiding electrical noises ( <b>further work:</b> might we want prompts? Would these help people remember things they need or would they mean people are less likely to remember important things that aren't on the list) | Are there task-based things that need particular accommodations, for example do you need instructions to be written not spoken | What is it that you need in order to flourish at this task or in this environment? |

**Tables 4 & 5 – Edits**

Further work: how should accommodations and skills be listed so as to make them most easily accessible for editing? Should there be a search function? I would imagine that “clicking” would reopen the original data entry portal.

## Portal for Employers

| Skill    | Needed? | Accessibility note  | What if...   | Explanation  | Rank  |
|----------|---------|---|--|--|---|
| teamwork | y/n     | <p>Many autistic people have difficulties with face to face social interaction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They need time to process and respond to information so as to give their very best response</li> <li>- They can find it difficult to interpret social codes and “rules” that are not explicitly conveyed.</li> <li>- Often autistic people are overwhelmed by sensory input from sound, light, smell, and touch. So a busy office, or social gatherings can be difficult.</li> <li>- These factors combine to make, say, coffee breaks very difficult and can lead to people feeling and being excluded</li> </ul> | <p>What is it that you need the team to do?</p> <p>Could this be achieved by communication that was electronic – this would allow a person to consider their answers fully?</p> <p>Could this role be carried out remotely, or in a quiet room?</p> <p>Could you think about the elements of day to day office life that are key to this role and draw up instructions to make them easier to understand?</p> <p>Could you think about the way tasks are handed out, and how praise is given? Could it be more focussed on how tasks are performed and less on participation in activities that are not part of those tasks?</p> <p>Could you think differently about what actually makes someone a valuable team member? Is performing key tasks you all rely on exceptionally well actually really valuable?</p> | <p>Enter text here about what you really want from this skill, how you think about what it means for the job</p> | <p>Rank how important this skill is compared to the others – this will enable the information presented to you to be given in the clearest way possible</p> |

Employers would need boxes to ask and pull through information in relation to the following

- Referees – how many referees, and what relationship each referee should have to the applicant
- Additional questions – so that job-specific knowledge, for example, could be requested
- The closing date and time – this would create a firm deadline after which the system would not allow the flow of documents

## **Templates and interfaces for job specification, CV, and support plan**

### **Job Specification**

The job specification would be generated in response to the employer's input. It will be sent simultaneously to the employer and the applicant. It should be noted that this is not the job specification that would accompany the advert for the post, and so does not need detailed background information. It is, rather, designed to convey clearly and completely the information that the employer has requested from applicants, including clarifications of language and the manner in which skills need to be deployed. It should, therefore, be as clear and simple as possible.

### **CV and applicant's edit/submit interface**

A draft CV is generated by the software in response to the job specification. The format will follow that of the job specification, listing the skills required by the employer in order of ranking and the ways in which the applicant demonstrates those skills along with examples and any accommodations (to this extent it would look like a "skills-based" CV, but it would not have extraneous information). There will also be spaces to respond to specific questions from the employer.

Ideally the CV and the editing capability should be as simple to use as possible – integrated to the extent that they do not require keeping multiple windows open or toggling from window to window, but with enough distinction that an applicant will not make large irreversible edits (there should be a "reopen original" button for safety) or submit before ready.

The ideal format would be a CV that appears as a sheet that looks like the final document where all the pulled-through answers are editable separately by clicking on them, opening a small textbox window that will allow the applicant to add, amend, or delete, with a "save changes" button. Each text box should contain a "revert to original" option for maximum simplicity should the applicant wish to change a decision. The same principle should apply to the empty text boxes for answering specific questions.

There would also be a list of general accommodations pulled through from the database, and a blank space for "anything else". These would be editable on the same basis.

There would be a box with a list of the referees in the applicant's database and the number and kind of referees requested by the employer. Applicants could select the relevant referees or "add new".

