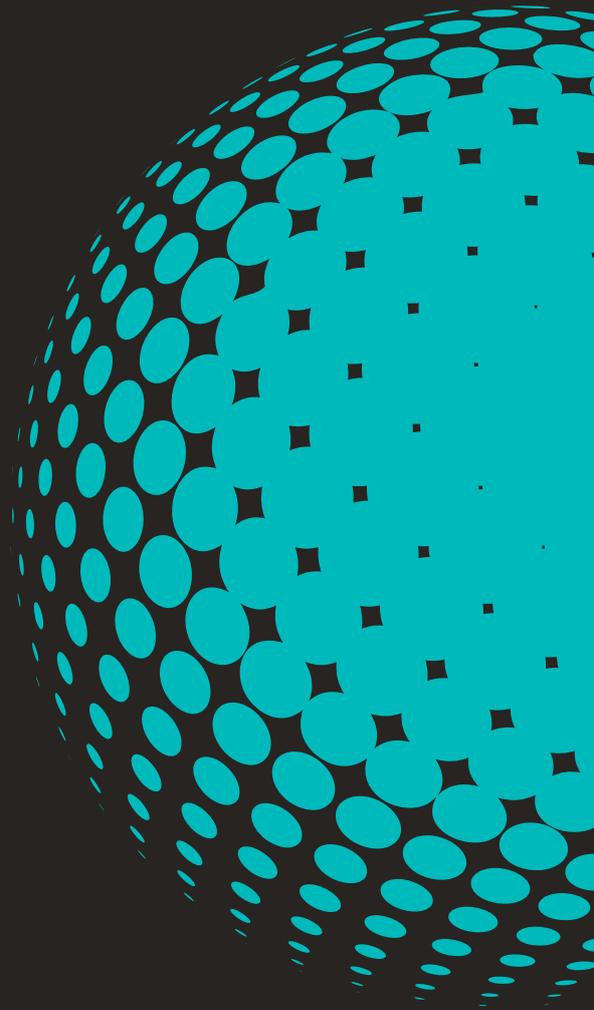


# Access to Apprenticeships

September 2019



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## Foreword

The UK economy faces many challenges in the current economic and political environment. The recent **Open University Business Barometer survey<sup>1</sup>** of UK employers reported that the UK is in the middle of a skills crisis. The business landscape is challenging with much uncertainty brought about by changes such as digital transformation. It is crucial for businesses to overcome these challenges and, where possible, turn them into opportunities, but they can only achieve this with diverse, flexible and highly skilled workforces.

Employers have started to change their approaches to solving skills shortages and preparing themselves for the future, with more than half increasing investment in training and a third now employing apprentices<sup>2</sup>. They have also recognised that building diverse workforces is a powerful way to unlock creativity and fresh thinking.

At the heart of creating a diverse skilled workforce is having a skills system that supports everybody's potential to thrive and develop no matter what background they come from or which barriers they may face. Official statistics show that there remains a gap in employment between those with declared disabilities and those without. In 2018/19, only 12.3% of individuals starting an apprenticeship in England declared a disability, while UK-wide figures show almost one in five (19.5%) adults of working age have a disability<sup>3</sup>.

To understand why this is the case and what more can be done, the *Access to Apprenticeships* report examines how effectively our current skills system in England supports employers to recruit and develop people with physical impairments, mental health conditions and learning disabilities. It also highlights employers' intentions with regard to hiring apprentices and graduates with disabilities and seeks to shed a light on the barriers they face and the support they would like to see from the UK Government and training providers.



**Penelope, Viscountess Cobham CBE**

Director General  
The 5% Club



**Gill Cronin**

Director of Operations  
The 5% Club

The 5% Club is a dynamic movement of employer-members working to create a shared prosperity across the UK by driving 'earn and learn' skills training opportunities.

We are proud to be supporting The Open University, now in its 50th year, with this important report. We have no doubt that this is a positive contribution to the debate and will spark further interest amongst relevant stakeholders, including charities, employers, providers and the UK Government.



