Business Disability Forum

Creating a disability-smart world together

The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey

Exploring the experience and outcomes of workplace adjustments in 2019-20

Business Disability Forum

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"If we wish to increase the number of disabled people and people with long-term conditions entering and remaining in employment, getting it right on workplace adjustments is vital. With most disabilities acquired, rather than present at birth, this is not just about attracting new staff – though that is vital if businesses want to reach the widest possible talent pool, but also retaining the skills of existing employees who become disabled – employees who may be crucial to the day-to-day functioning of a business.

With the population aging and the number of people living with a disability increasing each year, it is also about reflecting and understanding the needs of a changing workforce. This report is very timely; as we adapt to life and work during Covid-19 there is a unique opportunity to rethink our attitudes and approaches to adjustments – after all, we are all working with adjustments now – and to ensure there is a lasting legacy of acceptance of different ways of working. The findings in this report will influence the advice we give to businesses and Government. We hope it will also help shape a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture for everyone.

We would like to thank everyone who has given their time to contribute to this important piece of research and to thank our long-standing friend and partner Microlink for their generous support."

Diane Lightfoot, CEO, Business Disability Forum

Executive summary

This research report explores the feedback from over 1,200 respondents taking part in Business Disability Forum's survey in 2019 about their experience of workplace adjustments in their organisations. It draws together the evidence of how effective the provision is and perceptions of both employers and employees about how the adjustments provided work and opportunities for employees with disabilities and long-term conditions. At the end of each section, we offer key topics for organisations to consider about their own internal workplace adjustments experience and processes.

The main themes developing from the survey are summarised below.

Look beyond 'disabled' staff

The findings highlight employees' need for adjustments, and the need for organisations to be able to respond to the fluctuating needs of their employees accordingly.

- 42 per cent of respondents with adjustments had **acquired a disability or condition** whilst working for their current organisation.
- Of respondents with disabilities or conditions working **with** adjustments in place at the time of the survey, 52 per cent said they had either **requested additional or alternative adjustments** or had considered them but decided not to request them. Six in ten recorded further types of adjustments they felt they **still needed**.
- Of respondents with disabilities or conditions working **without** adjustments in place, 60 per cent said they had either requested or had considered requesting them.

The most common types of adjustments

The most common adjustments provided needed a degree of **flexibility** from the organisation but very often required **minimal budget**. These adjustments include ergonomic equipment, flexible working, or adjusted hours, working from home and time off to attend appointments or therapies to help manage a condition.

Employees often find the conversation about adjustments sensitive and fearful

Organisations need to be aware that employees find the conversation about adjustments sensitive and, in many cases, even amongst those with adjustments already in place, many avoid them for **fear of stigma**.

- 28 per cent of those with adjustments and 34 per cent of those without adjustments said they **did not make requests because they were worried** their employer might treat them differently to how they did before they requested an adjustment.
- 28 per cent of those with adjustments and 43 per cent of those without adjustments said they did not make requests because they **did not want to approach their employer**.

- 23 per cent of those with adjustments and 31 per cent of those without adjustments said they did not make requests because they were **worried other colleagues would treat them differently** to how they did before they requested and adjustment.

Managers need more knowledge and confidence about the workplace adjustments process

It is critical that, as a first contact for most employees, managers in the workplace are knowledgeable about the process and well equipped to handle discussions about adjustments. There is evidence in the data that managers are not always as effective or confident as they should be.

- Almost one in ten respondents with adjustments in place cited difficulties in the process due to their manager showing a **lack of support, help or understanding** or being **resistant to the flexibility** needed to implement and manage adjustments.
- While a majority of managers were confident to some extent in a number of aspects of managing adjustments (for example, knowing where to get information about the process, knowledge of the process, managing the wider team's attitudes about adjustments, and understanding what adjustments can be made) only a minority – approximately a third for each attribute – described themselves as **'very confident'**, which leaves much room for improvement.

Employee confidence in the process

Employers should not assume that employees are fully confident in the implementation of the workplace adjustments process, even if they have had adjustments in the past.

- A fifth of employees with adjustments in place who decided not to request additional or alternative arrangements **thought their employer would not make the right adjustments**.
- 30 per cent employees thought any adjustments they might need in future **would definitely be put in place** for them (49 per cent said 'maybe' and 12 per cent were not confident at all).

Waiting times are long and reviews are infrequent

Experience of the process was varied among respondents and the findings suggests that the waiting times for adjustments was, in some cases, too long. Review meetings to ensure adjustments were working and are effective were also happening too infrequently.

- Almost a third (32 per cent) generally experienced a relatively quick process of getting their adjustments in place of under one month. However, at the other end of the spectrum almost a fifth (17 per cent) had waited for **over a year** (8 per cent were waiting for **two or more years**).
- Approximately a quarter (24 per cent) spoke to their main contact (someone in a disability support team or a line manager, for example) about their adjustments **weekly**

or monthly. However, at the other end of the spectrum, almost one in ten (9 per cent) stated once a year and another fifth (21 per cent) less often. Indeed, 15 per cent said they never spoke to their main contact about their adjustments.

When adjustments are in place, it helps employees keep their job and remain productive

Most employees felt their adjustments had a positive impact for them in the workplace:

- 19 per cent of respondents felt that their adjustments had successfully **tackled all barriers and difficulties** and another three quarters (73 per cent) said they had tackled some of them.
- 80 per cent agreed that adjustments **helped them stay in their job**, made them **more productive** and/or were happy with the adjustments that they had in place.
- More than 60 per cent **enjoyed their job more** due to their adjustments.

Managers also agreed that employees in their teams who have adjustments in place generally were happier and more productive employees with their adjustments in place.

Little impact on career development and progression

Although respondents and their managers agreed adjustments had a good impact on job retention, productivity and job satisfaction, the workplace adjustments had less of an impact on employee's career progression beyond their current role.

Managers were more likely than employees to agree that **adjustments could be kept if employees moved to a different role in the organisation** (75 per cent agreeing to some extent compared to 53 per cent of individuals with adjustments in place) and also that adjustments helped progress careers (53 per cent compared to 29 per cent given by employees with adjustments). This shows clear differences in perception between employees and managers on how employees with adjustments would be supported to develop or progress their career in the organisation.

Mixed feelings about the priority of workplace adjustments at board level

Organisations should ensure that adjustments and support for staff with disabilities and long-term conditions is a priority at board level. Just **one third** of managers with experience of managing people with disabilities agreed strongly that this was the case in their own organisations.

Key statistics

80 per cent employees said their adjustments have helped them stay in their job and help them be more productive.

60 per cent enjoyed their job more since having adjustment in place.

60 per cent of employees with adjustments do not have all the adjustments they need.

34 per cent of employees have not asked for adjustment because they fear their manager would treat them differently.

Only 30 per cent of employees were confident their employer would make adjustments for them if they were needed in the future.

25 per cent employees waited over a year to get their adjustments in place.

Only 24 per cent employees with adjustments regularly speak to their manager (or equivalent) about how well their adjustments are working.

Only 19 per cent employees said adjustments remove all barriers they experience in the workplace.

Introduction and background

Business Disability Forum is a not-for-profit membership organisation which exists to transform the life chances of disabled people. As a membership organisation working with over 300 businesses, we are uniquely equipped do this by bringing business leaders, disabled people, and Government together to understand what needs to change to improve the life opportunities and experiences of disabled people in employment, economic growth, and society more widely.

Through our Advice Service, consultancy and expert advisers, and policy and research work, we provide practical, evidence-based, strategic solutions for businesses to recruit, retain, and provide inclusive products and services to disabled people. Our policy, research and advice related functions are channels through which Business Disability Forum has access to the latest business insight on challenges, changing business structures and landscapes, and the types of practices that employers and service providers are currently developing and are most effective for removing barriers for people with disabilities and long-term conditions.

Throughout Business Disability Forum's almost 30 year existence, we have consistently seen that the subject of adjustments remains the most common topic that businesses ask us about – particularly with regards to making adjustments in the workplace.Topics of regular interest and question have included funding, how adjustments should be implemented and reviewed, what an effective adjustments policy and procedure looks like and, the age-old question of what is 'reasonable'.

Improving the experience of workplace adjustments for employees as well as their managers continues to be on the minds of many of our member organisations. This is because, when employees have a negative experience of their employer's workplace adjustments support and process, the consequences are huge. Relationships between the employee and people managers become distrustful and frustrated; employees may go off sick because of this broken-down relationship or while they wait for their adjustments to be put in place; the employee may raise a formal grievance; the employee's morale is reduced and there develops a huge distrust, not just in the manager, but in the whole inclusion and people agenda in that organisation. In addition, the business function in which this all happens sees the consequences: tasks go unfulfilled, customers and clients also see the impact, and some employers tell us they even hire agency staff to cover the role of the employee who is off work waiting for their adjustments to be put in place.

"Topics of regular interest include funding, how adjustments should be implemented and reviewed, what an effective adjustments policy looks like and, the age-old question of what is 'reasonable'."

Although our advice, consultancy, and policy teams advise employers and other bodies on all the above on a daily basis, Business Disability Forum was keen to capture a 'snapshot' of the current experience of getting and making adjustments in the UK workforce. We therefore launched **The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey**. In March-April 2019, we asked for employees, managers, and senior leaders in UK workforces to share their views with us. We have spent the following year analysing the data and looking into some of the unique themes that emerge from the 1,200 respondents. During 2020, we will therefore be releasing a series of discussion papers to help us learn from the experiences that respondents shared with us.

This research report gives an overview of the survey findings. We thank everyone who took time to complete the survey and who shared their very personal experiences with us.

A huge 'thank you' also to Microlink who sponsored the project and whose generosity has enabled this research to happen.

