



Department  
for Education

# Exploring the funding and support for apprentices with additional support needs

Research report

April 2018

Emily Jones and Elizabeth Davies –  
Learning and Work Institute



Social Science in Government

# Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	4
Key findings	4
Introduction	11
Context	11
Research aims and objectives	13
Method	14
Terminology and definitions	16
Defining and identifying support needs	17
Types of support needs	17
Identifying support needs	24
Identification and declaration	28
Support provided	31
Provider support for apprentices with learning support needs	31
Employer support for people with learning support needs	34
Gaps in provision for supporting apprentices with learning support needs	35
Provider and employer support for apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs	37
Use of funding	44
Experiences of funding streams	44
Enablers to claiming funding	59
Gaps in provision	64
Potential implications of wider apprenticeship reforms	68
Conclusions	69
Appendix A: Topic Guides	72

Apprenticeship funding support: Topic guide for provider interviews	72
Interviewer notes	72
Introducing the research to respondent	72
Terminology and definitions	73
Confidentiality and Consent	73
Questions	74
Apprenticeship funding support: Topic guide for employer interviews	81
Interviewer notes	81
Introducing the research to respondent	81
Terminology and definitions	82
Confidentiality and Consent	82
Questions	83
Apprenticeship funding support: Topic guide for third party interviews	90
Interviewer notes	90
Introducing the research to respondent	90
Terminology and definitions	91
Confidentiality and Consent	91
Questions	92

# Executive summary

## Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to explore the effectiveness of funding to support apprentices with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) and/or apprentices from a disadvantaged background. The research involved in-depth qualitative interviews with apprenticeship providers, employers and third party organisations who they work in partnership with. Interviews explored how organisations define and identify support needs, the support they provide to apprentices, the funding they access to meet these needs, and whether this enables apprentices to successfully participate in and complete their programme. This report presents the findings from the study and identifies areas for consideration in the future development of apprenticeships funding policy.

## Research approach

A qualitative approach was used for this research in order to facilitate a detailed exploration of the key research questions and the experiences of providers, employers and third party organisations. A total of 30 apprenticeship providers and 28 employers were engaged in the research. In addition, 9 third party organisations providing support for groups of individuals who might consider apprenticeships also took part in the research, such as charities and support organisations with expertise in working with disadvantaged young people. Interviews were only conducted with organisations who have current or recent experience of supporting apprentices with LDDs and/or apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds. The findings are therefore reflective of the organisations interviewed and may not be reflective of the experiences and perceptions of employers and providers more widely.

## Key findings

Providers and employers recognise that there are a range of factors which mean individuals may require additional support to help them access and progress in apprenticeships. These are broadly consistent with the areas where additional funding is currently made available by the DfE, including factors relating to LDDs and disadvantage. Most commonly, providers interviewed claim funding from the ESFA through two streams: Additional Learning Support and Disadvantage Uplift. Drawing on this funding, as well as core funds, providers and employers adopt different approaches to provide individualised support to apprentices.

## Defining and identifying support needs

Most providers engaged in the research believe the definitions for apprentice support needs should be wider than they are currently defined in funding, based on the apprentices they work with and the barriers they experience.

Specifically, providers tend to consider support needs as falling into two broad categories:

- **Learning support needs:** Support required by an apprentice in order for them to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship. This may include apprentices with 'diagnosed' LDDs; apprentices with 'undiagnosed' LDDs; and apprentices who do not have an LDD but require additional support in order to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship.
- **Social or safeguarding support needs:** Support required by an apprentice for them to take part in the apprenticeship more generally. This can include a wide range of personal, social and economic factors, including financial hardship, insecure housing, or a lack of familial support. Such issues are not seen by providers as exclusively relating to postcodes eligible for Disadvantage Uplift funding.

Mental health issues are of concern both as a factor in learning support and in addressing social and safeguarding support needs. These are seen as a growing issue and providers and employers do not always feel sufficiently equipped to deal with them.

Providers tend to take responsibility for identifying and assessing support needs. This is done both at recruitment and throughout the apprenticeship programme using a combination of evidence assessment (for example, asking for an EHCP) and formal testing (such as Functional Skills initial assessments) which can identify learning support needs, and wider questioning on home-life characteristics to identify social support needs.

Employers may identify learning support needs if this affects in-work training or if they or a provider believes that a learning difficulty is affecting an apprentice's ability to do their job. In such an instance, tutors or additional support staff will involve the apprentice's line manager if they have the apprentice's permission to disclose this.

Employers and providers also play a key role during the in-programme stages, particularly when identifying social support needs by observing and monitoring performance and attitude over time.

One of the main issues that providers and employers face in identifying support needs is that they often rely on individuals to declare these. While some providers and employers have found effective ways to encourage declaration, some apprentices do not declare

due to fear of being stigmatised. In addition, apprentices are sometimes unaware of learning difficulties, which may not have been identified in the past, or they do not have evidence of this need, for example an EHCP, Statement of SEN or LDA.

## **Support provided**

Providers and employers offer support to individual apprentices on a case by case basis and are reluctant to offer one-size-fits-all programmes. Providers believe apprentices are more likely to engage and succeed in a programme of support that is tailored to their specific needs.

Employers typically perceive addressing learning support needs to be the role of the provider; although, most are open to working with the provider in order to ensure that in-work adjustments and support are available to their apprentices. Where on-the-job support needs are identified, most providers work with employers to advise and support workplace adjustments. However, this support can only be provided if the apprentice declares, or gives permission for the provider to declare, their learning support need to their employer. Providers are concerned that in many instances, apprentices may go without in-work support for fear of subsequent stigma.

Providers use a range of approaches to support apprentices with additional learning needs, including:

- Providing additional one-to-one sessions with apprentices to help with assessments and functional skills.
- Paying for specialist assessments and support if needed.
- Contextualising English and maths teaching and learning either by making it workplace-based or specific.
- Allowing more time in examinations.
- Using adaptive technologies.
- Encouraging the use of different coloured ink, reading pens, paper, and overlays.
- Providing support for adaptations to workplace processes and systems.
- Providing training for employers regarding additional learning needs.
- Providing training for internal staff on best practice when working with those with learning support needs.
- Offering support for communications and sensory needs.
- Offering buddy systems.

Providers and employers offer a wide range of support to apprentices with social and safeguarding needs, reflecting the breadth of needs an apprentice may have. The types

of support offered by employers and providers tend to be similar, as these needs can affect both in-work and off-the-job performance, as well as motivation and commitment to the apprenticeship. Support for those with social and safeguarding support needs includes:

- Additional one-to-one support from tutors, assessors, additional support staff, HR teams, and line managers to provide coaching and reassurance.
- Mentoring and buddying support.
- Providing or referring to counselling services.
- Supporting access to specific financial support for travel, housing, and food.
- Being flexible with shift and timetable patterns and appointments for those with caring responsibilities or with chaotic personal lives.
- Providing support on understanding employability skills and behaviours such as timekeeping and personal hygiene and presentation.
- Providing advice and guidance on managing money issues.
- Providing equipment such as laptops for coursework.

Providers and employers use a range of methods to achieve this tailored approach, although some would value information about what constitutes effective practice to ensure the support they provide is as good as it can be. Support is further enhanced through the engagement of partner organisations who can offer specialist support to apprentices when the employer or provider do not have the appropriate skills and resources. These services often offer resources that providers may not be able to access otherwise, and they are reliant on the availability of these services in their local area (and their knowledge of them).

### **Use of funding**

Providers interviewed are most likely to claim funding from the ESFA through two streams: Additional Learning Support and Disadvantage Uplift. Other forms of DfE/ESFA funding support are not well known/widely used. Nearly all providers interviewed are aware of, and have at some point used, the Additional Learning Support funding, and the Disadvantage Uplift funding, whilst awareness and understanding of Excess Learning Support or Exceptional Learning Support is mixed and few have accessed it. Very few have claimed payments of £1,000 for apprentices aged 19-24 years with EHCPs and care leavers, introduced in May 2017.

Additional Learning Support funding is seen by some providers as a beneficial and flexible way to provide additional support for those with learning support needs. Most providers interviewed have either accessed or explored accessing the funding, and for many it is the only external source of funding they use to support apprentices with

learning support needs. Due to the funding criteria, this funding is typically used specifically to support apprentices with diagnosed learning difficulties or disabilities such as dyslexia, autism and Asperger's Syndrome, and providers do not think the funding allows them to support all apprentices with learning support needs.

Providers expressed concerns that the processes underpinning the Additional Learning Support funding may be off-putting to many, who perceive a lack of clarity in the eligibility criteria, and the complexity of evidencing and auditing involved to be a disincentive to apply. This has led some to become risk averse and only claim for a small proportion of the support they provide. Most providers are aware of and access the Disadvantage Uplift, which they use to support apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs. Providers were positive about the process for claiming Disadvantage Uplift funding, which is calculated based on postcode and requires providers to only ensure that postcodes are included in their ILR data returns. Providers use this funding flexibly to target support based on need rather than the postcode area the apprentice comes from. It also gives them some stability of funding, enabling them to plan provision on a longer-term basis. While interviewees recognised that postcode is an imperfect indicator for support needs, providers appreciate the straightforward eligibility criteria. Some FE colleges have concerns that the funding is added to wider budgets and is not sufficiently ringfenced within their organisation.

Providers and employers both also rely on 'core' funding and resource to provide support to a wider range of apprentices when they are not able to draw support from other places. Both would value more information about what is available, where and for what. Employers in particular draw down very few other sources of funding, with Access to Work not being widely used for apprentices.

### **Potential implications of apprenticeship reforms**

Wider apprenticeship reforms, such as the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, standards and end-point assessment, do not appear to have affected the support offered by the providers and employers involved in the research, or the funding they receive. Many interviewees explained that with the number and rapidity of the reforms, they are 'waiting to see' what the impact is and that they will respond when they need to. Regardless of changes, there is ongoing commitment to providing support to apprentices who need it.

Employer and provider motivations for taking on apprentices with additional support needs need to be considered. For some, the £1,000 payment to contribute to additional support will enable employers and providers to think more creatively about what they are offering, to who, and how.



## Considerations for future policy

While providers identified specific groups of apprentices or areas of provision that require more investment, some providers interviewed called for more flexibility in the way that support funding can be used. They suggested that wider definitions should be adopted (for example 'learning needs' and 'social and safeguarding needs') so that they are better able to provide personalised support on a case by case basis. Some providers suggested that screeners used for assessing eligibility for funding could be standardised and used as part of the apprenticeship initial assessment (to help increase identification and disclosure earlier on) or subsequently. With this approach one single form could be completed and eligibility for the range of funding sources assessed at different points in the learner journey.

The evidence suggests there are currently two main issues in funding provision that require further consideration and/or clarification:

- Funding to support apprentices with undiagnosed LDDs and apprentices with a learning support need that is not related to an LDD. Around a third of providers interviewed do not currently claim Additional Learning Support funding for these apprentices because they do not know what evidence would be acceptable to the ESFA. Providers and employers engaged in the research suggested the following types of information (with appropriate examples) are made available by the ESFA in one central and clearly signposted place:
  - What funding is available: Including what types of funding are available and who provides this.
  - Who is eligible: Clearly establishing the types of support needs the funding is aimed at and any specific restrictions on eligibility.
  - What can the funding be used for: Outlining what specific types of support or resources can different funding types be used for and what is not allowed.
  - What evidence and supporting information is required: Including what forms of evidence are acceptable if there is an auditing requirement and examples of the level of detail required.
- Funding to support apprentices with mental health conditions. Most providers interviewed do not claim Additional Learning Support for these apprentices as they are unsure of the eligibility criteria and/or find it challenging to evidence the specific impact that mental health issues have on learning. Some interviewees raised questions about whether this is a need the funding was intended to meet, given disadvantaged postcodes are not indicative of mental problems. More critically, providers explained that mental health support is a growing need and may require more funding than is available through the uplift. A number of

providers question the extent to which it is their responsibility to meet needs associated with mental health, which can sometimes require specialist expertise.

## Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to explore the effectiveness of funding to support apprentices with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) and/or apprentices from a disadvantaged background. The research involved in-depth qualitative interviews with apprenticeship providers, employers and third party organisations who they work in partnership with. Interviews explored how organisations define and identify support needs, the support they provide to apprentices, the funding they access to meet these needs, and whether this enables apprentices to successfully participate in and complete their programme. This report presents the findings from the study and identifies areas for consideration in the future development of apprenticeships funding policy.

## Context

The government has a clear agenda to deliver three million quality apprenticeships by 2020.<sup>1</sup> Following the 2012 Richard Review of Apprenticeships,<sup>2</sup> the government laid out plans to ensure that employers can take greater ownership of, and make greater investment in, apprenticeships through the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, which came into force in April 2017. Since the introduction of these reforms, the number of apprenticeship starts in England has risen annually, with a slight decrease in 2016/17 attributed to employers and providers adjusting to the introduction of the levy.<sup>3</sup>

In 2016/17, 10.3% of individuals starting an apprenticeship declared an LDD. Although the proportion has increased slightly each year from 7.7% in 2011/12, this still only represents around half the total proportion of people with disabilities – almost one in five (19.5%) of people aged 16-64 years in England.

As apprenticeship numbers increase, it is vital that they represent high quality opportunities with genuine outcomes and that no one who is able to undertake an apprenticeship is prevented from doing so. Recent government reforms, such as the introduction of standards, are intended to ensure higher quality within apprenticeships, and the government has placed a clear emphasis on the importance of widening access to apprenticeships.

---

<sup>1</sup> HM Government (2015) *English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 Vision*  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-richard-review-of-apprenticeships>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

In 2016, a taskforce was commissioned by the then Minister for Disabled People, Justin Tomlinson MP, and the then Minister for Skills, Nick Boles MP, to explore access to apprenticeships for people with learning disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Paul Maynard MP chaired the taskforce, which drew on evidence briefings from stakeholder groups to: reach an understanding of the factors that affect people with learning disabilities in accessing and completing an apprenticeship; identify solutions that could help overcome these barriers and raise participation levels; and make recommendations on actions that should be taken to address these barriers. In response to these recommendations, the DfE committed to review the impact of funding support for apprentices with learning difficulties or learning disabilities in the new funding approach implemented in May 2017. This comes at the same time as reforms to the SEND system placing a duty on learning providers to support young people up to the age of 25.<sup>5</sup>

Rates of apprenticeship participation are linked to a range of factors indicating disadvantage. For example, analysis by the Social Mobility Commission highlights income-based inequalities in access to Level 3 apprenticeships, with young people eligible for free school meals (FSM) being half as likely to select this route than non-FSM eligible young people.<sup>6</sup> This varies across geographical regions, with non-FSM eligible young people in Yorkshire and the Humber being 2.66 times more likely to start a Level 3 apprenticeship and 2.5 times more likely to complete it than their FSM-eligible peers.

To ensure individuals are provided with the support they need to successfully access and participate in apprenticeships, it is also crucial that funding models are fit for purpose, and that providers and employers understand how funding can be accessed to provide effective support to all apprentices who may have additional needs. Following changes to the apprenticeships system, new funding models were introduced in May 2017 for new starts. The following section outlines the key changes of interest for this research.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-recommendations>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans/send-19-to-25-year-olds-entitlement-to-ehc-plans>

<sup>6</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2016) *State of the Nation 2016: Social Mobility in Great Britain* [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/569410/Social\\_Mobility\\_Commission\\_2016\\_REPORT\\_WEB\\_1\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/569410/Social_Mobility_Commission_2016_REPORT_WEB_1_.pdf)

## Funding models

### Learning difficulties and/or disabilities

The new apprenticeships funding model, introduced in May 2017, provides additional support for individuals with LDDs. Apprenticeship employers and providers working with apprentices aged 19-24 with an Education Health and Care Plan each receive a payment of £1,000 (per year), extending the financial support available for all 16-18 year olds. Providers can also draw down **Additional Learning Support** of up to £150 per month to meet costs associated with achieving the learning goals on an apprenticeship; **Excess Learning Support** above the fixed monthly rate; and **Exceptional Learning Support**, which embraces all eligible learners with support needs over and above £19k.

### Disadvantage

The previous funding model included a '**disadvantage uplift**' to support apprentices living in the most deprived areas. The new funding policy brings together standards and frameworks and continues disadvantage uplift payments for apprentices on frameworks. The DfE has committed to review the payments made to providers to support apprentices from disadvantaged areas.

From May 2017 apprenticeship employers and providers working with apprentices aged 19-24 who are **care leavers** each receive a payment of £1,000 (per year).

### Other sources of support

Apprenticeship employers and providers may also draw on other sources of funding for the support they offer to apprenticeships. This could include:

- Provider-specific hardship funds to use at their discretion with disadvantaged learners.
- Funds from specialist support agency hardship and emergency funds.
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provides Access to Work funding to contribute to support beyond reasonable adjustments for people with a disability, health condition or mental health condition that affects their ability to work.

## Research aims and objectives

This research provides an evidence base on the effectiveness of apprenticeship funding support for people with LDDs and/or from a disadvantaged background. It aims to understand how apprenticeship providers and employers support these apprentices, how this support is resourced and funded, and whether this enables individuals to successfully participate in and complete their apprenticeship.

The insights from the research are intended to inform the future development of apprenticeship funding policy. Specifically, the research explored:

- employers' and providers' views on the barriers that support is required to address;
- how additional support needs are identified and which needs most commonly require support;
- the types of support that have been found to be effective;
- how different funding streams (within apprenticeships and others) are used to fund additional support;
- how support and its effectiveness varies across different types of providers, employers and apprentices;
- how changes to apprenticeship funding and policy in May 2017 will affect the support that providers and employers can offer and how this support is funded; and
- how effective current policy is at providing funding for additional support and how, if at all, it could be improved.

## Method

A qualitative approach was used for this research in order to facilitate a detailed exploration of the key research questions and the experiences of providers, employers and third party organisations. A total of 30 apprenticeship providers and 28 employers were engaged in the research. In addition, 9 third party organisations providing support for groups of individuals who might consider apprenticeships also took part in the research, such as charities and support organisations with expertise in working with disadvantaged young people.

## Sampling

It was agreed that 20 providers, 20 employers and five third parties would be interviewed about their experiences of supporting apprentices with LDD (see Table 1 below). In addition, 10 providers, 10 employers and five third party organisations would be recruited for interviews about supporting apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds. While organisations were recruited on this basis, where relevant, interviewees were keen to discuss their experiences in supporting both apprentices with LDD and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Table 1 Sampling overview**

<b>Apprentices supported</b>	<b>Number of employers interviewed</b>	<b>Number of providers interviewed</b>	<b>Number of third parties interviewed</b>	<b>Total number of interviews</b>
Apprentices with LDDs	20	20	5	45
Apprentices from disadvantaged areas	10	10	5	25
<b>Total</b>	30	30	10	70

All participants were recruited using a combination of telephone and email approaches. Appointments were booked following an initial screening conversation to establish whether they currently or recently had any apprentices who had LDDs or were from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **Conducting and analysing interviews**

The in-depth interviews were conducted using topic guides developed by L&W to reflect the three main interview types: provider; employer; and third party organisation. The topic guides were designed to be used flexibly by the research team following a detailed briefing. As such, where appropriate topic guides were tailored by the interview based on:

- Level of involvement the organisation had in arranging and providing support for apprentices.
- Number of apprentices supported.
- Gathering a holistic picture of how apprentices are supported.
- Whether the organisation supports apprentices with LDD, from a disadvantaged background, or both.