<sup>1</sup> Open University Business Barometer. July 2019

<sup>2</sup> Open University Business Barometer. July 2019

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education Apprenticeships and Traineeships England. July 2019

## Background to the report

**In recent years we have seen significant changes in the skills landscape in England, with policy makers looking to revitalise the vocational education system and create more opportunities through high-quality apprenticeships. A key goal of these reforms is to create a system that fosters social mobility and is open and inclusive to all. This includes providing pathways to work for people with disabilities, with apprenticeships being one of these routes.**

The UK Government set a goal of increasing the proportion of apprentices with a declared disability by 20% by 2020<sup>4</sup> to ensure that more people with disabilities are able to take advantage of apprenticeships in England. To support this goal, the Department for Education (DfE) created the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) to promote best practice in diversity recruitment amongst employers and encourage them to target under-represented groups.

The recent National Audit Office review<sup>5</sup> of apprenticeships in England stated that:

***“The Department’s targets for widening participation among under-represented groups lack ambition. The Department is on track to meet two of its diversity targets: the numbers of starts by black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) apprentices and by apprentices with a learning difficulty, disability or health problem. However, these targets are not stretching.”***

DfE statistics show that in 2018/19, 12.3% of individuals starting an apprenticeship in England declared a Learning Difficulty or Disability (LDD). Although the proportion has increased slightly each year from 7.7% in 2011/12, this still only represents just over half of the total proportion of people with disabilities in the UK – almost one in five (19.5%) of the working age population<sup>6</sup>.

In 2018, the DfE commissioned the Learning and Work Institute (LWI) to undertake a study to explore the effectiveness of funding to support apprentices with an LDD and/or apprentices from a disadvantaged background<sup>7</sup>. This report made several recommendations regarding the funding policy and identified two issues that required further consideration:

1. 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 did not claim Additional Learning Support funding for these apprentices because they do not know what evidence would be acceptable to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Providers and employers that engaged in the research suggested the following types of information 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 the funding can be used for: outlining what specific types of support or resources different funding types can be used for and what is not allowed
  - What evidence and supporting information is required: including which forms of evidence are acceptable if there is an auditing requirement and examples of the level of detail required

<sup>4</sup> English Apprenticeships: our 2020 vision, as reported in Disability Rights UK Briefing Paper

<sup>5</sup> National Audit Office 2019

<sup>6</sup> DfE 2019

<sup>7</sup> DfE/LWI research 2018

2. 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.

The Open University (OU) is one of the UK's most accessible Higher Education Institutions and training providers, with over 24,000 students declaring a disability, which is more than half of all part-time disabled undergraduates in the UK. It recognises that good progress has been made to date in supporting those people with an LDD into work and long-term meaningful careers but also believes that a lot more can be done in England, which is why it has commissioned the *Access to Apprenticeships* survey and report.

*Access to Apprenticeships* seeks to build on the DfE/LWI report to shine a light on the progress that both the UK Government and employers in England are making in building more diverse and accessible workplaces that support every apprentice or graduate with a disability to achieve their ambitions. It also, we hope, serves to support apprentices in declaring their disability or health condition and access the support available from both their employer and training provider.

The comprehensive survey examines employers' intentions for the future as well as the challenges they face and the impact these have on both the organisation and the individuals they recruit. The report puts forward practical recommendations for solutions that will help achieve both the UK Government's goals and employers' ambitions to create more diverse workforces.

This report focuses on employers in England and puts forward recommendations to the UK Government although, as a training provider operating in all four Nations of the UK, we know that many of the experiences that employers encounter across the Nations are similar. The policies and funding environments in which they operate, however, are very different. For example, the Welsh Government has an 'Inclusive Apprenticeships: Disability Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2018-21'<sup>8</sup>.

**In 2018/19, 12.3% of individuals starting an apprenticeship declared a Learning Difficulty or Disability (LDD)**



<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government 2018

## Research methodology

**The survey was conducted with 711 large and small employers in England from across the public, private and third sectors and sought to understand the following:**

- Employers' plans to hire apprentices/ graduates
- Employers' attitudes to hiring apprentices/ graduates with disabilities
- The barriers they face and support they require
- The readiness of the workplace to support apprentices/graduates with disabilities
- The opportunities that exist to make improvements to the current apprenticeship system in England
- The role of employers, training providers and government

This survey took the form of both quantitative and qualitative telephone interviews with key decision makers in these organisations including CEOs, HR Directors and Senior HR Managers.

