



# Speaking from experience

Getting it right for Disabled apprentices

February 2023

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# Acknowledgements

It has been a great pleasure to continue to work with existing and new members of the Disabled Apprentice Network (DAN). We are also grateful to the professionals and stakeholders working with Disabled people who participated in the round table group discussions and other engagement activity.

We are delighted to share the ideas, personal experiences, knowledge and recommendations from DAN members and stakeholders in this report and thank everyone who contributed to this report.

We would like to express our thanks to the Department for Education for supporting this report, giving a voice to Disabled apprentices and highlighting the opportunities apprenticeships offer Disabled

people. Crucially, the report also sets out the changes needed to attract more Disabled young people into apprenticeships.

*Rabia Lemahieu*  
*Young Disabled People Post-16*  
*Engagement Manager*  
*Disability Rights UK*



# Foreword

I am delighted to see this new publication from the Disabled Apprentice Network. The Network is a fantastic opportunity for apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities to share their experiences with their peers and suggest how apprenticeships could be improved or provided differently in the future. I am grateful to Disability Rights UK for the support it provides to the Network.

Apprentices in the Network not only support each other – they are making a real difference to the apprenticeship journey of disabled individuals up and down the country. That is a very powerful contribution, and I would like to thank them for the brilliant work they are doing to make things better for the future apprenticeship cohorts.

Apprenticeships are a core part of the government's skills agenda, helping to drive economic growth by boosting the skills of the nation's workforce. They also enable people of all backgrounds to climb the ladder of opportunity to a good job and great career prospects. As the Minister for Skills, I want more people with learning difficulties and disabilities to undertake apprenticeships – and benefit from the excellent career development and progression opportunities they represent.

In recent years we have seen an increase in the number of people who have declared

a learning difficulty or disability when starting their apprenticeship. I want to make sure that this continues, and that all who are able to start an apprenticeship go on to thrive in it, paving the way for a fulfilling and successful career.

In order to improve apprenticeships, we talk to lots of providers and employers. While all the information we receive is important, the feedback from apprentices themselves is invaluable, especially those who are studying for their apprenticeship alongside a health condition or disability.

By hearing the views of Network members, we get to know what you want to get out of completing an apprenticeship, and recognise the issues and barriers that a disabled person might face (or think they might face) in choosing this route. It is vital that we learn from the experiences you have had on your employment journey, so we can open up this opportunity to more talented candidates like yourselves.

Last year, the Disabled Apprentice Network's report *Getting it right for Disabled Apprentices* provided valuable information that shaped our thinking on how to make apprenticeships more attractive and fulfilling for people with disabilities. It showed how apprenticeships can form an important part of a student's lifelong learning, and empower disabled people to determine their own career path.

# Foreword

The content of this report is valuable information, straight from the source. It will help apprentices, employers, training providers and policy makers to understand how we can work together, communicate better, and improve the apprenticeships process. Together, we will ensure that this route continues to provide an open pathway to employment and career success for talented candidates, no matter what their circumstances.

*The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP:  
Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and  
Higher Education*



# Who we are

## The Disabled Apprentices Network

The [Disabled Apprentices Network](#) is a forum for Disabled apprentices, where they can share their experiences and offer ideas and proposals on how to improve apprenticeships for Disabled people.

Members of the network are doing or have finished full or part-time apprenticeships at different levels and in various sectors. These include business administration, learning and development, information support, project management, learning mentor, business management and pharmacy technology.

We collected the views and lived experiences of Disabled apprentices at a series of online meetings in 2022 – as well as through questionnaires and other written and verbal responses.

We expanded our scope of consultation and collected the insights and expertise of stakeholders working with apprentices in three online round table discussions and through other activity. We also heard about best practice from training providers and employers.

## Disability Rights UK

[Disability Rights UK](#) is a pan-disability charity and the UK's leading organisation led by, run by, and working for Disabled people.

We bring the lived experiences of Disabled people to everything we do and we challenge policy makers, institutions and individuals to remove the barriers that exist for us.

We work with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and governments across the UK to influence regional and national change for rights, benefits, quality of life and economic opportunities for Disabled people.

# Executive summary

## Introduction

- This report explores the experiences of young Disabled people who are using, or have used, apprenticeship schemes as a route into employment. It is Disability Rights UK's follow-up report to 2022's *Getting it right for Disabled apprentices*
- The report considers what works well through collecting and analysing young Disabled people's experiences of training providers and employers and the support they received, as well as other stakeholders working with young Disabled people
- Apprenticeships offer training alongside paid employment and the Government wants to see more Disabled people benefit from them
- Apprentices declaring a learner learning difficulty and/or disability (LLDD) for 2021/22 made up 14% of the total – up from 12.4% on the previous year.

## The Disabled Apprenticeship Network

- A network of Disabled people who are undertaking or have finished an apprenticeship
- The network includes people who are either undertaking or completed a part-time or full-time apprenticeship. They have trained and worked across a range of disciplines, including media, business administration and working with young people.

# Executive summary

## Finding out about apprenticeships

### Lack of parental knowledge

- Many parents didn't understand the benefits of apprenticeships.

### Reaching young people

- Organisations should be using social media more to reach young people.

### Information on disability related-support and adjustments

- There's not enough clear information on what support and adjustments are available for Disabled apprentices
- A lack of familiarity with terminology is a key part of the problem.

### Getting good careers advice

- Good careers advice is crucial to young Disabled people
- Careers advice is patchy and sometimes below the expected standards
- Getting qualified and experienced SEND careers advisers into schools is an issue.

### Applying for an apprenticeship

- Not all apprenticeships are advertised on the national apprenticeship website
- Application processes can be long and complex
- Part-time apprenticeships should be more widely available, as they are more likely to appeal to Disabled people managing a health condition.

## Doing work experience

- Doing work experience is an important part of preparing to do an apprenticeship
- Schools should ensure work experience opportunities are accessible to all Disabled young people.

## Barriers to starting or completing an apprenticeship

- The numbers of Disabled people taking up apprenticeships is too low
- Financial pressures and low wages may be part of the reason for this
- The requirement for English and maths is a barrier for some Disabled apprentices
- Sharing information about a disability or health condition is a concern for some people.



# Executive summary

## What makes an apprenticeship successful

### Networking and mentoring

- Networking was an important part of an apprenticeship
- Apprentices also wanted a dedicated person such as a mentor to support them during an apprenticeship.

### Apprentice and learning provider interaction

- Some providers did provide good support, including making changes to the curriculum
- Apprentices highlighted problems with support for exams, off-the-job training and provision of reasonable adjustments
- Some training providers did not know how to access additional support for Disabled apprentices.

### Off-the-job training experiences

- The quality of off-the-job training and course material varied
- Remote learning worked well for some but others preferred face to face options
- Apprentices wanted consistency in assessments and fewer changes of skills coaches, learning support and assessment personnel.

### Language and accessibility

- Lots of information sources are complex and more should be available in alternative formats, such as Easy Read
- Some online platforms and software programmes are not easy for Disabled apprentices to use.

### Apprentice and employer interaction

- Employers should recognise the added value Disabled people can bring to an organisation.

### Adjustments and support at work

- Many apprentices got the support they needed in the workplace
- Some found employers reluctant to put in place reasonable adjustments, even though it's a legal requirement
- Some waited a long time for adjustments to be put in place.