Who has adjustments (and who hasn't) and why people do not request them

This section explores the proportion of respondents in our survey with disabilities and conditions who said they had workplace adjustments in place. We also explore the reasons why some employees do not have adjustments in place. We also examine how many respondents with adjustments were in the process of requesting additional or alternative support. Finally, we review what types of workplace adjustments were currently being used and which, if additional support was needed, was most required.

Summary of findings

- Two thirds (66 per cent) of our respondents with disabilities and conditions had adjustments in place at the time of the survey.
- Of respondents with disabilities or conditions working **with** adjustments in place at the time of the survey:
    - 44 per cent said that they **have all the adjustments need**. 26 per cent said they had requested additional or alternative adjustments, but they were not in place, and 29 per cent had considered asking but then decided not to request them.
    - Later in the survey, 60 per cent recorded further types of adjustments they felt they **still needed**.
- Of respondents with disabilities or conditions working **without** adjustments in place, 31 per cent said that they **did not need adjustments** and 60 per cent said they had either requested or had considered them.
- Perceptions of **stigma and discomfort** with conversations about adjustments were relatively prevalent amongst respondents who had been through the process of securing adjustments as well as those who had not. Organisations need to mindful that these feelings exist and, in some cases, could be a barrier to employees discussing their adjustment needs. When respondents had thought about requesting adjustments but had decided not to, the following reasons were given:
    - '**I am worried that my employer might treat me differently'**: 28 per cent of those with adjustments but deciding not to request additional or alternative arrangements and 34 per cent of those without adjustments and deciding not to request them.
    - '**I am worried that other colleagues will treat me differently'**: 23 per cent of those with adjustments but deciding not to request additional or alternative arrangements and 31 per cent of those without adjustments deciding not to request them.
    - '**I didn't want to approach my employer to request adjustments'**: 28 per cent of those with adjustments but deciding not to request additional or

alternative arrangements and 43 per cent of those without adjustments deciding not to request them.

- Organisations should not assume that employees are fully confident in the implementation of the process, even if they have previously requested and had been provided with workplace adjustments. When respondents had **thought about requesting adjustments but had decided not to**, the following reasons were given:
    - '**I don't think my employer can make the right adjustments for me'**: 20 per cent of those with adjustments but deciding not to request additional or alternative arrangements and 22 per cent of those without adjustments deciding not to request them
    - '**I am worried that my employer will not know how to support me'**: 16 per cent of those with adjustments but deciding not to request additional or alternative arrangements and 21 per cent of those without adjustments deciding not to request them

Some adjustments were more commonly provided in the workplace than others. The most frequently mentioned were:

- Ergonomic equipment (45 per cent),
- Flexible working or adjusted hours (44 per cent),
- Working from home (39 per cent) and/or time off to attend appointments or therapies to help manage conditions (39 per cent) and
- Assistive technologies (20 percent).

These adjustments were also most mentioned by respondents who stated they needed more or alternative support.

The demand for workplace adjustments

A total of 982 respondents recorded that they had disabilities or conditions in the survey. Of these, **66 per cent (651 respondents in total) had adjustments in place at the time of the survey** and 34 per cent (331 respondents) did not.

Chart 1 (below) shows the percentage of respondents with each type of condition that had adjustments in place at the time of the survey. It should be noted that respondents often cited **multiple conditions.** We therefore cannot categorically link the presence of adjustments to a single specific condition – and the data shows employees rarely separate their conditions in this way anyway – but the data indicates context where they were most prevalent.

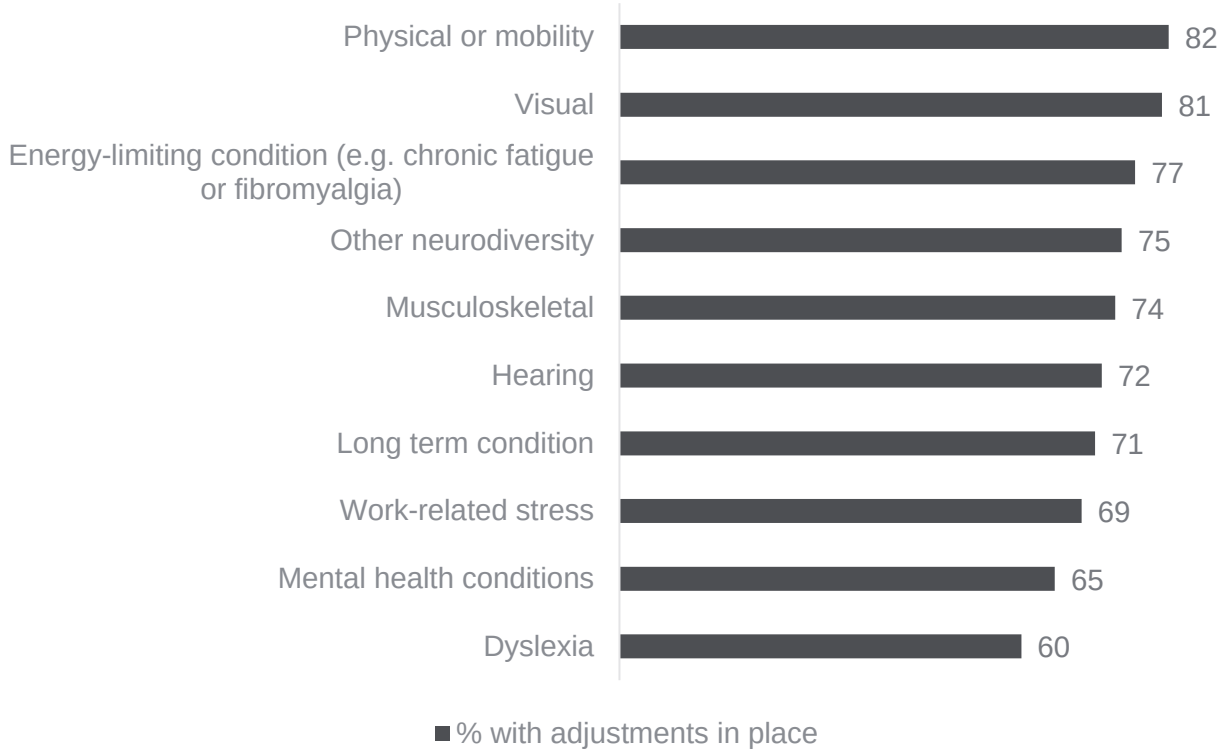
At least three quarters of respondents with the following conditions or disabilities had adjustments of some type in place:

- Physical or mobility (82 per cent)
- Visual (81 per cent)

- Energy limiting conditions (77 per cent)
- Neurodiversity (other than dyslexia) (75 per cent).

Under two thirds of respondents with mental health conditions and/or dyslexia were in receipt of adjustments at the time of the survey.

Chart 1: Adjustments in place at the time of the survey by type of disability or condition[1]



Importantly, the findings highlight the need for organisations to be able to **identify and respond to changing needs** of their employees. In terms of respondents with disabilities and conditions who had adjustments in place at the time of the survey:

- 36 per cent acquired their condition whilst working for their current employer.
- 52 per cent acquired their condition(s) before working for their current employer.

[1] Base: Respondents stating each condition type: Hearing (120), Visual (75), Physical or mobility (239), mental health (324), Work related stress (148), Dyslexia (113), Other neurodiversity (99), Musculoskeletal (313), Energy limiting condition (154), Long term condition (403).

- 8 per cent had disability and condition before working for their current employer and acquired another while working for their current employer.

The most common types of adjustment provided were:

- Ergonomic equipment (45 per cent).
- Flexible working or adjusted hours (44 per cent)
- Working from home (39 per cent).
- Time off to attend appointments or therapies to help manage conditions (39 per cent).
- Assistive technologies (20 per cent).
- Phased return to work following absence (16 per cent).
- Adjusted duties (15 per cent).
- Additional breaks (13 per cent).
- Travel to work (i.e. arrangements to enable an easier journey to work) (11 per cent).

Table 1: Adjustments in place at the time of the survey[2]	Percentage of respondents
Ergonomic equipment (for example, supportive chairs, alternative desks, alternative computer mice or screens	45
Flexible working or adjusted hours	44
Working from home	39
Time off to attend appointments or therapies to help manage a condition (for example, attending specialist medical appointments, counselling, or assistance animals training)	39
Assistive IT technology (for example, speech to text or mind-mapping)	20
Phased return to work following absence	16
Adjusted duties	15

[2] Mentions of 5 per cent or more are shown in the table. 'None of above' and 'Don't know' are not shown. Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments = 651).

Additional breaks	13
Travel to work (for example, arrangements to enable an easier journey to work)	11
Travel in work (for example, arrangements to enable travel between sites or for meetings)	7
Adjusted targets	6
Adjustments to the built environment (for example, ramps, door adjustments, or other fixings)	6
Communications support (for example, speech to text or sign language interpreters)	5
Other (specify)	8

Experiences of employees who have workplace adjustments in place

The following relates to employees with disabilities and conditions who had adjustments in place at the time of the survey.

Just over two fifths (44 per cent) of respondents who had adjustments in place felt they **did not need additional or alternative adjustments**. Of the remaining:

- Just over a quarter (26 per cent) had requested adjustments which were not in place at the time of the survey; and/or
- Almost three in ten (29 per cent) had considered, but decided not to request, additional or alternative adjustments.

Table 2: Status of adjustment requirements[3]	Percentage of respondents
I have requested adjustments, but they are not yet in place	26
I have a known or suspected disability or conditions but decided not to request adjustments	29
Not applicable (I do not need more/other adjustments)	44
Don't know/Prefer not to say	4

[3] Base: Respondents with disabilities or conditions working with adjustments = 651.

