Supporting staff with Visual Impairment

What is Visual Impairment?

Visual impairment is a loss of sight that cannot be corrected using glasses or contact lenses. Many visual impairments develop over time, and age-related eye conditions are the most common cause of sight loss in the UK. Impairment can include total loss of vision, a loss of central or peripheral vision, and blurred/patchy vision.

Common challenges associated with Visual Impairment

The challenges encountered by individuals with visual impairment will depend on the degree and nature of the impairment. However, the most common challenges include:

- Difficulty navigating unfamiliar and/or busy places
- Requiring more time to read work documents and learning materials
- Difficulty accessing work information and training in a suitable format
- Difficulty accessing necessary equipment and software

How can staff get assessed?

Formal diagnostic assessments are carried out by opthalmologists and a GP referral is usually required for this. It is strongly recommended that individuals with visual impairment receive a workplace assessment from Access to Work or Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB).

Reasonable adjustments at work

Effective adjustments will be specific to individuals. Ask the person what they find harder to do and what has helped previously. Adjustments to be considered include:

- Adapting working hours to allow travel during non-peak times
- Providing a screen magnifier and/or screen reader, and speech-to-text software to aid reading and writing
- Ensuring lighting levels are optimal for the individual
- Agreeing a suitable format for work documents and training materials
- Providing in advance any material to be read for meetings and training programmes, in a suitable format
- Allowing more time for tasks, or reassigning tasks to colleagues where appropriate
- Locating the individual’s desk with a clear and simple route to the door
- Supporting the individual to organise their work area and computer settings in a way that suits them
- Avoiding use of ‘hot-desking’ for staff with visual impairment
- Supporting the use of an assistance dog in the workplace
- Scheduling regular breaks to avoid eye strain and fatigue

Health and safety considerations

Where an individual has recently acquired a visual impairment, it may be necessary to conduct an individual risk assessment, specific to the job role and working environment. Where an individual requires assistance during an emergency evacuation, a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) must be put in place (https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/fire-safety/fire-safety-provision/disabled-evacuation).

External support:

Access to Work – https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Royal National Institute of Blind People – http://www.rnib.org.uk