

Access all areas



Opening up apprenticeships and the world of work to people with a learning disability

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Foreword: Jan Tregelles



Supporting people with a learning disability into employment is one of Mencap's strategic objectives because we have witnessed again and again how getting a job changes people's lives for the better. It is not just that in some cases a person is better off financially. Being in a job is an opportunity to be part of society, to make friends and build confidence. Regrettably, it is something that few people with a learning disability get to experience.

Because of this, we have welcomed the Government's commitment to get 1 million more disabled people into work by 2027. It is vital that this commitment fully includes people with a learning disability.

At Mencap, we think education and training programmes are an impactful and sustainable solution to support more people to move into employment. That's why we see 'the three ships' – supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships – to be part of the solution. We believe that if done well, these training programmes could be a real step change for people with a learning disability and open up routes into work.

Apprenticeships are central to getting people with a learning disability into work; they are a widely recognised qualification, well regarded by employers and seen by individuals as something to strive for. And since we started to deliver apprenticeship training for people with a learning disability and take on apprentices ourselves, we have been able to witness the positive impact they can have. Over the last two years, we have seen individuals who never thought that they would be able to have a paid job, start an apprenticeship and being offered a permanent role at the end of it. We have seen people do and learn things they never thought possible.

However, delivering apprenticeships has also enabled us to get an insight into the things that are not working so well. We have seen, for example, that the maths and English requirements associated with apprenticeships are still a barrier for many people with a learning disability trying to access apprenticeships, and that employers willing to give people a chance are still few and far between.

Nevertheless, we are hopeful that things can change, once the right adjustments and frameworks are put into place. This is why we have welcomed working with the Department for Education to try to find solutions to some of the outstanding issues with apprenticeships we, as well as others, have identified.

We all must now make sure access to apprenticeships, and to employment, is opened up to as many people with a learning disability as possible.



1. Executive Summary

Unemployment has historically been extremely high for people with a learning disability. The latest employment figures show that only 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority were in employment in 2017/18¹.

High unemployment figures amongst this group coincide with people with a learning disability historically having had very few training options available to them, with the result that apprenticeship participation by people with a learning disability is very low with only 0.5% of all apprentices identifying as having a learning disability in 2017/2018².

This issue was once again highlighted during an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) session on apprenticeships in July 2018, with the maths and English requirements of apprenticeships being considered an issue central to this debate. Following the APPG, Anne Milton MP, the Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills therefore asked the APPG for Learning Disabilities to provide some further evidence, and make recommendations in relation to:

- improving self-declaration rates about whether an apprentice identifies as having a disability
- the English and maths flexibilities offered to those with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and whether Government could go further with supporting people with learning difficulties and/or a Disability (LDD) and expand the flexibilities
- best practice in supporting people with a learning disability and/or difficulty to achieve their full potential in maths and English

Mencap, which provides secretariat support to the APPG has taken this forward.

Between January 2019 and March 2019, Mencap conducted three workshops with about 25 stakeholders ranging from employers to providers, colleges and special schools to educational psychologists. The focus in these workshops was on people with a learning disability and/or difficulty. Participants in the workshops set out to explore what more needs to be done to ensure that apprenticeships are truly accessible to people with a learning disability and/or difficulty. In addition, Mencap also spoke to a number of people with a learning disability to get an insight into their experiences.

Based on the findings from these workshops, the insights we gathered from people with a learning disability themselves as well as wider research we undertook, Mencap makes a number of recommendations. They are focused on improving access to apprenticeships for people with a learning disability, but addressing them is likely to benefit a wider group of disabled people.

Recommendations for the Department for Education (DfE)

Issues	Recommendations
<p>Qualification requirements</p> <p>Workshop participants highlighted that there are currently many people with a learning disability and/or difficulty who cannot access an apprenticeship, because they do not have access to the flexibilities around English and maths available to those with EHC plans. Participants highlighted the inherent unfairness of this and asked for this to be urgently addressed, so as to ensure that this group of people has access to better routes into employment, thereby reducing the risk of them becoming NEET or long-term unemployed.</p>	<p>Recommendation 1: Mencap is urging the Department for Education to make the flexibilities around the maths and English requirements for apprenticeships currently available to those with Education, Health and Care Plans, also available to a wide group of people with a learning disability and/or difficulty who have through a clear process of assessing need been identified as requiring these flexibilities.</p> <p>Recommendation 2: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education make it a requirement for apprenticeship training providers to make available a cognitive assessment to every apprentice they think would benefit from doing such an assessment, as well as any apprentice who requests such an assessment.</p>
<p>Attendees highlighted that there are many people with a learning disability or difficulty who do not manage to get an entry level 3 maths and English qualification. As a result, they are unable to access this training opportunity, despite otherwise being able to fulfil the wider requirements of an apprenticeship.</p>	<p>Recommendation 3: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education remove the age cap on traineeships for people with a learning disability and looks to find ways to incentivise employers to offer more traineeship opportunities to this group.</p>

Issues	Recommendations
<p>Qualification requirements</p> <p>It was also highlighted that recent changes to the English and maths requirement in 2018 have made things more difficult even for those who have an Education, Health and Care Plan, as apprentices now need to achieve Entry Level 3 Functional Skills rather than the broader Entry level 3 level in maths and English.</p>	<p>Recommendation 4: Mencap recommends the Department for Education review whether the current maths and English qualification requirements in apprenticeships are fully accessible to people with a learning disability.</p>
<p>Working culture</p> <p>The issue of working culture was raised as a real concern. Participants suggested that the reasons why people are unlikely to be forthcoming with their support needs are that they are concerned about the reaction they may get from employers, should they do so. It was highlighted that individuals worry about being filtered out of any application process should their mention their disability or learning needs. Participants also raised the point that some disabled people, including people with a learning disability, may assume that a particular job role is not for them, as employers are not making it clearer that they are open to a more diverse workforce and will make reasonable adjustments.</p>	<p>Recommendation 5: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education and the National Apprenticeship Service continue to raise awareness of the apprenticeship offer, as well as the funding that is available to support apprentices with learning disabilities and/or difficulties with employers and providers.</p>

Issues	Recommendations
<p>Lack of awareness</p> <p>A recurring theme coming out of conversations in the workshops and with other reference groups such as the Apprenticeship Equality and Diversity Advisory Group was the issue of a lack of awareness of the rights that individuals have in relation to apprenticeships, and the flexibilities in relation to the English and maths requirements currently available to those with EHC plans.</p>	<p>Recommendation 6: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education and the National Apprenticeship Service continue the work to develop more accessible and clear resources for people with a learning disability around apprenticeships, and to ensure they are distributed widely.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 7: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education works more closely with local authorities to improve their Local Offers so as to ensure that all include clear, easy-to-find information about the routes into training and employment available to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including people with a learning disability, in their local area and the particular adjustments that are available to them.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 8: Mencap wants to see all schools to provide information and a personalised careers advice to pupils with a learning disability. This should include information about apprenticeships and the flexibilities that may be available to them. The Department for Education should continue to take action to ensure that all schools follow the rules, both in terms of the law and in the spirit the rules were intended.</p>

Issues	Recommendations
<p>Identifying inclusive providers Employers attending the workshops highlighted that it can be quite difficult as an employer, or in fact as a learner, to find out whether an apprenticeship provider or end-point assessor is good at ‘inclusion’. It was suggested that this can cause difficulties, as an employer may try to be inclusive and encourage disabled applicants, having signed up for example to the Disability Confident Scheme, but they have no guarantees that the same holds true for the provider.</p>	<p>Recommendation 9: Mencap asks the department for education to explore how providers and End-Point Assessors who are good or exemplary at inclusive practices could be made more visible to employers and prospective apprentices.</p>
<p>Current teaching approaches Person-centred approaches for teaching and assessing apprentices with a learning disability are widely recognised as good practice. However, there was widespread consensus in the workshops that current approaches to teaching at apprenticeship level are still a far way off being person-centred. While there is some good practice out there, it was discussed that many apprenticeship providers do not offer the support/teaching approaches people with a learning disability may need to succeed.</p>	<p>Recommendation 10: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education explores what support and guidance apprenticeship providers need to better support learners with a learning disability and/or difficulty, and to ensure that the right support and guidance is available to the sector.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 11. Mencap would like to see the Department for Education to ensure that all guidance aimed at employers supports them to better embed maths and English learning in the day-to-day jobs for apprentices, and that this guidance is widely distributed.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 12: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education works with apprenticeship providers to make claiming Additional Learning Support (ALS) and Excess Learning Support (ELS) easier, and to promote the funds’ availability.</p>

Issues	Recommendations
<p>Decrease in people with a learning disability doing apprenticeships</p> <p>Data from 2014/2015 indicates that at the same time as the overall proportion of apprentices with a learning difficulty and/or a disability has increased from a low in 2011/2012, the proportion of those with moderate and severe learning difficulties participating in an apprenticeship has decreased, from an already low base of 1% in 2011/2012 to 0.9% of apprentices in 2014/2015. Newest data from 2017/2018, although not directly comparable, seems to confirm this downward trend; only 0.5% of apprenticeship participants in 2017/2018 identified as having a learning disability.</p>	<p>Recommendation 13: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education introduce a target of 2.5% of all apprentices being people with a learning disability by 2025.</p>
<p>Lack of publicly available data</p> <p>Workshop members highlighted that there are group of people with a learning disability and/or difficulty who do not currently have access to apprenticeships because they cannot meet the English and maths requirements and do not have access to the flexibilities offered to those with EHC plans. There is currently no publicly available data providing a breakdown that shows how many young people there may be in this category</p>	<p>Recommendation 14: The Department for Education should publish data on how many people with a learning disability and/or difficulty do not achieve Level 1 in maths and English by the age of 19. This should be broken down into those who receive EHC plans and those who are in the SEND support group, the actual level they achieve, as well as the type of learning disability and/or difficulty they have.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 15: The Department for Education should improve the data collection in relation to the use of the flexibilities to ensure that monitoring the use of the flexibilities is possible and transparent.</p>

Recommendations for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Issues	Recommendations
<p>Lack of awareness</p> <p>A recurring theme coming out of conversations in the workshops and with other reference groups such as the Apprenticeship Equality and Diversity Advisory Group was the issue of a lack of awareness of the rights that individuals have in relation to apprenticeships, and the flexibilities in relation to the English and maths requirements currently available to those with EHC plans.</p>	<p>Recommendation 16: Mencap would recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions continues to use the Disability Confident scheme and the platform that it provides to raise awareness of best practice in this field, and provide more information to employers about the benefits of employing people with a learning disability, information about workplace adjustments and the flexibilities that are available to apprentices with a learning disability and/or difficulty.</p>
<p>Working culture</p> <p>The issue of working culture was raised as a real concern. Participants suggested that the reasons why people are unlikely to be forthcoming with their support needs are that they are concerned about the reaction they may get from employers, should they do so. It was highlighted that individuals worry about being filtered out of any application process should their mention their disability or learning needs. Participants also raised the point that some disabled people, including people with a learning disability, may assume that a particular job role is not for them, as employers are not making it clearer that they are open to a more diverse workforce and will make reasonable adjustments.</p>	<p>Recommendation 17: Mencap recommends that the Department for Work and Pensions strengthen the Disability Confident scheme and review the requirements made of employers to ensure that the scheme supports the culture change necessary to encourage disabled people to declare their needs.</p>



2. Introduction

Unemployment has historically been extremely high for people with a learning disability. The latest employment figures show that only 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority were in employment in 2017/18.³

High unemployment figures amongst this group coincide with people with a learning disability historically having had very few training options available to them. In theory apprenticeships should work well for people with a learning disability, as they resemble in many ways the 'place, train and fade' model of supported employment, which we know works for people with a learning disability. However, participation in apprenticeships by people with learning disabilities has fallen over the years from what was already a very low base. In 2014/2015, for example, only 0.9% of all apprenticeship participants were people with moderate and severe learning difficulties⁴. Most recent data, although not directly comparable, suggests an even lower participation rate, with the number in 2017/2018 standing at 0.5%⁵ of all apprenticeships participants.