Of employees with adjustments in place who had considered asking for an additional or alternative adjustments but decided not to, almost a quarter (24 per cent) felt that they could **manage their condition without requiring any additional support**. Of the remaining, several barriers were mentioned by relatively high proportions of respondents (at least a fifth in each case):

- **Barriers relating to stigma and openness**:
    - 28 per cent did not want to approach their employer to request adjustments.
    - 28 per cent were worried their employer might treat them differently.
    - 23 per cent were worried other colleagues would treat them differently.
- **Process related barriers (awareness, management, and effectiveness):**
    - 20 per cent did not think that an adjustment would help with their condition.
    - 20 per cent thought their employer would not make the right adjustment for them.
    - 16 per cent were worried their employer would not know how to support them.
    - 13 per cent did not know whether they would be 'entitled' to adjustments.

Of the employees who had requested further adjustments but were still waiting for them to be put in place, it is interesting to note that, although employees had re-entered the process of evaluating and requesting further or alternative adjustments, concerns relating to stigma and openness were once again mentioned by some: almost a fifth (19 per cent) were worried that their employer might **treat them differently** and 15 per cent were worried that other colleagues would treat them differently.

There were, in addition, indications that confidence in the process was again an issue: 23 per cent thought their employer would not make the right adjustment for them and 13 per cent were worried their employer would not know how to support them. For this group of employees, three in ten (29 per cent) had been **refused adjustments** and 19 per cent were **still waiting** for their adjustments to be processed at the time of the survey. Table 3 shows the full detail.

Table 3: Reasons for some adjustments not in place or employees deciding not to request them	Percentage of respondents considering but deciding not to request adjustments	Percentage of respondents requesting further adjustments not yet in place
Respondents with disabilities or conditions working with adjustments in place	**187**	**172**
I am worried that my employer might treat me differently	28	19
I didn't want to approach my employer to request adjustments	28	7
I can manage my condition without requiring any additional support	24	6
I am worried that other colleagues will treat me differently	23	15
I don't think my employer can make the right adjustments for me	20	23
I didn't think that an adjustment would help with my condition	20	4
I am worried that my employer will not know how to support me	16	13
I don't know whether I am entitled to adjustments	13	7
I don't want people to know I have a disability or long-term medical condition	9	5
I didn't know that workplace adjustments were available	4	3
I don't know what adjustments are	4	1
Cost/budget/expense	3	5
Refused/unwilling/denied/not processed	2	29
Awaiting/still in process/being assessed	1	19
Other	14	7
No specific reasons	5	2

Later in the survey, all respondents with disabilities or conditions and adjustments in place were asked what (if any) additional support they felt that they still needed. They were

offered the list of adjustments shown in Table 4. Just over a third (35 per cent) said that they **did not need more adjustments** at all (and 11 per cent said they did not know or preferred not to say). At least one in ten respondents mentioned the following:

- Flexible working or adjusted hours (17 per cent).
- Working from home (17 per cent).
- Ergonomic equipment (16 per cent).
- Time off to attend appointments or therapies (14 per cent).
- Additional breaks (12 per cent).
- Adjusted duties (11 per cent).

All other types of workplace adjustment were mentioned by less than one in ten respondents. Table 4 shows the detail.

Table 4: Which of the following types of adjustments and support, if any, do you feel that you still need[4]	Percentage of respondents
Flexible working or adjusted hours	17
Working from home	17
Ergonomic equipment (for example, supportive chairs, alternative desks, alternative computer mice or screens)	16
Time off to attend appointments or therapies to help manage a condition (for example, attending specialist medical appointments, counselling, or assistance animals training)	14
Additional breaks	12
Adjusted duties	11
Assistive IT technology (for example, speech to text, or mind-mapping)	9
Adjusted targets	9
Travel to work (for example, arrangements to enable an easier journey to work)	7
Adjustments to the built environment (for example, ramps, door adjustments, or other fixings)	6
Phased return to work following absence	4
Travel in work (for example, arrangements to enable travel between sites or for meetings)	3
Communications support (for example, speech to text or sign language interpreters)	3
Support worker (for example, taking notes, driving or helping you get around)	3
Other (specify)	10
Not applicable: I have all the adjustments I need	35
Don't know	4
Prefer not to say	1

[4] Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments = 651.

Experiences of employees who do not have workplace adjustments in place

The following paragraphs relate to those respondents who had adjustments in place at the time of the survey.

Respondents with disabilities and conditions but without workplace adjustments in place were asked if they had requested them previously, if they had considered them but decided not to request them or, if they believed that no adjustments were needed. Just over three in ten (31 per cent) felt that they **did not need adjustments**. Of the remaining, 32 per cent had **considered them but decided not to request them**, and 30 per cent had requested adjustments but they were not in place at the time of the survey.

Table 5: Status of workplace adjustments[5]	Percentage of respondents
I have requested adjustments, but they are not in place	30
I have known or suspected disability or conditions but decided not to request adjustments	32
Not applicable (I do not need any adjustments)	31
Don't know	6
Prefer not to say	3

Respondents who had requested, or had considered requesting, adjustments were asked for more detail about their situation.

Just over a third (36 per cent) of those who had considered adjustments but decided ultimately not to request them, believed that they could manage their condition without requiring any additional support. Of the remaining, several barriers were mentioned:

Barriers relating to **stigma** and **fear of being treated differently**:

- Over two fifths (43 per cent) **did not want to approach their employer**.
- 34 per cent were worried their employer might treat them differently.
- 31 per cent were worried other colleagues would treat them differently.
- 25 per cent did not want people to know they had a disability or long-term medical condition.

Process related barriers (awareness, management, and effectiveness)

[5] Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions without workplace adjustments = 318.

- 29 per cent did not think that an adjustment would help with their condition.
- 25 per cent did not know whether they were entitled to adjustments.
- 22 per cent thought their employer would not make the right adjustment for them.
- 21 per cent were worried their employer would not know how to support them.

Focussing on those **without** adjustments in place who had made requests in the past, the perception of need and effectiveness of adjustments was far greater compared to those who had decided not to request them. Just 5 per cent said they could manage their condition without requiring any additional support. However, just under a quarter of these respondents (24 per cent) said that they had been refused adjustments and 10 per cent said that they were still in the process.

It is worth noting concerns about stigma and openness were also mentioned by this group of respondents (i.e. employees without adjustments):

- 16 per cent said they had not wanted to approach their employer to request adjustments.
- 26 per cent were worried their employer might treat them differently.
- 18 per cent were worried other colleagues would treat them differently.

There were also indications that confidence in the process was an issue for those who had previously used it:

- 15 per cent did not know whether they were entitled to adjustments.
- 15 per cent thought their employer would not make the right adjustment for them.
- 15 per cent were worried their employer would not know how to support them.

Table 6 gives the full detail.

Table 6: Reasons that workplace adjustments are not in place (respondents waiting or deciding not to request) 5 per cent or more mentions displayed in the table	Percentage of respondents considering but deciding not to request adjustments	Percentage of respondents requesting further adjustments not yet in place
Respondents with disabilities/conditions without adjustments who had requested and waiting and/or decided not to request adjustments	102	96
I am worried that my employer might treat me differently	34	26
I didn't want to approach my employer to request adjustments	43	16
I am worried that other colleagues will treat me differently	31	18
I can manage my condition without requiring any additional support	36	5
I don't know whether I am entitled to adjustments	25	15
I didn't think that an adjustment would help with my condition	29	3
I don't want people to know I have a disability or long-term medical condition	25	9
I don't think my employer can make the right adjustments for me	22	15
I am worried that my employer will not know how to support me	21	15
Refused/unwilling/denied/not processed	2	24
I don't know what adjustments are	6	9
Awaiting/still in process/being assessed	0	10
Other	7	11
No specific reason	2	3

Considerations for employers: Employees with and without adjustments in place

- Employers need to reconsider how they think about adjustments for specific disabilities and conditions. Employees with disabilities and conditions generally have more than one disability or conditions, and they **do not separate their adjustments into condition categories** (for example, 'adjustments for dyslexia' or 'adjustments for fibromyalgia'). Adjustments processes need to be more intuitively human and focus on the person and the barriers they are experiencing, rather than the conditions they have.
- You are likely to have employee who want adjustments but who want to **maintain privacy at work** and keep details of the disability or conditions away from the workplace. In many organisations, accessing adjustments and support in the workplace is dependent on employees sharing details of their disability. Employers who take this approach are leaving some employees unsupported.
- Employers should think of providing workplace adjustments to employees as providing a service to them. Asking employees **what they thought of the process and how they feel it could be improved** will help many other employees who are nervous of coming forward to ask for support. It will also give the organisation evidence of what is causing people who have asked for adjustments not to ask again.

"Adjustments processes need to be more intuitively human and focus on the person and the barriers they are experiencing, rather than the conditions they have."

Experiencing the process: From request to review

The initial and on-going conversations between an employee and employer about workplace adjustments are important in shaping how the employee feels about how supported they are **as an individual**, and also how genuine they feel **the wider disability and inclusion agenda** is in their organisation. Employees need to feel they can have conversations with their manager (or equivalent) openly and fully to access the most effective services, tools, and solutions to enable them to thrive at work.

After adjustments are being processed and provided, we found many employers believe their 'duty' to make adjustments has been fulfilled and they need do nothing more. Employers too often miss that the Equality Act 2010 provides that **the duty to make reasonable adjustments is an on-going one**, meaning that if adjustments are no longer working, the employer is potentially failing to meet their legal duty; the conversation should continue with on-going reviews of the effectiveness of adjustments in place.

But this is the legal context only, and the legal context only gives the **bare minimum standard**. Employers who are keen to reach beyond this 'minimum standard' need to ensure ongoing review conversations about how well adjustments are working (for the individual and for the conversation) are working, and build this into their workplace adjustments procedures.

The survey explored the nature and frequency of conversations alongside some other reflections about the process itself. We asked:

- Who initiated the initial conversation and the first line of contact for subsequent discussions.
- The frequency of reviews.
- The length of time it took to get adjustments in place.
- Difficulties experienced in the process.
- Confidence in the organisation to supply adjustments, as needed, in the future.

