

Accessible Apprenticeships

A TUC guide for trade union activists on bargaining for accessible Apprenticeships for disabled workers



unionlearn
from the TUC

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Introduction

Disabled people are disabled by the barriers they face every day. These barriers may be environmental, societal, or attitudinal. We call this the social model of disability.



The social model of disability

The diagram below explains the medical model vs the social model. It explains why the TUC advocates for the social model, where disabled people themselves can determine the adjustments they need in order to work and lead independent and autonomous lives.

The social model sees the person first and identifies the barriers that can make it impossible or very difficult for disabled



people to access jobs, buildings or services. Removing the barriers is the best way to include millions of disabled people in our society.

At the heart of this guide is the social model of disability and how union representatives/ officers can use it to address the barriers disabled people face when accessing Apprenticeship opportunities.

The medical model of disability



- Needs and wants to be CURED
- Can make LITTLE OR NO CONTRIBUTION at work
- Has SOMETHING WRONG with him/her
- The IMPAIRMENT is the problem
- Should be AT HOME or IN A HOME

- Needs DECISIONS about him/ herself to be made by EXPERTS
- Is DANGEROUS to her/himself and others
- CAN'T do things e.g.. walk, talk, climb stairs, read, etc
- Is not like NORMAL people
- Needs CONSTANT CARE

The social model of disability



- Needs and wants to BE ACCEPTED
- Can make a SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION at work
- There is SOMETHING WRONG with society if it excludes him/her
- PREJUDICE and BARRIERS are the main problems
- Can be INVOLVED in society, at work and otherwise

- Can – and has the right to – MAKE DECISIONS for her/himself
- Is NOT DANGEROUS so long as society does not create danger
- CAN do things, if barriers are removed and with support or equipment if necessary
- Is a NORMAL person (whatever that means)
- Can be INDEPENDENT with appropriate support

“ Between 2005/06 and 2015/16 the proportion of apprentices classified as disabled fell from 11 per cent to 9.9 per cent. ”

Disabled people and Apprenticeships

The government collects statistics¹ on the number of disabled people accessing Apprenticeships. These highlight that widening access is still a major challenge. For example, between the years 2005/06 and 2015/16, the proportion of apprentices classified as disabled fell from 11 per cent to 9.9 per cent. The number of disabled people starting an Apprenticeship has actually increased in this period (up from 19,230 to 50,640) but this increase has not mirrored the much more rapid growth in Apprenticeships among other groups.

In comparison, the official government statistics for further education show the proportion of students classified as disabled is not only higher than that for apprentices but has also been growing. The proportion of FE students classified as disabled increased from 11.5 per cent in 2008/09 to 17 per cent in 2014/15.

The employment rate of disabled people remains below 50 per cent, at 47.2 per cent in 2015. It averaged around 46.6 per cent between 2008 and 2014. The latest



employment rate for non-disabled people is 80.3 per cent, and the average rate between 2008 and 2015 was 78.0 per cent.²

¹ Apprenticeship Programme Starts by Learners with Learning Difficulties and/ or Disabilities (2005/06 to 2015/16) – Learner Volumes. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586183/apprenticeships-starts-by-geography-learner-demographics-and-sector-subject-area.xlsx

² October-December 2015, Great Britain, TUC analysis of Labour Force Survey

Government plans to increase disabled people's access to Apprenticeships

The government has committed to increase the number of Apprenticeships substantially by delivering three million Apprenticeship starts in England by 2020. In the last parliamentary period (May 2010 to April 2015 inclusive), there were 2.4 million Apprenticeship starts, so there will be a significant increase.

The Apprenticeship Levy

The Apprenticeship Levy (www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeship-levy) requires all employers operating in the UK, with a pay bill over £3m each year, to make an investment in Apprenticeships. The levy is a monthly, mandatory financial contribution made by employers to the Treasury. It is anticipated that the levy will raise £3bn a year.

Employers will be able to recoup their levy contribution if they take on apprentices. The levy can be used to fund apprentices aged 16 and over. Apprentices can be new entrants or existing employees.