### The Access to Work scheme

- The Access to Work scheme is a crucial tool to help support Disabled people to get and keep jobs
- The scheme should be quicker and easier to use so apprentices get the support they need promptly.

### Conclusion

- Apprenticeships have the potential to transform young Disabled people's lives
- Apprenticeships are key if the Government wants to tackle the disability employment gap
- Disabled apprentices bring energy, ideas and innovation and organisations involved in the apprenticeship scheme should tap into that talent
- Government, employers, training providers and schools and colleges can all do more to improve Disabled people's experiences of doing an apprenticeship.

# Introduction

This report is a follow up to [Getting it right for Disabled apprentices](#), which was published in February 2022.

Apprenticeships are a great way to gain work experience and learn new skills. Apprentices earn a salary, are trained and work towards a nationally recognised qualification.

They can fill a wide range of job roles across many industries. Almost any type of apprenticeship can be made accessible, and additional support is available while apprentices learn and work.

But for Disabled young people, accessing training and meaningful employment is challenging and has been even more so during and after the Covid pandemic. They are facing additional barriers such as lack of information, lack of confidence in their ability as a Disabled person, inaccessible environments and locations, lack of assistive technology, transport issues, negative attitudes and lack of work experience.

According to the [Youth Voice Census 2022](#): *“Young people without additional needs were twice as likely to be looking for apprenticeships (66.7%) than those with additional needs.”*

It continued: *“Young people with additional needs were most likely to say they ‘could not find opportunities or that they (the opportunities) were not in the right location’.”*

[Government statistics for the 2021/22 academic year](#) report 349,200 apprenticeship starts. This is 8.6% higher

than the previous year and 8.3% higher than the 2019/20 figure. However, it is 11.2% down on the 2018/19 number.

Some 22.2% (77,500) of starts were by under 19-year-olds (up from the previous year’s 20.3%). Most starts were for advanced and higher apprenticeships (levels 4 & 5). According to the Youth Voice Census 2022 young people with additional needs were 30% more likely to be looking at entry level jobs (83.3%).

Apprentices declaring a learner learning difficulty and/or disability (LLDD) for 2021/22 made up 14% of the total – up from 12.4% on the previous year.

In this report we looked at how Disabled young people find out about apprenticeships, what makes an apprenticeship successful and what their engagement with training providers and employers was like.

We also continued to explore some of the themes that were raised last year and expanded our research and engagement methods. We held three round table discussions, individual meetings and online communications sessions. Through these methods we were able to engage with careers advisers, job coaches, training providers, education professionals, local and regional government representatives, employers and other stakeholders working with apprentices.

# Top tips for training providers and employers

If you want to attract, support and keep Disabled apprentices, here's some of the things you can do.

## Training providers

- Develop and change your curriculum to make it easier for Disabled apprentices to get the training they need
- Create networking opportunities for apprentices so they gain insight into other jobs and different departments
- Allocate a 'go to' person for the entire apprenticeship journey so individuals know who to approach for support and have someone they can confide in
- Ensure staff have an understanding of the principles and requirements of reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act (2010)
- Ensure training schedules are clear and whether learning and training sessions are online or face to face
- Familiarise yourselves with the additional learning support funding available for apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities.

## Employers

- Have a mentor or dedicated support person for apprentices, particularly at the start of an apprenticeship
- Offer flexible work arrangements tailored to individual needs, including part-time apprenticeships
- Be prepared to support Disabled apprentices with applications to the Access to Work scheme
- Have a streamlined process to put reasonable adjustments in place quickly, so Disabled apprentices can focus on getting on with the job
- Promote a culture where apprentices feel safe to talk about their disability and support needs, including conversations about mental health
- Make yourselves available for work experience placements to give Disabled young people an insight into the workplace.

# What apprentices say

## What works well for Disabled apprentices – their voices

“ Doing an apprenticeship was the best path for me as I could gain hands-on experience whilst working towards a degree (no student debt is a big plus too!).

**Eve**

“ The apprenticeship was a learning curve. I liked the fact that I could make a mistake and not be told off about it. My employer was very helpful.

**Tom**

“ The best thing about doing the apprenticeship has been working with such knowledgeable colleagues and having lots of opportunities to learn and develop my skills.

**Vicki**

“ Doing an apprenticeship gave me the opportunity to learn more, meet and network with other apprentices doing the same work and share experiences whilst working and learning.

**Natasha**

“ I tried college a few times and I just couldn't get on with classroom style learning – it was difficult for me to maintain that level of concentration. I'm over halfway through my apprenticeship and it's a much more appropriate way of learning for me.

**Katie**

“ This is an apprenticeship in a working environment, it will give you that stepping-stone for a job further on, you learn something new for the job that you are in, or to better yourself in the future. You get paid for doing it and you achieve something at the end.

**Emma**

## What apprentices say

### Katie – an apprenticeship success story

Katie said that she always struggled with classroom style learning and her attention span but did not know there was a reason for this. She has since learned she has ADHD, autism and sensory processing disorder along with suspected dyspraxia.

At the age of 16 she went to college to study Performing Arts. Whilst she very much enjoyed the practical element, she struggled to keep up with the assignments and withdrew from the course. Katie knew she was capable of achieving great learning results and is a keen learner but did not know why she couldn't apply herself and complete education.

She began working full time and had many jobs. In some jobs she settled well but others have not been suited to the way she works.

She tried college once again as she liked to feel she was progressing and developing but withdrew again realising she wasn't suited to classroom learning. Katie did not know there were other ways to gain qualifications.

After a few years' break Katie applied for an apprenticeship position within Great Western Hospital. She knew little about apprenticeships, but the hours worked around her family life.

*“During my nearly 3 years here I have learnt so much and grown so confident.*

*I have been doing a Learning Mentor Level 3 apprenticeship which has been an entirely different experience to college. I am able to play to my strengths of working and progressing in my role, whilst completing manageable assignments within my working time. I am going to gain the A level equivalent I never thought I would.”*



She now also has a completely different outlook on learning and feels so confident that she wants to progress further and do a Coaching Professional Level 5 apprenticeship.

*“I have finally found a career path that suits me and plays to my strengths.”*

Since working for Great Western Hospital Katie feels more confident in being open about who she is as a person. She does not feel she needs to mask her symptoms as much and is accepted with her additional needs.

*“I would encourage anyone that feels classroom learning is not suited to them to try an apprenticeship and I would also highly recommend a Disability Confident employer and for people to be open with any additional needs they feel they may have. This will aid your manager to understand how to work with you and ensure you are correctly supported in the workplace.”*

## Finding out about apprenticeships

We asked participants (at the DAN and round table meetings) how information about post-16 options and apprenticeships reached Disabled young people and about the accessibility and suitability of that information. We also asked about the best ways to inform and empower Disabled young people about apprenticeships and what routes could raise awareness, confidence and understanding about apprenticeships.

The information the young people received about apprenticeships varied widely. Apprentices said they did not receive enough information from their parents or at school. These spanned issues ranging from the support that is available and reasonable adjustments to Access to Work and the availability of part-time apprenticeships. They reported problems finding apprenticeships online and completing the application process.

Parents and carers have the most influence in young people's decisions about post-16 options and careers – followed by their friends, teachers and careers advisers.

