

# Disability toolkit [Title Page]

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## **Foreword**

### **Kathryn Billing, Chief Fire Officer, Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service and NFCC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead Officer**

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is committed to supporting fire and rescue services to embed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in all they do.

Championing the values of EDI is an integral part of promoting safer communities. When we are able to talk openly about EDI and embed those values in all we do, we create more inclusive workplaces and more accessible services.

This toolkit is designed to support services and managers to be more informed about disability, so they can have open dialogue and appropriately support their disabled colleagues. It aims to help managers provide an accessible and inclusive environment where disabled colleagues can thrive.

The toolkit provides links to widely available sources, including legal information, guidelines on inclusive language and practical tips for managers. It also provides more detail and examples of specific work settings and aims to establish a better understanding of challenges faced by those living with disability. It seeks to show how managers can take action and make a difference, including practical advice about reasonable adjustments to ensure the workplace is as accessible as possible.

We hope you find the materials and links to resources in this toolkit useful. It draws on resources developed by subject matter experts and has been developed by professionals from across the fire sector.

We would like to thank all who have been involved in the development of NFCC's first disability toolkit for use across the fire and rescue community.

## **[Section 1] Introduction**

### **1.1 What is this toolkit?**

This toolkit provides information and practical guidance that begin to remove the barriers that keep disabled people from thriving in the workplace. Used effectively, it can help create an inclusive and accessible working environment that enables employees to reach their full potential.

### **1.2 Who is this toolkit for?**

This toolkit is for disabled employees and line managers supporting disabled staff to advance disability inclusion in the workplace. It has been developed in conjunction with subject matter experts from across the fire and rescue sector, key partners and stakeholders.

While the toolkit is primarily aimed at line managers, the tools, information and guidance presented here will benefit staff across the sector by increasing knowledge and understanding.

### **1.3 How can it be used?**

This toolkit is an important resource for individuals who manage or supervise a disabled member of staff. However, it should be used alongside open dialogue with individuals to best understand their unique requirements.

Disabled people have varying needs, so it is important to adapt your approach for each individual by engaging in open communication and working collaboratively to ensure equal access to opportunities and resources. In addition, training and education on disability awareness and inclusion for all staff can help create a more inclusive and supportive working culture.

## [Section 2] Inclusive language

Using inclusive language at work is crucial for several reasons. It demonstrates respect and dignity, promotes equal treatment, facilitates communication and understanding, and encourages accessibility. Inclusive language fosters an inclusive and supportive work environment that values all employees. It is included here, at the start, so we begin to change the way we think about – and talk about – disability. The very idea of disability acknowledges that our society and, by default, our workplaces, are not accessible or inclusive to all. Changing the way we think and speak of disability can help us to begin breaking down the barriers that keep disabled people from thriving in the workplace. This reflects the social model of disability, which recognises that it is primarily the physical environment, people’s attitudes, the way people communicate, how institutions and organisations are run, and discrimination that ‘disables’ those who are perceived as ‘different’. ([Disability Rights UK](#))

When using inclusive language, consider the following:

Instead of:	Use:
The handicapped, the disabled	Disabled people
Suffer from, victim of, has a problem	Has (condition or impairment)
Able-bodied	Non-disabled
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures
Mental handicap	Learning disability
Describing a busy time as crazy, insane, manic	Hectic, chaos, busy, demanding, exhausting

Avoid phrases like, “I’m so OCD” or “I’ve been so bipolar lately”. Using terms in this way can trivialise disabled people’s experiences.

When someone tells you about their condition, avoid using phrases like, “Wow, you don’t look [condition or impairment]”. Using terms in this way can also trivialise disabled people’s experiences.

When producing corporate documentation, avoid using the phrase ‘people with a disability’, ‘employees with disability’ or ‘customers with a disability’. Instead, use the phrases ‘disabled people’, ‘disabled colleagues’ and ‘disabled customers’ – this aligns to the social model of disability.