Interviews typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio recorded and subsequently fully transcribed. All participants were offered the choice of a telephone or face-to-face interview. Interviews were analysed by L&W using a thematic framework approach.

Interview topic guides can be found at Appendix A.

## Terminology and definitions

During this research the following terminology/definitions were used and explored with participants. The definitions are in line with Individualised Learner Record (ILR) definitions and those used by the Maynard taskforce:

**Learning difficulty or disability** – including: Emotional/behavioural difficulties; Social and emotional difficulties; Moderate learning difficulty; Severe learning difficulty; Dyslexia; Dyscalculia; Autism spectrum disorder; Asperger syndrome; Other specific learning difficulty (e.g. Dyspraxia); Other learning difficulty.

**Disadvantage** – disadvantaged backgrounds, identified by postcodes used by the government to provide extra funding in the shape of a 'disadvantage uplift'. The research also considered other indicators of disadvantage, for example, whether an individual was a care leaver or young adult carer.

**Support** – any type of support that is provided by the apprenticeship provider, employer, or another party in order to remove barriers to an individual accessing or successfully completing an apprenticeship. This might include specific funding that is provided or other types of support.

These definitions were explained to interviewees prior to each interview.



## Defining and identifying support needs

This chapter explores the range of support needs that apprentices may have, and the types of support that they may require in order to successfully access and complete an apprenticeship. It explores how providers and employers identify these needs, and the extent to which providers and employers believe support can be provided to meet different needs.

### Types of support needs

All the providers and employers interviewed recognise that there are a range of factors which mean individuals may require additional support to help them access and progress in apprenticeships. These are broadly consistent with the areas where additional funding is currently made available by the DfE, including factors relating to learning difficulties or disabilities (LDDs) and disadvantage. However, based on the apprentices they are already supporting and the barriers they experience, most providers believe the definitions used should be wider. Employers are more mixed in their views of the definitions, with most not having given thought to this issue, relying on the provider to inform them of need. However, some (around one-fifth) employers agree with the providers that the definitions could be wider.

Nearly all the providers and employers report that where an apprentice has support needs, they see it as a key part of their role to accommodate these in the on and off the job learning elements they are responsible for. Most organisations interviewed, particularly providers, are reluctant to group people into too specific categories, emphasising that apprentices need to be considered on a case by case basis, as they will require differing levels of support. Providers therefore tend to shape provision around support needs.

*"We have a very strong pastoral function within our provision and that tends to uncover a lot of previously-unmet needs, which might be learning or physical disabilities which have hampered their learning, it could also be a lot about their background in terms of family, in terms of previous experience. It can be about caring responsibilities where they're already a primary carer, it can be about parental aspiration."* Independent Training Provider

Specifically, providers tend to consider support needs as falling into two broad categories:

- **Learning support needs:** Support required by an apprentice in order for them to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship.

- **Social or safeguarding support needs:** Support required by an apprentice for them to take part in the apprenticeship more generally.

These definitions are discussed further in the next section.

## Learning support needs

### Defining learning support needs

Providers consider learning support needs that they, and in some instances the employer, may need to address to include any additional support that enables individuals to meet the learning-specific on-the-job and off-the-job components of their apprenticeship, as well as meeting the English and maths requirements. This includes:

- **Apprentices with ‘diagnosed’ LDDs:** people with the LDDs identified in the terms and definitions of this research, who have been formally diagnosed and have supporting evidence of this such as an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), Statement of Special Education Needs (SEN), or Learning Difficulties Assessment (LDA).
- **Apprentices with ‘undiagnosed’ LDDs:** people with the LDDs identified in the terms and definitions of this research, but who have not been formally diagnosed, therefore do not have supporting evidence such as an EHCP, Statement of SEN or LDA.
- **Apprentices who do not have an LDD, but require additional support in order to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship:** people who providers do not think have an LDD, but do require additional support to meet the learning requirements of their apprenticeship. For example, this might be because they struggle with English and maths, because they have a mental health problem, or because they have English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs.

References to “learning support needs” throughout this report include all three categories, unless stated otherwise.

Providers identified that additional support can be required by apprentices in all of these categories, and believe that it is their role to ensure this support is available. However, when discussing LDDs (diagnosed and undiagnosed), providers tended to focus on apprentices with dyslexia, Asperger’s Syndrome and autism, as these are the most frequently supported LDDs at their institutions.

### Barriers associated with learning support needs

Providers note that apprentices with learning support needs can experience a range of barriers to both accessing and completing an apprenticeship. Typically, these relate to achieving the qualifications and learning standards required by the apprenticeship.

Providers and employer-providers argue the biggest barrier for most people with learning support needs is meeting the English and maths requirements for apprenticeships. This is the primary challenge for apprentices who do not have an LDD, but require additional support in order to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship. Employers without provider status are less likely to cite English and maths as the main barrier for apprentices, placing more emphasis on social barriers. However, providers are concerned that English and maths requirements will put people off undertaking an apprenticeship in the first instance and could also act as a barrier to retention and completion.

*"What we generally find around apprenticeships is it's the academic work with the qualifications. So it's not generally about their employment skills or their apprenticing, it's generally academic, so the maths, English."* Third Sector Provider

When considering the wider learning elements of an apprenticeship (both on and off-the-job), providers are more likely to think this would be a barrier for those with diagnosed or undiagnosed LDDs, as more adjustments would be necessary in their day-to-day learning activities. For example, apprentices with dyslexia may be given coloured paper to use in the workplace.

Providers also noted that any reasonable adjustments required (for example additional time to complete work or assessments) may act as a barrier for employers from employing apprentices with LDDs, who may not feel able, comfortable and/or willing to provide this support. This view is reinforced by a number of the employers interviewed, who suggested that the additional time it may take individuals to complete the learning elements of the apprenticeship could be off-putting for some employers, and significantly exceed the 20% off the job requirement. In a small number of instances providers referred to extending the length of the apprenticeship in order to better accommodate apprentices learning support needs. One employer explained that if managers have a negative experience, this can discourage them from offering learning opportunities to other members of staff.

*"It's trying to keep the managers from seeing it as a negative and really continue embracing it. If they have a bad experience and realise that every two weeks for two hours their employee is going to be disappearing [in addition to their off-the-job training], and it's leading up to a very busy period for our business, then that can mean they're less likely to have discussions with other members of the team about learning opportunities."* Employer

Providers believe that their own staff may also be unsure of how to provide support for some apprentices. This was particularly true amongst providers that had not been established for as long or did not have in-house expertise supporting learners with similar

needs more widely (in particular Employer-Providers). However, others who have been established longer also want reassurance that the support they provide is in line with best practice.

*"Even in our college sometimes, it's not something that everybody is well aware of or confident in promoting."* FE College

A number of providers also noted that for some apprentices, particularly those with diagnosed LDDs, the perceived stigma of having a learning support need will be a barrier. Individuals who have previously been stigmatised at school may be reluctant to declare their need for additional support. They may also be resistant to receiving additional support creating challenges for providers, such as not turning up to appointments or cancelling sessions.

*"We have had a lot of learners who say, 'Oh no, I don't want that,' and I don't know whether they feel that there's some sort of stigma attached, that they've almost left that behind at school and they don't want that to travel with them, but obviously it then makes our job a little bit harder because when it comes to evidencing we need something that's up-to-date."* Independent Training Provider

*"We're talking about learners who have not achieved the required level of maths and English at school. So historically they don't like this, so they push against it. They cancel sessions, they don't turn up, they don't return calls. That's the biggest issue we have at the moment."* Independent Training Provider

Where providers consider an apprenticeship to be inappropriate or unachievable for an individual due to their learning needs, they may refer them onto another scheme, such as a supported internship or a traineeship. Such schemes may help to prepare an individual for an apprenticeship in the future, or they can provide an alternative route into employment. One provider noted that they would be most likely to refer individuals to another programme if they were more than one level away from the English and maths requirements of the apprenticeship.

*"If they've got more than two jumps to get there, we've found through history that it's very, very challenging for people to get two levels. So, as long as they're working a level below, or at the level that they require, then that should be fine. If you're not going to achieve level two English and maths, then the level three apprenticeship cannot be taken. So, we can't offer you something that you're not going to achieve on. So, we would look at an alternative programme for you."* FE College

## Social and safeguarding needs

### Defining social and safeguarding needs

Providers were unanimous that some apprentices require support to meet the daily social requirements, employee behaviours, and structure that an apprenticeship involves. This is seen as crucial for retention on an apprenticeship and for ensuring a positive experience for both the apprentice and employer.

Providers report a wide range of disadvantage, personal and social factors that may contribute to an apprentice having social and safeguarding needs. Most do not believe that the full range of indicators of these needs can be captured through the postcode approach applied in the Disadvantage Uplift. Providers believe the following factors would also be indicative of an apprentice having social or safeguarding needs:

- Having a mental health problem
- Facing financial hardship
- Having left the care system
- Having caring responsibilities
- Lacking a support network
- Having an unstable or unpredictable home life
- Experience of homelessness
- Having a criminal record
- Having a history of, or current substance, abuse issues

Providers acknowledged that being from a disadvantaged postcode can be an indicator that an apprentice may have experienced some of the issues listed above and therefore require additional support. However, it is important to note that these factors are not seen by providers to exclusively relate to areas eligible for Disadvantage Uplift funding and that these issues could be experienced across postcode areas.

Some of the issues described above can be exacerbated by the apprenticeship itself, with a number of providers reporting that low apprentice pay and impact on family benefits has led to financial and housing difficulties. In turn, they can also contribute to the onset of mental health problems.

*“Access and entry into apprenticeships or work itself is not a learned experience at home, and we’ve actually had issues in the past where parents have been actually trying to persuade their young person that they don’t want to go that way, because it will actually impact negatively on household benefits. So yes, there’s a bit of a*

*perverse incentive there, because of the level of the apprenticeship wage, and that's a whole other issue really."* Independent Training Provider

Mental health problems were seen by nearly all the providers interviewed as a crucial area of support for apprentices and one which has become increasingly and concerningly common. Providers identified anxiety, stress and depression as three common examples of mental health problems that apprentices presented with.

*"I think one of the big, amazing areas of concern, for me, from talking to the training advisors and going around and seeing them, is mental health. Anxiety and depression, stress. That is one of the biggest reasons that we have learners requesting to come off programme or go on a planned break, because they're just not coping with life in general."* Independent Training Provider

Whilst providers acknowledge that mental health can constitute a learning need (for example, if it impacts on an apprentice's ability to sit exams or undertake coursework), the majority of providers view it as a social or safeguarding need. This is because mental health problems may impact on attendance, how apprentices relate with colleagues and customers, and their overall motivation and attitude to the apprenticeship.

Employers also recognise that apprentices may have social and safeguarding support needs. Mental health problems are less commonly cited by employers, who were more likely to discuss personal or family-related issues as an indicator of disadvantage. Some employers have aimed their recruitment of apprentices at young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, seeing this as an important part of their own corporate social responsibility and ethos.

*"We try to encourage employers to think a little bit more about corporate social responsibility, and about giving people a chance who've had a rough deal, or giving people a chance who struggle to cope with what your average applicant might do."* Employer-Provider

However, given apprenticeships are jobs, interviewees explained that employers are focused on recruiting the right person for the role and are unlikely to appoint someone who shows signs of being unreliable or who require a disproportionate level of investment to train.

*"Employers are really clear and they say this to young people at our employer breakfasts and events we do, 'We will judge you either way but you need to turn up, be trained and do the job.' It isn't a youth club, it isn't a pre-employability programme where you can really nurture them, 'I know you couldn't get in this morning because, you know, your housing allowance has run out.' Employers won't tolerate that, so if they get any whiff of that at any point of that recruitment stage it's, 'Sorry, no. They're not right for us.'" Third Sector Provider*

## Barriers associated with social and safeguarding support needs

Providers and employers noted that apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs experience a range of barriers when both accessing and taking part in apprenticeships. For example, they may experience a lack of concentration in both the in-work and off-the-job elements of their programme, a lack of motivation, poor attendance, and/or a lack of support from those in their personal life.

Several providers report that the financial implications of taking part in an apprenticeship can be a key factor in whether an apprentice experiences these barriers. Some report that a family may be unsupportive of the decision to take part in an apprenticeship as the removal of Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits negatively impacts on the household income; with the apprentice's pay not being seen as sufficiently high to address this concern. As a result some providers and employers report that they have experienced at least one occasion where an apprentice has been made homeless as a result.

*"We've had issues with personal cleanliness... We've had parents throw out apprentices from their homes because they've affected housing benefit, so we've had learners turn up on their first day of work with all of their belongings in bin bags."* Employer-Provider

The level of additional support required from the employer and provider to ensure the apprentice remains engaged in their programme is seen as a particular barrier for an apprentice with social and safeguarding needs. The context of the apprentice, the provider and the employer can determine the support offer. Larger providers and employers are thought to be more likely to be able to meet needs, as they have existing infrastructure and programmes that could benefit apprentices, for example mentoring and buddy schemes.

A few providers noted that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may not be able to access an apprenticeship at all, and as such they may be routed to pre-apprenticeship programmes, but often do not progress further. One Third Sector provider noted that a third of their pre-apprenticeship intake were those who were eligible for free school meals when they were at school, but that the vast majority of individuals were still too 'far away' from being ready for an apprenticeship.

*"We automatically are working with the ones who come with different disadvantage for lots of different reasons. What we know is that we might work with someone pre-employability programme with the view that will transition them through traineeship or apprenticeship but in reality we probably have less than 1% who actually move over. They're too far away. So what I'd say is there's a real need for more transitional focus for those young people."* Third Sector Provider

## Identifying support needs

The ways in which providers and employers identify apprentices with both learning and social support needs varies between institutions and organisations. However, the timings and types of activities used to identify apprentices with support needs are mostly consistent, as are the challenges faced by providers and employers in identifying need.

### Pre-programme

Prior to commencing an apprenticeship programme there are a range of ways that providers and employers assess and understand both learning and social support needs.

### Recruitment

The approach taken to recruiting apprentices is key in enabling providers and employers to understand what their support needs are. There are three main approaches for recruitment used:

- **Employer-led recruitment:** Employers have an existing or newly recruited member of staff they would like to start an apprenticeship.
- **Provider-led recruitment:** Providers lead the recruitment process for employers, screening and sometimes interviewing potential candidates for them.
- **Partner-led recruitment:** Providers work with partners (such as local authorities, schools, or charities) in order to deliver specific and targeted programmes of activity for apprentices from particular backgrounds or demographics, for example, individuals not in education, employment or training, individuals with LDDs, or care leavers.

Most organisations interviewed use a combination of employer- and provider-led approaches. Around a third of providers have taken part in at least one targeted partner-led recruitment activity. This may include working closely with jobcentres or youth employability services, or in some cases working specifically with charities with a focus on a specific learning difficulty or disability, such as autism. These approaches had often been used as a one-off approach and were not the provider's main source for recruitment.

Providers and employers all report that they aim to make their recruitment approaches as accessible as possible. However, where providers and employers have strict eligibility criteria for apprenticeships (for example, candidates have to hold Level 2 English and maths qualifications), this excludes some individuals with learning and social support needs.

The approach to advertising an apprenticeship vacancy can also influence who applies. For example, working closely with local schools, local authorities, and local charities is



seen as a good way to widen access to apprenticeships, particularly for those with social support needs.

Where providers use partner routes to support recruitment, they are more likely to be aware of the wider support needs of the apprentices. Many providers also encourage self-declaration of any support needs on application and interview, although some candidates do not declare due to fear of discrimination or lack of awareness or understanding. The challenges associated with self-declaration are discussed later in this chapter.

*"We typically ask, 'Did you receive any support? Did you receive any help when you were at school?' We can then start to dig down into, 'Okay, what was that help for? Was it reflective or was it learning difficulties, moderate, severe?' You know, those sorts of questions because often if we just launch in with, 'Have you got a diagnosis for whatever?' they're not quite sure. They don't know, they might be aware of something, but they're not quite sure specifically what it is they're coming in with". "Once they've flagged that they may LDD or support needs then we can start working with the standard codes that we've got to start doing a form of assessment and seeing what that support need would be like." FE College*

Assessment of learning support needs is mostly the responsibility of the provider. Where individuals are able to produce evidence of need at the recruitment stage (such as an EHCP, Statement of SEN, or LDA), this makes identification and understanding of learning needs much more straightforward. However, individuals do not always have this type of documentation and reasons for this vary greatly. For example, it depends on whether or not a need has been successfully identified previously, whether an individual has been able to evidence their need, whether their previous education provider transfers the plan to their apprenticeship provider, and whether the apprentice still has it or is aware of it. As such, providers do not rely on an EHCP or other form of evidence when assessing learning needs.

*"We've also had learners who have had a statement in the past. It seems to just get lost; however, the need is still there. So, a learner that might have had a lot of support from 16-19, or 25, depending on the need. They seem to be lost after they hit 25, but the need is still there. So, some of our learners, we don't find out about their dyslexia until four to five months down the line, because they feel like it's going to go against them." Independent Training Provider*

## **Assessment**

As discussed above, providers do not rely on documentation, such as an EHCP, to identify learning support needs. All providers interviewed have an assessment process to identify and understand support needs, particularly those directly related to learning. Many providers have dedicated members of staff who oversee these initial assessments

and develop a support plan for an individual as a result. This plan then follows the individual through their apprenticeship.

*"Every learner is interviewed individually by their training advisor when they start, to look at things like likes, dislikes, barriers to learning, prior experience. Obviously, they then use that to plan out the learning programme."* Independent Training Provider

At the assessment stage, learning support needs are mostly identified by providers through Functional Skills tests, with many of the providers using tools such as BKSB and ForSkills. Some providers also use working memory assessment and tacit skills tests. For many providers, these tests identify people with undeclared or undiagnosed dyslexia.

*"We had a very high number of dyslexic students that were flagging and weren't declaring. When we drilled into it, actually they didn't have a formal diagnosis. What they had were difficulties with English and maths and it was on maths, because they couldn't understand the question and interpret what the question was asking them."* FE College

*"This is often coming from the automated working memory assessment that we've carried out. This looks at your working memory capacity, and we've chosen that because it sits behind all learning needs. Your ability to plan, your ability to organise, it sits behind everything. All of your major learning disabilities could be identified by a working memory assessment."* Independent Training Provider

For many individuals with undiagnosed LDDs, a formal diagnosis is either not possible, because it would involve paying for the apprentice to be tested by an outside specialist, or not appropriate, as the apprentice may not want to be tested and this may be off-putting to them participating. However, some providers do have partnerships with external dyslexia specialists and do pay for formal testing where they think this will be of benefit for the apprentice.

Providers take the lead in assessing learning support needs, with employers viewing this as part of providers' role. While the employer can provide support to the apprentice while on programme, they rely on providers to have the skills and expertise for identifying learning needs.

*"The learner support interviews that they have with the training provider, they're really skilled at probing and trying to tease out any, any learning difficulties that that person might have in a supportive way, so that we know we can get, we can do the best for them while they're on programme."* Employer

*"We rely heavily on our training provider, so they do the initial assessment with them...so we don't ask if anyone has a disability or learning difficulty, if they*

*interview well or they have something about them - it doesn't matter to us if they have [learning difficulties or disabilities] so it's then left to the training provider [who will] help guide them through...they'll let us know if they're behind on something, or if they need extra hours, and that's when we'll work around that."* Employer

However, some larger employers do have staff whose role it is to provide wider support to apprentices, particularly those with social and safeguarding support needs. These members of staff meet with apprentices to discuss their programme and wider needs, often as part of their induction.