In 2012, Peter Little OBE highlighted the problem and the need to make apprenticeships more inclusive. The Maynard Taskforce built on this in 2016 and made a number of recommendations with the view to make apprenticeships more accessible to people with a learning disability. The Government accepted all of these recommendations and made a number of changes as a result. These changes include exemptions for people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) around the English and maths requirements⁶ of an apprenticeship, as well as additional funding for those learners. All of these were welcomed by those working with people with a learning disability.

With the changes taking effect, as well as the wider apprenticeship reforms coming in, some providers and employers have started to open up their apprenticeship programmes to a more diverse group of people, including people with a learning disability; we have started to see the first success stories coming through. However, it is also becoming clear that there is still a lot more to do to make apprenticeships accessible to more people with a learning disability, and that some of the wider reforms may have unintended negative consequences on this group.

There are, for example, still concerns about the maths and English requirements that are part of an apprenticeship. Our own experience and consultation with stakeholders indicates that the flexibilities offered do not go far enough or are too complex to deliver. This leaves many people with a learning disability still unable to access apprenticeships as a route to employment.

Minister Anne Milton, responded to concerns raised in July 2018 by asking the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Learning Disabilities to explore this further. In addition, the Minister was keen for the APPG to explore what more needs to be done to encourage disabled people to declare their needs, to ensure that they get the support they require.

Mencap, which provides secretariat support to the APPG, has taken this forward, and held a

series of workshops with a range of stakeholders, ranging from providers of apprenticeships to employers, colleges and SENCOs, to explore this further, and to make a series of recommendations. We also spoke to people with a learning disability directly to gather insights into their experiences; these are highlighted in the case studies. This report is the result of these efforts.

We are now looking to the Government to take forward these recommendations and to continue to work with Mencap and other stakeholders to create a truly inclusive apprenticeship offer that will enable people with a learning disability to improve their chances of employment.

CASE STUDY - Homes for Haringey

My story – Qasim

I am Qasim and I am 24 years old. I have a learning disability, dyslexia, some mobility issues and asthma. I went to a special school where I had a statement and I currently have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). After school I went to college, where I did a number of vocational qualifications, but also did my maths and English, both up to entry level 3. I do have some difficulties with writing, spelling and reading, and I find maths also quite difficult.

When I left college Mencap started supporting me. They had come to me college, which is why I knew about them. It was through them that I started a supported internship in 2017, which lasted for one year. I learned a lot during this time, and when I finished, I briefly got a job at another employer for six weeks. But it didn't last that long so Mencap offered me to move to a traineeship with Homes for Haringey – and I am still here, now doing my Level 2 Apprenticeship in Customer Service.

I love my job and I have learned so much over the time I have been here. I am excited about being part of mainstream society and I really think that learning on the job has been really good for me. I think my vocabulary has really improved and I am able to do a lot more things than I used to. If you had asked me two years ago whether I would ever have been able to do an apprenticeship, I would have said no way. I didn't think I had the right qualifications. And I really wasn't confident travelling anywhere. But now I am here, and I have been told that if I pass my apprenticeship, I will have a permanent job at Homes for Haringey. I am very excited about this. They have been so supportive of me, which has really helped.

My parents have always supported me with getting a job, but I don't think this is the same for everyone. I think that's really important. And I don't think young people with a learning disability don't know enough about apprenticeships and that they can do them. I feel that this needs to change. Everyone with a learning disability should have this opportunity. It has really changed my life for the better.

Mahi, Qasim's manager

One of the things I love about working for Homes for Haringey is our diversity. We are a diverse employer proudly serving our wonderfully diverse and vibrant community. In my role as an Executive Assistant to the Managing Director and the Director of Housing Demand, I always felt I could do with a second pair of hands to help with tasks that take time but wouldn't really be enough for a full-time employee. When Sean McLaughlin, our new Managing Director floated the idea for a junior assistant, I was keen; when he suggested recruiting someone with a learning disability, I was really thrilled. As well as fitting perfectly with our ethos as an employer, for me, this was personally rewarding.

We were keen to ensure the role was easy to understand and the interview selection was not overwhelming – the process of designing an easy to read job spec and coming up with a different style of interviewing was interesting and fun to do.

In a very short time, Qasim has been a huge hit around the office. He is everything I'm not! He complements the team, he is outgoing and confident and easily strikes up a conversation with everyone, offering his help. He knows everyone, and everyone knows him. The response from his co-workers has been amazing too. It has really resonated with staff. After all we work with residents who have learning disabilities, so recruiting someone who reflects our community plan makes sense.

It is important to note that even though Homes for Haringey is an inclusive employer, Qasim is not a charitable recruitment – he has an important role helping me support the MD and the Director. Qasim is responsible for meeting and greeting all the MDs guests and he creates a fantastic first impression of our organisation. He has a list of usual tasks that help the office run smoothly, such as preparing meeting papers and keeping the stationary cupboard stocked, and on top of his usual tasks he has been assigned his own projects. He is for example responsible for keeping and managing the Recognition and Reward cards, so all the staff in our head office must come and see him for these.

Qasim has made a lot of progress in a short time frame and he is so much more confident than when he first started. Working with Qasim has been a learning curve for me too! I tend to work at 100 miles an hour, and in the last six months, I have learnt to slow down to explain myself and make sure my instructions have been understood. But when you think about it – that's just plain good practice. In short, Qasim has made me a better person to work with and I would wholeheartedly recommend any employer not hold any preconceived notions and to seriously consider looking at recruiting someone with a learning disability. All people have the capacity to learn well and no one walked into their first job knowing everything. A big thank you to Mencap for supporting us all the way and always being on hand if we need anything.

However, whilst it's fantastic that Qasim has been able to benefit from the apprenticeship, other people with a learning disability who could also benefit may not be able to access opportunities like these because they cannot meet the English and maths requirements of an apprenticeship, or because an employer thinks they cannot do it. This report raises important new ideas about how these barriers can be addressed, and we welcome that and want to see everyone who could benefit from an apprenticeship able to access it, and like Qasim, look forward to a positive future.





3. Background

a. Who is this report about and what do we know about them?

There are approximately 1.4 million people with a learning disability in the UK, with around 863,000 of those being adults of working age.^{7,8,9} Approximately 2.16% of adults in the UK are believed to have a learning disability, it is estimated that approximately 2.16% of adults in the UK have a learning disability.¹⁰

What is a learning disability?

Mencap defines learning disability as a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life.

People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complicated information and interact with other people. A learning disability is distinct from a learning difficulty in that it affects the intellect rather than the way information is learned and processed.

The data

Research and statistics related to the employment of people with a learning disability tend to use a number of different descriptors and measures for people with a learning disability, or may refer to a broader group that people with a learning disability are a part of. In the absence of consistent data on people with a learning disability, we make reference to these descriptors and measures in this report, and explain them further below.

Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD)

Some datasets combine people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) into a single category. This category is broader than Mencap's definition of learning disability, as it includes learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, and all other disabilities, such as physical disabilities.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The SEN part in Special Educational Needs

'Special educational needs' is a legal definition and refers to children with learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children the same age. According to the Code of Practice, a child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

The 'D' part of SEND

Many children and young people who have SEN may also have a disability under the Equality Act 2010, or “a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

SEND is the overarching descriptor used for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Within this, there are a number of sub-categories, including:

- moderate learning difficulties
- severe learning difficulties
- profound learning difficulties

These categories combined may be approximately equivalent to learning disability¹¹ although they may over-estimate the likely number of people with a learning disability¹²

i. Employment rates for people with a learning disability

The latest employment figures show that in 2017/18, 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England were in paid employment. This is a small increase from 2016/17, when it stood at 5.7%; however, it follows years of decreasing employment rates for people with a learning disability.¹³

Most people with a learning disability of working age are not known to social services and it is estimated that of this wider, somewhat more unknown population, only around 17% are currently employed.¹⁴

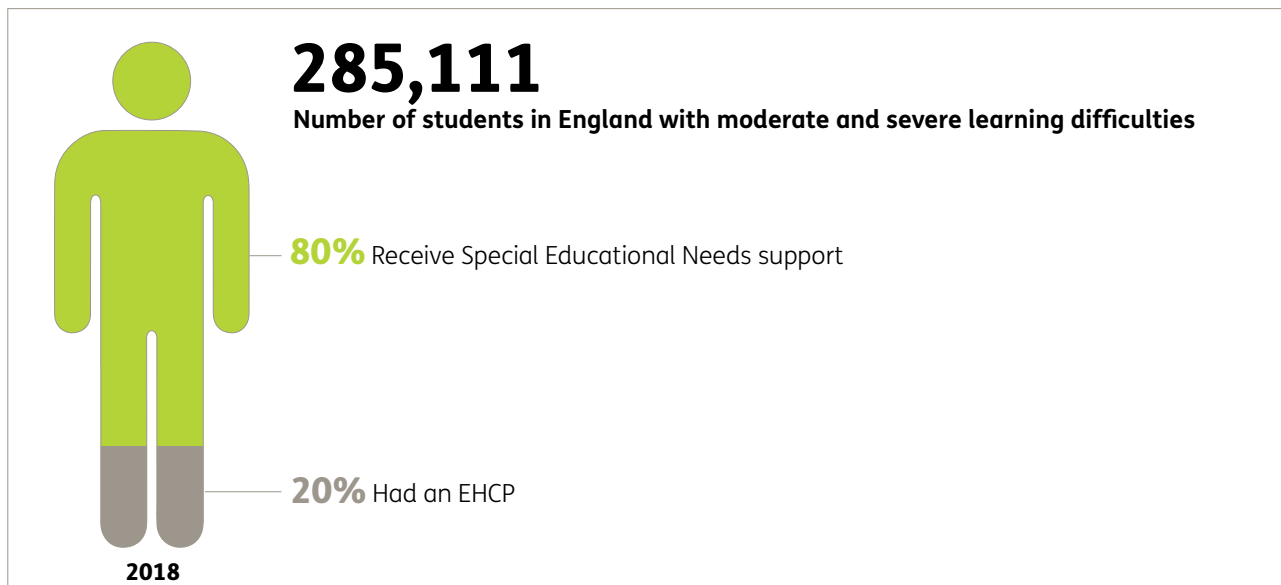
There are many reasons for the low number of people with a learning disability in employment, ranging from employer's attitudes to insufficient employment support being provided. In addition, training programmes, which present a route into employment, have traditionally not been easily accessible to people with a learning disability due to amongst other things their access requirements and the difficulties this group has with achieving the right qualifications.¹⁵

ii. Number of students with special educational needs and their attainment levels

In light of the flexibilities introduced in relation to the English and maths requirements within apprenticeships, it is important to understand the number of pupils with a moderate and severe learning difficulty/disability who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), compared to those who do not.¹⁶ The focus in this section on those with moderate and severe learning difficulties stems from the assumption that it is this group of people with a learning disability who the apprenticeship route could be suitable for.