Summary of findings

In most cases, respondents with adjustments in place said that they initiated the first conversation about their provision. Employees were far more likely to talk to their **manager or supervisor** during the first conversation about adjustments (89 per cent) compared with other sources such as the HR team or personnel department (27 per cent), their disability or workplace adjustments team (28 per cent) and/or their departmental manager or director (15 per cent).

On-going reviews about the effectiveness of adjustments relied heavily on the manager or supervisor relationship once again. Almost 8 in 10 respondents (77 per cent) said reviews happened with their manager or supervisor and far fewer mentioned any other contact point (less than 10 per cent for each type). These figures highlight the importance for

managers to be fully informed about workplace adjustments policy in the organisation – particularly with self-service approaches to employees getting adjustments – and equipped to handle any related discussions which can potentially be very sensitive.

In terms of the process itself, data suggests that the waiting time for adjustments was often **too long** and reviews were happening **too infrequently**.

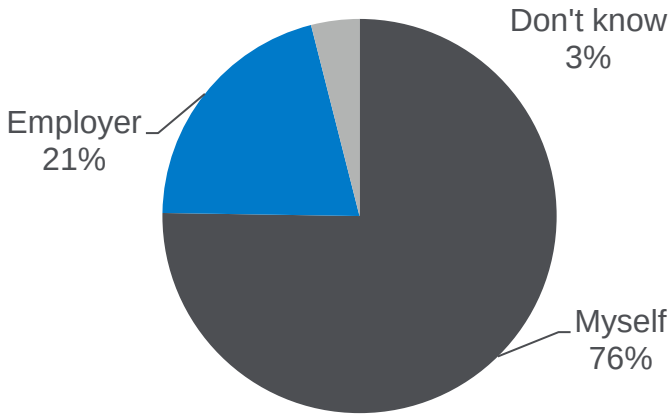
Whilst just over two fifths (42 per cent) reported that they had not experienced any difficulties in the process at all, a majority did report issues. Delays in the process, issues with managers and **difficulties at an organisational level**; for example, a lack of procedure or policy, "bureaucracy", and a general lack of understanding of needs were common problems.

As a measure of confidence in the process, all respondents working with adjustments in place were asked if, on the basis of their experience, they felt that any outstanding adjustments they might need in future would be put in place for them. Three in ten (30 per cent) felt that they would. Another half (49 per cent) said 'maybe' and one in ten (12 per cent) said 'no'.

The main contact person for requesting adjustments and ongoing review

Three quarters of respondents with adjustments in place (76 per cent) reported that they themselves initiated the first conversation about them. Just over a fifth of respondents (21 per cent) said it was their employer.

Chart 2: Who initiated the first conversation about adjustments and workplace support (myself: 75 per cent; employer: 21 per cent; don't know: 4 per cent).



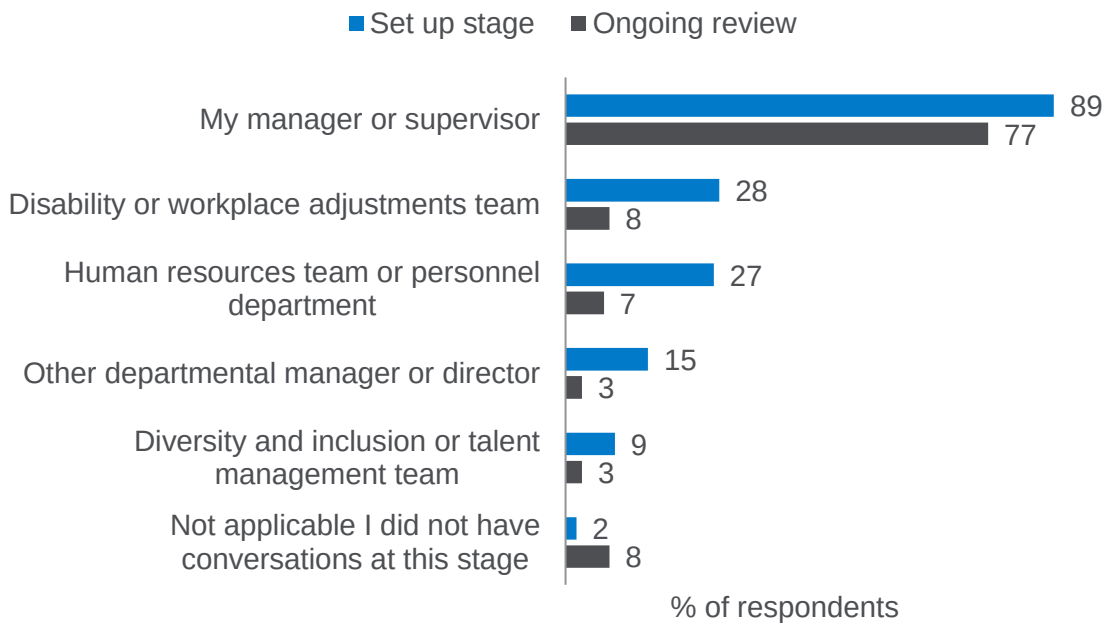
The survey explored who in the organisation the employee was in most contact with at the initial stages of evaluating the adjustments needed and at the later stages when reviewing how they were working.

Almost nine in ten respondents (89 per cent) said that their **manager or supervisor** was the person they had most contact with when initially reviewing the type of support they needed and sorts of adjustments that would be available to them. Other contact points mentioned at this initial stage of the process by at least one in ten respondents were:

- The disability or workplace adjustments teams (28 per cent).
- Human resources teams or personnel department (27 per cent).
- And/or another departmental manager or director (15 per cent). Almost one in ten (9 per cent) mentioned the diversity and inclusion or talent management team.

Just over three quarters (77 per cent) reported that their manager or supervisor was the person they had most contact with when adjustments were in place and being reviewed for how well they were working and if any changes needed to be made. Reliance on the manager becomes pronounced at these later review stages after adjustments are in place. Chart 3 shows that contact with any of the other departments was much less likely (less than 10 per cent in all instances).

Chart 3: Person in most contact with when initially reviewing the type of support and adjustments needed and also at ongoing reviews. (Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments 651)



Length of time taken to get adjustments in place

All respondents were asked how long it took to get their current adjustments in place starting from the initial conversation. The findings reveal a very varied experience from our respondents:

- Almost a third (32 per cent) reported that they had had a relatively quick process of **under one month**.
- Another 38 per cent had waited between **one and six months** and 10 per cent up to a year.
- Almost a fifth (17 per cent) said that they had waited for **over a year** (8 per cent were waiting for 2 or more years).

Table 7: Length of time taken to get adjustments in place.[6]	Percentage of respondents
Less than 2 weeks	18
Approximately 2 weeks to 1 month	13
1 to 2 months	18
3 to 6 months	20
7 to 12 months	10
1 to 2 years	9
2 to 3 years	5
4 years or more	3
Don't know	3

Difficulties experienced with getting adjustments in place

Respondents were asked what difficulties, if any, they had experienced in the process of getting their current adjustments in place. This was an open question. Just over two fifths (42 per cent) reported that they had not experienced any difficulties at all. For the remaining, difficulties revolved around a few key areas (mentioned by at least 5 per cent of respondents with disabilities or conditions with adjustments currently in place):

- **Delays**: The process itself was the root cause of some difficulties either in terms of the length of time taken with some respondents mentioning delays and **approvals taking**

[6] Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments = 651.

too long (11 per cent) or, more specifically, in relation to **waiting for occupational health assessments and diagnosis** (6 per cent).

- **Managers**: Difficulties also emerged for some in respect of their manager either by showing a **lack of support, help or understanding** or being resistant to the flexibility provided by adjustments (9 per cent), or, linked to a **lack of awareness** of process/legislation (4 per cent).
- **Issues at an organisational or general level**: A clear **lack of procedure** or policy, "bureaucracy", and a general lack of understanding (8 per cent).

In 6 per cent of cases, respondents mentioned how stressful the process was and that it had been **too much of a 'fight' or 'struggle'**. In some instances, they felt that they had **not been heard,** or, it was hard to **convince** or **prove** their need for adjustments.

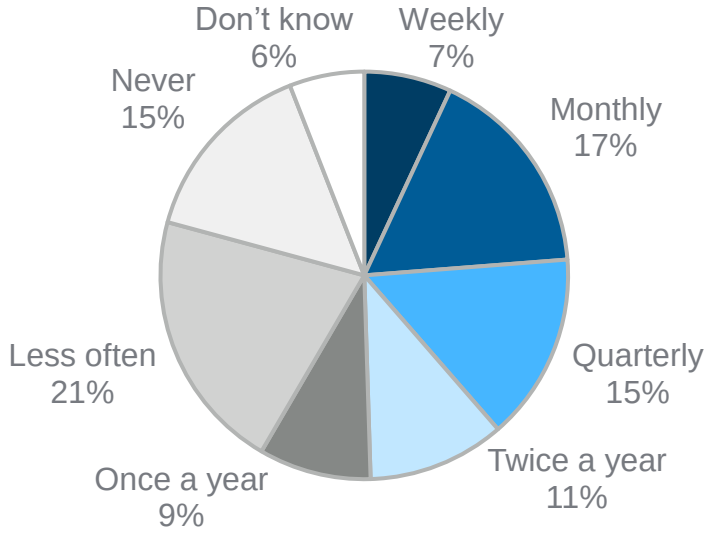
Table 8: Difficulties with the process for getting adjustments	Percentage of respondents
No difficulties	42
Process: time/lengthy/delays/approvals/wait too long/passed around	11
Manager: lack of support/help/understanding/resisting/flexible	9
Organisation: bureaucracy/lack of understanding/no procedure/ or policy	8
Fight/struggle/not heard/hard to convince/prove my need	6
Process: occupational health assessments/diagnosis/waiting time	6
Equipment: delays/supplier delays/not found/hard to access/room moves)	4
Equipment: IT specific (training/installation/fitting)	4
Disagreement on adjustments/refused/what should be included	4
Budget/funding	4
Manager: lack of awareness of process/legislation	4
Issues relating to Access to Work process	3
Other	4
Don't know/not stated	3

Frequency of reviews about the effectiveness of adjustments

All respondents were asked how regularly they spoke to their main contact (most often their manager or supervisor) specifically about their adjustments:

- Approximately a quarter (24 per cent) stated it was weekly or monthly.
- A similar proportion (26 per cent) mentioned it was quarterly or twice a year.
- Almost one in ten (9 per cent) spoke to their main contact once a year.
- Just over a fifth (21 per cent) stated it was less often.
- 15 per cent of respondents with adjustments in place said that they never spoke to their main contact specifically about their adjustments.

