Guidance for Staff
Supporting Disabled Staff at Newcastle University
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1. What can the University do to assist me?

To ensure that those of us who are disabled have equal access and opportunity, 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:

- Equipment such as assistive computer software or an adjustable height desk
- Adjustments to workplaces or the physical environment
- Adjustments to duties or work routine
- The services of a support worker (for example, a personal assistant or sign language interpreter)
- Transcription of written materials into accessible formats (for example Braille or large print)

The “reasonable adjustments” we make will be right for your needs. We will explore the options available and reach a conclusion, with you, on what is reasonable. You will be fully involved in any discussions about adjustments. Our Occupational Health Staff and the Access to Work Service (part of Job Centre Plus) are also available to advise us.

Reasonable is difficult to define here, but it is important to remember that all adjustments must be aimed at addressing the particular barriers you face. 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 is not reasonable.

What are my rights under the law?

You have a right not to be discriminated against, harassed or victimised because of your disability. You have a right to reasonable adjustments to help you work. You also have a right to make a complaint to an Employment Tribunal if you feel you have been treated unfairly.

How does sickness absence link with a disability?

Disability related absences are recorded using the Self Certification Form for sickness absences of up to an including 7 calendar days. These absences are recorded separately from non-disability related absences so that staff do not receive less favourable treatment and reasonable adjustments can be made. The Self Certification forms should be forwarded by email (where possible) to the relevant Human Resources Office.
Richard Boggie’s guide dogs have become a familiar sight at Newcastle University. His last dog, Foley, would sit happily under Richard’s desk or take a stroll around Level 4 of King’s gate to stretch his legs while Richard got on with his work.

Foley has now gone into retirement, and has been replaced by Flash. But Foley certainly left his mark on the workplace. “I think most people who work here like having a dog around and are used to it now,” said Richard. “The only problem we’ve had has been when he once took a colleague’s glove out of her bag and chewed it. My colleague was very good about it.”

Richard, 43, is a Human Resources Manager in the Policy and Projects Team. He has retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic disorder which affects the retina’s ability to process light. It is a progressive condition which has worsened over time.

A Newcastle graduate, he came to work at the University in 2002. “The biggest challenge I’ve faced since starting work at the University was when we moved office into King’s Gate. Management consulted me about the move throughout but I think I underestimated the effect moving from an office I had worked in for eight years to a new environment would have.

“They have been very accommodating, for example they have let me take time to train my guide dogs up, and made sure I have the technology I need.

“As my condition has worsened I’ve had to use more and more assistive technologies which are incredibly useful. For example, I have a CCTV document reader and a programme which turns documents into speech for me. One benefit of these advances in technology is that I have not had to learn how to read braille, which only a few years ago I would have had to do. The University’s ISS department has been a great help to me. They keep me updated about the different things which are available and advise me on the ones which will work best for me. This has been very helpful as I don’t know which technology is the best and they have guided me through it.”
2. Why should I tell anyone in the University about my disability?

The University is working hard to create an environment in which staff feel happy to say that they have a disability.

Telling us that you are disabled is particularly important if you might need any adjustments to carry out your job safely and effectively. It will be difficult and in many cases impossible, for the University to provide these if you don’t tell us.

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 member of staff. If you need more help or advice about health and safety issues you can contact the University Safety Office or the Health and Safety Officer for your Faculty/School or Service.

In addition, telling us can also help the University to improve the way it works with disabled staff – for example the information can help us assess the impact of University practices on disabled staff.

Knowing how many disabled people are employed at the University enables Human Resources to monitor for imbalances or problems and helps us to ensure that disabled staff are fully involved in any new policy decisions or changes to disability support.

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

If you decide not to tell anyone that you are disabled you will be able to do so if you change your mind at a later date.

We have a form on the HR website for existing staff to use to tell us about your disability where you can ask to talk to someone confidentially about it.
Peter Douglas and Christine Newark, who both have learning difficulties, are general assistants in the University’s catering department and carry out a range of tasks across the university catering outlets on and off campus.

![Christine and Peter in the Kitchen](image)

They are the people who work behind the scenes to ensure Campus Coffee doesn’t run out of beans or milk, that deliver the hot drinks for your meeting and the sandwiches turn up on time for your lunchtime buffet.

They have worked there for the past three years but have been based on campus for the past two decades, after previously working in the Students’ Union.

Peter, 46, has held a variety of jobs in his time, including a stint as a security guard at the Metro Arena, but this one is by far his favourite. “What I like about working here is that in the kitchens it is just like one big happy family,” said Peter. “You can ask anyone any question and nobody minds. They don’t make you feel like you’re being daft.”

