

HR Guide Template for UK companies, for the employment of staff with ADHD.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction to ADHD in the Workplace	3
2. Legal Framework and Compliance	3
2.1 The Equality Act 2010 (UK)	3
2.2 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)	3
2.3 Types of Discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 and ECHR	4
2.3 Bullying and Harassment: Risks and Prevention	5
2.4 Importance of Training for Awareness and a Non-Hostile Environment	6
2.5 Proactive Measures: Occupational Health and Reasonable Adjustments	6
3. Benefits and Challenges for ADHD Employees	7
3.1 Benefits of Employing Individuals with ADHD	7
3.2 Challenges Associated with ADHD in the Workplace	7
4. Reasonable Adjustments and Support	8
4.1 Flexible Working Arrangements	8
4.2 Structuring the Work Environment	8
4.3 Access to External and Professional Support	8
5. Managing and Reporting to Employees with ADHD	8
5.1 Advice for Managers	8
5.2 Managing Performance Reviews and Feedback	9
6. Advice for Working with ADHD Employees	9
6.1 Cultivate a Culture of Understanding and Inclusion	9
6.2 Respect Diverse Communication Styles	9
6.3 Supportive Collaboration	9
6.4 Give Space for Creative Thinking	9
7. Performance Evaluation and Development for ADHD Employees	10
7.1 Objective and Fair Evaluation Criteria	10

7.2 Development Plans and Career Progression	10
8. Monitoring and Reporting Discrimination	10
8.1 Reporting Mechanisms	10
8.2 Addressing Discrimination Complaints.....	10
8.3 Zero Tolerance for Discrimination	10
9. ADHD Disclosure and Confidentiality	10
10. Additional Resources and Support	11
10.1 Neurodiversity Awareness and Training Programs	11
10.2 External Resources for ADHD Support	11

HR Guide: Employing and Supporting Staff with ADHD

Executive Summary

By proactively offering support, implementing inclusive policies, and conducting regular awareness training, UK companies can create a supportive, legally compliant workplace that harnesses the strengths of ADHD employees and provides a safe, non-hostile work environment. This approach not only mitigates potential legal risks but also promotes a culture of empathy and inclusivity, helping every employee to perform to the best of their abilities.

1. Introduction to ADHD in the Workplace

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterised by varying levels of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Approximately 2-4% of UK adults are affected by ADHD, many of whom bring unique perspectives and valuable skills to the workplace. This guide provides a foundation for HR teams, managers, and colleagues to understand, support, and leverage the strengths of employees with ADHD.

2. Legal Framework and Compliance

2.1 The Equality Act 2010 (UK)

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including ADHD, and places a duty on employers to ensure that employees with ADHD are treated fairly. This section provides essential information on the legal aspects of ADHD-related challenges, varied forms of unfair treatment, and the proactive responsibilities of employers.

Definition of Disability: ADHD qualifies as a disability under the Equality Act because it has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the employee's ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This legal recognition means that individuals with ADHD are entitled to protections from discrimination and reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

2.2 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

Under the ECHR, specifically Article 14, individuals are protected from discrimination on any grounds, including disability. This right is complemented by Article 8, which guarantees the right to respect for private and family life, encompassing the workplace environment. In practice, ECHR protections require employers to ensure that employees with ADHD are not subjected to discriminatory treatment or actions that undermine their right to respect and dignity in the workplace.

- **Equal Treatment and Dignity:** The ECHR mandates that employees with ADHD are treated with respect and that their dignity is maintained in the workplace. Employers must take proactive steps to ensure fair and equitable treatment, ensuring that all workplace policies and interactions respect the rights of ADHD employees.
- **Fair Opportunity and Inclusion:** Employers must provide equal opportunity to ADHD employees, ensuring that employment conditions, including access to promotions and training, are offered on an equal basis with neurotypical colleagues. This includes consideration of how ADHD may affect employees when assessing them in performance reviews/appraisals.

