

DISABILITY PASSPORTS

Recently, I was invited to speak at a meeting on fluctuating medical conditions and employment, writes ME Association medical adviser DR CHARLES SHEPHERD.

The meeting was organised by the Cabinet Office and the large accountancy firm KPMG – both of whom have a very proactive policy in helping people with fluctuating medical conditions and disabilities remain in work, or return to work.

Among the various strategies that the civil service and KPMG use to help people with employment is the use of what is called a **Disability Passport** or **Workplace Adjustment Passport** (WPA).

These emerged in the 1990s when the Business Disability Forum worked with the MS Society to produce a document for managers and employees to each have a record of agreed workplace adjustments and support.

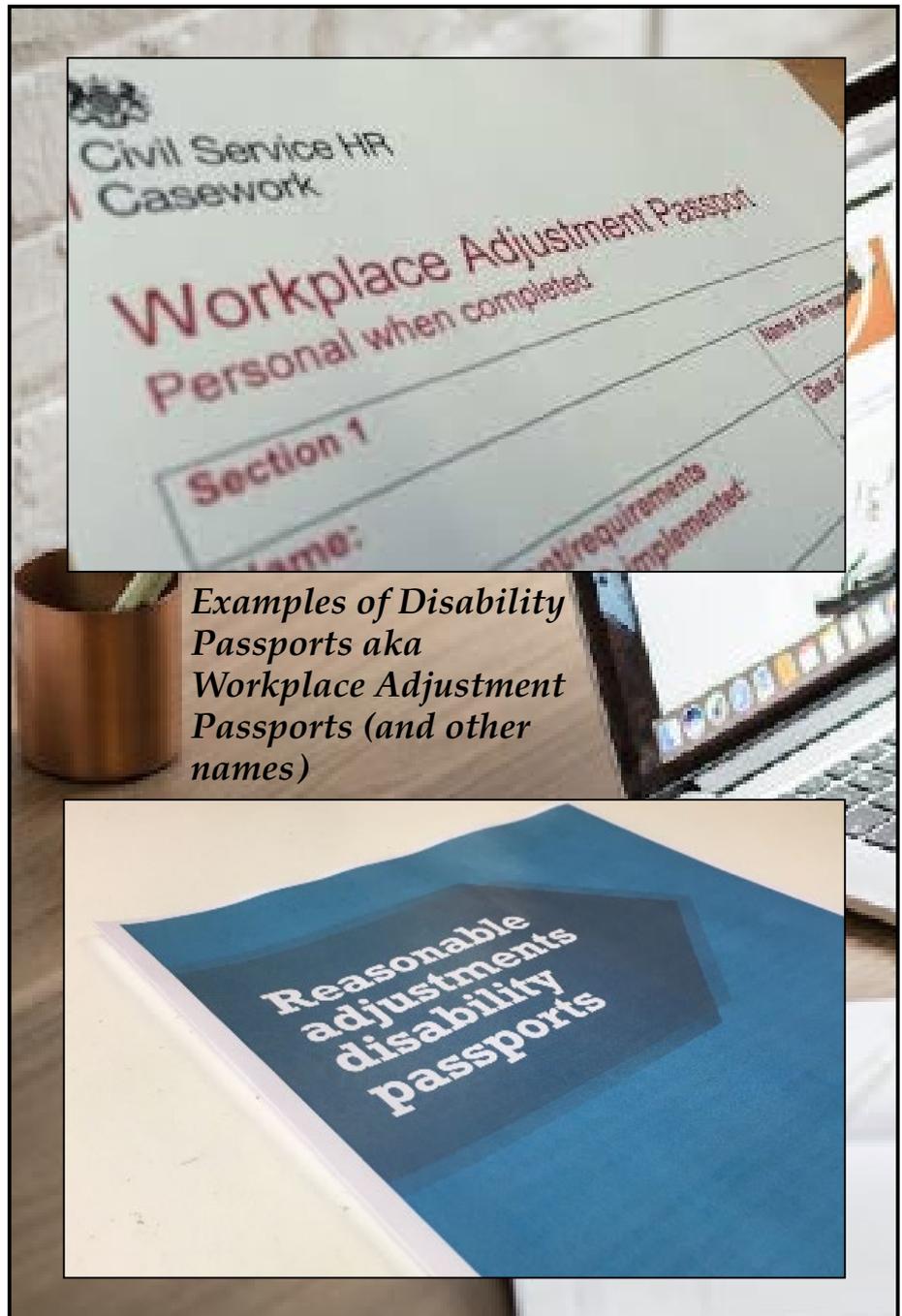
This was designed particularly with fluctuating medical conditions (such as MS) in mind, where different support might be needed at times when an employee's symptoms are more pronounced than at other times.