The survey focused on England and English regions and did not cover other UK Nations where separate apprenticeship and skills systems are in operation.

In this case, the term disability covers the following:

- Physical impairments
- Mental health conditions
- Learning difficulties



## Executive summary and recommendations

**94% of employers researched are looking to either grow or maintain the number of graduate and apprentice hires they make in the next 12 months.**

This growth in hiring is strong both for public and private sector employers and across all regions. Larger firms are anticipating more growth than SMEs.

As part of this growth, hiring people with a disability is important for more than two in three (68%) employers.

Employers are now translating that intent into action, with over a third (38%) of employers stating they have started to proactively recruit individuals with disabilities in the past three years.

There are a wide range of disabilities that employers are encountering as they recruit. There has also been a growth in the declaration of mental health issues amongst existing apprentices and graduates.

Employers are supplementing their own internal resources with a wide range of partners to attract and recruit people with declared disabilities including specialist recruitment agencies, training providers/colleges, Job Centre Plus and third sector organisations such as Mind, The Prince's Trust and Scope.

With employers seeking to increase the number of recruits with disabilities, the survey shows that support is needed to help them overcome a range of barriers:

- 18% of all employers surveyed were not using any external support. 43% of these employers are unaware of what support is available to them or are unclear as to how to access the support

- This is particularly the case in SMEs with 56% of respondents unclear on the support available compared to 28% amongst larger employers
- The availability of internal resource to support apprentices and graduates with declared disabilities is a challenge faced by both small and large employers with 47% of employers saying that they could do with more internal support
- Many employers feel that their management and operational teams are unprepared to support individuals with disabilities with only 27% of employers stating that their line managers are 'very prepared'
- There are knowledge gaps amongst employers when hiring individuals with disabilities including a lack of knowledge and understanding of potential practical adjustments required

**Hiring people with a disability is important for more than two in three (68%) employers in England**

- Employers believe that the responsibility for supporting recruits with disabilities needs to be a shared one between the UK Government, training providers and the employer
- Employers feel that the responsibility for both financial support and the education and training of staff should be a joint government/ employer responsibility
- Employers agree that training providers have a role to play in attracting and supporting apprentices with disabilities and providing advice and guidance on accessing both financial and non-financial support
- These challenges have had negative impacts on individual apprentices and graduates including dropping out of courses and mental health issues
- They also impact employers in several ways including financial cost, loss of talent and a loss of confidence in recruiting apprentices with disabilities.

This report concludes with four recommendations for UK Government, employers and training providers in England:

1. Enhance recruitment support
2. Provide more transparent Information, Advice and Guidance
3. Simplify the funding and clarify the eligibility and assessment processes to ensure every individual receives the support they deserve
4. Improve education and training for employers



## Survey findings

### What are employers' intentions regarding hiring apprentices and graduates with disabilities?

94% of employers surveyed stated that they intend to grow or maintain the number of apprentice and graduate hires they make over the next 12 months.

### Employers' hiring intentions in the next 12 months

	All Employers	SME Employers	Large Employers
More (apprentice/graduate hires)	49%	45%	51%
The same (apprentice/graduate hires)	45%	49%	43%
Less or don't know (apprentice/graduate hires)	6%	6%	6%

This growth in hiring is strong for both public and private sector employers and across all regions. Larger firms are anticipating more growth than SMEs:

- 51% of large employers intend to hire more graduates or apprentices in the next 12 months, compared to 45% amongst small employers
- 55% of public sector employers intend to hire more graduates or apprentices in the next 12 months, compared to 48% in the private sector
- As part of their hiring plans, hiring people with a disability is seen as 'very important' or 'somewhat important' amongst two in three employers (68%)

Employers have become more proactive in recruiting apprentices and graduates with disabilities:

- 38% of businesses state they have started to proactively recruit individuals with disabilities in the past three years
- Amongst small employers, 39% have started to proactively recruit individuals with disabilities which is a similar figure to that amongst large employers (37%)
- There are some sizeable regional variations in employers proactively recruiting individuals with disabilities

**94% of employers want to grow or maintain the number of apprentice and graduate hires they make over the next 12 months**

Regional breakdown of employers proactively recruiting individuals with disabilities over the past three years, as illustrated below:



**How do employers go about recruiting apprentices and graduates with disabilities and what support do they need?**

Employers are working with a wide range of partners to attract and recruit apprentices and graduates with declared disabilities, including specialist recruitment agencies, training providers/colleges, Job Centre Plus and third sector organisations such as Mind, The Prince’s Trust and Scope.

