

Fair Access Policy (Earned Recognition)

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to set out Natural England's principles and approach with regards to ensuring that all applicants to the Earned Recognition accreditation scheme have an equal chance of success regardless of any disadvantage that may, without reasonable adjustment, prevent them accessing and achieving the accreditation. All Natural England staff and sub-contractors (eg Assessors) involved in the accreditation scheme must be made aware of this policy and their responsibilities in its implementation.

Reasonable adjustments in this context are adjustments made to the delivery and/or method of assessment for applicants to enable fair access. It supports Natural England's compliance with relevant equalities legislation and should be used in conjunction with Natural England's Diversity and Inclusion Policy (available on request from enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk).

Principles

Natural England recognises its legal and moral responsibility to provide an accreditation scheme that is fair to all applicants, regardless of any disability or disadvantage.

The following principles apply:

- All applicants participating in the accreditation process have the right to equal access to it.
- Assessment processes will be designed to exclude features that could disadvantage applicants or create other barriers to entry.
- Assessment processes will be designed to be relevant to, expected skills and experience of the applicants accessing the scheme.
- The criteria under which a reasonable adjustment can be provided will be clearly defined, readily available and consistently applied.
- The integrity of the assessment process must not be compromised by a reasonable adjustment or adjustments. The applicant should be neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by the adjustment(s).
- All staff and sub-contractors (ie Assessors) involved in the accreditation process must be aware of the circumstances in which a reasonable adjustment may be required and the procedure for agreeing and providing such an adjustment.
- All assessment locations will fulfil their fair access responsibilities and adhere to equalities legislation.
- Applicants will be treated with sensitivity and dignity should a reasonable adjustment to their assessment process be required.
- Where appropriate and agreed with the applicant, Natural England staff will cooperate with other stakeholders (eg employers) to understand an applicant's needs and to plan an appropriate reasonable adjustment.

Approach

Natural England's approach to ensuring fair access is designed to support applicants in engaging in the accreditation assessment without unnecessary barriers or disadvantage (or with solutions that overcome those barriers or disadvantage). Our fair access principles will be applied fairly and consistently through the following activities:

- All staff and sub-contractors engaged in the accreditation process, including application, assessment and reporting, will be made aware of this policy and its purpose.
- All staff and sub-contractors will receive appropriate initial training and periodic refresher training regarding fair access, the process for providing reasonable adjustments and their responsibilities in helping to maintain the integrity of the accreditation process.
- There is a clearly defined process for requesting and granting a reasonable adjustment. This includes:
 - The applicant, or their employer, advising Natural England of the potential barriers created by the standard application and assessment process and requesting a reasonable adjustment using the form provided. This request should include sufficient detail of the access issue and identification of potential reasonable adjustments to enable Natural England to make an informed decision for approval. Applicants and/or employers are encouraged to make the need for reasonable adjustment known as soon as possible.
 - Reasonable adjustments are best proposed by the applicant and/or employer, who will have a good understanding of the issues behind the need for a reasonable adjustment and how best to provide it.
 - Natural England will confirm that the proposed reasonable adjustment(s) is/are logistically possible and will not undermine the integrity of the accreditation process or disadvantage others.
 - Natural England will inform the Assessor(s) of the agreed reasonable adjustment(s).
 - Records of any reasonable adjustments made will be anonymised.
 - If a request for a reasonable adjustment is refused, Natural England will advise in writing the reason for this decision.
- Assessors will be provided with a point of contact for advice or support in relation to the implementation of reasonable adjustments.
- Should a request for a reasonable adjustment be refused, applicants or their employer have the right to appeal via the Earned Recognition Complaints and Appeals Policy.

When might a reasonable adjustment be required?

Whilst it is not possible to be prescriptive about all circumstances in which a reasonable adjustment may be required, the following are some examples.

The applicant has:

- Temporary or permanent physical disablement.
- Difficulty in reading and understanding written material because, for example, of a learning difficulty.
- Difficulty in concentrating due to a mental or physical impairment.

- Is unable to access an assessment process or venue on a specific day/date for religious reasons.

Types of reasonable adjustment

Reasonable adjustments can take many forms but could include:

- Changing the location, duration or structure of assessment process, including providing an alternative assessment process.
- Providing additional services such as a sign language interpreter, hearing loop or speech recognition technology.
- Providing other physical equipment.
- Adapting facilities.
- Providing assessment materials in an alternative format.
- Providing additional supervised rest breaks during assessment activities.
- Providing a practical assistant.

NB: The applicant and/or employer would normally be expected to cover the additional costs associated with the reasonable adjustment.