**University of Aberdeen**

**Disability Equality**

**A Guide to Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Staff and their Line Manager**

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# **Introduction**

1. The University of Aberdeen celebrates and values the diversity of its community. In line with its strategic plan, Aberdeen 2040, the University is committed to treating all staff, students, visitors, and partners with dignity and respect, and seeks to provide a positive working environment free from discrimination, harassment, or victimisation. The University is dedicated to securing the highest standards of equality, diversity, and inclusion.
2. It is understood that fear of stigma and discrimination may prevent individuals from seeking reasonable adjustments to their work environment. The University is committed to creating an environment where disabled staff feel comfortable sharing information about their disabilities and requesting reasonable adjustments. An inclusive environment supports disabled staff to fulfil their potential and succeed in their role.
3. An inclusive environment is more likely to encourage individuals to seek reasonable adjustments, leading to enhanced well-being. Most adjustments are low-cost and easy to implement.
4. It is understood that there is a wide range of disabilities that can be hidden or visible. With 80% of disabilities being invisible it is important that line managers create environments that encourage staff to share a disability, particularly where a reasonable adjustment would be of benefit to the member of staff and support them to undertake their role effectively. Hidden disabilities may include dyslexia, depression, chronic pain, diabetes, or hearing impairments. Visible disabilities can include cerebral palsy, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Tourette’s syndrome, or amputations. Consequently, the needs and adjustments required will vary from person to person, and requests for reasonable adjustments should be explored on a case-by-case basis.
5. The University also recognises that some people with disabilities might not need or want adjustments, although this might change over time.
6. The social model of disability is used by the University and so the term “disabled staff” is used in this Guidance. This model acknowledges that a disability arises from disabling environmental, attitudinal or cultural factors. The University acknowledges that identity is multi-faceted and thus individual preferences with respect to terminology may differ.

# **Scope of Guidance**

This guidance is relevant to staff, including honorary staff, wishing to seek reasonable adjustments and to line managers within the University.

# **Background**

This document outlines guidance on reasonable adjustments to support both line managers and staff who are seeking reasonable adjustments. The guidance serves to reassure that the University will explore each request for reasonable adjustments fully and on a case-by-case basis. More detailed information can be sought from the [Human Resources Business Partnering team](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/hr-employment-services-3031.php#panel3613) or from the [University’s Occupational Health Service](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/support-services-1168.php#panel1243) to ensure that appropriate and valuable adjustments are implemented.

# **Legal Requirements**

1. Under the Equality Act 2010, you are disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. “Substantial” is defined as more than minor or trivial. For example, taking longer to complete a daily task such as getting dressed. “Normal day-to-day activities” could include communicating with other people, driving, sitting down or standing up, or using a computer. A “long-term” impact means that the disability lasts 12 months or more. It can still be considered long-term if the effects are likely to come and go, for example, a fluctuating condition that impacts for a few months at a time with periods of time with little or no impact.
2. Under the Equality Act 2010, the University must consider reasonable adjustments when:

* It knows or could be expected to know, an employee or job applicant is disabled.
* A disabled employee or job applicant asks for adjustments.
* A disabled employee is experiencing 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.

1. However, the University recognises that some individuals may not meet the legal definition of a disability but may require reasonable adjustments. For example, individuals who are experiencing moderate to severe menopause symptoms, have broken a bone that will heal in due course, or are recovering from an operation. Thus, the University will comply with a duty of care towards individuals who may be at greater risk under health and safety or fire legislation.

# **What is a Reasonable Adjustment?**

1. Reasonable adjustment is a legal term introduced under the Equality Act 2010. It is a change to working patterns or the environment to remove or reduce the effect of an employee’s disability so they can do their job, or a change to remove or reduce the effect of a job applicant’s disability when applying for a job. A reasonable adjustment could be a change to the workplace environment, a change to how work is undertaken, the provision of assistive technology, or additional equipment.
2. What is “reasonable” will depend on each situation. When looking at reasonableness the following may be considered:

* Will the adjustment remove or reduce the disadvantage for the disabled person?
* Is the adjustment practical to make?
* Could the adjustment harm the health and safety of others?

1. The University must make the changes if they are reasonable and should also consider reasonable adjustments for impacts that flow indirectly from an employee's disability.