They also use their own internal wellbeing and HR teams to provide support and advice on issues such as reasonable adjustments required.

The approach taken to recruiting apprentices is key in enabling employers to understand what their support needs are. There are three main approaches to recruitment and many employers did not just use one method:

- Employer-led recruitment: Employers rely solely on their own recruitment processes to attract and recruit new apprentices with disabilities

This is often challenging in larger organisations where they are reliant on online application processes that can prove inaccessible to many with disabilities

- Provider-led recruitment: Providers lead the recruitment process for employers, screening and sometimes interviewing potential candidates for them. Often, providers have access to a pool of more diverse candidates but the degree to which they are equipped to support hiring apprentices with disabilities varies greatly
- Partner-led recruitment: Providers or employers 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 with LDDs, or care leavers

### The support employers seek to hire potential candidates with declared disabilities

	All Employers	SME Employers	Large Employers
Specialist recruitment agencies	41%	37%	45%
Training provider/college	47%	47%	46%
Charities (e.g. MIND, Prince's Trust, Scope, etc.)	34%	37%	31%
Job Centre Plus	32%	33%	31%
Employer-led	32%	30%	33%

Many organisations interviewed use a combination of employer and provider-led approaches. This may include working closely with job centres 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 employers' main source for recruitment.

Some employers use more specialist supported internship programmes to provide extra support in the recruitment process both for the individual recruit but also to help recruiting managers make adjustments. These programmes are, however, only delivered by 23% of respondents and are more prevalent in larger employers where 27% use this approach.

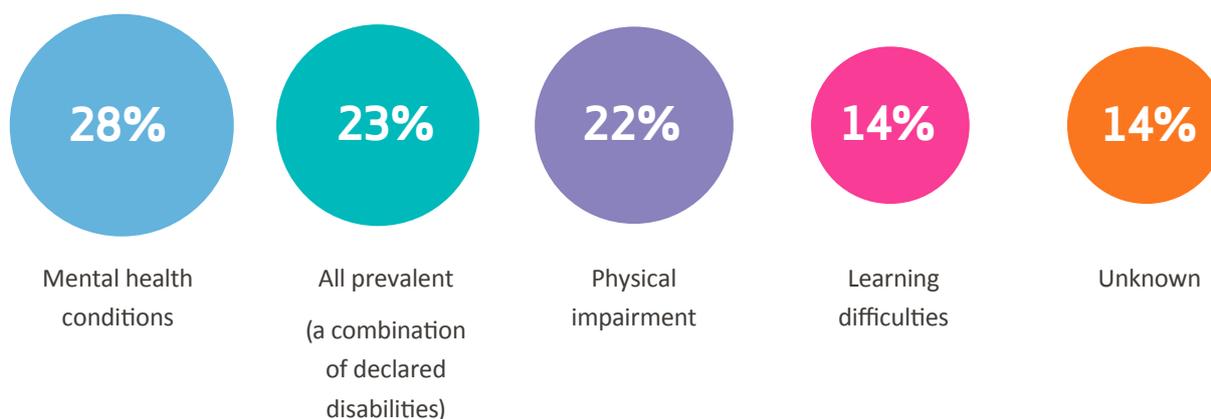
### The support employers seek to onboard new employees with declared disabilities

	All Employers	SME Employers	Large Employers
Training provider/college	39%	36%	41%
Job Centre Plus	39%	41%	37%
Access to Work Scheme	38%	36%	40%
Employer-led	18%	20%	17%
Supported Internships	23%	19%	27%

### What declared disabilities are employers seeing as they recruit?

conditions and learning difficulties being declared amongst their new apprentices and graduate recruits.

Employers are seeing an equal split of disabilities between physical impairments, mental health



### Have you seen a growth in any declared disabilities?

One in three (34%) employers said that they are seeing a rise in mental health conditions amongst their existing apprentice and graduate cohorts. This trend can, in part, be attributed to increased disclosure.

