

Accessible Apprenticeships

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

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Section one

Introduction

The social model of disability

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 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.

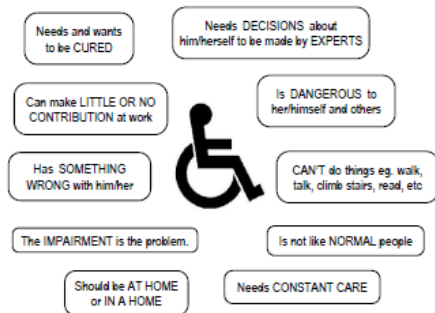
At the heart of this guide is the social model of disability and how union representatives/officers can use it to address the barriers disabled people face when accessing Apprenticeship opportunities.

Disabled people and apprenticeships

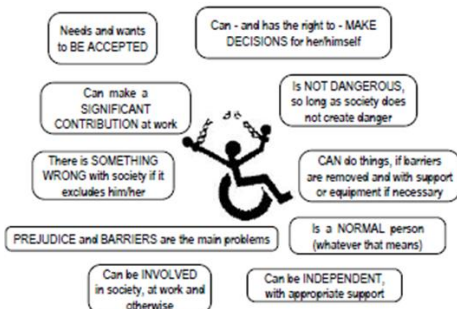
The government collects statistics on the number of disabled people accessing apprenticeships that highlight how widening access remains a major challenge. For example, looking at the last 10 years, 2005/06 – 2015/16, the proportion of apprentices classified as disabled has fallen from 11 per cent to 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 there is a higher proportion of students who are classified as disabled than apprentices. For example, 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 MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



The latest 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.

Section two

Government plans to increase disabled people's access to apprenticeships

The government has committed to substantially increase the number of Apprenticeships. Some of the recent Apprenticeship reforms include:

3 million target

The government has committed to delivering 3 million Apprenticeship starts in England by 2020. In the last parliamentary period (May 2010 to April 2015 inclusive), there were 2.4m Apprenticeship starts, so there will be a substantial increase in the number of Apprenticeship starts.

The Apprenticeship Levy

The Apprenticeship Levy (<https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeship-levy>) requires all employers operating in the UK, with a pay bill over £3 million 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:

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 inception of Apprenticeship programmes and to negotiate high-quality opportunities.

Apprenticeship public sector targets

The government has 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% 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. A quality Apprenticeship programme should ensure 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 disabled apprentices and help more disabled people into employment. The rate of disabled apprentices hovers around 6.8%.

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:

1. reach an understanding of the issues and barriers that affect people with

learning difficulties in accessing and completing an Apprenticeship

2. identify solutions that could help overcome these barriers and raise participation levels
3. 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 (<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/eg1724>).

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

<https://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 now confirmed that for the first time British Sign Language (BSL) will be accepted as an accredited qualification to meet the minimum standard in English for apprentices where BSL is their first language.

In addition, as part of the Apprenticeship funding reforms the government introduced in May 2017, employers who take on 19 to 24-year-olds who were formerly in care or who have an Education and Health Care plan will receive £1,000 to help meet the extra costs associated with this direct from the government, while providers training them will receive a government payment equivalent to 20 per cent of the funding band maximum for the relevant Apprenticeship framework (Apprenticeship funding in England from May 2017

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

Section three

Initiatives to support disabled workers

Role of employers

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. These include:

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:

<https://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:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collectons/disability-confident-campaign>

Pre-Apprenticeship options

There may be circumstances where a disabled (or a non-disabled) person is not ready to immediately embark on a full Apprenticeship because they want to access a pre-Apprenticeship option – for example, a period of supported work experience to help them become accustomed to employment.

All these pre-Apprenticeship opportunities involve unpaid work experience and 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:

<https://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.

There is a range of voluntary and community organisations across the country that facilitate work experience placements with employers and when these are of a good quality they can support disabled people to progress to an Apprenticeship.

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:

1. *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.

2. *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, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-and-support-for-young-disabled-people-to-find-and-stay-in-work> victimisation or harassment, they also have a legal duty to ensure that others

Section four

Addressing the barriers 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 table below (reproduced from Under-representation by gender and race in Apprenticeships, Unionlearn Research paper No. 13, November 2013 –

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

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.

<i>Demand-side</i>	<i>Supply-side</i>
Parental views of suitable occupations	Lack of positive role models and mentors
Perceptions 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

Section five

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 (<https://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 demonstrate their commitment to disabled staff, they should say so in their recruitment materials. Similarly, if they have – and take pride – in a diverse workforce, say so. Employers could include one or two monitoring statistics to show this includes disabled people. In addition, 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 available on the Equalities and Human Rights Commission website (<https://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 facilitate employers taking on disabled workers such as the ones noted above.
- ✓ Encourage your employer to take advantage of the flexible and part time working arrangements that are allowed for specific groups including disabled apprentices.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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 and disabilities (LDD). Mentoring has been shown to be particularly effective for apprentices with LDD, 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.



Section five

Good practice case studies

Case studies

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 GMB branch equality officer Carl Lewthwaite 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," 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) coordinator 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 centers 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.

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

For more information about equality issues, go to:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeships

Follow the campaign on:

<https://twitter.com/unionlearn>

Follow the TUC on Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/tucunionlearn/