



# Recruiting, managing and developing people with a disability or health condition

A practical guide for managers

In collaboration with:

# CIPD



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Career Progression</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Why it makes good business sense</b>	<b>6</b>	Access to training and development	24
<b>The role of the manager</b>	<b>7</b>	Making adjustments to the performance management process	24
<b>Legal responsibilities and definitions</b>	<b>8</b>	Discussing performance	25
The definition of disability	8	Adjustments and improving performance	25
Reasonable adjustments	8	Adjustments and moving jobs	26
Sources of advice	8	Sources of Advice	26
<b>Language and Behaviour</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Sickness Absence</b>	<b>27</b>
Language	10	Effective absence management	27
Communication	11	Long-term absence and returning to work	28
Offering assistance	11	Disability related absence	28
Sources of Advice	11	Fit notes	28
		Occupational health	29
		Sources of advice	30
<b>Reasonable Adjustments</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Supporting Specific Disabilities and Long-Term Health Conditions in the Workplace</b>	<b>31</b>
The cost of adjustments and Access to Work	13	Long Covid	31
Examples of adjustments	13	Mental health	31
Consider ways you can be flexible about how a job is done	14	Learning difficulties	32
Flexible Working	14	Neurodiversity	32
Sources of advice	15	Visual and sensory impairment	33
<b>Recruiting People</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Retaining People</b>	<b>34</b>
Attracting a wide range of people	16	<b>Leaving the Business or Organisation</b>	<b>35</b>
Positive action	17	Exit interviews	35
Offer of an interview	17	Dismissal	35
Making adjustments to your recruiting process	17	Redundancy process and criteria	35
Sources of advice	18		
<b>Welcoming new starters</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Further Information and Guidance</b>	<b>36</b>
Making adjustments for new employees	20	Equality and Inclusion – good practice and the law	36
Sources of advice	21	Advice and support on disabilities and health conditions for employers	37
<b>Disclosure and confidentiality</b>	<b>22</b>	Disability Organisations	39
An individual's choice to tell you about their disability	22	Job Advertising and Job Boards	40
The benefits of disclosure	22		
Encouraging sharing	22	<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>41</b>
When an employee does share information about a disability or long-term health condition	23		
Confidentiality and consent to share information	23		





The Disability Confident scheme aims to help employers make the most of the opportunities provided by employing and developing disabled people. It is voluntary and has been developed by employers, disabled people's representatives and the government.

The scheme has three levels that have been designed to support employers on their Disability Confident journey. [It is free and easy to sign up.](#)

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In collaboration with:

# CIPD

The CIPD has been championing better work and working lives for over 100 years. It helps organisations thrive by focusing on their people, supporting our economies and societies. It is the professional body for HR, L&D, OD and all people professionals – experts in people, work and change. With over 160,000 members globally – and a growing community using its research, insights and learning – it gives trusted advice and offers independent thought leadership. It's a leading voice in the call for good work that creates value for everyone.

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This guide has been produced with the support of a number of individuals and organisations listed below. Disability Confident and the CIPD are enormously grateful for their advice and feedback.

- [ACAS](#)
- [Business Disability Forum](#)
- [ENEI – Employers Network for Equality Inclusion](#)
- [Federation of Small Businesses](#)
- [Maximus](#)
- [Michael Page](#)
- [Reed in Partnership](#)
- [Scope](#)
- [Shaw Trust](#)
- [SOM – Society of Occupational Medicine](#)
- [Tech Talent Charter](#)
- [The Clear Company](#)



# Introduction

Promoting and supporting diversity and inclusion in the workplace is an important aspect of good people management – it's about valuing everyone in the organisation as an individual and recognising that each person has a unique set of skills, experiences and perspectives. To reap the benefits of a diverse workforce it's vital to have an inclusive environment where everyone feels able to participate and achieve their potential.

Taking a proactive and inclusive approach to employing disabled people and people with long-term health conditions can help to reduce the barriers they face in society. Recruiting, supporting and developing disabled employees can also bring many benefits for organisations and the people who work for them, including employee commitment, the ability to tap into different perspectives and skills which can boost innovation and performance, the ability to recruit and retain good people and enhanced company image and reputation.

The CIPD's Health and Wellbeing at Work survey report<sup>1</sup> found that the knowledge and confidence of managers is the most common challenge their organisations experience in managing people with a disability or long-term health condition. That's why Disability Confident and the CIPD have worked in partnership to develop this guide, which aims to support managers and anyone who leads another individual or team – from those working in large organisations to owner-managers of small firms. We also hope it will be a useful resource for HR professionals or anyone with an interest in the management of people with a disability or long-term health condition.

We know that managers are busy people who want to enable everyone in their team to fulfil their potential. This guide therefore aims to be a quick and easy reference tool for managers to use in their daily work, providing key information and advice on the employment of disabled people. It doesn't aim to answer every question a manager might have, but it's a starting point and includes links throughout to further, more detailed information.



Using this guide should help managers to:

- attract the most suitable talent to their organisation
- be confident about managing and supporting employees with a disability or health condition, from recruitment and induction through to training, development, progression and retention
- understand, identify and reduce the barriers that could potentially be preventing a colleague with a disability or health condition from performing and/or developing to their full potential
- understand the law relating to disability in the workplace and identify appropriate workplace changes or adjustments to support employees with a disability or health condition
- ensure fair treatment for colleagues and foster an inclusive working environment

Users of this guide will also find that much of the advice is relevant to enable all employees to perform at their best, regardless of their identity, background or circumstance, and whether they have a disability or not.

The [Disability Confident scheme](#) has been designed by employers and disabled people's representatives to support and recognise businesses that are actively inclusive in their recruitment and retention practices. Scheme members have free access to guidance, tools and resources to give them the skills and confidence to employ disabled people. Members also receive accreditation when they join the scheme, including a certificate and Disability Confident badge to use on their website and in recruitment adverts. Employers can join Disability Confident [online](#).