2.3 Types of Discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 and ECHR

The Equality Act and ECHR outline multiple types of discrimination that employers need to be vigilant about, as claims can arise even from unintentional actions or oversights. Examples include:

- 1. Direct Discrimination:** This occurs when an employee is treated less favourably explicitly because of their ADHD. An example would be denying a promotion to someone because of stereotypes about ADHD and perceived limitations.
- 2. Indirect Discrimination:** Indirect discrimination happens when a seemingly neutral company policy disadvantages individuals with ADHD more than others. For example, a policy requiring all employees to maintain a strict level of attention in lengthy, uninterrupted meetings may disadvantage employees with ADHD, who might benefit from regular breaks to maintain focus.
- 3. Discrimination Arising from Disability (DAD):** This type of discrimination arises when an employee is treated unfavourably due to something related to their disability. For example, if an employee with ADHD is unable to communicate on a project without going into too much detail, and is disciplined without exploring reasonable adjustments, this could be considered DAD, because people with ADHD can have trouble filtering out irrelevant information and focusing on what's important due to brain chemistry affecting executive functioning, and internal distractions.
- 4. Failure to Make Reasonable Adjustments:** If an employer fails to make necessary accommodations for an employee with ADHD, they may be in breach of the Equality Act and ECHR protections. For instance, not allowing a flexible working schedule, not providing assistive technology after an employee discloses their ADHD, or not providing ADHD awareness training (particularly if requested by the employee) could lead to a claim.
- 5. Harassment:** Harassment occurs when behaviour related to an employee's ADHD creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment. This can include derogatory remarks, jokes about ADHD, or actions that exclude or isolate the employee.

ECHR protections further mandate that individuals be protected from hostile work environments, including any behaviour that diminishes their dignity or equality in the workplace.

- 6. Victimization:** This occurs when an employee is treated unfairly after making a complaint about discrimination or raising concerns about their ADHD support needs. For example, if an employee files a grievance about lack of reasonable adjustments or experiencing unfair treatment and subsequently faces negative consequences, it could constitute victimization.

2.3 Bullying and Harassment: Risks and Prevention

Employees with ADHD are statistically more vulnerable to bullying and harassment in the workplace than their neurotypical peers. Bullying and harassment may be overt or subtle and can significantly affect mental well-being and job performance. Employers have a duty to actively monitor and address both forms.

Overt Harassment Examples: This includes making jokes, inappropriate comments, or spreading rumours about ADHD. For instance, calling someone “scatterbrained”, “lazy”, or “incompetent” due to ADHD-related traits is unacceptable and could constitute harassment.

Subtle Harassment Examples: Subtle forms of exclusion or isolation can also be harassment. Examples include:

- **Being Ignored or Excluded:** Not inviting the employee to meetings or social gatherings, disregarding their contributions in group discussions, refusing to communicate with them directly, or not allowing them access to relevant information/updates (for example with tasks or projects they are connected to).
- **Microaggressions:** Negative body language, such as sighing or eye-rolling, when the ADHD employee speaks, or regularly speaking over the employee so they cannot add input, which may create an unwelcome environment.
- **Withholding Support:** Refusing to provide assistance or deliberately avoiding collaboration with the ADHD employee.
- **Undermining Authority, Professional Abilities, and Experience:** Doubting or questioning the abilities of employees with ADHD due to ADHD-related traits can lead to undermining their expertise and disregarding their professional experience. This may include overlooking their input on projects, assigning them lower-responsibility tasks that don't reflect their skill level, or dismissing their decisions unreasonably. This kind of undermining not only fails to recognise their qualifications but also contributes to a hostile work environment by devaluing their contributions.
- **Giving Unsolicited Advice on ADHD:** Offering unsolicited advice on managing ADHD can be intrusive and inappropriate, particularly if it undermines the employee's own knowledge of their condition or implies they are not capable of managing it independently. This may include comments like suggesting lifestyle changes or unsolicited opinions on how they should handle tasks, which can feel patronising and dismissive.

Employers must monitor for both overt and subtle forms of harassment and should create clear reporting channels to allow ADHD employees to safely report incidents. This demonstrates an inclusive company culture and deters unwanted behaviour.

2.4 Importance of Training for Awareness and a Non-Hostile Environment

Training on ADHD and neurodiversity for all employees, especially managers and team leaders, is crucial to training to build awareness and empathy.

Training Goals: Training should focus on educating employees about ADHD traits, how these traits may manifest in a workplace setting, and how colleagues can provide support without stigmatisation. It also helps employees understand the types of discriminatory behaviour, emphasizing that discrimination doesn't need to be intentional to have serious consequences.

Awareness of Microaggressions and Subtle Discrimination: Training should include examples of microaggressions or unintentional actions that could still be discriminatory, such as exclusion from team activities or ignoring input from ADHD employees.

ECHR Compliance: Training also serves to align with ECHR requirements, fostering respect for the dignity and private life of ADHD employees and reducing the risk of unintentional breaches of their rights.

Through awareness training, companies can create a culture of respect and inclusivity, where employees understand the importance of empathy, communication, and understanding neurodiverse perspectives.

2.5 Proactive Measures: Occupational Health and Reasonable Adjustments

Employers have a responsibility to be proactive in addressing the needs of ADHD employees. This means not relying solely on the employee to request accommodations but actively ensuring that support is offered as soon as the employee discloses their condition.

