Understanding Workplace Barriers

Barriers arise when workplace environments, systems or expectations do not accommodate different access needs. Some are easy to see; others may be less obvious.

Visible barriers

Inaccessible entrances, unsuitable desks or equipment, obstructed routes and spaces that restrict mobility.

Non-visible barriers

Sensory overload, inaccessible communication, unpredictable routines, assumptions and exclusionary expectations.

How barriers can arise

Workplace design

Access needs

Participation

When workplace design does not meet access needs, participation can become harder. Adjusting the environment or process can remove the barrier.

Which visible or non-visible barriers have I noticed at work?

What would make my working environment more accessible?

Recognising Barriers in My Workplace

Consider different parts of your working environment. You may notice barriers in more than one area, and your needs may change over time.

Physical and sensory

Access, seating, equipment, lighting, noise, temperature and movement through shared spaces.

Communication and practices

Meetings, instructions, formats, workload, schedules, recruitment and expectations.

My workplace barriers

Workplace area	Barrier I have noticed	How it affects me
Physical environment		
Communication		
Sensory environment		
Workplace practices		

Which barrier would I most like to address first?

Understanding the Impact of Barriers

An inaccessible workplace can affect wellbeing, participation and opportunities. These effects do not reflect a lack of ability or commitment.

Participation

Difficulty accessing meetings, information or shared activities.

Wellbeing

Avoidable fatigue, distress, discomfort or increased effort.

Performance

Tasks made harder by unsuitable systems or working methods.

Opportunity

Barriers to training, progression or workplace development.

Which barriers have the greatest impact on my working experience?

How do these barriers affect my wellbeing, participation or opportunities?

What might improve if these barriers were reduced or removed?

Identifying Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments can help reduce substantial disadvantages experienced by disabled employees. What is appropriate depends on the person, the barrier and the circumstances.

Environment

Accessible equipment, quieter areas, suitable lighting or workspace changes.

Communication

Written instructions, accessible formats, clear agendas or captions.

Working arrangements

Flexible hours, suitable breaks, adjusted schedules or remote options.

Tasks and expectations

Clear priorities, alternative methods, adjusted processes or deadlines.

Which changes could reduce the barriers I have identified?

What adjustments have helped me before, or might be worth trying?

What support might I need to discuss or put these changes in place?

UK note: Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers in relevant circumstances. Individual advice may help with specific situations.

Communicating My Accessibility Needs

You can focus on the workplace barrier, its impact and what may help. You do not need to share unnecessary personal medical details to explain an access need.

1. Identify the barrier

What practice, environment or process is creating difficulty?

2. Explain the impact

How does it affect access, participation or wellbeing?

3. Suggest a change

What adjustment or alternative could help?

4. Agree next steps

Who will consider the request, and when will it be reviewed?

The barrier I would like to discuss:

How it affects my work or participation:

The adjustment or support I would like to request:

Who I could speak with, and any questions to prepare:

My Workplace Accessibility Action Plan

Use this page to bring your reflections together. You can revisit your plan as your needs, working conditions or available support change.

1. Main barriers

What needs to change?

2. Impact

How does this affect my work or wellbeing?

3. Helpful adjustments

Which changes or alternatives might help?

4. Support and communication

Who could I approach, and how?

5. My next manageable step

What would I like to do first?

6. Reviewing progress

How will I know whether the change is helping?

Accessibility means removing unnecessary barriers so everyone has a fair opportunity to participate, contribute and develop.