Apprenticeship levy example:

An employer of 250 employees, each with a gross salary of £20,000, would pay:

Pay bill: $250 \times £20,000 = £5,000,000$

Levy sum: $0.5\% \times £5,000,000 = £25,000$

Allowance: $£25,000 - £15,000 = £10,000$
annual levy payment

The introduction of the levy will undoubtedly lead to the creation of new Apprenticeships. This provides a good opportunity for unions to become involved at the start of Apprenticeship programmes and to negotiate high-quality opportunities.

The government has also introduced an Apprenticeship target for public sector organisations with more than 250 employees, in addition to their levy requirements. The target will require public sector organisations to work towards employing an average of at least 2.3 per cent of their workforce as new apprentices over the period 2017–2020.

Quality Apprenticeships

Trade unions have consistently called for the increase in Apprenticeships to be matched by an improvement in Apprenticeship quality. One feature of a quality Apprenticeship programme is that under-represented groups are given equal opportunities to start an Apprenticeship. A good Apprenticeship programme will include strategies to ensure that Apprenticeships are accessible to the widest possible demographic and a diverse spread of people.

The government has committed to halving the disability employment gap and by ensuring Apprenticeships are accessible, it will help to upskill disabled people. The government also recognises that work is required to improve the participation rates for

“The government has committed to halving the disability employment gap and by ensuring Apprenticeships are accessible, it will help to upskill disabled people.”

disabled apprentices and help more disabled people into employment. Employment rates for disabled people hover around 47 per cent and the lifelong costs of economic inactivity are considerable.

Maynard taskforce

In May 2016, the government commissioned a taskforce chaired by Paul Maynard MP to explore access to Apprenticeships for those with learning difficulties.

The main objectives of the taskforce were to:

- reach an understanding of the issues and barriers that affect people with learning difficulties in accessing and completing an Apprenticeship
- identify solutions that could help overcome these barriers and raise participation levels
- make recommendations to Ministers on which options to pursue.

The taskforce also drew on a previous report commissioned by the government, *Creating an Inclusive Apprenticeship Offer*, which was written by Peter Little (www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/eg1724).

The 14 recommendations put forward by the Maynard taskforce can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-recommendations

The government has accepted all of the taskforce's recommendations and is currently taking forward action to deliver on them, including the following:

- a communications strategy to promote awareness of accessible Apprenticeships, including highlighting available financial support (e.g. Access to Work) and setting out the positive business benefits for employers
- a review of the minimum standards of English and maths required for Apprenticeships in the case of people with learning difficulties
- government leadership by example as an employer by recruiting more disabled apprentices
- a pilot to test out how the Apprenticeship Levy system can be flexed to encourage more employers to recruit apprentices with learning difficulties
- government awareness-raising of non-traditional recruitment practices to encourage more employers to recruit apprentices with learning difficulties.

One of the specific outcomes of these recommendations is that the government has confirmed that the British Sign Language (BSL) qualifications are now accepted as an alternative to functional skills in English for apprentices where BSL is their first language.



Funding incentives

As part of the funding reforms introduced in April 2017, there are a number of new incentives to encourage employers to support disabled people to access Apprenticeships. These funding incentives apply to employers paying the levy and all other employers who do not pay the levy because their annual pay bill is less than £3m a year. Employers who don't pay the levy have to pay 10 per cent of the total training costs of each apprentice they take on and the government pays the remaining 90 per cent.

The following funding incentives apply to employers recruiting disabled apprentices (and some other groups):

- Government pays an additional £1,000 to employers and a further £1,000 to training providers for apprentices aged 19-24 who have an Education, Health and Care Plan provided by their local authority (young people aged up to 25 qualify for a EHCP if they require

additional special educational needs support). These additional payments are also triggered in the case of care leavers aged 19-24 or any young person aged 16-18 recruited to an Apprenticeship, whether or not they are disabled.

- In addition to the £1,000 payment, small employers with less than 50 employees who take on any of the above groups do not have to pay anything toward the training costs of these apprentices (as opposed to the normal 10 per cent payment).
- In addition to the £1,000 payment, training providers can claim up to £150 a month for disabled apprentices who require extra learning support and any additional costs in this area where the provider can demonstrate evidenced need.

