



FASD AND REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

Under the Equality Act 2010, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) can be legally classified as a disability, requiring an employer to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

What are reasonable adjustments?

A **reasonable adjustment** is a **change an employer is legally required to make** to remove or reduce a disadvantage experienced by a **disabled person** at work.

If the way work is organised, communicated, or assessed makes things harder for a disabled employee, the employer **MUST change the system**, not expect the employee to struggle on or “cope better”.

FASD and the workplace

FASD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. It affects the brain and body, leading to a "spectrum" of challenges.

It is often referred to as an "invisible disability" because those with FASD are often very articulate and its primary impact is on the brain's executive functioning rather than always being physically apparent.

FASD and the Equality Act 2010

In the UK, a person is considered "disabled" under the Equality Act 2010 if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a **"substantial and long-term adverse effect"** on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Substantial means more than trivial or minor.

FASD is a life-long condition which has a substantial effect on many aspects of day-to-day activities and therefore an individual with FASD is likely to be a disabled person under the Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable adjustments for an individual with FASD

An employer can only remove or reduce a disadvantage experienced by a **disabled person** if it understands what disadvantage the employee is experiencing. This sounds an obvious point but is frequently overlooked by employers. In practice this means the employer must understand what FASD is and how it might affect the employee. The employer should talk to the employee and may need to seek external support and guidance from an organisation which supports those with FASD.

Employees with FASD will often have **executive functioning difficulties, memory problems, slower processing speed, sensory sensitivity, emotional regulation issues,** and **difficulty with abstract concepts** or **time management**.

Useful adjustments often focus on:



STRUCTURE



CLARITY



PREDICTABILITY



**REDUCED
COGNITIVE LOAD**



Example reasonable adjustments:

Reasonable adjustments *might* include the following, **BUT** this will always depend on the individual employee and what difficulties they are experiencing at work as well as the job the employee is required to do:

Time, workload, and organisation

- **Flexible deadlines** where possible
- Extra time for tasks, meetings, or exams
- Help with **prioritisation** and planning
- Regular check-ins to confirm understanding and progress
- Use of calendars, reminders, or task-management tools

Communication and instructions

- Clear, **simple language** (avoid ambiguity or figurative speech)
- Instructions given **in writing**, not just verbally as receptive skills do not match expressive skills.
- Break tasks into **small, concrete steps**
- One task at a time, not multi-part instructions
- Allow extra time to process information before expecting a response

Policies and expectations

- Adjusted performance management processes
- Allowance for mistakes linked to **memory** or **processing difficulties**
- Behavioural expectations framed clearly and explicitly
- Avoid penalising disability-related traits (e.g. lateness caused by executive dysfunction without considering adjustments first)

Environment

- Quiet workspace or **reduced sensory distractions**
- Consistent routines and predictable schedules
- Advance notice of changes wherever possible
- Option to work from home if this reduces sensory or cognitive strain

Support and supervision

- Named point of contact or mentor
- Clear feedback that is specific and constructive
- Avoid reliance on common senses or initiative without guidance