

These guidelines are designed to help increase your confidence when having conversations about supporting employees with disabilities, and to equip you with some ideas of things we can do to make our workplace more accessible for new and existing employees.

Workplace Accommodations

Making some small alterations to our workplace or practices can make a huge difference to an individual's ability to participate fully and contribute effectively. Providing accommodations of this nature also opens up the widest possible talent pool to us as an organization, so everyone wins.

Do we have a duty to accommodate?

This will vary by location, but generally we will have a legal duty to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, we also believe that we have a strong ethical obligation regardless of local requirements. This means that we should provide reasonable accommodations where possible and financially viable.

What is a 'reasonable accommodation'?

What is considered a 'reasonable accommodation' will differ on a case-by-case basis, but generally it means any change to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that allows an individual with a disability to apply for a job, perform job functions, or enjoy equal access to benefits available to other individuals in the workplace. As an employer, we must make accommodations as required under the applicable law, or where no such law exists, to the extent we are able, which will be determined by the cost and work involved to make the accommodation and the organization's ability to absorb this.

Examples of Workplace Accommodations

These examples are good to consider for both visible and non-visible disabilities (e.g., Anxiety, depression, arthritis, ulcerative colitis, multiple sclerosis, etc.)

Schedules and Hours of Work

We see the value of flexible working and encourage it for all staff, as outlined in our Flexible Working policy, but it may offer particular benefits in supporting the needs of an individual with a disability. The following should be considered reasonable accommodations.

- Part-time hours
- Flexible work schedule

- Ability to work from home
- Split shifts
- Scheduling work only at one location
- Scheduling (and enforcing) regular breaks during meetings of more than one hour

Providing materials in alternative accessible formats

- Documents with a font size of at least 18pt and easy to read sans-serif font types (e.g. Verdana, Arial) may accommodate individuals with low vision.
- You can also provide these documents in accessible PDF formats to be used with screen reader software.
- Avoid walls of text. Written materials that include photos and other visual anchors will make it easier for some employees with cognitive challenges to understand what is being described.
- PowerPoint presentations provide live subtitle functionality (under the slideshow tab, 'always use subtitles') which can accommodate individuals with hearing difficulties.
- PowerPoint also has a 'Check Accessibility' tool under the 'Review' tab which will provide further insights.
- Similarly, MS Office provides Dictation and Read Aloud tools which may help accommodate other diverse abilities.

Ensuring all paths of travel to the workspace are clear of barriers

Ensure that all major pathways to key areas of your workspace are clear of obstacles. This will make it easy for all employees to navigate the space. Please contact Facilities before reconfiguring any work areas as they will be able to assist you with this.

Allowing flexibility in job duties for non-essential functions

Create roles by identifying the key duties and responsibilities and then reflecting upon the skills and abilities that are required to perform those duties successfully. This is good practice, but we need to remain flexible in our assessments and ensure that we are not excluding individuals by applying overly restrictive criteria. For example, standing and problem solving at a whiteboard may be a helpful skill for a Software Engineer, but an individual may have a physical or cognitive disability which prevents them from doing this. As writing on a whiteboard isn't an essential and integral part of the Software Engineer role, we should be flexible in allowing an individual to perform the role without engaging in this specific activity, or we should identify reasonable accommodations that enable them to perform this activity.

Other reasonable workplace accommodations include:

- Working with a job coach

- Peer mentoring
- Maximizing employees' strengths by minimizing distractions (e.g., quiet space to work, providing earplugs if necessary)
- Relocating an individual's workstation to be closer to other required equipment/rooms
- Providing written job instructions (and audio recordings of them where helpful)
- Providing a list of prioritized job tasks
- Providing optical magnifiers to magnify written material
- Allowing audio recording devices for notetaking of instructions or meeting minutes
- Hands-free telephones or voice-to-text/text-to-voice translation
- Document holders to assist in typing
- Keyboards with keys that use high-contrast colours
- Speech recognition and other assistive software
- Noise cancelling headphones

The above is by no means an exhaustive list, so it is important to talk to individuals to better understand their needs and the specific support we can provide. There is a commonly held myth that making accommodations for employees with disabilities is complicated and expensive. All of the above can be implemented at relatively low cost and could make a huge difference to an individual's ability to access and operate effectively in a workplace, and to benefit from their talents and unique abilities.