Chart 4: How regularly employees speak to their main contact about their adjustments.[7]



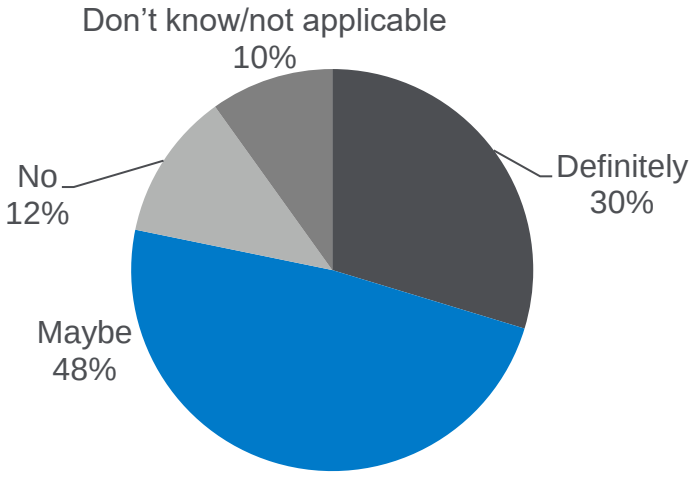
Confidence in the organisation to make adjustments in the future

All respondents working with adjustments in place were asked if, based on their experience in their organisation, they felt any outstanding adjustments they might need in future would be put in place for them:

- Three in ten (30 per cent) were positive, saying this would definitely be the case.
- Another half (49 per cent) said 'maybe'.
- Just over one in ten (12 per cent) stated that no, they were not confident this would be the case.

[7] Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments = 651.

Chart 5: Confidence in getting adjustments that might be needed in the future.[8]



Considerations for employers: Experience of the process

- Employees and managers should be able to readily find information about the process for requesting and assessing adjustments. Organisations should explore levels of awareness among their staff of how to locate the information needed and be clear on its interpretation. One of the most common policy related problems Business Disability Forum's Advice Service hears about is how differently individual managers each **interpret a policy or procedure**. If there is room for interpretation in your policies, review them and identify if and where you need to be more explicit about how you want your workforce to interpret them.
- Although many employees speak to their line or people managers about adjustments (to request and review), employees are speaking to **many different roles** in the organisation about the support they need. In the Equality Act 2010, an employer's duty to make adjustments engages when the organisation (not just the manager) 'knows' or could 'reasonably be expected to know' that an individual employee could have a disability or long-term condition. Therefore, many roles – from line managers and HR to diversity/inclusion and departmental leads – need to know (a) **where to signpost** employees to, and (b) **when to pass on what information** and to whom.
- Two of the key difficulties' employees had with their workplace adjustments process were the length of time it was taking to get adjustments and needing to 'prove' that they do need support. We would always recommend that employers regularly review and

[8] Ibid.

seek feedback form employees and managers on the experience of using the workplace adjustments process; but pay particular attention to how you can speed up the process, and **identify what is causing delays** in your organisations' workplace adjustments process. This may also include finding out where (if at all) in the process employees are asked to justify or 'prove' why they are asking for adjustments or support. There are many reasons why employees may not want to share personal information at work; consider how your workplace adjustments process can be more inclusive, not just from a disability perspective, but from an multi-equalities perspective (consider religious and cultural perspectives on disability, for example). Make sure an un-inclusive workplace adjustments process is not preventing people from getting support or adjustments.

- Ensure your workplace policy and related processes include how you want managers (or equivalent) to review adjustments with employees and how you want this to be done (including how this is recorded). Various practices exist, but the most important thing is that, as reviewing adjustments is part of the adjustments itself, **the regularity of review must be tailored to the individual** and their type of adjustments. Defining a fixed period for everyone in a policy is unlikely to be helpful to the organisational or the individual.

"Getting adjustments was stressful, and too much of a fight"

The impact of adjustments on career development and in removing all workplace barriers

This section explores the extent to which adjustments have tackled difficulties and barriers for employees in the workplace. It also reviews employees' perceptions of the impact on aspects of their working life and career.

The findings confirm that adjustments had a positive impact for a majority of those working with them in place and were very often successful in tackling difficulties and barriers in the workplace. One in five respondents (19 per cent) felt that their adjustments had successfully **removed all barriers and difficulties** and another three quarters (73 per cent) said they had tackled some of them.

Difficulties remaining were sometimes linked to **wider cultural or environmental issues within organisations** and not with the efficacy of the adjustments themselves. For example, some respondents talked about a need to tackle awareness and understanding of specific disabilities and conditions and/or issues remaining related with their work area or building at a sensory or practical level. In some cases, however, difficulties outstanding were linked to **workload, duties, and job roles**.

The findings highlighted a range of positive opinion from respondents about the application of adjustments. For example:

- Approximately eight in ten agreed that their adjustments helped them **stay in their job**, made them **more productive** at work and/or were happy with the adjustments that they had in place.

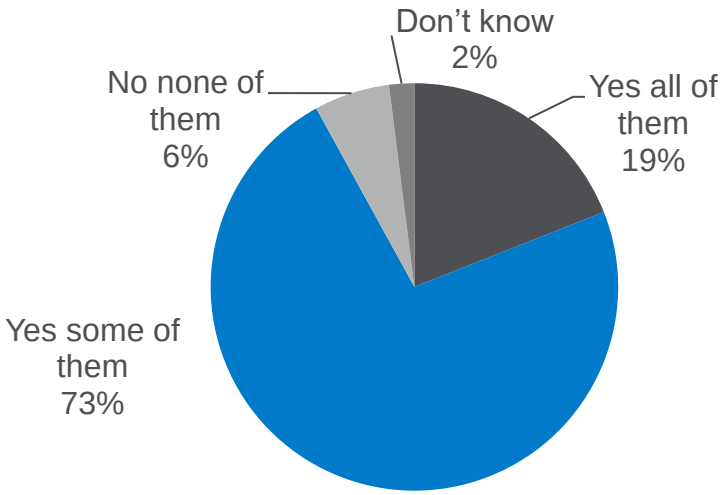
- Just over six in ten **enjoyed their job** more due to their adjustments.

However, adjustments did not have such a high positive association with being **transferable** across the organisation if employees were applying for different roles (53 per cent agreed this would be the case) and/or helping or **enhancing career progression** in the longer term (29 per cent agreed).

Extent to which adjustments had tackled difficulties and barriers in the workplace

There was a very high level of agreement that adjustments had tackled some, if not all, barriers that employees had experienced in the workplace. Just under a fifth (19 per cent) of respondents thought that their adjustments had tackled all of them and another 73 per cent said that it had tackled some of them. Just 6 per cent said that their adjustments had not tackled any.

Chart 6: Extent to which adjustments have tacked difficulties and barriers in the workplace.[9]



Those who stated some barriers and difficulties remained were asked for more detail. More than one in ten (12 per cent) said that **managing their disability or condition was difficult** both in and outside of work and, in some cases, employees felt adjustments had helped them as much as could be possible, but the fact remained that their disability or condition(s) presents difficulties in and of itself.

From other responses, the following themes emerged:

- **Culture**: general culture, attitudes, and bias in the workplace (12 per cent).
- **Awareness**: lack of understanding of specific disabilities and conditions (9 per cent).
- **Tasks and responsibilities**: high workload or the types of duties and tasks expected (9 per cent).
- **Equipment**: IT technology and equipment not working properly or as effectively as needed (7 per cent)
- **Travel**: including travel to work and/or to and from meetings or various offices and sites (7 per cent).
- **Working hours**: breaks in the working day, including start and finish times and length or frequency of breaks (6 per cent).
- **Environmental**: for example, the immediate workspace such as desks or chairs (6 per cent); wider environmental difficulties in their building such as parking, lifts, stairs (6 per cent); and wider environmental difficulties at a sensory level, such as noise, light, air conditioning (4 per cent).

[9] Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments = 651.

Table 9: The barriers and difficulties that remain after adjustments have been put in place[10]	Percentage of respondents
General management of my individual condition (for example, pain, fatigue)	12
Culture/attitudes/stigma/faking it/bias/prejudice	12
Lack of understanding/awareness of specific disabilities and conditions	9
Work tasks and workload: duties, roles, and pressure	9
IT/tech not working properly/as effectively (including headsets)	7
Travel: meetings, work, different sites, or offices	7
Hours and breaks: adjusted hours, flexible hours, different/more breaks, shift issues	6
Personal working space: desks/chairs/ own working space/needs/issues hot desking	6
Wider environmental barriers: stairs, lifts, doors, evacuation procedure/signage/parking	6
Poor management/inconsistent management/not listening/not understanding	6
Wider environmental and sensory: noise, aircon, light, open plan	4
Accessible working: materials, documents, communication, meetings, helplines/webchat	4
Failure to make effective adjustments/give adjustments/replace adjustments	4
Progression: meeting or adjusting targets, reward, progression, development	4
Process Timing: delays in getting adjustments/time it takes	4
Issues with time of sick/worried about time off sick	3
Other	5

[10] Base: all respondents with disabilities or conditions excluding those who said all barriers had been removed by adjustments = 525.

