

WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENT GUIDE



Are you
disability
confident?



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Introduction

This toolkit has been designed to help managers navigate the procedure and processes laid out in our [Human Resources \(HR\) Manual](#).

It details some of the 'how' and 'what' managers should consider when discussing and putting in place workplace adjustments.

This document should not be read in isolation. The toolkit is made up of the following:

- Workplace adjustment guide.
- Tailored adjustment plan.
- Workplace adjustment flowchart.
- Training; and
- Managing adjustment scenarios.



What is a workplace adjustment?

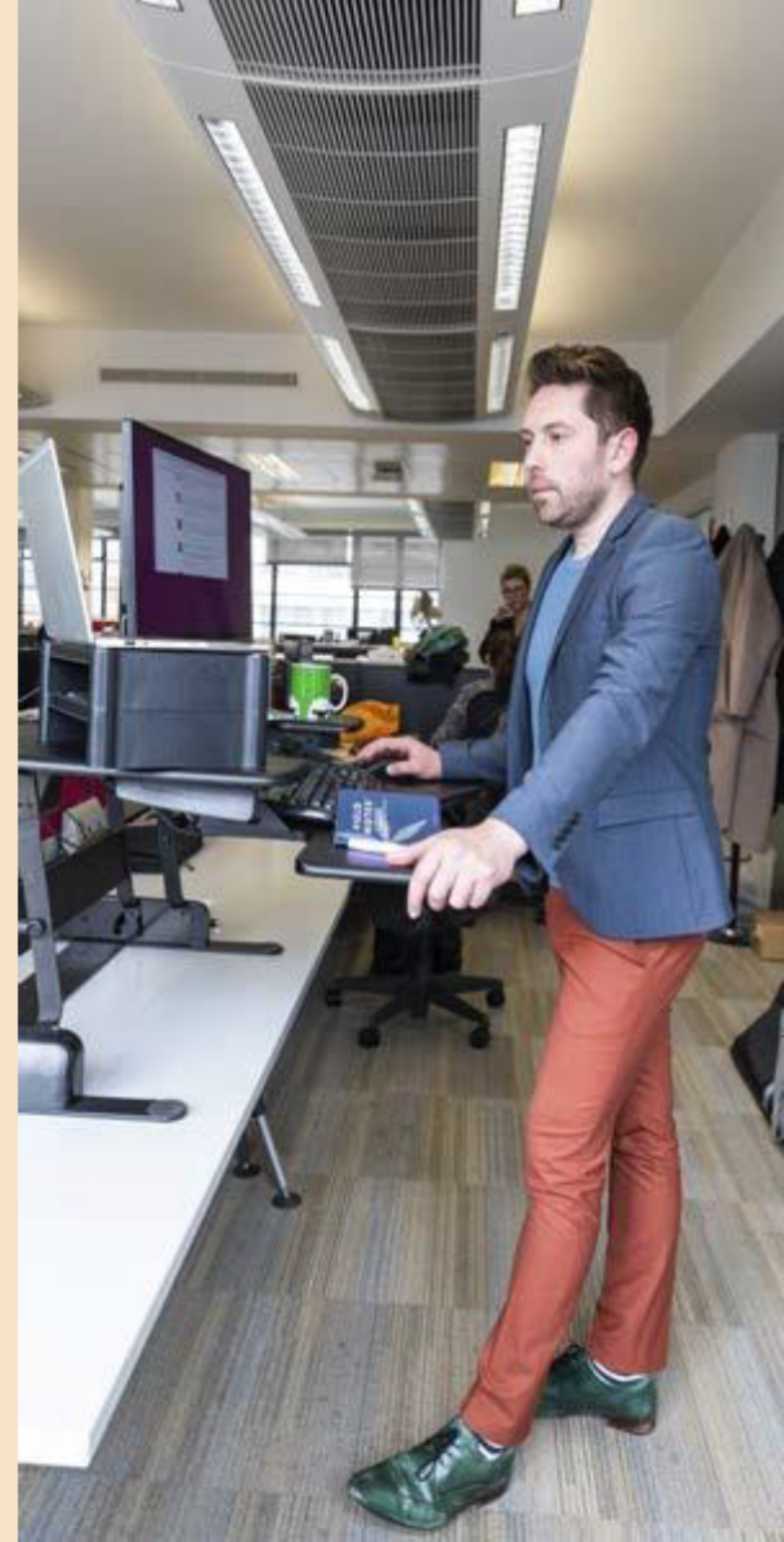
Workplace adjustments are specifically for disabled employees. In the future we are looking to expand workplace adjustment processes to cover other responsibilities or non-work commitments.

