

# Managing a centralised workplace adjustments budget

Diversity and Ability



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# About us

NHS Employers is the employers' organisation for the NHS in England. We support workforce leaders and represent employers to develop a sustainable workforce and be the best employers they can be. We also manage the relationships with NHS trade unions on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

# Introduction

Workplace adjustments are crucial to creating inclusive environments in which all staff can thrive. While an anticipatory approach will benefit all staff, managing a centralised budget to provide these adjustments can be challenging and can require careful thought and decision-making.

This guidance explores the essential considerations for effectively managing a centralised workplace adjustments budget. Drawing on lived experiences, it delves into the challenges, best practices and key principles to ensure that your organisation can provide the necessary adjustments for disabled employees while maintaining financial sustainability.

# Key benefits to centralising your workplace adjustments budget

## It creates a safe, inclusive environment for all

If you choose to prioritise making adjustments for your employees alongside being anticipatory in your approach and inclusive by design, you can expect to see a number of positive outcomes:

- People feel welcomed from day one.
- Barriers are removed before people need to ask for support or declare a disability.
- A sense of care for the wellbeing of staff.
- A safe environment for people to declare needs.
- Less ‘othering’ and more accepting staff, destigmatising disability and accessing support.
- Benefits for everyone and everyone enabled to explore new ways of working.
- Everyone is encouraged to ‘be themselves’ and fulfil their potential to the benefit of themselves and the organisation.
- A pipeline of untapped talent in the workplace in a recruitment shortfall.

## A streamlined experience

Our recent research uncovered some frustration with how long the processes can be to get workplace adjustments in place. Here are some advantages to taking the approaches discussed in this report:

- Having site licences and service level agreements in place makes access to specialist support quicker.
- Procurement options and partnership agreements should make ordering and the implementing of the adjustments quicker.
- Having a clear, visual process helps staff and their line managers feel confident in what the workplace adjustments process is and how to access support.

# Key considerations for managing your centralised budget

## Allow for larger initial costs

During the initial period of having a centralised workplace adjustments budget, it is worth over-budgeting to account for 'startup' costs. Below are some examples of the extra costs that might be incurred during this time:

1. **Inclusive spaces:** dedicate some of the budget to creating inclusive spaces in your work environment. For example, a quiet workspace, a sensory breakout space, appropriate wheelchair access etc. Once these are developed, most ongoing maintenance and upgrades should be minimal.
2. **Know the reality of your current situation:** take time to assess what you already have in place in your organisation and where the gaps might be. Consider partnering with a representative from your disability network and/or external specialists. Include the voice of disabled staff. Don't underestimate the time and resources you might need to do this effectively.
3. **Set up service level agreements:** allocate time to establish service level agreements and partnerships both internally and externally. Some examples of this include:
  - collaborating with your IT and privacy teams to agree which assistive software is appropriate for your systems
  - researching external services that you would like to engage with to provide support, such as interpreting services, workplace

coaching and assistive technology training or disability inclusion training

- setting up your working agreements
- working with central procurement to agree suppliers that can be engaged with directly to order specialist equipment such as ergonomic office equipment and noise cancelling headphones. Aim to streamline this process so that the budget holder can sign off on these orders quickly and efficiently.

**4. Audit your communications:** make sure the process for workplace adjustments and information around this is accessible for all:

- Is the body of the text at least a size 12 sans serif font for written documents?
- Are those documents accessible for screen readers?
- Do you have braille or larger font documents available?
- Do your digital resources avoid a white background with black writing?
- Do your images have alt-text?
- Is the process laid out in a visual, accessible format?

**5. Consider your recruitment process:** work with HR and an external specialist to assess how inclusive your recruitment process is. Recruitment is the first stage of an employee's journey with your organisation, by embedding inclusive practices at the very start you can attract a diverse pool of talent.

- Make sure interview adjustments can be made. This can include:
- assessment information available in different formats

- consideration on the timing of the interview as there may be care or travel needs
- preparing to allow for extra processing time or rest breaks
- sending interview questions in advance.

During this initial set-up phase, you should get an idea of what adjustments you can offer and how many disabled employees you might expect to be supporting. This will help predict and manage the future budget requirements. One strategy for this is to create packages of support for barriers that you see are common. For example, if someone presents with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), you might suggest a typical package of noise-cancelling headphones, access to different workspaces, organisational software and regular movement breaks. However, everyone is individual and no two people will have the same needs, it is always important to listen to each individual. Packages like this may help you understand those ongoing costs. It might also help some initial support to be in place swiftly while you discuss the more focused support needed with the individual.

## Know your ongoing costs

Once you have everything set up, there will be ongoing costs involved with providing workplace adjustments:

### **Assistive technology:**

- It is worthwhile speaking with companies to decide whether a site licence would be appropriate for certain pieces of software, such as Read&Write or MindView. This can really reduce costs compared with individual licences and also makes the process to access the software more efficient. This would mean ongoing annual costs.
- It is worth noting that there are some great accessibility features included with Microsoft Office and lots of free options that can



be explored.

