



RAR1

Reasonable Adjustments Request Policy

This policy sets out how the Law Society of Northern Ireland (the Society) can make reasonable adjustments as the professional body and regulator of the solicitors' profession in Northern Ireland. The Society recognises that it is important that everyone has access to our services and that it is easy to communicate with us.

We have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments under the disability discrimination legislation.

If you have a disability or health condition, we can support you by making adjustments to remove or reduce the barriers you might be facing that make it difficult for you to access or prevent you from accessing our services. We will make reasonable adjustments to ensure our services are as inclusive as reasonably possible.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Confirm our commitment to improving accessibility for all.
- Set out the basic principles of our commitment to provide reasonable adjustments.
- Set out the factors that we will take into account in assessing requests for reasonable adjustments.

How do you ask for help?

If you require this policy document in another format or want to make a reasonable adjustment request, please contact us either by:

- Email to enquiry@lawsoc-ni.org.
- By telephone on 028 9023 1614 between 09.00 & 17.00 Monday to Friday.
- By post to: The Law Society of Northern Ireland
96 Victoria Street,
Belfast,
County Antrim,
BT1 3GN

We will require you, or a nominated person where appropriate authority has been evidenced to complete an application for a Reasonable Adjustments Request which will help us understand what adjustments you require and to assess what adjustments the Society can provide. Your request will be dealt with sensitively and confidentially.

What happens next?

We will acknowledge receipt of your reasonable adjustment request and provide you with an application for a Reasonable Adjustments Request. Upon receipt of this completed form a response will be provided within 14 working days. There may be cases where we will need more time to consider adjustments in more detail, or to seek appropriate advice. If this is the case, this will be communicated to you, and you will be kept updated.

How can we help?

We will examine ways we can remove or reduce any disadvantages that you may face due to disability or health condition. Adjustments are identified and implemented on a case-by-case basis with your individual circumstances considered and your input at each stage of the process.

There is no list of prescribed reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments will depend on:

- Individual needs and circumstances.
- The barriers or difficulties faced when a person is interacting with the Society.
- What is reasonable for the Society to provide.

We will discuss the requirements with the person concerned, or a nominated person where appropriate authority has been evidenced. We will not make assumptions about whether a disabled person requires any adjustments, nor about what those adjustments should be.

Examples of adjustments we can consider include: *(Please note this list is not exhaustive.)*

- **Changing how we do things** e.g., Allowing extra time for submissions or responses during a regulatory investigation or inspection. Prioritising a case based on the complainant's circumstances. If it is not possible to accommodate this, we will explain why.
- **Providing information in appropriate formats** e.g., in large print, appropriately justified, or on coloured paper. This may include providing information in different languages, or translating and interpreting services for people with a disability whose first language is not English.
- **Physical adaptations to our office space** e.g., providing an accessible car parking space, changing the layout of our meeting rooms, or adjusting the lighting in a room.
- **Communicating with people in their chosen format if and where possible** e.g., in person, via video conference, by phone, or by email. Having one point of contact within the Society with whom you can liaise. Updating you by telephone if preferred though it should be noted that any conversations will be recorded to the file in writing and followed up by written correspondence.
- **Communicating through a representative or intermediary** – with the person's written consent. This may include an appointee such as an attorney or guardian with relevant powers.
- **Allowing you to have someone with you** for emotional or communication support during a regulatory meeting or firm visit.
- **Providing extra aids or services** e.g., induction loops for hearing aids, British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters, alternative formats, or changing the venue of a meeting.

How is it decided what is reasonable?

While for most cases identifying and implementing reasonable adjustments is straightforward and timely, some cases may need additional considerations or input from other expert sources and thus take more time to facilitate the right decision. In some cases, consideration may have to be given to the practicalities of making the requested adjustment.

Useful guidance from the Equality & Human Rights Commission suggests relevant factors include:

- **Effectiveness:** To what extent does the adjustment in question remove or minimise the disadvantage?
- **Practicability:** How practical is the adjustment? For example, how long will it take to implement? Will staff need additional training?
- **Cost:** How much will it cost? What financial resources are available to the Law Society?
- **Disruption:** How disruptive to the Law Society, to others, and to our business needs would it be to make this adjustment?
- **Risk:** Would making this adjustment cause risk to others?

Our regulatory obligations

We will not be able to agree an adjustment that is not in keeping with our statutory responsibilities or functions as a regulator. For example:

- If there is an immediate risk to a member of the public, we are unlikely to be able to delay an investigation into allegations made about an individual or firm which is under our jurisdiction as a regulator; and,
- We must implement processes and make decisions in the "public interest". This could impact the reasonableness of a proposed adjustment, and whether it can be applied to a particular situation. Any such decisions will be made following detailed consideration of our legal obligations and available options.

There may be some instances where a request for a reasonable adjustment cannot be granted and if this arises, we will advise you as soon as possible and provide a reason why. In the rare event of a disagreement regarding adjustments and whether they are reasonable, the matter should be referred, in the first instance, to the Head of the Department in which your adjustment has been requested. They will make the final decision on the reasonable adjustment that will be offered.

Any agreed adjustments will be recorded on a file kept by the Society to ensure the adjustment can be afforded or observed any time you contact us.

Reasonable adjustments will be kept under review to ensure it is still required and continues to meet your needs.

Providing medical evidence

In most instances, we will not require sight of any medical or other evidence to support your reasonable adjustment request, but should it become necessary for any reason, we will let you know what we require and why.

Monitoring

Where appropriate, and in keeping with our data protection obligations, we will record and monitor the reasonable adjustments that have been requested and made. This will allow us to identify whether there are any wider steps that we can take to improve.

Complaints

If you are dissatisfied with the arrangements, we have made for providing reasonable adjustments, this should be raised with the Society's Disability Liaison Officer using the appeals application form located here. Your application for appeal should be returned to:

- Email to dlo@lawsoc-ni.org; or
- By post to: The Disability Liaison Officer
Law Society of Northern Ireland
96 Victoria Street,
Belfast,
County Antrim,
BT1 3GN

Your application for appeal will be considered by the Disability Liaison Officer and the Head of Governance and Corporate Services. The outcome of the appeal will be communicated to you in writing.

If you have requested reasonable adjustments in association with a client complaint of inadequate service against your solicitor and you are dissatisfied with the arrangements we have made, or been unable to make, you can also write to the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner for Northern Ireland, at 2nd Floor, Craigantlet Buildings, Stoney Road, Belfast, BT4 3SX or by email at marian.cree@legalcommissioner-ni.org.uk.

The Legal Services Oversight Commissioner for Northern Ireland has taken over the function of the Lay Observer for Northern Ireland and can review how a particular client service complaint was treated by the Society. The Legal Services Oversight Commissioner can look at the Society's file and inform you whether the Society has carried out its investigation properly. Please note however that the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner responsibilities only apply to client service complaints.