

Making workplace adjustments to support disabled staff

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.

Most workplace adjustments cost less than £100, whilst many cost nothing at all and simply require a change to a process or a policy.

The benefits of making reasonable adjustments

Whilst it is important to consider the legal context, putting in place some simple adjustments can have a positive impact on the wellbeing, experience and performance of the workforce.

Workplace adjustments can make an organisation a more attractive place to work and can contribute to the development of inclusive working environments and cultures by:

- Helping people to feel more valued, confident and supported in their job and in working towards their career aspirations.
- Improving employee engagement and staff experience, which in turn will increase staff retention.
- Providing higher levels of productivity and reducing levels of sickness absence.
- Reducing levels of harassment, bullying and abuse.
- Increasing understanding amongst senior leaders, managers and colleagues about diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace, which in turn, will help to improve patient care and outcomes.

What is a reasonable adjustment?

There are some factors which employers might want to consider when deciding which adjustments are reasonable:

- How effective the change will be in removing, reducing or preventing the barrier someone may experience.
- The practicality of making the adjustment.
- The cost of the adjustment.
- The employer's resources and size.
- The availability of external financial assistance.

As no two employers are the same, what may be reasonable for one employer, may not be for another. Regardless of these differences, the aim is to remove any substantial barrier that a person may experience in the recruitment process or within the workplace.

In some cases, individuals are asked for evidence of disability or evidence that a particular adjustment would be beneficial. There are some circumstances where this is required, but often, the cost of the adjustment is lower than the cost of the employer putting a request through an occupational health department. A general practitioner or occupational health referral can also delay the process significantly for the individual. It is not always necessary to insist on evidence where it is obvious that the adjustment would be beneficial.

What is a reasonable adjustment?



How to start implementing adjustments

Managers should use every opportunity to ask their staff whether they need any adjustments; this can be done through:

- One to one meetings
- Health and wellbeing conversations
- Keep in touch meetings (KIT), when people are off on long term leave (sickness and maternity)
- Appraisals
- Staff returns to work from absence
- Health passports
- Recruitment
- Onboarding and inducting staff

Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is recognised as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment or condition that is either visible or hidden, that has a substantial (more than trivial) and long-term (12 months or longer) impact on their ability to do normal daily activities. However, this definition can be perceived to contain negative language surrounding disability and might not reflect lived experiences of the disabled community. We believe in the social model of disability, that people are disabled by barriers in society and not by their impairment or difference.

Workplace adjustments are changes that are made to remove these barriers and allow disabled people to participate equally in all aspects of life. This can include changes to the physical environment, such as installing ramps or lifts, or changes to the way things are done, such as providing sign language interpreters or allowing flexible working hours.

Organisations have a legal duty to make workplace adjustments in the workplace for disabled staff and service users.

To begin the workplace adjustments process, it is important that employers consider the following questions:

- Can adjustments be made to the way in which the employer works and operates (defined as provision, criterion or practice under the legislation)?
- Can changes be made to the physical features of a workplace to overcome any barriers that may exist?
- Can extra equipment (auxiliary aids) or assistance (auxiliary service) be provided to support any staff?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has also produced some examples of workplace adjustments in practice.

Employers should consider adjustments for:

- individuals working for the organisation, for example alternative communication methods
- individuals applying for a job with the organisation, for example, giving more time to a candidate with dyslexia to do any written or reading tests that are part of the interview process
- individuals who tell an employer that they are thinking of applying for a job with them, for example alternative formats of the job advertisement if requested

Individual access needs can change over time and anyone can become disabled at any point in their lives. Therefore, employers should ensure they are aware of these changes and not make assumptions.

Employers will also need to consider adjustments for a range of people who will be working in a variety of capacities. For example:

- Permanent staff in clinical and non-clinical roles
- Bank staff
- Contractors
- Apprentices
- Students and doctors in speciality training (trainees) who may be on placement within the organisation

When placing students or trainees, consideration should be given to the individuals facing barriers that may potentially impact on their training. Placement providers will have a responsibility for assessing and implementing workplace adjustments if required.

The need to consider adjustments should not be a reason for not offering an otherwise suitable placement to a student or trainee.

The costs

The cost should be factored into decisions as to whether an adjustment is reasonable or not. Most workplace adjustments cost less than £100, whilst many cost nothing at all, and simply require a change to a process or a policy. For example, an employee with chronic fatigue syndrome may find it helpful to work from 8am to midday and then from 1.30pm to 5pm, so they can have a rest during the middle of the day.