Examples of terms to use include:

- ‘Wheelchair user’
- ‘With a learning disability’ (singular) ‘with learning disabilities’ (plural)

- 'Disabled person'
- 'Person with cerebral palsy'
- 'Person with a mental health condition'
- 'Deaf', 'user of British Sign Language (BSL)', 'person with a hearing impairment'
- 'People with visual impairments', 'blind people', 'blind and partially sighted people'
- 'Person with epilepsy', 'person with diabetes' or 'someone who has epilepsy or diabetes or depression'

Suggested terms for mental health conditions:

- A person is 'living with' or 'has a diagnosis of' a mental health condition
- A person is 'being treated for' or 'someone with' a mental health condition

*\*\*\*For more information on language that aligns to the social model of disability, visit: [Disability Rights UK – Social model of disability: language](#)\*\*\**

## [Section 3] What do we mean by disability?

### 3.1 Legal definition

The [Equality Act 2010](#) (England, Wales and Scotland) states that you are disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

'Substantial' and 'long-term' have the following meanings:

- 'Substantial' is more than minor or trivial, for example, it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed
- 'Long-term' means 12 months or more, for example, a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection

You should also be aware of progressive conditions:

- A progressive condition is one that gets worse over time, and people with progressive conditions can be classed as disabled
- Individuals automatically meet the disability definition under the Equality Act 2010 if they are diagnosed with HIV infection, cancer, multiple sclerosis or a visual impairment

### 3.2 Who is affected?

The Equality Act 2010 definition requires that the effects which a person may experience must arise from a physical or mental impairment. It is not necessary for the cause of the impairment to be established, nor does the impairment have to be the result of an illness.

In many cases, there will be no dispute about whether a person has an impairment. Any disagreement is more likely to be about whether the effects of the impairment are sufficient to fall within the definition and whether they are long-term.

Whether a person is disabled for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 is generally determined by reference to the effect that an impairment has on that person's ability to carry

out normal day-to-day activities. An exception to this is a person with severe disfigurement including scars, birthmarks, limb or postural difference.

### 3.3 What are the statistics?

The latest estimates from the Department for Work and Pensions (Family Resources Survey) indicate that 16 million people in the UK had a disability in 2021/22, which represents 24% of the population. This figure increases to 45% in pension-age adults.

In the fire service, just under 5% of fire fighters declared that they were disabled (March 2023)\*. This was slightly higher in fire control personnel at just over 8%, and support staff at almost 10%. It is worth noting that a quarter of firefighters did not state their disability status.

*\*Experimental statistics from the Home Office: [Fire and rescue workforce and pensions statistics: England \(March 2023\)](#)*

There is additional fire and rescue service quantitative data in the [EDI sector report \(2023\)](#).

### 3.4 The social model of disability

The social model of disability is a way of understanding disability that focuses on the barriers and disadvantages imposed by society, rather than on the individual's impairments or medical conditions. In this sense, disability is not caused by a person's physical or mental differences but is a result of the way that society is organised, as well as the attitudes and practices within it.

It emphasises the need for societal changes, such as accessible infrastructure, inclusive education, equal employment opportunities and positive attitudes towards disability.

By adopting the social model of disability, we can work towards constructing a more inclusive and equitable environment that enables disabled people to fully participate and enjoy their lives alongside everyone else.

*\*\*\* For more information about the social model of disability, visit the Sense charity website: [The social model of disability](#)\*\*\**

### 3.5 Disability, health and well-being

Disability can have a significant impact on an individual's health and well-being. In particular, reduced access to high-quality healthcare is disproportionately experienced by disabled people and people with learning disabilities.

Areas of impact include:

- **Physical health** – many disabilities can lead to physical health complications, including reduced mobility, chronic pain, fatigue and increased susceptibility to infections
- **Mental health** – disabled people may experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, stress and low self-esteem
- **Social well-being** – disabilities can affect an individual's social life and relationships because many disabled people face barriers to participating fully in community activities, education, employment and social events
- **Access to healthcare** – disabled people often face additional challenges in accessing healthcare services, which can have a negative impact on overall health and well-being

- **Quality of life** – barriers to education, employment, social participation and access to services can limit opportunities and experiences

Advocacy and support services play a crucial role in promoting health and well-being, and help individuals navigate challenges, address mental health concerns and access necessary resources.

It is important to ensure your service has the correct policies and initiatives in place which promote inclusion, accessibility and equal opportunities. This can significantly improve the overall health and well-being outcomes for disabled employees.