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/562401/Apprenticeship_funding_from_May_2017.pdf

Initiatives to support disabled workers

There are a number of initiatives to support disabled people into work. These initiatives will also be effective in ensuring disabled people can access Apprenticeship opportunities.



Access to Work

An Access to Work grant can pay for practical support for a disabled person beyond 'reasonable adjustment' required under the Equality Act 2010. The money can pay for things like:

- adaptations to the equipment they use
- special equipment
- excess fares to work if they can't use public transport
- a support worker or job coach to help them in their workplace
- a support service if they have a mental health condition and they're absent from work or finding it difficult to work
- disability awareness training for their colleagues
- a communicator at a job interview
- the cost of moving their equipment if they change location or job.

More information: www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

Disability Confident

This is a government initiative to ensure employers can employ disabled people with confidence. It helps to upskill employers and provides them with useful information and resources. The government lists the benefits as:

- enabling employers to draw from the widest possible pool of talent
- enabling employers to secure high-quality staff who are skilled, loyal and hard-working
- saving time and money on the costs of recruitment and training by reducing staff turnover
- helping employers keep valuable skills and experience
- reducing the levels and costs of sickness absences
- improving employee morale and commitment by demonstrating that employers treat all employees fairly.

More information: www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign

Pre-Apprenticeship options

Some disabled (or non-disabled) people may not be ready to embark on a full Apprenticeship because they want to become accustomed to employment by doing work experience first.



These pre-Apprenticeship opportunities are unpaid and there is a range of voluntary and community organisations across the country that facilitate work experience placements with employers. However, the TUC has highlighted a number of safeguards that union reps should address to prevent employers exploiting young people entering a workplace on such programmes, whether they are disabled or not. For example, the TUC has published a **Charter for Traineeships**, which is available at: www.unionlearn.org.uk/traineeships. The TUC's ambition is to ensure Apprenticeships are as inclusive and accessible as possible so everyone can access them including disabled and non-disabled people.

The government has also recently announced that it is going to test out a new voluntary supported Work Experience programme for young disabled people. This will enable them to benefit from time in the workplace with a mainstream employer to build their confidence and skills, enhance their CV and demonstrate their ability to perform a job role.

There are also two specific government programmes involving structured work experience that are available to young disabled people:

→ *Supported Internships* – this programme is aimed at people aged 16-25 who have an Education, Health and Care Plan and is usually provided through a partnership between an employer, an education provider (usually a FE college) and ideally a supported employer provider. A supported internship involves a work experience placement of at least six months, personal support from a job coach and a personalised study programme.

→ *Traineeships* – this programme is aimed at 16- to 24-year-olds who are unemployed and do not have the necessary qualifications to achieve an Apprenticeship place or another form of employment with training. The government says that the core components of a Traineeship are a high-quality work experience placement, work preparation training and support to improve English and maths qualifications, if required.

More information on the government programmes mentioned above is available on the government website www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-and-support-for-young-disabled-people-to-find-and-stay-in-work

Addressing the barriers that disabled workers face

Employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled people can carry out their duties. The vast majority of disabled people in work can be supported by these reasonable adjustments, which are often at low or no cost – 95 per cent are low cost and most are under £200.



The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published a list of possible reasonable adjustments including:

- physical changes to buildings
- changes to work duties
- changes to hours of work
- allowing working from home
- allowing time off for treatment
- modifying equipment
- modifying tests or assessments
- taking periods of 'disability leave' not counted as sickness absence
- employing a support worker, reader or interpreter
- modifying grievance or disciplinary procedures

- adjusting redundancy selection procedures
- transfer to a vacant position elsewhere in the company.

The adjustment must deal with the issue and be reasonable for the employer.

The duration of an Apprenticeship is generally based on an apprentice working 30 hours a week or more, including the off-the-job training they need to undertake. However, government guidance states that a part-time working pattern can be adopted in order to meet the circumstances of specific groups undertaking an Apprenticeship, including disabled people facing difficulties working and studying full-time. To enable these apprentices to have the time to complete the required training elements of the programme, the duration of the Apprenticeship is extended pro-rata. For example, if a disabled apprentice was enrolled on an Apprenticeship with a minimum duration of one year and they were averaging 15 hours per week, the minimum duration would be increased to two years.

