

Reasonable adjustments

A 'reasonable adjustment' is a change to remove or reduce the effect of:

- an employee's disability so they can do their job
- a job applicant's disability when applying for a job

The reasonable adjustment could be to:

- the workplace
- the ways things are done
- get someone to help the employee or job applicant

Example of a change to the workplace

An employee who uses a wheelchair because of their disability has been struggling to get to the office because they can only manage to use the wheelchair for short distances. So the employer provides an accessible car parking space near the office entrance.

Example of a change to the way things are done

An employee with epilepsy can sometimes struggle with drowsiness and lack of energy in the mornings. So their employer agrees for the employee to start their working hours later when this happens.

Example of a change to get someone to help

An employee with an eyesight condition, certified as a disability, agrees with their employer for someone they work with to read their post to them.

1. When an employer must consider reasonable adjustments

By law, an employer must consider making reasonable adjustments when:

- they know, or could be expected to know, an employee or job applicant has a disability
- an employee or job applicant with a disability asks for adjustments
- an employee with a disability is having difficulty with any part of their job
- an employee's absence record, sickness record or delay in returning to work is because of or linked to their disability

The employer must make the changes if they're reasonable.

The employer must also consider reasonable adjustments for anything linked to an employee's disability. For example, if an employer does not allow an assistance dog in the building for a partially sighted person, it's likely to be discrimination.

[Find out more about disability discrimination.](#)

What is reasonable

What's 'reasonable' will depend on each situation. The employer needs to consider carefully if the adjustment:

- will remove or reduce the disadvantage for the person with the disability
- is practical to make
- is affordable by the employer or business
- could harm the health and safety of others

What the employer can consider changing

The employer must look at what they can do to reduce or remove the disadvantage for the person with a disability, such as:

- changing working arrangements, for example the employee's shift pattern
- removing something from the workplace, for example bright lights above the employee's workstation
- providing something in the workplace, for example an accessible car parking space
- providing extra or specialised equipment
- getting someone in to help, for example a sign language interpreter

To help make the best decision, the employer could:

- get professional advice
- get quotes
- research different options

To help see what adjustments are needed, the employer and employee could agree to get an [occupational health assessment](#).

Examples of reasonable adjustments

Examples of reasonable adjustments can include:

- providing the right type of phone for an employee who uses a hearing aid
- arranging for an interview to be held on the ground floor for a job applicant who uses a wheelchair
- replacing a desk chair with one designed for an employee who has a disability affecting their back
- giving more one-to-one support to help prioritise the work of an employee suffering from anxiety
- a [phased return to work](#) for an employee who's been on long-term sick leave because of their disability
- allowing more frequent breaks for someone with diabetes to get the right amount of food or drink throughout the day
- giving more time for someone with dyslexia to do any written or reading tests that are part of the interview process

See more examples of reasonable adjustments on the [Equality and Human Rights Commission website](#).

Good practice for employers

It's a good idea for the employer to focus on the reasonable adjustments they can make rather than trying to work out if an employee's condition is a disability.

Find more advice from the [Business Disability Forum](#).

Workplace policies

The employer should make sure their workplace policies do not put employees with disabilities at a disadvantage.

For example, they might look at policies on working hours, working from home, shift patterns and managing sickness absence.

Keeping a record of reasonable adjustments

When an employer makes a reasonable adjustment for an employee, it's a good idea for them to set up a 'reasonable adjustments passport'.

This is an up-to-date record that the employee can show if any new management comes in, saving them having to go through the same process again.

It also helps employees and employers make sure the reasonable adjustment is:

- correct
- practical
- up to date

Find out more about [reasonable adjustments passports from the Trades Union Congress](#).

When an employer might not have to make a change

The employer does not have to change the basic nature of the job for the person.

Example

Toni works in a call centre and has type 1 diabetes. Toni often needs to use the toilet urgently, so they ask if they can come off the calls and do paperwork instead. The company does not have a paperwork-only job.

Toni and their line manager meet to talk through options. These include giving a desk nearer the toilet and being flexible with breaks so Toni can manage their diabetes as they need. Toni is also given the option to review start and finish times in case early starts affect Toni's management of their diabetes.

The manager and Toni agree to review the new arrangements after a couple of weeks to see if they're helping.

If an employer is not sure if they must make an adjustment for someone with a disability, they should [get legal advice](#) first.

Who covers the costs

The employer is responsible for paying for any reasonable adjustments.

Many adjustments can be simple and affordable. But a small business might not be able to afford the same level of adjustments as a big company.

An employer does not have to make adjustments that are unreasonable, but should still try to find other ways to support the employee.

Example

An employee who uses a wheelchair asks for a lift to be installed so the upper floor of their work building is accessible. When the employer looks into the costs, they work out that they'd go out of business if they went ahead with the work.

In this case they can turn down the request. They should still see if they can make any other adjustments, for example agreeing for the employee to work entirely on the ground floor.

If an employer cannot afford a reasonable adjustment, the employee with a disability might be able to apply for funding through the government's [Access to Work scheme](#).

If an employee or job applicant finds there's a disadvantage because of their disability, it's best for them to talk to the employer as soon as possible about what they need.

Nobody has to tell an employer they have a disability. But sometimes an employer might need to understand any effects of the disability on workplace health and safety.

Employees

An employee who needs a reasonable adjustment should talk with their manager or employer.

It's a good idea to meet so:

- the employee can explain their situation
- the employer can understand how they can help
- they can discuss and agree on possible adjustments together

It's also a good idea to put anything agreed in writing.

Job applicants

Employers should ask all job applicants if they need reasonable adjustments for any part of the recruitment process.

The employer must consider making reasonable adjustments for the recruitment process if the:

- job applicant asks for reasonable adjustments
- job applicant says they have a disability
- employer knows, or could be expected to know, of the disability

It's against the law for employers to ask applicants if they have a disability.

Offering the job

If the employer wants to offer the job to an applicant they've made reasonable adjustments for, by law they can only ask the following questions:

- if the reasonable adjustments are suitable
- if the applicant can do essential parts of the job and, in principle only, whether reasonable adjustments might be needed
- in very rare circumstances, if the applicant has a specific disability that's an 'occupational requirement'

The employer could also ask if there's anything they can do to improve their workplace through positive action for people with disabilities.

The employer must be careful not to discriminate if they ask these questions.

After offering the job, the employer can ask the successful applicant:

- what reasonable adjustments they need to do the job and progress at work
- if necessary, other appropriate health-related questions depending on the nature of the job, for example an eyesight test to be a lorry driver

[Find out more about avoiding discrimination when hiring someone.](#)

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If the employer believes a suggested adjustment is unreasonable, they should talk with the employee or job applicant and:

- explain why they think the adjustment is not possible
- try and find another option

If an employer does not make reasonable adjustments for an employee or job applicant with a disability, it counts as discrimination under the law.

3. If someone feels they've been discriminated against

Employees

The employee can try talking to the employer to [resolve the issue informally](#).

If it cannot be resolved informally, they can [raise a formal grievance](#).

Job applicants

The job applicant can try talking to the employer to [resolve the issue informally](#).

If it cannot be resolved informally, they can [make a claim to an employment tribunal](#).

Find out more

[Find out more about disability discrimination](#).

You can also get advice and support through [Access to Work on GOV.UK](#).

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