## [Section 4] What is considered an impairment?

### 4.1 Types of impairment

There are different types of impairment, depending on what type of limitation they imply. The Equality Act 2010 recognises these substantial and long-term impairments as either physical or mental. It is important to be aware of the wide variety of impairments that can impact our colleagues, so that we approach conversations with sensitivity and understanding. We must also remember that it is not the individual's 'impairment' which disables them, rather it is barriers caused by neglecting to prioritise accessibility and inclusion. By learning more about different disabilities and impairments, we can begin to dismantle those barriers and promote genuine inclusion and accessibility.

Physical or mental impairments can include:

- Physical impairments, such as mobility difficulties
- Sensory impairments, such as those affecting hearing or sight
- Learning difficulties, including people with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia
- Mental health conditions or illnesses which have a long-term effect, such as depression and anxiety, panic attacks, phobias, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, schizophrenia and bipolar affective disorder
- Genetic and progressive conditions if the condition affects the individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, such as motor neurone disease and muscular dystrophy
- Conditions which are characterised by several cumulative effects, such as pain or fatigue
- Hidden impairments such as asthma or diabetes if these influence the individual's day-to-day activities
- History of impairment – this applies if the individual is no longer disabled but met the definition in the past

### 4.2 Visible versus non-visible impairments

Understanding the differences between visible and non-visible impairments (also known as invisible or hidden impairments) is crucial for fostering inclusivity and empathy towards disabled people. It helps others to recognise that not all impairments are obvious, and that individual experiences and challenges may differ.

Visible impairments refer to physical or mental impairments that are apparent to others, such as using a wheelchair, wearing hearing aids or having a prosthetic limb. Examples of visible impairments also include Down's syndrome or facial disfigurement.

In contrast, non-visible impairments are not necessarily obvious to others. These conditions often involve chronic pain, cognitive impairments, hearing loss, epilepsy, mental health issues, or conditions like fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome. While individuals with non-visible impairments may not use assistive devices or have visible physical symptoms, they still face challenges related to their condition.

It is important to note that someone may have an impairment that is somewhere in between visible and non-visible. For instance, a person with a mobility impairment may not use a mobility aid or appear to be disabled, but they may still have limitations in their physical abilities. Similarly, individuals with certain mental health conditions may not display visible symptoms but may still struggle in various aspects of their life.

### **4.3 Impairments that are not immediately apparent**

Many disabled people have conditions that are not immediately apparent. In some cases, these individuals may not think of themselves as disabled or choose not to inform their employer.

There could be a number of reasons for this, including:

- Believing it does not impact on their ability to do their job
- Lack of knowledge about their rights and protections under disability laws
- Concerns about career advancement or future job opportunities
- Perceived stigma associated with some impairments
- Fear of reaction to their impairment and discrimination from colleagues
- Uncertainty regarding accommodations and support available in the workplace
- Not being aware of their impairment

Legally, they would still be protected by the Equality Act 2010 and, as a manager, you should still be aware of signs that someone may have an impairment or long-term health condition that requires support. This may include changes to behaviour, routine, attendance, appearance and performance.

Reasonable steps to find out what support is needed depend on the circumstances, but may include:

- Talking to the employee privately to ask if there is any support they need
- Asking the employee if they would agree to see an occupational health adviser
- Assuring the employee that anything they tell you will be dealt with confidentially

This does not mean asking intrusive questions. An employer should not try to diagnose someone – only a medical professional can do that.

*\*\*\*For more information about how you can support staff with impairments that are not always visible, visit the NHS Employers website: [Understanding and supporting staff with a hidden disability](#)\*\*\**

### **4.4 Discrimination**

The Equality Act 2010 protects disabled people, including those with mental illness, from unfair treatment and discrimination. There are a number of different types of discrimination, these include:

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect discrimination
- Discrimination arising from a disability
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments
- Harassment
- Victimisation

\*\*\*For more information about the different types of discrimination, visit the Acas website:  
[Types of disability discrimination](#)\*\*\*

## [Section 5] Talking about disability

### 5.1 Why is this important?

Whether you are personally disabled or know people who are disabled, there is still a stigma when talking about disability. Disabled employees may worry they will be treated differently if they share details of their disability and could feel anxious about asking for reasonable adjustments. Talking openly about disability will help normalise the subject and may make it more comfortable for those asking for help.