# **Becoming Aware of the Need for Reasonable Adjustments**

1. Line managers may become aware that an employee is disabled or has a medical condition and the need for a reasonable adjustment through several different routes. For example, an employee may share, either through the recruitment process or through notifying their manager through day-to-day contact, that they have a disability. A disability or medical condition may be identified following a period of absence and, for example, be confirmed by Occupational Health.
2. However, some employees may not wish to share that they are disabled for a range of reasons such as fear of social stigma and discrimination. Line managers should endeavour to create an environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their condition or conditions. Staff should be reassured that conversations regarding reasonable adjustments will be kept confidential.

# **How Reasonable Adjustments Can Be Implemented**

1. Employees are advised to inform their line manager of the need for a reasonable adjustment as soon as possible but may wish to contact their [Human Resources Partner or Adviser](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/hr-employment-services-3031.php#panel3613) for an initial discussion. There is no obligation on the employee to share private or medical information.
2. In some cases, the Human Resources Partner, line manager, and employee can discuss the most suitable options to implement. The member of staff is encouraged to provide suggestions about potential solutions.
3. In other cases, the employee will be referred to Occupational Health to pinpoint which reasonable adjustments will be most effective for them. An external assessor may also assess the individual and examine their workstation. Following this, the external assessor will recommend the most appropriate action and/or equipment for the individual. In some cases, a risk assessment of an employee’s duties will be carried out.
4. Staff should notify their line manager and/or their HR Partner of mobility impairments that may inhibit their ability to self-evacuate from a building in the event of a fire. The University Fire Safety Adviser coordinates the preparation of individual written personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs). Each plan will outline the evacuation arrangements specific to the individual and their work location/s. Plans will be prepared in consultation with the individual concerned.
5. A Human Resources Partner or Adviser may also encourage members of disabled staff to apply to the Access to Work Scheme in anticipation of costly adjustments being required. The [Access to Work Scheme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-guide-for-employers/access-to-work-factsheet-for-employers) will contribute to the cost of the adjustment, but the University will be required to pay the first £1000. After an application is made, an adviser from the Scheme will contact the member of staff and their Human Resources Partner or Adviser to discuss the support available. A workplace assessment may be required to progress the Access to Work application. If the employee knows what support is needed, an assessment may not be required.
6. Identified adjustments should be implemented as quickly as possible. Managers should adopt a flexible approach and recognise that further adjustments may be required in the future. It can be noted that adjustments will be implemented where reasonable. This may involve further consideration in some cases, taking a range of factors into account.

# **Who Pays for Reasonable Adjustments?**

The School or Directorate of the individual requesting a reasonable adjustment will be responsible for costs. Most reasonable adjustments have minimal or no cost and have a significant positive effect on staff wellbeing. Additional benefits of implementing reasonable adjustments in a fair, consistent, and appropriate manner include higher retention rates and may also attract a diverse candidate pool.

# **Examples of Reasonable Adjustments**

1. It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of reasonable adjustments since an adjustment is determined as reasonable within the context of each case. However, some examples may include:

* Providing equipment such as an adapted keyboard, supportive chairs, or height-adjustable or standing desks.
* A phased return to work after a period of absence. This involves gradual re-entry to work to develop stamina, rebuild confidence and review the effectiveness of additional adjustments.
* Altering premises such as inputting automated doors, ramps, or quiet spaces.
* Holding meetings in venues that are accessible for staff with physical impairments. For example, providing accessible toilets and ensuring meeting rooms are in close proximity so that attendees do not have to travel far.
* Providing an outside space, such as a garden or grassed area, for staff with service dogs to use.
* The provision of support assistants such as a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.
* Adjusting or removing items from the workplace for example, bright lights above the employee’s workstation.
* Providing assistive technology to an individual who is dyslexic or has a visual impairment. This could include text-to-speech software or screen tinting software.
* Altering assessment procedures by providing additional time.
* Time off during work hours, for example, for hospital appointments, physiotherapy, counselling, or treatment.
* Flexible working or adjusted hours.