In 2018, there were 285,111 pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties in

England. Out of these, 227,378 (or 80%) received Special Educational Needs (SEN) support and 57,733 (20%) had an EHCP. Among those with moderate learning difficulties only, just over 11% had an EHCP.¹⁷



Furthermore, just over 12% of pupils with moderate or severe learning difficulties achieved maths and English GCSE's with a mark between 4-9, which equals a Level 2 qualification.¹⁸

There is no publicly available data on how many pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties do not achieve maths and English GCSEs at Level 1 (equivalent to 1-3 GCSEs), and how many of them have an EHCP. However, we know that 64% of those who receive SEN support at school achieve maths and English qualifications at Level 1 or below¹⁹ and that overall 15,024 young people aged 19 did not achieve a Level 1 qualification in English, and 25,012 in maths in 2017.²⁰

It is important to remember that these statistics are only snapshots of a particular year. Overall numbers in the wider adult population of people with a learning disability will be many multiples of the numbers outlined here.

iii. Number of people with a learning difficulty and/or a disability doing an apprenticeship

In 2016/17, there were 494,880 apprenticeship starts in England, of which 50,930 (10.3%) were people with a learning difficulty and/or a disability (LDD).^{21, 22} Of the 277,790 people who achieved their apprenticeship in 2016/17, the figure for LDD apprentices stands at 25,430 (9.2%).²³ Apprenticeships starts fell substantially in 2017/18, coming in at 375,760. However, starts by people who declared a learning difficulty and/or a disability stood at 42,230 and therefore the proportion of starts with LDD increased to 11.2% of overall starts (although not in overall numbers).²⁴ Of the 276,160 people who achieved their apprenticeship in 2017/18, the figure for people with a learning difficulty and/or a disability stands at 26,460 (9.6%).²⁵

Over the last 7 years, the proportion of apprenticeships starts by people with a learning difficulty and/or disabled has been steadily increasing, starting from a low of around 7.8%

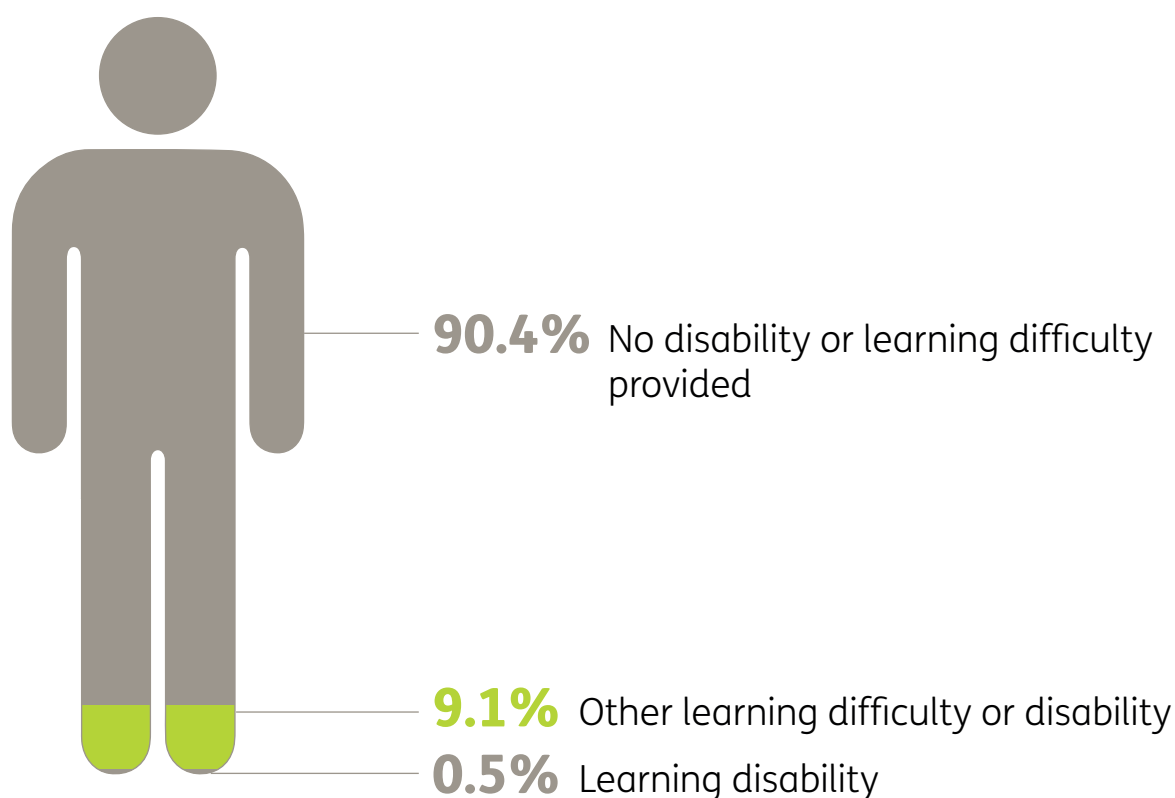
of the overall number of apprenticeships starts in 2011/12.²⁶ Most recent data shows that the Government is on track to deliver on its overall target to increase apprenticeship starts by people with a learning difficulty and/or a disability in percentage terms by 20% (up from a baseline of 9.9 per cent in 2015/16 to 11.9 per cent by 2020), which is welcome news.²⁷

iv. Number of people with a learning disability doing an apprenticeship

Statistics on wider apprenticeship participation, however, also show that what seems to be generally good news for the wider group of people with a learning difficulty and/or a disability in terms of the participation rate, may not hold true for a subset of the wider LDD group - those with learning disabilities. Data from 2014/2015 indicates that at the same time as the overall proportion of apprentices with LDD has increased from a low in 2011/2012, the proportion of those with moderate and severe learning difficulties²⁸ participating in an apprenticeship has decreased, from an already low base of 1% in 2011/2012²⁹ to 0.9% of apprentices in 2014/2015³⁰. Newest data from 2017/2018, although not directly comparable, seems to confirm this downward trend; only 0.5% of apprenticeship participants in 2017/2018 identified as having a learning disability³¹.

It therefore seems that the overall increase in the percentage of apprentices with LDD has predominantly been driven by those with physical disabilities and those with dyslexia, and less by those with learning disabilities.³²

Apprenticeship participation 2017/2018





b. An overview of apprenticeships

i. What is an apprenticeship?

Apprenticeships combine practical training in a job with study. An apprentice will work alongside experienced staff in a company or organisation to gain job-specific skills. An apprentice earns a wage and gets holiday pay, and they get time for study related to their role.

There are various levels of apprenticeships ranging from Level 2 to Level 7, with a Level 2 being equivalent to a GCSE and a Level 7 equivalent to a Bachelor's or Master's Degree. Depending on which Level, an apprenticeship can take between one and five years to complete.

People with a learning disability are most likely to be aiming for a Level 2 apprenticeship. In order to be able to do a Level 2 apprenticeship, a person needs to be at least 16 years old and show they have the ability to complete the programme. They need to be able to achieve at least at Level 1 in maths and English at the end of the apprenticeship, but should ideally be working towards a Level 2 (see section ii below for further details). However, there are some exemptions to these requirements. Apprentices with either an existing or previously issued Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) may be able to complete a Level 2 apprenticeship with an Entry Level 3 qualification in maths and English (for further detail see section iv below).

To complete the apprenticeship, an apprentice has to undergo an End Point Assessment (EPA). This is the final assessment for an apprentice to ensure that they can do the job they have been training for.

ii. Recent apprenticeship reforms

Following the publication of the Richard Review³³, the Government set out a major programme of reform to apprenticeships in its 2020 Vision document in December 2015.

One of the most significant changes was the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, a compulsory tax for all employers with a pay bill of over £3 million each year, which the Government hopes will provide long-term sustainable investment in training. Co-investment is offered to support smaller employers who do not pay the levy, which shares the cost of training apprentices between employers and the government.

As part of the reforms, the Government is also removing apprenticeship 'frameworks', moving all apprenticeship provision to 'standards'. Apprentices doing the new 'standards' must pass an EPA, which assesses the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) that are learned throughout the apprenticeship to ensure they are occupationally competent. The older 'frameworks' will be withdrawn on July 31 2020, and all new apprenticeship starts will be using 'standards' by the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year.

iii A focus on English and maths

As part of the reforms, there has been a lot of focus on English and maths and the requirements on individuals to achieve a certain standard in each. For those undertaking

a Level 3 or higher apprenticeship, it is now a requirement to hold or achieve an approved Level 2 in both English and maths before the apprenticeship can be successfully completed.

Those undertaking a Level 2 apprenticeship must achieve a Level 1 in these subjects and study towards, and take the assessment for, Level 2. In some circumstances where the individual is not able to pass the assessment, achievement of Level 1 English and maths is sufficient for the successful completion of their apprenticeship.

The Government points to research that shows that higher English and maths attainment provides a number of benefits including greater access to work opportunities, enabling learning in other areas and improved job proficiency. It points to the employer skills survey, for example, which reported of staff not deemed fully proficient at their job, 31% staff lack proficient reading skills, 23% writing skills and 20% numeracy skills³⁴, while a London Chamber of Commerce and Industry report London found that basic numeracy and literacy and written communication are among employers most valued skills, alongside basic IT. 92% of respondents value basic numeracy, while 90% value literacy and written communication³⁵.

The Government points out that this improved access and progress in work leads to increased pay, higher probability of employment, reduced chances of being on benefits and increased sustainability of employment³⁶. In addition, higher maths and English skills are associated with benefits to family life, children's development, civic participation and a positive impact on professional relationships.

However, stakeholders have pointed out that achieving these levels can be extremely challenging for some, potentially closing off the apprenticeship route to them³⁷.

iv. The Maynard Taskforce

In 2016, the then Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson MP, and Minister for Skills, Nick Boles MP, commissioned a review to explore how to improve apprenticeships for people with learning disabilities. Paul Maynard MP was asked to chair the taskforce. The taskforce drew on evidence from stakeholder groups, and built on previous work by Peter Little OBE in 2012³⁸ to reach an understanding of the factors that affect people with a learning disability in accessing and completing an apprenticeship. It also looked at possible solutions that could help overcome these barriers and raise participation levels of people with a learning disability.

The report made a number of recommendations, listed in Appendix A, which were widely welcomed. The Government accepted all of the recommendations, and as a result, a number of positive changes have already been made. For example, legislation was introduced which allows the minimum English and maths completion requirement for apprenticeships to be adjusted to Entry Level 3 for those who have a current or previously issued EHCP, Statement of SEN or LDA, and who, as a result of their learning difficulties and/or disability, cannot meet the regular English and maths requirements but could otherwise meet the occupational requirements of their apprenticeship.

Work is currently underway as to what further reasonable adjustments should be made to the end-point assessments.

Apprenticeships are now starting to be offered to this group of people who previously struggled with the English and maths requirements of a Level 2 Apprenticeship, following the introduction of these flexibilities.

Case study: Jessie

Jessie is 24 years old and lives in Thetford with her Nan. She has a mild learning disability and has mental health issues. She has a Statement of Special Educational Needs from school for her learning disability. She needed 1:1 support from a teaching assistant because she struggled with some of the lessons like maths and English, but she managed to get a grade C in childcare, health and social care, which she is quite proud of.

Before starting her apprenticeship with Mencap, she had completed some work experience in Superdrug, and the Premier Inn and she really loved working with lots of different people. She thought that she would never get a paid job, but in January 2018 she started working at the Mencap charity shop in Thetford as a retail apprentice.

Jessie's apprenticeship is going really well and she has learnt lots of new things like using the till, meeting and greeting customers, pricing and tagging and displaying items and sorting donations, as well as other things about retail and how to work in a shop. Jessie found her apprenticeship quite hard at the start because of her mental health difficulties and lack of confidence. But having 1:1 support from an apprenticeship coordinator and being referred for counselling helped her a lot. Her confidence and motivation is getting better every day, especially since she started working on the till.

'I wouldn't have been able to an Apprenticeship it if I didn't have my Statement of Special Educational Needs from school because I've got Entry Level 3 in Maths and English and not Level 1. I found the Apprenticeship at my local job centre and applying was much easier than in most other places. All I had to do was upload my C.V. I was asked to come in for an interview and they sent me some of the questions before the interview which made it much less stressful as I knew what to expect. They asked me to come in for a work trial too which helped me to see what it would be like working in the shop.'

Jessie is about to do her final assessment. She is nervous about this, but also very proud that she has come this far. Mencap are confident that she will be able to pass this. And the best news of all is that Jessie has already been offered a new job front of house at KFC where she will start following her End Point Assessment.

'I still can't quite believe I have nearly finished my qualification as I didn't think I would even be able to do an Apprenticeship because of my Math's and English qualifications! I have really enjoyed my Apprenticeship and can do lots of different things that I couldn't do before.'

v. Funding for apprentices with special educational needs

There are a range of different funding pots that should be available to employers and apprenticeship providers to support people with a learning disability accessing apprenticeships. All apprentices with SEN receive funding for the core costs of their training in the same way as all other apprentices. In addition to that, their employers and apprenticeship providers will also be able to access the funds outlined below, depending on the individual's situation.