### 5.2 What should be considered?

Make it comfortable for the individual to share the details of their disability. When discussing reasonable adjustments, consider that individuals may have had bad experiences when opening up about their disability before. Even assuming no direct discrimination will take place, perceptions of a disabled colleague's performance and competence can be skewed by bias.

Always make clear that the reason people are asked to share information is so the employer can become aware of barriers, develop solutions, make adjustments and provide support. This will result in fewer misunderstandings or anxieties. This also reflects the social model of disability, which emphasises the responsibilities of the employer to remove barriers to full participation in the workplace.

Respect the privacy and confidentiality of disabled employees so that personal information is only shared when necessary, and with full consent from the individual, and adheres to relevant data protection laws.

### 5.3 Tips and guidance

It is important to note that individuals may have a personal preference about how they refer to themselves, their family, friends and colleagues. We should respect this preference in conversations and when referring to personal articles. It is always a good idea to find out how people prefer to describe themselves. Simply ask them politely.

It is important to see each disabled person as an individual and not to make assumptions about them based on their condition.

It is OK to make mistakes. If you realise, stop and apologise then move on swiftly. If the person corrects you, thank them and then move on.

### **Inclusive communication top tips [wording for infographic design]**

Here are some key elements of inclusive communication:



- **Positive language** – use the terms ‘disabled people’ or ‘disabled person’ to describe people with impairments who are disabled by barriers constructed by society
- **Identity** – recognise that disability is just one aspect of a person’s identity
- **Terminology** – avoid terms that can be derogatory, offensive or stigmatising and keep yourself updated on current terminology that promotes respect and dignity
- **Listen and respect** – different individuals may have different preferences when it comes to the language used to describe their disability
- **Individual differences** – disabilities are diverse, and it is crucial to recognise and respect individual differences and variations
- **Inclusivity** – when discussing disability, it is important to use neutral language that encompasses people with a range of disabilities
- **Capability** – shift the focus from limitations to abilities and strengths, and highlight skills, experiences and contributions
- **Context** – keep in mind the context in which you are discussing disability, as the appropriate language may vary depending on the setting
- **Challenge** – reflect on any biases or preconceived notions you may have about disabilities, and challenge your own assumptions and stereotypes
- **Development** – be open to learning and evolving your language use as societal attitudes and language evolve

## [Section 6] Reasonable adjustments and accessibility

### Reasonable adjustments

#### 6.1 What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are changes that can be made by an organisation, a place of work or a service provider to prevent the environment causing barriers to access for disabled people.

If disabled people find the working environment challenging, it means that it is ill-adapted, and additional facilities may reduce the challenges faced by staff.

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers may have to provide disabled employees with reasonable adjustments when:

- Employers are aware of the disability
- The employee may be having difficulties with an aspect of their job
- An absence record is linked to a person’s disability
- The employee has asked for adjustments

*\*\*\*For more information, refer to the [Equality Act 2010, section 20](#), which outlines the duty to make adjustments\*\*\**

#### 6.2 Why are reasonable adjustments important?

Reasonable adjustments enable people who are disadvantaged by the working environment to access support mechanisms. This allows them to have equal access to employment and a working environment where they feel valued and comfortable doing their jobs.

From an employer’s perspective, supporting staff with reasonable adjustments is likely to decrease absence from work and sickness leave; improve productivity; and help increase

employee satisfaction, organisational reputation and understanding of diversity in the workforce.

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person based on disability. The act requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to any element of a job which may put a disabled person at a disadvantage. Many neurodivergent individuals will also meet the definition for disability, which includes having a substantial and long-term (12 months or more) effect on an individual's daily activities.

Any costs that are considered a reasonable adjustment should be covered by the employer. For costs that are 'above and beyond' what is reasonable, the individual can seek further support from Access to Work [www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work) – refer to section 8.2 for more information.