Don't know	8
Not stated/not applicable	5

Application of adjustments and impact on working life

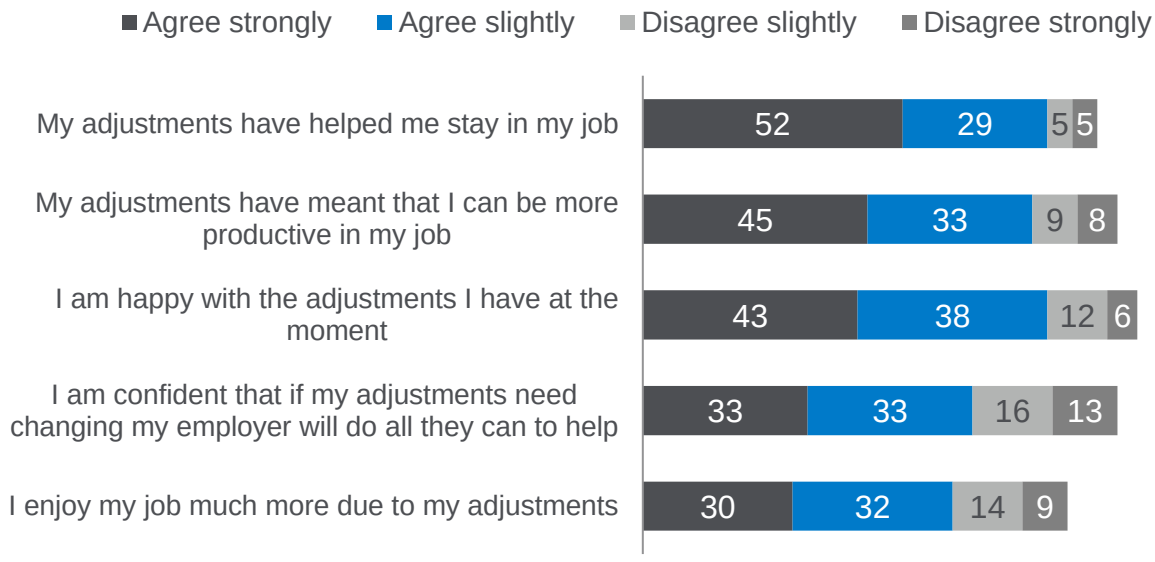
The survey explored employees' own perception the impact adjustments had on their working lives. Perhaps most fundamentally, just over eight in ten (81 per cent) agreed that their adjustments had **helped them they stay in their job** (52 per cent agreeing strongly this was the case). Other points to highlight were:

- Adjustments have a strong impact on **productivity**. Almost eight in ten respondents with adjustments agreed this was the case (45 per cent agreeing strongly).
- Adjustments can enhance **enjoyment** in work for a significant number of those working with them. 62 per cent agreed that they enjoyed their job more due to adjustments (30 per cent agreeing strongly).

While a relatively high proportion (81 per cent) agreed that they were happy with the adjustments that they had at time of the survey (43 per cent agreed strongly), their confidence in the process displayed some limitations:

- Two thirds (66 per cent) felt confident to some extent that their employer would change their adjustments in the future if needed; but
- Three in ten (29 per cent) disagreed.

Chart 7: The practical impacts of adjustments working life.[11]



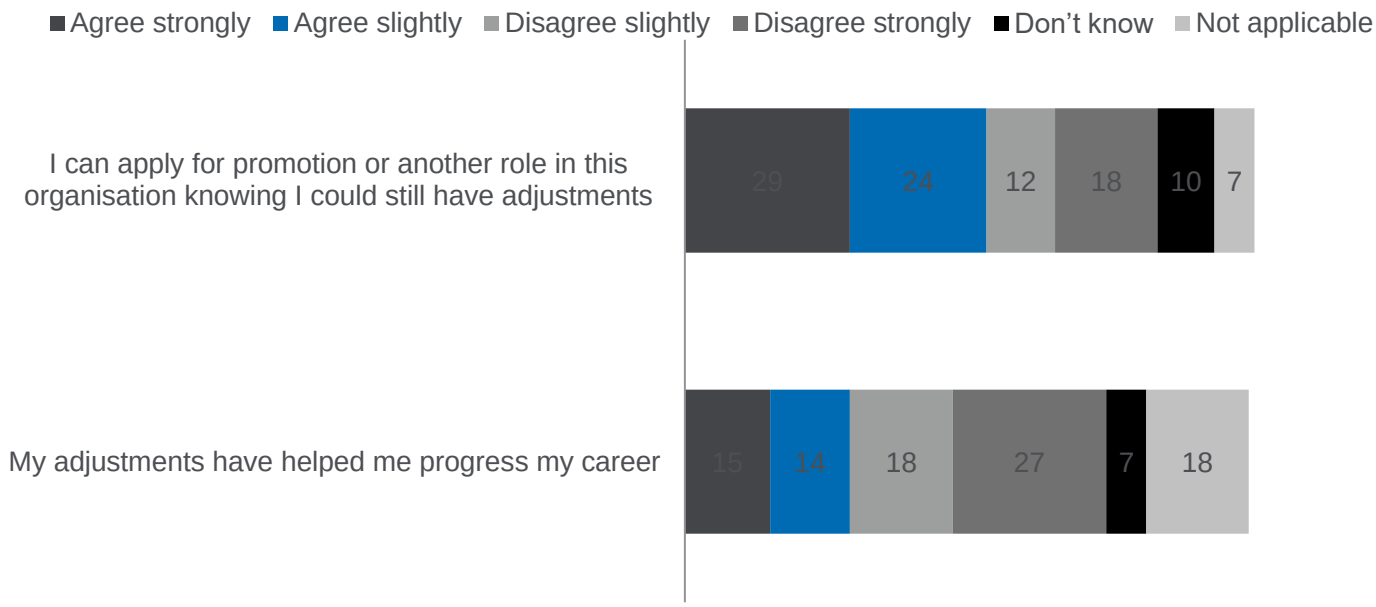
[11] Don't know/not applicable not shown in the chart. Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments = 651.

Impact of adjustments on further career progression

It is interesting that, despite some previous positive responses relating to impact, respondents were less likely to feel adjustments help them progress or enhance their career:

- Just over half of the respondents (53 per cent) thought they could **apply for promotion** or another role in the organisation knowing that they could still have their adjustments (just 29 per cent agreed strongly).
- Just under three in ten (29 per cent) agreed that their adjustments had helped **progress their career** (45 per cent disagreed and 18 said this was not applicable).

Chart 8: Impact of adjustments on career progression[12]



Considerations for employers: The impact of adjustments on career development and removing all workplace barriers

- Less than a fifth of employees feel adjustments have removed all disability related barriers in the workplace. Making adjustments for individuals does not define a disability inclusive employer. **Wider environment and cultural situations** also present barriers that disability inclusive employers should seek to remove. This includes

[12] Base: Respondents with disabilities/conditions working with adjustments = 651.

ensuring the built environment is accessible and useable, ensuring the organisations language and communications are inclusive and uphold disability inclusive values, and ensuring non-disability related policies also consider the needs of and impact on disabled employees.

- Employees did not generally feel their adjustments had helped them with career development or progression. This makes some sense: in law, adjustments for individuals primarily remove the barriers that are **currently** experienced in the role an individual **currently** performs. However, a barrier-free job is a very different experience for employees to a barrier free workplace. Employers who want to ensure disabled people can move to different roles within the organisation, be promoted, or develop their career through other means (such as job shadowing, mentoring, or professional development learning) will need to **ensure wider policies and opportunities are barrier free** to disabled employees. Disability inclusive employers consider an employees' path beyond their current role and seek to remove barriers that could get in the way of this. This research showed employees are often the first to start conversations with their managers to request adjustments; but employers need to show that they are being proactive about valuing disabled employees and seeing a trajectory which is barrier-free for the employee to move though.
- There is a **mismatch between what employees and managers believe** about career progression and adjustments. Business Disability Forum often hears that employees in an organisation believe they would not be able to keep their adjustments or work in other different ways if they were to apply for and be successful in getting another role within the organisation. Employers should **explore the perceptions staff (particularly disabled staff) have** about how well they would be supported if they were to get a different role or be promoted in their organisations. Perceptions are powerful; they can alter behaviours and influence employees' decisions that ultimately prevent them from progressing their career or applying for promotion in your organisation. Employers can redefine these beliefs through, for example, effective, inclusive, and targeted communications and career development initiatives.

"Perceptions are powerful; they can alter behaviours and influence employees' decisions that ultimately prevent them from progressing their career or applying for promotion in your organisation"

The experience of managers when managing workplace adjustments

A total of 523 respondents were in a management role. This was most commonly line management or supervisory responsibilities (72 per cent of all managers) and/or project management responsibilities (45 per cent). Just over one in ten managers in the survey (11 per cent) had a senior leadership role and another 8 per cent identified themselves as central departmental or divisional management.

Eight in ten managers in our survey (420 in total) stated that they had experience of managing someone (either currently or in the past in their organisation) with a disability and/or they had been through the process of discussing and arranging adjustments for employees in the past. We focus on this group of managers through the following section.

Questions evaluated their **level of confidence** in managing staff with disabilities and/or the adjustments process and their perception of the impact adjustments have in the workplace. They were also asked if they thought **disability was a priority** in their organisation at a senior leadership level.[13]

Summary of findings

Managers with experience of managing staff with disabilities and conditions or arranging adjustments were **relatively confident** in managing these employees with a disability or long-term condition. This included knowing about the process, where to get additional information about the process, managing employees and the wider team's attitudes about adjustments, and understanding what adjustments can be made. However, for each of these attributes, while the majority agreed they were confident to some extent, approximately a third tended to agree strongly. This suggests that there is room for improvement at the highest rating (‘agree strongly’).

