



Cabinet Office



Disability Unit

Reasonable adjustments

Building the evidence base

March 2026

Executive summary

Reasonable adjustments are changes an employer makes to remove any substantial disadvantage faced by an employee due to a mental and/or physical impairment.¹ The Equality Act 2010 sets out an employer's duty and employee's right to these adjustments.² Adjustments can include alterations to working practices, the physical workplace, the provision of auxiliary aids and many other changes.

Limited evidence base

Analysing the reasonable adjustment process is challenging, due to the limited and patchy evidence-base.

Academic research is limited and fragmented. Very few studies look at adjustments in isolation. Where they are considered, they often focus on a specific disability or workplace, making findings difficult to generalise to the wider process.

Survey evidence provides only partial and uneven coverage. Very little survey data exists on the process. Where it is available, it is skewed towards employee perspectives. Survey data largely comes from unions and charities, meaning the data does not capture employer attitudes and experiences.

There is limited evidence on employer experiences. Beyond survey data, there are very few reports that capture employer attitudes. This imbalance in the evidence base could lead to certain issues or barriers being overstated.

Available data is skewed towards disputes, rather than successful implementation, making analysis of successful cases impossible. This report uses data from Acas and the Employment Tribunal judgment portal. These datasets only capture cases that have been escalated and cannot be generalised to the wider experience of the process. There is no evidence on how many requests are rejected that do not escalate to Acas or tribunal.

Issues with processes

Most disabled employees who request adjustments receive some or all of their request. Survey evidence of disabled employees from multiple sources (Trades Union Congress, 2025; Unison, 2020; University of York, 2026) indicates that most who make a request receive all or some of the adjustments from their employer.^{3, 4} On average, a third receive all their adjustments, with another third receiving some of them.

1 Section 20, [Equality Act 2010](#)

2 Section 20, [Equality Act 2010](#)

3 TUC (2025) [Disabled workers' access to reasonable adjustment](#)

4 Unison (2020) [Let's be reasonable. Disability report](#)

But employers and employees face issues across the process, with some of them particularly impacted at certain stages.

Some employers may struggle when deciding on and implementing requests.

Employers may rely on external organisations, such as Access to Work or those providing specialist equipment, which can cause delays at the decision and implementation stage.

Some employees find it difficult to request adjustments. Some evidence suggests employees are not requesting adjustments when they potentially need them. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) (2025) found that only 37% of disabled employees requested an adjustment.⁵ Of those that did not, 47% reported that they could have benefited from one. Similarly, the University of York (2026) found that 16% of surveyed individuals did not request an adjustment, despite feeling like they need one. More research is needed to understand the exact reasons why these employees are not making requests.

A minority of employees are having their requests refused. The TUC (2025) found 11% of disabled employees did not receive any of the adjustments they requested⁶, while Unison (2020) estimated this number to be 20% of disabled workers.⁷ However, the scale of this is difficult to assess, as it is likely that some requests will be refused as they are clearly unreasonable. More research is needed to understand this further.

Knowledge gaps

Knowledge gaps are likely the biggest issue impacting the process for both employees and employers. Under the Equality Act 2010 (from now on referred to as the Equality Act), employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments. However, the act leaves the meaning of ‘reasonable’ largely undefined. This inherent ambiguity is often seen as beneficial, providing flexibility to both employers and employees, and avoiding the restrictive nature of overly-prescriptive legislation. However, this can also create ambiguity about what the duty requires and how far an employer’s obligation extends. Although limited guidance should fill these knowledge gaps, both employers and employees continue to be uncertain about when the duty applies and what actions are necessary to meet it.

Employers are unclear on their legal duties under the Equality Act. In interviews, legal and academic experts, as well as tribunal judges and Acas conciliators, confirmed that the ambiguity of the Equality Act leaves many employers unsure of their legal obligations. Employers may be unclear on how far the duty extends, particularly around what may be considered reasonable or unreasonable.

5 TUC (2025) [Disabled workers’ access to reasonable adjustment](#)

6 TUC (2025) [Disabled workers’ access to reasonable adjustment](#)

7 Unison (2020) [Let’s be reasonable. Disability report](#)

Employees are unclear what may constitute a ‘reasonable’ adjustment.

Employees are similarly disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in the law with some disabled employees requesting adjustments that are considered unreasonable. Others may not request adjustments at all, as they are unaware of their entitlements to support.

Additional barriers

We have identified 4 additional barriers which may undermine the efficacy of the process for both employers and employees, though evidence gaps make it difficult to assess their exact impact and scale.

Delays. Unison (2020) and the TUC (2025) both present delay as a major barrier to accessing adjustments.^{8, 9} Acas conciliators acknowledged that delays may occur in this process but did not view them as particularly impactful. Neither legal experts nor tribunal judges viewed delays as a significant barrier to adjustments or to accessing justice. There is little evidence from the employer’s perspective here.

Fear of negative consequences. Academic research and survey data suggests disabled employees may avoid disclosing their impairments, and subsequently requesting adjustments, due to fears of stigma and discrimination. Experts note that employers also fear making the ‘wrong’ decision in relation to adjustment requests, believing they may lead to legal costs and/or reputational damage.

Lack of clear workplace practices. The TUC (2025)¹⁰ and University of York (2026) suggest that employers rarely have clear procedures in place for dealing with requests. Acas conciliators also reported the lack of clear processes in the workplace to be a significant barrier to employees accessing and employers implementing reasonable adjustments. There is no evidence on how many employers have practices in place, making a full analysis difficult.

Cost. Survey data from the TUC (2025) and Unison (2020) suggests that some employees have their requests refused as employers see them as unreasonable due to the high costs they would take to implement.^{11, 12} However, numerous interviewees challenged this claim, explaining that most adjustments are cost neutral. Acas conciliators and tribunal judges similarly disputed the prevalence of cost, suggesting this is not a prominent barrier in escalated cases. We were unable to find views from businesses on this issue.

These barriers negatively impact employers and employees.

8 Unison (2020) [Let’s be reasonable. Disability report](#)

9 TUC (2025) [Disabled workers’ access to reasonable adjustment](#)

10 TUC (2025) [Disabled workers’ access to reasonable adjustment](#)

11 TUC (2025) [Disabled workers’ access to reasonable adjustment](#)

12 Unison (2020) [Let’s be reasonable. Disability report](#)

Certain employers are likely to be particularly impacted by an ineffective process. Issues with support for employers, such as delays in Access to Work funding, can mean employers are unable to provide adjustments, even where they wish to support disabled employees. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are likely to be particularly impacted, as they may have no or very small HR teams. These companies will likely have less knowledge and capability to provide adjustments, especially compared to larger companies.

Employees' productivity and conditions may worsen if not in receipt of essential adjustments. Research suggests not having adjustments leads to poorer retention, productivity and wellbeing. The Business Disability Forum (BDF) (2023) found that 49% of disabled employees said adjustments help them stay in their job¹³, while 48% said they help them to be more productive. Unison (2020) reported that disabled employees who had not yet received adjustments took more sick leave and experienced increased pain and fatigue.¹⁴

13 Business Disability Forum (2023) [The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023](#)

14 Unison (2020) [Let's be reasonable. Disability report](#)