### **6.3 What does 'reasonable' mean?**

What is reasonable will depend on each individual situation. You should consider whether a reasonable adjustment:

- Will remove or reduce a disadvantage – this should be done in consultation with the individual so that assumptions are not made
- Is a practical solution and will help the individual
- Is affordable
- Could affect the health and well-being of others in any way

Reasonable adjustments could include:

- Making changes to the workplace environment
- Changing an individual's working arrangements
- Finding a different way to do something
- Providing equipment, aids, services or support

## **Accessibility**

### **6.4 Accessibility in the workplace**

Accessibility for disabled people relates to an individual's capacity to perceive a location, integrate with it, or interact with its content, whether they have physical or mental impairments. For many disabled employees, knowing that their workplace understands and adapts tasks to their needs can feel very reassuring.

To facilitate inclusion, accessibility may occasionally need to be modified to simplify or remove obstacles. These may include:

- Visual aids such as Braille, larger print, easy read versions, screen reader compatibility
- Ramps and lifts for wheelchair users
- Computer access
- Hearing loops
- Extra training
- Specialist equipment

*\*\*\*Refer to section 10 for an example of a disability access policy.\*\*\**

## 6.5 Examples of reasonable adjustments and accessibility

Here are two examples of reasonable adjustments and accessibility:

### **Example 1**

John is dyslexic. In his fire service, training presentations are often delivered using PowerPoint on white backgrounds and the text is in a serif font. The white backgrounds make the text difficult to distinguish and the font appears blurry when in serif, so it is difficult to read. John also finds that exams tend to be for 60 minutes, which he feels is causing him to score poorly, as he processes information differently.

A reasonable adjustment for John would be to provide the presentations in a sans serif font on a light-coloured (but not white) background. This would be much more accessible and allow everyone to read the information easily. It is often possible for individuals with dyslexia to request additional time for written exams, to provide them with adequate time to process and write information, which puts them on an equal footing to their peers.

### **Example 2**

Aisha has recently been diagnosed with dyspraxia after performance issues were highlighted at work during her initial firefighting training. When putting the short extension ladder up, she was seen placing the ladder against the wall upside down, before attempting to extend it. Despite this being addressed by the trainers several times, no improvements were made, and Aisha was growing increasingly nervous. When climbing the ladder, she appeared clumsy, though safe.

After HR had a discussion with Aisha, she felt that it would help if the bottom of the ladder had a yellow label to easily identify it. In practice, this simple procedure aided her greatly. Staff awareness training was given on dyspraxia, which also supported organisational understanding of how to best support staff with this condition and helped her watch manager offer support in building her operational confidence. This has not only benefitted Aisha but has given the organisation a greater understanding of neurodiversity.

*\*\*\*For more information and examples of reasonable adjustments, visit [Acas](#).\*\*\**

The Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) has produced a [Let's talk workplace disability and reasonable adjustments toolkit](#) for fire and rescue services. It provides further advice for line managers, including key considerations and case studies from across the sector.

## 6.6 What should be considered?

If a request for reasonable adjustment is made, consult HR to ensure that legal requirements are met. Inform the individual that the situation will be discussed with HR colleagues and give them an opportunity to speak to HR to fully explain their circumstances.

Individuals may be asked to put their request for adjustments in writing so that a full record of the request and response is kept.

Review these adjustments with your employee regularly to ensure they are fit for purpose, and consider using an action plan or 'reasonable adjustments disability passport' to record and keep track of activity (refer to section 10). Further advice and guidance can be sought

from a medical expert, such as a GP or from an Occupational Health service, or other organisations that offer support, such as the Access to Work scheme (refer to section 8.2).

Revisit with your employee the areas where adjustments have been made because new equipment may be available, and the employee's disability may change over time. Consider any additional training needs to support the employee and accommodate such changes.

When it comes to accessibility inside and outside the workplace, it is important to have a good understanding of how individuals use and access services. What are the barriers and how can they be overcome? Things that are accessible to some may be inaccessible to others. Speak to your employees to gain a better understanding and identify if and how modifications or adaptations can be made.

As well as adjusting workplace arrangements, think about how your employees commute to work. Are they able to access public transport? If not, consider transport arrangements and options to and from work or, where possible, allow them to work from home.

If your service often goes to events or meets individuals externally, always ask if the property is accessible. This can help reassure other employees that you are considerate of their requirements.