# Why it makes good business sense

Employers are increasingly recognising the importance of employing a diverse workforce and of being inclusive to attract, retain and develop people with the skills they need. However, some groups remain under-represented in the jobs market, meaning a loss of skills and talent to the economy and employers.

There are around 9.5 million people of working age with a disability in the UK, and yet only 5.1 million of them are in work<sup>ii</sup>. This represents a huge pool of untapped talent which businesses can't afford to ignore, particularly in view of the ageing population and the likelihood that a greater proportion of the workforce will develop a health condition or disability.

Organisations with a diverse and inclusive workforce can tap into the different perspectives and skills which can boost innovation and performance. Organisations that embrace diversity and inclusion benefit from a broader range of experiences and opinions and make their employees feel valued. This approach can enhance the organisation's reputation with customers, investors and employees.

Organisations that have a positive and inclusive approach to managing disability can also reap benefits in terms of increased loyalty and commitment from staff.

It makes commercial sense for businesses to have a diverse workforce that reflects their consumer base – disabled customers and their families have a spending power worth £274 billion per annum<sup>iii</sup>.



# The role of the manager

Managers have a vital role in creating an inclusive working environment to attract and retain valuable skills and talent – providing day-to-day leadership, removing barriers and building a culture in which everyone is respected and has the opportunity to reach their potential.

Effective management of people with a disability or long-term health condition will help you to improve your team's performance and morale, retain valuable employees and reduce sickness absence.

It's the manager who:

- usually has the ongoing responsibility for implementing the people management policies and practices that will affect how supported someone with a disability or health condition feels in their role
- will typically be the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss their health concerns or disability, or a change or adjustment to their work or working hours, to enable them to perform to their full potential
- is usually responsible for managing absence and keeping in touch if someone is off work ill or because of their disability, as well as supporting an effective return to work

It's therefore essential that a manager is knowledgeable about the organisation's framework for managing people with a disability or health condition and understands their role within that. This includes the organisation's responsibility to make reasonable adjustments.

The type of relationship that a manager builds with their employees is also key. A management style based on trust is essential if someone with a disability is going to feel comfortable and empowered to discuss their condition and receive the support they need. This approach will also help to develop an open and inclusive culture based on respect.

This means managers having regular one-to-ones with staff, being comfortable having sensitive conversations and asking how people are on a regular basis. If people in your team (or those joining you) know you have a positive approach to equality and inclusion, they may be much more likely to tell you about their disability or health condition.

There is more information on CIPD's website about [diversity and inclusion in the workplace](#).



# Legal responsibilities and definitions

The Equality Act 2010 protects people against discrimination at work because of their disability or long-term health condition.

## The definition of disability

The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. 'Long-term' is usually considered to be a year or more. This covers a wide range of people and impairments, some of which may not be immediately obvious. For example, in March 2023, 2.4 million working age disabled people had a mental health condition as their main health condition, and 2.3 million had a musculoskeletal condition as their main health condition<sup>iv</sup>.

Some conditions are automatically considered disabilities, such as cancer, HIV infection and multiple sclerosis.

## Reasonable adjustments

Employers also have a duty under the Equality Act to make 'reasonable adjustments' for people with a disability if there are any aspects of a job or workplace which put them at a disadvantage. An employer failing to make reasonable adjustments for a disabled job applicant or employee is one of the most common types of disability discrimination. There is more information later in this guide on making reasonable adjustments.

## Sources of advice

There is more information on the Equality Act at [Equality Act 2010: guidance – GOV.UK and the definition of disability](#) and [Equality Act 2010: how it might affect you – GOV.UK](#). Acas has also produced a guide on [disability discrimination in the workplace](#).



## TOP TIPS

- Focus on ensuring employees have the support that they need to do their job to the best of their ability – if you are not sure what to do then take additional advice
- Many adjustments are straightforward, don't cost anything and can be implemented easily
- Some employees or job applicants might have a 'health passport', which is a form from the Department of Work and Pensions that can be used by employees to identify what support and changes they need. Other organisations, like the [Mind Charity](#), also have forms that allow employees to document how their health can be supported at work, so it is possible that employees might bring these with them to meetings with you.

# Language and Behaviour

The disability charity [Scope](#) have found that two-thirds of people say they feel awkward when they meet disabled people. There can be a variety of reasons for this – some people may not know many disabled people and some simply worry about saying or doing the wrong thing.

Some basic advice on situations you may encounter at work is outlined below. If you would like more information and guidance, Scope's '[End the Awkward](#)' initiative provides more practical tips on what to do and what not to do in a variety of situations.

## Language

Disabled people will often have different preferences and views on what language they find appropriate or inappropriate. If you are unsure about how to say something, ask the person what they would prefer.

In general, don't worry about using common expressions, such as 'see you later' in front of someone who has a visual impairment or 'I've got to run' in front of a wheelchair user.

'[End the awkward](#)' provides tips on preferred language, but there are a few general rules to be aware of:

- avoid saying someone is 'suffering from' as it encourages a view of that person as a 'victim'
- don't use collective terms or labels like 'the disabled', 'the deaf', 'the blind'
- don't describe people by their impairment, for example, instead of saying 'she is diabetic' it is better to say 'she has diabetes'
- don't describe people without a disability as 'able bodied' or 'normal' – not all disability is physical – and not all people describe themselves as disabled

Be respectful in the language you use about disability, and expect the same of others, whether a disabled person is present or not.



## Communication

There are simple principles you can bear in mind when thinking about how you communicate about disability at work:

- talk to a disabled person as you would to anyone else – focus on a person’s ability rather than their disability
- how much someone wishes to talk about their disability depends on their individual preferences
- speak directly to the disabled person, not their support worker or interpreter
- if you are having trouble understanding someone’s speech, it’s okay to ask them to repeat themselves – don’t pretend to understand or finish someone’s sentences – be patient

## Offering assistance

- don’t assume a disabled person wants or needs your help
- as a basic courtesy, ask before you help and wait until the disabled person accepts your offer – once the person has accepted your offer, listen or ask for specific instructions
- don’t worry if your offer is turned down

## Sources of Advice

More advice on language and behaviour is available at [‘End the Awkward’](#). The Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDI) have also produced a video on [How to use appropriate language](#).