Parents of Disabled children often feel that they have had to battle for support for years. That ingrained experience can lead to concern over how an apprenticeship will affect benefits and other parts of their child's education, health and care plan (EHCP).

*“Parents of a Disabled young person are more likely to be reliant on some kind of state benefits – they may not have been*

*able to work as much because they have their caring responsibilities so when an apprenticeship is mentioned, quite often parents are very reluctant because (of) what impact it will have on benefits they cannot afford to lose, and that is a real issue... especially now with the cost of living going up. A lot of parents are saying we need them to stay in college (but) if they do an apprenticeship, they lose their benefit. Although they are still learning, they are not classed (as) being in full time education anymore.”* **Sandra** (careers advice & guidance officer)

### Lack of parental knowledge

Many parents of Disabled young people are not aware of all the post-16 options and pathways open to their children and the support that is available. Being pro-actively engaged to inform parents about these options and about apprenticeships has had positive results.

Some special schools have taken positive steps to provide parents with information about post-16 options and apprenticeships by organising forums and coffee mornings and creating information booklets.

One careers adviser explains:

*“What I needed to do was make sure I got our young people so excited about apprenticeships, they go home and say, ‘mum, we did this, and I looked at this [video]’. That’s the key...to get the parents involved because we have to start that conversation going.*

# Finding out about apprenticeships

*By the end of the National Apprenticeship Week young people in my school go home with the apprenticeship ambassador badge that says: 'I'm an apprenticeship ambassador'. It's just getting that information out, because as soon as they go home, their mum, dad, or whoever's at home is going to say, 'what's that, what did you do?' and that starts the conversation."*

**Elizabeth** (SEN careers adviser)

Apprentices said that information about apprenticeships should be more widely available and clearer.

One apprentice said that her mother initially wasn't that happy she was doing an apprenticeship. She thought doing an apprenticeship was about construction or cars and didn't know they could educate people about business. She saw it as a cop-out from going to university and didn't realise that it was actually a good option.

*"University is just so automatic after college, and it was natural that I was going to apply. I did apply, not because I wanted to go, but because I thought that's what everyone else is doing. But now I've done it [an apprenticeship] and my brother is applying to university, she's like: 'Why are you going to university? Why are you not doing an apprenticeship?'"* **Eve** (apprentice)

*"I think clarity over the subject itself, apprenticeships, is very important. If I had to choose between doing an apprenticeship and doing a sixth form or other academic course, I'd probably choose the academic course because I know more about it than the apprenticeship scheme. I don't know*

*if it's more of a cultural thing – it is more outwardly openly promoted to go to sixth form or college doing A-levels or BTEC rather than doing the apprenticeship. I'm not sure why that is, but I think it's because there's more clarity. I think people will be more confident and more comfortable doing something like that as opposed to doing an apprenticeship."* **Ibrahim** (apprentice)

## Recommendations

- Better information to help parents understand the benefits of apprenticeships
- More financial support for Disabled young people doing apprenticeships.

## Reaching young people

Apprentices said that social media is a great way to increase visibility about apprenticeships. They want to see more Disabled people showing they're doing apprenticeships.

An apprentice said that she learns best from videos, but not if they are long. She can watch a 60 second video on Tik Tok. It has the information needed, can be watched repeatedly and doesn't feel like another boring thing. Individual influencers should be part of this, she suggested, rather than companies.

Apprentices said that young people need to see a clear pathway showing the different stages, progression and career

# Finding out about apprenticeships

opportunities of apprenticeships. Information should explain the level of financial stability that a particular apprenticeship can provide.

For one apprentice the incentive was: “...to be able to fund and to drive a car”.

## Recommendation

- A stronger focus on using social media to promote the benefits of apprenticeships, including detail on the different stages, progression and potential career opportunities.

## Accessibility of information about disability-related support and adjustments

There is a disconnect for Disabled young people and parents in accessing information about support and adjustments available during an apprenticeship. Many are still unaware of the right to reasonable adjustments and the role of Access to Work. There is little knowledge about the provisions of the [Paul Maynard Taskforce Recommendations](#) (the taskforce explored routes to make apprenticeships more accessible to people with learning disabilities) about possible adjustments to maths and English and the use of British Sign Language (BSL) as an alternative to English Functional Skills.

There are a lot of questions and information that Disabled young people have to navigate in order to find out who may be

able to help them. These questions include: Whether there is funding available; if a particular organisation that can support them operates in their part of the country; which universities offer particular autism support; what learning support can they get; does this still apply if they do a degree apprenticeship?

A big issue is the knowledge of language required regarding disability-related support. It is a key additional barrier for Disabled young people and their parents/carers when exploring training or work options.

*“If you are not embedded in the world of education and careers or disability, you are going to look for things you are familiar with. You are not going to find that information because you need to know what you are looking for to find that information about support and adjustments, you need to know the words in the first place. It is (currently) up to young people and parents to find out the extra support and information that is available for Disabled apprentices. It should be embedded in the curriculum.” Jules (careers adviser)*

*“Accessing that information by a lot of the Disabled learners is the problem. If the information is not accessible to begin with, if the schools are not aware of it, then they just don’t have a clue how to go about finding out.” Nasser (employer)*

However, apprentices said that promoting apprenticeships is futile if there are no apprenticeship opportunities available, they are difficult to access or are in locations which involve high transport costs.



# Finding out about apprenticeships

*“We were speaking about advertising to get Disabled people to apply, but if there are not enough apprenticeships or employers who are disability friendly, what is the point of getting people to apply if they [apprenticeships] are not available.”*

**Eve** (apprentice)

## Recommendations

- Information needs to be clearer about all the support available for Disabled apprentices, including reasonable adjustments
- More resources on apprenticeships should be created such as set class/ form time activities during National Apprenticeship Week – targeted at various academic levels.

## Getting good careers advice

Participants highlighted the importance of Disabled young people having early knowledge of the different pathways open to them so they can plan in advance and explore what adjustments and support they would need. Good careers advice was considered crucial.

*“You need to educate the teachers and the careers advisers on how to be more inclusive and giving people with disabilities that opportunity to apply for these opportunities.”* **Ellie** (apprentice)

*“Low expectations and misguided information impact negatively on Disabled young people’s journey into adulthood and work. This can be...by teachers who have misconceptions about disability. One young person had been told by a well-intentioned teacher: ‘You can’t be a midwife because you’re dyslexic, and you can’t do maths.’”*

**Elizabeth** (SEN careers adviser)

Despite the statutory duty for maintained schools, academies, further education colleges and sixth form colleges to provide independent careers guidance, DAN members and round table contributors pointed out the careers advice some Disabled young people receive falls below expected standards. This included not having access to a qualified careers adviser, careers advisers with little or no understanding about disability or SEND training, and not being given all the post-16 options, including apprenticeships.

*“I didn’t know about apprenticeships until I finished university – apprenticeships (weren’t) even on my radar. The first thing on my radar was finish school, go to college and then go to university. I didn’t know that apprenticeships were a viable option until I got into the workplace. The earlier we can do the educating the better – if you educate the educators and the (Disabled) people earlier, you’ll get a more diverse workforce. A lot more people would feel fulfilled.”*

**Luke** (apprentice)

Participants said that even though careers discussions in schools follow the curriculum, it does not cover what this means for a Disabled young person on how to access the extra support.