A high proportion of managers observed positive impacts of adjustments on employees’ working lives. Indeed, they were in line with most of the impacts perceived by individuals themselves about their own adjustments (see previous section). Where perceptions differed was in relation to career progression. Managers were more likely to agree that **employees could keep their adjustments** (75 per cent agreeing to some extent compared to 54 per cent of individuals with adjustments in place), and also that adjustments **helped progress careers** (53 per cent compared to 29 per cent given by employees with adjustments).

Two thirds (66 per cent) of respondents who manage employees with a disability or long-term condition agreed to some extent that disability and workplace adjustments is a

[13] It should be noted that 68 per cent of these managers had a disability or condition themselves and this should be taken into context when looking at these findings.

priority at board or senior leadership level in their organisation (33 per cent agreed strongly).

Confidence in managing the process

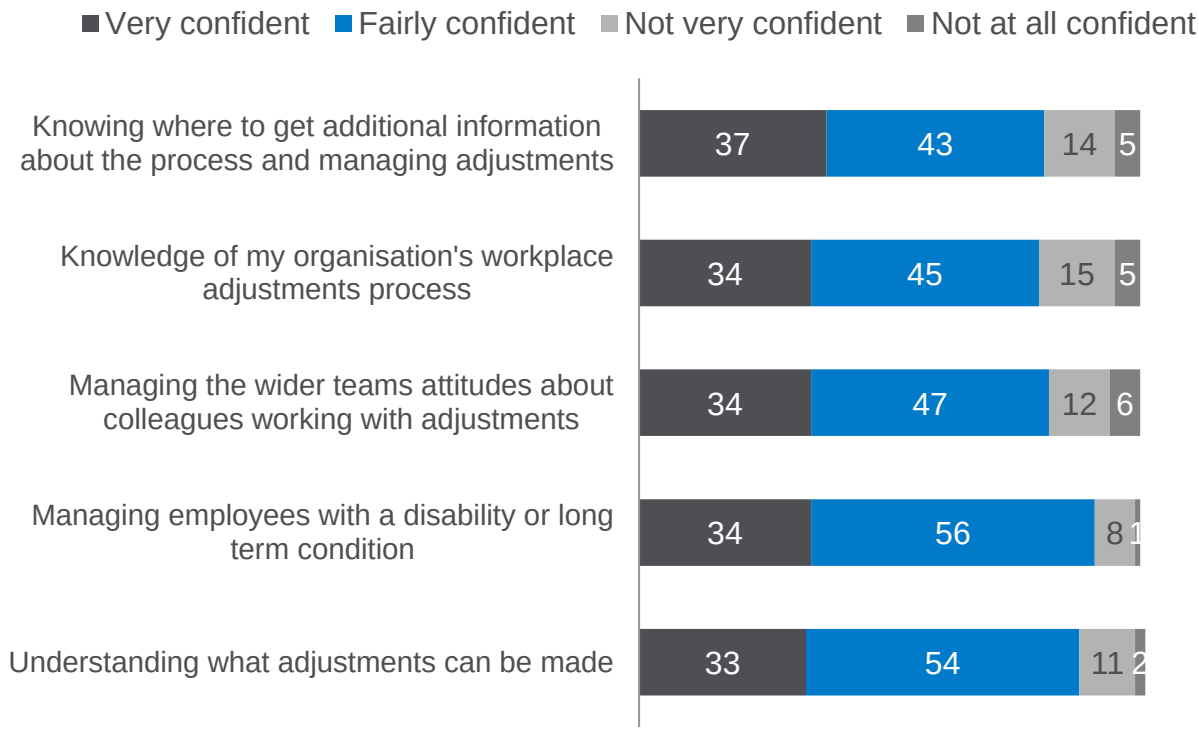
Confidence levels were similar among managers with experience of managing employees with disabilities or conditions or managing adjustments across a range of aspects (as shown in Chart 9). Between three and **four in ten** of these managers stated they were very confident in the following:

- Knowledge of their organisation's workplace adjustments.
- Knowing where to get additional information about the process and managing adjustments.
- Managing employees with a disability or long-term condition.
- Managing the wider team's attitudes about colleagues working with adjustments.
- Managing staff with a disability or condition and understanding what adjustments can be made.

The findings suggest, given the importance of the manager in the adjustment process from the initial conversation through to on-going reviews, there could be some **improvements in the confidence of managers**. This was slightly more pronounced in the following attributes:

- Knowledge of your organisation's workplace adjustments process (20 per cent were not very or not at all confident).
- Knowing where to get additional information about the process and managing adjustments (19 per cent were not very or not at all confident).
- Managing the wider team's attitudes about colleagues working with an adjustment (18 per cent were not very or not at all confident).

Chart 9: Confidence in managing aspects of disability inclusion and adjustments.[14]



The impact of adjustments on daily working life

Most respondents with experience of managing staff with disabilities or conditions and/or managing adjustments readily agreed to a positive impact that adjustments have on employees. Over eight in ten agreed to some extent that:

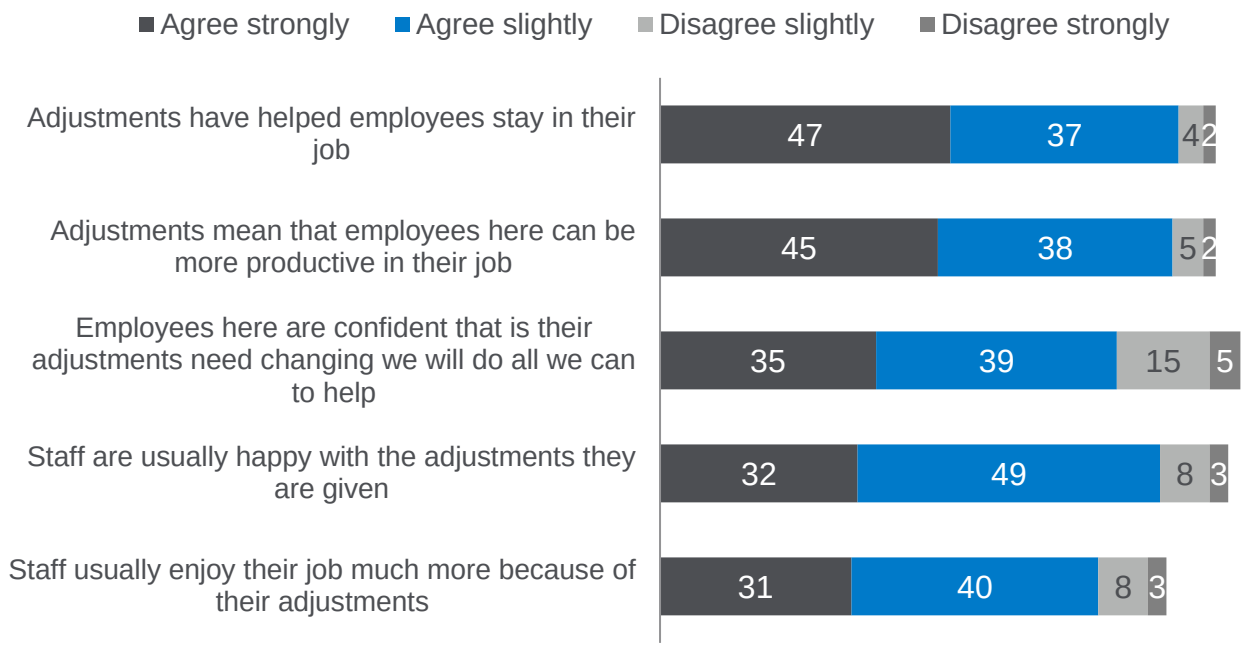
- 'Adjustments have helped employees stay in their job' (84 per cent with 47 per cent agreeing strongly).
- 'Adjustments mean that employees here can be more productive in their job' (83 per cent with 45 per cent agreeing strongly).
- 'Staff are usually happy with the adjustments they are given' (81 per cent with 32 per cent agreeing strongly).

Interestingly, the issue of **updating and reviewing adjustments** was the one that managers showed least confidence in and this was also flagged in the data previously as a potential issue from employees with adjustments. One in five (20 per cent) disagreed

[14] Base: Respondents with experience of managing employees with disabilities or conditions and/or managing adjustments = 420.

that ‘employees here are confident that if their adjustments need changing, we will do all we can to help’.

Chart 10: Manager perception of impact of adjustments on current job role.[15]



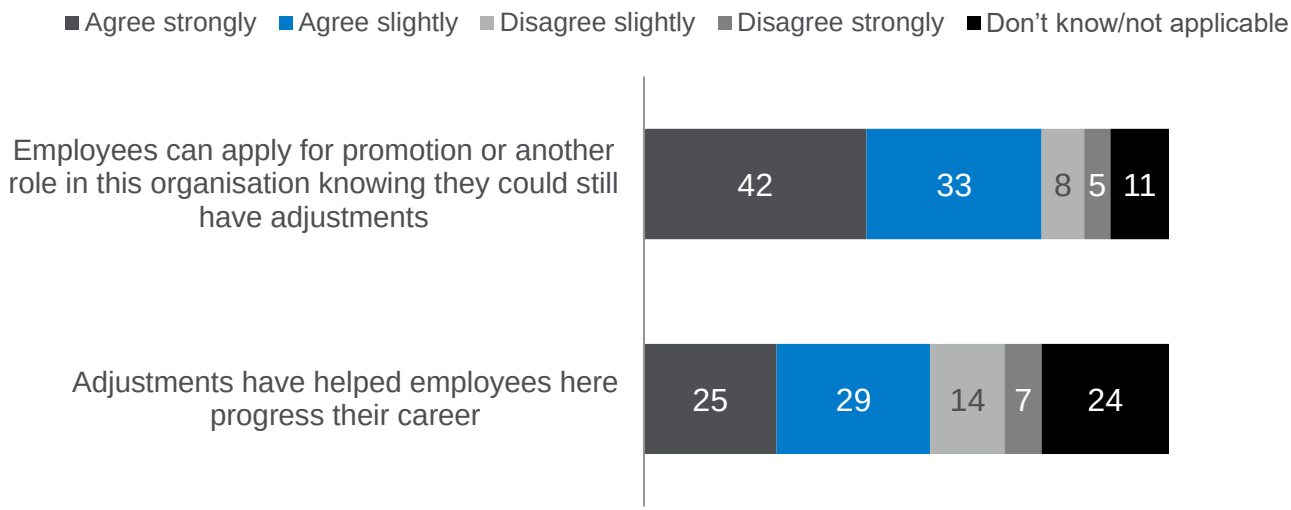
Impact of adjustments on furthering career progression

Three quarters of the managers with experience of managing staff with disabilities or conditions and/or managing adjustments (75 per cent) agreed to that ‘employees can apply for promotion or another role in their organisation in the knowledge they could still have adjustments’ (42 per cent agreed strongly). The recognition of transferability of adjustments was considerably higher amongst managers compared to employees with adjustments (75 per cent compared to 53 per cent agreeing to some extent).