- It is recommended to have options for quality speech-to-text and text-to-speech software, a mind-mapping tool and an organisational/project management tool as a minimum offering.

### **Specialist equipment:**

- As previously indicated, equipment will need to be ordered for people who need it.
- For some low-cost, smaller items such as ergonomic keyboards, noise cancelling headphones or large monitors, consider if your budget will allow you to have some stock in place so that staff can access them quickly.

### **Specialist support:**

- If service level agreements can be made with external support services, such as workplace coaching, mental health support, assistive technology training, and British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters for events and meetings, this can make the process much more efficient for disabled employees to engage with.
- You can communicate clearly who your usual suppliers are. This doesn't necessarily mean you cannot consider others, but these will be the options with minimal processing time.

### **Annual review:**

- Carry out a review of your workplace adjustments offering annually to inform your practice and budget predictions. Listen to user feedback and improve services where necessary.
- Once all your processes and communications are clear, consider where some budget might be used to provide more depth of support and going beyond obligatory into best practice.

### **Training:**

- It is important to train staff on understanding disability and the process to apply for workplace adjustments. This is an ongoing process as staff change regularly and refreshing knowledge will be important. Ideally, this training can be delivered to all staff, but prioritise line managers and those who disabled staff are likely to disclose to, so that there is consistency in experience when someone is experiencing barriers.

## Assessment costs

One big decision is whether to support the cost of private neurodiversity assessments, such as for specific learning differences (SpLD), autism and ADHD. The advantage of providing this is that an employee could access the assessments they need much sooner than if they went through their GP. However, there are many things to consider:

- This is not a small cost and will not be covered by the government's Access to Work funding.
- An individual should not feel that they must have a diagnosis in order to get support, it is the characteristics that are protected by the Equality Act 2010, not the diagnosis. This should always be the choice of the individual.
- You will need to consider the criteria for which an individual might access this in order to manage your budget. Open conversations can help to see what support can be put in place first.

## Larger cost considerations

Every individual is different and for some, the costs incurred to have the right adjustments may be higher. For example, someone may need a personal assistant in order to access certain spaces, ongoing workplace coaching or a BSL interpreter for all meetings and events.

In this scenario, it is worth engaging the government's Access to Work funding. Large organisations need to provide the first £1,000 of support and then the Access to Work funding will help with costs beyond that. D&A has guidance on how to access this (see appendices). As mentioned above, assessment costs are not included in this funding.

**Key highlights and actions from this section:**

- Allow extra budget early on in order to get everything in place and running as effectively as possible.
- Keep track of spending in order to inform future budget requirements. Get an idea of how many people you are supporting and which requests are likely to come up often.
- Remember that some adjustments are cost effective and easy to implement, such as flexible working times and software features that are already available in Word.
- Engage with external specialists and partners you can order from.
- Have some smaller items of specialist equipment in stock if possible.
- Engage with Access to Work funding when you feel the costs will go well beyond the £1,000 mark (not including assessment costs).

# Challenges

It is important to understand some of the challenges an organisation can experience when considering how workplace adjustments will be provided.

## Budget constraints

We can often be faced with limited resources, making it challenging to allocate sufficient funds for implementing workplace adjustments at an individual team level.

## Changing needs

Adjustments can vary greatly and may change over time, making it difficult to predict budget requirements. As the conversation around workplace adjustments develops, you may find there is an influx of people ready to share their requirements. It is also important to remember that an individual may identify as disabled at any time, so you cannot depend upon people only declaring a disability during recruitment, for example.

## Legal compliance

Your organisation must comply with discrimination laws such as the Equality Act 2010. This mandates that disability is a protected characteristic and workplace adjustments must be made, but no budgetary limits are identified.

## Equity concerns

It is important to ensure that all disabled staff across the organisation have fair and equal access to adjustments, while acknowledging that the most equitable way to do this is to treat everyone as the unique individuals that they are. This can make

managing a restricted budget and predicting budget requirements  
challenging.

## Misconceptions

There is often a misconception that adjustments are hard to implement, can cost a lot of money, are not doable or will fail to make the definition of being a 'reasonable' adjustment. This report looks at ways to challenge these misconceptions by streamlining both the process and the costs involved.

# Best practices for implementing adjustments

This section of the report offers recommendations for implementing and communicating how you will be managing your workplace adjustments budget and the processes that sit alongside it.

## Creating the right culture

Our research suggests that best practice in facilitating workplace adjustments sits within a culture or approach that views adapting environments and providing equipment as the norm or as an everyday occurrence. All such adjustments would make life easier and almost always benefit a wider range of individuals than the specific recipient for whom they were originally intended (e.g. accessible toilets).