## Finding out about apprenticeships



## Finding out about apprenticeships

*“A young SEN person in mainstream school will get the careers advice and guidance that is geared towards the traditional routes into employment on getting ready for going to college, going to university. For those who do not want this as an outcome, what is there for them? There is no good quality information, advice and guidance around that.*

*“Careers advisers should have better training across the board. Young people I meet at the jobcentre who are 18 have not received good careers information advice and guidance – they are quite lost by the time they get to the jobcentre and say ‘I do not know what to do, I do not know what will fit, I don’t know how I can work’. There is that kind of inkling they need that type of job that’s going to work with them and their needs but they have not tapped into how they access the market. For example if they are looking for remote work, what will suit them best – are remote apprenticeship opportunities available? Can they do remote work and progress?”* **Moniya** (post-16 employment adviser)

Some careers advisers only look at the grades and GCSE exams and have discouraged young people from doing apprenticeships, including telling a young person their grades were too high to do an apprenticeship and should go to sixth form. Such attitudes ignore student ambitions and aspirations and do not follow the Gatsby Benchmarks, which provide guidance on best practice for careers advice.

*“Schools and colleges that have higher education are very reluctant to allow you to go in and talk about apprenticeships. I think there is a real stigma for numbers and statistics, that if they allow students to leave their establishment, they lose money, they lose funding and they lose talent. And I think that’s become more apparent over the years, especially with apprenticeships becoming more competitive.”*

**Ellie** (apprentice)

Careers advisers only spend limited time with students, and they do not get to know them well enough to comprehensively engage with those young people who need more time to build up trust or to tailor their advice to individual needs. They need time to explain all the other issues involved such as reasonable adjustments, Access to Work and extra support. A single one-to-one intervention is not enough. It can make young people really anxious to see a careers adviser whether they are ready and if they are in the right frame of mind.

*“I found that having a careers adviser that didn’t know me personally actually really affected me and I went completely off grid in terms of engagement from that one meeting.”* **Ellie** (apprentice)

*“I always make sure that I tell them (students) they do not have to remember stuff. I write it (putting) links to information to specific support like Access to Work and reasonable adjustments and (I) always ask their permission to share that. We share it with support staff at school, with*

# Finding out about apprenticeships

*parents and carers as this is not easily accessible information unless you know what you are looking for. It's not embedded. We are almost doing it as an add-on, and it should not have to be like that."* **Jules** (careers adviser)

Getting qualified and experienced SEND careers advisers can be a challenge.

## Recommendations

- All schools should use level 6 qualified impartial careers advisers
- Careers advisers need to have better training about disability, what support is available and how this impacts on a Disabled young person
- Every school and college should have a programme of careers education and guidance that is known and understood by students, parents, teachers, governors, employers and other agencies
- Information for Disabled people needs to be embedded in the standard information given about apprenticeships
- Careers advice should start at a younger age
- Careers advisers should be allocated additional sessions when working with young Disabled people.

# Finding out about apprenticeships

## The application processes

Not all apprenticeships are advertised on the National Apprenticeship website. One apprentice suggested that employers should be required to advertise on the website as a condition for accessing the apprenticeship levy.

Apprentices said it is difficult to find out about an apprenticeship on the government website, including the 'Find my Apprenticeship' section. They didn't know they could find an apprenticeship through online job sites.

For many young people application processes were too complicated, confusing and long.

*"The application process is very long – the NHS application was 40 pages and is very intense."* Ellie (apprentice)

Young people did not know who was going to reply to their application. They found this unsettling and suggested a step-by-step guide about the application process.

One apprentice said support to fill out her apprenticeship application after leaving school would have been very helpful.

Some employers however do take positive action to recruit young people into apprenticeships through working with local communities and organisations like the Prince's Trust.

## Recommendations

- All information on apprenticeships should be streamlined and advertised on the National Apprenticeship website
- The Government website about apprenticeships should be reviewed and supplemented with additional information incorporating case studies from Disabled apprentices and using different media, such as videos.

## Part-time apprenticeships

For many Disabled people and people with health conditions, doing a full-time apprenticeship is not a viable option. They need flexibility and may need longer to complete them. The work/study load and the time required to complete coursework during a full time apprenticeship was too much for some. The 3 hours a week 'protected study time' was not enough for those learners who need more time to finish assignments.

However, Disabled young people, careers advisers, employers and training providers are not always aware part-time apprenticeships are even an option. Some Disabled apprentices first heard about part-time apprenticeships when they were discussed in the DAN meetings.

# Finding out about apprenticeships

Apprenticeships will usually be advertised as full-time. Apprenticeship information online refers to 30-hour weeks and does not immediately point to the possibility of part-time apprenticeships or that this could be an adjustment.

Unlike online recruitment agencies, the Find an Apprenticeship website has no part-time search option.

This means many young Disabled people do still apply but then don't feel confident enough to ask about a part-time option and the process involved in that.

A recent pilot study by the Learning and Work Institute and Timewise identified negative perceptions from managers, having no blueprint for how to make an apprenticeship work on a part-time basis, barriers and limits to the apprenticeship levy and a business model for training providers that is not set up to facilitate part-time training as main barriers employers face in creating part-time apprenticeships. One apprentice said that being able to change to a part-time apprenticeship made all the difference to him.

## Recommendations

- Add information on part-time apprenticeships to the Find an Apprenticeship website
- Develop new guidelines and a business model for creating part-time apprenticeships.

## Doing work experience

Apprentices and roundtable participants have highlighted the value of having pre-apprentice work experience to develop the necessary communication and soft skills to prepare them for a workplace environment.

*“People that are struggling in college are stressing about work...they don't get taught the right stuff, they don't have the experience – maybe they know a little bit about...the hardware or the software side, but most importantly, they don't know the customer side of things...how to deal with a customer, what to say on the phone. They're new to the job and no one is confident starting a new job, but they [don't know how to] talk to a customer, colleagues, or the people that they are helping. That's where the on-the-job experience really helps someone.” Tom (apprentice)*

*“A one day a week trial for people who are maybe not as confident as (other) people going into the apprenticeship is a good idea and that can gradually increase to more days. When you first come into a workplace or apprenticeship it can be quite daunting.” Scott (apprentice)*

One apprentice said that she would have liked to have done work experience in the business sector she wanted to work in, but there was nothing available. Her part-time job doing children's parties and getting transferable skills helped her instead.

She thinks that schools should have a business day where pupils dress up in business clothes and interact like they

## Finding out about apprenticeships

are in the corporate world. Everything was a totally new world to her, and it was very hard.

*“We have an internship programme and a pre-internship programme as well. Early intervention in careers education in schools is key (for) those students who are leaving school (and are) looking for an apprenticeship (to ensure they) are ready for that next step...it’s an embedded strategy...that for me is the key to our success.” Jackie (careers & employment co-ordinator)*

One apprentice said that she was lucky and had a week’s worth of work experience in year 10. But that was through her own initiative and wasn’t something the school directly supported her with.

