



Accessible and Inclusive Workplaces

Making your workplace accessible and inclusive for disabled employees

What is disability?

Under the Equality Act 2010, disability is a protected characteristic – this means that workplaces cannot discriminate against disabled employees, candidates or customers. However, not everyone is aware of what constitutes a disability, the government has defined it as such:

“You’re disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.”

– Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010, Gov.UK

Different types of disability

Physical and visible

These are the conditions that most people think of when they think of disabled people; the person in a wheelchair, the person with prosthetics, a blind person with a cane and/or guide dog.



Physical and hidden

These conditions are often well known conditions but until someone tells you, you likely won't know they have it, with some exceptions. This list includes deaf or hard of hearing, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, endometriosis, PCOS and in some cases menopause.



Neurological

When people think of neurological conditions they think of extreme learning difficulties or significant psychological disorders like schizophrenia. Whilst those should be included the list of neurological disabilities is extensive. This list will include all neurodiverse conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia and more.



Mental Health

This list could come under neurological but it's important to note that depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder can all be disabilities when they last longer than 12 months.





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Creating an Accessible and Inclusive Workplace

How can you create a safe, accessible and inclusive space for disabled employees, candidates, customers and clients? Consult with your disabled employees, your disability network or an expert consultant. This will take time but it will allow you to create the most accessible and inclusive space.

In the meantime, here's some things you can start doing now:

Accessibility



Remove physical barriers

Ensure you have ramps/wheelchair lift on any external stairs or internal steps, ensure you have accessible doors (automatic with or without button), elevators to all floors (with alternatives for maintenance), all walkways are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and are never blocked.

Adapt the work environment

Create quiet spaces within the office layout, ensure disabled employees have easy access to the facilities they need (i.e. kitchen, toilets, quiet rooms and/or self-contained cubicles).

Provide flexible working

Including options to work from home or office, flexible start and finish times, prioritising output over time worked.

Communicate using multiple accessible channels

Consider how people like to receive information and provide multiple options where possible, i.e. large font, braille, audio, video, infographic.

Where there is a cost involved in implementing some of these, there is help for employers under the government's [Access to Work programme](#). [The Equal Group](#) can provide some advice on this process and signpost further assistance in navigating the application and assessment.



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Accessibility (continued)

Providing tools and equipment

Ensuring employees have the tools and equipment they need to do their job well. This can include noise cancelling headphones, screen filters, digital technology, ergonomic seats / keyboards / mouse, etc.



Offering specialist training and/or support

Employees with specific needs whether for learning or performing their job, may need additional or alternative training, or support



Inclusion

1. Raise disability awareness

Provide accessible resources for managers – ensure managers know where to get information when an employee discloses their condition and asks for support.

2. Fund, advertise and celebrate ERGs

Providing an Employee Resource Group (ERG) helps to give employees a safe space to discuss their issues and can create a powerful tool to help employers create, adapt and implement initiatives.

3. Check your policies and processes

Ensure your policies and processes are considerate of the diverse needs of your employees. Just because it's legally compliant doesn't mean it is automatically inclusive.

4. Ensure your workplace(s) is safe space

Each organisation needs to understand the nature of the work they do and the needs of their staff to perform this work. This will require working directly with ERGs, staff wellbeing reps and union reps to develop a full understanding of the issues faced in their workplace.

The ONS have reported that a higher proportion of disabled employees have been made redundant than employees who are not disabled.





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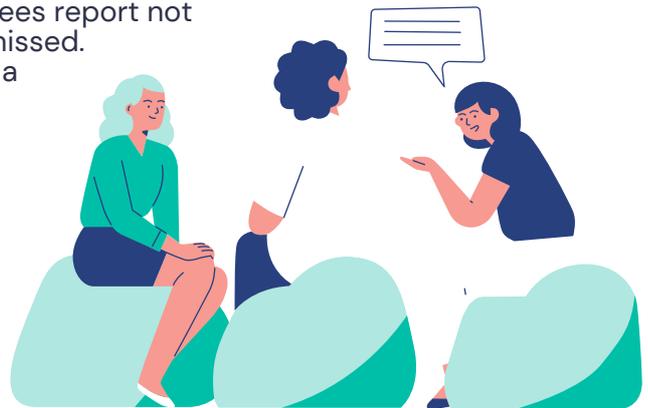
Creating a Safe Space

Remove or mitigate ableism – this comes in various forms, from inaccessible environments to arranging work events that always require physical participation to the language we use. Challenge all forms of ableism and provide training to help staff understand how to be more inclusive.

Handle complaints and disputes appropriately – any complaint or dispute must be taken seriously, particularly when related to a protected characteristic and/or a routinely oppressed group. Listening to and solving grievances swiftly and appropriately builds trust and confidence between the employee and employer.

Listen to live experience – many disabled employees report not feeling listened to, with their experience often dismissed. This can make them feel unwelcome and unsafe in a workplace.

Eliminate ableist language – challenging ableist slurs that have become common in workplace banter is step 1, employers also need to consider the regular or subtle ableism (assuming someone can't do something, assuming they can, making comments about their abilities) and even positive ableism (autistic people have superpowers) which can create unattainable expectations.



Next steps

Investigate your organisation's disability inclusion initiatives. Follow this checklist:

- Disability Awareness and Inclusion Training
- Disability considerations in policies and/or processes
- Accessible options for policies, learning and other work resources
- Functioning and funded disability ERG
- Robust reasonable adjustments process and guidance (with examples)
- Signposting for support, including Access to Work
- Understanding of the intersectional impact on disabilities
- Do your disabled employees feel safe and included in the workplace and their teams?

We are here to help...

Book a consultation: www.theequalgroup.com/book-a-consultation
Email: contact@theequalgroup.com