Conversations and requests for adjustments are encouraged, whether staff have shared a specific diagnosis, disclosed a disability, or not. In the workplace, adjustments can range from small adjustments like providing a desk by a window, which can make a huge difference to the individual recipient. Adjustments are not always large scale. The more managers and staff see this as an everyday occurrence, the more buy-in there will be.

A useful tool to facilitate this culture is to use a disability ‘passport’ that allows individuals to describe their best way of working and what they need without having to disclose personal details, unless they would like to. It provides an individual with safety and enables them to share information on their terms, and change and adapt

their passport with their needs. One step further is to have this as a tool for everyone. This will allow all people to be focused on how they thrive, develop a sense of belonging and embrace intersectionality.

## Clear processes

It is important for managers and staff to be able to understand how to make requests to access the workplace adjustments budget to implement what they need. The more streamlined the process is for making and actioning requests, the better. For example, have as few steps as possible outlined on a flow chart, and a guidance document that clearly indicates expected timescales. Inclusion of named roles, rather than individual staff names, such as HR, the disability staff networks, occupational health, finance and any other key stakeholders will be useful in drawing up a process that works for individual organisations.

It is important to be clear and upfront about any thresholds or restrictions that you might need to be in place in order to keep within your budget.

It can be helpful to include the allocation of the work time needed to set up and manage the budget, so that this is integral to the role of the person responsible for the process. One option is to institute a minimum spend approach for the centralised budget. For example, the centralised budget deals with any adjustments over £100, whereas any adjustments below that amount go through the local department budget to speed up the process and discourage the need for occupational health sign off for simple or low-cost adjustments.

## Communication

The need to widely publicise the workplace adjustment process in as many ways as possible cannot be overemphasised. The process will be underused if no one knows about it, so it's important to consider disseminating the information in as many ways as possible:

- Top-down.
- Within teams.
- Staff networks and associations.
- Trade unions.
- People / HR teams.
- Organisational media.
- Posters.
- Newsletters.

This information should also be provided in as many formats as possible so that the whole process is accessible and anticipatory. For example:

- visual aids
- written documents that are screen-reader compliant
- printing on buff paper
- ensuring images have alt-text and image descriptions
- ensuring short videos are captioned
- having transcriptions available for any audio files.



# Line manager training and development

Well-informed and understanding line managers are another crucial aspect of implementing a successful centralised workplace adjustment budget. Underpinned by a clear, streamlined and effective process (see above), they are likely to be the first port of call for staff making the requests.

Some organisations may centralise the whole process and ensure all requests are made to a central point, such as an HR team, staff network or appointed panel. But it's important that line managers remain involved in these arrangements in order to successfully signpost when needed.

Where line managers process the requests themselves, either through a one-to-one conversation or some other context, they will need to be confident that they can conduct these competently, compassionately and be encouraging. This is likely to require further development and input.

It is unlikely that an individual seeking support will have an exhaustive list of what software / equipment is available or supportive for them. In many cases managers may know little or nothing about adaptive equipment, but it is the willingness to be supportive and anticipatory that is key. Often, the adjustments being requested can be more about flexible working times or requesting a designated quiet area. Sometimes, individuals may not know what they need at all. Continuous learning is to be expected and encouraged for both parties involved throughout the process. Confidence and sensitivity grows with experience.

Including EDI specialists, staff networks and disability buddy schemes can help strengthen the workplace adjustments process by involving expert experience, advice and advocacy. Buy-in is more likely if managers feel supported and have the benefits identified, within a clear and streamlined process.

**Key highlights and actions from this section:**

- Create the right culture by being inclusive by design.
- Create clear, streamlined processes that are communicated in an accessible way.
- Make sure line managers are well trained and supported to offer the right advice at the right time as well as to implement straight-forward adjustments that they can agree.

# Useful links and common acronyms

## Appendices

- [Passionate about Neurodiversity - Genius Within](#) - Information about neurodiversity (ND) and a place to find ND workplace coaching.
- [Your guide to the Access to Work \(AtW\) process \(diversityandability.com\)](#) - A video from Diversity and Ability to guide you through the Access to Work process.
- [Resources | D&A | Diversity and Ability](#) - A resources page that lists assistive software, including free options.
- [Understanding workplace adjustments infographic](#) - Access our infographic to find out about the different types of workplace adjustments that can help support disabled staff in their roles.
- [Guide to making workplace adjustments to support disabled staff](#) - Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a legal responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for disabled staff.
- [NHS Health passport](#) - This health passport allows individuals to record details about their disability, health condition or learning disability.

## Common acronyms

- SpLD: Specific learning differences
- ASD/C: Autistic Spectrum Disorder/Condition
- ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- SLA: Service level agreement
- BSL: British Sign Language
- GP: General practitioner

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