Transport, access to equipment and access to workplaces were raised as barriers for some Disabled young people doing work experience

*“There are also restrictions being from a poorer background, or if you are Disabled. If it is one week, how will you get all your accessibility equipment in for that one week, and if you’re poor and it is unpaid work how are you going to afford to travel to that destination? Is your employer going to provide all the equipment you need for that one week, or are you going to have to just crack on like everyone else who doesn’t have a disability?” Ellie (apprentice)*

Schools and colleges have shared some of their best practice to prepare young people to be workplace ready.

Undershaw Education focuses on developing transferable skills and has dedicated communications lessons each week drawing on real life experience.

The school supports both students and families when exploring post-16 pathways and operate a tailored and predominantly off-site work experience programme with varied partners including a local museum, café, foodbank and hotel.

*“We are passionate about our young people being given the opportunity to reach their full potential and transition confidently from education into full time paid employment.”*

**Leliah** (head of employability and life skills)

### Recommendation

- Schools should ensure Disabled young people are not left out of workplace experience opportunities.

# Finding out about apprenticeships

## Other factors that stop Disabled young people starting or completing an apprenticeship

Though apprentice take-up for Disabled people rose from 12.4% last year to 14% this year, this is still a low number, and for Disabled people there are still many barriers.

The Disabled people we spoke to highlight a number of other issues that blocked their progress including lack of confidence, financial pressures, location and lack of progression within a company.

*“I think there’s barriers in terms of confidence in young people. I think Covid has really affected young people.”*

**Ellie** (apprentice)

*“We still have the barriers with learners thinking that they can’t do an apprenticeship because they’ve got a learning difficulty or disability. There’s still a huge educational piece (of work) to remove those barriers, not only with the learners but also with employers as well.”* **Micaela** (head of quality training)

Financial pressures are another factor. Low wages and location disadvantage some people. Though apprenticeships are paid employment, this itself can be a barrier if the pay is low. Apprentices on a low wage may find transport or relocation costs unaffordable.

For a lot of Disabled people, it could be quite hard to move away from the location they know, where they’ve got the support networks and families; and where they

understand how to get to community facilities or use public transport.

Some apprentices were unable to get to their workplace or training provider due to poor communication; in one case, the employer had a minibus they could have used.

For one apprentice having to go to a new location was initially a barrier: *“...I got quite anxious about the location of my apprenticeship provider...I had a massive panic over the phone about location...I don’t know where that is...I don’t think I can do this...but luckily at the time... Mencap supported me by doing some travel training.”* **Scott** (apprentice)

One apprentice left his apprenticeship because the small company he was doing his apprenticeship with was unable to offer career progression. He took up another work opportunity.

The Government has made [new adjustments for level 2 apprenticeships](#). Apprentices who do not have level 1 in English and maths can now prioritise achieving level 1 in these subjects and only work towards level 2 English and maths where they have time remaining to make meaningful progress, once they have achieved level 1. However, English and maths are still considered barriers for some apprentices including those who are doing level 3 apprenticeships.

Apprentices said that there are gaps between people leaving education and getting a job, changing jobs or when they



# Finding out about apprenticeships

are unsuccessful with their job application where they have little or no follow up or support and that this can adversely affect their mental health, self-esteem and confidence.

And some Disabled young people do not feel comfortable talking about their disability or health condition to access support. This can be particularly true of young people experiencing mental health problems.

One careers adviser explained that often young people want to follow the route they are familiar with and what their peers are taking, going to college or staying in post-16 special school because it is a safe route. That extra mile that people need to go to engage with apprenticeships takes a really determined young person. Also, parents may be tired and not feel they have capacity to support their children in training or work.

## Disclosure of disability status without permission

One issue people felt strongly about was that disclosing their disability status without consent was wrong. It made people feel like they stood out, that they were targeted and that they were used for reasons such as data collecting and marketing purposes. Having an invisible disability publicly disclosed among a peer group can obviously cause distress and mental health issues. Policies and actions should be all-inclusive and not target difference. It is a violation of privacy.

## Recommendations

- Financial incentives for apprentices for additional transport costs or when they take up apprenticeships in different locations
- Better support for Disabled young people when leaving education.

# What makes an apprenticeship successful

Apprentices talked about what facilitated their apprenticeship journey including networking with other apprentices, getting the right support from their training provider and employer (including mentoring), regular contact with training providers and working for a Disability Confident employer.

For one apprentice the benefits included that she can ask more questions, and colleagues are more willing to give up their time to support her to fulfil her potential as an apprentice.

## Networking

Apprentices said that the networking opportunities during their apprenticeships were an equally important element on their apprenticeship journey and as a support system. They said it helped build up their skills, was beneficial for their mental health and enabled them to connect and speak with other apprentices working in different departments.

They thought that networking opportunities could be improved by building regional networking face to face events, but also acknowledged this may not be possible for smaller employers.

## Mentoring

Apprentices said that having consistency and stability from a dedicated person to provide the right support for their mental well-being, support them in building up confidence and teach them a range of skills throughout their apprenticeship was crucial.

They reiterated mentoring support in the workplace could make apprenticeships more inclusive for Disabled apprentices.

*“I wouldn’t have gone through my apprenticeship if I hadn’t had that mentor in place because he was a [source of] stability for me.” Ellie (apprentice)*

*“I think also that the aspects of mentoring for Disabled people...would really help. Giving that sort of understanding and lesson (about) what to do in a particular working environment because working is very different (to) learning in the classroom – stuff like social cues and how to behave in a particular way in an office setting. I think certain people, especially those who are neurodiverse, need that sort of understanding or clarity. I know a lot of people who are neurodiverse, and they’ve always struggled throughout their working life because they weren’t able to have that comprehensive social understanding of what to do in an office setting. The ‘whole aspect of professionalism’ – I say that in quotations – doesn’t necessarily appeal to the mindset of someone who is neurodiverse because they just think differently, and that’s where they struggle, and that’s why they kind of get a bit apprehensive.” Ibrahim (apprentice).*

The Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network 2021-22 Annual Report says: *“Mentoring is proven to be a powerful process to develop apprentices when it comes to progressing in their careers – mentees are five times more likely to be promoted.”*

## What makes an apprenticeship successful



# What makes an apprenticeship successful

## Recommendations

- Training providers should appoint a dedicated person for the entire apprenticeship journey
- Employers should appoint mentors for each of their apprentices.

## Apprentice and learning provider interaction

We discussed training provider interaction with Disabled apprentices. The response was mixed. Apprentices and training providers highlighted good practice and initiatives but also areas for improvement.

Issues with training providers included refusing to change how they did exams and adjustments to entry requirements. Inconsistency about off-the-job training and reasonable adjustments were also problems.

Nearly half (47%) of all apprentices did not complete their apprenticeship in 2021. A variety of reasons have been cited for this, including personal or domestic factors such as a getting a better job offer, mental health issues and caring responsibilities. Some apprentices achieved a qualification that proved their professional competence before sitting their end-point assessment.

The 'No Train, no gain' investigation into apprenticeships by think tank EDSK shows

that the majority had concerns about the quality of their apprenticeship. These included a lack of support from their training provider, the apprenticeship being badly organised and poor quality training.

## Reasonable adjustments and support for off-the-job training

Disabled apprentices can ask their employer, university or training provider for reasonable adjustments so they can access the same opportunities and services as non-Disabled people.

Overall apprentices said that they had reasonable adjustments, including assistive technology, extra time and extensions to finish assignments, one to one tutoring and alternative assessments.