## TOP TIPS

**Following some basic principles in your day-to-day interactions will help:**

- **don’t make assumptions – everyone is different, so take your lead from the individual**
- **treat everyone with respect – talk to disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else**
- **don’t worry – being over-sensitive will stop you doing or saying anything**



# Reasonable Adjustments

Certain aspects or conditions of a job or the workplace can cause a barrier for someone with a disability which can mean they are disadvantaged. As explained in the section on ‘Legal responsibilities and definitions’, employers have a duty to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for people with a disability to help remove that disadvantage.

Adjustments are changes that are made to the work environment or the way the work is carried out, so that someone with a disability can do their job more effectively and remove or reduces a barrier that someone is experiencing. They should be considered at every stage of employment, from recruitment and induction to day-to-day work. What is considered ‘reasonable’ depends on the specific circumstances. If you are not sure whether an adjustment is reasonable you may want to seek additional advice.

Reasonable adjustments can be an important factor in helping disabled employees to remain in work. It’s important to remember that:

- not all adjustments relate to the physical working environment, such as wheelchair ramps – other adjustments can be less tangible but just as important, such as changing work hours or increasing one-to-one supervision
- not all adjustments cost money or are difficult or time consuming to make
- reasonable adjustments can be made for anyone, and not just employees with a disability or health condition – for example, changing the working hours of someone who has caring responsibilities

More detailed information is also available from Acas on [‘reasonable adjustments’](#).

## The cost of adjustments and Access to Work

Some employers worry that employing disabled people and making adjustments will result in significant additional costs, but many adjustments are simple and affordable. However, a small employer may not be able to afford as much as a large organisation.

Where there are costs for the adjustment, financial support may be available for individuals through, for example, the government's Access to Work scheme. Support can be provided where someone needs support or adaptations beyond reasonable adjustments.

**Access to Work can provide practical and financial support for people with a disability or long-term physical or mental health condition. It can provide funding for adaptations to the workplace both on recruitment and during employment of individuals with a disability or long-term health condition. This includes specialist equipment, premises alterations, assistance travelling to and from work, and some personal support.**

**Applications must be made by the employee (although managers should ensure that an application has been made if funding is needed).**

**More information on Access to work is available [here](#).**

## Examples of adjustments

Reasonable adjustments can include:

- a more flexible working arrangement, for example, allowing someone to work from home for some of the time or changing their hours so they don't have to travel to work in the rush hour
- arranging more one-to-one supervision or additional training, or providing a mentor
- making a physical change to the workplace or workstation, for example, changing a desk height, or moving office furniture to improve access
- altering assessment procedures – such as giving extra time, providing assistive technology or offering a 'work trial' instead of a traditional formal interview
- providing extra equipment or assistance, such as a new chair or specific software

## Consider ways you can be flexible about how a job is done

By discussing with the employee how a job can be done differently, you can often find ways it can be done better. Usually, the individual will have the best ideas on what changes can make the biggest difference to how well they can do their job. Many adjustments are straightforward, don't cost anything and can be implemented easily.

You should keep agreed adjustments under review to see how well they are working and if any others are needed.

Once an adjustment has been agreed, it should be implemented as soon as possible. Keep a written record of any agreed adjustments. This will help you and your employee to review the adjustments made. This can also be used to pass information to a person's new manager if they move jobs in the future, if the employee agrees.

## Flexible Working

Since the pandemic there has been an increase in hybrid and remote working. Hybrid and remote work can be a reasonable adjustment; for example, allowing an employee with a disability to work from home for some of the time can help them to manage their condition better or reduce commuting difficulties.

Employers have a legal duty to ensure that employees who are working remotely are doing so in a safe and healthy environment. The HSE have provided [guidance on remote worker health and safety](#).

Organisations should also consider what types of flexibility they can offer to workers in non-office and front-line roles. There are lots of small things employers can do to increase flexibility for front-line workers, such as allowing direct input to shift rotas, making it easier to change shifts, or even offering split shifts and job share options. Being flexible about how people can use leave to help cover short appointments or events can also help to give workers more control and support flexibility.

Under UK law, employees also have the right to make a statutory flexible working request and have this properly considered by their employer – managers should give careful consideration to flexible working requests from disabled employees and consider them alongside the duty to make reasonable adjustments.

## Sources of advice

You are not expected to be a legal expert on disability legislation or adjustments, so take additional advice where necessary:

- use your HR or Occupational Health team if you have one
- where appropriate contact the [Access to Work](#) service at Jobcentre Plus
- Maximus have produced a [disability guide](#) providing practical advice for employers on supporting people with a range of disabilities in the workplace
- the Equality and Human Rights Commission has a guide on '[Employing people: workplace adjustments](#)'
- specialist disability groups can also provide [advice and information](#) on workplace adjustments for people with particular disabilities or long-term health conditions

## TOP TIPS

- **Don't make assumptions about an individual's abilities or requirements – some people with a disability or long-term health condition don't need any adjustments**
- **Treat each employee as an individual – an adjustment for one person may not be appropriate for someone with the same condition**
- **Talk to the person who may need an adjustment to find out specifically the problems they are experiencing and what would make the most difference – they will be the best judge of their ability and some may be able to suggest an adjustment themselves**

# Recruiting People

When recruiting a new member of your team, the aim should be to hire the most suitable person for the job – the person with the skills, qualities and experience needed for the role. Therefore, job descriptions and person specifications, application forms and interview questions should be clearly written and focus on achieving this goal.