Disability is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as “a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. ‘Substantial’ means more than minor or trivial. ‘Impairment’ covers, for example, long-term (that is to say, lasting more than 12 months) medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes and fluctuating or progressive conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis or motor neurone disease.

A mental impairment includes mental health conditions, such as bipolar disorder or depression; development disorders, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); learning difficulties, such as dyslexia; and learning

disabilities, for example, Down’s syndrome. A learning difficulty does not affect general intelligence, whereas a learning disability is linked to an overall cognitive impairment. People with progressive and fluctuating illnesses such as cancer, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and HIV or AIDS, are automatically protected by the Act from the point of diagnosis. People with severe disfigurement are protected without needing to show that their disability has a substantial adverse effect on day-to-day activities.

The duty to make workplace adjustments applies to all aspects of employment and to all the services we provide. This guide deals with the employment aspects of workplace adjustment.



What is judged to be reasonable within the law depends on several factors including:

- How effective the change will be in overcoming the barriers faced;
- Practicality;
- Cost;
- Organisation's resources and size; and
- Availability of financial support.

The terms 'reasonable adjustments' and 'workplace adjustments' have both been in use at the National Audit Office (NAO). The Business Disability Forum (BDF) consultation report from 2018 recommended that the term 'workplace adjustments' was the preferred term for employers. The process and communications around adjustments in the NAO will, therefore, now use the term workplace adjustments.

An adjustment must be practicable to be reasonable. An adjustment can be practicable if it does not detract from a core component of the role. It can help to distinguish between process and outcomes. If an adjustment means the process changes, but the outcomes remain the same, then it is likely to be practicable. You could also allow a slight reduction in the levels of output, but not in the quality of

outputs. It can also be reasonable to transfer your employee to a suitable, alternative, vacant position. Remember, you have a legal duty to make an adjustment if it is reasonable.

Effectiveness

Does the adjustment remove or significantly reduce the barrier? If it does not, it is not effective. To be reasonable, an adjustment must be effective. It is important to remember that an individual may not be an expert in their own condition. This can be especially true for neurodiversity.

Deciding what is reasonable

Where individuals may not have a formal diagnosis or even be aware that they are neurodiverse it will be difficult for them to consider what adjustments might be appropriate and whether they would be effective. They should be actively encouraged to seek and accept advice from HR and diversity and inclusion (D&I) experts, and other specialists in their condition. We can refer colleagues for a formal diagnostic assessment or screening for neurodiverse conditions.

Disruption of the business

This is the extent to which the adjustment would disrupt the functioning of the organisation. Most adjustments do not disrupt the business significantly. If the adjustment only affects the way an individual works and not their outputs, then it is unlikely to disrupt the organisation. Consider whether it would be more disruptive not to make the adjustment – that is, if the business would be more disrupted by an individual's inability to perform their role fully because the adjustment was not made.

Effect of adjustments on others

Some adjustments for one employee will have an impact on other employees. For example, if the adjustment is giving the employee flexible hours, will that affect the ability of the people they work with to perform their roles?

Some people may be resentful of their colleagues' adjustments. It is important that all your team members know that you are a fair manager, and that fairness can mean treating people differently. Make sure that everyone in your team knows that their needs are all equally important to you. Remember that the information relating to the colleague's condition is confidential unless they choose to share with the other members of the team. We encourage colleagues to be open where possible to build and support an inclusive working environment.

Health and safety risks

Most adjustments do not present a health and safety risk. However, it is your job to assess health and safety risks for all your staff, and an adjustment will never be reasonable if it poses an unacceptable risk to the individual or to others. Make sure you are assessing risks accurately before refusing a request for an adjustment on health and safety grounds. Collect all the facts and do not base your decision on assumptions.