Some apprentices said that they would like better assessments of their personal needs at the start of the apprenticeship, so the reasonable adjustments are in place right from the start.

One training provider revamped the whole of their curriculum as a reasonable adjustment to meet the access needs of an apprentice.

However, some training providers are not fulfilling their legal obligations around reasonable adjustments because they do not seem to know how to draw down all available funding or get additional support; and are unaware that a Disabled person does not require a formal diagnosis to be covered by the Equality Act 2010.

# What makes an apprenticeship successful

One dyslexic apprentice who asked for extensions to finish her assignments was only given an extra day. This was not sufficient for her and caused her distress.

One Disabled apprentice who worked in a coffee shop did not have a good first experience. The training provider didn't make an effort to get to know or properly assess the young person and whether he had additional needs. The provider overloaded him with too much literature. They did eventually extend the apprenticeship as an adjustment.

## Recommendations

- Better assessments of learning and support at the start of an apprenticeship
- Training providers need to improve their awareness and understanding of reasonable adjustments, learning adjustments and funding available for Disabled apprentices
- Training providers should offer changes to their curriculum as a reasonable adjustment.

## Apprentice off-the-job training experiences

The quality and suitability of off-the-job training and courses apprentices were offered varied. Some were remote; for others it was a dedicated day a week or different days and times.

One apprentice said that the training workload was much larger than anticipated and assignments were more like a degree level rather than the BTEC level she was doing and the quality of the course material was poorly written.

The size of the workload was also an issue for other apprentices.

*“There was a lot more sit down and write work than I thought it would be... I found the academic side of things a little bit more difficult than the practical side.”*

**Tom** (apprentice)

Doing remote learning has mixed responses. For some learners, doing courses online and through webinars has been beneficial. Calls to the DR UK student helpline highlighted that remote learning was welcomed by some students. It meant that students did not have to negotiate public transport and were better able to manage their health condition or disability.

Some Disabled apprentices who preferred to have their classes at university or college as they wanted to be part of the university/ college community found some courses continued to be taught online after the Covid lockdowns. They wanted to have choice and options.

*“I like going into college and have face to face tutorials. It helps building a rapport with other classmates and it is also a release from work.”* **Natasha** (apprentice)

However, some training providers are not engaging with apprentices about what arrangements best suit them.

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Apprentices said they wanted clarity of information and consistency around whether lectures were going to be in person or online in advance, and such information should not be disclosed at the last minute. For neurodiverse apprentices the inconsistency and lack of communication created additional stress.

One apprentice said she had five assessors in one year. As with the training provider, communication between the assessors was lax. She felt her progress was due to her efforts keeping up to date with coursework rather than support from professionals.

Another apprentice said that her training provider is not very good, the lectures are poor quality and communication with the training provider is poor. She also called for consistency around assessors, skills coaches and learning support throughout the apprenticeship. Frequent changes in the personnel in these roles cause difficulties.

However, the skills coaches were considered good, and she enjoys meeting with them but feels that the six-weekly meetings should be more regular.

She liked the fact that they are separate from the employer and training provider. She welcomed the consistency and dedication of having one 'go to' person to confide in who got to know them and felt confident and positive about discussing a range of issues, from safeguarding and well being to off-the-job training needs.

She also found it beneficial having different people as learning support coaches and skills coaches because they have distinct skills.

## Recommendations

- Training providers should provide a clear off-the-job training programme
- Consistency and better communication is needed between training providers and apprentices
- Training providers should provide better quality and appropriate course material.

## Language

Participants said the language used by some training providers can create barriers for young people. They do not want jargon or complex words.

*"I find very often that we need (to give the apprentices) a glossary just so they can even get a chance. We get them (training providers) to just do picture forms instead of some of the glossaries...because some of the words I can't even pronounce myself. We should change not just the language in the way we're working with them (Disabled young people) but use the language they use and help to assimilate some of the things they're experiencing in their own language contexts, rather than just placing things on them. And I think that's why they're not winning at things like English and maths and some of the other stuff, because the language they're using today is very different."* **Marcus** (neurodiverse disabilities consultant and advocate)

# What makes an apprenticeship successful

It is vital that the voice of young people on their learning journey is heard so they can succeed and complete a training course. It is not enough to just have a conversation. Young people want to have ownership of their learning and want to co-produce, rather than being told what to do and learning providers just checking in.

One participant suggested that learners should be able to mark training providers and employers on how they have found the experience.

## Recommendations

- Training providers to use plain language and provide different formats including easy-read material as standard
- Training providers should look to co-produce training packages and courses with Disabled people.

## Accessibility of online platforms

Some apprentices praised their training provider for providing a variety of online resources which they found very helpful. However, for some students the technology is not accessible.

This was a particular issue for apprentices who are blind or have sight loss.

*“if you didn’t have sight loss, the myriad of things [available for] the way different*

*people learn was fantastic. But there really wasn’t much that I thought was all right [for me]” Leigh (apprentice)*

This issue has been monitored by the sight loss charity, the RNIB.

*“Our biggest challenge with the apprenticeship scheme is ensuring all learning is accessible. To date there are not any training providers that offer truly accessible learning. If a resource is built without accessibility in mind, it is difficult to make changes once it is live.”*

**Andy Smith, RNIB**

Some of the areas to be addressed include: Learning management system and portfolio platforms are often not set up to work with screen readers; E-learning courses are not written with accessibility in mind; software visualisation tools need to be formatted for screen readers; access issues with PowerPoint, Word and Excel; screen sharing; and having better accessible endpoint assessments.

## Apprentice and employer interaction

Apprentices and round table participants discussed the value and benefits Disabled apprentices bring to a company.

Some employers have embraced the value that Disabled workers bring to the workplace through creating a new perspective or providing insight from their experiences.

*“I came in and refreshed the whole branding of my team.” Ellie (apprentice)*

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Eve, who is doing an apprenticeship at the BBC, said that they serve a lot of audiences, and they can't reflect those audiences if their workforce doesn't.

*"They need to know the benefits that we're all creative. We've got these innovative ideas no one else has. And I feel like I have a lot to say on the good support that my apprenticeship has provided me with."*

**Eve** (apprentice)

One apprentice said that they should see themselves as investments. He said that working for a company specialising in disability technology he looks at things slightly differently and thinks outside the box. Being a wheelchair user gives him a different point of view because he looks at things to do with access and being able to do things as independently as possible. If they have software that would be good for people with physical disabilities, he would give his opinion on how it would be good and what scenarios it would fit and how it could fit around that situation.

*"I learned to embrace my disability – it has been one of my major strands if not my most valuable asset, because I can look at things through a different lens."*

**Luke** (apprentice)

*"When you've got that perspective on board, you have the mindset of who you are trying to serve, you can tap into that – whereas other people, if they haven't lived like that, they're not going to get it."*

**Eve** (apprentice)

## Emma – getting the right support

Emma had a good job doing sales and window displays at a jewellery shop when she began losing her sight. After she lost total vision in her left eye and 83% vision in her right eye, Emma had to retire from her previous career as the adjustments needed were not feasible for the organisation.

Emma's confidence was very low at that time. She hit rock bottom when she became completely blind for three weeks. She said being Disabled is not an easy thing to go through especially if a disability came later on, as it was a complete change of life.