## Attracting a wide range of people

You are more likely to find the most suitable person if your recruitment processes are designed to attract a wide range of talent and give all candidates, including those with a disability or long-term health condition, the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and potential.

To attract a wide range of applicants:

- make it clear in your recruitment literature that your organisation is committed to inclusion and diversity, and welcomes applications from people with a disability or long-term health condition
- display your Disability Confident badge
- advertise your vacancy through a range of media to appeal to a diverse audience and consider using a mix of channels, including those that specifically reach disabled people
- provide a contact point for people who may have questions about the recruitment process
- offering disabled people an interview if they meet the minimum criteria for the job

Toolkits to help with writing inclusive job descriptions as well as a language and tone checklist is available from [The Clear Company](#). The Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDI) have also produced a video on [Creating Inclusive Recruitment Resources](#).



## Positive action

[Positive action](#) refers to actions taken by an employer to remove barriers or improve access for underrepresented groups. An example would include actively encouraging job applications from groups with underrepresented protected characteristics, such as disability, or providing training opportunities for specific groups. This is different from positive discrimination, which is unlawful. Decisions, such as about who to recruit or promote, must still be based on merit. The UK Equality Act 2010 does permit organisations to take positive action that is ‘proportionate’. Positive action needs to be carefully balanced and based on evidence – it is therefore usually part of an organisation-wide strategy. You should take specialist advice if you are considering positive action.

## Offer of an interview

Employers who are part of the Disability Confident scheme usually commit to offering disabled job applicants an interview if they meet the minimum criteria for the role. This is a form of positive action, with the aim of encouraging disabled people to apply for jobs and providing an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, talent and abilities at the interview stage.

Even if an organisation is not part of the Disability Confident scheme, they could still elect to follow this approach to support disability inclusion in the workplace. This positive action should be included on the job advertisement.

## Making adjustments to your recruiting process

You may need to make adjustments to each stage of the recruitment process to make sure you don’t put any candidate at a disadvantage because of their disability or health condition.

You can’t ask questions about an individual’s health or disability during the recruitment process (except in limited circumstances). However, during recruitment activity it’s important to ask all applicants whether they need any particular adjustments or arrangements for any part of the recruitment or selection process.

Make sure you give every candidate the opportunity to discuss these in advance of an interview or other selection test. You shouldn’t make assumptions about what adjustments are needed or are feasible.

There are also adjustments that can be made to your organisation's recruitment or selection policies or approaches. These may need to be agreed at an organisational level, but could include:

- ensuring that the interview room is accessible
- allowing a support worker to attend an interview if required
- offering communication support if needed
- allowing a candidate to use a specific online platform or assistive technology for a remote interview
- adapting tests or selection exercises, for example, by granting some additional time for completion, or questioning whether timed tests are needed at all

## Sources of advice

Do seek expert advice where necessary:

- engage with your HR team if you have one – if you don't, Jobcentre Plus offers [help for recruiters](#) and there are a number of organisations who specialise in supporting disabled people into work, including [Ingeus](#), [Shaw Trust](#), [Reed in Partnership and Pluss](#)
- the [Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative \(RIDI\)](#) helps recruiters and employers to become disability confident and offer more job opportunities to people with disabilities
- specialist disability groups can also provide [advice on reasonable adjustments](#) for people with particular disabilities
- Scope have a [guide](#) to making adjustments in job interviews
- your local jobcentre or disability groups may be able to put you in touch with local support networks

Further information on recruitment is available at [www.gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people](http://www.gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people)

## TOP TIPS

- You can't ask questions about an individual's health or disability during the recruitment process (except in limited circumstances), but you should ask all applicants whether they need any particular arrangements or adjustments for any part of the recruitment or selection process
- Ensure that any job description, person specification and job advert clearly state the skills, knowledge and experience required for the role
- State clearly that adjustments are available – for the application process, the interview and the job itself – so applicants understand why telling you that they have a disability may be beneficial
- Think about possible barriers and adjustments that might exist before you start the recruitment process – you may need to make adjustments at each stage to ensure all candidates have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities
- You may want to consider whether you could take an alternative approach to get the best outcome. You could consider some of these options, although you may want to discuss these first with your HR team if you have one:
  - do you need to have traditional face-to-face interviews?
  - can you give the option of an interview via video-link or online if it suits the candidate better?
  - would a 'work trial' rather than a formal interview give you a clearer indication of a person's suitability for the job (by giving them an opportunity to show you what they can do, rather than tell you about it)?

Remember, many adjustments are straightforward and can be implemented easily, at little or no cost.



# Welcoming new starters

Starting a new role or job can be stressful, so a good induction for all new starters in your team is important to help them settle in and familiarise themselves with the workplace, colleagues and their role. If you can, you may also want to consider having a mentor or ‘buddy’ for all new starters.

## Making adjustments for new employees

If you’re aware that your new starter has a disability or long-term health condition, arrange to talk to them as soon as possible after their appointment to discuss any adjustments they may need in their new job so these can be put in place before they start. Ask them what adjustments or support can help them be effective and successful in their new role.

It may be useful to confirm next steps and any agreed adjustments in writing.

As with all employees, you should discuss the job with the new starter on their first day, to familiarise them with workplace policies and practices and to outline your expectations.

Ensure your new starter has the equipment and adjustments needed to do the job as soon as they start. If anything is not in place, tell the individual what you are still waiting for and when it is expected.

Once the new individual is in post and has a clearer sense of their day-to-day work, you should have a further discussion with them to ensure the agreed adjustments are meeting their needs.

Keep a written record of any agreed adjustments. This will help you and your employee to review the adjustments made and how well they are working. This can also be used to pass information to a person’s new manager if they move jobs in the future, with the employees consent.

[Access to Work](#) can help disabled employees where someone needs support or adaptations beyond reasonable adjustments.



## Sources of advice

Further information on workplace induction is available from [Acas](#). Acas also have a [standard letter](#) that you can use to send to an employee to confirm the adjustments you have agreed.