For adaptations and modifications to buildings, speak to your estates and properties department. The UK Building Regulations Approved Document M, provides additional guidance on access to and use of buildings, including facilities for disabled people and the ability to move through a building easily.

*\*\*\*For more information, refer to [The UK Building Regulations Approved Document M](#) on the GOV.UK website.\*\*\**

## **6.7 Case study**

### **Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) – FireENABLE [logo sent]**

FireENABLE is the disability, neurodiversity and mental health network group active in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRS. It gives a collective voice on issues relating to accessibility and additional needs. It also enables staff to share their experiences to help inform future change and policy to ensure we enable an inclusive workplace.

One of the successes of the network group is the personal support passport (PSP), an app that helps individuals to share what condition they have and how it affects them daily. Another success from the network group is introducing dyslexia pens that read out text as the words are highlighted with a pen. The network's Co-chair, Lotty Whittingham, shares her experiences using the PSP:

*"I'm on the autistic spectrum and one of the things I find frustrating when joining a new company is explaining what I have repeatedly. It can also be incredibly nerve-wracking, as some people don't know what the condition is. With the PSP, I can write it all down in one place and share it with whoever I want to share it with. It's a huge relief to have this tool."*

Having network groups is incredibly useful; they are a practical and safe space. Practical as a place to suggest ideas on how we can raise awareness and make things more inclusive. And a safe space because we are among like-minded individuals who have either had that lived experience (personally or through someone else) or are open-minded allies looking to understand how they can be more inclusive.

## [Section 7] Disability-related absence

Disabled employees may require time off work for their disability. This typically consists of disability leave and disability-related sickness absence, although other terms may be used:

- **Disability leave** – for rehabilitation, assessment, treatment or servicing of necessary equipment, disability aids or other practical or environmental factors that make attendance at work impossible while adjustments are being made. This may or may not be pre-planned. Disability leave is a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010 and is in accordance with good employment practice, as recommended by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).
- **Disability-related sickness absence** – includes time when an employee may be otherwise well but is absent from work for recuperation following a period of disability leave

Disability leave and disability-related sickness absence should not typically be included for the purposes of assessing performance, promotion, attendance, selection for redundancy and similar issues. To do so might discriminate against the disabled employee.

With advice from the Occupational Health service and in consultation with the employee, the recognised trade unions and other relevant parties, it may become clear that a disabled employee is not able to return to their job. In this case other reasonable adjustments, including redesigning the job, retraining and redeployment should be considered.

*\*\*\*For more information about disability leave, including disability-related sickness absence, speak to your HR team or visit the Acas website: [Disability-related absence – supporting disabled people at work](#).\*\*\**

## [Section 8] Disability schemes

### 8.1 Disability Confident

The Disability Confident scheme is an initiative from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), with input and broad support from various other stakeholders, including employers and disabled people's representatives.

Its overall vision is to create a movement of change, encouraging employers "... to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people".

There is a degree of rigour, balanced with the government's desire, particularly at entry level, to make the scheme easy and accessible for smaller employers.

Becoming Disability Confident, especially taking it all the way to level 3, is one way to have a visible leadership role in fire and rescue services, as well as supporting other work to recruit and retain diverse talent and positively change workplace cultures and attitudes to disability.

Employers who sign up receive confirmation of membership, a Disability Confident certificate and can use the appropriate level badge on their business stationery, website, social media and other communications.

There are three different levels of the Disability Confident scheme:

- Level 1 – Disability Confident Committed
- Level 2 – Disability Confident Employer
- Level 3 – Disability Confident Leader

Any employer joining the scheme starts at Disability Confident Committed (level 1). This focuses on flexible and inclusive recruitment practices, including communicating about vacancies, providing reasonable adjustments and choosing from a list at least one action to support the employment of disabled people.

Employers can then progress through the different levels by signing up to further commitments, outlined in the [Disability Confident guidance](#).

## 8.2 Access to Work

[Access to Work \(AtW\)](#) is a government scheme that pays for support for people who have a disability, health or mental health condition to help them at job interviews, to start in their role and stay in work.