Where costs are higher, assistance is available through the [Access to Work](#) scheme, which reimburses the costs of equipment, adaptations or support worker services. Organisations should familiarise themselves with the scheme, gain expertise and see the benefits it can bring to both the employee and the organisation.

The importance of a workplace adjustments policy

Organisations should ensure they provide clear guidance and have a comprehensive, equitable and practical workplace adjustments policy which outlines the step-by-step process for requesting workplace adjustments, examples of the support available and the role of different functions such as Human Resources (HR), occupational health and Information Technology (IT).

Many organisations have policies in place, some specific to workplace adjustments and some linked to absence or wellbeing policies. Some examples are:

- [Torbay and South Devon reasonable adjustment policy](#)
- [Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust reasonable adjustment policy](#)
- [Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust reasonable adjustments policy](#)

Raising awareness of workplace adjustments

Some measures can help to raise awareness of disability and workplace adjustments, for example:

- Include information on staff intranet pages about trust building sites such as disabled parking, lifts, doorways etc.
- Include information in staff and manager inductions about what resources are available to support staff with workplace adjustments, for instance health passport, access to work, disability and carer's leave and staff networks.
- Any team events (including out of hours) consider workplace adjustments.
- Disability and carer awareness training attended by teams rather than just optionally by individuals.
- Have signs at reception trust sites to show what equipment is available for physical meetings, such as hearing loops.
- Ask colleagues and external stakeholders prior to online meetings if anyone needs any workplace adjustments.

NHS Health passport

Employers may want to consider introducing a NHS health passport which allows individuals to easily record information about the individual barriers they face, and any workplace adjustments they may already have in place.

The passport helps to ensure there is a clear record and can be used with new line managers to explain what is needed in the workplace to help them carry out their role.

It may also be beneficial to use the support that your local occupational health team can offer to help improve staff wellbeing within your organisation.

Good practice videos

We have produced a suite of videos detailing individual stories of NHS staff who have received workplace support that has enabled them to thrive in their roles:

- [An introduction to inclusive recruitment in the workplace](#)
- [Paul Belk](#) - a payroll officer at Northumbria Healthcare and a wheelchair user with neurological differences.
- [Haseeb Ahmad](#) - a Diversity and Inclusion Lead at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust who is partially sighted.
- [Naomi Harris](#) - an occupational therapist at East London Healthcare Foundation Trust who is dyslexic.
- [Emma Wood](#) - a deputy CEO and director of people at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust who has a hidden disability.

In addition:

- [Guys and St Thomas's NHS Foundation Trust](#) highlight in a [video](#) how they have supported Tamara, a nurse who is dyslexic.
- [Patients Voices](#) share digital stories from staff which highlight how workplace adjustments have made a difference to their working lives.

Other resources

- [The NHS Health Passport](#) allows individuals to easily record information about their condition, any workplace adjustments they may have in place and any barriers they face.
- [Information on reasonable adjustments in return to work](#) from the NHS Employers 'Everything You Need To Know About Sickness Absence' guide.
- [Disability equality in medicine](#) from the BMA looks at the experiences of disabled doctors and medical students.
- [Employers guide to supported employment](#) produced by the National Development Team for Inclusion.
- Trades Union Congress: [workplace adjustments model disability passport policy \(pdf\)](#) and [model workplace policy \(pdf\)](#)
- Diversity and Ability's [AXS passport](#) allows individuals and organisations to record information about their access needs, the barriers they may face, without having to disclose.
- The [Empowerment Passport](#) which is a digital platform enabling individuals with long term health conditions or disabilities think about and communicate their unique adjustment needs.

Webinar recordings

- Managing reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- Managing disability related absence
- Improving disability declaration rates
- The role of senior leaders in supporting the workforce.
- Recruiting and retaining diverse staff - manager responsibilities
- Developing WDES annual reports and action plans
- Learning Disability Employment Programme

Other organisations that can provide support

- Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) provides helpful information on workplace adjustments.
- Access to Work offers employers assistance by reimbursing the cost of equipment, adaptations or support worker services.
- The Business Disability Forum works in partnership with business, Government, and disabled people to remove barriers to inclusion.
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission provide an explanation of what a workplace adjustment is in a video, along with practical examples and a guide to employment workplace adjustments.
- The Government has provided guidance on workplace adjustments for workers.
- Disability Confident shares examples of where workplace adjustments have supported staff in work.
- Disability Rights UK provides lots of practical guidance, including a summary of the Access to Work scheme.
- Diversity & Ability can provide audit support for recruitment and workplace adjustments processes, as well as provide external specialist support.
- Purple Space is a networking and professional development hub for disabled employees, network and resource group leaders and allies.

- AccessAble has access guides with accessible information for disabled people and carers.

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