

## Protected Characteristics: Disability

Disability discrimination means treating one person worse than others because they have some form of disability and it's against the law for employers to discriminate against someone because of this.

Disability is defined as a *physical or mental condition which has a long-term and substantial effect on your daily life.*

More than 10 million people in the UK are disabled, which is 1 person in every 6.

3 million disabled people have jobs, so 1 person in every 10 in the workplace has a disability of some type

The Equality Act protects disabled people in different areas in the workplace, such as:

- Recruitment
- Terms of employment
- Promotion and training
- Dismissal and redundancy
- Discipline and grievances

The stereotypical view of a person in a wheelchair is not at all representative of the range of impairments which are seen as disabilities and in fact ONLY around 8% of disabled people are wheelchair users. There are many people who have disabilities which you can't see. People who have conditions like asthma or epilepsy, learning difficulties or mental health conditions such as depression or eating disorders for example. Also, it may surprise you to hear that someone is automatically viewed as disabled under the Equality Act when they are first diagnosed with HIV, cancer or multiple sclerosis.

The most commonly reported disabilities are those that affect mobility, lifting or carrying.

Employers are legally obliged to make REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS to accommodate the needs of disabled employees.

What is seen as *reasonable* will change depending on the size and resources of a particular organisation.

Reasonable adjustments could be things like making physical adjustments to the workplace such as buying a particular chair or fitting access ramps, changing the hours or place of work, or arranging additional training or supervision. The law is not excessive and REASONABLE is the key word. Large and rich organisations can make more adjustments than smaller businesses.

Whilst employers MUST make reasonable adjustments there are things we can ALL do to make the workplace supportive for disabled people, whether they chose to make their conditions known or not.

Firstly, a supportive and flexible approach to work is really helpful. Whether or not someone is disabled there are always things at work we find harder than others and might need extra support

with. By willingly supporting colleagues at work you can help create an environment where everyone feels comfortable asking for help when they need it.

1 in 6 workers will experience a mental health problem such as anxiety, depression or stress at some point in their life.

Many disabled people, particularly those who have mental health conditions don't want to tell the people they work with because they are concerned that they will be treated differently.

Sometimes you may find that you work with someone who has some adjustments in place, this may mean that they don't have to do some aspects of the work that you do. Try to be supportive and focus on what you are doing rather than what others are doing.

Finally, it is worth considering that most people are not born with disabilities, they acquire them during their lives and the incidence of disability increases with age. One day you yourself may need to ask for adjustments to be made to the workplace, think about how you feel about that and how you would like your colleagues to respond.