Grants are made to help cover the costs of practical support or equipment in the workplace, or getting to and from work. There are different types of support that can be funded. Some of the more common examples are:

- A support worker or job coach to help in the workplace
- Equipment and assistive technology, including specialist software, such as voice recognition, screen reading software and training in how to use them
- Fares to work if the employee cannot use public transport
- Disability awareness training for colleagues
- A communicator for a job interview
- A support service if the employee has a mental health condition and is absent from work or finding it difficult to work

The initial application needs to be made by the employee. This can be [online](#) or by phone. Visit [www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply) for more details.

## 8.3 Disability Employment Charter

The Disability Employment Charter consists of nine areas of action that the founders and signatories feel need to be tackled to address the disadvantage that disabled people face in finding and staying in work. One driving force behind it is the fact that, despite every other initiative, the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people has remained persistently large, at approaching 30%.

In brief, the nine calls to action are:

1. Employment and pay gap reporting
2. Supporting disabled people into employment
3. Reform of Access to Work (AtW)
4. Reform of Disability Confident
5. Leveraging government procurement
6. Workplace adjustments
7. Working with disabled people and their representatives
8. Advice and support
9. National progress on disability employment

The full charter is available on the [Disability Employment Charter website](#).

As of December 2023, over 150 organisations have signed the charter. Fire and rescue service employers can sign as a way of demonstrating a commitment to playing their part in bringing about changes many disabled people want to see.

Alternatively, employers can choose to lead by example on specific areas of the charter, such as publishing data on the number of disabled people they employ and their disability pay gap. If employers join the Disability Confident scheme, they can commit to moving beyond level 1 within three years. They can also align themselves with the charter by setting themselves a standard of notifying employees about any decisions regarding reasonable adjustment requests within two weeks.

## **[Section 9] Support from organisations**

### **9.1 The Fire Fighters Charity**

The Fire Fighters Charity (FFC) offers specialist, lifelong support for members of the UK fire services community, empowering individuals to live happier and healthier lives. It supports serving and retired fire and rescue service personnel, as well as their dependants, and provides a broad range of health and well-being services, online and in person.

Disabled employees, or people with a long-term health condition, may benefit from its support – all of which is tailored to the individual. It focuses on the impact that disability or long-term health conditions have on health and well-being, exploring how it can offer the best support.

Here are some of the ways it can help:

#### **Physical health support**

FFC physical health services offer rehabilitation following injury or ill health, as well as support which is designed to meet the needs of those with long-term conditions including:

- Chronic health conditions, such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and long COVID
- Progressive neurological conditions, such as multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's
- Support following injury or illness, where the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities has been impacted, such as stroke or spinal injury

A team of physiotherapists and exercise therapists provide support, digitally and face-to-face, at residential centres in West Sussex, Devon and Cumbria – the latter provides 24/7 nursing support for those who need additional help.

For more information about how FFC can support physical health visit:

- [Physical health – The Fire Fighters Charity](#)
- [Our nursing team – The Fire Fighters Charity](#)

### **Psychological health support**

Living with a disability or long-term condition affects everyone differently and the FFC can help individuals navigate their way through any challenges they may face. This could be stress or anxiety about the future, difficulty sleeping due to pain, or coming to terms with a diagnosis.

A team of psychological therapists offer support, remotely and face-to-face, depending on the individual's need. These include:

- Access to an online, self-management [Hope Programme](#)
- Online and telephone counselling
- Residential stay at Harcombe House in Devon to attend the [Reset Programme](#).

There are additional resources on the FFC website and 'My Fire Fighters Charity' health and well-being digital platform, offering a dedicated space for the UK fire and rescue service community.

Online resources include:

- [Mental health – The Fire Fighters Charity](#)
- [Online courses – The Fire Fighters Charity](#)
- [My Fire Fighters Charity – The Fire Fighters Charity](#)

### **Social well-being and financial support**

The Welfare Services team provides advice, information and support on a wide range of issues. It also offers funding for the provision of small pieces of equipment or home adaptations to help individuals live independently in their own home.

For more information on social well-being visit: [Social well-being – The Fire Fighters Charity](#).

### **Residential breaks**

In addition to structured rehabilitation and the Reset Programme, residential stays are available at all the charity's centres for individuals, families and couples who need time away to rest and recharge following a difficult or challenging time.

