Headway

the brain injury association

factsheet

Adaptations to the workplace after brain injury

A guide for employers

Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 states that employers must make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate the needs of disabled employees. This factsheet is intended to provide guidance on the kind of adaptations that may be necessary in order to best accommodate employees with a brain injury.

According to the Equality Act, 'reasonable adjustments' include:

- Allocating some the employee's work to someone else
- Transferring the employee to another post or another place of work
- Making adjustments to the buildings where the employee works
- Being flexible about the employee's hours - allowing them to have different core working hours and to be away from the office for assessment, treatment or rehabilitation
- Providing training or retraining if the employee cannot do their current job any longer
- Providing modified equipment
- Making instructions and manuals more accessible
- Providing a reader or interpreter

People with brain injury may experience some of the limitations discussed below, however, they seldom develop all of them. In addition, the severity of the brain injury and degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Employers should be aware that not all people with brain injury will need adaptations to perform their jobs, and many others may only need a few adaptations.

The following is only a sample of the types of accommodations and/or adjustments an employer might consider.

Questions to Consider:

- What limitations is the employee with brain injury experiencing, and how do these limitations affect the employee's job performance?
- What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
- What adjustments are available to reduce or eliminate these problems?
- Has the employee with brain injury been consulted regarding possible adjustments?
- Do supervisory personnel and employees need training regarding brain injury?

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Common problems and solutions

Physical limitations

- Install ramps, handrails, and provide disabled parking spaces
- Install lever style door handles
- Clear workspace of any unnecessary equipment and furniture
- Brain injury can sometimes result in epilepsy. Most people with epilepsy can successfully manage their condition with medication. However, some reasonable adjustments to the workplace and working conditions may be necessary and this should be discussed with the employee and their medical professionals.

Visual problems

- Provide written information in large print
- Change fluorescent lights to high intensity, white lights
- Increase natural lighting
- Provide a glare-resistant screen for computer monitors
- Consult a vision specialist, particularly for an employee who has lost part of or all of their vision

Maintaining stamina during the working day

- Permit flexible scheduling and allow longer or more frequent work breaks
- Increase natural lighting
- Provide back-up cover for when the employee needs to take breaks
- Allow for use of supportive employment and job coaches
- Provide job sharing opportunities
- Allow part-time work schedules
- Avoid scheduling more challenging tasks at the end of the work shift, when fatigue is more likely to be a factor

Maintaining concentration

- Reduce distractions in the work area, including clutter in the employee's work environment
- Provide a private office
- Provide additional time to learn new responsibilities
- Try to limit white noise and environmental sound
- Encourage the employee to focus on one task at a time
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Restructure the job to include only essential tasks

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Difficulty staying organised and meeting deadlines

- Encourage the employee to use daily to-do lists and check items off as they are completed
- Provide a calendar to mark meetings and deadlines
- Remind employee of important deadlines via memos, e-mail or weekly supervision
- Provide a watch or pager with timer capability
- Provide electronic organisers
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Assign a mentor to provide daily guidance
- Schedule weekly meetings with supervisor, manager, or mentor to determine if goals are being met
- Recognise that emotionality and irritability can be common following some brain injuries
- Recognise that the individual's ability to manage stress can be impacted by a brain injury

Memory deficits

- Allow the employee to tape-record meetings
- Provide typewritten minutes of each meeting
- Provide notebooks, calendars or sticky notes to record information for easy retrieval
- Provide written as well as verbal instructions
- Limit verbal instructions to shorter, manageable chunks of information
- Allow additional training time
- Provide written checklists and use colour-coding to help identify items
- Post instructions close to frequently used equipment

Problem solving deficits

- Provide picture diagrams of problem solving techniques (e.g. flow charts)
- Restructure the job to include only essential functions
- Assign a supervisor, manager or mentor when the employee has questions

Working effectively with supervisors

- Provide praise and encouragement
- Provide written job instructions
- Write clear expectations of responsibilities
- Allow for open communication with managers and supervisors
- Establish written long-term and short-term goals