The government guidance is available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612159/PROVIDER_V3__1_.pdf



The table below highlights some of the obstacles disabled people may face in accessing Apprenticeship opportunities. This relates to the demand side (i.e. how people view Apprenticeships) and the supply side (the barriers in the working environment

that may stop disabled people accessing or staying in good-quality Apprenticeships). Many of these issues may impact non-disabled people as well but there are additional barriers for disabled apprentices.

Demand-side	Supply-side
Parental views of suitable occupations	Lack of positive role models and mentors
Perception about routes to a good job	Exclusive recruitment practices
Lack of knowledge of (the benefits of) Apprenticeships	Direct and indirect discrimination
Negative perceptions of Apprenticeships	Lack of focus on equality and diversity among providers
Lack of direct occupationally relevant experience	Lack of Apprenticeship vacancies
Lack of confidence	High levels of competition for Apprenticeship vacancies
Stereotyped perceptions of occupations	Lack of flexible working conditions
Cultural barriers	Lack of suitable support
Earlier decisions for non-Apprenticeship routes	Impacts of policy developments
Lack of, inaccurate or insufficient careers guidance	At local level, Apprenticeships can reflect only the make-up of the local population

Reproduced from *Under-Representation By Gender And Race In Apprenticeships*, unionlearn research paper No. 13, November 2013 www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/UnderRepresentationInApprenticeships.pdf

Recommendations for unions

When making collective bargaining arrangements, you may want raise the following with the employer. (This checklist is used with permission from the Learning and Work Institute.)

✓ **Think about the job description.**

Employers should only include requirements in the job description or person specification if they are essential for a candidate to complete an Apprenticeship. By including non-essential requirements, an employer may inadvertently be discriminating against disabled candidates.

✓ **Let disabled people know that you welcome applications from them.**

It is important that employers make clear in their recruitment materials that they would welcome applications from disabled

candidates. If they are a 'Two Ticks' employer (www.gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people/encouraging-applications), an Investor in Diversity or a Mindful Employer, they should say so in their job adverts. If their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities show their commitment to disabled staff, they should say so in their recruitment materials. Similarly, if they have – and take pride in – a diverse workforce, they should say so. Employers could include one or two monitoring statistics to show this includes disabled people. Also, it is important to include information on how applicants can declare they are disabled.

✓ **Provide recruitment materials in alternative formats.**

All recruitment materials should be written concisely, in Plain English and in an accessible font and size to reduce the need for alternative format versions. Making recruitment materials available as Word documents (rather than PDF files) will make them more accessible to people who use assistive technology. However, some candidates may require information in formats other than text and may contact an employer to request their recruitment materials be provided to them in alternative formats.

✓ **Work with partners to advertise vacancies.**

In order to reach disabled candidates, employers may want to work with disabled people's organisations, education and





training organisations (such as the National Apprenticeship Service), training providers and voluntary or community organisations, to advertise and promote their Apprenticeship vacancies to as wide a network and range of communities as possible.

✓ **Make interviews and assessments inclusive and accessible.**

Employers should ensure that they offer to make reasonable adjustments at interview and assessment stages. More information on what this might include is on the Equalities and Human Rights Commission website (www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/multipage-guide/employing-people-workplace-adjustments). If an employer has made people feel safe enough to declare that they are disabled, they may describe in their application the reasonable adjustments they will need at interview and in assessments.

Checklist for reps when negotiating for workplace Apprenticeship policies

- ✓ Consider what reasonable adjustments your employer could make and what support services they could offer in order to make their Apprenticeship programmes accessible to disabled people. It is worth considering that disclosure is difficult but without disclosure, adjustments cannot be made.