### TOP TIPS

- **It is important that your induction processes are accessible for all new starters and are personalised to their particular needs so they can quickly become productive**
- **Talk to your new starter as soon as possible after they have been offered the job to welcome them and to discuss any adjustments they may need in their new job**
- **Check in regularly with the new starter to make sure that they have everything they need, that any adjustments put in place are working effectively, and if they need anything else to be effective and successful**

# Disclosure and confidentiality

An individual's disability or long-term health condition may not be visible. For example, you may not know about a person's mental health problem unless they tell you about it.

## An individual's choice to tell you about their disability

Employees vary in their preferences regarding what they tell their employer about their disability or health condition. Some choose not to say anything because, for example, they are concerned it will jeopardise their future career prospects, due to their culture or belief, or they are simply daunted by the prospect of the discussion. There is no legal requirement for someone to tell their employer that they have a disability.

## The benefits of disclosure

Sharing information about a disability or health condition can be beneficial for both the individual and the employer. If an employee informs their employer about their disability or health condition, effective adjustments can be put in place for that individual, giving them the opportunity to fully use their skills and abilities. However, not everyone will want to do so – employees should never be pressured to share this information.

## Encouraging sharing

Actively promoting a positive approach towards health and wellbeing by the organisation, and a clear commitment to disability and inclusion, can encourage employees to feel more confident about telling you about their disability or long-term health condition. The discussion doesn't need to be daunting. The term 'disclosure' sounds formal and has negative and/or legal connotations for some people. Using more informal, everyday language might help to break down the barriers around discussing disability. Ask people to 'share' or 'tell' rather than 'disclose' or 'declare'.

Someone's health or disability can be a sensitive issue, but most people would prefer a concerned and genuine enquiry about how they are, as opposed to silence. Often employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager making the first move to open up the conversation can be important.



Disability charity Scope's report '[Let's talk: improving conversations about disability at work](#)' includes tips for employers to encourage employees to share information about their disability or health condition.

In the case of someone who may be stressed or experiencing a mental health issue, NHS [Every Mind Matters](#) offers expert advice and practical tips on looking after mental health and wellbeing. Mind and the CIPD have also developed a [good practice guide for managers](#) to help them manage mental health issues at work.

Employees with a mental health condition can also access confidential advice and support as part of the [Access to Work Mental Health Support Service](#). Find out more about the service by visiting [Able Futures](#) or [Maximus](#).

If a member of your team wants to discuss their disability or health condition, conversations should be private and in a place where the individual is comfortable. Listen with empathy and respond with openness and common sense. You may also start to discuss possible adjustments and support.

## **When an employee does share information about a disability or long-term health condition**

If an employee tells you about a disability or long-term health condition, you may find it useful to learn more about that disability or condition. Remember that not everyone's experience will be the same and how they live with that condition, any symptoms that they experience or how they manage it – as well as any support that they need at work – will vary from person to person.

## **Confidentiality and consent to share information**

If an employee has told you about their disability or health condition, as with any personal information, this should be treated as confidential. You should give all members of your team reassurance of this.

Consent to share information about a disability or health condition must always be sought from the individual concerned. If a person doesn't give you consent to share their information, this must be respected. If the employee gives permission for information about their disability to be shared, discuss with them who will be told and by whom, and what they want and don't want colleagues to know.

Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions should have the same opportunities for promotion and progression as everyone else. They can, however, experience barriers to career progression. You might want to explore additional opportunities to support progression for disabled employees, such as mentoring or peer support with other disabled employees.

There should never be assumptions about someone's ability to perform to a high standard due to a disability or health condition. Developing an inclusive culture means recognising that people with a disability or long-term health condition can thrive at work if they have the appropriate understanding and support.

## **Access to training and development**

Ensure all employees have equal access to training, development and career opportunities. If training is being delivered outside your usual workplace, check that the training is accessible and whether delegates need any specific support or adjustments to help them engage fully with the learning. Similarly, also check that any online training provided is fully accessible.

## **Making adjustments to the performance management process**

Most large and medium-sized employers have formal performance management and appraisal processes in place. You may need to consider adjustments to these to ensure a disabled employee can participate fully and is not disadvantaged by any part of the process. Adjustments could include, for example:

- using accessible meeting rooms
- allowing the employee member longer to prepare for meetings and appraisals
- having a fellow employee or advocate present to support them

## Discussing performance

Remember that performance management should, in essence, be a positive process and focus on the support needed to help everyone perform to the best of their ability.

To effectively manage your team's performance, it is good practice to have regular discussions with all of your employees on a one-to-one basis. These discussions can be formal meetings focused on the individual's work, providing constructive feedback, recognising good performance and identifying development needs.

However, a more informal approach can be an effective way of giving ongoing feedback and exploring any issues which may be affecting an individual's performance, such as an underlying health condition. Informal conversations can be used to identify possible solutions to overcome any barriers a person is facing, and to help them perform to the best of their ability.

Discussions or meetings about performance should focus on the employee's work, but asking straightforward, open questions about how they are and whether anything is affecting their performance can encourage people to open up about any health issues.

## Adjustments and improving performance

It's important that the performance management process takes full account of any health condition or disability where there is under-performance on the part of an individual. These should be fully explored and discussed before any formal process is initiated. The focus of any performance management process should be on positive improvement, and supportive measures put in place to help someone reach their potential.

If under-performance is an issue, you need to discuss potential adjustments, training or support that could help bridge someone's gap in performance. Possible adjustments could include development activities or supervision, providing a mentor or adjusting someone's responsibilities.

## Adjustments and moving jobs

If a disabled member of your team is moving to another part of your organisation, their new manager will need to know about any existing adjustments as soon as possible – it may also be that new or different adjustment need to be made.

