

FACTSHEET

Examples of Reasonable Adjustments at Work

The definition of a disability in the Equality Act 2010 goes far beyond traditional stereotypes and includes conditions which may not immediately be obvious. An employee is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This is an individual and technical test.

While many employees with minor health issues will satisfy the test, they will not always suffer disadvantages at work. Encouraging an open culture of communication will help employers to identify where employees might be struggling.

Where employees do face difficulties at work due to a disability, the employer may need to make reasonable adjustments to, for example, formal or informal workplace policies, rules, practices, arrangements or qualifications including one-off decisions and actions.

In practical terms this might mean, for example:

- Altering the work environment for accessibility or comfort
- Altering or reducing working hours
- Extending contractual sick pay where employees have higher absence levels due to a disability
- Redeployment to a vacant position for which the individual is qualified
- Providing equipment or devices
- Providing a parking space close to the workplace
- An extension of paid or unpaid leave
- Allowing assistive animals in the workplace
- Altering roles (e.g. dividing complex tasks into smaller parts)
- Offering additional training
- Providing an adjustment or modification of examination, training materials or assessments
- Modifying an employment policy, such as amending absence triggers for disciplinary action
- Offering working from home opportunities
- Providing an assistant or work partner

These examples demonstrate that reasonable adjustments can be straightforward and inexpensive, especially where disabilities are caused by physical impairments; however, things can be more difficult where disabilities involve mental impairment.

In all cases, the key is to obtain the employee's input to identify any disadvantages they feel they are suffering, and any reasonable adjustments they feel would help them. Advice from Occupational Health would be useful and sensible.

A disabled employee might ask for a move to a different job, or for a new job to be created for them. It is also not uncommon for employees to ask for counselling or other treatment to be paid for by the employer. None of these things are obligatory; the test is simply whether the adjustments are reasonable in the specific circumstances.

Cost, disruption and practicability are the key factors when assessing whether something is reasonable, together with the size of the organisation, the resources available to it and the nature of its activities. Although the focus always has to be on helping the employee, high-cost adjustments may not be reasonable where money is tight and where there is a cheaper alternative which is just as effective.

An employee-centred approach may help employees with more complex needs to accept that there is nothing further that can be done to help them at work. Being flexible from the outset will be less trouble than an expensive and time-intensive disability discrimination claim.