

Managing disabled staff: workplace adjustments

If you are aware that one of your employees has a disability or suspect that they might, you must take account of this and may need to make some tailored adjustments for them at work. The key factor for you to consider is, what effect an impairment may have on an employee's ability to carry out their work, rather than the nature of the impairment.

This means that impairments such as back pain should be managed in the same way as a disability if the adverse effect on the individual is substantial and long-term. This process is called making 'workplace adjustments'.

Declaring a disability

Managers may not know whether an employee has a disability and the legislation does not require the employee to declare a disability.

People may not reveal a disability for a number of reasons for example:

- they do not think of themselves as disabled
- it does not affect their day-to-day activities
- they fear that they will be treated unfairly if they do tell someone at work

If a member of staff wishes to take advice about declaring that they have a disability then they will need to speak firstly to their line manager or to the Diversity and Inclusion team. This will enable the organisation to plan what workplace adjustments may need to be put in place to support the member of staff when they are at work.

Confidentiality

If adjustments are being made, you must ask the employee and agree with them whether and how they wish the adjustments to be communicated to other employees. Remember that this may change over time depending on the nature of the issue.

If a disabled employee you manage is promoted, seconded or moved for any reason, the new manager will need to know what adjustments their new employee needs. Ask the employee whether you can pass on any assessments or reports on workplace adjustments or Tailored Adjustment forms. You must get the employee's written consent before doing so, as this is personal information. Reassure the employee that you will respect medical and personal boundaries.

It is the new manager's responsibility to discuss how the employee will do the job and to keep any adjustments under review. Go to the induction process for more information.

Making workplace adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers must make reasonable changes to the workplace environment or working arrangements if they make it difficult for a disabled person to do his or her job.

However, you should always ask each employee you manage what would make it easier for them to do their jobs, not just those who have told you they have a disability.

You must consider making adjustments if:

- the person tells you that they have a disability, illness or injury
- you think that the employee might have a disability
- there has been a marked deterioration in performance
- a workplace assessment has been conducted and makes recommendations
- making a workplace adjustment would help the employee do his or her job better

Examples of workplace adjustments are:

- acquiring different IT equipment
- changing working hours
- adjusting tasks and workloads
- transferring to a different job
- modifying grievance or disciplinary procedures
- providing additional training, mentoring or development opportunities
- making changes to tests or interviews
- agreeing a strategy for managing episodes of ill health

You must talk with the employee and may consult the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service (PHWS), Parliamentary Safety Team, the Workplace Adjustment Case Manager or HR Advice Services or the Diversity and Inclusion Team when considering what adjustments are required.

Take the following factors into account:

- the effectiveness of the adjustment in preventing the disadvantage
 - the practicability of the step
 - the extent of any disruption caused to the physical environment, the team, the work itself
- The size of the organisation and the availability of financial or other assistance are also factors in determining what is 'reasonable'.

Most adjustments are inexpensive and easy to make. Often, the disabled employee is the person best placed to offer solutions or suggestions for improving the working environment. Speak with the employee about how these might be put into practice and follow up with the most appropriate source of support.

Further guidance on how to request a workplace adjustment is available on the intranet

Evacuation and emergency planning

Personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) must be established in consultation with the individual person, their line manager and the Fire Safety team. It will also be essential that colleagues in the locality are aware of the contents.

Tailored adjustment form

The House has produced a 'tailored adjustment agreement' to help Commons staff record workplace adjustments agreed between the employee and their line manager.

The purpose of this agreement is to:

- Ensure that both parties, the individual and the employer, have an accurate record of what has been agreed
 - Minimise the need to discuss and agree reasonable adjustments every time the employee changes jobs, is re-located or assigned a new manager within the organisation, while recognising that in some situations it would be useful for both parties to review the agreement
 - Provide employees and their line managers with the basis for discussions about workplace adjustments at future meetings
- This is a live document and should be reviewed regularly by both the employee and line manager and amended as appropriate. Tailored adjustments form for Commons staff

Access to Work scheme

This is a government funded scheme that provides financial assistance towards the costs of workplace adjustments, either during the recruitment process, or for existing members of staff.

This could be payments towards a support worker, equipment at work, or travel to work if public transport cannot be used. The funding available depends on the size of the organisation. As a large public sector organisation, the House will be expected to pay some of the cost.

Application process

Applications for Access to Work must be made by the person with the disability.

- Contact the relevant Access to Work contact centre by email, telephone or post.
- Access to Work will then contact the employee and take their application over the telephone
- A form is then sent to the employee to sign and return. - if the employee cannot use the telephone due to a hearing disability, this may be done by email instead
- An adviser will then contact the employee to carry out an appraisal of their needs, and may need to speak the employee's line manager - sometimes a visit by the adviser will be necessary. In some circumstances specialist advice may be required, and the Access to Work adviser will help to arrange this