

Mental health at work – which adjustments are effective for returning to and staying in work?

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Managing employees experiencing mental ill-health is one of the biggest challenges employers face and never more so than during the current pandemic which has produced for some employees a perfect storm of isolation from colleagues, family and friends, the pressures of managing home working and worries about the future.

Even before the pandemic, research in 2016 and 2017 found that 1 in 6 employees in the UK reported mental ill-health each week and a third of fit notes with a known diagnosis note mental or behavioural disorders as the reason for absence.

Employers will be looking at the work adjustments that may assist employees experiencing mental ill-health in returning to work and, for those who have not had absence, in staying in work. The independent research paper published by Acas on 12 June 2020 is therefore extremely timely. The paper examines the evidence and guidance available to inform practices around work adjustments for mental health at work.

Employers will be familiar with the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees imposed by the Equality Act 2010 and the obligations imposed under the Public Sector Equality Duty on those employers to whom those obligations apply. Whether an adjustment is a reasonable adjustment is very case specific but the findings in the paper are nevertheless helpful in stimulating a more outcomes focus.

Findings of the research include that:

- work adjustments for employees with mental ill-health appears to be varied and inconsistent;
- there is a need for a clear picture of current practices; and
- guidance for employees, colleagues, managers and professionals working within occupational health and human resources should be enhanced.

Of these findings, the area in which an employer can have the most quick and effective impact is in enhancing guidance in the process of accessing and implementing work adjustments. Measures could include:

- mirrored versions of guidance for different stakeholders;
- reviewing the processes for accessing work adjustments and providing employees and managers with a clear understanding of how work adjustments can be accessed, supported and monitored and reviewed for effectiveness; and
- focusing on helping employees feel more confident in accessing and using the work adjustments; and
- inclusion of checklists and exercises to help employees and those involved in the provision of work adjustments prepare, implement and review how the work adjustment is working for the employee, the team, the manager and the wider organisation.

This article was first published by Western Morning News and [Business Live](#).

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