Learning Support Funding

Learning Support Funding (LSF1) is paid at a rate of £150 per month to meet costs associated with making reasonable adjustments to delivery, as set out in section 20 of the Equality Act 2010, to meet individual learning needs as part of their apprenticeship. LSF1 is provided via the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

To access LSF1 the provider must carry out a thorough assessment to identify the support the apprentice needs and deliver this support.

There are stringent reporting requirements associated with accessing this funding, and providers seem to have varying experiences with accessing LSF1, with many reporting the funding criteria and eligibility to be ambiguous and confusing, and the evidencing process complex.³⁹

Excess Learning Support

If the cost of support exceeds the fixed monthly rate of £150, the provider can claim additional funding (up to £19,000 per apprentice) from the ESFA. Furthermore, where the cost of providing additional support exceeds £19,000, the provider can apply for Exceptional Learning Support from the ESFA.

A recent report by the Learning and Work Institute⁴⁰ found that awareness of Excess and Exceptional Learning Support is mixed. Around half of the providers interviewed had not heard of this, and among those who had, very few providers had accessed this. This is for a combination of reasons. Some providers were discouraged from accessing this funding as they believed the process to be overly bureaucratic based on their experience of Additional Learning Support, others had not had occasion to access it.

Additional funding for young apprentices with an EHC plan

If an apprentice is aged between 16-18, or 19-24 and has an EHCP, then their employer and training provider each receive an additional £1,000 to meet any extra costs in their training.⁴¹

Access to work

Apprentices, or would be apprentices, can also apply for DWP Access to Work funding to support them with adjustments that they may need to do an apprenticeships.

Access to Work provides grants to help pay for the extra employment cost of working with a disability. This can include funding for things such as:

- Special aids or equipment to use in the workplace such as specialist software or computer access equipment including speech recognition software

- a support worker to provide one-to-one support in the workplace such as a British Sign Language Interpreter or personal reader for a person who is dyslexic, blind or visually impaired
- travel to work if public transport cannot be used due to health or disability and help with adaptations to vehicles
- travel in work to pay for the extra cost of travel while at work
- communication support at job interviews for an interpreter or other one to one support for someone who has difficulties in communicating with others
- adaptations to existing (but not new) buildings.

Access to Work pays for adaptations and adjustments up to £59,200 (rates for April 2019 to March 2020).





4. Methodology for this piece of work

Following an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) session on apprenticeships in July 2018, at which attendees highlighted the ongoing problems with accessing apprenticeships that people with a learning disability experience, Anne Milton MP, the Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills asked the APPG for Learning Disabilities to provide some further evidence, and make recommendations in relation to:

- improving self-declaration rates about whether an apprentice identifies as having a disability
- the English and maths flexibilities offered to those with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs), and whether Government could go further with supporting people with learning difficulties and/or a Disability (LDD) and expand the flexibilities
- best practice in supporting people with a learning disability and/or difficulty to achieve their full potential in maths and English

Mencap, which provides secretariat support to the APPG has worked with the group's Officers to take this forward.

Between January 2019 and March 2019, Mencap conducted three workshops with about 25 stakeholders ranging from employers to providers, colleges and special schools to educational psychologists. The focus in these workshops was on people with a learning disability and/or difficulty. Participants in the workshops set out to explore what more needs to be done to ensure that apprenticeships are truly accessible to this group.

They were asked to think specifically about three things:

- the current maths and English minimum standards in apprenticeships and how well they work for people with a learning disability
- assessing English and maths skills and the challenges surrounding this for people with a learning disability
- the issues around identifying people with a learning disability and questions around self-declaration

In addition to running the workshops, Mencap also spoke to a number of people with a learning disability to get their insights and undertook desk research to support the findings and recommendations coming out of the workshops. We also conducted some primary research into local offers, which included a web usability assessment of ten local offers and testing two websites with six participants with a learning disability. Further details of the research and its findings can be found in Appendix B. Furthermore, the Department for Education also kindly agreed to make previously unpublished data available for this report.

Based on the findings from these workshops, what we heard from people with a learning disability themselves and wider research we undertook, Mencap makes a number of recommendations. They are focused on improving access to apprenticeships for people with a learning disability, but addressing them is likely to benefit a wider group of disabled people.



5. Apprenticeships post-Maynard- the story so far

During workshop 1, participants were asked how well the current adjustments, exemptions and support available to apprentices with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) is working for people with a learning disability, and what challenges still remain for this group. Attendees highlighted a number of issues, which are outlined below:

a. Current teaching and assessment practices for apprenticeships often do not take a person-centred approach

Person-centred approaches for teaching and assessing apprentices with a learning disability are widely recognised as good practice. However, there was widespread consensus in the workshop that current approaches to teaching at apprenticeship level are still a far way off being person-centred⁴². While there is some good practice out there, it was discussed that many apprenticeship providers do not offer the support/teaching approaches people with a learning disability may need to succeed. The abstract nature of current maths and English teaching was raised as a major concern, as were end-point assessments (EPA).

Workshop members highlighted a number of factors that they felt to be important to be part of an apprenticeship teaching offer that enables people with a learning disability to succeed. These included:

- job coaches
- English and maths teaching embedded in the practical elements of the apprenticeship
- teaching of the communication and soft skills; participants felt that these were often overlooked in the wider teaching approach
- smaller class sizes

The issue of appropriate funding was raised in this context, with concerns being aired that the current funding environment is not particularly conducive to encouraging providers to improve their practice in this area. Rather than simply the amount of money being questioned, it was the complexities of drawing this money down that caused concerns, particularly in relation to accessing Excess Learning Support funding.

b. Evidence of previous support needs can be difficult to uncover and is often not applicable to the work environment

Also highlighted in workshop 1 was the difficulty that many people with a learning disability have in evidencing their support needs when wanting to access the flexibilities around English and maths. While people should have a copy of a previous Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or statement, they often do not have access to them, and where they do, they do not necessarily entail information relevant to employment.

Similarly, people with a learning disability without an EHCP do not generally have proof to say that they received Special Educational Need (SEN) support in school, even if they did. Attendees raised concerns that this is problematic when access to certain programmes, or exemptions, are dependent on this evidence being available.

This issue was of particular concern in the context of older learners, those above the ages of 25, and it was highlighted how time intensive it can be to try to unearth some of that evidence.

c. Lack of awareness of flexibilities and rights

A recurring theme coming out of conversations in the workshop, and with other reference groups such as the Apprenticeship Equality and Diversity Advisory Group, was the issue of a lack of awareness of the rights that individuals have in relation to apprenticeships, and the flexibilities in relation to the English and maths requirements currently available to those with EHCPs. It became clear throughout this process that the awareness of accessible apprenticeships, including what reasonable adjustments are and should be available in the context of end point assessments (EPA), is both low on the apprenticeship provider/ employer side as well as among individuals who would benefit from knowing what their rights are. This in turn, it was understood had a negative impact on people with a learning disability coming forward to do an apprenticeship.

.....
‘Training Providers are not always aware of the rule changes, regarding the flexibilities for English & maths and even if they are, they believe that some clients may struggle to complete the end-point assessment’.
.....

(Workshop Participant)

d. There are a number of people who need the flexibilities in relation to maths and English in order to be able to do an apprenticeship, but cannot currently access them.

There was also widespread agreement among the attendees of workshop 1 that there are many people with a learning disability without an EHCP who would benefit from access to greater flexibilities in relation to maths and English, as well as a wider support offer, during an apprenticeship. Yet, current rules do not allow for this. For example, Mencap identified five individuals during a recent application round for twenty apprentice placements who had support in school, but no EHCP. They were assessed as being able to fulfil the key requirements of the apprenticeship standard, yet were considered to not be able to reach the required English and maths standard by the end of the apprenticeship. More detailed case studies are also outlined below.

.....
'There are certain young people with SEND, but without an EHCP, who are very good at the practical aspects of a particular skill and could certainly manage to carry out this part of an apprenticeship. However, they may have considerable difficulties with English and maths. We very much hope these young people could be given the same flexibilities as those who have an EHC Plan.'
.....

(Workshop Participant)

Furthermore, attendees highlighted that there are many people with a learning disability who do not manage to get an entry level 3 maths and English qualification. As a result, they are unable to access this training opportunity, despite otherwise being able to fulfil the wider requirements of an apprenticeship.

It was also highlighted that recent changes to the English and maths requirement in 2018 have made things more difficult even for those who have an EHCP, as apprentices now need to achieve Entry Level 3 Functional Skills rather than the broader Entry level 3 level in maths and English⁴³. This move in effect introduces a mandatory summative assessment at the end of the qualification, which can be challenging for people with a learning disability.

Case study: Sibtain

Sibtain is 22 years old. He lives with his brothers and parents in East London. In his spare time Sibtain likes to play football, tennis and PlayStation. Sibtain went to a mainstream school. He has no statement or Education, Health and Care Plan. Workplace Newham referred Sibtain to Mencap so he could get some help finding a job. Sibtain became Mencap's first trainee. He managed to find his own work placement at Newham Community and Neighbourhood Centre as a library assistant.

Sibtain currently holds an entry level 3 functional skills qualification in English maths. He would really like to do an administration apprenticeship, but he is really concerned that his grades in maths and English seem to never be high enough to even apply.

'I didn't really know where to start with applying for work because I thought that if I couldn't get onto an apprenticeship then I wouldn't be able to get a job. I had struggled quite a bit with my English and maths.'

The traineeship with Mencap has really helped me to not only improve and develop my employability and interview skills, but the coordinators have really helped me become more confident with my English and maths skills. I've particularly liked how they've been able to link it into my voluntary work at the community centre. Over the past few months, I have started applying for more paid jobs, and I have had a few interviews. Two of my interviews have turned into work trials and I am really confident I will find a paid job soon.

But I am still struggling to find an apprenticeship that would accept me with my current maths and English levels. Although I have been supported by Mencap to improve my reading, writing and numbers, I don't have a certificate and I don't think I can sit an exam for maths and English again, it will be too difficult for me.'

Case study: Gina

Gina is 48 years old, has a mild learning disability, and lives in the City of London Corporation. She currently works as a Wills and Trust Officer for Mencap and is doing a Level 2 Customer Service apprenticeship in order to aid the learning of her new role. Gina has no statement of special educational needs and went to a mainstream secondary school.

Gina's disability means that she sometimes has difficulty with reading complicated information and with spelling, grammar and punctuation. She also has aphasia and a slight speech impairment, so she has difficulty remembering and understanding the meaning of certain words. Yet, Gina feels quite confident with English and has Level 1 Functional Skills in English.

Maths is a slightly different story for Gina. She does find it quite hard. Gina has no recognised maths qualification, and after completing an initial diagnostic functional skills assessment at the start of her apprenticeship it was determined, that Gina was working at Entry Level 2 in maths.

Mencap had committed to supporting her through her apprenticeship in the hope that she would be able to progress to Level 1 in maths. To support her learning, Gina has received an average of two hours of intensive support with her maths each week throughout her 15 months apprenticeship, all in small groups of five or on a 1:1 basis. This was in addition to the six guided learning hours of support as part of her apprenticeship. All of this additional support was put in place to meet Gina's need for repetition to learn and retain new knowledge. She also received additional time and a reader during her assessments.

After 13 months of this intensive support, Gina has now passed her maths functional skills assessment at Entry Level 3 on the second attempt. This is a significant achievement for Gina considering she previously had no recognised maths qualifications. She, however, did only achieve the pass mark.

As Gina will need to achieve maths at Level 1 in order to be eligible for her apprenticeship End Point Assessment, Mencap has provided Gina with intensive additional support and training to help her achieve this. However, she has found this increasingly challenging and despite all the additional support and reasonable adjustments, it is unlikely that she will achieve it.

If it were not for Gina's maths difficulties, her manager and apprenticeship trainer are confident that she would have been ready to complete her apprenticeship End Point Assessment after 13 months, as she is more than able to do everything else that the apprenticeship and her job requires of her. Instead, she has to worry about whether she will be able to complete it at all.

