

There are 870,000 working age people with a learning disability in the UK (1). Mencap's Big Learning Disability Survey in 2022 found just over a quarter (26.7%) of working age adult respondents were currently in work (2). Research commissioned by Mencap, meanwhile, found that 86% of learning-disabled respondents not currently not in work would like a job (3). Mencap believes this must and can improve.

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is caused by the way the brain develops before, during or shortly after birth. It is always lifelong and affects someone's intellectual and social development. There are different types of learning disability, which can be mild, moderate, severe or profound. It used to be called 'mental handicap' but this term is outdated and offensive. Learning disability is NOT a mental illness nor a learning difficulty, with the latter including things like dyslexia or dyspraxia.

What does this mean in the context of employment?

People with a learning disability can make great employees! [See Fact Sheet 2: The benefits of hiring someone with a learning disability.](#)

However, people with a learning disability find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate. They may need some support with learning new

tasks or with understanding new situations. They may lack confidence and need a little extra support at the start, particularly as many may not have had any work experience before.

You may need to provide some adjustments in the workplace to help them do their job, but this does not mean that they are unable to work. You can find further information about what adjustments you can make to get the best out of an employee with a learning disability in [Fact sheet 4: Making reasonable adjustments](#). Adjustments need not cost a lot of money – in fact, most are free.

Types of roles people with a learning disability can typically do

People with a learning disability are all individuals with different skills, so they will be able to do many different kinds of jobs. A learning disability can be mild, moderate or severe, so some people can do more complex tasks while others will need more basic responsibilities.

While we would encourage you to keep an open mind about what individuals can offer, there are some general guidelines about the sort of jobs you might be able to open up to candidates with a learning disability.

Jobs that could most easily be made accessible to people with a learning disability

These includes jobs that:

- require practical skills that can be learned through practice and repetition
- do not require high level qualifications
- do not require a driving licence
- have fixed elements and only require a little multitasking
- are within teams where tasks can be shared and support can be offered.

For example, roles like, but not limited to:

- warehouse operative
- administrator
- retail
- customer service
- cleaning
- catering

Many employers experience difficulty in recruiting to entry-level roles. Supported employment agencies, such as Mencap, can help guide employers and help match the right person to the right job.

More information about the various programmes and support appears in [Fact sheet 5: What support is available](#).

Sources:

1 Figures calculated by Mencap using learning disability prevalence data from [Public Health England \(2016\)](#) and population data from the [Office of National Statistics \(2020\)](#).

2 [Mencap \(2022\), Big Learning Disability Survey](#), p.15.

The rate for adults with learning disabilities known to adult social services in England is significantly lower still at 4.8%, though some people with learning disabilities who are in work may not be known to these services. See NHS Digital (2022), [‘Measures from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework England, 2021-22’](#), p. 26.

3 Harflett, N., Blood, L., Melling, K., Robinson, C., Richards, B., Chapman, S., Cooney, G., and Woodward, E., (2022), [‘Work and Learning Disability Research’](#), p. 20.

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