If you are worried about health and safety risks, you could conduct a risk assessment. This could involve talking to an occupational health adviser, a HR Business Partner your own Performance Coach, and other relevant experts such as IT or facilities managers and health and safety officers.

Innovative ways of thinking, contacts or training

An adjustment may be more reasonable if, by not making it, you would lose valuable knowledge and skills that the employee has developed. They will likely have useful organisational knowledge and experience. They may also have been trained in vital skills or have useful contacts that you do not want to lose. Consider the impact that not making an adjustment would have, and whether the cost of losing a long-serving employee – with innovative ways of thinking, knowledge and contacts, an employee into whom you may have invested time and money in training – is outweighed by the cost of making the adjustment.

Types of workplace adjustments

The equality duty contains three broad categories of adjustments.

1. Providing extra equipment or assistance. For example, hearing loops, specialist software, adapted keyboards, sign language interpreters and support workers where needed. When providing information to employees it is also reasonable to make sure that it is in an accessible format, when requested, for example a larger font or a subtitled video.
2. Changing a physical feature of our workplace. For example, providing flashing fire alarm warning systems for hard of hearing employees, or raising the height and changing the layout of a desk for someone with a physical impairment.
3. Changing a provision, criterion or practice or 'the way things are done'. For example, allowing extra time for a graduate with dyslexia to complete their online tests at application stage, or allowing a member of staff who uses a wheelchair to travel first class on long train journeys so that they can be served refreshments and use welfare facilities. It also covers redeploying someone into a new role because adjustments are not possible in their current role.



Starting the conversation

There are many reasons why a disabled employee might not tell their line Performance Coach that they are disabled. The fear of discrimination from colleagues and managers still exists, as does a lack of understanding about the potential benefits of sharing information that would help you as a line manager best support your employee.

We should be proactively asking all of our staff on a regular basis if they face any health-related barriers at work. Many disabled individuals are not aware of the support that is available to help them work to their full potential.

Many individuals who would be defined as disabled by the law would also not consider themselves to be disabled. Some staff may choose to tell you about their health issue only after they have come to trust you.

Our employee network, disAbility Network, exists to support our disabled colleagues and show that they are not alone. It is particularly important to consider adjustments when carrying out a return-to-work meeting with an employee, to facilitate and support their return to work. In some cases it may be useful to seek expert advice, especially where there are safety considerations.

However, some disabled employees will have a great deal of knowledge about their impairment and the kind of adjustments needed. In other cases they may need further support to enable them to thrive. You can download our [workplace adjustments form](#) to guide and record the discussion with your employee about the adjustments they need. One copy of this should be kept by the manager, one copy given to the employee and a third copy sent to the HRBP for recording purposes.

Performance Coach conversation wheel

In order to find out more about your employee's requirements in relation to reasonable adjustments, you need to speak to them. For effective conversations, you should follow the five steps shown in this diagram.





01 Rapport and Trust

Making sure the person knows the purpose of the meeting before they arrive and allowing adequate time for them to prepare, reassuring them before and during that it is to provide support and find solutions.

Mirroring the language the employee uses to describe their impairment. Some disabled people do not think of themselves as having a disability or describe themselves as disabled.

Clarifying confidentiality during the meeting – what is the person's view on wider sharing of their information? The discussion template used to agree workplace adjustments is sent to HR; however, no actual details of the employee's condition are required unless they agree for these to be shared.

Building trust as you explain to the employee what is involved in putting adjustments in place, including whether things can be put in place immediately or will take longer to implement.

02 Understanding the barriers

Focus should be on asking the employee to help you understand any barriers they face to doing their job well or be effective at work.

Remember, two people with the same impairment and the same job may need different adjustments. Try to establish what it is that helps or hinders the individual to stay safe and perform well. These barriers are a combination of their impairment, their role and their way of managing their impairment.

03 Assessments

The individual may have an assessment from their own health professional – ask them if they are happy to share it.

Occupational Health (OH) advisers – These are professionals who provide detailed advice on adjustments, which can include attending the workplace to make an assessment. You do not need to refer every request for workplace adjustments to OH (for example, someone with a mobility-related impairment might simply need to vary their working hours so they can avoid travelling at busy times).