When identifying and assessing social and safeguarding support needs, some providers use Personal and Social Development and needs analysis screeners at the initial assessment stage. Typically these assessments take the form of a discussion based around key questions and indicators of need. These screeners enable providers to capture information about the apprentice's social background and situation (for example, whether they have been in local authority care and whether they have a support network) and learning needs (for example, whether they are aware of any learning difficulties or whether they have a care plan).

*"That asks them whether they've come through the social care system, or if they've got a Pathway worker, so we know who is coming out of care. It asks them about their learning difficulties, disabilities, whether they've got a care plan. It also asks them about their confidence and self-esteem, support from family and friends, so I tend to identify anybody with signs of vulnerability and additional needs. They're then put on my radar, and I keep hold of them to track until the end of the programme. The support factors and everything are reviewed monthly as part of caseload reviews."* Independent Training Provider

However, providers and employers find social and safeguarding needs harder to capture at this stage, often picking these up in-programme.

## **In-programme**

Many learning support and social and safeguarding support needs are identified after the apprentice has started their programme. This happens for a number of reasons:

- **Apprentices choose to declare support needs as they become more comfortable with their employer and/or provider and understand the support that can be provided.**

Nearly all providers and employers recognise that some apprentices may not want to initially declare their need for additional support, and instead wait until they are comfortable to do so. Opportunities to do this are therefore provided throughout the

apprenticeship, often taking the form of regular meetings and updates with assessors and tutors.

*"Should the learner identify or flag up that they are having issues, then we have another document called a supplementary report request. So the skills tutor will then fill in that. That will come directly to me, and I will look in a bit deeper to the background. So, speak to the learner, see if there's something that we actually can do... then we can turn on the support there and then."* Independent Training Provider

- **Learning support needs become apparent as the apprentice is completing assessments and coursework as part of their apprenticeship.**

Most providers find that learning needs often do not become apparent until an apprentice has submitted coursework or taken part in ongoing assessments as part of their apprenticeship. In addition, employers often play a role at this stage as they may identify in-work learning support needs which a provider might not be aware of.

- **Social or safeguarding support needs negatively impact on an apprentice's performance or attitude to their apprenticeship.**

Both providers and employers find that a high volume of social and safeguarding support need is identified as a result of concerns raised by tutors and line managers about an individual's performance on their apprenticeship. This might include: trouble with timekeeping, poor motivation and attitude, poor communication skills, concerns about appearance and cleanliness.

When such concerns are raised, both employers and providers use line managers, tutors and assessors to engage with the apprentice and discuss where additional support can be provided.

- **Social or safeguarding support needs develop whilst the apprentice is in-programme.**

Several providers and employers are aware that an apprentice's circumstances can change at any time during their programme, and as such keeping a close eye on their progress and keeping in regular contact is important to ensuring additional support can be provided when needed.

## Identification and declaration

Many providers and employers rely on apprentices to declare support needs, and therefore ensure there are a range of opportunities for individuals to do this at all stages of the recruitment and assessment processes. Identifying ways to promote and support

self-declaration are very important to providers. Many noted steps taken to ensure staff are sufficiently trained and skilled to build rapport with apprentices, making them feel comfortable to declare any support needs. Providers explained that making apprentices aware of the support available to them can be an effective way of encouraging declaration.

*"We have tutors and assessors who are very adept and attuned to building relationships with those learners, but we also have pastoral support...So we build up a high degree of trust with our learners because we build very close relationships with them."* Independent Training Provider

*"We've also done some training with our trainers on, we call it learner-focused conversations. So, rather than just sitting there and saying, 'Right, you've got to do this, fill this paperwork in and tick the box.' We're trying to make it more engaging, so that learner feels more confident to share some of those things, and it's what it says on the tin, so it's more learner-focused. So, that would form that basis, and then it's almost a counselling model really, so getting them to talk and explore some of the things, and then that would get documented."* Independent Training Provider

Mechanisms for declaration are built into nearly all employer and providers' pre- and in-programme activities, including through formal paperwork, conversations with staff, and in some cases through specific programmes aimed at encouraging declaration of specific issues, such as mental health problems.

Partnerships between employers and providers are also crucial in encouraging declaration and ensuring a shared understanding of an apprentice's support needs. Some employers believe that, particularly for learning support needs, it is the role of the provider to engage with the apprentice on this, given they would be responsible for providing the support.

*"In terms of disclosure, it's not something, I don't think, that we ask for on their recruitment form. So we don't ask for disclosure on recruitment forms. The colleges obviously do, because they need to put the support in place."* Employer

Providers felt that employers should also play a role in encouraging declaration of needs and subsequently providing support. Providers recognised that in some instances, the employer will not fully understand or be aware of the apprentice's need, and therefore how to support them. Where this is the case, it can lead to an employer perceiving the apprentice to be unfit for the job, when small adjustments in the workplace might lead to improvement in performance.

*"It's very much dependant on the employers or the apprentices declaring and referring to our specialist team here. We encourage that, really. Once we've got*

*that, then we will take over the, kind of, identifying what those needs will be."* FE College

*"We've had a situation recently with a young individual who is from a care background and had some drug dependency issues. He could get a drug counselling session or service. He was employed with a very understanding employer and he had the issue disclosed to the employer, and was given, the same opportunities as other apprentices without those difficulties. The employer really did try and obviously offer whatever support that they could to the young individual to keep them focused and motivated towards achieving the qualification so that they could have the opportunity that an apprenticeship would give them. So some employers are absolutely keen to get involved and engaged if they are aware of the problem."* Independent Training Provider

Employer-Providers are often in the strongest position to be able to support and encourage identification and declaration of support needs, with some citing close relationships being in place between line managers and trainers in order to promote better sharing of information.

## Support provided

The following chapter explores the support provided for apprentices with additional support needs, who provides this support, and where there are gaps in provision.

Providers and employers provide support to individual apprentices on a case by case basis and are reluctant to offer one-size-fits-all programmes. Providers believe apprentices are more likely to engage and succeed with a programme of support that is tailored to their specific needs, as identified on assessment or in-programme.

*"It really depends on each individual learner. What they want, what they need, what their desires are. We want them to tell us. They can tell us what they want, what helps them and what works and we'll put it in place. That's the most important thing. We need to treat them like grown-ups."* Independent Training Provider

*"It's got to be the right support given in the right quantity and in the right way, otherwise you are at risk of over or under supporting a learner."* Employer-Provider

*"We are not here to actually diagnose people or put labels. We are here to identify their support needs on a particular course, and that's when we provide support."* FE College

## Provider support for apprentices with learning support needs

When seeking to address learning support needs, providers are required to consider the following three elements of the programme: on-the-job learning, off-the-job learning, and English and maths. Most of the providers interviewed deliver support across each of these elements, although a few providers indicated that apprentices with learning support needs are more likely to struggle with the off-the-job and English and maths learning.

*"Most apprentices struggle more with their day when they're doing more theoretical or academic, technical stuff. So, I would say, most learners are much more comfortable on their vocational area, whatever that is and we don't get many learners requiring support in a day to day sort of apprenticeship work within industry. The support we would put on mostly would be for students when they have their college day."* FE College

Where on-the-job support needs are identified, most providers work with employers to advise and support workplace adjustments. Where they believe that a learning difficulty is affecting an apprentice's ability to do their job, tutors or additional support staff will involve the apprentice's line manager. However, this support can only be provided if the apprentice declares, or gives permission for the provider to declare, their learning support

need to their employer. Providers are concerned that in many instances, apprentices may go without in-work support for fear of subsequent stigma.

Providers use a range of approaches to support apprentices, including:

- Providing additional one-to-one sessions with apprentices to help with assessments and functional skills.
- Paying for specialist assessments and support if needed.
- Contextualising English and maths teaching and learning either by making it workplace-based or specific.
- Allowing more time in examinations.
- Using adaptive technologies.
- Encouraging the use of different coloured ink, reading pens, paper, and overlays.
- Providing support for adaptations to workplace processes and systems.
- Providing training for employers regarding additional learning needs.
- Providing training for internal staff on best practice when working with those with learning support needs.
- Offering support for communications and sensory needs.
- Offering buddy systems.

Most providers offer a combination of these approaches, in order to best meet the apprentice's needs, although the most prevalent sources of support are additional one-to-one support and using specialist resources. Most providers ensure the apprentice is given a personal support plan and some providers use this as evidence of the support offered for funding claims. The support is typically delivered through personal support tutors, assessors, and Functional Skills advisers based at the provider.

*"So we speak to the learner, find out what the learner wants, how they respond best. Do they want webinars? Do they want additional visits? Do they want longer visits? Do they want it printed out? Do they want it so it's all about learning what the learner prefers? But it could be anything from extra resources to extra time to more frequent visits or visits at a different time or just what we can do to encourage that learner to learn and keep them engaged and motivated on their programme."* Independent Training Provider

Most providers do not differentiate their support according to whether the apprentice is a new starter or existing member of staff who has been put on an apprenticeship. Where support is offered, providers report that this can help achieve better retention rates and outcomes, sometimes beyond that of those not needing support.



*"Our additional learning needs and disability cohorts actually achieve better. We have less withdrawals than those without, so I would say what we are doing is working."* Independent Training Provider

There was no clear evidence as to which providers are better placed to deliver support. Larger apprenticeship providers were more likely to have a wider pool of resources and staff from which to draw on, as well as previous experience providing support. However, in several cases, smaller organisations have been able to develop effective resources and support offers.

Both providers and employers recognised that, in addition to the approaches identified above, apprentices with higher level needs may benefit from more specialist support. In such instances, providers and employers have developed relationships with specialist organisations who are able to offer this support, such as those specialising in autism and Asperger's Syndrome. In addition, some providers and employers work with external supported employment specialists in order to understand how people with learning difficulties and disabilities can best be supported in the workplace and how funding can be accessed for this.

The following example describes how one supported employment service works with employers and providers in order to encourage and support them to take on apprentices with additional learning needs. The service advises employers on the different sources of funding available for them and provides training to ensure individuals are fully supported, which helps the sustainability of good practice.

### **Partnership with supported employment service**

This third-party organisation provides supported employment services to disadvantaged individuals, either directly or through schools and colleges, to help them into paid employment by supporting them develop the necessary skills and confidence. This includes providing careers guidance so that individuals are aware of the different types of apprenticeships that might be suitable for them.

Staff work with employers and training providers to recruit and work with apprentices with additional needs, including numerous organisations that have no prior experience of working with people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).

This involves helping employers and training providers to understand and draw down additional funding that is available for apprentices with LDDs or those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes raising awareness of the £1,000 payment available for both employers and providers who take on an apprentice aged 19-24 with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), and informing them about Access to Work funding. Staff also provide guidance for employers around using the Apprenticeship

Levy and match them with training providers that will be able to meet their business needs.

The service has found that it is becoming more difficult for people to obtain EHCPs. In addition, there have been some instances where local authorities have been reluctant to write apprenticeships into an individual's plan because they are concerned that this means that they will have to fund this. The service has found that employers are unaware of the available funding, and subsequently are struggling to understand the interaction between different funding streams, and what evidence is required to draw this down.

Wider support includes informing training providers about how to provide evidence for assignments and the apprentice's portfolio in a suitable way; such as making this more visual or by using observations and video evidence. Disability Awareness training helps to address concerns around how to engage and communicate with staff or apprentices with LDD and remove negative assumptions.

Staff also support employers with non-traditional recruitment practices. For example, organising work trials to make recruitment processes more accessible to individuals with additional needs; connecting employers with one another so that they can share good practice; and informing employers about Disability Confident, which helps them get recognition for their efforts and access additional resources.

## **Employer support for people with learning support needs**

Employers typically perceive addressing learning support needs to be the role of the provider; although, most are open to working with the provider in order to ensure that in-work adjustments and support are available to their apprentices. Employers interviewed typically use a combination of the following approaches:

- Providing a detailed induction process to allow the apprentice to acclimatise and understand what support can be made available to them.
- Allowing additional time to plan and complete tasks.
- Providing a mentor or role model for support.
- Providing support and training on wider employability skills, for example, communication and timekeeping.
- Being accommodating of additional time spent with tutors.
- Working with existing staff to ensure they understand and are able to support the needs of the apprentice.

- Job carving and offering flexibility in shifts.
- Practical adaptations such as use of adaptive technologies, different coloured ink, reading pens, paper, and overlays.

Larger employers are more likely to offer a wider range of these adjustments, possibly as they have more opportunity for flexibility given their higher volumes of staff. In addition, they often have schemes in place such as mentoring programmes, to support staff more widely, that can be adapted for those with additional learning needs.

Employer-providers also note that they are in a strong position to be able to make adjustments for apprentices, due to good communication between staff, in particular line managers and those with responsibility for off the job training. One noted that they feel it is important for employers to be involved in adjustments, as they are most likely to be aware of how these exhibit in the workplace.

However, it is important to note the limitation of the findings in this instance, given the employers interviewed are all aware of the learning support needs of their apprentices. If the apprentice has not declared their need to the employer, or given permission for the provider to do so, support may not be provided.

*"We know the ones that we've got that have declared that they, usually for us in terms of autism, or ADHD, dyslexia. However, we know that because of the college enrolment rather than our enrolment."* Employer

## Gaps in provision for supporting apprentices with learning support needs

Providers and employers recognise that access to some of the more enhanced additional support is dependent on the extent to which staff are aware of any wider support available in the area, and have good links with them. As such, providers are not always able to support those with more complex needs and would value further information about services that are available and how to build partnerships with these organisations.

*"We do it very well [in our local area], but maybe that's why we don't have learners coming through with those needs in other areas, because staff maybe are unsure how we're going to support them, because we haven't got that link, say in London, or Birmingham, or whatever. So, it is something that I will be working on, to try and develop those links, so we can support apprentices in other areas with those needs."* Independent Training Provider

Where providers and employers had identified or been made aware of apprentice's learning needs most are confident that what they offer provides a good level of support,

that can be tailored for the individual. However, some were able to identify gaps in staff understanding of what constitutes best or effective practice.

There is a view amongst some providers that the support they offer those with learning support needs is 'standard practice', for example, using coloured paper for those with dyslexia. Providers who have delivered this support for a longer period of time want to ensure the support is still considered to be best practice, whilst those that are newer to offering this support want reassurance they are providing the best possible support for their apprentices. Many providers said that additional resource for learning about effective practice and new approaches and technologies would be beneficial, as well as support more generally for developing their staff in this area. Providers reported that the cost of sending staff to training and development sessions is often prohibitive.

*"I certainly haven't got that in my budget capacity, to release my staff for such time... They require an overnight stay, and you're kind of thinking, 'Alright, you know, that's going to cost the best part of, like, £800 here... There's no additional funding that's been allocated to it.'" Employer-Provider*

The following vignette explores the experience of a charity specialising in training opportunities for people with learning disabilities and how they work as a broker between the employer and provider. This includes advising on best practice and funding sources.

### **Support from charity specialising in training opportunities for people with learning disabilities**

This charity provides training opportunities to help people with learning disabilities to enter employment. It has recently started delivering a supported apprenticeship programme in the health and social care sector, funded by a Skills for Care grant. Using this funding, the organisation is responsible for recruiting individuals on to the programme and sourcing the employer and training provider.

The charity provides a lot of support to the training provider, who did not have any experience of delivering apprenticeships to people with learning disabilities and were unaware of available funding. They informed the training provider of the £1,000 available for individuals 19-24 with an EHCP and told them about Access to Work funding for job coaches.

One issue the charity encountered was the removal of Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits from the family once a young person enters an apprenticeship. They were working with one individual who chose not to take up an apprenticeship opportunity because of this.

## Provider and employer support for apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs

Providers and employers offer a wide range of support to apprentices with social and safeguarding needs, reflecting the breadth of needs an apprentice may have. The types of support offered by employers and providers tend to be similar, as these needs can affect both in-work and off-the-job performance, as well as motivation and commitment to the apprenticeship. Support for those with social and safeguarding support needs includes:

- Additional one-to-one support from tutors, assessors, additional support staff, HR teams, and line managers to provide coaching and reassurance.
- Mentoring and buddying support.
- Providing or referring to counselling services.
- Supporting access to specific financial support for travel, housing, and food.
- Being flexible with shift and timetable patterns and appointments for those with caring responsibilities or with chaotic personal lives.
- Providing support on understanding employability skills and behaviours such as timekeeping and personal hygiene and presentation.
- Providing advice and guidance on managing money issues.
- Providing equipment such as laptops for coursework.

Providers noted the importance of being flexible about the way in which support is offered, for example meeting individual preferences for group work or one-to-one support to ensure the apprentice feels comfortable.

*"...this one particular learner... they get very nervous in groups. So we identified that straightaway. We gave additional support, wherein one of my team will go and meet that learner off-site on a one-to-one session rather than meeting in a group."*

Independent Training Provider

In addition, many of the providers and third party organisations interviewed find that use of pre-entry support in order to match apprentices with employers is important. Pre-apprenticeship support and work placements for potential apprentices can also help them to develop their employability skills, which are important for their retention. The following vignette describes a sector-based approach to providing pre-apprenticeship support for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, offering support to help them become work-ready, including work placements.

### **Partnership with sector-focused youth charity**

This charity helps young people to build better futures by giving them access to training, education and employment opportunities in the construction sector.

They support young people (aged up to 30) who face disadvantage and take referrals from Connexions, Probation, youth workers, and increasingly schools. The majority of the young people therefore come from disadvantaged backgrounds but they also have a number with mild learning difficulties. Individuals have to be able to attain a Level 1 in English, maths and IT, so opportunities are not open to those with higher level learning needs.

The charity sees their job as getting these most vulnerable young people in a position to take on an apprenticeship in the construction sector. They provide support to get them work ready and provide work placements. They work with several employers who want to give the young people opportunities and can see the potential of them joining the workforce.

The charity receives no Government funding, instead relies on charitable foundation grants and donations from the industry. Employers come to them when a Section 106 (legal agreements between local authorities and developers) requires them to take on a certain number and type of young people from an area. This funding is seen as too restrictive and does not allow them to deliver training in the flexible way this cohort requires. Such a 'contract-driven' approach restricts their ability to support individuals 'at the edges'.

### **Specialist support from third party organisations**

There is considerable variation in who provides support for apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs. In some cases, support is delivered by a combination of providers, employers, and third party specialist organisations to create an overall offer for apprentices. In other instances, the employer or provider may be the sole provider of support, depending on whether the apprentice has declared their support need, the extent to which the employer sees it as their responsibility to provide support for the apprentice, and whether the organisation has the expertise and capacity to deliver the support.

A clearly defined 'package' of support, with involvement and understanding between employers, providers, and other partners, is considered to be most likely to be successful.

Where apprentices are facing particularly challenging and complex needs, such as mental health problems or homelessness, providers and employers prefer to work with

specialist support services to enable apprentices to access the help they need. The nature of these relationships varies and includes signposting to the service, a more managed referral process, and partnerships to develop specific support.