Christine, 50, agrees. “I’ve worked in other places where people weren’t very nice,” she said. “And that’s why I know it is good here. Peter’s right, it is like a family and I like working here.”

“They give us responsibility, said Peter. “And that’s good because it makes you feel trusted.”

Both Peter and Christine have taken advantage of a taking a number of courses while working at the university. And the university has met their needs when the going got a little tough. “I was taking a test,” said Peter. “But I can’t concentrate when there are other people around me so I didn’t pass. But the next time I took it the university made sure I could do it on my own and I passed.”

“The courses have been good,” said Christine. “The only thing I’d change is that that I’d like more of them for us to do.”
3. Who should I talk to?

It is up to you whether or not you tell the University as your employer that you are disabled.

If you feel that 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 Human Resources Adviser, for your area of the University, 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. There is a form on the website you can use.

Your Manager

Ideally, you should talk to your manager if you have a disability related question. Depending on your job this person might go under another title such as “supervisor” or “team leader” or “head of school”.

Managers have a key responsibility for your general well-being and ensuring that 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 disability has on your work and what adjustments you might need to do your job now or in the future. Once they are aware of the issues, they can seek advice on how best to assist you, or refer you to other services and individuals who can provide further advice and assistance. You are entitled to the same sort of staff development, support and guidance in your work, involvement in what goes on in your area, as any member of staff. Your manager is responsible for making sure that this happens.

Your HR Adviser

Our Human Resources teams are available to advise you, your manager and to co-ordinate disability support where you need it. A case conference approach is taken where support potentially involves several University services or sections. Your HR Adviser is the person to arrange and chair these meetings.

If you are uncomfortable talking to your manager or prefer to talk to someone else first, you can consult your HR Adviser for your Faculty or Professional Support Services. However, if you need changes to your workplace or working conditions your manager will need to be involved.

Similarly, even if you approach your manager first, your HR Adviser may become involved at some point as they are there to
assist you. You can contact your HR Adviser in confidence at any point.

**Health and Safety Staff**

In some 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 does not know it will not be possible to put in place any additional training or support required to protect your safety at work. For example:

- If you are visually impaired is there someone who will be there with you to make sure you can evacuate a building in an emergency?
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, is there someone who will make sure you have heard the fire alarm or do you have a LifeLinePager?
- If you use a wheelchair or have other mobility difficulties is there someone who can make sure you have support you need to leave the building when you cannot use a lift?
- The Safety Office has a system in place called PEEPs (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan) which prepares individual plans for who does what if there is a fire drill or a real fire.

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**Positive about Mental Health**

The University is a [Mindful Employer](https://www.mindfulemployer.org/), which means being a signatory to the Charter for Employers who are Positive about Mental Health. We recognize that at least one in four of us will experience a mental health problem at some point in our life. We are committed to removing any stigma attached to mental health issues and to supporting staff through these difficult times. A [Line Managers’ Resource](https://www.mindfulemployer.org/resource) provides practical guidance for managers supporting staff with a mental health condition.
Ian Selmes, 60, is a laboratory technician in the Institute for Cell and Molecular Biosciences. He has a speech impediment, the result of being born without a palate. He has undergone eight operations to reconstruct his palate and years of speech therapy.

We have many foreign students and young scientist in our laboratory and the University generally who, from my own experience have similar problems in communication initially if their English language skills are still developing.

“You could say that I experienced something similar when I first arrived in Newcastle and had to get used to the Geordie accent!

“I like working here. I enjoy my job and I find it interesting. I don’t think people treat me differently because of the way I speak but it can be frustrating when people don’t realise that I have a disability. Speech therapists’ always told me to raise my voice if I am not understood and sometimes this can be mistaken for taking an aggressive stance”.

“However, the fact that people don’t treat me any differently with this disability is really a compliment to the surgeons, the speech therapists and the positive and tolerant work environment created by the University towards people with disabilities of all forms.”

“My speech impediment doesn’t get in the way of my work,” says Ian. “People new to the lab have to ‘tune in’ to understand what I’m saying initially. Some find it harder than other’s at first – I speak softly and it takes a bit of getting used to - but once they get used to my voice then it is ok.
4. I think I need some adjustments, what happens next?

If you plan to talk to your manager or have already done so, you should discuss with them any reasonable adjustments that you need. They will be able to help you identify what you need and put this in place for you. If it is necessary to seek advice from other people, then your manager will arrange a meeting (called a Case Conference Approach) where everyone who will contribute to providing the adjustments for you will meet, including you, to discuss what is needed.