However, there are several other factors that employers said were driving this trend. These include the stress and pressure of work but also wider factors such as personal issues and financial worries.

### Reasons for the rise in mental health conditions and disclosure amongst apprentices/graduates

	All Employers	SME Employers	Large Employers
Personal, non-work-related issues	45%	36%	52%
Financial pressures or worries	41%	36%	46%
Increased pressure or stress of work	42%	39%	44%
Decreased stigma surrounding mental health issues	40%	36%	43%
Increased pressure or stress of studies or exams	28%	26%	31%
Adjustment to the workplace for the first time	28%	26%	30%

### What barriers do employers encounter in recruiting individuals with disabilities?

There are a range of barriers identified by employers including a low awareness of the recruitment support that is available as well as limited internal resources.

Those employers using external resources such as their training provider or UK Government schemes, including the Access to Work programme, are benefitting from this additional support, although our in-depth interviews would suggest that the processes for accessing support can be seen as “complex, and the eligibility criteria unclear and confusing”.

18% of all employers interviewed were not using any external support. 43% of those employers who did not

access external support (i.e. Access to Work) reported that they were unaware of the support that is available to them or how to access it.

This is particularly the case amongst SMEs where 56% of those that did not use external support cite a lack of awareness as the reason. For large employers who did not access the available support, 28% were unclear on the support available.

*“We struggled a bit to find additional help, but we did get some advice... It wasn’t easy, but we sorted it out ourselves eventually through trial and error and experience with the apprentice.”*