Emma had seven job rejections and had a lot of self-doubt.

Her employment officer from the JobCentre (Susan) was a great support including accompanying her to a job fair where she was able to explore different work options and advising Emma on who is who and what she thought she'd be good at. Some employers at the job fair said they would consider employing Emma.





## What makes an apprenticeship successful

During lockdown, Susan contacted her every four weeks to enquire how she was getting on, if there was anything she could support her with and to discuss what kind of jobs would fit her.

After lockdown, Susan sent information about an administration apprenticeship at Walsall Council. Emma applied and was shortlisted for an interview.

Susan supported Emma with interview preparation and discussed questions which could be asked and what questions would be good to ask in the interview. Susan was there to reassure her, telling Emma she can do so much more.

Emma emphasises that having personal support and having that one person there was really important and made all the difference. "Susan was fantastic!"

Despite her reservations, Emma was offered the job and was elated when they told her that they wanted her. *"That was the best thing I heard after having had seven job rejections. They have seen past the vision impairment and accepted me for who I am and not what they want me to be."*

Her employer told her that if she needs support, they would do all they could to help meet her access needs. Emma was given a big screen and uses assistive technology. She has extra breaks away from the screen and extra time to finish her tasks.

Emma's loss of vision means that colours confuse her, and she struggles with detail and spreadsheets. She can see the spreadsheet, but not the whole one and has to enlarge it on her big screen and do section by section.

She says her team is very understanding; this flows from them knowing about her as a person and the way she does things.

They know how she works best and what she is good at.

*"It is enabling me to achieve something without the judgment you are taking forever on that. For me to finish a spreadsheet is massive – the support comes from my manager saying 'Emma, you've done the spreadsheet, you can crack on now.'"*

Emma has made great progress and is a winner at the first Black Country apprenticeship awards – not only winning her category of 'Professional Service' award but also winning the 'Overall Apprentice of the Year' award in 2022.

# What makes an apprenticeship successful

## Adjustments and support at work

Apprentices said that overall, they received the support they needed from their employer, including regular rest breaks, working in a quiet working space, extra time to finish tasks and regular conversations about support they need.

*“Communication has been key for me. As long as I’ve been open to my employer, my manager and my team have been really supportive with any adjustments. So, trying not to hide it is a better way forward, I think.”*

**Ellie** (apprentice)

However, one apprentice said there was no correlation in her recruitment process. She put all the information about her disability and the support she required on a form, but this was not picked up by the manager and she had to repeat the whole process, causing additional stress.

*“You start a new job and fill in all the information about your disability on the application form, which can be a difficult process. Then when you start the job, you find out that your manager has not looked at the form and is unaware about your disability and you have to go through the whole process again. That is frustrating and confusing.”* **Natasha** (apprentice)

One apprentice commented that some work environments are often not ideal study environments and can be too noisy and busy for some Disabled apprentices. She would like more flexibility from her employer to study at home.

Apprentices mentioned they did not feel confident to challenge work rotas. One apprentice who was struggling with her mental wellbeing said that her leave request was not acknowledged, leading to additional anxiety.

*“Accessibility is no longer just a good thing – it’s a legal requirement whether you’re a big or small company. So, it’s always good to have somebody in the organisation who could make things accessible.”*

**Nasser** (employer)

One apprentice reported that even when occupational health had agreed and signed off on additional support, her manager had reservations whether they could provide this support, leading to additional stress.

Some employers were unaware of the support available to them or were unclear how to access it.

*“...there is not enough information out there for people to understand what’s involved and what they need to do because they don’t think they have the know-how to manage them [Disabled apprentices].”*

**Nasser** (employer)

We also discussed why employers – particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs) – may be reluctant to take on Disabled apprentices.

*“...the problem we have is that small employers don’t have that support they need for training. So, if there was somebody to guide them on how this is going to work, (it) will be much easier to get*

# What makes an apprenticeship successful

*the apprentices into the SME sector. They just don't know enough about disability and the kind of strength they bring into the organisation."* **Nasser** (employer)

Apprentices also suggested that reluctance to take on Disabled apprentices could reflect a lack of awareness about the apprenticeship levy amongst employers.

*"With smaller organisations...I think one of the barriers is lack of knowledge around levy support. Because smaller organisations don't have a levy, they don't understand how they can get funding for the tuition for the courses. There is also an issue with employers not allowing apprentices to have one day off for off the job training."*  
**Katie** (apprentice)

## Recommendations

- Organisations should be made more aware of the support available to apprentices, as well as their duties under the 2010 Equality Act
- Employers to follow through the recruitment process to make sure all support is in place at an early stage for Disabled apprentices
- Employers should look to creating an environment and culture where apprentices feel safe to talk about their disability and support needs, including conversations about mental health
- Employers need to be better informed about the apprenticeship levy
- Information about apprenticeships should be made more accessible during recruitment advertising and inform potential candidates about support the employer will offer
- Employers should aim to embrace an inclusive policy of support for all employees.

# What makes an apprenticeship successful

## Access to Work

For many apprentices, Access to Work, the Government scheme which provides practical help to enabled Disabled people to get and keep jobs, provided the support they needed. For many thousands of Disabled people, it has been crucial in enabling them to stay in paid employment.

However, there are still issues including being asked questions apprentices felt were not relevant, the format and language used in forms and equipment not arriving in time. One apprentice said she is still waiting for an assessment one year after starting her apprenticeship.

*“There is a problem with Access to Work not really being there when they [apprentices] need it.*

*“I deal with a lot of job advisers and the local DWP and when I speak to them, they kind of give a message that it’s positive to employ Disabled apprentices as well, but they don’t really explain why and how. So that’s something that really needs to be addressed. They don’t really understand the challenges Disabled people face day to day due to the impact of their condition, hence they don’t know what solutions exist to overcome these. If they knew the art of the possible with assistive technology then they wouldn’t just give a message that it is good to hire Disabled people. They would have challenges, but we will equip them with what they need to overcome these hence they can be productive from day one.”*

**Nasser** (employer)

Apprentices thought the adjustment passports were a good idea and would help support Disabled people, especially if they leave college or university; or change employer.

The Department for Work and Pensions is piloting adjustment passports, which document someone’s support needs in employment. The aim of the pilot is to explore the role and benefits of passports which should support transitions into employment, new jobs and between job roles. It should also empower Disabled people to have confident discussions with employers, raise the visibility of the Access to Work scheme, enable Disabled people to make informed career choices and support additional Access to Work applications by reducing the need for assessments if in-work support needs are already known.

## Recommendations

- **Access to Work and the Department for Work and Pensions to continue efforts to publicise and promote the scheme, which has been described as ‘the Government’s best kept secret’**
- **Access to Work should be better resourced to enable prompt assessments and provision of technology, equipment and support for Disabled apprentices.**

# What makes an apprenticeship successful

## Luke and Access to Work

Luke did a Junior Project Management apprenticeship at Microlink. He successfully completed his apprenticeship and now has a full-time job as a content researcher in the same company.

Working for a company that specialises in disability technology, Luke was able to share his life experiences as a Disabled person at work. *“I can use my disability as an advantage, which I didn’t know until coming into work.”*

Luke says working for a Disability Confident Employer made things easier for him as it took away some of the pressure when discussing his progress, reasonable adjustments and other support he needed. They gave him advice and guidance on how to apply for Access to Work.

