



Office Accessibility – The Physical Environment

Often, when considering accessibility for employees, employers will think about accessible parking, access to the building and having accessible toilet facilities, all of which are important. But when we think about the accessibility of the workplace it's important that we think of the physical environment within the office working area too. An office designed with accessibility in mind is beneficial for all, furthermore it can reduce the need for additional adjustments for disabled employees. Below are 5 of the factors that you should consider.

To learn more, book a free 20-minute consultation with one of our accessibility experts.

Ensuring there is space to manoeuvre

A cramped office space isn't a conducive work environment but it's especially important that there's space to manoeuvre for people who are wheelchair users or have mobility impairments. It's vital that space is left around desks and tables and in meeting rooms for wheelchair users or people who use mobility aids to be able to move freely.

Circulation route widths should ideally have a clear width of 1200mm or not less than 1000mm over a short distance.

Carpets and soft furnishing

For some people who are neurodivergent, excessive noise can elevate stress levels and reduce or halt productivity. Background noise can also be problematic for people with hearing loss as they may struggle to distinguish what they want to hear from other sounds.

Soft furnishings help by reducing the way sound reverberates or bounces around the room. Carpets are especially useful and should be short pile to aid wheelchair users propelling themselves and provides easier movement for office chairs on wheels. Other soft furnishing can include padded/soft chairs for example.

Avoid patterned carpets (and soft furnishing) as these can cause difficulties for people with a number of different impairments and consider choosing a colour which contrasts well with the walls.

A place for everything, everything in its place.

Simple, tidy, and clutter-free offices can increase productivity, focus and efficiency for all your team. They make it easier for people to navigate, find things and concentrate. This is especially important for visually impaired colleagues and colleagues who are neurodivergent.

Blinds

Ensure that windows have vertical blinds to enable control of natural light. People who are deaf or hard of hearing are not able to lip-read speakers who are between them and a window as the speaker's face will be in shadow on sunny days.

Being able to control the levels of natural light can also be helpful for people who are visually impaired and people who are neurodivergent. Consider adding blinds to glazed internal walls too. It can be hard for many people to concentrate in meetings or at their desks with visual distractions such as people walking in corridors and moving around.

Colours

Choosing appropriate colours to use in your office space is vital. Colours which work well on logos do not necessarily translate into accessible and comfortable office colour schemes. Avoid using bright colours and bold artwork in areas where focus is required. This is especially important for people who sensitivity to sensory input is already increased, for example