Case Study: Raymond

Raymond is 22 and lives in East London with his mum. He like to go to the cinema, hang out with friends and write in his spare time. Raymond went to a mainstream school and his holds entry level 3 qualifications in maths and English. However, when being assessed by Mencap, Raymond was operating at entry level 2 for both maths and English.

Before he started the traineeship with Mencap, he found it very difficult to socialise with people. He didn't feel confident at all to travel independently. He wanted to work, but he wasn't sure what he wanted to do or how to go about doing it. He had some experience in the past working in a hospital, which had provided him with some really useful skills, however, he didn't get a paid job at the end and this hit his confidence quite badly.

Over the months with Mencap he has become much more confident. Having spent time going to the employability, English and maths workshops he quickly started to find it easier to be taken out of his comfort zone, and he started to make friends with the other learners.

Raymond has experience working as a cleaner, however, he really wanted to start an admin apprenticeship. He was nervous to apply for apprenticeships as he has not been successful in the past because of his grades. He always preferred the idea of going into an apprenticeship rather than a paid job straightaway as he felt that it would allow him to get used to his surroundings, and learn at his pace with support. It has been a real struggle and quite a negative experience for him to have opportunities denied to him because of his grades.

e. Current working culture and environment discourages disabled people to declare their disability and support need

Central to the discussion around why people may declare their disability and/or support needs during the workshops was the concept of the current working culture. Participants suggested that the reasons why people are unlikely to be forthcoming with their support needs are that they are concerned about the reaction they may get from employers, should they do so. It was highlighted that individuals worry about being filtered out of any application process should their mention their disability or learning needs. Participants also raised the point that some disabled people, including people with a learning disability, may assume that a particular job role is not for them, as employers are not making it clearer that they are open to a more diverse workforce and will make reasonable adjustments.

Discussed in this context was the language used by employers and training providers, with words such as ‘disclose’ or ‘declare’ being seen as having quite negative connotations for the individual. It was suggested that employers and apprenticeship providers should be reviewing the language they use to ensure that it makes disabled people more comfortable with letting prospective employers know about their needs.

.....
‘The use of terms like disclose or declare a disability are very negative and are likely to discourage applicants from being open about any challenges they may face or any reasonable adjustments they might need.’
.....

(Workshop Participant)

f. Lack of aspirations for people with a learning disability

Participants highlighted a lack of aspiration for people with a learning disability to be able to do training and work. This was considered to be a major factor holding people with a learning disability back from moving into training and employment. Participants raised the issues that lack of aspiration came from a number of sources ranging from parents, to teachers and employers and was leading to possible options, such as apprenticeships not being discussed or offered to people with a learning disability.



6. Exploring solutions

Workshops two and three focused on finding possible solutions to the problems that had been identified during the first workshop and which are listed in Chapter 4 above. In particular, the last two workshops focused on the following four areas:

a. Addressing the flexibility question and looking how to best identify support needs

Attendees suggested at the end of the first workshop that there should be a form of assessment at the start of an apprenticeship. It was suggested, that this could help with identifying the support needs of the individual hoping to do an apprenticeship, as well as whether or not they should have access to the flexibilities around the English and maths requirements. Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) were not considered to be a good enough proxy for accessing the flexibilities, with local variations and difficulties accessing them being quoted.

In addition, the workshops discussed whether such an assessment could also act as a portal to receiving funding to support apprentices with learning disabilities and/or learning difficulties, simplifying what has been identified by many as a complex issue. Attendees were then asked in workshop 3 to discuss in further detail what this assessment could look like, how it could be built into broader practice, and what it should achieve.

Attendees were clear that there would need to be some sort of assessment, which would identify who needs access to the flexibilities, in order to reduce the risk of ‘gaming’ in the sector.

b. Awareness raising of how apprenticeships work for people with a learning disability

Following on from the Maynard recommendations, which clearly highlighted the need of raising awareness of apprenticeships with relevant stakeholders involved in the lives of people with a learning disability, the workshops explored in some depth what could be done to improve awareness and empower people with a learning disability and/or difficulty to take the apprenticeship route. The workshops highlighted that on the employer side, the importance of better information and guidance about funding, the flexibilities and how to support people was central to improving the offer for people with a learning disability. With regards to improving awareness about apprenticeships amongst people with a learning disability, attendees suggested looking at the role of the local offer, reviewing the terminology currently used around the support that is on offer to prospective disabled learners, and looking at the role of the apprenticeship application process itself. Making individuals aware of their rights in relation to apprenticeships and employment more generally, and finding avenues to do this, was considered to be vital.

c. Pushing for culture change

Workshop participants were clear that without a change in culture by employers offering apprenticeships, with employers being more open about what support they can offer to applicants, individuals with learning disabilities, as well as disabled people more generally, will not want to declare, their support needs when accessing an apprenticeship, or understand the importance of doing so.

Workshop participants discussed a number of ways employers could encourage individuals to be more open about their support needs, as well as systems that may support a culture change. Employers changing the language they use around disability and support, benchmarking of employers and their support for disabled apprentices, as well as a Disability Confident scheme for providers of apprenticeships were discussed in this context. It was recognised that achieving culture change is dependent on a number of factors and central to it is disabled people feeling that their needs will be met. To achieve this employers need better support, guidance and networking opportunities, therefore linking this debate closely to the wider discussion around how to raise awareness of accessible apprenticeships.

d. Ensuring best practice teaching in apprenticeships

Throughout workshop 1 and 2, attendees discussed in some detail what teaching approaches work for people with a learning disability and which should be used more widely to support individuals with learning needs. Participants were asked how providers and employers may be influenced to take up such approaches including embedding English and maths into wider learning on the job, smaller class sizes, offering job coaches, and offering the teaching of softer skills such as communication and confidence. The importance of sharing best practice was highlighted during the discussions as well as the need to look at crediting and rewarding employers and providers who are good at supporting people with a learning disability. In the context of apprenticeship providers, the role of Ofsted and the lack of financial incentives to take on students with additional needs was also mentioned.





7. Recommendations

Taking into account the discussions and proposals from the workshops, as well as the insights gathered via our desk and primary research and from people with a learning disability directly, Mencap outlines below a number of recommendations that we believe would support the greater inclusion of people with a learning disability in the apprenticeship programme.

We hope that the Government will be able to support these recommendations which build on the recommendations put forward by the Maynard Taskforce, and take the necessary steps towards improving the apprenticeship offer for people with a learning disability.

Recommendations for the Department for Education

Recommendation 1: Mencap is urging the Department for Education to make the flexibilities around the maths and English requirements for apprenticeships currently available to those with Education, Health and Care Plans, also available to a wide group of people with a learning disability and/or difficulty who have through a clear process of assessing need been identified as requiring these flexibilities.

Workshop participants highlighted that there are currently many people with a learning disability and/or difficulty who cannot access an apprenticeship, because they do not have access to the flexibilities around English and maths available to those with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP). Participants highlighted the inherent unfairness of this and asked for this to be urgently addressed, so as to ensure that this group of people has access to better routes into employment, thereby reducing the risk of them becoming 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) or long-term unemployed.

Attendees of the workshops acknowledged the risks of opening up the flexibilities to a wider group of learners and with letting providers decide who should have access to them, with the issue of 'gaming' being considered in some depth. However, they were also clear that EHCPs are not a good enough proxy for deciding who should have access to the flexibilities. They highlighted the fact that there are too many local variations to use it as a marker and that EHCPs are ultimately more a functional tool that can unlock funding rather than a diagnostic one.

Recommendation 2: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education make it a requirement for apprenticeship training providers to make available a cognitive assessment to every apprentice they think would benefit from doing such an assessment, as well as any apprentice who requests such an assessment.

This assessment must be able to:

- Identify whether someone should have access to the flexibilities around the English and maths requirements of an apprenticeship

- identify an apprentice's support needs throughout their apprenticeship and provide suggestions as to how to best support these learners.

It should also be able to:

- Act as a gateway and source of evidence to more easily access additional funds for apprenticeship providers, enabling them to improve the teaching support to their learners.

Attendees of the workshops were clear in their support for a form of upfront assessment available to prospective apprentices that would help employers and providers of apprenticeships identify individuals' learning (cognitive) needs right at the start of an apprenticeship. They agreed that such an assessment could be used to identify those who should have access to the flexibilities around the English and maths requirements outside the current existing exemptions, and at the same time could act as the gateway to accessing additional funds for providers and employers that enable them to provide the right support. Stakeholders suggested different approaches, including using educational psychologists and digital platforms. Amongst some of the digital platforms mentioned were Cognassist, but also Pearson Assessment, GL Assessment, Test Partnership and Woodcock Johnson.

Mencap has learned that some providers are already using digital assessments to ensure that they can better support individuals on their learner journey, and to help them access additional funding to support those learners. On average we have heard from one provider of such assessments, Cognassist, that around 28%-32% of all apprentices are identified as having some additional learning need. Feedback on these digital assessments has generally been positive.

However, whilst providers have to undertake a functional skills assessment at the start of an apprenticeship, there is currently no requirement for providers to assess apprentices cognitively. There is also nothing linking these assessments to the flexibilities around maths and English.

Mencap supports this call for an upfront assessment that would help identify those who should have access to the flexibilities around maths and English and clearly identify an apprentice's support needs. We would welcome to be involved in further explorations around what such an assessment could look like, who should be undertaking the assessments, how they should be paid for and how and whether it could link in with current assessment requirements on providers.

Mencap would particularly advocate further exploration of what digital assessments may be suitable and acceptable to the department. Having explored one of these digital options currently available further, we understand that such programmes should be able to identify who is likely to need some flexibilities around the maths and English requirements of an apprenticeship, what learning support someone may require and also support access to additional funding for these learners.

Recommendation 3: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education remove the age cap on traineeships for people with a learning disability and looks to find ways to incentivise employers to offer more traineeship opportunities to this group.

Participants in workshop 1 had highlighted that in addition to the group of students with learning disabilities who are unable to meet the Level 1 requirements in maths and English, there are also many people with a learning disability who do not manage to get an entry level 3 maths and English qualification, and who in effect as a result have few training options available to them. Whilst these people are likely to have an EHCP, the flexibilities do not go far enough to enable this group to access apprenticeships. This was considered to be problematic and something that DfE must address. Participants suggested that an improved traineeship offer could be part of the solution.

As it stands, traineeships are only available to young people under the age of 25, as are supported internships. This means that for those over that age and with the qualifications outlined above no formal training options are available to them. Mencap believes that this needs to change to ensure that all people with a learning disability, who want and can work, are able to access training that supports their ambition.

Mencap also believes that more should be done to incentivise employers to offer traineeships to people with a learning disability and we recommend that Government explores a variety of options. This should include allowing employers to use part of the levy payments to offer traineeships to this group, as well as bursaries to help them set up a traineeship offer.

Mencap believes that, whilst there are other, mainly DWP, programmes, aimed at this age group, relying on these programmes to fill this gap is problematic as our own experience with delivering these has shown us. DWP programmes' funding structures are very much focused on job outcomes only and do not acknowledge the process of getting someone there. As a result, providers have been known to work with those closest to the labour market in order to generate the outcome payments to fund their provision. In many cases people with a learning disability are left behind.

Education focused programmes, such as traineeships offer a more personalised approach, recognising the learning throughout the process and we have found them to be a good stepping stone for people with a learning disability to move into an apprenticeship. Many people with a learning disability above the age of 25 will have little work experience and therefore will need an opportunity to gather this experience before being able to move into work or take on an apprenticeship.

Recommendation 4: Mencap recommends the Department for Education review whether the current maths and English qualification requirements in apprenticeships are fully accessible to people with a learning disability.

Workshop attendees highlighted that the most recent changes to the Specifications for Apprenticeship Standards have had the effect of tightening up the flexibilities around English and maths that had been introduced following the publication of the Maynard

recommendations. The change from requiring apprentices with an EHCP to achieve Entry Level 3 to Entry Level 3 Functional Skills⁴⁴ was said to effectively moved the bar higher for individuals wanting to access an apprenticeship. Functional Skills are assessed through a summative assessment at the end, which workshop attendees argued was less suited to some learners with a learning disability compared to other Entry Level 3 qualifications which may be assessed through a moderation process.