- ✓ Raise awareness of government support programmes that are in place to help employers take on disabled workers, such as Access to Work, Disability Confident, Supported Internships and Traineeships (see more on pages 6-7).
- ✓ Encourage your employer to take advantage of the flexible and part-time working arrangements that are allowed for specific groups including disabled apprentices (see more on page 8).
- ✓ Urge your employer to encourage applications for Apprenticeships from under-represented groups by considering how marketing and recruitment strategies could reach a wider audience.
- ✓ Encourage your employer to use more targeted recruitment by working with community groups and media outlets that work closely with under-represented groups.
- ✓ Work with your employer to tackle workplace discrimination and discriminatory recruitment practices that exclude disabled candidates.
- ✓ Encourage your employer to consider giving interviews to applicants from under-represented groups who meet the minimum selection criteria, and consider using positive action to address under-representation.

“ Ask current apprentices and employees from under-represented groups to act as role models or ‘champions’. ”



- ✓ Work with your employer to carry out equality and diversity training for managers and others involved in recruitment.
- ✓ Ask current apprentices and employees from under-represented groups to act as role models or ‘champions’.
- ✓ Encourage your employer to engage with particular under-represented groups by holding recruitment days at community events.
- ✓ Look for training providers that are actively involved in training apprentices from diverse backgrounds, and have incorporated their views in the design, development, review and delivery of Apprenticeships.
- ✓ Encourage your employer to target information at parents of young people from disadvantaged groups to help address their under-representation.
- ✓ Work with your employer to ensure the composition of the workforce reflects the local community.
- ✓ Negotiate a comprehensive equal opportunities policy.
- ✓ Check whether any workforce training and development plan has an equal opportunities clause.
- ✓ Check that training provided to the staff involved in running the Apprenticeship programme includes training on equal opportunities and its application to recruitment.
- ✓ Put in place steps to monitor the outcome of Apprenticeships to ensure that people from under-represented groups gain access to long-term employment opportunities.
- ✓ On-the-job support both in terms of job coaching but also mentoring is critical to success for apprentices with learning difficulties. Mentoring has been shown to be particularly effective for apprentices with learning difficulties, some of whom may have limited experience of the workplace, while others may have difficulties integrating themselves into a team. Mentors are also important in that they can monitor progress and spot signs of distress or simply where the apprentice might be struggling. Structured job coaching is crucial for some and its availability through Access to Work must be promoted.
- ✓ If the apprentice has learning difficulties and disabilities they can have an adjustment, which means that they don't have to achieve Level 2 in English and/or maths. Find out more from the training provider.

Helping disabled apprentices progress into full-time work

As a young man with autism, David Herbert faced some significant challenges during his Advanced Mechanical Engineering Apprenticeship at the Sellafield nuclear power plant in Cumbria.

The kind of communication problems that are common among people on the spectrum sometimes led to conflict when David and his co-workers misunderstood each other, while his greater dependence on his parents (another common characteristic) made his transition from school to work a bumpier ride than for many of his peers.

But the quality of his work was never in doubt: he won a company award recognising his

contribution in and outside work, and was a finalist in the apprentice of the year category at the local Chamber of Commerce Excellence in Cumbria awards.

However, after he completed his Apprenticeship, the transport department where he was first placed did not have a full-time position available, so the company asked Carl Lewthwaite, who is the disability lead on the GMB national equality forum, as well as the company's disability, equality and welfare adviser, to help find an alternative place for David to progress in the business.

Since Carl had supported people with autism before and has a nephew who is autistic, he knew it would be important to get to know David himself and learn about the barriers he himself faced in the workplace.



“I had to learn and understand the social barriers through David and then use that understanding and my knowledge of the business to come up with somewhere more suitable, where there would be a real job for an apprentice coming out of his time.”

“I had to learn and understand the social barriers through David and then use that understanding and my knowledge of the business to come up with somewhere more suitable, where there would be a real job for an apprentice coming out of his time,” Carl explains.

After getting to know David by spending time with him at work, visiting him at home and talking to his parents, Carl decided the young man would make a good addition to the team at Calder Hall, the now decommissioned site where workers are removing tens of thousands of fuel rods from its four reactors.

“I had a sense of what working life was like in that department because I’d personally supported other people who worked there, and knew the kind of people he’d be working with, and that there was a low turnover of staff,” Carl explains.