You, your manager and appropriate representatives from other sources of support will meet to identify the areas of support for reasonable adjustments needed, gather information on possible solutions, and agree an action plan. They will then secure funding, implement the necessary changes review at regular intervals, see the Flowchart on page 12.

Who pays for the adjustments?
There are two main sources of finance for adjustments. First of all, each key budget holder for the three Faculties and for the Professional Support Services as a group, has a budget for reasonable adjustments within their area.

Secondly, if the cost is likely to be more than £1000, we will ask you to contact Access to Work. Also if you are a new member of staff in the first 6 weeks of working at the University, Access to Work are more likely to pay 100% of the cost, so we ask you to apply to them as soon as possible.

What if the adjustments don’t work or eventually stop helping me do my job?

Your managers and other staff who can provide support take great care to identify and put in place the adjustments that are anticipated to work for you. If they don’t then alternatives would be examined, more advice sought if necessary, and something else tried. The process of support for you (see flowchart on page 12) includes a review stage. This means that there is a regular opportunity to talk about what is working and what might need to change.

Sometimes we have a situation where a member of staff’s disability has developed to a stage where they are no longer able to continue to work even with whatever up to date reasonable adjustments are available to them. Our main approach is that leaving their job is a last resort. We will endeavour to find a way that they can change jobs, if an alternative is available, or leave the University with dignity.
5. Who else in the University might be able to help me?

Newcastle offers a range of support services, **assistance available** for you and your manager in assessing your needs, which are individual and may differ from other disabled people. It is therefore vital for everyone involved, to work with you, to gain an understanding of your individual circumstances and requirements.

The flowchart on page 12 should provide an overview of the internal and external support services available, the relationships between them and how to access them.

**Contact information** is available for these departments.

### Information on University websites

The **Human Resources – Support and Wellbeing** section of the website contains copies of this Guidance and the Managers’ Guidance and supporting information, and links to the Hardware Loans Scheme and Disability Briefing Notes – an example of types of disabilities and the sorts of support that might be suitable. Any new or amended disability policy is published on the **HR website** after consultation and approval, and contains a number of policy documents which may be of interest.

The **Diversity Website** Information about rights and responsibilities of disabled staff and their managers

**Keep Well at NCL** is a website which is a collection of resources, links and advice that can contribute to your wellbeing. There is information about physical and mental health, personal support, career development and sources of support.
6. Flowchart summary of procedure

Steps in Process

People involved

Sources of support

HR Adviser

Meet to decide on areas that need to be explored for reasonable adjustments

Member of Staff
Inform Line Manager

Member of Staff
Local Management Representative

Meet to decide on areas that need to be explored for reasonable adjustments

Decide on Reasonable Adjustments

Access to Work options for support

Jobcentre Plus External Assessment or advice?

NUI - Assistive Technology Advice?

Meet to decide on areas that need to be explored for reasonable adjustments

Secure Funding

Local funding management representative

Implement Adjustments

Co-ordinated by local management representative

Review

Co-ordinated by local management representative

Estates Support Services request?

Occupational Health referral?

Local Safety or Estate contacts

University Safety Office PEEP or DSE

Access to Work - HR Officer

Local funding management representative

Co-ordinated by local management representative

Co-ordinated by local management representative
7. Helpful hints

This Staff Toolkit aims to ensure that every University employee with a disability feels confident and secure in all aspects of their working environment, and with our support where needed, is able to fully achieve their potential in their role.

The University is committed to help you, but can only do so if we are aware of your needs – information and dialogue is vital and we would refer to ‘Top tips’ adapted from the 2003 Joseph Rowntree Foundation report “How disabled people manage in the workplace”:

You should:

- be assertive and confident in asking for support
- be aware of your rights
- be open and up front about your needs

Your managers should:

- ask disabled staff if their needs are being met
- encourage mutual respect amongst employees
- be well informed about support options

Your colleagues should:

- avoid making assumptions about disabled colleagues
- be supportive but not overbearing
- be informed about how they (colleagues) can provide support

Accessibility

We constantly monitor and review our practices in producing online and printed information to ensure that it is accessible, or can be made accessible quickly and effectively.

The University is striving to comply with all of the Priority 1 and 2 accessibility checkpoints across its web presence, as established in the World Wide Web Consortium’s (W3C) web accessibility initiative (WAI). We are actively engaging with content providers across the University to ensure that all future web pages are compliant with W3C guidelines for accessibility.

Authors of this Guidance are:

Human Resources, Policy & Projects Team, Level 4 King’s Gate First Issued February 2016.

0191 208 5974

If you would prefer to have this document or any other referred to in an alternative format, please contact the HR Policy and Projects Team. For other documents, please contact the information provider and they will arrange for you to receive a copy in a suitably accessible format.