*“Giving me time to complete the tasks in order for me to obtain my apprenticeship was a really big deal. Because of my cerebral palsy, I need a bit more extra time than the regular person, so we would have conversations probably every month asking me how I was doing and what I needed to do and how much time I needed to complete it.”*

Luke uses assistive technology and has a personal assistant during working hours. This allows him to be independent, gives him the freedom to attend work-related events and removes the barriers to do his tasks.

*“I can safely say that without the Access to Work grant, I would not be where I am today in my career. It has given me the freedom and ability to be judged solely on my ability to do my job and not because of my disability.”*



# Conclusion

This report has highlighted some things we already know.

Apprenticeships can transform the life chances, and life choices, of young Disabled people. When things go well, apprenticeships are a pragmatic and supportive route for people to develop a career path which is good for them, their communities and the organisations they work for.

Apprenticeships also support them into long term employment opportunities, which is key to the Government's ambition to increase the number of Disabled people in work and shrink the disability employment gap.

It's clear that there are schools and colleges, training providers and employers offering good support and delivering what young Disabled people need.

But there's more to do. Information and application processes are complex and inaccessible, careers advice can be patchy, and many organisations charged with supporting, developing and delivering apprenticeships aren't getting it right – sometimes even at a basic level.

Schools and colleges need to do more to help young Disabled people and their families understand what apprenticeships are. Training providers need to offer clearer training opportunities with a particular focus on accessibility. Employers need to offer better support so Disabled apprentices understand how their apprenticeship is going to work and get better support in

navigating the complexities and links between employers, training providers and relevant Government support.

And, as always, there's a role for Government to better support organisations delivering apprenticeships in all their facets, as well as increasing its efforts to make the Access to Work scheme more responsive to the needs of Disabled apprentices.

Young Disabled people need consistency and clarity when it comes to employment options. They also have experience of barriers and thoughtful and innovative ideas on how to overcome them.

Involving them in the development of policies, procedures and projects around apprenticeship information, structures and plans may help, in turn, develop solutions to some of the avoidable problems others have experienced.

We hope our recommendations may help with this, and perhaps help address, in part, the significant drop out rates the apprenticeship scheme has seen.

However, we should also acknowledge there are things to celebrate and we welcome some of the innovations and best practice that are being developed.

We hope this continues, and young Disabled people are given the opportunities they both want and need.

## What makes an apprenticeship successful



# Appendix 1

## Best practice examples

In the course of our research for this report, we came across examples of good practice from schools, colleges, employers and training providers. This included developing networks of Disabled employees. One apprentice said that her employer has created a dedicated network (the Differently Aabled Network) where they encourage people to feel confident in discussing their additional needs and how they can

make the workplace more inclusive. Other initiatives included comprehensive career guidance and support, proactive approaches to mentoring and designated staff to liaise between apprentices, managers and training providers.

Below are case studies which explore some of these in more detail.

### **Best practice – training provider/ employer interaction City College Norwich**

*“We have been running a mandatory inclusive employer induction process for all employers that we engage through our apprenticeship framework. We talk about the standards and off-the-job training and inclusive practice is covered within that, including reasonable adjustments. We talk about learning disabilities and difficulties and how to have an inclusive and inclusive workplace.”*

*“I’ve been sharing that best practice through the Centres for Excellence, working with other colleges nationally.”*

*“Part of our success and our work is that planning from very early on when you’re looking at the pathway – understanding the learner journey and planning for that apprenticeship. That includes tapering off support with a graduated approach so learners can become self-sufficient. We also discuss what strategies they are going to have within the workplace.”*  
**Elaine** (director of SEND)



## Appendix 1

### Best practice – mentoring

Breaking Down Barriers: 'Opportunity Plymouth' – a progressive model of student mentoring and post-16 progression.

[Opportunity Plymouth](#) is a model of mentoring for young people with SEND in preparation for post-16 apprenticeships, work or further study.

It is a collaborative model developed by University of Plymouth Associate Professor Dr Suanne Gibson, Annette Goddard from the Careers Service and student Liz Staples. They work in partnership with Plymouth City secondary schools. University students are trained to become mentors and receive a certificate of their programme and learning. They work with year 10

pupils on a 1-1 and small group basis to help plan their successful post-16 destination.

The mentors work with their mentees over eight weeks, building self-esteem and self-confidence and developing a clear post-16 direction.

Evaluation of 2021/22: The mentors gained valuable skills from the experience and the school pupils gained confidence, as well as the ability to talk to someone new and discuss work opportunities that will help with their future aspirations. A school leader noted: *"It's highlighted a real need for our kids and establishments like the university to come together and give kids a focus for their future. It's really helped their self-esteem."*

# Appendix 2

## Help for employers and training providers

### Learning support funding for apprenticeships

[Learning support funding](#) is available for training providers to make reasonable adjustments to support apprentices who have learning difficulties or disabilities.

- Training providers can claim £150 learning support per month
- Excess learning support where monthly costs of support exceed £150, up to £19,000
- Exceptional learning support – support costs of more than £19,000 in a funding year.

Learning support can be used for additional resources or equipment, for example:

- Additional staff to support apprentices
- Extended or more frequent assessor visits
- Specialist equipment
- Additional time on exams/tests.

### Apprenticeship levy

The government [apprenticeship levy](#) is an amount paid at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's annual pay bill. Some employers pay less or do not have to contribute. The levy pays for apprenticeship training costs for 16-18 year olds and 19-24 year olds who have been in care or have a Local Authority Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

An incentive payment of £1000 is available for employers and training providers if the apprentice is:

- 16 to 18 years old
- 19 to 25 years old with an education, health and care plan or has been in the care of their local authority.

### The Access to Work scheme

[Access to Work](#) is the Government funded scheme which provides support to help Disabled people get, and keep, jobs. This includes help like:

- Taxis for people who can't use public transport to get to work
- Support workers to carry out tasks Disabled people can't manage because of their impairment or health condition
- Adapted equipment such as IT hardware and software
- The costs of putting written materials into a different format
- Subsidising overnight and subsistence costs for people who find travelling difficult

## Appendix 3

### Other resources

#### [Disabled Apprentice Network](#)

Disability Rights UK's [Into Apprenticeships Guide](#) deals with common questions such as how to find an apprenticeship, whether the training will be accessible and what support is available in the workplace.

[Get Ahead](#) – a resource by DR UK for young Disabled people looking for information on post-16 opportunities in education, training and work.

[Joe Grimshaw](#) and [Chloe O'Toole](#) – videos of young Disabled people talking about their apprenticeships.

[Disability Rights UK Student Helpline](#) – Advice and information for Disabled people in education, apprenticeships, traineeships or supported internships. It is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 11am and 1pm.

Telephone: 0330 995 0414

Email: [students@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:students@disabilityrightsuk.org)

In addition to the helpline, Disability Rights UK also produces a range of free [education factsheets and guides](#) for Disabled students, trainees and apprentices on post 16 education and training.

#### [Disability Rights UK website](#)

[Amazing Apprenticeships](#) – promotes apprenticeship opportunities and resources.

#### [Government apprenticeship website](#)

#### [Government Disability Confident scheme](#)