Remember to ask your employee if you can pass on any information and reports on reasonable adjustments so they can be put in place automatically. You can suggest to the employee that they use the [Health Adjustment Passport](#) to help provide their new manager with the information that they need to support them effectively. This is a helpful form that provides information about adjustments.

If you are the person moving jobs, be sure to talk to your employee to discuss communicating with their new manager about their adjustments and requirements.

### TOP TIPS

- **Ensure all employees have equal access to training and development and career opportunities.**
- **An informal element to performance management is key to encouraging trust and openness – this will then make it easier for an individual to share any underlying health issues (if they choose to do so) and identify any adjustments needed.**

## Sources of Advice

For further information on changing and leaving employment, the [Acas advice](#) section covers promotion, dismissal and redundancy.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have produced guidance on '[Avoiding unlawful discrimination when dismissing a worker](#)'.

Acas have produced guidance on [good performance management](#).



# Sickness Absence

Don't assume that employees with a disability or health condition will have more sickness absence than any other employees – this is often not the case. For example, Mencap have found that if placed in the right job, people with a learning disability actually have fewer sick days than people without a learning disability.

## Effective absence management

All employees may need time off for a variety of reasons, from short-term sickness to longer-term health issues. Effective absence management is vital to support the needs of individuals and minimise the impact on the business – check your organisation's policy on managing absence if you have one.

As a manager, you have a crucial role to play in this, from day-to-day management of sickness absences to creating an open and inclusive working environment where employees feel able to discuss health and wellbeing issues.

These also link to effective management of employees with disabilities or long-term health conditions in your team. This could be, for example:

- recognising when absences might be related to a disability
- how to support an individual where this could be the case
- how you manage an individual's absences related to their known disability or health condition

If one of your employees is taking a lot of time off sick, and you are not aware of any disability or health condition, discuss this with them to find out exactly the cause of the problems they are experiencing and whether reasonable adjustments can be made to help them. Do consider that sometimes, you might not be the best person for them to speak too. For example, an employee might feel happier with some disabilities or long-term health conditions to talk to someone from their own gender. Where possible, let the employee know if there is someone else they can talk too if they feel more comfortable.



Discussions about health issues can be difficult for both employees and managers. An informal approach can be a good way to encourage an open, two-way dialogue about any barriers your employee is facing, and how they might be overcome.

## Long-term absence and returning to work

Stay in regular contact with any employee who is absent for a long time, not only to find out how they are, but also to keep them in touch with work. This will make the transition back to work easier for the person when they are ready to return.

If an employee is looking to return to work after a long-term absence, discuss with them adjustments or support which can help to ease them back into the work routine.

These could include, for example:

- a phased return to work, initially working certain days a week or having shorter days for a period of time (and adjusted duties during that time)
- re-designing a person's job role
- a move to a different role

## Disability related absence

In some circumstances, some people with a disability or long-term health condition may need to take additional time off, for example, for medical treatment or rehabilitation.

Standard treatment and recording of these absences can mean that that person faces a disadvantage as a result of their disability. Expert organisations such as the Business Disability Forum recommend recording 'standard' sickness and disability-related absence separately to avoid this. Some employers have a 'disability leave' policy to help managers to do this.

## Fit notes

Healthcare professionals issue fit notes (after the first seven calendar days of absence) to provide evidence of the advice they have given employees about their fitness for work. They record details of their patient's condition so the patient and their employer can consider ways to help them return to work. A fit note may tell an employee to refrain from attending work or that they may be fit to undertake some work, possibly with changes or support.

If you cannot make any changes to take account of the advice in the fit note, you do not have to do so. However, supporting someone with a health condition to come back to work could save your organisation money and minimise disruption. People can come back to work before they are 100% fit if appropriate – in fact, work can even help their recovery. Often, small changes can help someone with a health condition come back to work earlier.

Your employee can come back to work at any time, even if this is before their fit note expires. They do not need to go back to their healthcare professional first.

If your employee's fit note says that they may be fit for work, you should discuss with them whether there are any specific changes which could help them return to work and what support they might need to ensure this return is successful – focus on practical ways you can support that return and document agreements made. It is also a good idea to put a timeframe on when you will review any arrangements or changes.

The Government have an [advice document](#) on fit notes for organisations and managers.

## Occupational health

Occupational health is a specialised service that provides advice and guidance about health in the workplace. Some organisations will have their own internal services, or they may engage the services of external providers. Occupational health typically advise on reasonable adjustments, undertake health assessments, provide guidance on returning to work after sickness absence and assess risks to health. Sometimes, occupational health will also liaise with other medical professionals, such as the employee's GP where appropriate, if the employee agrees to this. Normally, engaging with an occupational health service involves a formal referral, and after the assessment, the provision of a report setting out the advice and guidance to the manager or organisation.

You may want to check whether your organisation uses an occupational health service and how and when you can refer employees to that service.

Acas have more [guidance and information](#) on occupational health.



## TOP TIPS

- **Creating an open and supportive environment can help give employees the confidence to discuss an underlying health condition or disability, and explore possible adjustments to help them overcome any barriers they face**
- **Record disability-related absence separately from other sickness absences, so that employment decisions, such as bonuses or disciplinary action, are not affected by a person's disability**
- **Be clear, consistent and open about your approach on sickness absence to avoid misunderstanding and concern**

## Sources of advice

A number of organisations have produced advice and guidance on managing absence, including the HSE, CIPD and Acas.

You can also access the [Support with employee health and disability – resource from Gov.UK](#) where you can get answer questions about your situation and get advice based on your answers, as well as get information on legal requirements.

# Supporting Specific Disabilities and Long-Term Health Conditions in the Workplace

There are many different disabilities and health conditions, and each of them influence how an organisation and an individual's manager needs to respond to support employees in the workplace. This section discusses just a few specific conditions that may be relevant to people managers.