*"As an employer we would absolutely not want somebody living in their vehicle for all sorts of reasons, including their own safety and wellbeing, but clearly we can't just go and give them extra money. So we had to find other mechanisms to provide support. We worked with the local authority to get the individual into a hostel and the benevolent fund paid for the bed."* Employer

The following vignettes provide examples of where employers and providers work with specialist charities, in order to support apprentices with more complex needs. In these instances the partner organisations provide targeted one-to-one support in order to increase resilience and motivation to help enable individuals to remain on their apprenticeship.

### **Support from homelessness charity**

This charity supports homeless people by providing them with a home and work in a community setting. It provides a safe and secure environment to 25 residents aged 18 and over as well as community-based training and support. Most of their funding comes from their retail and social enterprises as well as fundraising activities, whilst residents rely heavily on housing benefit payments. Individuals can self-refer, with referrals also accepted from families, GP surgeries and dentists.

The organisation has numerous partners, including apprenticeship providers, and signposts residents to these as appropriate.

*"What we are good at is partnership working, and we are good at signposting, and we are good at advice and guidance."*

The support provided helps individuals to prepare for employment, including apprenticeships, through making them aware of their transferable skills, building their emotional resilience and increasing their confidence and motivation.

*"So we don't focus on the negative, we look at what the positives are, we look at how we can work with them going forward... What we are being is supportive of people to look at what they're good at, and encourage them to do more of that."*

The charity is concerned that employers sometimes take on young people for corporate social responsibility reasons, rather than because they see their potential. This can have a negative effect on the individuals' motivation and can mean that good quality care and support in the workplace does not always exist.

### **Support for care leavers**

This organisation delivers a youth unemployment programme aimed at supporting care leavers, which has helped many care leavers enter apprenticeships. The apprenticeships are part-funded by the local authority.

When someone joins the programme, staff use the Work Star tool and action planning process to assess need, decide on activities to overcome recognised barriers, and measure distance travelled.

Dedicated support workers provide intensive, structured support where required to ensure individuals are motivated and meet the requirements of the apprenticeship, for example, committing to regular attendance at work and college.

*“About moving forward, keeping motivated, believing in themselves. Calls at night, calls in the morning, taking them in the car to make sure they turn up on time. It’s that kind of support.”*

### **Support from charity working with victims of sexual abuse**

This charity provides support for young people up to the age of 25, who have experience of sexual exploitation. The charity is part of the YMCA. Staff posts are funded by grants and the service on offer is free.

One member of staff was put in touch with an apprentice who had experienced assault. They provided weekly visits to the apprentice and discussed issues related to exploitation and grooming, as well as wider issues and concerns. This included talking about drugs and the criminal offences related to them, and linking the young person in with housing support services.

*“I’ve supported that young person, linking them with our services, trying to support them and engaging with them to get housing. So, I’m a bit of a jack of all trades, it’s what needs to be done to make sure that young person is safe and making the safest choices.”*

With the apprentice’s consent, the charity worked closely with staff at the training provider to share information and make decisions about additional support. The apprentice saw their training provider as a safe space, and so meetings were arranged there.



## Gaps in provision for supporting apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs

The biggest gap, identified by both providers and employers, in meeting the needs of apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs, is support for mental health. Interviewees were most likely to cite anxiety, depression and stress as mental health problems that apprentices present with. Whilst many providers and employers can provide one-to-one support, and in some instances can provide or refer to counselling services, there is a view that more needs to be available. There was also uncertainty about who should take responsibility for addressing this need, when it is outside of their own capability or expertise.

*"If somebody has got so many issues they just can't conduct themselves and cope with the kind of work environment an apprenticeship would require, we'll do everything we can but we have to accept there are going to be occasions when it is beyond our experience to help them. We just do the very best we can."*

Employer-Provider

Awareness of Access to Work's "Supporting Apprentices Mental Health Support Service"<sup>7</sup> (funded by the DWP and delivered by Remploy) was low. Only two providers referred to having used this service and no employers. However, one of these providers had worked very closely with the service and were very positive about the support on offer.

The following vignette provides further information about the Supporting Apprentices Mental Health Support Service. It shows how referrals to the service can be made by the apprentices themselves, as well as by providers, and stresses the importance of encouraging declaration so that different partners can work together to support apprentices. The case study considers the reasons for low take-up of the service, which is an underused resource, including, drop-out following initial referrals, a view that the service may be too 'remote' for apprentices needs (with many preferring face-to-face support), and reluctance to discuss mental health in the workplace.

---

<sup>7</sup> [www.remploy.co.uk/info/20014/in\\_work/450/supporting\\_apprentices](http://www.remploy.co.uk/info/20014/in_work/450/supporting_apprentices)

## **Supporting Apprentices Mental Health Support Service (delivered by Remploy on behalf of DWP's "Access to Work" programme)**

Supporting Apprentices MHSS has provided mental health support to apprentices since May 2016. It is a confidential service which aims to provide apprentices with the support and tools they need to manage their mental health problems, primarily within the workplace setting. Apprentices can refer themselves to the service. The service provider is not permitted to inform the training provider or employer when a referral has been made, though one of their key priorities is to work with the apprentices to support them to declare their mental health problems. They perceive the service to be most beneficial when there is a wider support network for the apprentice. Support is free, can be for either a diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health condition, and is delivered in England and Wales by a team of 35 staff.

Service staff see a range of mental health problems. The most common being stress, anxiety, and depression, although have seen an increase in co-complexities, that is people with a learning difficulty and disability combined with a mental health problem. They have also seen an increase in more complex mental health conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), bipolar, personality disorder and schizophrenia. If apprentices contact them because they are at a point of crisis, this probably is not the most appropriate source of support for them. They therefore signpost them to other mental health services.

Apprentices call the confidential helpline or email to begin the support process or managed referrals can also be made through their provider. Remploy has sought to engage with providers to raise awareness of the service and encourage them to share information about it with apprentices.

On referral, a member of staff then asks the apprentice a series of questions over the phone to assess their eligibility and circumstances. These include who they work for, their job role, their duties and responsibilities, their symptoms, whether there is any formal diagnosis in place, how it is impacting on their apprenticeship, and whether the employer or provider is aware. The apprentice will be allocated to a vocational rehabilitation consultant who will contact them within seven days for an initial telephone call. The apprentice and vocational rehabilitation consultant develop an individual support plan, which is signed off by Access to Work within four weeks. A six-month support period will then begin, during which the apprentice receives three face-to-face meetings and fortnightly contact with their consultant. At the end of the support, the apprentice is given a self-help tool kit, offering them strategies in case they experience difficulties in the future. Occasionally a case is put forward for an extension to the support plan, where this is considered to be of added value. Their key success

measure is whether somebody is still employed at the end of the six-month support period and across the whole programme.

This service is an underused resource at present. It initially had a target of 1,600 referrals within the first year, yet the service has received approximately 150 referrals to date. They find that they have a high dropout rate between the initial contact and the support beginning. They think the support may not be immediate enough for some people or that it might be the wrong delivery model for some apprentices because it can be too light touch and remote. They are concerned that younger apprentices are more likely to drop out when an apprenticeship gets too difficult, as there are no repercussions in terms of them being able to access another apprenticeship in the future. They also suggest there may be some misconceptions that involvement in the service may impact apprentices in a negative way, for instance in relation to receipt of benefits. They find that some people are reluctant to acknowledge they have an issue with their mental health in the workplace and therefore to seek help. Finally, across the sector as a whole they have found low engagement in the service amongst employers and providers.

A number of interviewees highlighted the challenges of being dependent on the availability and quality of services in their local area. In some cases, a lack of support on more complex issues has led to apprentices leaving their programmes. One employer gave an example of being contacted by social services to let them know an apprentice was no longer living with their parents. They were asked to keep an eye on the apprentice. However, the employer was not provided with any advice or support on how to go about this.

*"I haven't got a clue what to do because it's a bit like, 'Oh, okay, what am I supposed to do?' You don't really know what to do, I did not want to put myself down as a parent, but my instinct was to go and ask them if they were okay, what can we do... I felt very much in the dark... they rang and that was that." Employer*

One provider noted that larger employers, and public sector employers in particular, were often better equipped to support apprentices, as they already have some systems in place, for example mentoring or buddy systems. Several providers noted that it would likely be more challenging for smaller employers to take on apprentices with social or safeguarding needs, as they may not have the capacity to offer the support required.

*"With the small employer, I think that's very, very difficult because small employers are looking their bottom line all the time, and how much, you know, social responsibility can they contribute to when they are trying to drive the business, keep that afloat." Employer-Provider*

Similarly, among those employers interviewed, larger employers tended to be able to provide most support, with smaller employers more likely to refer to the provider for this.

## Use of funding

This chapter explores provider and employer experiences of accessing funding to support apprentices with additional support needs. This includes the types of funding accessed, how this is used to provide support, and enablers to providers claiming funding. It also explores gaps in current provision and the potential implications of apprenticeship reforms on individuals' access to apprenticeships and the support providers and employers can offer.

## Experiences of funding streams

Providers draw down funding from a range of sources in order to resource support for apprentices with learning and social and safeguarding needs. The majority use a combination of their core funding, funding offered by DfE (via the ESFA) for providing support to particular apprentices, and wider funding streams.

Employers are less likely to draw down funding, being more likely to use their own resources to support apprentices. Around a quarter of the employers interviewed have accessed funding available from the DfE via the ESFA (although only a small number had accessed the £1,000 available for care leavers and those with EHCPs), and/or the DWP (through Access to Work) which they use to provide support, while a few have utilised support and signposted to funding available from wider sources.

## DfE funding for providing additional support

Provider awareness of additional support funding, available via the ESFA, varies by funding stream. Nearly all are aware of, and have at some point used, the Additional Learning Support funding, and the Disadvantage Uplift funding, whilst awareness and understanding of Excess Learning Support or Exceptional Learning Support is mixed and few have accessed it. Very few have claimed payments of £1,000 for apprentices aged 19-24 years with EHCPs and care leavers, introduced in May 2017.

## Additional Learning Support

*Additional Learning Support is funding of up to £150 per month to meet costs associated with learning aids and adaptations. To access Additional Learning Support the provider must:*

- *carry out a thorough assessment to identify the support the apprentice needs;*
- *deliver support to meet the apprentice's identified needs, and review progress and continuing needs, as appropriate;*

- *record all outcomes in the evidence pack and keep evidence of the assessment of the needs; and*
- *report in the ILR that an apprentice has a learning support need.*

The monthly £150 Additional Learning Support funding is seen by some providers as a beneficial and flexible way to provide additional support for those with learning support needs. Most providers have either accessed or explored accessing the funding, and for many it is the only external source of funding they use to support apprentices with learning support needs. Due to the funding criteria, this funding is typically used specifically to support apprentices with diagnosed learning difficulties or disabilities (LDDs) such as dyslexia, autism and Asperger's Syndrome, and providers do not think the funding allows them to support all apprentices with learning support needs.

*"The majority, I would say, of the money that we use to support learners comes from that Additional Learning Support funding. However, that funding doesn't cover every difficulty that lands on our books."* Independent Training Provider

Employers cannot access Additional Learning Support funding, unless doing so in an Employer-Provider function. Some employers with an external provider see it as the provider's role to offer this type of support to apprentice, so they expect them to claim it. One employer is aware that their provider does not draw on any additional funding for their apprentices with learning support needs, as they feel it is too complicated to evidence.

*"The reason they don't claim is because it was quite difficult in their view to be able to track the level of support that was given to the learners, and it was open for all of it. So, it was just something they didn't want to get in to."* Employer

Additional Learning Support funding is used in a range of ways by providers to support apprentices with learning support needs. Most are related to either the cost of staff time or specific equipment, including:

- Paying for additional staff to support apprentices.
- Paying for extended or more frequent assessor visits.
- Providing specialist equipment if needed.
- Enabling additional time on exams/tests.

Providers have concerns that the processes underpinning the Additional Learning Support funding may be off-putting to many, who perceive a lack of clarity in the eligibility criteria, and the complexity of evidencing and auditing involved to be a disincentive to apply.

- **Funding criteria are unclear and do not reflect all needs.**

Many providers find the funding criteria and eligibility for Additional Learning Support to be unclear and ambiguous. Some providers interpret the guidance as requiring evidence of a diagnosed LDD, rather than more of a general learning support need, meaning they are more likely to be cautious when claiming funding. For example, they may only claim when a learner has an EHCP, Statement of SEN or LDA. As many individuals with learning needs do not have a formal LDD diagnosis, some providers do not feel confident in accessing this funding for them.

*"The requirements are quite ambiguous. It doesn't clearly tell you what needs to be in place, to be able to meet the eligibility, if you know what I mean?"*

Independent Training Provider

*"They only provide £150 per month, and it's only for someone that we can prove that they're dyslexic, or somebody that's actually statemented. We need way more support than that."* Third Sector Provider

Some providers have explored how they can use other approaches such as providing evidence of where a learner has struggled, or using available tests in lieu of an EHCP, and have had some success using these.

*"It needs a bit of clarity because it says, 'robust assessment' and my understanding of a robust assessment is that a learner has failed their exam four times and they're really struggling because their cognitive area is not very good, so, we buy, you know, a qualified skills coach who's been in the industry a while. We put provisions in place, then I'll claim the £150 funding, even if there is no formal assessment or statement."* Independent Training Provider

The following vignette describes one provider's approach to using Working Memory Assessment to identify and evidence learning and wider needs, which they use to identify and evidence learning needs and social needs. They find this is a sufficient and clear way to evidence learning needs when making Additional Learning Support claims.

## Providing evidence without an EHCP or statement of special education needs

*"This is where we use Working Memory Assessment<sup>8</sup>. So, we are using that as evidence that they've got additional learning needs and, in some cases, we're also building up a picture of their social needs. We have to prove that the learner has specific needs and exactly how we're going to address these, so that's why we're using the assessment we use.*

*"We put a lot of effort into this, we've always had a large number of learners with ALN [additional learning needs], and we've had all kinds of hiccups with funding in the past, which is why we're now using the automated working memory assessment. It's independent, it's used by educational psychologists, no one can argue about it, it's fairly straightforward to administer and it's a good way of being able to point to a piece of paper and saying, 'This person's got these needs.'*

*"The reason that we focus on this one test is that you can't find a test that identifies all of the needs a learner might come with, but we think this underpins most of the needs, so we use this one."*

Independent Training Provider

- **Evidencing process is complex and auditing creates risk for providers.**

Approaches to evidencing vary depending on how providers have interpreted and understand the ESFA's requirements (although only a small number had been recently audited). Overall, providers explained that they find the evidencing process to be bureaucratic and believe it creates additional work for assessors and support colleagues when gathering information needed. In addition, as noted in previous chapters, obtaining EHCPs and formal diagnosis of specific LDDs can be challenging, and as such, not all who may require support have them. The risk of failing an ESFA funding compliance audit<sup>9</sup> is a concern for many providers, who are worried that if they do not pass this that they may have to return funding.

*"Trying to get [assessors] to also record the evidence of what they're doing with these learners and what individual interventions they're putting in place for all of their learners, so that we can draw down the appropriate claims, is proving to be really, really difficult." FE College*

Those providers claiming funding, report that they undertake regular learner reviews against their support plans in order to understand what additional support has been

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pearsonclinical.co.uk/Education/Assessments/WorkingMemory/WorkingMemory.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> A proportion of providers are selected annually to have an audit from the ESFA

provided, and why, in order to provide the appropriate evidence. A report is compiled on the support provided, which can mean a shift in their effort from providing support to reporting on it. Some providers therefore find they have to give significant consideration to each claim, and whether the funding and support are sufficient to justify the time that goes into evidencing the claim.

*"So we can have a look at what extras have been involved in that journey over the twelve weeks as well. That's how we draw it down, and evidence it."* Independent Training Provider

Some providers have invested, or explored investing, in finance tracking software to allow them to better track and draw down learner support, but for others the cost involved in this is prohibitive. Those who have invested in such software report fewer difficulties in their experience of collating and processing evidence for claims.

As a result of the concerns outlined above, most providers believe that the process of accessing Additional Learning Support funding can be a barrier to applying, as providing the required evidence is seen as a challenging and bureaucratic process. As such, providers do not think they are accessing funding for all of the apprentices that they may be able to.

*"Probably not as much as we should do but it's still a thing we're aware of. We have claimed it. I think we've claimed about £15,000 this year, which isn't a huge amount given the size of our contract."* FE College

*"Where it comes to a learning difficulty, we feel that it's a little bit hard to justify why because I don't think the guidance is particularly clear... We had one last year but then we had to stop because we just thought we couldn't be 100% sure we were doing it correctly. Again, I think the guidance again on that is very ambiguous and I don't want, sort of, the SFA to come in and with their auditors and say, 'Well, you didn't claim this money, you're going to have to pay it all back.'" Independent Training Provider*

In the following vignette, a provider explains what they use Additional Support funding for, and how they decide what to claim for. To ensure their practices stay in line with the ESFA funding rules, they are careful to only claim for support that requires them to go "above and beyond" the level of support they would normally expect to provide. The support covers resource needed for both staff and equipment, and they keep an evidence log in case of audit. The level of funding claimed is very much dependent on the learner, and the level of support (and therefore funding) may change throughout their apprenticeship programme.



## Provider experience accessing and evidencing for ALS

*"We will claim [ALS] each month and whilst we won't look at it in detail every month, what we've spent, over the duration of an apprenticeship that's around nearly £2,000... That would resource any staff resource, equipment resource, and just general support with the apprenticeship. We keep an evidence log of that for audit purposes.*

*"We only claim additional funding if we really need to put something in place. We have to evidence why we're claiming it and what we're using it for, so we have to really start getting quite protective that any money we claim, we can evidence that it's really important that we claim that money."*

*"We've been through two audits and we've not been caught out, but there's been question marks. Because of the way the ESFA have their section around Learning Support funding worded in the funding rules, it can be seen as quite woolly, so we are a little bit sceptical about claiming it at times. We want to be really sure that what we claim is genuine and legitimate learning support. If we feel it's just the norm that we would expect to give to a learner as additional support, we won't claim it. If we feel we're going above and beyond, outside of our duties, to make sure the learner gets the best support available, then we will claim it. We won't necessarily claim it for the entire apprenticeship period, we'll do it on a monthly basis, and if we feel at a point in the apprenticeship that the learner no longer requires that much additional support and it now just comes down to a normal level, we will probably stop that claim.*

*"We're trying to make sure our processes are robust and if then any needs are identified, then that's being claimed through the ILR as additional support. So, it would be under the new guidance of £150 per month for the maximum amount you can claim... we need to make sure that we're still doing a very good job, but if we need to do above, let's make sure we get paid for doing so. That will then totally enhance the learner's experience and support the learner even more."*

Third Sector Provider

## Excess Learning Support and Exceptional Learning Support

*If the cost of Additional Learning Support exceeds the fixed monthly rate of £150, the provider can claim additional funding (up to £19,000) from the ESFA on the **Earnings Adjustment Statement**. In those cases where the cost of providing additional support exceeds £19,000, the provider can apply for **Exceptional Learning Support**, again covered by ESFA.*

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 have accessed this. This is for a combination of reasons: some providers are discouraged from accessing this funding as they believe the process to be overly bureaucratic based on their experience of Additional Learning Support; others have not had occasion to access it.