1. Involving Occupational Health Early: When an employee discloses ADHD, it's best practice for the employer to bring in occupational health services early to evaluate necessary adjustments and accommodations. Occupational health professionals can provide guidance on adjustments that support the employee's productivity and well-being.

2. Assessing and Implementing Reasonable Adjustments: Reasonable adjustments should be customised based on the employee's individual needs. Employers should actively engage with the employee to identify accommodations that will best support their work. Examples of common adjustments include:

- Flexible working hours to accommodate optimal focus times.
- Providing noise-cancelling headphones or a quiet workspace.
- Project management software to aid organization and time management.
- ADHD training for managers and colleagues, for awareness and understanding.

3. Creating a Culture of Open Communication: Encourage a proactive environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their ADHD and adjustment needs without stigma. Managers should regularly check in with ADHD employees to reassess accommodations and provide an open forum for feedback.

3. Benefits and Challenges for ADHD Employees

3.1 Benefits of Employing Individuals with ADHD

- 1. Creative Thinking and Innovation:** ADHD individuals often have unconventional thinking patterns, which can drive creativity and innovative solutions.
- 2. Adaptability and Resilience:** Many ADHD individuals are used to managing challenges and can be very adaptable and resilient, which is valuable in dynamic environments.
- 3. Hyperfocus:** ADHD employees may experience periods of intense concentration, known as hyperfocus, allowing them to excel in certain tasks requiring sustained focus.
- 4. High Energy and Enthusiasm:** Employees with ADHD may bring a high level of enthusiasm and energy to projects, which can contribute positively to team dynamics.
- 5. Risk-Taking and Problem Solving:** They may be more open to taking calculated risks and thinking outside the box, providing unique problem-solving capabilities.

3.2 Challenges Associated with ADHD in the Workplace

- 1. Attention Regulation:** ADHD can make it difficult to focus on tasks that require prolonged attention, especially if they are repetitive or lack stimulation.
- 2. Time Management:** Deadlines and organising tasks efficiently may be challenging. This can be improved with support and clear prioritisation.
- 3. Impulsivity:** This may manifest as speaking out of turn, talking excessively (e.g. “going off on a tangent”), or making hasty decisions. Such tendencies require understanding and structured management.
- 4. Memory and Organisational Difficulties:** Forgetting tasks, misplacing items, or difficulty following sequences are common challenges that can be managed with assistive tools, clear processes, and ensuring instructions are provided in writing.

5. Sensitivity to Environmental Factors: Sensory sensitivities, such as sensitivity to noise or visual stimuli, can cause distractions or discomfort in open-plan office environments.

4. Reasonable Adjustments and Support

Creating a supportive, inclusive workplace for employees with ADHD requires a proactive approach. Here are some recommended adjustments:

4.1 Flexible Working Arrangements

- **Flexible Hours:** Allow employees to work at times when they feel most productive, which may help in reducing stress and enhancing focus.
- **Remote Working Options:** For employees who struggle with distractions, remote work can offer a quieter, more controlled environment.
- **Compressed or Part-Time Schedules:** Allowing compressed or part-time schedules can help ADHD employees avoid burnout while maintaining productivity.

4.2 Structuring the Work Environment

- **Quiet Workspaces:** Provide noise-cancelling headphones, cubicles, or quiet rooms for employees who may struggle with focus in open-plan environments.
- **Visual and Task Management Tools:** Visual aids like whiteboards or task management apps can help employees organise tasks and maintain focus.
- **Written Direction:** Ensure that task requests and instructions are provided in writing, and that any processes to be followed are written down.

4.3 Access to External and Professional Support

- Provide access to mental health services, ADHD coaching, and assistive technology tools (e.g., organizational apps like Trello or Todoist).
- Partner with mental health organizations or provide employee assistance programs (EAPs) that include ADHD support resources.

5. Managing and Reporting to Employees with ADHD

5.1 Advice for Managers

- **Set Clear, Measurable Objectives:** Define specific, achievable goals and communicate expectations clearly to support consistent performance.
- **Adapt Communication Style:** Use clear, concise language. Avoid overwhelming ADHD employees with multiple instructions at once.

- **Leverage Their Strengths:** Assign tasks that play to the individual's strengths, such as brainstorming sessions, problem-solving tasks, or high-energy projects.
- **Avoid Rigidity in Methods:** Allow ADHD employees to approach tasks and projects in their own way, acknowledge that different thinking styles leads to different approaches.
- **Encourage Autonomy with Boundaries:** Empower ADHD employees with autonomy, allowing them to use processes that work best for them while still ensuring accountability.