## Long Covid

Long Covid (also known as Post Covid Syndrome) is a relatively new health condition which we are learning more about every day. It can include wide-ranging and fluctuating symptoms – this might mean that employees living with Long Covid improve but then experience worsening symptoms. This may influence their attendance at work. Treatments are available and Post Covid support services are available from the NHS throughout the UK – recovery can be slow but generally individuals improve over time. The range of symptoms and their fluctuating nature mean that support and adjustments will need to be tailored to the employee's specific needs and the nature of the work that they do. Communication between the manager and the employee is key and should be ongoing.

## Mental health

Mental health is an umbrella term used to describe a range of conditions including depression, anxiety, stress, eating disorders and phobias. Poor mental health can result in a wide range of symptoms, treatments and support requirements. Poor mental health can be long-term or result suddenly from a specific situation such as a bereavement. It may or may not be related to the work that people do. Some conditions, like stress, can be worsened by circumstances at work.

Just like physical disabilities, mental health can be considered a disability under the Equality Act and employees are entitled to reasonable adjustments in the workplace.



Not all employees will be comfortable sharing that they have a mental health condition with anyone at work. Managers can promote a culture of wellbeing and positive mental health by regularly checking in with employees on their wellbeing, ensuring workloads are manageable and promoting healthy working habits

Some organisations offer mental health support from wellbeing activities to Employee Assistance Programmes. You may wish to find out what is available within your own organisation.

The NHS website has a [range of information](#) on different mental health conditions that can be referred to in the event of the disclosure of a specific condition.

## Learning difficulties

A learning difficulty (also sometimes known as a learning disorder) is another umbrella term that is used to describe a range of conditions that can affect certain areas of learning, such as reading, writing, spelling and maths. They range in severity and include conditions such as dyslexia, and they do not affect general intelligence.

There are now a wide range of assistive technologies that can support employees with learning difficulties be effective in the workplace. Microsoft have produced some useful [information](#) about different types of assistive technologies.

## Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the natural variation in human brain functioning. It refers to the fact that human brains are wired differently in terms of information processing, communication and sensory processing. While all brains are different, some people with broadly similar ways of thinking, communicating and processing information can have a sense of shared identity and experience. For example, an identity as autistic, dyslexic, or as an ADHDer.

A lack of employer awareness and understanding of neurodiversity means it has rarely been considered in the design of workplace processes, environments, or in the way work is organised. This may suit, or function, for a majority, but isn't enabling many others to be their best at work; that perhaps as many as up to 20% of people who identify as neurodivergent in some way. In contrast, those organisations leading the way in this area are seeing advantages of doing so – hiring people they wouldn't have hired, making better managers, supporting employee wellbeing and supporting retention.



The CIPD, working with Optimize, has published a [guide on neurodiversity](#) in the workplace for managers, HR professionals and leaders across functions who want to learn more about neurodiversity, the benefits for their organisation, and how they can support neurodivergent people to be comfortable and successful at work. The CIPD also participated in the Buckland Review of Autism Employment, and that review recommended working with the CIPD to ensure the 2018 Neurodiversity at Work guidance is publicised and accessible to employers.

## Visual and sensory impairment

Visual and sensory impairment often refers to impairments or conditions impacting vision or hearing (or both at the same time), although it can also include conditions that also affect other senses. Such conditions can present challenges for employees in the workplace, such as hearing effectively in meetings or engaging with workplace communications. Adjustments for people with sensory impairments might include environmental changes (such as lighting levels) or assistive technologies.

With all these conditions, as with all other disabilities and long-term health conditions, a personalised approach to support in the workplace is essential, as every employee will have different experiences and needs. Assessments, such as those that can be undertaken by occupational health, can help to establish how best to enable an employee with a disability or long term-health condition be successful at work.

# Retaining People

Having an effective framework in place to retain people with a disability or health condition is crucial – it saves money on recruitment and training and prevents businesses from losing valuable skills and talent.

If a member of your team becomes disabled or if their existing condition worsens, be sure to discuss this with them. But be aware that they may still be coming to terms with their disability and how it is affecting their day-to-day life.

Initially someone may not want to discuss their disability with you. If this is the case, make sure there is signposting for the individual to have a confidential discussion with someone else, for example, a wellbeing champion or HR adviser.

## TOP TIPS

- **Don't make assumptions about an individual's abilities or requirements.**
- **Talk to the person about potential reasonable adjustments that will help them to stay in their role – however, if they have only recently acquired their disability, they may not know the barriers they are likely to face at work yet, or how they can be overcome.**
- **Keep a written record of any agreed adjustments and keep them under regular review to see how well they are working.**



# Leaving the Business or Organisation

There are a number of other reasons a disabled employee may leave your team. These include resignation, dismissal, redundancy and retirement.

If a disabled member of your team asks you for a reference, remember to focus on that person's skills, experience and qualities – don't mention their disability or health condition.

## Exit interviews

Even if a disabled employee has been provided with all necessary support, they may still choose to move on from your organisation for new opportunities. All employees who resign should be offered an exit interview. They can be asked if their decision to leave was influenced by a disability or health condition. The feedback can be used to see what could be done differently in future.

## Dismissal

If you are considering dismissing an employee with a disability for any reason, you need to make sure you have taken all reasonable steps to, for example, improve that person's performance or attendance. You may wish to consider taking specialist advice before taking action, such as from your HR department if you have one.

## Redundancy process and criteria

If you are considering making redundancies, you need to make sure that people with a disability or health condition are not placed at a disadvantage because of their condition.

Think carefully about the criteria you use to select employees for redundancy, which should be objective. You will need to make adjustments to any criteria that would place a disabled employee at a disadvantage. For example, if sickness absence is a criterion, you could exclude disability-related absence from the absences you take into account.

You will need to make sure that the way you manage the redundancy process doesn't disadvantage a disabled person. For example, by making alternative arrangements if someone is unable to attend a meeting about the terms of the redundancy for a reason related to their condition.