*"There is a gap between those who have severe needs (and EHCP) and those who just need help, but which is difficult to quantify and justify."* Independent Training Provider

In one instance, where the provider has purchased specific software for tracking claims, the funding manager requests information annually from the support team to identify which apprentice's needs are likely to require higher levels of support so that they can apply for this. This provider uses the Atlas database, which includes activity and the cost of support which feeds into the colleges ILR system.

*"At the beginning of the year, our funding manager will request from the ALS team data on students who support needs that are projected to be over £19,000 – they will then be responsible for drawing that [Exceptional Learning Support] down. We use a database, the database is called Atlas it's a dedicated ALS database where you capture all of the activity and the cost, and then that feeds into the colleges ILR in terms of reporting month by month."* Third Sector Provider

### **£1,000 employer and provider payments for apprentices aged 19-24 with an EHCP**

*Apprenticeship providers and employers are both eligible for a payment of £1000 if they take on an apprentice aged 19-24 with an Education, Health and Care Plan. This funding was introduced in May 2017. To be eligible for these payments, employers and providers must have evidence of an Education, Health and Care Plan for each apprentice prior to the beginning of the apprenticeship. Payments are made to the training provider. They receive 50% of this funding 90 days after the apprentice starts and the remaining 50% 365 days after the apprentice starts. They are responsible for passing this funding onto the employer within 30 days of receipt.*

Most providers interviewed are aware of the introduction of the additional funding for employers and providers working with apprentices aged 19-25 with an EHCP. However, less than a quarter have accessed this type of funding so far. Only a small number of employers were aware of or had accessed this funding.

Providers are mostly positive about this change as they see it as another way that employers may be encouraged or incentivised to support apprentices. They also

recognise that it provides another source of funding for additional support that can be used flexibly to address support needs as appropriate. Similarly, one employer who has received this funding thinks it is a positive way to encourage employers to think more creatively about who they take on as apprentices. They also think the funding is a good way to encourage more small and medium sized employers to take on apprentices. Another employer was starting to investigate using this as a way to fund support for those who have completed supported internships to progress into apprenticeships.

Providers who have accessed the funding have found the process to be straightforward when the learner has an EHCP, reporting that this can be added to the ILR and drawn down. One Employer-Provider noted that this was more straightforward than an Additional Learning Support claim as no further evidence is required regarding how the funding was used, which is preferable as it is less time-consuming as a result.

*"That's an automatic thing that's drawn down if you register a learner on the ILR who's got those characteristics, then the money drops. It's the same as if they're 16-18."* Employer-Provider

However, many providers raise concerns that they may not be able to access this funding for all who may benefit from it, as EHCPs are not always available for apprentices. This is especially the case as individuals get older as documentation may have been lost in previous transition stages, if it had been in place at all.

### **Disadvantage Uplift**

*The Disadvantage Uplift provides extra funding to support the most disadvantaged apprentices. It is calculated based on postcode using the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Disadvantage Uplift payments are available for apprentices studying on frameworks but not on standards. Payments are adjusted once a learner's postcode information is included on their ILR record.*

Most providers are aware of and access the Disadvantage Uplift, which they use to support apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs. The process for accessing this is seen as relatively straightforward, as it is based on apprentice postcode which is entered into the ILR data for funding to be drawn down. In addition to the straightforward process for claiming the funding, one of the main benefits of the Disadvantage Uplift for providers is that it does not rely on the apprentice declaring a need.

Providers do not typically use this funding solely for apprentices from disadvantaged postcodes, but use it flexibly to also support those with social and safeguarding support needs more widely. Disadvantage uplift funding is typically subsumed into the wider funding available for learner support, and is not 'tied' to a learner in the same way that other sources of funding such as Additional Learning Support are seen to be. Providers

tend to monitor the number of apprentices in different postcode areas, so they can draw down funding, but they do not always see a correlation with performance in the learning environment. This is viewed positively by all but a few providers as it allows them to make sure support is targeted at apprentices who have the most need of it.

*“Obviously I’m aware that there is a disadvantage uplift to the funding, but you know, we deal with that in the round rather than an individual learner. So if a learner needs additional support, like as in extra support, and that might be to do with their prior attainment, their prior experience, whatever, we’ll provide that support. We won’t necessarily say, ‘Oh, because Joe Bloggs is from a particular postcode where we get a 10% uplift then we’ll give him a bit more support.’”*

Independent Training Provider

*“We do have people out of deprived areas, but I wouldn’t necessarily say it affects them as a person and their ability within the lessons at all. You couldn’t sit in a group and pick out who’s from a deprived area.”* Employer-Provider

As such, it is used to fund the wide range of activities delivered by providers for apprentices with social and safeguarding support needs explored in the previous chapter.

However, a few providers, particularly FE Colleges, did feel the funding could be ringfenced further within their organisation to ensure it was reaching those most in need. Providers who want more ringfencing differed in who they thought this would apply to, with one stating this would be more specifically needs-based e.g. those who are likely to drop-out if they are not supported, and another believing it should be linked further to those the funding is claimed for based on postcode. This seemed to be a particular concern where disadvantage uplift funding was subsumed into wider organisational finances, making it more difficult to monitor how the funding is allocated and spent.

*“There is no ring-fenced money for this or that group. I just got a resource and I have to use it with all the people so we just have a simple priority list. We just prioritise people on the basis of need. Which are the people, if we do not support, that they will straight away drop out or something?”* FE College

*“It’s not ring-fenced, and really I think that’s the whole problem. One of my biggest bits of advice to you, which is about disadvantaged apprentices, that really Disadvantage Uplift payment really, really needs to be ring-fenced. It needs to go to the students who we’re actually getting it for.”* FE College

A key concern for providers is that they believe that the numbers of individuals with social and safeguarding support needs are likely to be greater than those identified using postcodes. For example, people with mental health problems may come from any postcode and still require additional support, as could people experiencing financial hardship. Rural areas were highlighted as an example of where, due to large postcode

areas, people may be experiencing deprivation even though they are in what is considered to be a more affluent postcode. Given individuals in these areas may also need to spend more on travel costs, it is important they are considered.

*"I mean rural, young people probably struggle a lot. I mean, you don't get a bursary, do you, on top of your apprenticeship funding. Which includes travel costs and I would say that would be quite a significant dent for them from an already existing small pot of money."* Third Party

Awareness of changes to the Disadvantage Uplift amongst providers is very low, with only a small minority being aware that this would not apply for apprentices on standards. Most providers wanted to 'wait and see' the impact that the changes had on their apprenticeship provision and then respond accordingly. Whilst around half of the providers interviewed have delivered standards, most were still offering frameworks as their main method of delivering apprenticeships. As such, most had not yet seen a decrease in the funding they received from the uplift. More information on the potential implications of apprenticeship standards is below (see section 'Potential implications of wider reforms').

#### **£1,000 employer and provider payment for care leavers aged 19-24**

*Apprenticeship providers and employers are both eligible for a payment of £1000 if they take on an apprentice aged 19-24 who is a care leaver. This funding was introduced in May 2017. To be eligible for these payments, employers and providers must have evidence for each apprentice prior to the beginning of the apprenticeship. The apprentice must provide a signed, original declaration to confirm they are a care leaver. Payments are made to the training provider. They receive 50% of this funding 90 days after the apprentice starts and the remaining 50% 365 days after the apprentice starts. They are responsible for passing this onto the employer within 30 days of receipt.*

Providers interviewed are aware of the introduction of the additional funding for employers and providers for care leavers. However, only a small number (fewer than 5) have accessed this type of funding so far, predominantly because only a small number of providers have recently knowingly enrolled a care leaver.

This is also the case for employers. Around a third of those interviewed had not heard of this funding. Others were aware but had not knowingly employed any care leavers recently, and only a small number (fewer than 5) had been in receipt of this funding to date. One of the employers who had received this payment had been made aware of the funding by their provider, who had also supported them in claiming it.

*"The college told us about it, and then came out to see us, and chatted us through it all. I mean, because, obviously that's their day-to-day job, isn't it, that's not mine. We received a payment, in two payments, two halves. So, not as £1,000 payment, it came in, like, two £500s. Not a problem at all, and really, they kind of did it for us if I'm being honest... They asked us to fill in the relevant paperwork for it, gave us some paperwork to fill in, and then it was all just dealt with. It was really quite simple."* Employer

Providers are mostly positive about the introduction of the funding as it provides another way that employers may be encouraged to support apprentices and fund additional support for them. Providers who have accessed the funding have recently added fields to identify care leavers in their initial learner assessments, to ensure they are able to capture this and draw down the funding. As with the payment for those with an EHCP, providers find the process of drawing down the funding to be straightforward as this can be done directly via the ILR.

A few providers noted that the main barrier that may prevent them from accessing this funding is if an apprentice does not declare that they are a care leaver or if appropriate information and documentation did not 'follow' the learner to make this known. A small number of providers also have concerns about potential disclosure issues for employers – that if the apprentice did not want to disclose that they are a care leaver it would mean they would not know they can draw down this funding.

## **Core funding**

There is a view amongst providers that the available funding does not meet the needs of all of those with additional learning and social and safeguarding support needs. This is due to a combination of eligibility for funding, high levels of need, and the bureaucracy involved in claiming funding. Providers believe it is their responsibility to support apprentices to the best of their ability, and many provide additional support for individuals which they do not claim funding for. However, one provider did express concern that an increase in apprenticeship numbers could negatively impact on providers' ability to continue to offer support without funding.

Most providers also use their core funding in order to provide additional support for individuals that they do not believe they can draw down funding for from the ESFA. In most instances this additional support involves the staff time required to provide additional meetings and one-to-ones with apprentices with support needs. The support funded in this way varies by provider depending on the extent to which they access Additional Learning Support, but typically this involves:

- Providing support for those with learning support needs who do not have a formal diagnosis.

*"Unless they have a medical certificate we don't draw any funding... We do what we do to support the learner because we think they've got the capability to do it and they want to do it. So we will provide that extra support off of our own back."*  
Employer-Provider

- Providing support for those with social and safeguarding needs over and above what is funded through the Disadvantage Uplift (for example, providing support for individuals with mental health problems).

*"I would say, yes, we are providing over and above, but we're not applying for funding to cover it. I suppose it's not something that we've really thought about before. We've never really thought about applying for funding for that kind of thing. Like I say, unless somebody comes and they specifically say, 'Here's my letter from the doctor, I'm clinically depressed,' or, 'Here's my Educational Healthcare Plan,' we wouldn't necessarily apply for additional funding, because we would work with the learner, like I say, on an individual basis. So, it might be that the learner requires an extra visit, you know, an extra couple of visits and another new learner to help settle them into the workplace and help them to build the relationship with the tutor. We would do those things, but we wouldn't necessarily apply for additional funding for it, possibly because we just haven't really thought about that before."* Independent Training Provider

A few providers note that providing this additional support is crucial for their overall funding, as it supports the retention of apprentices and therefore ensures outcomes payments are received and secures their overall funding. As such, use of core resources to support this is seen as appropriate, but this needs to be balanced against the extent to which the support is 'over and above' the norm (for example, it requires an additional member of staff or specific equipment).

One provider offers training for staff in the employers they work with in order to ensure they understand the needs of apprentices with LDDs and are confident in working with them. This support is provided at no additional cost by the provider, even without additional funding support, as this is seen to help with employer relationships and retention, and with completion rates.

Similarly, most employers find that as they are not always aware of, or able to, access funding for apprentices with additional support needs, they cover the costs of providing in-work support through their own core resource. This includes the cost of staff time and of any additional training courses they might require (either internally or externally). One employer had also purchased a specialist computer to support their apprentice, but thinks this could be considered standard employer practice as they buy computers for new starters anyway. Providers however voiced concerns that increases in the number of

apprentices, as a result of the Apprenticeship Levy, could affect employers' willingness or ability to taken on apprentices with additional support needs.

*"We were [funding all the support] ourselves, so, because that's what we'd set out to do with the apprentices, so it was just coming out of the bottom line of the business, really. Which, we'd agreed would happen, because the idea being is that we would be getting these new recruits in, and the business has got a growth plan, it needs fifteen new staff a year. The aim was, that if, if at least half were good, and sustained, and, kind of, were good in the role, it was much cheaper to put money in to support the learners as they begin, than actually, to do the advertising to get them, and do the selection. So, we were trying to do, what, the right thing, and grow some of our own, and invest to do that." Employer*

*"So our two ADHDs, they're both with the same provider, so I imagine that they will draw down the funding support, whether or not we see any of that in the workplace. I think that's probably my biggest challenge when it comes to, whether it's learning support or AS..., it's the impact that that has on that apprentice in the workplace. Obviously they're only at college, I mean our guys are only at college maybe 15% of their time, yes, so you've got all of that funding going to the provider, but, actually, the majority of their time is spent with us." Employer*



## Access to Work

*The DWP funds Access to Work, which provides funding to support people with a disability, health condition or mental health condition that affects their ability to work. It contributes towards the costs of any help that surpasses a reasonable adjustment, and may be used to pay for special equipment, adaptations, support worker services required in the workplace, and for help getting to and from work. Apprentices apply for this in consultation with their employer.*

Only a small number of employers (fewer than 5) report that they have used Access to Work funding to support apprentices with additional learning needs. Awareness of this funding was very low. Two of those who report that they have used the funding thought this was restricted to the provision of support for those with physical disabilities. One employer with a charitable purpose had used Access to Work to fund job coaches in their supported employment team, which supports individuals who progress from supported internships into apprenticeships.

In some cases, providers and third party organisations work with employers in order to raise their awareness and support them to make Access to Work claims. The following vignette explores the role of a third party organisation in raising awareness of Access to Work funding amongst employers and providers. This includes advising on funding and resources that can be used to support people with LDD, and hosting a website which includes information and effective practice resources that can be used to support those making funding claims and working with apprentices.

### **Support from centrally funded service to access employment-related funding and support**

This programme is funded by the DfE as part of the delivery support for the post-16 element of the special educational needs and disability reforms. Staff provide expertise and support to local authorities and their partners to ensure that young people with special educational needs and disabilities make a successful transition to adulthood and achieve paid employment.

One aspect of this involves providing resources and guidance around funding options that will support people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) to enter employment. For example, staff provide support with drawing down Access to Work funding for job coaches. Job coaches can support individuals with additional learning and social needs to complete a job interview and learn how fulfil the job requirements, whilst advising employers on suitable support in the workplace.

Applying for Access to Work funding through completing an online application form was described as time-intensive, an issue exacerbated by limited resources and funding cuts to support services.

This organisation's website brings together multiple resources for individuals and their families, employers and training providers. As well as government guidance employing disabled people and people with health conditions and Access to Work, there is practical funding guidance for young people seeking employment. This references apprenticeships, the additional funding available for young people with EHCPs and Exceptional Learning Support. It also includes a link to the funding guidelines on the ESFA website.

In addition to funding support and information sharing, this programme develops, implements and shares good practice, and provides regional support to facilitate partnership working and network building. For example, staff raise awareness of and provide support with: Vocational Profiles to help identify what kind of job a young person may be interested in; good quality careers advice so that young people can make informed decisions; and different employment pathways, including supported internships and apprenticeships.

Because of partnerships with local employers, staff have been able to source employment opportunities for young people with LDD, who then increased their confidence and motivation. Access to Work-funded job coaches then provided in-work support and mentoring to help them sustain such opportunities.

## Wider funding

Most providers are also aware of other sources of funding and support which they can access to provide support for apprentices with additional needs. This includes:

- Working with local councils to access funding and support provided for young people and care leavers and employers taking on these apprentices.
- Working with charities and other organisations who provide support for specific groups and needs, for examples foodbanks.

These sources tend to be used for specific items and support that an apprentice might need such as covering travel costs, providing food and housing support, and providing counselling support. However, awareness of such support was patchy and also depended on such support being available in local areas.

Some providers also noted they have hardship funds, but they are not able to draw on these as they are designated for full-time students, apprentices being ineligible.

Employers were less aware of wider sources of support and most had not explored these options. However, some believe further information would be beneficial, for example by creating a map of all the avenues of support available to apprentices with varying needs. This would be helpful for employers and would remove some of the apprehension about employing an individual with additional needs.

*"There are support groups, community groups, social enterprise and everything like that. We're awash with them but we all work independently of each other a lot of the time."* Employer

## **Enablers to claiming funding**

As discussed above, providers and employers have mixed experiences of claiming funding from different streams. This section outlines some of the factors that providers say affect their ability to and experience of claiming funding, and some suggestions of how these could be improved.

### **Raising awareness of funding streams**

Employers frequently find that they are not aware of the different types of funding that are available to support their apprentices, with many feeling they need to fund in-work support themselves. Several employers suggest that being provided with clear information about what is available and how they can access this would be useful for them.

In some instances, providers and third parties work with employers to raise awareness of different funding streams and support employers to make claims. Employers value this support as they often find they do not have the time or resource to be able to do this themselves.

*"It is just really too complicated. We've just not got around to it unfortunately. Really, it's time constraints as well. We've got a lot of work to do and very little staff to do it."* Employer

Whilst providers tend to be more aware of the funding streams available to them, some felt that further awareness raising may be beneficial, so that they might be reassured they are aware of the different funding that is available. However, this related more to simplifying and clarifying existing documentation, which is discussed later in this chapter.

### **Straightforward processes for claiming**

Overall, provider feedback on their experiences of using systems to draw down funding showed that they prefer the approach used for the Disadvantage Uplift and the £1,000

employer and provider payments, whereby a field is completed on the ILR data and funding is allocated on that basis. Providers see this as a straightforward approach. There were some suggestions that Additional Learning Support funding could work in the same way.

*"There's no audit linked to [the Disadvantage Uplift] or anything like that. I mean, I think that's an interesting thought to replicate, with learning difficulties, disabilities, actually, we know who is disadvantaged from that point of view, we know our stats, I would have thought regionally the agencies could identify, well, what's the rates of LDD and just pay a proportionate amount again, and say whether they are at a deeper disadvantage, but no, it [ALS] is against every single learner. It's a learner need rather than a payment to support the college and those learners within the college."* FE College

Providers tend to find it more challenging and time-consuming to draw down funding when the systems require more detailed evidence and they have to interpret funding rules. The issues with the Additional Learning Support funding in particular have also put some providers off from pursuing Excess Learning Support and Exceptional Learning Support funding. Many providers criticised what they perceive to be ambiguous eligibility criteria and lack of detail regarding what constitutes sufficient evidence, and some do not attempt to make claims as a result, believing the burden of evidencing outweighs the benefit of the available funding.

*"I know that our tutors are supporting a lot more than, in terms of the funding that we draw down. It is another task to do, because we are saying that, like, 'Okay, for audit evidence, you need to fill in the form, but then also you need to identify what additional support over and above you are providing when you come to do the Learner's Progress Reviews.' That's our audit document focus review, so that we need to make sure that, if we are audited it's clearly to say it's just the additional over and above support we have given this learner. They find that quite a laborious and obviously an additional task, hence why, you know, I am not speaking out of turn, some won't actually complete the Additional Learning Support paperwork. It's just as easy to carry on as normal with the learner."*  
Employer-Provider

The other challenge that providers face when claiming funding is where the process relies on learner declaration of need. As discussed in the chapter on identifying support needs, not all apprentices will self-declare learning support needs or social and safeguarding needs. This can be due to a lack of awareness or understanding, as well as fear of stigma. The process for claiming Disadvantage Uplift funding, which is determined by postcode, is therefore preferable to providers. Whether or not postcode is the most appropriate proxy for identifying support needs is discussed later in more detail later in this chapter (see 'Gaps in funding provision').

