

Briefing

Employment adjustments for people with sight loss

Abridged content for sample purposes

This briefing is not an authoritative statement of the law. While we have made every effort to ensure that the information we have provided is correct, Business Disability Forum cannot accept any responsibility or liability.

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Introduction

What is sight loss?

Over two million people in the UK are living with sight loss, with around 350,000 people registered as blind or partially sighted.^[1] The number of people with sight loss in the UK is expected to double by 2050.

There are many causes of sight loss – some people are born with a visual loss, others inherit an eye condition and some lose their sight as a result of an accident, after illness, or through age.

One in five people aged 75 and over is living with sight loss and one in two people aged 90 and over is living with sight loss. Also, adults with learning disabilities are 10 times more likely to be blind or partially sighted than the general population.

Sight loss affects the visual acuity and/or the field of vision.

Visual acuity

Visual acuity allows people to look at objects in detail, describing how clear or sharp the vision is.

[1] RNIB

Field of vision

The field of vision is the area that people can see without moving the eyes from side to side.

Few people who have sight loss have no vision at all and so your employees may have different levels of vision. For example:

- Blind and partially sighted people – only 4% of people registered as 'blind' have absolutely no useful vision.
- People who have no central vision or no vision to the sides.
- People with blurred or patchy vision.

Many people with sight loss are able to get around, using their remaining vision or with the use of a mobility aid, such as a white cane or a guide dog. The degree and nature of sight loss is specific to the individual and assumptions about what that might mean for individuals should not be made.

Employment and people with sight loss

Many people with sight loss will be protected under the Equality Act 2010 but may not consider themselves to be disabled.

Nevertheless employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and not discriminate against current or potential employees who might be facing barriers at work because of a disability or long-term condition – even if it has not been diagnosed as a disability or accepted as such by the individual.

Employers should be aware that non-visible disabilities, such as sight loss, mean that specific barriers can be less obvious. This means reasonable adjustments may be more challenging for employers to determine and put in place. Employers can seek advice from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers at Jobcentre Plus who refer people with sight loss for positions. There are also organisations which offer specialist advice and disability awareness training to help employers ensure that their recruitment process takes into account any barriers faced by those with sight loss – **see page 29 for further details.**

It is important that employers have an honest conversation with new employees and their support staff about the barriers that may be present in the workplace and what simple measures might help to remove them. The best practice approach is to make reasonable adjustments for anyone who needs them in order to work effectively and contribute fully to your organisation.

Employment adjustments for people with sight loss

Most employers will want to know what is 'reasonable'. Doing what seems fair for the individual and others who work for you given the size and resources of your organisation is a good place to start.

This guidance will help you deliver best practice.

- You might need to treat people differently in order to treat them fairly.
- Don't make assumptions about what people can and cannot do.
- Ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for doing what and when it must be done.
- Involve the individual in identifying barriers and generating solutions to them.
- Respect their right to confidentiality.

For more detail on the law and making reasonable adjustments contact **Business Disability Forum's** Advice Service on telephone number **+44-(0)-20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or see the Briefing on The Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments and best practice

Only one-third of blind and partially-sighted people of working age are in employment,^[2] representing a significant untapped resource in the labour market.

As age-related eye conditions are the most common cause of sight loss in the UK, even if you do not currently employ someone with a sight loss, it is likely that you will have to manage the retention of an employee with sight loss in the future.

Employers often regard people with sight loss as particularly hard to employ. Misconceptions include the belief that they are restricted to certain jobs and will require a lot of specialist support. However, people with sight loss can undertake many jobs and, with adjustments, training and support, can demonstrate the same employment potential as anyone else.

Consider the skills, abilities and aspirations of each individual and implement appropriate and reasonable support so that everyone can maximise their potential; this can have a positive effect on an organisation as it unlocks different ways of tackling problems, removing barriers and making decisions.

The severity and impact of sight loss varies, as do the strategies that help people with sight loss overcome barriers in employment. Adjustments may well be simple and inexpensive and they make good business sense. Without adjustments, good candidates may not apply for jobs and good employees could be lost. Precise requirements vary from one individual to another, so you should always ask the person what they need. By talking to employees both at the beginning of employment but also regularly about their work going forward, employers are better able to identify difficulties that could be attributable to an employee having sight loss.

[2] RNIB

Recruitment and selection

Candidates with sight loss may be prevented from both applying for jobs and demonstrating their abilities and potential by conventional recruitment processes and a more creative approach might be worth considering.

You need to make sure that you do not discriminate against a disabled job applicant during the recruitment process. You may also have to make reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process. It is important not to make assumptions about what the applicant can or cannot do; instead, ask applicants about any adjustments they may require. Your willingness to make such adjustments should be well publicised as part of any recruitment process. If you use external recruitment agencies, ask for evidence that they make reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants and work to the standards that underpin this guidance.

Employers should be aware that some potential employees with sight loss may have in place or need to put in place effective support from a specialist job coach. Local employment support providers can be contracted by Jobcentre Plus staff to support people before, during and after recruitment. The Access to Work (AtW) scheme can help fund adjustments, for example adaptations to equipment. For more information on this support, visit: **GOV.UK - Looking for a job**

Further information on best practice in recruitment and selection is also available from the Government's Disability Confident Scheme. For further information, visit: **disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk** or contact **Business Disability Forum's Advice Service** on telephone number **+44-(0)-20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk**.

Remember that it is unlawful to ask questions about health or a disability prior to a job offer under the Equality Act 2010 unless the question relates directly to an intrinsic aspect of the role for which the person is applying, or is for the purpose of making reasonable adjustments to the application or interview process. Questions about disability can still be asked on equal opportunities monitoring forms.

Job descriptions

Job descriptions can inadvertently place unnecessary barriers in the way of people with sight loss. When drawing up job descriptions and candidate specifications:

- Be specific about what skills are needed and what the job involves.
- Distinguish between essential and desirable requirements and ensure you present an accurate picture of the job and key skills actually required, e.g. the essential criteria of a receptionist is to answer the telephone and meet and greet visitors; a desirable skill may be to take notes of meetings.
- Be flexible. Very often minor changes can make a significant difference.
- Do not ask for educational qualifications that do not relate to the position. This may exclude people with sight loss who have not been successful in education.
- Do not needlessly exclude a candidate with sight loss. Concentrate on what is to be achieved in a job rather than on how it is achieved, e.g. stating "must be able to drive" may exclude a candidate with sight loss who is able to demonstrate how they will be able to travel extensively throughout the UK to meet clients using alternative means of transport or support from a travel buddy financed via Access to Work.
- Be prepared to provide job recruitment information in alternative formats as well as accepting completed application forms in alternative formats. Appreciate that a written application may have been completed with support.

There is no requirement to alter the fundamental nature of a job so that a candidate with a disability can do it.

Content has been removed for sample purposes. Pages 11 to 30 are available in the full booklet.

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Registered Charity No: 1018463.
Registered in England No: 2603700.**



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