# Further Information and Guidance

## Equality and Inclusion – good practice and the law

The following organisations provide a range of information and guidance on workplace inclusion and the legal framework – the Equality Act 2010.

### **Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Services (Acas)**

Acas provides free and impartial information, advice, and training to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law, including a number of disability discrimination and health at work:

### **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)**

CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. It provides information on a range of people management issues, including diversity, inclusion and wellbeing in the workplace.

### **The Clear Company**

The Clear Company Equality, Diversity and Inclusion services helping employers to remove barriers to inclusion and create diverse workplaces. They [provide a range of toolkits and resources](#) (registration required)

### **Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI)**

ENEI is an employer network promoting workplace equality and inclusion of employers. It can provide training, consultancy and information for members including:

- [Neurodiversity in the workplace](#)

### **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**

The EHRC promotes and monitors human rights. It has a range of information on disability discrimination, including:

- [guidance for employers on the Equality Act 2010](#)
- [employing people, workplace adjustments](#)



## Advice and support on disabilities and health conditions for employers

The following are sources of information and advice on recruiting, retaining and developing disabled people.

### **Access to Work**

Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support grant scheme that aims to support disabled people start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support for people who have a disability or physical or mental health condition. Support can be provided where someone needs support or adaptations beyond reasonable adjustments.

### **Business Disability Forum (BDF)**

Business Disability Forum is a not-for-profit member organisation that offers information, support and advice to help businesses across all sectors to recruit and retain disabled people and to serve disabled customers. It can help employers to make sure that their recruitment tools and processes are fully accessible for disabled people.

### **British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)**

BASE is the national trade association involved in securing employment for disabled people. Their website offers [guidance for employers](#) on disability and work. BASE members work closely with disabled jobseekers and employers to help find sustainable work for the disabled person.

### **Disability Confident**

The Disability Confident scheme provides guidance and resources about employing disabled people and how the scheme can help your business.

### **Federation of Small Businesses**

A member organisation for small business and the self-employed that also has information on [‘business without barriers’](#).

### **GOV.UK**

GOV.UK includes guidance for employers on [employing disabled people](#), information about [Access to Work](#) and the services provided by [Jobcentre Plus](#).

### **Purple**

Purple seeks to bring disabled people and businesses together and provides a range of support services.



### **Ingeus**

Ingeus deliver specialist services in employment and health, working with employers to support their workforce development and recruitment.

### **Pluss**

Pluss is a social enterprise which supports disabled people into work and provide disability employment services tailored to employers.

### **Reed in Partnership**

Reed in Partnership provides services that positively transform people and their communities. They deliver employment support, skills training, youth services, health interventions and business support.

### **Maximus**

Maximus is the UK's leading disability specialist, with more than 70 years of experience delivering employment and skills support. They provide [guides](#) and information on:

- attracting, developing and retaining an inclusive workforce
- mental health and wellbeing
- training
- a disability guide
- disability awareness factsheets
- workplace adjustments advice and guidance
- skills and apprenticeship programmes

### **Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDI)**

The Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDI) is a national, voluntary group with one purpose: to break down the barriers faced by the millions of disabled people who are entering or progressing through the job market. They have produced a [series of six videos](#) to become a disability confident recruiter.

### **Shaw Trust**

Shaw Trust provide specialist services for employers UK-wide, including training and consultancy, accessibility and absence management services. Shaw Trust [accessibility services](#) also advise on making digital and physical environments accessible.



## Trade Bodies

The [Trade Association Forum](#) has been the ‘association of associations’ – encouraging the development and sharing of best practice among UK trade associations and promoting the role of effective trade associations to government, industry and the wider public

## Disability Organisations

The following are organisations which represent disabled people and therefore have specialist knowledge on a range of disabilities and health conditions and offer advice and guidance for employers:

- [Scope](#) provides information on a range of disabilities and health conditions
- [Leonard Cheshire](#) can help businesses make their workplaces as inclusive as possible
- [Mencap](#) A charity for people with a learning disability. Provides a range of information include a [‘Good for Business’ report](#) about the benefits of employing people with a learning disability.
- [Disability Rights UK](#) provides a number of services for employers

The following are organisations which can provide support and information on particular disabilities and health conditions:

- alzheimer’s/dementia – [Alzheimer’s Society](#)
- arthritis – [Versus Arthritis](#)
- autism – [Autism Alliance UK](#), [Autism Plus](#) and [The National Autistic Society](#)
- back-related pain – [BackCare](#)
- diabetes – [Diabetes UK](#)
- dyslexia – [Dyslexia Action](#) and [British Dyslexia Association](#)
- dyspraxia – [Dyspraxia Foundation](#)
- epilepsy – [Epilepsy Action](#)
- hearing impairment – [Action on Hearing Loss](#), [British Deaf Association](#) and [UK Council on Deafness](#)
- heart disease – [British Heart Foundation](#)
- learning disabilities – [British Institute of Learning Disabilities](#) and [Mencap](#)



- mental health – [Mind](#), [Rethink Mental Illness](#), and [SANE](#)
- multiple sclerosis – [Multiple Sclerosis Society](#)
- muscular dystrophy – [Muscular Dystrophy UK](#)
- speech impairment – [The British Stammering Association](#)
- spinal injuries – [Spinal Injuries Association](#)
- strokes – [Stroke Association](#)
- visual impairment – [RNIB](#)

## Job Advertising and Job Boards

The following are a list of specialist job boards and resource sites that enable and support the employment of disabled people.

- [Evenbreak](#)
- [Disability Jobsite](#)
- [RNIB](#)
- [Vercida](#)
- [Embracing Future Potential](#)

[Jobcentre Plus](#) can provide support with recruitment and have an [online enquiry form](#) for employers.

# Endnotes

- i <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/health-well-being-work>
- ii <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2023/employment-of-disabled-people-2023>
- iii [Source: Scope's analysis based on Household Below Average Income \(2017 to 18\)](#)
- iv <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2023/employment-of-disabled-people-2023>



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