## Clarity of funding rules and guidance

A frequent concern voiced by both providers and employers, is that the available funding guidance documents are too lengthy, ambiguous and challenging to understand. They also report having to look in more than one place for the information they require. One employer explained that having this information clearly set out in an accessible way could influence employers' decisions about whether or not to recruit apprentices.

*"I think the funding rules are complex and there's not just one set of funding rules, there's several. We just, you know, we deliver to our learners and the learners wellbeing and achievement is paramount. We've failed to find the clarity on exactly what it is they want to know for us to be able to be eligible."* Independent Training Provider

*"That information never comes easy, it's complicated and there's always grey areas. I would say a simple place to find that information in one place that is very clear would be really useful."* Third Sector Provider

*"If there was a composite list of the type of funding that might be available to support learners, then, one, could we support learners better, with things that we could put on for them, does that make it more attractive to try and give younger people with particular issues a better chance? If we don't know that information as employers, then that may affect recruitment decisions. I mean, if I was a commercial company, you know I've said this, if there was access to two or three thousand pounds worth of different funding to support things, then I could employ twenty or fifty employees, or whatever it might be."* Employer

Providers and employers want the following types of information (with appropriate examples) to be made available by the ESFA in one central and clearly signposted place:

- What funding is available: Including what types of funding are available and who provides this.
- Who is eligible: Clearly establishing the types of support needs the funding is aimed at and any specific restrictions on eligibility.
- What can the funding be used for: Outlining what specific types of support or resources can different funding types be used for and what is not allowed.
- What evidence and supporting information is required: Including what forms of evidence are acceptable if there is an auditing requirement and examples of the level of detail required.

## Organisational awareness and internal communication

In most providers, the teams delivering additional support work closely with their organisational finance teams in order to: process funding for additional support; provide evidence for why it is needed (for example, an apprentice has an EHCP, or an apprentice is from a postcode eligible for the Disadvantage Uplift); and (in some cases) evidence how it is being used. In order to better support this process, some providers have chosen to invest in software to help them track and manage claims, allowing frontline staff to communicate with finance staff about what funding is required, why, and how it is being used.

Some providers reflected that their own internal communications and information sharing can also impact on their understanding and awareness of funding for additional support and recent changes. Several of those who have more positive experiences of accessing additional funding and are more aware of the changes, note good internal and external communications at their organisation, this includes:

- Having internal or attending external training sessions on the funding changes and the implications of these.
- Having clear systems and established interdepartmental relationships in order to understand and access funding streams.
- Investing in software to help staff track and manage claims, and facilitating communication between frontline and finance teams about what funding is required, why, and how it is used.
- Developing strong knowledge and understanding of the changes in order to support and inform employers of their role.
- Engaging with guidance documents and other materials released by sector stakeholders such as the ESFA, Association of Colleges, and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

A few providers also note that the provider context can impact on their effectiveness and ability to access funding and provide support. Several believe larger providers are more likely to have robust systems and supporting processes and software to help manage a larger volume of claims. Those who have been delivering support for longer periods of time may have a better understanding of the funding rules and how to access and evidence support. In the past, some smaller providers have claimed funding through larger providers who have the infrastructure and experience to do this.

*“I remember in the past when we have been able to [claim for providing more intensive support]. It’s probably been through a college partner, or something like*

*that, you know, because they're obviously much bigger. They're used to dealing with that type of resource, you know, but they can carry that cost within their organisation to have some specialist support available, or you know, that sort of thing."* Independent Training Provider

## **Best practice examples and staff development**

Many providers, particularly more recently established providers and Employer-Providers, feel there is a gap in support that is available for providers to help them understand best practice when implementing support for apprentices. Many were delivering support but wanted reassurance that what they were offering was of sufficiently high quality. They believe funding and wider resources should be available for providers and employers to help them understand the different types of support that most benefit apprentices, and how they can access funding to enable this. Similarly, a few providers who have been established longer also feel that they would benefit from staying more up to date with new resources and methods.

*"I would say one of the things that is not good is how you keep on top of what specialist equipment is out there, and what works best for who. So I've never seen a conference running for how to support dyslexic learners, look at all this fabulous technology that's been developed, and all the equipment you could get to help them and all the rest of it. I would absolutely love to see that. Equally, all of us as education providers now can't afford to be going off to conferences."* FE College

Further to this, providers and employers are of the view that more support should be available for those working directly with apprentices with additional support need, so they can be confident in how they are supporting them and able to respond to their needs.

*"So, what are you doing to support your managers who you expect to take on the support of apprentices that are suddenly going to turn up? Because not all for managers are born trainers, or mentors, and I think that message yet needs to be put out there."* Employer-Provider

Several employers noted that they are most likely to find out about sources of funding from their provider. They felt this was a key role that the provider has for employers, particularly in respect to funding for learning support needs.

*"I'm probably not as aware [of funding options] as I should be....I'd hope that [in the future] our training provider would tell us about them...with them being the ones providing the training."* Employer

## Gaps in provision

Providers note a range of gaps in the support needs they feel funding can be used to address, mainly relating to people with undiagnosed LDDs, people who do not have an LDD but require additional support in order to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship (including mental health problems), and from disadvantaged backgrounds. Providers also identify gaps in provision as a result of geographical location.

While providers identified specific needs that require more investment to address, some providers interviewed called for more flexibility in the way that funding can be used. They suggested that wider definitions should be adopted (for example 'learning needs' and 'social and safeguarding needs') so that they would be better able to provide personalised support on a case by case basis. Some providers suggested that screeners used for assessing eligibility for funding could be standardised and used as part of the apprenticeship initial assessment (to help increase identification and disclosure earlier on) or subsequently. With this approach one single form could be completed and eligibility for the range of funding sources assessed at different points in the learner journey.

*"Everyone's needs aren't black and white. There is a massive grey area and I think that it does need to be more case by case rather than just you fitting this box or you fitting this box."* Employer-Provider

*"You know, 'Are you a care leaver, yes or no?' 'Education, health and care background for somebody, yes or no?' You know, make that as a standardised thing, because literally, as soon as someone's, almost, from a provider point of view, once you've uploaded the information, you've ticked that box, then everything else should just generate through."* Independent Training Provider

## Undiagnosed LDDs and learning support needs not related to an LDD

One of the biggest gaps for most providers was the extent to which they can access additional support funding for those who have a learning support need but do not have a diagnosed LDD – either because they have an undiagnosed LDD or because they have learning needs not related to an LDD. Around a third of providers are put off from applying for Additional Learning Support for all the apprentices they feel would benefit from this due to concerns in how they would provide clear evidence of learning need without a formal diagnosis of an LDD. Some providers therefore do not apply for funding as the time that would go into making the case may be disproportionate to the funding that could be received, or because they feel there is a risk that the evidence provided may not be sufficient for audit.



A small number of employers and Employer-Providers also believe that those with language barriers and ESOL needs may also require additional support in their learning, and at present they were not applying for additional funding for this.

## Mental health

Mental health problems are seen by providers and employers as a key issue contributing to an individual's likelihood of having learning support needs and/or social and safeguarding needs. How to best provide support for these apprentices is a growing concern for them.

Most providers feel there is a gap in the funding available to address learning support needs related to mental health problems, particularly through Additional Learning Support funding as they find it challenging to evidence the specific impact that mental health problems have on learning.

In the following vignette, one provider discusses the challenges of assessing and evidencing mental health problems. They explain that there appears to be a 'hierarchy of learning difficulties and disabilities' and that claiming funding is more straightforward if someone has a 'known or seen' condition. In their experience mental ill-health can be just as much of a barrier as other conditions and the need to ask someone to prove it could be discriminatory.

### **Provider challenges accessing and evidencing ALS for those with mental health problems**

*"I think for me, where the Additional Learning Support funding falls down and really should be readdressed, and it's such a hot topic at the minute, is the mental health. How do you prove the impact of a mental health concern on learning? I think that the difficulty is because we can only apply Additional Learning Support Funding against the impact that it's having.*

*"My biggest issue I have with funding is I appreciate that I have to evidence things, but I think it's not made easy for us to evidence. I've worked with learning difficulties and disabilities for some time, and I know within that cohort there is a hierarchy of difficulties and disabilities. People with them will say that themselves, but I think that's becoming more and more prevalent. I think support is far easier to apply if somebody is dyslexic, or if somebody has a known and seen disability and difficulty. There's so many kids out there, and adults equally, that don't and I think because we adhere to the same code of practice and we're, sort of, aware that that covers disclosed, undisclosed, diagnosed and undiagnosed then potentially everybody has some, sort of, special educational need or disability.*

*“For me, it’s the proof, it’s the evidencing the need. It can just be so frustrating when you can see that learner struggling and you know what that learner needs, but you’re tied because you’ve got to find evidence. It’s, like, you know, ‘Why are we asking?’ We wouldn’t ask somebody in a wheelchair to stand up and prove that they couldn’t walk, so why are we asking somebody with a mental health issue to explain why they can’t sit at a computer and take in, you know, a test that’s being put in front of them. I just think it’s a little bit discriminative within itself, if you like.”*

Independent Training Provider

Providers also feel there is a disconnect between Disadvantage Uplift funding and mental health problems. Some interviewees raised questions about whether this is a need the funding was intended to meet, given disadvantaged postcodes are not indicative of mental problems. More critically, providers explained that mental health support is a growing need and may require more funding than is available through the uplift. If the funding was used to address this need, it could limit the extent to which the provider could meet other social or safeguarding needs.

Some providers question the extent to which it is the role of their assessors and staff to provide mental health support. They are cautious and advise staff not to provide specialist counselling support, recognising that their funding should enable them to focus on support that will help the individual to succeed in their apprenticeship. The interviews indicated very low awareness of the DWP’s Access to Work “Supporting Apprentices Mental Health Support Service” offered by Remploy. As such only a small number of providers engage with the service, but those that do are very positive about the support offered.

## **Disadvantage**

Nearly all the providers interviewed are of the view that the current postcode system for the Disadvantage Uplift is imperfect as a method to understand and identify social and safeguarding support needs. Whilst postcode is broadly viewed as a good proxy for this in some areas, most providers were quick to note this was not a good way to identify and understand learner needs, with all apprentices having the potential to experience indicators of social and safeguarding support needs regardless of postcode.

Some providers, however, are wary of asking for change in relation to the Disadvantage Uplift. In addition to the straightforward process through which it is claimed, one of the main benefits of this funding is that it does not rely on learner declaration of needs. Providers explained that support needs are identified at various stages of the learner journey and a system reliant on self-declaration may likely lead to an overall reduction in the funding available. This would have a detrimental impact to the support that is

available and potentially limit providers' ability to make long-term plans of their offer. Some providers report that the Disadvantage Uplift funding gives them flexibility, enabling them to ensure that those with social and safeguarding needs are supported regardless of their postcodes.

## Geographical location

A few providers also discussed potential gaps in the provision and the levels of provision that can be offered, due to geography. This was for a number of reasons:

- Varying local authority approaches to EHCPs: Providers believe that different local authority approaches to EHCPs means that there is something of a 'postcode lottery' for apprentices, with some who would benefit not having a plan in place. As such, in some areas providers felt they were less likely to be able to access funding that requires an EHCP as evidence.
- Engaging with apprentices in rural areas, particularly where there are small 'pockets' of deprivation: Providers who engage with apprentices on-site in more rural areas find that visiting employers for one-to-ones requires considerably more resource due to travel time, and this is a particular issue when a learner requires more frequent one-to-ones due to their support needs. They attempt to address this through other methods such as scheduling group activities on the same day if there are multiple apprentices or using remote working approaches such as Skype, but this is not always ideal if the learner benefits from in-person support.

*"Well, I think for us, because we're a national apprenticeship provider, is just the geography really. So, we'll get the same funding, probably regardless of any learner who identifies, but we have to try and manage that caseload and geography, and try and split that out. So, you know, if you're in a remote rural area, sort of, like the East of England, that could make it quite hard. So, we might have to use techniques around remote support, perhaps a call or a Skype call to a learner, so it can impact on that, because I don't think that's considered."*

Independent Training Provider

- Availability of services in different areas: Providers who work with third parties to deliver support for apprentices recognise that availability and awareness of such partner support in different areas is crucial to being able to offer this. One national provider noted that they are able to provide specialist provision for apprentices with autism in one part of the country, due to a partnership with a specialist local charity; however, they could not offer similar support in other parts of the country as they did not have partners in other areas or know where to access these.

## Potential implications of wider apprenticeship reforms

The reforms to funding for supporting apprentices are happening alongside other apprenticeship reforms, including the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, transition from frameworks to standards, and the introduction of end-point assessment. The potential impact of these reforms on providers' and employers' support offer was explored in the interviews. While interviewees recognised that these reforms could affect the scale of provision, the range of individuals who have access to apprenticeship opportunities, and the resource required to support them, the reforms do not appear to have affected current practice or funding.

Some providers and employers reported that due to the rapidity of apprenticeship reforms, they are still reviewing and getting used to new systems and funding rules. As such, they do not feel they have had sufficient time and capacity to review the changes in detail.

*"Sometimes there's just too much going on at once. They changed the standards, the assessment and the levy. It's almost that they've brought in three years' worth of changes in one fell swoop and it's caught a lot of people off guard."* Employer-Provider

Regardless of these wider changes, there is ongoing commitment to providing support to apprentices who need it.

## Conclusions

This research provides an evidence base on the effectiveness of apprenticeship funding support for people with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) and/or from a disadvantaged background. It aims to understand how apprenticeship providers and employers support these apprentices, how this support is resourced and funded, and whether this enables individuals to successfully participate in and complete their apprenticeship.

Providers and employers recognise that there are a range of factors which mean individuals may require additional support to help them access and progress in apprenticeships. These are broadly consistent with the areas where additional funding is currently made available by the DfE, including factors relating to LDDs and disadvantage. However, most providers believe the definitions used should be wider, based on the apprentices they are supporting and the barriers they experience.

Specifically, providers tend to consider support needs as falling into two broad categories:

- **Learning support needs:** Support required by an apprentice in order for them to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship. This may include apprentices with 'diagnosed' LDDs; apprentices with 'undiagnosed' LDDs; and apprentices who do not have an LDD but require additional support in order to meet the learning requirements of the apprenticeship.
- **Social or safeguarding support needs:** Support required by an apprentice for them to take part in the apprenticeship more generally. This can include a wide range of personal, social and economic factors, including financial hardship, insecure housing, or a lack of familial support. Such issues are not seen by providers as exclusively relating to postcodes eligible for Disadvantage Uplift funding.

Mental health issues are of concern both as a factor in learning support and in addressing social and safeguarding support needs. These are seen as a growing issue and providers and employers do not always feel sufficiently equipped to deal with them.

Providers tend to take responsibility for identifying and assessing support needs. This is done both at recruitment and throughout the apprenticeship programme using a combination of evidence assessment (for example, asking for an EHCP) and formal testing (such as Functional Skills initial assessments). Employers also play a key role during the in-programme stages, particularly when identifying social support needs.

One of the main issues that providers and employers face in identifying support needs is that they often rely on individuals to declare these. While some providers and employers have found effective ways to encourage declaration, some apprentices do not declare

due to fear of being stigmatised. In addition, apprentices are sometimes unaware of learning difficulties, which may not have been identified in the past, or they do not have evidence of this need, for example an EHCP, Statement of SEN or LDA.

Providers and employers offer support to individual apprentices on a case by case basis and are reluctant to offer one-size-fits-all programmes. Providers believe apprentices are more likely to engage and succeed in a programme of support that is tailored to their specific needs.

Providers and employers use a range of methods to achieve this tailored approach, although some would value information about what constitutes effective practice to ensure the support they provide is as good as it can be. Support is further enhanced through the engagement of partner organisations who can offer specialist support to apprentices when the employer or provider do not have the appropriate skills and resources. These services often offer resources that providers may not be able to access otherwise, and they are reliant on the availability of these services in their local area (and their knowledge of them).

Providers are most likely to claim funding from the ESFA through two streams: Additional Learning Support and Disadvantage Uplift. Other forms of DfE/ESFA funding support are not well known/widely used. Providers expressed concerns that the processes underpinning the Additional Learning Support funding may be off-putting to many, who perceive a lack of clarity in the eligibility criteria, and the complexity of evidencing and auditing involved to be a disincentive to apply. This has led some to become risk averse and only claim for a small proportion of the support they provide.

Conversely, providers were positive about the process for claiming Disadvantage Uplift funding, which is calculated based on postcode and requires providers to only ensure that postcodes are included in their ILR data returns. Providers use this funding flexibly to target support based on need rather than the postcode area the apprentice comes from. It also gives them some stability of funding, enabling them to plan provision on a longer-term basis. While interviewees recognised that postcode is an imperfect indicator for support needs, providers appreciate the straightforward eligibility criteria, although some FE colleges have concerns that the funding is not sufficiently ringfenced.

Providers and employers both also rely on 'core' funding and resource to provide support to a wider range of apprentices when they are not able to draw support from other places. Both would value more information about what is available, where and for what. Employers in particular draw down very few other sources of funding, with Access to Work not being widely used for apprentices.

Wider apprenticeship reforms, such as the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, standards and end-point assessment, do not appear to have affected the support offered

by the providers and employers involved in the research, or the funding they receive. Many interviewees explained that with the number and rapidity of the reforms, they are 'waiting to see' what the impact is and that they will respond when they need to. Regardless of changes, there is ongoing commitment to providing support to apprentices who need it.

Employer and provider motivations for taking on apprentices with additional support needs need to be considered. For some, the £1,000 payment to contribute to additional support will enable employers and providers think more creatively about what they are offering, to who, and how.

While providers identified specific groups of apprentices or areas of provision that require more investment, some providers interviewed called for more flexibility in the way that funding can be used. They suggested that wider definitions should be adopted (for example 'learning needs' and 'social and safeguarding needs') so that they are better able to provide personalised support on a case by case basis. Some providers suggested that screeners used for assessing eligibility for funding could be standardised and used as part of the apprenticeship initial assessment (to help increase identification and disclosure earlier on) or subsequently.

The evidence suggests there are currently two main issues in funding provision that require further consideration and/or clarification:

- Funding to support apprentices with undiagnosed LDDs and apprentices with a learning support need that is not related to an LDD. Around a third of providers interviewed do not currently claim Additional Learning Support funding for these apprentices because they do not know what evidence would be acceptable to the ESFA.
- Funding to support apprentices with mental health conditions. Most providers interviewed do not claim Additional Learning Support for these apprentices as they are unsure of both the eligibility and evidence requirements for mental health and find it challenging to evidence the specific impact that mental health issues have on learning. Some providers do not think it would be appropriate to use Disadvantage Uplift funding to contribute to the support for these apprentices, because mental health is not linked to postcode, and they do not think this funding would be sufficient to cover the level of need. A number of providers question the extent to which it is their responsibility to meet needs associated with mental health, which can sometimes require specialist expertise.

## Appendix A: Topic Guides

---

### Apprenticeship funding support: Topic guide for provider interviews

---

#### Interviewer notes

This document is a guide to the principal themes and issues to be covered with apprenticeship providers.

This topic guide should be used flexibly. Questions can be modified and followed up in more detail where necessary and can be adapted for different types of participants.

