

Factsheet 1: Learning disability and employment

There are 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Of these, only around a fifth are currently in employment. Mencap believes this must and can change.

What is a learning disability?

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 It used to be called 'mental handicap' but this term is outdated and offensive.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

What does this mean in the context of employment?

People with a learning disability can make great employees! Evidence has shown that they are dedicated workers, having fewer sickness absences on average than other employees. In addition, people with a learning disability generally stay in entry-level jobs longer, saving employers money on recruiting and training new staff.

Many employers also report that their staff team morale increases as a result of working with their colleagues with a learning disability.

However, people with a learning disability find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate. They may need some support with learning new tasks or with understanding new situations. They may lack confidence and need a little extra support at the start, particularly as many may not have had any work experience before. You can find more information in Factsheet 5: What support is available ([insert link](#))

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

Types of roles people with a learning disability can typically do

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

While we would encourage you to keep an open mind about what each individual can offer, there are some general guidelines about the sort of jobs you might be able to open up to candidates with a learning disability. ([Insert links to case studies](#))

The types of jobs that could most easily be made accessible to people with a learning disability include:

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

For instance, roles such as, but not limited to:

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

Many employers experience difficulty in recruiting to entry-level roles. Supported employment agencies, such as Mencap, can help guide employers further and can help you to match the right person to the right job. More information about the various programmes on offer and the support available, including apprenticeships for people with a learning disability, appears in **Factsheet 5: What support is available** ([link](#))