# **Related Policies**

[Digital Accessibility Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-governance-and-compliance/Digital_Accessibility_Policy.pdf)

[Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-governance-and-compliance/Equality_Diversity_Inclusion_Policy.pdf)

[Homeworking Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/homeworking%20policy.pdf)

[Menopause Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-employment/Menopause_Policy.pdf)

[Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/Mental-Health-Policy-2.0-September-2021.pdf)

[Neurodiversity Equality Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-governance-and-compliance/Neurodiversity_Equality_Policy.pdf)

[Recruitment and Selection Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/policy-zone-employment/RecruitmentAndSelectionOfStaff.pdf)

**Appendix A – Sources of Advice within the University**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue** | **Description** | **Source of Advice or Assistance** | **Contact Details** |
| Access to buildings | Provision of physical adaptations such as ramps, handrails, stairlifts, door holders, etc.  Provision of other systems including induction loops, brail signs and pagers and strobes etc. | Estates and Facilities | [estates@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:estates@abdn.ac.uk) |
| Egress from buildings | Advice for the procedure for those who need assistance to evacuate premises, writing of personal emergency evacuation procedures (PEEPs) and training on emergency evacuation lifts and evacuation chairs. | Health and Safety Team | [healthandsafety@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@abdn.ac.uk) |
| HR policies, procedures or reasonable adjustments | Advice on HR Policies and Procedures  Referral to the Occupational Health service  Advice on reasonable adjustments | Human Resources | [hr@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:hr@abdn.ac.uk) or your Human Resources Partner or Adviser |
| Furniture | Provision of adjustable desks, specialist chairs and altered layouts | Estates and Facilities | [estates@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:estates@abdn.ac.uk) |
| Assistive Technology | Provision of specific software and hardware | IT Service Desk | [servicedesk@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:servicedesk@abdn.ac.uk) |
| Parking | Blue Badge scheme and temporary parking | Estates and Facilities | [estates@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:estates@abdn.ac.uk) |
| Workstation assessments | Advice on assessing and adjusting workstations to suit individuals and referral to specialist assessors or ergonomic equipment suppliers if needed. | Health and Safety Team | [healthandsafety@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@abdn.ac.uk) |

**Appendix B – Sources of Pastoral Support within the University**

* The [Counselling Service off](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/support/counselling-3635.php)er confidential online and face to face counselling appointments for both staff and students. Counselling is a talking therapy which gives you the opportunity to explore issues which are causing you concern or distress.
* The University offers staff an [Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/support-services.php#panel6424) which provides a free, confidential face to face and telephone counselling service as well as information services. The EAP is provided by Care First and staff can contact them about work related or personal issues as well as information, such as legal advice.
* [The Menopause Network](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/menopause-network-13372.php) aims to raise awareness of the potential impact of the menopause at work and provide a support mechanism for staff who are experiencing the menopause.
* The [Multi-Faith Chaplaincy is](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/campus/multifaith-chaplaincy/index.php) open to staff and students from all cultures, faiths and beliefs and is a place of pastoral care. Chaplains provide support and advice to members of the community in times of stress, crisis, bereavement, or illness. They are also available for those wishing to explore questions of a personal or confidential nature. The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy operates an open-door policy.
* The [Staff Disability Network Group is](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/staff-disability-network--13339.php) open to disabled staff and staff with an interest in disability. It aims to provide support for disabled staff and those with an interest in disability in the workplace, share information and consider good practice, and provide recommendations to enhance University policy where appropriate.
* Your School EDI Lead can be contacted regarding matters in their School. They can also signpost to appropriate internal or external information and support.
* The [Workplace Dignity Network pro](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/wellbeing-portal/workplace-wellbeing-11651.php#panel11794)vides support to staff who would like to talk through wellbeing concerns. This could be in relation to bullying/harassment, stress, work relationships, work/life balance or mental health issues.

**Appendix C - External Sources of Guidance**

* [Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)
* [Equality Act 2010: guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance)
* [Fire safety guidance: evacuating disabled people from buildings](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fire-safety-guidance-evacuating-disabled-people-from-buildings/)
* Advice on reasonable adjustments can be sought from the Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) at the [local Jobcentre Plus office](https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus)
* [Principles to support disabled workers and workers with long-term health conditions in work](https://www.hse.gov.uk/disability/best-practice/overview.htm?utm_source=hse.gov.uk&utm_medium=refferal&utm_campaign=disabled-workers-principles&utm_term=disability&utm_content=home-page-popular)