**Prior to interview researcher should check and confirm the sampling criteria the respondent has been selected to meet. Follow ups and prompts should be used as appropriate:**

IF SELECTED FOR SUPPORTING APPRENTICES WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OR DISABILITIES (LDD): Primarily to prompt based on experience supporting those with LDD. Disadvantage can also be explored if appropriate.

IF SELECTED FOR SUPPORTING APPRENTICES FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS: Explore experience supporting those from disadvantaged areas only.

**This interview will aim to capture the respondent's holistic understanding of the sources of support that are used with their different types of apprentices, how these work together to support the apprentice to access and complete the apprenticeship, who is responsible for these elements, and how they are funded.**

#### Introducing the research to respondent

- Learning & Work Institute (in partnership with ASK Research) have been commissioned by DfE to build an evidence base on how apprenticeship providers and employers support apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes what support is required; how this support is funded; and whether this enables apprentices to successfully participate in and complete their programme.
- This research is being carried out to inform the future development of apprenticeships funding policy. It may also help to identify examples of effective support and how this is funded, which other providers and employers can learn from.
- As an apprenticeship provider, you have been identified to take part in this research so you can share your experiences of providing or organising such support.
- The interview will last 60-90 minutes. Participation is optional and you can choose to break, stop the interview or decline to answer specific questions at any time without giving reason.



## Terminology and definitions

During this interview we will be using the following terminology/definitions:

**LDD** – learning difficulty or disability, including: Emotional/behavioural difficulties; Social and emotional difficulties; Moderate learning difficulty; Severe learning difficulty; Dyslexia; Dyscalculia; Autism spectrum disorder; Asperger syndrome; Other specific learning difficulty (e.g. Dyspraxia); Other learning difficulty.

**Disadvantage** – disadvantaged backgrounds, identified by postcodes used by the government to provide extra funding in the shape of a 'disadvantage uplift'. We are also interested to hear about other forms of disadvantage, for example, care leavers and young adult carers.

**Support** – any type of support that is provided by the apprenticeship provider, employer, or another party in order to remove barriers to an individual accessing or successfully completing an apprenticeship. This might include specific funding that is provided or other types of support.

For clarity, the difference between Learning Support (a funding stream) and learner support (wider financial support that may be offered) are briefly described below:

- **Learner support** – Financial support for learners with specific financial hardship preventing them from taking part or completing learning e.g. for childcare, transport, hardship and residential costs.
- **Learning Support** – Funding for learners (including but not limited to Additional Learning Support and Exceptional learning support) which allows providers to meet the cost of putting in place reasonable adjustments.

**Access to Work** – Discretionary government funding from DWP for employees to provide a contribution towards the extra disability related costs of working beyond reasonable adjustment. Grants are payable to the commissioner of this extra support either individuals, employers or providers.

Ensure interviewee is comfortable with these and understands these definitions.

## Confidentiality and Consent

- We are undertaking this work on behalf of The Department for Education. The information given to us in the research will be used to develop a final report. We will not use the names of any individuals or organisations, or any identifying information in the report.
- Quotes from the discussion may be used in the report but these will not be attributed to participants by name or organisation.
- The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder so we have an accurate record of what is said. Recordings will be deleted once material has been transcribed and only the research team will have access to these. *Ensure interviewee is comfortable with recording, if not, detailed notes will be taken.*

- All files are stored in secure folders in line with the Data Protection Act. Only the research team will have access to the recordings and transcripts
- Do you have any questions?

**Ask interviewee to verbally confirm on the audio recording that they understand the purpose and confidentiality of the research and that they are happy to take part.**

## Questions

### Background (5mins)

1. Please tell me about your role within your organisation, and in particular the nature of your remit in relation to supporting apprentices or ensuring accessibility/support?  
*(Probe: is role delivery or management focused?)*
2. Do you have any direct contact with apprentices with LDD/ from disadvantaged backgrounds? *(Probe: the nature of any contact)*
3. Could you give me a brief overview of the type of apprenticeships your organisation offers?
  - History / how long they have been delivering apprenticeships
  - Type / sector of apprenticeships
  - Number and size of apprentice employers worked with
  - Geography of apprenticeship provision
  - Number of apprentices currently on programme
  - How they typically work with employers to identify and meet their apprenticeship requirements (at the outset, on an ongoing basis)
  - Do you have an equality and diversity policy in relation to apprenticeships? Briefly what types of areas does it cover?

### Defining groups for support (5mins)

4. What barriers or additional needs does your organisation recognise as requiring additional support so that an individual can begin and complete an apprenticeship?
  - How are these defined? *(Probe: How do these compare with the definitions used in this research? What other groups require support?)*
  - What impact do you think these barriers have on apprentices? *(Probe: absence, struggle to complete tasks, dropping out etc.)*
  - What impact do you think these barriers have on providers? *(Probe: additional classroom support needed, struggle/concerns of how to support individuals etc.)*
  - What impact do you think these barriers have on employers? *(Probe: absence/retention, struggle/concerns of how to support individuals etc.)*

## Identifying barriers and additional needs (10mins)

5. How are apprentices typically referred to or recruited by your organisation?
  - Does your organisation support employer recruitment or are individuals referred via employers?
  - Is this recruitment approach accessible for individuals with LDD/from disadvantaged backgrounds?
  - Does your organisation use any particular approaches for apprenticeship recruitment to ensure accessibility for those with LDD/from disadvantaged backgrounds?
    - What are these and which groups specifically are they aimed at?
    - Are these activities part of your core offer or part of another funded programme of activity? (*Probe: How are such activities funded or resourced?*)
  - How does this differ between new starts and converter apprentices?
6. How does your organisation identify apprentices who may have additional needs or require additional support?
  - What opportunities are there for apprentices to declare additional needs?
  - Have you experienced any challenges regarding encouraging declaration? How have these been addressed?
  - What opportunities are there for employers or providers to identify/assess whether an apprentice needs additional support?
  - How is eligibility for this support assessed?
  - Who is involved in this and why? (*Probe: types of provider staff, employers, third parties, apprentices, parents/carers*)
  - Can you recall/provide an example(s) where this approach has been applied? How frequently has this approach been used – is it a fixed approach for every apprentice, a specific programme of activity, or utilised in select instances?
  - How does this differ between new starts and converter apprentices?
7. How successful has your organisation found these approaches to identifying additional support needs to be?
8. Are there particular groups of apprentices who most commonly require support?
  - Which groups are these?
  - What barriers do they face?
9. To which groups of apprentices does your organisation currently provide support?

## Addressing barriers and additional needs (20mins)

10. When additional support needs are identified what are the next steps your organisation would take to address these?

- Who is involved in this and why? (*Probe: types of provider staff, employers, third parties, apprentices, parents/carers*)
- Can you recall/provide an example(s) where this approach has been applied? How frequently has this approach been used – is it a fixed approach for every apprentice, a specific programme of activity, or utilised in select instances?

11. Can you outline the types of additional support that have been provided for different groups of apprentices and the point at which these types of support are put in place/accessed? (*Probe for each different group additional support is provided for.*)

- Tailoring their apprenticeship programme/making reasonable adjustments (*Probe: what types of adjustment are made and how are these agreed*)
- Providing special equipment or technology
- Financial support
- Additional learning resources
- Support worker/buddy
- Other

12. IF APPRENTICES ARE ON STANDARDS AND NOT COVERED PREVIOUSLY:

What types of support are or will be offered for End Point Assessments for different groups and how will these be funded and implemented?

13. What is the impact of these types of support on the different groups of apprentices? (*Probe for each different group additional support is provided for and different types of support mentioned.*)

- What are the benefits for apprentices? (*Probe: increased awareness, reducing stigma, supporting declaration, staying in apprenticeship, improved health.*)
- What are the benefits for employers? (*Probe: increased awareness, more support, retention of apprentices.*)
- What are the benefits for your organisation? (*Probe: retention/completion rates, any strategic goals, profile of organisation*)

14. How does this differ between new starts and converter apprentices?

15. Have any aspects of support been particularly effective for specific groups of apprentices?

16. Who is responsible for ensuring this type of support is in place for the apprentice?  
*(Probe: provider, employer, another organisation.)*

- How do you work with other partners to agree and implement the support?
- Who is responsible for different elements of the support?

17. What resources (including specific costs and staff time) are needed to provide this support and who is responsible for these? *(Probe for each different group additional support is provided for and different types of support mentioned.)*

18. How are the different types of support funded? *Probe for each group and type of support.*

- Are these support activities part of your core offer, part of another funded programme of activity, funded by bursaries/grants, supported by other government funding or services?
- How are these absorbed/treated by the organisation?
- How did you find out about funding option(s)?

19. Just to check/recap – which of the following types of funding support have you accessed to support apprentices or are you aware have been used to support your apprentices? *If not mentioned previously, explore in what circumstances/for which types of learners and for what reasons they have accessed each type of funding.*

- Payment of £1,000 (each for employers and providers) taking on an apprentice aged 19-24 with an Education Health and Care Plan. (Introduced in May 2017)
- Payment of £1,000 (each for employers and providers) taking on a care leaver aged 19-24 as an apprentice. (Introduced in May 2017)
- **Additional Learning Support** of up to £150 per month to meet costs associated with learning aids and adaptations, **Excess Learning Support** is above the fixed monthly rate and **Exceptional Learning Support** embraces all eligible learners with support needs over and above £19k.
- ‘Disadvantage uplift’ payments to apprentices studying on frameworks.
- Discretionary Learning Support for apprentices aged 19 or over to contribute towards costs associated with accommodation, travel, learning materials and/or childcare.
- Earnings Adjustment Statement funding for additional support.
- Provider-specific hardship funds to use at your discretion with disadvantaged learners.
- Funds from specialist support agency hardship and emergency funds.
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provides Access to Work funding to contribute to support beyond reasonable adjustments for people with a disability, health condition or mental health condition that affects their

ability to work. Apprentices can apply for Access to Work (in consultation with their employer) to pay for special equipment, adaptations, and support worker services required in the workplace beyond reasonable adjustments, and for help getting to and from work.

20. How did you find the process of understanding and implementing the support required for the different groups? (*Probe: issues, complexities, timing*)

- [If multiple funding streams used] Were there any difficulties in accessing and combining multiple funding streams to offer a coherent programme of support or confusion around what was possible?

21. Was the available funding and resource adequate to provide the support required for the apprentice(s)?

- Would the support provided have been available without the funding?

22. Have any sources of funding been particularly effective for supporting particular activities or specific groups of apprentices? Why was this?

23. Are you aware of any wider sources of support (that you are not involved with) that your apprentices with additional needs access that supports them to sustain their apprenticeship?

- Is this a source of funding or something else?
- Who provides this support?
- What role does it play in enabling the apprentice to access and complete their apprenticeship?
- How effective is this type of support?

24. Has there been any additional support that you have wanted to provide, but have been unable to do so?

- If so, why is this? (*Probe: extent to which limitation was due to funding issues/ lack of knowledge about funding streams, or availability of provision/ wider circumstances*)
- Which groups would this benefit and how?
- What barriers are preventing adequate support being provided to apprentices with additional needs?

25. Are there any groups that you believe require additional support to successfully access and complete an apprenticeship who are not currently being supported? (*Probe: which groups and why is this?*)

26. To what extent does the support provided/not available impact on participation in apprenticeships amongst different groups? (*Probe: explore impact on different groups for both accessing and completing an apprenticeship.*)

27. What additional resources would be needed to address these perceived gaps?

- What would this resource be used for?
- How could it be funded?

### **Future funding and policy context (15mins)**

28. How has the support you have provided to apprentices with additional needs changed over time? What improvements have you made and have you found to be most effective?

29. To what extent do you feel you understand the changes to funding for apprentices with additional support needs in place since May 2017? (*Probe: what is clear/not clear.*)

- Do you think it has been sufficiently clear for employers and any third parties you work with? (*Probe: what is clear/not clear.*)

IF REQUIRED: OUTLINE THE APPROPRIATE FUNDING CHANGES FOR THE RESPONDENT INCLUDED IN RESEARCHER BRIEFING DOCUMENT.

30. How will these funding changes impact on the model you use to support apprentices with additional needs? What specifically will change for different groups?

- Will those supported change? How?
- Will types of support change? How?
- Will roles in the support provided change? How?
- Are there any elements of support required which are not possible under the new arrangements?
- What impact will the changes have on the effectiveness of the support available?

31. How do you think information about available additional funding and approaches to supporting apprentices with additional needs should be disseminated amongst providers and employers?

32. Do you think that the new apprenticeships funding model will help to widen access to apprenticeships? (*Probe: why/ why not? For whom? Suggested changes?*)

33. What impact do you think these changes will have on the number of apprentices with additional needs from being able to access and complete an apprenticeship? Why do you think this is?

34. Do the new funding approaches introduce any new barriers or risks to supporting apprentices with additional needs? What are these and who do they affect e.g. types of apprentices, employers, providers?

35. To what extent do you think the changes to the funding model are appropriate and why? What further changes would you want and why/how would they be of benefit or what gaps would they address?

### **Summary (5mins)**

36. What do you think the critical success factors are to developing and providing high quality support for apprentices with additional needs?

37. Based on your experiences, do you think your organisation would offer apprenticeships to individuals with additional needs in the future? If not, what would need to change?

38. Based on our discussion is there anything else you would like to add?

### **Close the interview**

- Thank them for their time.
- Ask if they have any further questions and provide contact details for further comments/queries.
- Reiterate next steps and confidentiality.



---

# Apprenticeship funding support: Topic guide for employer interviews

---

## Interviewer notes

This document is a guide to the principal themes and issues to be covered with employers offering apprenticeships.

This topic guide should be used flexibly. Questions can be modified and followed up in more detail where necessary and can be adapted for different types of participants.

**Prior to interview researcher should check and confirm the sampling criteria the respondent has been selected to meet. Follow ups and prompts should be used as appropriate:**

IF SELECTED FOR SUPPORTING APPRENTICES WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OR DISABILITIES (LDD): Primarily to prompt based on experience supporting those with LDD. Disadvantage can also be explored if appropriate.

IF SELECTED FOR SUPPORTING APPRENTICES FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS: Explore experience supporting those from disadvantaged areas only.

**This interview will aim to capture the respondent's holistic understanding of the sources of support that are used with their different types of apprentices, how these work together to support the apprentice to access and complete the apprenticeship, who is responsible for these elements, and how they are funded.**

## Introducing the research to respondent

- Learning & Work Institute (in partnership with ASK Research) have been commissioned by DfE to build an evidence base on how apprenticeship providers and employers support apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes what support is required; how this support is funded; and whether this enables apprentices to successfully participate in and complete their programme.
- This research is being carried out to inform the future development of apprenticeships funding policy. It may also help to identify examples of effective support and how this is funded, which other providers and employers can learn from.
- As an employer who offers apprenticeships, you have been identified to take part in this research so you can share your experiences of providing or organising such support for those with additional needs.
- The interview will last 60-90 minutes. Participation is optional and you can choose to break, stop the interview or decline to answer specific questions at any time without giving reason.

## Terminology and definitions

During this interview we will be using the following terminology/definitions:

**LDD** – learning difficulty or disability, including: Emotional/behavioural difficulties; Social and emotional difficulties; Moderate learning difficulty; Severe learning difficulty; Dyslexia; Dyscalculia; Autism spectrum disorder; Asperger’s syndrome; Other specific learning difficulty (e.g. Dyspraxia); Other learning difficulty.

**Disadvantage** – disadvantaged backgrounds, identified by postcodes used by the government to provide extra funding in the shape of a ‘disadvantage uplift’. We are also interested to hear about other forms of disadvantage, for example, care leavers and young adult carers.

**Support** – any type of support that is provided by the apprenticeship provider, employer, or another party in order to remove barriers to an individual accessing or successfully completing an apprenticeship. This might include specific funding that is provided (such as Access to Work) or other types of support.

**Access to Work** – Discretionary government funding from DWP for employees to provide a contribution towards the extra disability related costs of working beyond reasonable adjustment. Grants are payable to the commissioner of this extra support either individuals, employers or providers.

Ensure interviewee is comfortable with these and understands these definitions.

## Confidentiality and Consent

- We are undertaking this work on behalf of The Department for Education. The information given to us in the research will be used to develop a final report. We will not use the names of any individuals or organisations, or any identifying information in the report.
- Quotes from the discussion may be used in the report but these will not be attributed to participants by name or organisation.
- The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder so we have an accurate record of what is said. Recordings will be deleted once material has been transcribed and only the research team will have access to these. *Ensure interviewee is comfortable with recording, if not, detailed notes will be taken.*
- All files are stored in secure folders in line with the Data Protection Act. Only the research team will have access to the recordings and transcripts
- Do you have any questions?

**Ask interviewee to verbally confirm on the audio recording that they understand the purpose and confidentiality of the research and that they are happy to take part.**

## Questions

### Background (5mins)

39. Please tell me about your role within your organisation, and in particular the nature of your remit in relation to supporting apprentices or ensuring accessibility/support?  
*(Probe: is role delivery or management focused?)*
40. Do you have any direct contact with apprentices with LDD/ from disadvantaged backgrounds? *(Probe: the nature of any contact)*
41. Could you give me a brief overview of your organisation and the type of apprenticeships you offer?
- Size of employer (number of employees)
  - History / how long they have been delivering apprenticeships
  - Type / sector of apprenticeships
  - Number and type of apprenticeship providers worked with
  - Geography of apprenticeship provision
  - Number of apprentices currently with them and that they have had in the past
  - How they typically work with providers and others to identify and meet their apprenticeship requirements (at the outset, on an ongoing basis)
  - Do you have an equality and diversity policy in relation to apprenticeships? Briefly what types of areas does it cover?
  - Number of apprentices now/in past with additional needs and types

### Defining groups for support (5mins)

42. What types of needs does your organisation recognise as requiring additional support so that an individual can begin and complete an apprenticeship?
- How are these defined? *(Probe: How do these compare with the definitions used in this research? What other groups require support?)*
  - What impact do you think these barriers have on apprentices? *(Probe: absence, struggle to complete tasks, dropping out etc.)*
  - What impact do you think these barriers have on employers? *(Probe: absence/retention, struggle/concerns of how to support individuals etc.)*

### Identifying barriers and additional needs (10mins)

43. How are apprentices typically identified, referred to or recruited by your organisation?
- Do providers or other parties provide recruitment support for apprentices?
  - Is this recruitment approach accessible for individuals with LDD/from disadvantaged backgrounds?

- Does your organisation use any particular approaches for apprenticeship recruitment to ensure accessibility for those with LDD/from disadvantaged backgrounds?
  - What are these and which groups specifically are they aimed at?
  - Are these activities part of your core offer or part of another funded/non-funded programme of activity? (*Probe: How are such activities funded or resourced?*)
- How does this differ between new starts and converter apprentices?

44. How does your organisation identify apprentices who may have additional needs or require additional support? If so, how?

- What opportunities are there for apprentices to declare additional needs?
- Have you experienced any challenges regarding encouraging declaration? How have these been addressed?
- What opportunities are there for employers or providers to identify/assess whether an apprentice needs additional support?
- How/by whom is eligibility for this support assessed?
- Who is involved in this and why? (*Probe: types of provider staff, employers, third parties, apprentices, parents/carers*)
- Can you recall/provide an example(s) where this approach has been applied? How frequently has this approach been used – is it a fixed approach for every apprentice, a specific programme of activity, or utilised in select instances?
- How does this differ between new starts and converter apprentices?

