



Guidance on Supporting Disabled Staff

1. What is a disability?

A disability is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on someone's ability to carry out normal day to day activities'.

For the purpose of the Act, these terms have the following meanings:

- 'Substantial' means more than minor or trivial
- 'Long term' means that the effect of the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months. Long term effects include those which are likely to recur, for example in fluctuating conditions.
- 'Day to day activities' are normal activities carried out by most people on a regular basis. Examples include non-specialist job tasks, communication skills, learning and understanding.

This broad definition of disability covers a wide range of physical, mental and sensory impairments, including specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and chronic health conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy and depression. Certain medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis, cancer and HIV, are covered by the definition of disability from the point of diagnosis.

2. Disclosing a disability

The University is committed to promoting an environment where staff feel confident and safe to disclose information about their disability. Disabled staff are encouraged to make their disability known to their manager so that they can be supported fully to perform in their role. Disabled staff are also encouraged to update their staff record through People and Money. This allows the University to gather statistical information on the diversity of its workforce and consider whether this fully reflects society, and to ensure the adequacy of support provision.

3. Duty to make reasonable adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010 employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to any elements of the job which place a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled people. Sometimes this may mean treating disabled staff more favourably than non-disabled staff.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments applies if a manager becomes aware, or could reasonably be expected to be aware, that an individual has a disability even if that disability

has not been disclosed by the individual. A failure to make reasonable adjustments is a form of discrimination under current law.

Examples of reasonable adjustments may include, but are not limited to:

- Changes to working hours/pattern, or flexible working;
- Changes to work location, or home-working when required;
- Paid time off for assessment or treatment;
- Covering the costs of dyslexia assessments;
- Alterations to the working environment or procedures;
- Purchase or modification of equipment;
- Reallocation of duties;
- Redeployment.

In many cases disabled staff themselves may be able to advise what adjustments they may benefit from. Disabled staff and their manager may also wish to seek advice from one or more of the services in Section 6.

Suggested adjustments should be made where these are reasonable and practicable in line with business needs. When deciding on the reasonableness of a proposed adjustment, managers should consider the following:

- The effectiveness of the adjustment in removing or preventing the disadvantage;
- The practicability of making the adjustment;
- The costs of making the adjustment, and availability of resources;
- Health and safety implications.

If an adjustment cannot be made the employee should be informed and given a clear explanation of the rationale behind the decision. Any adjustments made should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are still appropriate and effective for the staff member.

The University has made available the e-learning module 'Implementing Reasonable Adjustments for Staff'.

[Implementing Reasonable Adjustments for Staff eLearning module](#)

4. Recruitment

The University aims to be an employer of choice for disabled people. The University is committed to reducing the barriers faced by disabled people in recruitment and selection processes. Recruiters should ask all shortlisted candidates if they require adjustments to participate in interviews or assessment procedures, and requested adjustments should be accommodated as much as possible.

Adjustments may include:

- Providing extra time for assessment tasks;
- Allowing a support worker to accompany the candidate;
- Enabling a candidate to 'show' their skills rather than 'tell';
- Providing interview questions in advance.

Where a disabled candidate is successfully recruited discussions on any reasonable adjustments should begin as soon as possible so that they can be in place for the individual's first day. This may include health and safety requirements such as a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan. It may be appropriate to contact Access to Work for a needs assessment and funding for any adjustments, as described in Section 7. Applications to Access to Work must be made by the disabled staff member.

5. Emergency Evacuation of Disabled Staff

Managers must put in place a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) for any individual who requires assistance or special arrangements to evacuate a building in an emergency. This may include staff with mobility, sensory and learning impairments. Guidance and forms are available from the Fire Safety Unit.

[Fire Safety Unit guidance for the evacuation of people requiring assistance](#)

6. Support for Disabled Employees

6.1 Occupational Health Service

The University's Occupational Health Service (OHS) is a specialist, impartial and confidential service that provides advice and support on all health-related matters to employees, their managers and HR staff.

The OHS should be contacted for advice or referral where an individual's health is an issue or a component of a disability, or where an individual's disability is affecting their ability to attend work.

[Information about OHS referrals](#)

6.2 Staff Disability Advice Service

The Staff Disability Advice Service (SDAS) provides advice on a range of disability-related matters, including workplace adjustments. This service is available to all disabled staff, their managers, and HR teams.

The service covers disabilities that are not directly impacting on a person's health. Examples of disabilities covered include mobility issues, sensory impairments, or neurodiversity conditions.

[Information about SDAS referrals](#)

6.3 Human Resources

Managers supporting disabled staff can seek advice and guidance from their local HR Partner.

[HR contacts](#)

6.4 Information Services Assistive Technology

This service is available to advise on IT-related adjustments for disabled staff. A range of assistive software and hardware can be borrowed by staff to try out.

[More information and access to support](#)

6.5 Parking Office

Disabled staff may be entitled to priority parking access in University car parks and, where possible, to University buildings.

[Further information on disabled parking permits](#)

6.6 Timetabling Unit

Managers of teaching staff should liaise with their contact from Timetabling to ensure disabled staff are allocated teaching and tutorial rooms that are suitable for their individual needs.

6.7 Disabled Staff Network

The Disabled Staff Network provides a network of mutual support and a collective voice for disabled staff.

[Disabled Staff Network webpage](#)

7. Support for costs of reasonable adjustments

Where feasible, the costs of reasonable adjustments will be borne from departmental budgets, including for those employees whose employment is supported by external funding. It is unlawful to require staff to make any financial contributions to the cost of reasonable adjustments.

Disabled staff may also be able to get financial support from Access to Work.

Access to Work Funding

Access to Work (AtW) is a UK government initiative managed by the Department for Work and Pensions which provides workplace assessments, funding and other support to employees to help them overcome work-related obstacles resulting from their disability.

An application for the AtW Programme must be made by the disabled employee.

[Government webpage on Access to Work funding](#)

8. Further Guidance

Guidance on reasonable adjustments for specific disabilities can be found on the Disabled Staff Support webpages.

[Disabled Staff Support webpages](#)

Where required, further advice can be sought from the HR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team.

Email: equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk