



People manager guide

Managing attendance

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Introduction



This guide is designed for people managers, supervisors, project and matrix managers and line managers.

It will also be helpful for Human Resources and Diversity & Inclusion teams and people with responsibility for owning and reviewing employment-related policies.

It is designed to make it easier for you to manage attendance by helping you:

- Spot the signs that someone might have a disability or long-term condition.
- Recognise when absences might be disability related.
- Learn how to manage different types of absence.
- Treat your disabled colleagues fairly.
- Identify how work can be done differently to maximise the potential of your disabled staff.
- Decide if an adjustment is reasonable.
- Make sure you do not break the law.
- Know where to go for more help and advice.

As a people manager you have a vital role to play in enabling your team to work to the best of their ability. You are key to creating an open and supportive environment at work where employees can talk about any issues, and to helping them develop and contribute to organisational goals.

It is down to you to ensure that you keep in touch with employees who are absent long-term, to help them return to work as soon as possible. You will also need to ensure they get the support and assistance they need to stay at work once they return.

This is particularly important when you are managing disabled employees because you are required by law to enable them to return to work and make changes or 'reasonable adjustments' to help them do so. Reasonable adjustments are not about treating some people more favourably but rather about recognising you need to treat people differently in order to treat them fairly and to enable them to realise their full potential.

Who are disabled people?

The term 'disabled people' covers a wide range of different people with different conditions, which may or may not affect how they do their job. Disabled people work in all types of roles. Disabled people do not necessarily take more time off sick than their non-disabled colleagues.

Disabled people in the UK are protected against discrimination at work under the Equality Act 2010.

Under the law the term 'disability' is so wide that people you might not regard as disabled and who may not even think of themselves as disabled are protected. This may include, for example, people with diabetes, asthma, back problems and mental health conditions like depression. Other people, who have cancer, multiple sclerosis (MS) and HIV are automatically covered.

So, you probably already have disabled people working for you – they might just have decided not to tell you about their disability. This could be because it doesn't affect the way they do their job, or they could be worried about how you might react. They also may not yet know themselves that they have a disability or long-term condition or identify with the word 'disability'.

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“Disabled people do not necessarily take more time off sick than their non-disabled colleagues”.

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Remember too, few people are born with a disability and the prevalence of disability rises with age. Only 8% of children have a disability, compared to 19% of working age adults and 45% of State Pension age adults [1] so it is very likely that in your career you will manage more than one person who becomes disabled while working for you. Indeed, this is going to become increasingly likely because the population as a whole is ageing. As society and the education system also becomes more inclusive of disabled people, we can also expect to see more young disabled workers entering the job market for the first time.

Being seen as a manager and employer who treats disabled people fairly is good for your business and will help you:

- Become an employer of choice.
- Retain employees who have valuable experience and knowledge if and when they acquire a disability or health condition as they get older.
- Reduce sickness absence levels and early ill-health retirements (as this guide will show you).
- Protect yourself and your organisation from claims of unlawful discrimination.

(For more information about the law visit our website:

businessdisabilityforum.org.uk or contact our Advice Service:

advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk)

How do I know if someone meets the definition?

Don't worry about trying to work out if someone meets the legal definition of disability. If a member of your team is having problems at work, talk to them, try to find out what would help and make any changes that you reasonably can to help them do their job. This is called making 'reasonable adjustments' and is something that the law requires you to do for disabled employees.

However, as you can't usually be sure whether someone would legally be considered disabled or not, it is best practice, and legally least risky, to make these adjustments for anyone who is having problems at work. This way you will have done all you can to try to help someone work to the best of their ability.

Reasonable adjustments

The law requires employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled employees. This means removing barriers wherever possible that get in the way of a disabled person doing their job. This can mean changing where they work, the way in which they do their job or providing equipment to help them. [See our People Manager Guide on Making Adjustments in this series for more on making adjustments.]

You may, for example, need to:

- Allow someone with ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) to work from home from time to time because the commute to work is too tiring.
- Let someone with a back problem start and finish work later so they can get a seat on the train.
- Provide specialist software for an employee with dyslexia to help them produce accurate reports and letters.
- Allow someone with depression to leave work early once a week to see their psychotherapist.

For all the above examples, by making a simple adjustment you may be able to prevent employees from being absent from work, for example:

- An employee experiencing fatigue who can work from home from time to time will be better able to manage their energy levels and be more productive – and to remain in work.

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- An employee with a back problem who can work at different hours and thus get a seat will be less likely to aggravate their condition and thus need time off work.
- An employee with dyslexia may experience acute stress – potentially leading to time off – in producing accurate reports and letters which could be alleviated by providing specialist software.
- An employee with depression who can leave work early once a week to see their psychotherapist will not need to call in sick to make their appointment or alternatively skip sessions which may exacerbate their condition and lead to absence.

What's reasonable?

When the law talks about 'reasonable adjustments', all this really means are adjustments that are both effective at enabling the disabled individual to perform in their role, and sustainable by the business. In the context of Attendance Management, this might mean deciding whether a piece of equipment or allowing more time off sick, is reasonable. You can find out more in our Making Adjustments People Manager Guide but as a starter, the main criteria for considering what's reasonable are:

Cost.	Practicality.
Effectiveness.	Disruption.
Health and safety.	External sources of help, e.g. Access to Work.

Whether an adjustment is reasonable will depend on the individual disabled person, the organisation they work for and their circumstances. An adjustment that is reasonable for one person in a department or organisation might be completely unreasonable for someone else somewhere else, even in the same organisation. For example, whilst it might be reasonable for an employee who is not client-facing to work from home or flexibly, it might not be for a member of your reception team.

Often more than one factor will play a part in the decision as to whether an adjustment is reasonable.

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You might not be able to make this decision by yourself and may need to talk to other people that you work with so that a joint decision can be made on what is reasonable. Remember always to include the disabled person in all your conversations about what might enable them to do their job in a way that can be sustained by the business.

A people manager who makes adjustments realises that to get the best from their team they must not only recognise people's differences but use them to deliver the best results as a team. Remember, treating everyone the same does not mean that you are treating everyone fairly. Sometimes you need to encourage people to work in different ways in order to get the best from them. Many organisations already do this for all their employees, for example, by allowing people to work flexibly to accommodate childcare commitments. Adjustments for disabled employees are no different.

Knowing how to make adjustments will increase your confidence about recruiting disabled people and managing disability-related absence in your teams. For more information about how to make adjustments see our 'Making adjustments' people manager guide or contact our membership Advice Service: advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk or on telephone number +44 (0)20-7403-3020.

Scenario one

Amy, new manager

Amy has just taken over as the manager of a team, which she has been told has some problems.

Amy asked for the files on all the team before she started and has noted that one member of the team is on long-term sick leave. Sickness absence levels generally within the team seem to be quite high and a number of members of staff have left. As a result, the team did not meet its targets last year.

However, one of Amy's first tasks is to recruit a new member of staff...

Recruitment



What questions can you ask?

What adjustments does an applicant need before they start work?

What help is available?

Past history

Many organisations ask applicants how much time off sick they have taken in the past year or two. Some even ask former employers this in requests for references. However, it is unlawful to ask candidates, prior to job offer, questions about their health that are not directly related to their ability to do the job for which they are applying. You should not be asking these questions on the application form or at the interview. Indeed, you should consider whether you need to ask these questions at all.

You may be asking because you think that if someone has taken a lot of time off sick in the past, they are likely to do so again. This isn't necessarily true. If you reject a candidate because of their past sickness absence record not only might you lose a talented employee, but you might be discriminating against them if the absences were due to a disability.

Medical history or past sickness absence levels are not always a reliable indicator of future work performance because past absences might relate to:

- A former employer's unwillingness to make adjustments.
- A "one off" illness in that year, e.g. chicken pox.
- A newly acquired or diagnosed disability which the person is now managing well.
- Time off for an operation from which the person has now recovered and which might well prevent future absences, e.g. a hip replacement.

We are Business Disability Forum. We believe the 26 million people in the UK and over 1 billion people worldwide with disabilities and long-term conditions enhance the social and economic health of our societies.

We are the world's first business disability network and have almost 30 years' experience bringing together business, disabled opinion leaders and government to transform opportunities for disabled people to contribute equally to society and economic growth.

Our aim is to help organisations become fully accessible to disabled employees, customers and service users for mutual benefit.

Our 300 plus Members collectively represent around 20% of the UK Workforce and employ an estimated 8 million people worldwide.

We provide them with pragmatic support through training, consultancy, resources and guidance plus peer to peer learning and support.

Our leading business inclusion Advice Service provides a responsive space for members working on any aspect of disability inclusion to talk through ideas, trouble shoot, and get case support on the disability related challenges in their business.

Our community of businesses, thought leaders, and disabled people develop research which influences policy development.

Our events, sector networks, and subject task groups bring together professionals with shared interests to learn from one another, share insight, and collaborate on projects.

Join us

If you are not already a Member or Partner of Business Disability Forum, why not join us? To find out how, contact our team on telephone number **+44-(0)20-7403-3020**; or by email to **join@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk**.

For a full list of our Members and Partners and for further details on the service we offer please visit **www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or contact our team:

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