

Building Disability Confidence - Supporting Disabled Staff At The University Of Leeds

What is the University's position on disability and how do I know if I am disabled?

All too often, disability can be seen as a problem by employers – something that means you are either ill or that your job performance is suffering. That's not how we see it.

The University of Leeds supports the social model of disability. We believe that what really disables a person are not the impairments they have, but the physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers society creates by failing to take into account the requirements and aspirations of that person.

We also recognise that disabled staff members may require some practical adjustments, support or guidance to ensure, as far as possible, that you have equal access to everything the University can offer you. We are committed to working to provide you with these, if you need them.

So, who is defined as disabled?

There are many kinds of disability, some more widely understood and visible than others. Many of us who work at the University may have a disability that is covered by the Equality Act 2010 without even realising it.

Under the Equality Act, a person is considered disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This effect must be:

- substantial – in other words, not minor or trivial. The person is still considered disabled if the effects of their impairment are alleviated or removed by ongoing treatments or aids
- long-term – which is usually taken to mean that it has lasted, or is likely to last, for more than 12 months

This definition is quite broad, for example it can include people with cancer,

cystic fibrosis, depression, dyslexia, HIV, repetitive strain injury (RSI) or a severe facial disfigurement.

Further information about the definition of disability can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

What Can The University Do To Assist Me?

To ensure that those of us who are disabled have equal opportunities to non-disabled staff members, the University must make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled employees. 'Adjustment' is the legal term for any adaptation made in the workplace to ensure equal access for a disabled person. The most common types of adjustment include:

- the services of a support worker (for example, a personal assistant or sign-language interpreter)
- equipment (for example assistive computer software or an adjustable height desk)
- transcription of written materials into accessible formats (for example braille or large print)
- adjustments to workplaces or the physical environment
- adjustments to an employee's duties, working routine or conditions of service or the provision of disability leave

'Reasonable' is difficult to define here, but it is important to remember that all adjustments must be aimed at addressing particular barriers you face, and that you have a right to be fully involved in any discussions about adjustments. Clearly not all potential adjustments would be reasonable to make, but if a request or suggestion that you make is not accepted, you should be given a clear explanation of why it was not reasonable.

I think I am disabled. Should I talk to anyone in the University about it?

It is up to you whether or not you tell the University that you are disabled. However, the University is working hard to create an environment in which staff feel happy to disclose their disability.

Telling us that you are disabled is particularly important if you might need any adjustments to carry out your job. It will be very difficult, and in many cases impossible, for the University to provide these if you do not tell us. In addition, telling us can also help the University to improve the way it works with disabled staff – for example this information can help us to assess the impact of University practices on disabled staff.

You may have told the University that you were disabled when you accepted your job here, by ticking the relevant box on your 'monitoring form'. However, this, on its own, will not necessarily prompt a discussion about adjustments you might need.

If you feel you require any adjustments, you should talk to the person or people who are responsible for supporting you generally in your day-to-day work. Your manager or HR manager are often good first points of contact. You can also contact HR if you would like to notify the university that you are disabled, without necessarily requesting any adjustments.

In rare circumstances, you may also need to think about whether there might be any particular health and safety implications for you, or the people you work with – for example, if you are likely to encounter any difficulties with fire evacuation. If the University doesn't know about these, it will not be possible to put in place any additional training or support required to protect employees' safety at work. Of course, in the vast majority of cases, there is no reason why a disabled member of staff should present any greater health and safety risks than a non-disabled staff member. Also, health and safety issues must never be used by managers, or anyone else, as a false excuse to justify discriminatory treatment. If you need more information or advice about health and safety issues, you can contact the University's Health and Safety Service (see 'Contact Information') or talk to your local Safety Co-ordinator.

If you decide not to tell the University that you are disabled, you can always talk to someone at a later date. So you might want to keep this booklet for future reference.

Your manager

Ideally, you should talk to your manager if you have a disability-related issue or question. Depending on your job, this person might go under another title, such as 'supervisor' or 'team leader'. Managers have a key responsibility for

your general well-being and ensuring you have access to the full range of opportunities that go with your job. If you feel comfortable about it, you should discuss with your manager any impact your impairment has on your work, and what adjustments you might need to do your job now and in the future. Once they are aware of the issues, they can seek advice on how to best assist you, or refer you to other services and individuals who can provide further advice and assistance if necessary.

Your HR Manager

If you are uncomfortable talking to your manager, you can consult your HR Manager to discuss any concerns. There are many legitimate reasons why you might not want to talk to your manager about your disability, and you do not have to explain your decision. However, if you need significant changes to your workplace or working conditions, then your manager may still need to become involved eventually. Similarly, even if you approach your manager first, your HR Manager may become involved at some point, as they are there to assist you in all aspects of your employment. You can contact your HR Manager in confidence at any point.

I think I need some adjustments, so what happens next?

If you have talked to your manager or HR Manager about your disability, you should discuss with them any reasonable adjustments you might require. They should help you identify what you need, and put this in place where possible. If you need any adjustments in the workplace – particularly to your duties, working routine or conditions of service – in the majority of cases you will probably need to talk to your manager or HR Manager eventually.

If you require changes to your physical work environment, your school or service (normally your manager) would be responsible for identifying an appropriate workspace for you, or for working with the University's Estates Services to arrange any necessary works or adjustments.

On rare occasions Access to Work (see 'What is Access to Work?') may be able to make some contribution to such works or reasonable adjustments.