Just over half (54 per cent) agreed to some extent that adjustments had helped employees **progress their career** (25 per cent agreed strongly). As above, the recognition of a longer-term impact was considerably higher amongst managers compared to employees with adjustments (54 per cent compared to 29 per cent agreeing to some extent).

[15] Base: Respondents with experience of managing employees with disabilities or conditions and/or managing adjustments = 420.

Chart 11: Manager perception of impact of adjustments on career progression.[16]

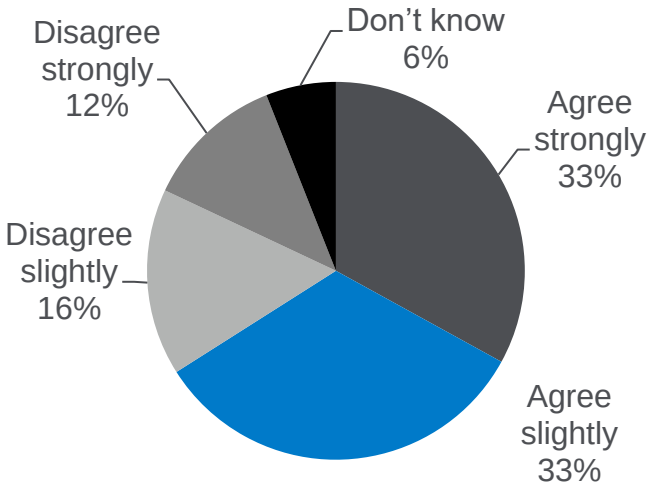


The priority of adjustments and supporting disabled staff at senior level

Two thirds (66 per cent) of managers with experience of managing staff with disabilities or conditions and/or discussing the adjustments process agreed to some extent that adjustments and support for staff with disabilities or conditions was a **priority at board or senior leadership level** in their organisation. Almost a fifth (18 per cent) actively disagreed this was the case.

[16] Base: Respondents with management responsibilities and experience of managing staff with disabilities/conditions = 420.

Chart 12: Support for staff with disabilities or conditions being a priority at board or senior leadership level.[17]



Considerations for employers: The experience of managers

- Throughout this research, we have consistently seen the pivotal role managers have in conversations where adjustments are requested, arranging those adjustments, and reviewing those adjustments. Yet the confidence of managers often comes from a working knowledge of the workplace adjustments process and confidence to deal with situations where employees may share personal details and information with them. It is crucial that employers **equip managers with these process and communication skills**. Employers should assess the confidence and knowledge skills of managers in their own organisations and provide the appropriate learning and development opportunities accordingly.
- Due to this pivotal role managers play in the supporting employees and interpreting the policies s well as the wider cultural values of an organisation, employers should enable managers to be **custodians of the organisations' disability and wider inclusion values**. This includes managers being able to recall – and instil confidence in their teams – as to what their board and senior managers' priorities are. If disability inclusion is a priority to senior leaders in your organisation, the organisation should enable managers to **'live' and communicate these priorities** in how they work with and support disabled employees. At the moment, managers and employees are telling us they are unclear if disability and adjustments are a priority to their employer at the most

[17] Base: Respondents with management responsibilities and experience of managing staff with disabilities/conditions = 420.

senior level. Employers should identify the level of confidence and knowledge managers and staff have in what then board and senior leadership priorities are.

"If disability inclusion is a priority to senior leaders in your organisation, the organisation should enable managers to 'live' and communicate these priorities in how they work with and support disabled employees"

Concluding thoughts for businesses:

Adjust Our Workplaces

Business Disability Forum has spent the last year listening to and analysing the stories and experiences of employees, people managers, senior leaders and other stakeholders when interacting with workplace adjustments processes and talking about getting disability related workplace support put in place.

Throughout this report, we have presented the evidence base for many messages that Business Disability Forum has held crucial for many years. These include that everyone's experience is different but equally as important; business processes should not rely on medical diagnosis or labelling; and employers must ensure their policies on paper work for everyone in practice.

To conclude our findings, we bring together the top headline themes in a way that can form a discussion in organisations and help you consider how the finding from The Great Big Workplace Survey can help you revise your own processes and improve staff experiences of engaging with and using them.

- **Focus on barriers, not conditions.** Many employees who are working with adjustments do not yet know they have a condition, or what the name of that condition is. Employers need to work faster than medical diagnostic processes can to ensure they are providing effective support to employees. Focussing on medical 'proof' or relying on an employee having a neat 'label' for their experience, is unhelpful, slows down the process of that employee getting support, and is unrealistic: it does not reflect the reality of 'becoming' disabled or acquiring a condition. **How are you ensuring that everyone who needs adjustments is getting them, without relying on the employee having a diagnosis or a 'name' for their disability or condition?**
- **A good process on paper does not necessarily equal a good experience for employees.** Processes are about people. If the people processes are not designed and revised in a way that includes the input of those stakeholders, the process is likely to feel 'alien' and not reflective of 'where the person is'. **How have you included the feedback and experiences of disabled employees and employees with conditions in the process revision and improvement?**
- **Business talk rarely reflects employee experience.** Profession-specific jargon and terminology is understood and can be helpful when working within profession-specific frameworks (such as inclusion, HR, or business management). However, that language is rarely effective when transferred into communications about processes that are for employees. Many employees say the language used in workplace adjustments processes is often legal and HR-centric. If employees do not understand the terminology you are using, they are less likely to think this process or support applies to them. Do not let your language distance yourself from those you are trying to support. As an example, the term "reasonable" defines an employer's process, yet

reasonableness is not the employee's concern. Employees with disabilities and conditions often do not engage or are not familiar with legal terms. **How does the language you use in your processes reflective the supportive tone that you want to get across to employees?**

- **Adjustments do not remove barriers to inclusion elsewhere in the organisation.** We heard from employees that the adjustments often remove all barriers in their own job and immediate working area (such as their desk or office area) but having these adjustments does not equate to an inclusive organisation more widely. Other factors in wider workplace are presenting barriers that adjustments do not address. These include attitudes from managers; harassment from colleagues; access to learning and development opportunities; opportunities for promotion and progression; perceptions about ability and disability in management and senior management; and the perception of how much of a priority disability and workplace support is at senior and board level in the organisation. **How are you identifying the barriers disabled employees and employees with conditions experience beyond their immediate role and area of work, and how are you removing those barriers?**
- **When adjustments – the right adjustments – are in place, employees stay in their job, are productive, and are happy.** An employer's duty to make adjustments in the Equality Act 2020 is an ongoing one. This means employers need to ensure that, even after adjustments are provided and in place, they keep checking that those adjustments continue to remove the barriers the employee was experiencing. Many employees in this research told us this rarely happens. Not only is there a legal risk to the employer here, but the retention, productivity, and happiness of the employee is also compromised if the adjustments provided do not work (or no longer work). **How do you know these reviews are consistently taking place in your organisation, and how do you equip managers to initiate and undertake them effectively and at appropriate periods?**

"We must all challenge each other to be better and to do more. You never know when you might need that support and how it can drastically improve your quality of life and even be enough to save your life…

We have a choice. We can provide a space for hope, healing, and transformation inclusive for all to equally thrive."

Research participant, The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey

Appendix 1: Methodology and reporting

Business Disability Forum asked their membership organisations, partners and stakeholders, as well as the disability, HR and business press and social media to share a link to an online survey about workplace adjustments. The questionnaire explored the experiences and perceptions of getting, and working with, adjustments in the workplace. Employees and managers were asked to take part; the only criteria in place was that they should be UK based and that, if self-employed, respondents should be working with organisations on long term contracts. The survey link remained open for four weeks and the average completion time was just under 10 minutes.

When an invitation to a survey is disseminated in this way, those who respond are self-selecting and will not represent the offline world or those who are not associated to the channels disseminating the survey link. This being the case, we cannot report the findings as a representative measure of behaviour and attitude across the whole of the UK workforce. However, each and every response is someone's story and the feedback is incredibly valuable. This is a large body of evidence. Since over 1,200 individuals took the time to share their thoughts and experiences, we have built a very detailed picture of what is working in relation to adjustments and what challenges we still face. We can give informed opinion on what adjustments are most common, what is needed, and the perceived value and importance of this process in the workplace.

In this report, we have discussed the overall findings (the data is unweighted).

Profile of respondents by conditions and whether adjustments were in place	Number of respondents
Number recording disabilities/conditions	982
Number recording no disabilities/conditions	291
Number recording adjustments in place	691
Number recording disabilities/conditions and adjustments in place	651
Number recording disabilities/conditions without adjustments in place	331

"Each and every response is someone's story"

Business Disability Forum

Creating a disability-smart world together

Business Disability Forum is committed to ensuring that all its products and services are as accessible as possible to everyone. If you wish to discuss anything with regard to the accessibility of this document, please contact us.

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