Most disabled people know what adjustments they need, so it is recommended to speak to the employee first to discuss with them what is required. If you need help working out what adjustments are the most effective, there are several options:

- If the person has a mental health condition, read the related guidance and consider carrying out a stress risk assessment.
- If a person has a fluctuating condition, consider recording all possible foreseeable workplace adjustments, while bearing in mind that some may be used infrequently or only when required.

04 Solutions

The following questions and considerations should help you to find the information you need. This is not an exhaustive list. Further guidance can be found on our [webpage](#).

Whenever there is a dispute about whether to make adjustments or what adjustments are considered to be reasonable, the manager concerned must seek further advice through their HR Business Partner.

05 Reviews

Make regular appointments to review the workplace adjustment plan. You should meet as soon as possible if the role or impairment alters, or if the employee's management changes. This may see you taking on responsibility for someone with workplace adjustments already in place. If there is an existing discussion template, the employee may have a copy to show you what is already in place.



Getting adjustments in place

Making reasonable adjustments may not involve any cost at all. Where funding is required, the average cost of an adjustment has been calculated to be around £100 per person. Take the following steps:

1. Identify suitable products.
2. Further information is available on Sharepoint at: [Procurement](#) (sharepoint.com).
3. Obtain authorisation from HRBP.

IT software and hardware



Do you know what IT software your employee needs?

Software can be ordered from Digital Services via: <https://naoprod.service-now.com/sp>. Your HR Business Partner will authorise the order.

Office equipment



Do you know what equipment your employee needs?

Accessible parking



Is the employee a 'blue badge' holder?

No In some instances, it may be appropriate for an employee who is not a blue badge holder to have access to disabled parking.

Yes Health, Safety and Environment Manager, Facilities



Building adaptations

If changes are required to the building, for example:

Adapting the workplace;

- Creating or reserving parking spaces near to the entrance/exits of the building so that people with limited mobility are supported.
- Having step-free access to the building.
- Having automatic doors to help those with limited dexterity.
- Installing lifts (including braille on buttons) and ramps.
- Having braille on doors and all signage.
- Having accessible toilets.
- Having access to kettle/microwave (if provided for all colleagues) and having a lowered reception desk.

Adapting the work environment;

- Changing how the office is set up so that there is enough room for a wheelchair user to get to their desk without asking others to move.

- Using natural daylight bulbs.
- Ensuring meeting rooms are fitted with hearing loops.
- Moving a wheelchair user and their team to the ground floor if there is no lift.

Contact Facilities Service Desk via Facilities. ServiceDesk@nao.org.uk to discuss any of the above adaptations.

Support worker



Does the employee need a support worker?

Support workers are 'buddies' or helpers who support employees where this adjustment is considered reasonable. Speak to your HR Business Partner to discuss options.

Deaf and deaf blind interpreter



Does your employee need a deaf or deaf blind interpreter?

This type of support can often be vital to help employees communicate effectively in the workplace. Speak to your HR Business Partner to discuss options.

Adjustments to working practices

Working from home

NAO positively embraces flexible working, recognising that employees may wish to balance work and family/home life. Employees may also be offered flexible working arrangements as a workplace adjustment. This can include working from home; OH will advise.

Business travel



Does the employee need help with business travel?

First class travel may be appropriate for some journeys, for example a long-distance journey where the employee would find it difficult to walk through the train to reach the refreshment facilities, or on shorter journeys on peak services/busy services to allow the employee to sit down on trains where seats cannot be booked. If you think you may need workplace adjustments with regards to travel arrangements, please speak to your HRBP.

Further advice and guidance can be obtained around arranging business travel from your HR Business Partner.



Travel to and from work

It may be reasonable to provide support to an employee to travel to and from work if their impairment makes travelling on public transport or driving to work difficult. This is likely to be an expensive adjustment. Further advice and guidance can be obtained around arranging business travel to and from work from your HR Business Partner.

Emergency evacuation

Does the employee need help in an emergency situation at work?

A personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) is a plan agreed with a member of staff who may need assistance to get out of a building in the event of an emergency. To arrange a PEEP please contact Health, Safety and Environment Manager, Facilities.

Phased return

Does your employee need help in returning to work following an absence?

We know supporting the health and well-being of their teams is important to all our people managers. Conducting a return-to-work meeting with an employee who has been