These stays provide an open space and opportunity to unwind, relax and reflect on well-being, recovery, building resilience and finding those initial steps to help move forward.

For more information, visit: [Take time out to rest and recharge – The Fire Fighters Charity](#)

Support is also available for families of fire service personnel across the UK. Visit the family hub: [www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/how-we-can-help/the-family-hub](http://www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/how-we-can-help/the-family-hub) to find out more.



## Accessing support

The FFC supports the health and well-being of the whole of the UK's fire family. If you feel that you or your employee would benefit from support, visit the FFC website at [www.firefighterscharity.org.uk](http://www.firefighterscharity.org.uk) or call the support line on 0800 389 8820. To access the FFC crisis line for immediate and ongoing mental health crisis care, call 0300 373 0896.

## 9.2 Trade unions

Trade unions play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and support of disabled staff in the workplace. Your employee may wish to be represented by a trade union, that may assist with:

- Negotiating reasonable adjustments
- Campaigning for equality
- Providing information and guidance
- Identifying and organising training and education
- Offering legal support

There are a number of trade unions in operation in the UK to support FRS staff, some of which include disability resources, including, but not limited to:

- Fire Brigades Union (FBU) – [Disabled and neurodivergent members' forum](#) and [Guidance for FBU members on the Disability Discrimination Act](#)
- Fire and Rescue Services Association (FRSA) – [www.frsa.org.uk](http://www.frsa.org.uk)
- GMB Union – [Disability-related information and guidance](#)
- Trades Union Congress (TUC) – [Guide to disability](#)
- The Fire Officers' Association (FOA) – [www.fireofficers.org.uk](http://www.fireofficers.org.uk)

## [Section 10] Template examples [links not live]

Example documents from a range of services are provided below.

### National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)

- NFCC reasonable adjustment action plan – example template to identify and record workplace barriers, medical advice, guidance and agreed reasonable adjustments

### Suffolk County Council / Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service

- Reasonable adjustments disability passport – record of agreed reasonable adjustments that remains with the employee
- Disability leave policy – to provide disabled employees with reasonable paid time off work for reasons related to their impairment

### Nottingham Fire and Rescue Service

- Disability equality policy – to ensure that disabled people have access to employment and services
- Disability access policy – to provide a procedure to ensure the service's buildings, events, written materials and ICT meet the access needs of disabled staff, visitors, stakeholders and service users

## [Section 11] Further information and resources

A number of organisations provide additional information and resources online. These include, but are not limited to:

### **Access to Work**

Overview of the Access to Work scheme, including eligibility and application.

Website: [www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)

### **Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas)**

Free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees about workplace relations and employment law, including the Equality Act 2010.

Telephone: 0300 123 1100 / Relay UK service: 18001 0300 123 1100

Website: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

### **Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)**

Toolkit providing information, considerations and case studies regarding reasonable adjustments across the fire sector.

Website link: [Lets talks workplace disability and reasonable adjustments toolkit](#)

### **Disability@Work**

Evidence for policy and practice on disability in the workplace.

Website: [www.disabilityatwork.co.uk](http://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk)

### **Disability Rights UK**

Resources, guidance and information developed by disabled people, for disabled people.

Website: [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

### **Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)**

Practical advice and information about the Equality Act 2010 and discrimination.

Telephone: 0808 800 0082 / Textphone: 0808 800 0084

Website: [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

### **Equality and Human Rights Commission**

Information about discrimination and the Equality Act 2010.

Website: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

### **Health and Safety Executive**

Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety, offering workplace guidance.

Website: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

### **Mencap**

Advice and guidance for people with a learning disability.

Website: [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

### **Business Disability Forum**

Membership-based organisation, specialising in disability inclusion, providing a suite of resources and support services for businesses.

Website: [www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk](http://www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk)

### **National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)**

Neurodiversity toolkit, including information, guidance and links to additional sources.

Website link: [Neurodiversity toolkit](#)

**Scope**

Resources, advice and guidance supporting disabled employees in line with the social model of disability.

Website: [www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

**UK government**

Summary of reasonable adjustments for disabled employees with health conditions.

Website link: [Reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities or health conditions](#)

Website: [GOV.UK](#)