45. How successful has your organisation found these approaches to identify additional support needs to be?

46. Are there particular groups of apprentices who are more likely to require support?

- Which groups are these?
- What barriers do they face?

47. To which groups does your organisation currently provide additional support?

### **Addressing barriers and additional needs (20mins)**

48. When additional support needs are identified what are the next steps your organisation would take to address these?

- Who is involved in this and why? (*Probe: types of provider staff, employers, third parties, apprentices, parents/carers*)
- Can you recall/provide an example(s) where this approach has been applied? How frequently has this approach been used – is it a fixed

approach for every apprentice, a specific programme of activity, or utilised in select instances?

49. Can you outline the types of additional support that have been provided for different groups of apprentices and the point at which these types of support are put in place/accessed? *(Probe for each different group additional support is provided for.)*

- Tailoring their apprenticeship programme/making reasonable adjustments *(Probe: what types of adjustment are made and how are these agreed)*
- Providing special equipment or technology
- Financial support
- Additional learning resources
- Support worker/buddy
- Other

50. What is the impact of these types of support on the different groups of apprentices? *(Probe for each different group additional support is provided for and different types of support mentioned.)*

- What are the benefits for your organisation? *(Probe: increased awareness, more support, retention of apprentices.)*
- What are the benefits for apprentices? *(Probe: increased awareness, reducing stigma, supporting declaration, staying in apprenticeship, improved health.)*

51. How does this differ between new starts and converter apprentices?

52. Have any aspects of support been particularly effective for specific groups of apprentices?

53. Who is responsible for ensuring this type of support is in place for the apprentice? *(Probe: provider, employer, another organisation.)*

- How do/did they work with other partners to agree and implement the support?
- Who is responsible for different elements of the support?

54. What is the impact on employers of providing support for these types of apprentices?

55. What resources (including specific costs and staff time) are needed to provide this support and who is responsible for these? *(Probe for each different group additional support is provided for and different types of support mentioned.)*

56. How are the different types of support funded? *Probe for each group and type of support.*

- Are these support activities part of your core offer, part of another funded programme of activity, funded by bursaries/grants, fully provided/funded by providers or third parties, supported by other government funding or services?
- How are these absorbed/treated by the organisation?
- How did you find out about funding option(s)?

57. Just to check/recap – which of the following types of funding support have you accessed to support apprentices or are you aware have been used (e.g. by a provider or other support organisation) to support your apprentices? *If not mentioned previously, explore in what circumstances/for which types of learners and for what reasons they have accessed each type of funding.*

- Payment of £1,000 (each for employers and providers) taking on an apprentice aged 19-24 with an Education Health and Care Plan. (Introduced in May 2017)
- Payment of £1,000 (each for employers and providers) taking on a care leaver aged 19-24 as an apprentice. (Introduced in May 2017)
- **Additional Learning Support** of up to £150 per month to meet costs associated with learning aids and adaptations, **Excess Learning Support** is above the fixed monthly rate and **Exceptional Learning Support** embraces all eligible learners with support needs over and above £19k. These payments are made to providers.
- ‘Disadvantage uplift’ payments to apprentices studying on frameworks.
- Discretionary Learning Support for apprentices aged 19 or over to contribute towards costs associated with accommodation, travel, learning materials and/or childcare.
- Earnings Adjustment Statement funding for additional support.
- Provider-specific hardship funds to use at your discretion with disadvantaged learners.
- Funds from specialist support agency hardship and emergency funds.
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provides Access to Work funding to contribute to support beyond reasonable adjustments for people with a disability, health condition or mental health condition that affects their ability to work. Apprentices can apply for Access to Work (in consultation with their employer) to pay for special equipment, adaptations, and support worker services required in the workplace beyond reasonable adjustments, and for help getting to and from work.

58. How did you find the process of understanding and implementing the support required for the different groups? (*Probe: issues, complexities, timing*)

- [If multiple funding streams used] Were there any difficulties in accessing and combining multiple funding streams to offer a coherent programme of support or confusion around what was possible?

59. Was the available funding and resource adequate to provide the support required for the apprentice(s)?

- Would the support provided have been available without the funding?

60. Have any sources of funding been particularly effective for supporting particular activities or specific groups of apprentices? Why was this?

61. Are you aware of any wider sources of support (that you are not involved with) that apprentice(s) with additional needs access that supports them to sustain their apprenticeship?

- Is this a source of funding or something else?
- Who provides this support?
- What role does it play in enabling the apprentice to access and complete their apprenticeship?
- How effective is this type of support?

62. Has there been any additional support that you have wanted to provide, but have been unable to do so?

- If so, why is this? (*Probe: extent to which limitation was due to funding issues/ lack of knowledge about funding streams, or availability of provision/ wider circumstances*)
- Which groups would this benefit and how?
- What barriers are preventing adequate support being provided to apprentices with additional needs?

63. Are there any groups that you believe require additional support to successfully access and complete an apprenticeship who are not currently being supported? (*Probe: which groups and why is this?*)

64. To what extent does the support provided/not available impact on participation in apprenticeships amongst different groups? (*Probe: explore impact on different groups for both accessing and completing an apprenticeship.*)

65. What additional resources would be needed to address these perceived gaps?

- What would this resource be used for?
- How could it be funded?

66. Is there any further information or training that you feel employers need/would benefit from?

### **Future funding and policy context (15mins)**

67. How has the support you have provided to apprentices with additional needs changed over time? What improvements have you made and have you found to be most effective?

68. To what extent do you feel you understand the changes to funding for apprentices with additional support needs in place since May 2017? (*Probe: what is clear/not clear.*)

IF REQUIRED: OUTLINE THE APPROPRIATE FUNDING CHANGES FOR THE RESPONDENT INCLUDED IN RESEARCHER BRIEFING DOCUMENT.

69. How will these funding changes impact on the model you use to support apprentices with additional needs? What specifically will change for different groups?

- Will those supported change? How?
- Will types of support change? How?
- Will roles in the support provided change? How?
- Are there any elements of support required which are not possible under the new arrangements?
- What impact will the changes have on the effectiveness of the support available?

70. How do you think information about available additional funding and approaches to supporting apprentices with additional needs should be disseminated amongst employers?

71. Do you think that the new apprenticeships funding model will help to widen access to apprenticeships? (*Probe: why/ why not? Suggested changes?*)

72. What impact do you think these changes will have on the number of apprentices with additional needs from being able to access and complete an apprenticeship? Why do you think this is?

73. Do the new funding approaches introduce any new barriers or risks to supporting apprentices with additional needs? What are these and who do they affect e.g. types of apprentices, employers, providers?

74. To what extent do you think the changes to the funding model are appropriate and why? What further changes would you want and why/how would they be of benefit or what gaps would they address?



## **Summary (5mins)**

75. What do you think the critical success factors are to developing and providing high quality support for apprentices with additional needs?

76. Based on your experiences, do you think your organisation would offer apprenticeships to individuals with additional needs in the future? If not, what would need to change?

77. Based on our discussion is there anything else you would like to add?

## **Close the interview**

- Thank them for their time.
- Ask if they have any further questions and provide contact details for further comments/queries.
- Reiterate next steps and confidentiality.

---

# Apprenticeship funding support: Topic guide for third party interviews

---

## Interviewer notes

This document is a guide to the principal themes and issues to be covered with representatives from third party organisations that are working with apprenticeship providers and employers to support apprentices.

This topic guide should be used flexibly. Questions can be modified and followed up in more detail where necessary and can be adapted for different types of participants.

**Prior to interview researcher should check and confirm the sampling criteria the respondent has been selected to meet. Follow ups and prompts should be used as appropriate:**

IF SELECTED FOR SUPPORTING APPRENTICES WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OR DISABILITIES (LDD): Primarily to prompt based on experience supporting those with LDD. Disadvantage can also be explored if appropriate.

IF SELECTED FOR SUPPORTING APPRENTICES FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS: Explore experience supporting those from disadvantaged areas only.

This interview will aim to capture the respondent's holistic understanding of the sources of support that are used with their different types of apprentices, how these work together to support the apprentice to access and complete the apprenticeship, who is responsible for these elements, and how they are funded.

## Introducing the research to respondent

- Learning & Work Institute (in partnership with ASK Research) have been commissioned by DfE to build an evidence base on how apprenticeship providers, employers, and others support apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes what support is required; how this support is funded; and whether this enables apprentices to successfully participate in and complete their programme.
- This research is being carried out to inform the future development of apprenticeships funding policy. It may also help to identify examples of effective support and how this is funded, which other providers and employers can learn from.
- As an organisation working with apprenticeship providers and employers to support apprentices, you have been identified to take part in this research so you can share your experiences of providing or organising such support.
- The interview will last 60-90 minutes. Participation is optional and you can choose to break, stop the interview or decline to answer specific questions at any time without giving reason.

## Terminology and definitions

During this interview we will be using the following terminology/definitions:

**LDD** – learning difficulty or disability, including: Emotional/behavioural difficulties; Social and emotional difficulties; Moderate learning difficulty; Severe learning difficulty; Dyslexia; Dyscalculia; Autism spectrum disorder; Asperger’s syndrome; Other specific learning difficulty (e.g. Dyspraxia); Other learning difficulty.

**Disadvantage** – disadvantaged backgrounds, identified by postcodes used by the government to provide extra funding in the shape of a ‘disadvantage uplift’. We are also interested to hear about other forms of disadvantage, for example, care leavers and young adult carers.

**Support** – any type of support that is provided by the apprenticeship provider, employer, or another party in order to remove barriers to an individual accessing or successfully completing an apprenticeship. This might include specific funding that is provided or other types of support.

For clarity, the difference between Learning Support (a funding stream) and learner support (wider financial support that may be offered) are briefly described below:

- **Learner support** – Financial support for learners with specific financial hardship preventing them from taking part or completing learning e.g. for childcare, transport, hardship and residential costs.
- **Learning Support** – Funding for learners (including but not limited to Additional Learning Support and Exceptional learning support) which allows providers to meet the cost of putting in place reasonable adjustments.
- **Access to Work** – Discretionary government funding from DWP for employees to provide a contribution towards the extra disability related costs of working beyond reasonable adjustment. Grants are payable to the commissioner of this extra support either individuals, employers or providers.

Ensure interviewee is comfortable with these and understands these definitions.

## Confidentiality and Consent

- We are undertaking this work on behalf of The Department for Education. The information given to us in the research will be used to develop a final report. We will not use the names of any individuals or organisations, or any identifying information in the report.
- Quotes from the discussion may be used in the report but these will not be attributed to participants by name or organisation.
- The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder so we have an accurate record of what is said. Recordings will be deleted once material has been

transcribed and only the research team will have access to these. *Ensure interviewee is comfortable with recording, if not, detailed notes will be taken.*

- All files are stored in secure folders in line with the Data Protection Act. Only the research team will have access to the recordings and transcripts
- Do you have any questions?

Ask interviewee to verbally confirm on the audio recording that they understand the purpose and confidentiality of the research and that they are happy to take part.

## Questions

### Background (5mins)

78. Please tell me about your role within your organisation, and in particular the nature of your remit in relation to supporting apprentices or ensuring accessibility/support?  
*(Probe: is role delivery or management focused?)*

79. Can you tell me about your organisation:

- What are your main activities/services?
- Main aims and objectives?
- Size and the number of staff?
- Geography you deliver in?
- What is your offer in relation to apprentices with additional needs?
- Approximately how many apprentices have been supported and are currently being supported and their needs?
- How is the organisation funded? Briefly, how are the organisation's apprenticeship activities funded *(this will be explored in more detail later)?*

### Identifying and engaging participants (10mins)

80. What barriers or additional needs does your organisation recognise as requiring additional support so that an individual can begin and complete an apprenticeship?

- How are these defined? *(Probe: How do these compare with the definitions used in this research? What other groups require support?)*
- What impact do you think these barriers have on apprentices? *(Probe: absence, struggle to complete tasks, dropping out etc.)*
- What impact do you think these barriers have on providers? *(Probe: additional classroom support needed, struggle/concerns of how to support individuals etc.)*

- What impact do you think these barriers have on employers? (*Probe: absence/retention, struggle/concerns of how to support individuals etc.*)

81. How does your organisation identify individuals who could be suitable for support to access and complete apprenticeships?

- How, if at all does your organisation work with providers and employers to identify individuals who would benefit from additional support to access and complete apprenticeships?
- How effective is this process and why?

82. Do you ever refer potential apprentices to providers and/or employers? (*If so, how does this work?*)

83. Are there particular groups of apprentices who are more likely to require support?

- Which groups are these?
- What barriers do they face?

84. To which groups of apprentices does your organisation currently provide additional support?

### **Journey through the support (20mins)**

85. When additional support needs are identified what are the next steps your organisation would take to address these?

- Who is involved in this and why? (*Probe: types of provider staff, employers, third parties, apprentices, parents/carers*)
- Can you recall/provide an example(s) where this approach has been applied? How frequently has this approach been used – is it a fixed approach for every apprentice, a specific programme of activity, or utilised in select instances?

86. Can you outline the types of additional support that have been provided for different groups of apprentices and the point at which these types of support are put in place/accessed? (*Probe for each different group additional support is provided for.*)

- Tailoring their apprenticeship programme/making reasonable adjustments (*Probe: what types of adjustment are made and how are these agreed*)
- Providing special equipment or technology
- Financial support
- Additional learning resources

- Support worker/buddy
- Other

87. What is the impact of these types of support on the different groups of apprentices? *(Probe for each different group additional support is provided for and different types of support mentioned.)*

- What are the benefits for apprentices? *(Probe: increased awareness, reducing stigma, supporting disclosure, staying in apprenticeship, improved health.)*
- What are the benefits for employers? *(Probe: increased awareness, more support, retention of apprentices.)*
- What are the benefits for providers? *(Probe: retention/completion rates, any strategic goals, profile of organisation)*

88. Have any aspects of support been particularly effective for specific groups of apprentices?

89. Who is responsible for ensuring this type of support is in place for the apprentice? *(Probe: their organisation, provider, employer, another organisation.)*

- How do/did they work with other partners to agree and implement the support?
- Who is responsible for different elements of the support?

90. How well (and joined up) do you feel the system works?

91. What resources (including specific costs and staff time) are needed to provide this support and who is responsible for these? *(Probe for each different group additional support is provided for and different types of support mentioned.)*

92. How are the different types of support funded? *Probe for each group and type of support.*

- Are these support activities part of your core offer, part of another funded programme of activity, funded by bursaries/grants, funded by employers or providers, supported by other government funding or services?
- How are these absorbed/treated by the organisation?
- How did you find out about this funding option?

93. Just to check/recap – which of the following types of funding support have you accessed to support apprentices or are you aware have been used to support the apprentices you work with? *If not mentioned previously, explore in what*

*circumstances/for which types of learners and for what reasons they have accessed each type of funding.*

- Payment of £1,000 (each for employers and providers) taking on an apprentice aged 19-24 with an Education Health and Care Plan. (Introduced in May 2017)
- Payment of £1,000 (each for employers and providers) taking on a care leaver aged 19-24 as an apprentice. (Introduced in May 2017)
- **Additional Learning Support** of up to £150 per month to meet costs associated with learning aids and adaptations, **Excess Learning Support** is above the fixed monthly rate and **Exceptional Learning Support** embraces all eligible learners with support needs over and above £19k.
- 'Disadvantage uplift' payments to apprentices studying on frameworks.
- Discretionary Learning Support for apprentices aged 19 or over to contribute towards costs associated with accommodation, travel, learning materials and/or childcare.
- Earnings Adjustment Statement funding for additional support.
- Provider-specific hardship funds to use at your discretion with disadvantaged learners.
- Funds from specialist support agency hardship and emergency funds. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provides Access to Work funding to contribute to support beyond reasonable adjustments for people with a disability, health condition or mental health condition that affects their ability to work..

94. Which aspects of the support do you think have proved the most effective in supporting apprentices to continue with, and successfully complete, their programme and why? Has this been evaluated or measured?

95. Have any sources of funding been particularly effective for supporting particular activities or specific groups of apprentices? Why was this?

96. Are you aware of any wider sources of support (that you are not involved with) that your apprentices with additional needs access that supports them to sustain their apprenticeship?

- Is this a source of funding or something else?
- Who provides this support?
- What role does it play in enabling the apprentice to access and complete their apprenticeship?
- How effective is this type of support?

97. Has there been any additional support that you have wanted to provide, but have been unable to do so?

- If so, why is this? (*Probe: extent to which limitation was due to funding issues/ lack of knowledge about funding streams, or availability of provision/ wider circumstances*)
- Which groups would this benefit and how?
- What barriers are preventing adequate support being provided to apprentices with additional needs?

98. Are there any groups that you believe require additional support to successfully access and complete an apprenticeship who are not currently being supported? (*Probe: which groups and why is this?*)

99. To what extent does the support provided/not available impact on participation in apprenticeships amongst different groups? (*Probe: explore impact on different groups for both accessing and completing an apprenticeship.*)

100. What additional resources would be needed to address these perceived gaps?

- What would this resource be used for?
- How could it be funded?

101. Is there anything you would like to, or plan to, change about the support model? (*Probe: Why?*)

### **Future funding and policy context (15mins)**

102. How has the support you have provided to apprentices with additional needs changed over time? What improvements have you made and have you found to be most effective?

103. To what extent do you feel you understand the changes to funding incentives in place since May 2017? (*Probe: what is clear/not clear.*)

- Do you think it has been sufficiently clear for employers and providers you work with? (*Probe: what is clear/not clear.*)

IF REQUIRED: OUTLINE THE APPROPRIATE FUNDING CHANGES FOR THE RESPONDENT INCLUDED IN RESEARCHER BRIEFING DOCUMENT.

104. How will these funding changes impact on the model you use to support apprentices with additional needs? What specifically will change for different groups?

- Will those supported change? How?



- Will types of support change? How?
- Will roles in the support provided change? How?
- Are there any elements of support required which are not possible under the new arrangements?
- What impact will the changes have on the effectiveness of the support available?

105. How do you think information about available additional funding and approaches to supporting apprentices with additional needs should be disseminated amongst providers and employers?
106. Do you think that the new apprenticeships funding model will help to widen access to apprenticeships? (*Probe: why/ why not? Suggested changes?*)
107. What impact do you think these changes will have on the number of apprentices with additional needs from being able to access and complete an apprenticeship? Why do you think this is?
108. Do the new funding approaches introduce any new barriers or risks to supporting apprentices with additional needs? What are these and who do they affect e.g. types of apprentices, employers, providers?
109. To what extent do you think the changes to the funding model are appropriate and why? What further changes would you want and why/how would they be of benefit or what gaps would they address?

### **Summary (5mins)**

110. What do you think the critical success factors are to developing and providing high quality support for apprentices with additional needs?
111. Based on your experiences, what do you think the risks are for organisations offering and supporting apprenticeships to individuals with additional needs in the future? What needs to change to address these risks?
112. Based on our discussion is there anything else you would like to add?

### **Close the interview**

- Thank them for their time.
- Ask if they have any further questions and provide contact details for further comments/queries.
- Reiterate next steps and confidentiality.



Department  
for Education

© Department for Education 2018

**Reference: DFE-RR800**

**ISBN: 978-1-78105-885-5**

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

[luke.beckett@education.gov.uk](mailto:luke.beckett@education.gov.uk) or [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

This document is available for download at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)