We would therefore recommend that the Department for Education work with Ofqual, Awarding Organisations as well as relevant stakeholders to understand whether any changes may be required to ensure that the apprenticeship qualifications requirements, and in particular the flexibilities introduced post-2016, achieve their intended outcome of making apprenticeships accessible for people with a learning disability.

Recommendation 5: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education and the National Apprenticeship Service continue to raise awareness of the apprenticeship offer, as well as the funding that is available to support apprentices with learning disabilities and/or difficulties with employers and providers.

A strong message coming out of the workshops was the importance of a working culture open to a diverse workforce and inclusive in its approach. Attendees of the workshops were clear that the current dominant working culture does not yet meet these criteria.

Workshop participants highlighted that a more inclusive working culture will lead to more people with a learning disability and/or difficulty believing that a job, or apprenticeship, is for them. Workshop participants were also clear that it would help improve declaration rates. There was also a general sentiment that in order to change the working culture, employers and providers, need to be better educated in how the apprenticeship offer applies to people with a learning disability and/or difficulty, the funding that is available to support this particular group and the benefits employing someone with a learning disability and/or difficulty can bring. In addition, it was also discussed that people with learning disabilities and/or difficulties need to be better educated in their rights around access to apprenticeships.

It was highlighted, that information about the flexibilities and other support on offer for this group, as well as the funding on offer for apprenticeship providers and employers, should be much more visible across all apprenticeship communication channels. Attendees also wanted to see more sharing of best practice examples, case studies, and learning from these cases, as well as better links between the different networks and communication channels to maximise the reach of the information and the learning that comes out of the different groups.

We acknowledge that there are already multiple efforts currently underway to improve the information available and we very much welcome this. However, we recommend Government to be more strategic in its approach to disseminating information and guidance on inclusive apprenticeships. We suggest that Department for Education (DfE) should map out all relevant platforms and communication channels, including the different forums,

and develop a communication strategy that cuts across DfE and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) channels. We recommend that DfE works more closely with employers to better understand what is still missing and explores different formats for conveying information, such as e-learning tools.

Recommendation 6: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education and the National Apprenticeship Service continue the work to develop more accessible and clear resources for people with a learning disability around apprenticeships, and to ensure they are distributed widely.

Stakeholders raised the issue that people with a learning disability need to better understand their rights, and the flexibilities and support they can access once they have declared their needs. There was a general feeling that there needs to be better and more easily accessible information available on this via a range of channels. By being more aware of their rights, will feel more empowered to challenge the culture that holds them back.

We have learned from the Department for Education that there are a number of projects in the pipeline such as an easy-read and audio guide to apprenticeships. We also understand that there is work underway to better understand the barriers that people with a learning disability experience throughout the application process, and we commend the Department and the National Apprenticeship Service for this work.

Recommendation 7: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education works more closely with local authorities to improve their Local Offers so as to ensure that all include clear, easy-to-find information about the routes into training and employment available to young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including people with a learning disability, in their local area and the particular adjustments that are available to them.

During discussions about how awareness about apprenticeships amongst people with a learning disability could be improved (workshop 3) attendees suggested looking at amongst other things the role of the Local Offer.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability regulations (Local Offer) 2014 stipulate that local authorities are responsible for developing and publishing a Local Offer web platform setting out the support they expect to be available for local children and young people (0–25 years) with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).⁴⁵ Local Offers should amongst other things provide information about pathways to employment such as apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships and how to apply for them.⁴⁶ As young people transition into their adult lives Local Offers present a unique opportunity to offer guidance and opportunities to pathways to employment.

However, Mencap's own research⁴⁷ confirms concerns raised during the workshops. Our analysis of ten Local Offer websites found only one Local Offer explained the national apprenticeship scheme and the flexibilities offered to those with EHCPs. Most of the

reviewed websites offered limited or no guidance to explain the pathways available to young people, and just provided listings of employment services. Listings were often only available through search functionality and the quality of search listings varied - six Local Offers did not provide adequate information to know what step to take next. User testing by a group of people with learning disabilities demonstrated that these content gaps represent significant barriers to accessing information. Some people did not know how to use the search bar, and the websites were impenetrable without this. Participants felt lost, frustrated and unable to understand the choices available to them without seeking support. The websites were described as 'limiting' and 'holding people back'.

User journeys should be designed to improve accessibility by people with learning disabilities, and to reduce reliance on support. The Department for Education should work more closely with local authorities and provide them with guidance and information materials to include on their websites, so as to ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication of work.

Recommendation 8: Mencap wants to see all schools to provide information and a personalised careers advice to pupils with a learning disability. This should include information about apprenticeships and the flexibilities that may be available to them. The Department for Education should continue to take action to ensure that all schools follow the rules, both in terms of the law and in the spirit the rules were intended.

All schools (mainstream and special) should be providing information to pupils with a learning disability and/or difficulty about apprenticeships and specifically the reasonable adjustments that can be made as part of their comprehensive careers programme. The 'Baker Clause' stipulates that since January 2018 every school has been legally required to ensure that a range of education and training providers speak to all pupils from years 8 to 13 to inform them about what technical education and apprenticeship opportunities are available to them. This includes pupils with SEND in mainstream and special schools.

Mencap welcomes the work undertaken by the Department for Education in this area, but we are also aware that the lack of aspiration by some schools for some pupils with learning disabilities means that they still do not get the advice they are entitled to. We believe that all schools should be following the Gatsby Benchmarks⁴⁸ and offer advice on different routes into employment for pupils with learning disabilities, including apprenticeships. We would ask the DfE to explore whether more funding needs to be made available to schools to enable them to fully implement the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Recommendation 9: Mencap asks the Department for Education to explore how providers and End-Point Assessors who are good or exemplary at inclusive practices could be made more visible to employers and prospective apprentices.

Employers attending the workshops highlighted that it can be quite difficult as an employer, or in fact as a learner, to find out whether an apprenticeship provider or End-Point Assessor is good at 'inclusion'. It was suggested that this can cause difficulties, as an employer may

try to be inclusive and encourage disabled applicants, having signed up for example to the Disability Confident Scheme, but they have no guarantees that the same holds true for the provider.

Mencap would suggest that the Department as a starting point works with providers to ensure that they become Disability Confident Employers themselves. This would signal that they are committed to inclusion. At the same time we would urge DfE to consult with amongst others Ofsted and Ofqual, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to explore how else good inclusive providers could be more visibly identified in the future. Mencap understands that employers were looking for something like a kitemark for inclusive providers similar to the Disability Confident Scheme.

Mencap believes that part of this exploration could and should look at what role the Ofsted inspection framework could play in this context, and what changes would be required to the framework in order for it to fulfil this role. As it stands, we would argue it is not fit for this purpose.

Recommendation 10: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education explores what support and guidance apprenticeship providers need to better support learners with a learning disability and/or difficulty, and to ensure that the right support and guidance is available to the sector.

During the workshops there was a lot of discussion about what makes good teaching and how individuals with a learning disability and/or difficulty should be supported in their learning. However, what attendees were less clear on was how to best achieve providers, particularly independent providers, taking a more inclusive teaching approach across the board, and thereby enabling people with learning disability and/or difficulties to access apprenticeships.

Mencap is aware that the DfE has recently established a number of Centres for Excellence with the aim to develop better guidance around maths teaching for the sector, and we are encouraged to hear that some of the centres will be looking at SEND specifically, as well as how the teaching of functional skills can be improved. We welcome this development and would be happy to work with the Department to identify how findings from these Centres can best be used to support apprenticeship providers going forward.

In addition to this, we would also like to see DfE explore other ways of improving the knowledge and application of inclusive teaching approaches, looking at the role of better partnership working, and the availability of expert advice, including Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO), to practitioners within an apprenticeship provider setting. We are also hopeful that the proposed cognitive assessment may go some way of supporting providers with an improved understanding of how to support people with a learning disability and/or difficulty going forward.

Recommendation 11: Mencap would like to see the Department for Education to ensure that all guidance aimed at employers supports them to better embed maths and English learning in the day-to-day jobs for apprentices, and that this guidance is widely distributed.

We believe that employers also need to play their part and support efforts to embed English and maths in the day-to-day working environment so as to better support the learning of apprentices in these subjects. Mencap believes that the Institute for Apprenticeships, for example, could amend its 'How to' guide for trailblazers to ensure that it includes a section about the importance of embedding English and maths teaching in the everyday aspect of an apprentices work, and then to quality check standards at the point of review to ensure that they do take that approach.

Recommendation 12: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education works with apprenticeship providers to make claiming Additional Learning Support (ALS) and Excess Learning Support (ELS) easier, and to promote the funds' availability.

Workshops attendees as well as other providers Mencap spoke to were clear in their criticism of the current inaccessibility of the funding streams that should be available to providers to enable them to support trainees or apprentices with their additional learning needs, such as one to one support. Accessing these funds can seem onerous with a lack of easily digestible guidance being one issue that was identified. Mencap has heard from providers who are operating programmes aimed at people with a learning disability and/or difficulty at loss as a result of not accessing these funds. This clearly raises concerns about how current difficulties, perceived or real, with accessing this funding might dampen the availability of training programmes for this group, and the support provided to this group.

We are aware that there is currently work going on to develop better guidance around these funding streams and we very much welcome this. However, we feel that the Department may need to go further than this and review the processes involved in claiming these funds; we are hopeful that the suggested cognitive assessment for apprentices in recommendation 1 will support these efforts.

Recommendation 13: Mencap recommends that the Department for Education introduce a target of 2.5% of all apprentices being people with a learning disability by 2025.

As highlighted in the background section in this report, closer analysis of the statistics on wider apprenticeship participation show that what seems to be generally good news for the wider group of people with a learning difficulty and/or a disability (LDD) in terms of the participation rate, may not hold true for a subset of this wider LDD group - those with learning disabilities. As highlighted earlier in the report data from 2014/2015 indicates that at the same time as the overall proportion of apprentices with LDD has increased from a low in 2011/2012, the proportion of those with moderate and severe learning difficulties⁴⁹ participating in an apprenticeship has decreased, from an already low base of 1% in 2011/2012⁵⁰ to 0.9% of apprentices in 2014/2015⁵¹ with newest data from 2017/2018,

although not directly comparable, seemingly confirming this downward trend.

Apprenticeship participation by people with a learning disability was at its highest in 2008/2009 when 2.5% of apprentices declared that they had a learning disability. Mencap believes that a good test of whether any new measures to support people with a learning disability and/or difficulty are successful in making apprenticeships more accessible to people with a learning disability is an increase in the overall participation rate by this group. Given that 2.5% of apprentices declared that they had a learning disability in 2008/2009, we see no reason why this target, although ambitious, should not be achievable. We therefore recommend that the DfE continue to publish their breakdown by disability of the apprenticeship participation figures.

Recommendation 14: The Department for Education should publish data on how many people with a learning disability and/or difficulty do not achieve Level 1 in maths and English by the age of 19. This should be broken down into those who receive EHC plans and those who are in the SEND support group, the actual level they achieve, as well as the type of learning disability and/or difficulty they have.

Recommendation 15: The Department for Education should improve the data collection in relation to the use of the flexibilities to ensure that monitoring the use of the flexibilities is possible and transparent.

Workshop members highlighted that there are group of people with a learning disability and/or difficulties who do not currently have access to apprenticeships because they cannot meet the English and maths requirements and do not have access to the flexibilities offered to those with EHCPs. There is currently no publicly available data providing a breakdown that shows how many young people there may be in this category; we do not know how many of the pupils who do not attain Level 1 qualifications in maths and English at the age of 19 are in the SEND support group, nor how many have an EHCP or in fact have a learning disability and/or difficulty. While progression data with regards to English and maths exists and shows that in the 2017 15,024 young people aged 19 did not achieve a Level 1 qualification in English, and 25,012 in maths⁵², we do not know how many of those fall in the above categories.