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- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- Provide written work agreements
- Develop a procedure to routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the adaptations

Difficulty handling stress and emotions

- Provide praise and encouragement
- Refer to counselling and employee assistance programmes
- Provide sensitivity training to co-workers
- Allow the employee to take regular breaks as a part of a stress management plan
- Recognise that emotionality and irritability can be common following some brain injuries
- Recognise that the individual's ability to manage stress can be impacted by a brain injury

Attendance issues

- Provide flexible leave for health problems
- Provide a self-paced work load and flexible hours
- Provide part-time work schedule or job sharing arrangement

Issues of change

- Recognise that a change in the office environment or of supervisors may be difficult for a person with a brain injury
- When changing supervisors, maintain open channels of communication between the employee and the new and old supervisor
- Provide weekly or monthly meetings with the employee to discuss workplace issues

Help for Employers

The Jobcentre Plus **Access to Work** scheme can help with advice and support for both employer and employee. It can also help with extra costs when returning to work. Access to Work can help pay for many adaptations, including:

- A communicator
- A reader at work
- Special equipment or alterations
- A support worker
- Help towards the cost of getting to work

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Contact your local Jobcentre Plus office and ask to speak to the Disability Employment advisor (DEA) or the Access to Work advisor in order to find out more about the Access to Work scheme.

- It may be necessary to perform an occupational health assessment. Small and medium size companies who don't have an occupational health department may be able to get help with this from **NHS Plus**. For more information, email: nhsplus@nhs.net or visit www.nhsplus.nhs.uk.

- It may also be necessary to carry out a risk assessment and more information on this can be obtained from the **Health and Safety Executive**. For more information, telephone 0845 345 0055 or visit www.hse.gov.uk.

- Headway provide training courses on a range of brain injury related topics, which can be very useful for raising the awareness and knowledge of staff. For more information, including details of the courses and how to book, visit the Headway website at www.headway.org.uk/training.aspx, or call 0115 924 0800.

- More information on the **Equality Act** can be found in the Headway factsheet *The Equality Act 2010*. Other sources of information include:

  - The Government Equalities Office website at www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_act_2010/equality_act_2010_what_do_i_n.aspx. The Equality and Human Rights Commission website at www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/.

- The **Employers' Forum on Disability** is an employers' organisation focused on disability as it affects business. The organisation aims to help companies to recruit and retain disabled employees and to serve disabled customers. They run an information and advice service for members called **Disability Directions**, which provides confidential advice on disability, including making reasonable adjustments. For more information, telephone 020 7403 3020, or visit www.efd.org.uk.

- The **Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service** (ACAS) provide information, independent advice and training in order to improve working life and employment relations. Employers and employees can get free advice from the helpline or website. For more information, telephone 08457 47 47 47 or visit www.acas.org.uk.

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- The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** helpline can provide advice on aspects of disability discrimination in the workplace. For more information visit www.equalityhumanrights.com, or contact 0845 604 6610 in England, 0845 604 5510 in Scotland and 0845 604 8810 in Wales.

Northern Ireland

- The Department of Employment and Learning (DELNI) provide advice and support for employers and employees. They also produce a factsheet on disability discrimination in employment. For more information, telephone 028 9025 7777 or visit www.delni.gov.uk.

- The Labour Relations Agency (LRA) offer free, confidential and impartial advice on all employment rights issues for residents of Northern Ireland. For more information, telephone 028 9032 1442 or visit www.lra.org.uk.

To discuss any issues raised in this factsheet, or to find details of our local Groups and Branches, please contact the Headway helpline free of charge on 0808 800 2244, or by email at helpline@headway.org.uk. You can also find more information and contact details of Groups and Branches on our website at www.headway.org.uk.

Headway produces a range of booklets and factsheets covering brain injury related issues. Booklets cost £3.50 each and can be ordered from the website or on 0115 924 0800. Factsheets are freely downloadable from the website.

Brain injury survivors and carers can receive free copies of appropriate booklets from the helpline.

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