Once the human resources department agreed the move, Carl regularly spent time supporting David and his new team leader, who had never worked with anyone on the spectrum before.

The new placement worked brilliantly: not only did David thrive in his new surroundings, but his team leader developed hitherto unsuspected paternal qualities that meant the two of them acquired the nickname ‘dad and lad’. “They don’t work together any more, but the team leader will tell you openly and

honestly that working with David changed him as a person, which is wonderful,” Carl says.

After three years in the department, David was encouraged to apply for a promotion by the head of engineering: although he was initially hesitant that he would be able to progress, David accepted Carl’s help with interview preparation and secured his current role as an equipment engineer.

Now 30 years old, David continues to enjoy his work at Calder Hall. “The support that I received has eventually led me to overcome the hurdles and succeed in the workplace,” David says. “One thing that I think is demonstrated in my story is not so much the support the union can provide to one individual but what benefits can be gleaned if both employer and union work together.”

Implementing an inclusive approach to Apprenticeship support

When Usdaw union learning rep (ULR) co-ordinator Sean Dixon found out that one of his learners was struggling with some aspects of his IT Apprenticeship, he stepped in to see how he could help.



Sean runs The Learning Zone at the Argos Castleford Distribution Centre (DC) near Wakefield, one the jewels in the crown of Usdaw's network of leaning centres around the country.

Peter, one of the warehouse clerks at Castleford, had enrolled on the Apprenticeship in January 2016, and within a few weeks, the tutor from training provider JTDS spoke to Sean to flag up a couple of issues.

"He said Peter had scored lower than would be expected in the Functional Skills assessment everyone takes when they start the Apprenticeship and he seemed to have trouble taking information on board when he was left to work through the worksheets," Sean recalls.

With his years of experience as a ULR at Castleford and a shift trainer in his previous role at Co-operative Retail Logistics, plus the knowledge he had gained on his ULR training course, Sean thought it might be possible that Peter had undiagnosed dyslexia.

And when he sat down with him and the tutor to discuss his progress, Peter revealed

that he had his own suspicions about mild dyslexia, although he had never gone for a formal diagnosis.

After seeking advice from Castleford's occupational health team and the Functional Skills specialists at JTDS, Sean developed an action plan of practical support.

First he made sure both Peter and his JTDS tutors learned how to change the background colours on the computer screens in The Learning Zone so Peter could find the best combination that would enable him to do his coursework.

Then he secured the agreement of the steering group for the centre to buy a set of coloured overlays and reading rulers that would help Peter to read printed course materials more easily.

"Although this didn't fully remedy all my issues, this didn't stop the reps from trying to find a solution," Peter says. "I am really grateful for their efforts in trying, which made me feel I was being treated as an individual and with respect for me at all times."

Sean's inclusive approach has ensured that Peter is keen to access further learning at the centre. "The problems Peter is having with this mild dyslexia have not put him off wanting to learn: The fact that he knows we'll try and support all learners who come in is a positive for him – he knows that support is here," he says.

“ Sean has also asked two of the ULRs on his team to look at further enhancements that could make The Learning Centre even more inclusive than it is at the moment. ”

In addition, the overlays have already proved helpful for one of the other learners at the centre: since his partner has struggled with reading, he borrowed the pack of overlays so his partner could identify the best colour for her and buy her own.

Sean has also asked two of the ULRs on his team to look at further enhancements that could make The Learning Centre even more

inclusive than it is at the moment, with one drawing up a dyslexia-friendly action plan and the other doing something similar for other learning differences.

“If anyone has a problem that could stop them from learning, we can find a way around it: that’s what we’re here to do – we’re here to help,” Sean says.



Find out more

Unionlearn has also produced a detailed guide to Apprenticeships – the *Apprenticeships Toolkit* – for union negotiators and reps. Hard copies of this toolkit can be ordered from the TUC and there is also an interactive online version. For more information, go to:

*[www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/
apprenticeships-toolkit](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit)*

For further information about Apprenticeships and equality issues, go to:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeships

www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues

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