DEVELOPED OVER TIME

Soon after this, BT adopted its use and named it the *Disability Passport*. They also developed a similar document for employees with caring responsibilities (called a *Carer's Passport*).

The Disability Passport (or WPA) is a live record of adjustments that have been agreed between you and your

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Examples of Disability Passports aka Workplace Adjustment Passports (and other names)

Useful to have if you are still in work or considering a return to work

line manager to support you at work because of a health condition, impairment or disability.

It is for you to keep and pass on the information to anyone you think needs to know about any impact or issue that can arise due to the interaction between your condition or impairment and barriers within or outside the workplace.

Barriers can include both attitudes and environmental factors and relates to people with both visible impairments (such as wheelchair users) and those with non-visible or 'hidden' conditions or impairments (such as people with fluctuating medical conditions and mental health problems).

YOU KEEP CONTROL

The document will not be passed on to anyone automatically. So you have control of the information and who it is passed to.

The main purpose of a Disability Passport is to:

- Make sure that everyone is clear and has a record of what adjustments have been agreed
- Reduce the need to re-assess adjustments every time you change jobs, are relocated or are assigned a new manager
- Provide you and your line manager with the basis for future conversations about adjustments.

The content should be reviewed regularly (at least every six months, or sooner if there is any change to your job or your condition or impairment) to check if the adjustments are still appropriate and work for you.

Your manager may need to obtain additional advice from Occupational Health, Access to Work or Human Resources before any adjustments or changes can be agreed and implemented.

But this process should not be subject to any undue delays and you should be consulted and kept informed of progress throughout.

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the process you can speak to

your trade union or professional body for advice. You are entitled to have a representative accompany you to any meetings to discuss adjustments if you wish.

If you change your job, or you have a new line manager, you should provide a copy of the passport to them so that they understand what adjustments have been made for you.

If you're in the same role and your health condition remains the same, a new line manager should accept the adjustments outlined in the passport.

The agreement may need to be reviewed and amended at a later date. But this should not happen until you have both worked together for a reasonable period of time.

If your health condition or impairment changes, or if you move to a new role, department, site, desk, etc or if there are other changes to your job description which mean that the adjustments may no longer be appropriate, then the adjustments may be reviewed straight away.

NO CENTRAL RECORD

Disability Passports aren't stored or recorded centrally. It is your responsibility to keep the document safe and provide it when necessary.

Your line manager should also keep a copy for their own records – which should be held securely in your personnel file.

If a review date is specified in the passport, you should put this in your calendar and let your line manager know when the date arrives.

But do speak to your line manager at any time if you believe your situation or needs have changed and it needs to be reviewed earlier.

It's also worth noting that the Equality and Human Rights Commission Statutory Code of Practice guidance states:

In order to avoid discrimination, it would be sensible for employers not to attempt to make a fine judgement as to whether a particular individual falls within the statutory definition of disability, but to focus instead on meeting the needs of each worker.

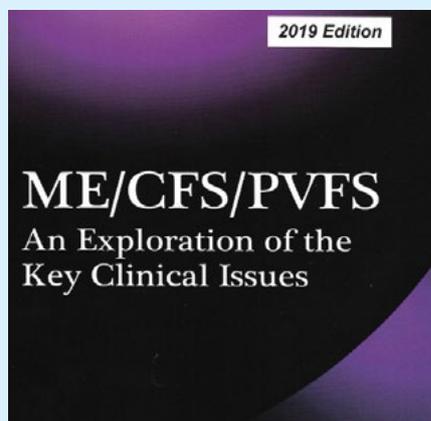
Disability Passports are now being used across many sectors, but the most prominent use is in the Civil Service. This is a blog by a senior Civil Servant on the use of a Disability Passport:

<https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2016/07/18/why-i-declare-and-why-im-getting-a-passport/>

Template of the Disability Passport, which can be filled in, can be downloaded from the TUC website:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/AdjustmentPassport.pdf>

- ◆ Please let us know if you have a Disability Passport and how it has helped you at work.



Our updated clinical and research guide. Available only from the MEA office, tel: 01280 818968 or for your Amazon Kindle or smartphone: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07NYT8TWB> Price £9