One of the most common forms of adjustment is the provision of assistive equipment (for example, specially designed software or office furniture). You may also get assistance from support workers, for example sign-language interpreters or personal assistants. If the cost of the agreed adjustment is less than £1000 there is unlikely to be any source of funding for this from

outside of the University for most staff, and usually the school or service you are working in would have to meet this. If it is over £1000 you would normally be expected to apply to the government's Access to Work Scheme to help with the funding. New staff who have been working for the University for less than six weeks should also apply for Access to Work funding even if your support is likely to cost less than £1000 as Access to Work can pay for all support under these circumstances.

What is Access to Work?

Access to Work is a government scheme managed through Jobcentre Plus. It provides practical, individually-tailored advice and support to disabled people who are in, or seeking, paid work. It is the most important source of funding for disability support.

If the support you need has a significant cost associated with it (currently over £1000 for University of Leeds staff) you should apply to Access to Work. An application to Access to Work needs to be made by you, as a disabled member of staff; no one can apply on your behalf. However, if you need any assistance with this you could talk to your HR Manager. You can apply to an Access to Work without talking to anyone in the University.

If you are a new member of staff at the University, it is important to make your first Access to Work application within the first six weeks after starting work here, because, in these circumstances, Access to Work will consider paying 100 percent of the approved costs of your support or adjustments. Otherwise the University will usually be expected to make at least a 20 percent contribution towards the first £10,000 of support.

Please see www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview for information on how to apply. Otherwise you can contact Access to Work for advice and assistance (see 'Contact Information').

Who else in the University might be able to help me?

Although it is the responsibility of everyone in the University to support disabled people, the following services have specific roles in the process, or may be able to provide you with particular forms of advice or support.

RNIB and University of Leeds Transcription Centre

We are one of a small number of universities in the UK to have a professional transcription centre on-campus, which is managed in conjunction with the RNIB. The centre converts printed information, such as textbooks, into alternative formats, including braille (grade 1 or 2), e-text, large print, digital audio or tactile diagrams. Blind or partially-sighted staff members who would find transcription services helpful in the course of their work are welcome to arrange a visit to the centre. You may be asked to make an Access to Work application for funding to cover part or all of the cost of these services. You can contact the transcription centre by email (leedstrans@rnib.org.uk).

Car Parking for Disabled Staff

In some circumstances, disabled staff members are eligible for a University parking permit. Please email carparking@leeds.ac.uk or visit <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/facilitiesdirectorate/disabledparking.html> for more information.

Occupational Health Service

The primary responsibility of the University Occupational Health Service is to promote the health, safety and well-being of University employees. As a part of this, it can provide services that are of value to some disabled employees, including:

- confidential advice and guidance to employees and managers
- work-place assessments, including advice on temporary or permanent adjustments

The Occupational Health Service can provide valuable information to help in any discussion with your manager, HR or with Access to Work about adjustments.

The most common procedure is for your manager to refer you to the Occupational Health Service, normally via your HR Manager. However, you may be able to self refer. Please contact the Occupational Health Service if you want to discuss this option (see Contact Information).

Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service

The University provides all staff access to a fully trained and experienced

counsellor free-of-charge. This person can help with a wide range of personal, emotional or psychological issues, and is not restricted to helping only with work-related issues.

These services are provided under the strictest confidence. Call 0113 3433694 or email staffcounselling@leeds.ac.uk to arrange an appointment. Please see <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/occupationalhealth/counselling/index.html> for more information.

Other University Services

If you have any disability-related access requirements in relation to using other University services – such as the Library, our Sports Centre or our Staff Centre – you are welcome to contact the relevant service to discuss your requirements. The University Library, for example, has a dedicated email address for such enquiries (librarydisabilitysupport@leeds.ac.uk).

Other External Organisations

If you are a trade union member, you can contact a union representative at any stage to discuss disability-related issues regarding your employment at the University. The three recognised unions at the University are: UCU, Unite and Unison.

If necessary, external organisations with specialist knowledge, such as the RNIB, RNID or other local disability groups, can also be consulted for advice.

You may also be able to get advice from your local Jobcentre Plus, particularly if they have a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA). They can provide specialist support to people who are recently disabled, or those whose disability or health condition has deteriorated and who need employment advice. Please see www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus for information on your local Jobcentre Plus office.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Human Resources

Level 11, E C Stoner Building
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT

General Enquiry Line & Reception: 0113 343 4146

Fax: 0113 343 4127

Email: hr@leeds.ac.uk

www.leeds.ac.uk/hr/

Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service

Tel: 0113 3433694

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/occupationalhealth/counselling/index.html>

University Occupational Health Service

Tel: 0113 343 2997

Health and Safety Services

University of Leeds, LS2 9JT

Tel: 0113 343 4201

Fax: 0113 343 4205

Email: safety@leeds.ac.uk

www.leeds.ac.uk/safety/

Access to Work – Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

Access to Work

Operational Support Unit

Harrow Jobcentre Plus

Mail Handling Site A

Wolverhampton

WV98 1JE

Tel: 0345 268 8489

Textphone: 0345 608 8753

Email: atwosu.london@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

This booklet provides an overview of the support available to disabled staff members. Any information provided about related aspects of the law is only a summary of the legal position, and anyone requiring information about how the law applies in a particular situation should seek specialist or legal advice. Information in this booklet is correct at the time of going to print.

If you require this booklet in an alternative format (for example braille, large print or e-text) please contact

disability@leeds.ac.uk