This data is vital to help Government and stakeholders understand the size and characteristics of the group of people who potentially need the flexibilities with regards to English and maths in the context of apprenticeships. Understanding the size of this group will also enable Government to develop better targeted solutions to support those learners.

Recommendations for the Department for Work and Pensions

Recommendation 16: Mencap would recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions continues to use the Disability Confident scheme and the platform that it provides to raise awareness of best practice in this field, and provide more information to employers about the benefits of employing people with a learning disability, information about workplace adjustments and the flexibilities that are available to apprentices with a learning disability and/or difficulty.

Following the Maynard taskforce recommendations, the DWP agreed to ‘use the Disability Confident campaign – both in terms of pledges and events – to encourage employers to drive demand and increase supply’⁵³ for apprenticeships. Since then DWP has created the Disability Confident scheme which gives employers the tools they need to recruit and retain disabled people and this does appear to be changing attitudes and practices, but DWP themselves acknowledge there is still a long way to go. Mencap acknowledges that the duty to raise awareness of the apprenticeship offer for disabled people, and the benefits that it can bring to both the individual and employers, does not rest solely with the Department for Education and we believe that there is still some room to improve the information provided via the Disability Confident campaigns channels.

Recommendation 17: Mencap recommends that the Department for Work and Pensions strengthen the Disability Confident scheme and review the requirements made of employers to ensure that the scheme supports the culture change necessary to encourage disabled people to declare their needs.

Workshop participants were clear that Disability Confident is a step in the right direction, with many pleasantly surprised by the clear increase in numbers of employers signed up to the scheme. Many felt that it is a good model and will over time support a change towards a more inclusive working culture.

However, Mencap believes that in order for Disability Confident to truly change working culture and practices it needs to continuously evolve. We would therefore welcome the Department for Work and Pensions to slowly raise the bar regarding the requirements made of employers, and ask employers to visibly display the logo of the scheme on their job pages, and to require at least Disability Confident Employers and Leaders to employ a disabled person. We also believe that there should be clearer guidance within the Disability Confident Scheme on how to ensure that knowledge around how to support disabled people filters down to all staff they employ.

Appendices

Appendix A

Maynard recommendations

1. BIS and DWP formulate, implement and subsequently evaluate a joint communications strategy to promote awareness, particularly of the funding and financial support available, and the positive business benefits of taking on someone with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD).
2. BIS adjusts the minimum standard of English and maths required (to entry level 3) for a defined group of apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities who are able to meet the occupational standard but will struggle to achieve English and maths qualifications at the level normally required.
- The taskforce recommends that further work is done to define this group and its potential volume, and quantify the impact any changes will have on people with LDD.
3. BIS investigates potential changes to the method of assessments for English and maths for targeted groups as some people with LDD may be able to demonstrate the minimum requirements in the workplace, but be unable to complete a formal assessment.
4. DWP updates the Access to Work eligibility letter to 'sell' the support available better (eg up to £41,400) and emphasise that this support is available in situations which require more than reasonable adjustments.
5. DWP uses the Disability Confident campaign – both in terms of pledges and events – to encourage employers to drive demand and increase supply.
6. BIS ensure Individualised Learner Records are as robust as possible in data capture by auditing providers, improving data collection particularly on severe and mild/moderate LDD to ensure that the right questions are asked, and also that there are ample responses.
7. BIS and DWP consider 'what good looks like' for relevant hidden impairment groups and age brackets, in order to set appropriate targets for increasing the number of apprentices with LDD.
8. BIS and DWP consider joining up funding streams, for example Additional Learning Support and Access to Work, so that potential hurdles are reduced and that the application is seamless from an apprentice/employer/provider perspective.
9. A defined pilot should be conducted exploring how the funding model introduced with the apprenticeship levy might be flexed to incentivise employers to recruit apprentices with learning disabilities.
10. BIS and DWP lead by example with their own apprenticeship programmes, and encourage wider Civil Service and public sector commitment to apprenticeships for those with LDD.
11. BIS and DWP investigate and raise awareness of the range of non-traditional

recruitment practices including working interviews, job carving roles, electronic portfolios and other digital options to help LDD apprenticeship applicants.

12. BIS revisits recommendations from the [Little report \(2012\)](#) and provide a response to his update with a view to making further progress in delivering against them.
13. DWP and BIS to undertake further work to ensure that the system of reasonable adjustments and the availability of support, for example through Access to Work, are understood and consistently applied by providers, particularly in relation to those learners who could meet the normal English and maths criteria with this help.
14. BIS and DWP to consider the use of technology to support user-led strategies for apprentices with LDD, for example the Brain in Hand app.

APPENDIX B

The limits of the Local Offer – an assessment of the usability of guidance for seeking employment provided on local authority websites for young people with learning disabilities.

Summary

Local authorities are required to develop and publish a Local Offer web platform detailing support available for local children and young people (0–25 years) with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Local Offer websites present a unique opportunity to offer guidance and opportunities to pathways to employment as young people transition to adulthood. This research investigated if the information provided on Local Offer websites is sufficient to explain the options available for young people seeking employment, and if the information provided is accessible to people with learning disabilities.

Ten local authorities were selected from a pool of 81 authorities which had completed a SEND Ofsted/CQC inspection. The Local Offer website of each local authority was reviewed according to an 11-point web usability scale. Two of these websites were then selected for user testing by six people with learning disabilities. Participants were asked to complete specific tasks and qualitative notes were taken to record participant response.

Websites scored an average score of six out of eleven on the web usability scale. The majority of websites scored well on basic accessibility criteria and search functionality, but scores were low for quality of content. Only one website explained the required guidelines for national apprenticeship schemes. User testing demonstrated that content gaps represent significant barriers to accessing information. Participants felt lost, frustrated and unable to proceed without seeking support.

The Local Offer websites reviewed in this study provided listings of services but limited guidance to explain pathways available to young people. To find relevant information, participants needed to know in advance what their options were. This limits people in a position where they will most likely require support to understand the choices available to them and how to take steps to achieve their choices. If Local Offer websites are to fulfil their potential to raise awareness of pathways to employment, more thought needs to be put into intuitive navigation and accessible information provision.

Background

The Special Educational Needs and Disability regulations (Local Offer) 2014 stipulate that local authorities are responsible for developing and publishing a Local Offer web platform setting out the support they expect to be available for local children and young people (0–25 years) with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)⁵⁴. Local Offers are published on local authority managed web pages, in theory providing a ‘one stop shop’ for all required information.

As young people transition into their adult lives Local Offers present a unique opportunity

to offer guidance and opportunities to pathways to employment. National apprenticeship schemes are positioned as viable options for some young people with SEND. Since 2017 flexibility has been incorporated into entry requirements to increase access to this employment pathway for applicants who have or have had an education, health and care plan, or who have a statement of SEN⁵⁵. In addition, other pathways such as traineeships and supported internships are available and can assist to prepare young people for apprenticeships. Local Offers should inform young people about these options, and provide access to locally available opportunities.

Detailed requirements for information Local Offers should provide in relation to preparing for and finding employment are set out in Appendix one. Local Offers are jointly inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and 81 inspection reports had been published at the time of this research⁵⁶.

Local Offer web platforms present a valuable opportunity for young people to get informed about the options available to them as they transition into adulthood, so that they can make their own choices and be empowered to take the steps necessary to achieve their goals. However, fulfilling that opportunity is dependent of how informative and accessible web platforms are. This research set out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Do Local Offer web platforms provide the information necessary for young people to understand their options for seeking employment?
2. Is the information provided accessible to people with learning disabilities?

Methods

(a) Web usability assessment

Ten Local Offers were selected to be included in the web usability assessment. The selection of local authorities was made from the 81 local authorities where the Ofsted/CQC inspection had been conducted⁵⁷. Initially we purposively selected the local authorities where Mencap was providing services to assist young people to enter employment (six in total). To select the additional four local authorities we selected every twentieth local authority listed as having completed the Ofsted/CQC inspection. Inspection reports were scanned for any reference to websites or employment and these references used to provide context to the website assessment.

All websites were reviewed in Google Chrome. The web assessment tool graded each website out of ten based on the criteria set out in figure 1. The total possible score for each website was increased to 11 when a final criteria: provision of named contact for further enquiries; was added to the tool following the user testing where it was apparent this was a clear priority for participants.

Domain	Indicator	Points
Ease to find	Local offer site is top of google search listings	1
Accessibility	Uses Plain English	1
	Uses good visual communication (icons/images/videos/ colours etc)	1
	Uses larger text and image size	1
Navigation	It is easy to navigate from the local offer homepage to the employment section	1
Quality of content	Employment section provides required content as detailed in the SEND Local Offer regulations (2014)	1
	Specific information is provided to explain flexibility of apprenticeship entry requirements, and locally available apprenticeship opportunities are listed in the directory	1
	Directory listings are locally hosted and provide next steps and contact information for providers	1
Search functionality	Local offer website has a search bar which is easy to use	1
	Search listings are relevant to search terms	1
General	The local offer website provides a named contact person and number for further enquiries/assistance	1

Figure 1: Web usability assessment tool based on eleven point score

(b) Web user testing

Two websites were selected to undergo testing by six participants. As it is well documented that the use of inaccessible language and inadequate visual communication present substantial barriers to people with learning disabilities when accessing web content⁵⁸, only websites which met all three of the accessibility criteria were considered for user testing. Six users with learning disabilities were voluntarily recruited from staff at Mencap's London office. User tests took place at the participant's normal computer enabling access to any required assistive technology. The researcher sat with the participant and asked the participant to conduct a series of tasks. To reduce any confusion we used a vignette approach⁵⁹, creating a character called 'John' who participants could identify with (figure 2). We intended to focus the user test on apprenticeships, however the web usability assessment found very limited information on apprenticeships so the user test was designed around supported internships.

The researcher made qualitative notes to record approach taken and asked the participant what they liked or disliked about each page. At the end of the test the participant was asked to put any improvements they had mentioned throughout the test into order of priority.

Results

There was limited reference to services to improve access to employment or to web provision in the Ofsted/CQC reports. However, seven of the local authorities had successfully piloted supported internships and were moving to wider roll out. Seven reports stated that there was limited target audience awareness of Local Offer websites. Three of the reports mentioned that the websites were not adequately accessible, and one mentioned inadequate search functionality.

(a) Web usability assessment scores

The web usability score for each website ranged from 2–10 with an average score of six for each website. Figure 3 presents results aggregated by each indicator of usability. Four of the ten websites did not show up at the top of Google search listings when the search term: <name of local authority> local offer; was entered. The majority of websites performed well on accessibility, with most using plain language (9/10); and a majority using good visual communication (7/10) and larger text (6/10). Most websites offered good search functionality (8/10). Performance was less reliable for quality of content. Only one website gave information about flexible entry requirements for national apprenticeship schemes and the same website was the only one to list locally available opportunities for apprenticeships. Quality of search listings varied, and in four out of ten websites once an opportunity had been identified, there was inadequate information provided to know what step to take next. Although all the websites provided at a minimum a ‘contact us’ option in the footer of each page, this most often provided generic details to contact the local authority, and only four of the websites provided details for the SEND department. None of the websites provided the name of a person to contact for further assistance.

