

# Discussing your disability with an employer

Disclosing your disability or health condition is always a matter of personal choice. If you are worried about disclosing, it is worth bearing in mind that employers are increasingly becoming disability confident, which means they value having a diverse workforce and recognise the skills, strengths and talents that employees with disabilities and health conditions offer. Furthermore, there are many benefits to being open as employers have a legal duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to both the recruitment process and in the workplace itself. If an employer is unaware of your support needs, you may find you are at a disadvantage compared to a non-disabled person, and you are unable to demonstrate your full potential.

## Explaining your disability or health condition to an employer – where, when and how is best?

There are no hard and fast rules as to when is the best time to disclose. You may prefer to explain in writing as part of your application; for example, include a short statement in your covering letter, CV or into the application form itself. Or you could raise the matter prior to attending an interview. As many employers ask applicants if they need adjustments in the application form or when invited to interview, this can be an ideal opportunity to say you are disabled or have a health condition and request information about the format of the interview.

Alternatively you could raise the matter during the interview when the interviewer invites questions. Tell them briefly about your disability or health condition and use the invitation to ask questions about adjustments that you know would enable you to perform the job effectively.

Or you may prefer to wait until you are offered the job, and discuss your support needs then.

The important thing to remember is that any information about your disability or health condition is protected by the Equality Act and the Data Protection Act which means that it can't be passed on to others without your permission.

## Requesting adjustments in the recruitment process

Whilst you do not have to 'disclose' your condition when you are applying for a job, if you are going to ask for 'reasonable adjustments', then you will need to say that you are disabled or have a health condition and specify what kind of adjustment would help. There are many examples of reasonable adjustments that an employer could make. These include:

- A rest break in between the interview and assessment test
- Use of a sign language interpreter
- Assistive technology (eg larger screen, screen reading software)
- A verbal test rather than a written one
- Extra time to complete a test
- An interview room with level access

Most employers provide an outline of their recruitment process, so candidates know what to expect, but if you are still unsure, it is perfectly reasonable to ask. For example, you might want to find out if there will just be an interview, or will there also be an assessment test or practical task? Tasks might involve using a computer, in which case, you might want to ask if you could bring your own. Likewise, you might find it useful to know how long the interview is likely to last. Finding out about the day will enable you to specify what adjustments would help you. It is then a good idea to summarise what you need in an email so there is a written record of your needs. It also means your request can be forwarded to people in the company who may have responsibility for equipment, or buildings for example. It's important too that you tell the recruiter as

soon as you receive the invitation to attend an interview or assessment day. This gives them time to prepare and also creates a positive impression of your planning and organisational skills.

## Talking positively about disability in an application or interview

Always focus on what you **can do**, rather than what you can't do, and avoid making your impairment the topic of your interview. If your condition has helped you develop useful and relevant transferable skills and personal qualities, mention these as strengths. For example, being able to pursue academic studies while managing your disability or health condition demonstrates determination and resilience to succeed. Likewise, attending medical appointments in between academic studies demonstrates the ability to manage time very effectively. You may also have had to explain and even negotiate your support requirements to a range of people. This will have developed your communication skills.

## Sources of support

- The University of Cumbria Careers and Employability Service is here to support you for up to three years after you complete your course. You can find resources on our web pages at <https://my.cumbria.ac.uk/Student-Life/careers>.
- You can also log on to our new career hub, My Career Enriched (<https://mycareerenriched.cumbria.ac.uk>) to book an appointment, find events, arrange a practice interview or request feedback on your application. Students with a disability or health condition may request a longer appointment if they feel this would be helpful.
- [Access to Work](#) (ATW) provides government funding for people with disabilities in paid employment. You can apply for an ATW grant, which helps pay for reasonable adjustments in the workplace. This can help pay for items or services such as computer software or special equipment, note-takers, taxi fares to work if you can't use public transport.

## Useful links and articles

- **Prospects** - how to disclose a disability in a cover letter.
- **Targetjobs** - disclosing a disability to employers.
- **Disability Rights UK** - fact sheet: "telling people about your impairment".
- **Scope** – Mentioning disability in your application.
- **MyPlus Students' Club**
- **EmployAbility** – [www.employ-ability.org.uk](http://www.employ-ability.org.uk)
- **Leonard Cheshire Change 100**
- **Mind**
- **BlindInBusiness**
- **Gov.uk** – Get help at work if you're disabled or have a health condition

*Acknowledgements:*

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