At the very end would be a checklist along with a submit button. It is important that this not be too detailed or confusing but that it give the opportunity to ensure key information has not been missed. The recommendation is that this should take the form of a question, "the following boxes are blank. Is that right?" followed by a list of those free text boxes left empty – there should be an option to submit the form with empty boxes.

**Further work:** would a “hold for now” button be useful? That is to say, you would submit, and if you did nothing further the CV would be sent to the employer after 24 hours (or some specified time that could not be after the closing date), but at any time in that window you could go back and edit.

### **Employer’s edit interface**

After receiving the CV back, employers would carry on the recruitment process largely offline, but the following would still be driven by the tool:

- Selection format. The employer’s “receiving” interface would have a button for “collate recommended selection practice” that would draw together all the ways in which the candidate has indicated they would find it most helpful to be assessed. This could then form the basis of an actual assessment procedure plan or it could be modified – there should be a box alongside the requested assessment method for employers to answer the question “how was this assessed?” by selecting “as requested” or completing a free text box.
- Support plan. In order to generate a support plan that can be considered “agreed” so as to be implemented proactively (which should always be the gold standard, with accommodations not needing to be asked for again or the subject of reminders), the employer needs to “sign off” the CV if the applicant is appointed.
- **Further work:** should this sign-off process include scope for one round of negotiation? That is to say, would it be reasonable/feasible for an employer to say “I might not be able to accommodate this but I can offer you this instead?” On a similar note, might it be the case that general accommodations need specifying? That is to say, if an applicant has said they need to be in a place without fluorescent lighting, is it sufficient for that simply to be “signed off” or should there be a separate process that sees detail put into that request – “you will be working in... for 80% of the time, and the lighting is... There may be requirements for meetings in a room with fluorescent lights but we would seek to turn lights off where possible and there would be a maximum time for meetings to last”?

### **Support Plan**

This would be generated once the applicant is appointed. It would pull together all the information about accommodations and be considered “agreed” (subject, as stated earlier, to the condition that it would not prevent the applicant making subsequent requests). Accommodations needed on a day to day basis would be put in place before the appointed applicant starts work.

**Further work:** what would need to be done in order to create this document in the form of a timeline that would be maximally beneficial to employers whilst creating minimum demand on applicants?

## Appendix 1 – list of skills

Research found these skills to be the ones most likely requested by employers. Inclusion of them all as tags would minimise the custom element to CVs and specifications. **Further work** is needed on most common adaptations in relation to skills, and translations of skills into non-coded language that will enable an autistic applicant most usefully to tag their skills.

To be listed in both employer and applicant portals, but the right hand column information, which would be displayed (**further work**: how – in a window, or a pop-up-on-hover?) would give potential applicants information that would enable them to tag something with a skill more accurately.

| Skill                     | Explanation   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Written communication     |   |
| Spoken communication      |   |
| problem solving           |   |
| initiative and enterprise |   |
| planning and organising   |   |
| self-management           | This is about being able to complete tasks with deadlines, about being able to prioritise your workload, and being able to schedule different tasks in your diary so that each is completed when it needs to be |
| learning                  |   |
| technology                |   |
| reading                   |   |
| maths                     |   |
| Project management        |   |
| leadership/management     |   |
| interpersonal             |   |
| commercial awareness      |   |
| analysis                  |   |
| flexibility               |   |
| languages                 |   |
| negotiating               |   |
| creativity                |   |
| Decision making           |   |
| Customer service          |   |

Self-management is the example explained above. This is a task autistic people can struggle with in some workplaces because many managers can use very unclear language when explaining the priority of a task when it is given, and even more unclear language when two tasks are given. A note would be given to employers about this task explaining this, and asking them to consider giving clear deadlines, and instructions such as “complete this task before beginning that task”. Likewise, applicants could add a note to this skill to the effect that they would need clear instructions that are not then changed until the task is completed; or that they would

benefit from a weekly (maybe online) meeting at which tasks for the week were prioritised and scheduled – that way changes in a longer schedule could be accommodated but not become overwhelming because you know that they will only be made at this one time.

This kind of note would then become “locked in” as part of a support plan if the applicant is hired.