5.2 Managing Performance Reviews and Feedback

- **Focus on Outcomes and Effort:** Evaluate the quality of work and contributions rather than the process, as ADHD employees may approach tasks differently.
- **Offer Constructive, Specific Feedback:** Use positive reinforcement to acknowledge strengths and offer constructive advice to address areas needing improvement.
- **Individual Development Plans:** Tailor development plans to align with the employee's goals and strengths, helping them to overcome challenges and succeed.

6. Advice for Working with ADHD Employees

6.1 Cultivate a Culture of Understanding and Inclusion

- Raise awareness and promote open dialogue about ADHD and neurodiversity in the workplace to reduce stigma.
- Encourage an environment of empathy and patience, where employees feel safe to express their needs.

6.2 Respect Diverse Communication Styles

- Recognise that ADHD employees may have unique communication needs, including the need for follow-up emails or additional clarification of tasks.

6.3 Supportive Collaboration

- Promote a collaborative approach to tasks, offering help or understanding when needed. Avoid judging ADHD colleagues based on stereotypes or misconceptions.

6.4 Give Space for Creative Thinking

- Allow flexibility in approach, as ADHD employees often bring out-of-the-box thinking that can benefit the team.

7. Performance Evaluation and Development for ADHD Employees

7.1 Objective and Fair Evaluation Criteria

- Avoid placing undue weight on rigid adherence to processes; instead, assess based on work quality, contributions, and goal achievement.
- Ensure that the measurements of evaluation are not predicated on attributes of ADHD.
- Balance any negative performance observations by including positive observations.

7.2 Development Plans and Career Progression

- Create personalised career growth plans to help ADHD employees navigate their career progression and align with the company's goals.
- Offer access to development tools focused on enhancing organisational, time management, and communication skills.

8. Monitoring and Reporting Discrimination

8.1 Reporting Mechanisms

- Establish clear reporting protocols for employees who experience negative treatment or harassment, ensuring confidentiality, timely response, and documented follow-up.

8.2 Addressing Complaints

- Investigate complaints thoroughly, involving HR and relevant parties as needed, to uphold the Equality Act 2010 and company policies.

8.3 Zero Tolerance for Discrimination

- Ensure employees understand the company's zero-tolerance policy towards unfair treatment, and clearly outline consequences for non-compliance.

9. ADHD Disclosure and Confidentiality

Employees with ADHD may face challenges in deciding whether to disclose their condition in the workplace. Disclosure can help employers provide appropriate support and adjustments, but it must remain a personal choice. Here are key considerations for managing ADHD disclosure effectively:

- **Creating a Safe Environment**

Employers and managers should foster an open and inclusive culture where employees feel comfortable discussing their needs. Clear policies on confidentiality and equitable treatment should be in place to reassure employees.

- **Who to Disclose To**

Employees may choose to disclose their ADHD to their line manager, HR, or a trusted colleague. It is essential that the organisation provides a clear process for disclosure and ensures that all discussions are handled sensitively and confidentially.

- **What to Disclose**

Employees are not required to share their entire medical history. They can disclose only the aspects of their ADHD that impact their work and the adjustments they believe would help them perform better.

- **Confidentiality**

Any information shared about ADHD should remain confidential unless the employee has explicitly consented to it being shared. Breaching confidentiality can damage trust and may also breach legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

- **Encouraging Voluntary Disclosure**

Managers can encourage voluntary disclosure by communicating the benefits of support and adjustments in the workplace. For example, explaining that disclosure allows the organisation to make reasonable adjustments can help reassure employees.

- **Supporting Disclosure Conversations**

Managers should be trained to handle disclosure conversations professionally and empathetically. Open-ended questions like, “How can we better support you at work?” can help employees feel more comfortable sharing their needs.

10. Additional Resources and Support

10.1 Neurodiversity Awareness and Training Programs

- Provide training sessions to educate employees about ADHD and neurodiversity, fostering an inclusive and supportive culture.

10.2 External Resources for ADHD Support

- Access to Work: Government funding assistance for reasonable adjustments, training, coaching, and more.

- ADHDworking: Online training for HR, managers, and colleagues of employees with ADHD.
- ADHD Works: ADHD coaching network, including for provision of 'Access to Work' coaches.
- ConsciousConnections.ie: Ireland/Eire based ADHD coaching.
- ADHD Foundation: Resources for individuals and employers to support ADHD in the workplace.
- Mind UK: A mental health organization offering support and resources for individuals with ADHD.