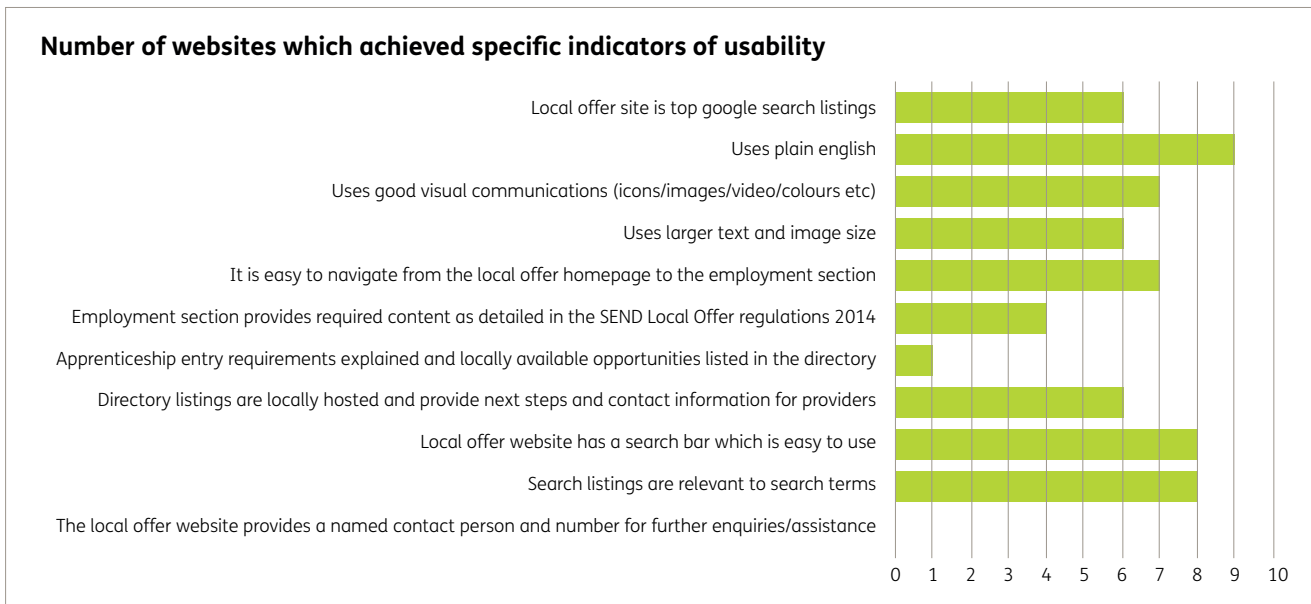


Figure 3: Number of websites achieving each indicator of usability

(b) Web user testing

Six volunteers (3 male/3 female) were recruited to participate in the user testing. Participant age ranged from 24–61 years. All six participants described themselves as having a learning disability, along with other conditions such as autism or Asperger syndrome, dyslexia, physical disabilities and dyspraxia. Five of the participants said they used the internet every day and could do so without assistance. The final participant said he used the internet about once a week. Reasons given by participants for using the internet included: for work; for entertainment (games and/or movies); for shopping, for information and for keeping in touch with people. Participants named Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and BBC news as their most visited websites.

All participants liked the homepages of both websites included in the review. Participants liked the use of bright colours, clickable boxes and images which were related to the text. One participant said the use of photographs of people with learning disabilities was favourable to cartoons or drawings.

When asked to find the employment section of the website, four participants looked among the clickable boxes on the homepage, whilst the other two went directly to the search bar. Next participants were asked ‘What is the next step John must take to apply for a supported internship’. The participants faired differently on this task dependent on whether they had used the search functionality, or tried to navigate from boxes on the homepage.

For the participants who used the homepage boxes to navigate, all four found the page easy to find from the first website, where the section was labelled: ‘Developing independence, employment and training’; but none were able to find the relevant section without help on the second website where it was labelled: ‘My adult life’.

Participant responses to both websites were critical once they had left the homepage. Websites were criticised due to: reduced text size; longer paragraphs; use of jargon and a reduction in the use of colours and imagery, but the most regularly cited challenge was that it was not clear where the user should go next on the page. For both websites, participants got lost in the content:

.....
‘It’s a mismatch – really it’s a total minefield. I wouldn’t go on this website, I would need someone to do it for me.’
.....
Participant, 47 years old.

One participant repeatedly described both websites as ‘limiting’ and ‘holding people back’. Participants expressed distress using words such as: horrible; struggling; and punishment. By contrast, the two participants who used the search bar from the home page were more comfortable accessing the search results, and were also comfortable following links to external websites. However, the search function on one of the websites featured a drop down menu with 41 categories, and this was considered a significant barrier to use by both

participants. They both agreed other people with learning disabilities would need support to access information on the website.

The four participants who had not intuitively used the search bar, were directed to it following their initial journey through the website. It was clear from responses given that there was a gap in understanding of how to use the search bar and the option to search on categories within the search bar was considered confusing.

.....
“It’s not self-explanatory – I didn’t know you could write in the (keyword) box.”
.....

Participant, 61 years old.

Without prompting all six participants looked for contact information on the Local Offer website itself. Two participants said contact information found in the footer of the website, was too hard to find, and all participants wanted the name of someone to contact. In addition all criticism of search listings focused around the lack of provision of contact names and telephone numbers. One participant summarised the importance of this:

.....
“When I was looking for my current job, I looked (at the listing) on the Mencap website and it said I should call Alex - and that made me feel safe.”
.....

Participant, 25 years old

User suggestions to improve the websites:

At the end of the user test the researcher presented the participant with a list of suggested improvements that the participant had made during the course of the user test. The participant was asked to organise the improvements in order of importance. Suggestions were collated across all users and ranked, as shown in figure 5.



Figure 5: Ranked participant suggestions to improve web usability

Accessible colours, fonts and language are the number one priority due to the reduced attention to these aspects once the user navigated away from the homepage. Other suggestions reflect the need to be guided through the website to avoid feeling lost. These suggestions included use of easy read pictures, pictures which link to words, and a simplified route to find the required information. This need was best summarised by one participant who said:

.....

“The website should be (structured) like the app I use on my phone to plan my bus route. It should be spread out with images and ask simple questions, one at a time. So the first question is: What are you interested in? And from there I can choose ‘Work’. Then it should show the types of work, like apprenticeship, supported internship, and I can choose the one that I want. It should give you information about each one if you click on it. It should be a simple route to find the information, not everything mismatched on one page.”

.....

Participant, 47 years old

Discussion

On average websites scored six out of eleven across a range of criteria reflecting accessibility, search functionality, ease of navigation and quality of information. One website was extremely high performing, achieving ten out of eleven of the specified indicators of usability, but performance was variable and the lowest performing Local Offer website only achieved two out of eleven of the indicators. Comparison with Ofsted/CQC

reports did not uncover any regional specific factors which could account for the variance in performance, however these reports provide very limited information with respect to employment services or web provision.

Quality of information was most often lacking, especially when explaining the options available for young people seeking work. Critically, with the exception of one website, the Local Offers did not provide needed information about apprenticeships. Approximately 11% of people who started apprenticeships in 2017/18 were people with a learning difficulty or a disability⁶⁰. However, data from 2014/2015 indicates that at the same time as the overall proportion of apprentices with a learning difficulty and/or disability has increased, the proportion of those with moderate learning difficulties taking on an apprenticeship has decreased substantially, from an already low base of 2.5% in 2008/2009 to 0.9% of apprentices in 2014/2015⁶¹ (7). The increase in the 2017 data is likely predominantly been driven by those with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, and less by those with a cognitive disability. Yet there is great potential for apprenticeships to play a substantial role in preparing young people with learning disabilities for long term employment.

User testing demonstrated that the gaps identified by the web usability tool represent significant barriers to access to information. Difficulties with site navigation, unclearly signposted information sources and non-intuitive search functionality quickly led participants to feel lost, frustrated and unable to proceed without seeking support. However the two younger participants were able to navigate the websites more intuitively by using the search functionality, rather than web navigation. Even though these two participants found the task easier, they considered the category choices within the search function confusing, and both thought the protagonist, John, would require support to find useful information. In addition all participants highlighted that neither website provided a clear overview of the options available to John. The combination of this, and the need to override the site navigation with the search function in order to access relevant information, results in websites which are only usable if the user already knows what they are looking for. This factor adds weight to participant opinions that John would need support to gain the information required.

It may be unrealistic to expect these websites to be fully usable by all people with learning disabilities. Some people may require a level of support, either through a paid professional or a family member in order to access the information, and it could be argued that the people providing support are the primary audience, rather than the person themselves. However, this positions the person's abilities as the barrier to information, rather than the barriers inherent in how the information is presented. As one of our participants said this approach is 'limiting' and 'holds people back'. Even if it is anticipated that a person will access these sites with support, as much as possible should be done to ensure that the person is enabled to understand the information on offer, and to make their own choices based on that information. In addition the challenge identified above, that a user would need to know before visiting the site what pathways are available to them in order to search for those options, will remain a challenge whether the user is the person, a family member or even a paid professional.

Participant reactions to feeling lost on the website resulted in a search for a contact phone number. We recognise that local authorities have limited resources and this is why enquiry forms are often provided in place of phone numbers, or generic numbers for a local authority switchboard provided. However, all participants expressed the need for these contact details, which suggests they would provide a valuable addition to the resource.

Local Offer websites need to host a diverse range of services covering all aspects of life for people with SEND from 0–25 years of age. It is no easy task to create a site map which would simplify the journey of all users, and yet still provide access to such a wide range of information. Search bar functionality is probably the easiest way to do this as it positions the user in the driving seat, rather than attempting to predict the journey they will take across the site. However, attempts to streamline the use of the search bar through the provision of categories complicated the functionality. In addition, any attempt to support the search functionality with site navigation seemed underdeveloped. Participants quickly got lost when following links, and the expectation that links would take people to where they needed to go most often led them to overlook the search functionality.

Participants’ experience of these websites was frustrating and in some cases, distressing. Websites were only considered usable if they were accessed with support. All participants were regular internet users who enjoyed accessing information online independently of support, suggesting that if well-designed, online provision has the potential to provide people with the tools to understand their choices and take steps to achieve their goals. In their current format the Local Offer websites reviewed by our participants only served to reinforce the need to fall back onto old pathways of support rather than opening up new avenues for people to make their own choices.

Recommendations

Problem	Most websites do not explain the different employment pathways available to young people
Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only one website explained the requirements for national apprenticeship schemes• Only four of ten websites provided the description of pathways required according to the SEND Local Offer regulations• Some participants described feeling lost, frustrated and unable to proceed without seeking support.
Recommendation	Provide an explanation of the employment pathways available to young people (apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships, job coaching).

Problem	When using the site navigation it is difficult to find relevant listings for employment opportunities on the websites
Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants described the websites as ‘limiting’ and that they would ‘hold people back’ • One participant said: ‘I don’t know where I am now – oh this is really confusing! John would definitely need support to do this, he would struggle and get quite frustrated.’ • Another participant said: ‘It’s a mismatch – really it’s a total minefield. I wouldn’t go on this website, I would need someone to do it for me.’
Recommendation	Improve site navigation by providing simple calls to action and response options.

Problem	The homepages of most websites are accessible, but the pages and listings within the website are less accessible.
Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four out of ten websites used small font and small pictures on internal web pages. • Participants criticized internal web pages due to: smaller text size; longer paragraphs; use of jargon and less use of colours and images. • When asked how they felt trying to find information, participants’ responses included: ‘horrible’; ‘a struggle’; and ‘a punishment’
Recommendation	Make every page accessible – not just the homepage.

Problem	<p>There is no explanation of how to use the search bar.</p> <p>The option to search on category is confusing.</p>
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Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four out of six participants needed guidance to use the search function. • One participant said: “It’s not self-explanatory – I didn’t know you could write in the (keyword) box.’ • All participants thought that the option to search of category was confusing. • One participant said: “There is too much information – John would need support here because it would be easy to select the wrong category.”
Recommendation	<p>Add clear instructions to search bar.</p> <p>Remove categories from search bar</p>

Problem	When you find an opportunity you are interested in it is not always clear what you should do next.
Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When participants looked at the search listings their main criticism was if there was no name and contact number given. • One participant said: “When I was looking for my current job, I looked (at the listing) on the Mencap website and it said I should call Alex - and that made me feel safe.”
Recommendation	Always provide the name and number of the relevant person to contact for all directory listings.

Problem	The name and telephone number of someone to contact at the local authority is not always provided.
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Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All participants looked for a name and number without being asked• ‘I’m having a hard time finding anything – it’s quite long winded, it would be much easier just to talk to someone.’
Recommendation	Provide the name and number of the relevant person to contact at the local authority if further information needed.

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