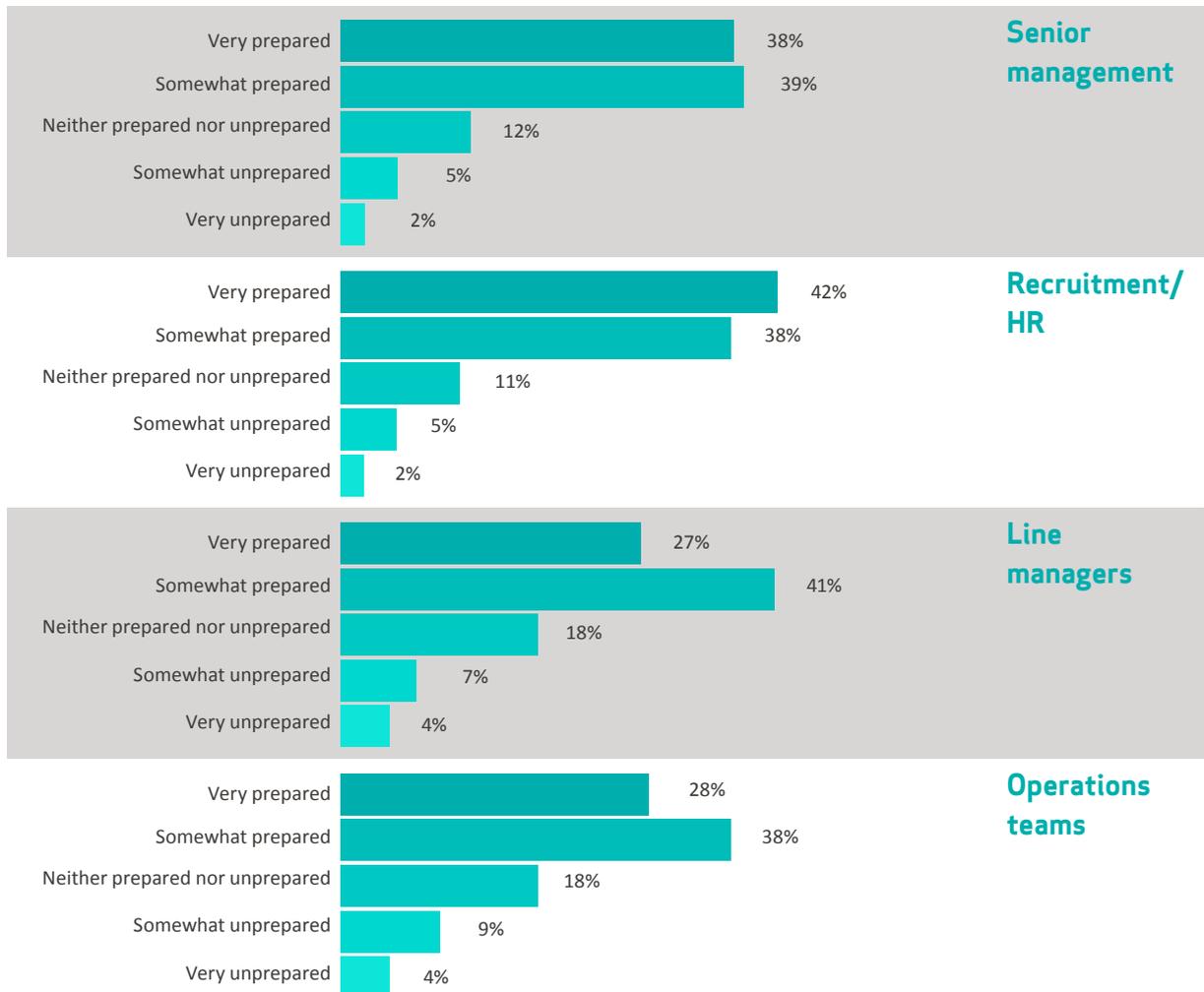
### Barriers to recruitment

The barriers employers encounter when recruiting individuals with disabilities	% of employers
There should be guidance on securing support to help disabled students	25%
It is unclear what financial support is available	22%
It is unclear what non-financial support is available	20%
The government does not make the support that is available clear	20%
The process of accessing financial support is unclear	18%
The government does not take any responsibility for ensuring that training is appropriate	18%
The process of accessing non-financial support is unclear	17%
It is unclear whose responsibility it is for providing additional support	17%
Learning providers do not make the support that is available clear	17%
The support available is not enough to make a difference	17%
Learning providers do not take any responsibility for ensuring that training is appropriate	16%
None	14%

- Employers also say that a lack of business readiness is a barrier, with insufficient internal resources to support apprentices and graduates with disabilities seen as a key challenge faced by both small and large employers
  - 47% of employers stated they would like more internal support
  - 51% of SME employers stated that they need more resources compared to 42% of large employers
- Many employers feel that their management and operational teams are unprepared to support individuals with disabilities. Less than a third (27%) stated that their line managers were very prepared

*“No, I am not [confident our teams are prepared]. Support depends on the different recruitment managers. We have processes in place being a big organisation but I am not confident that everybody [i.e. all the individual recruitment managers] does enough, so we need to work on it. We have a big programme around being disability-confident aware, in challenging stereotypes and prejudices.”*

**How prepared are employers?**



The survey highlighted a range of very practical challenges that employers of all sizes are coming up against. These include financial issues and gaps

in employer knowledge and understanding. These challenges are summarised in the table below:

The challenges organisations face when hiring apprentices or graduates with disabilities	% of employers
Knowledge and understanding around the practical adjustments required	31%
Knowledge and understanding around additional support required to learn and study	30%
Knowledge and understanding of training required to help existing staff to support disabled employees	29%
Staff members do not know or understand how to support disabled employees	27%
Knowledge and understanding around the pastoral support required	26%
Staff members do not have the skills or experience required to support disabled employees	25%
Financing additional support required to train and develop	24%
Financing training to help existing staff to support disabled employees	22%
Financing appropriate practical adjustments	21%
Financing adequate pastoral support	17%
My organisation does not face any challenges	15%
Don't know	5%

#### Who do employers see as being responsible for providing the support to diversify the workforce?

- 64% of employers believe it is their primary responsibility to provide the support necessary for individuals with disabilities to succeed. Often, they will turn to their occupational health provider to seek guidance on what adjustments or types of support are required
- 53% do, however, also see the UK Government as playing a role in providing the required guidance and advice
- 56% also believe the UK Government should provide financial support to meet individual training needs and 46% believe the UK Government should provide financial support to make reasonable adjustments

- Our in-depth interviews suggested that many employers already seek support from the Access to Work programme
- 33% see training providers playing a wider role of supporting the recruitment and training of other staff members in disability support

**What impacts do employers and apprentices/ graduates face as a result of inadequate support?**

- The survey uncovered a wide range of challenges faced by apprentices and graduates with disabilities including:
  - The pace at which they can learn
  - A lack of one-to-one support
  - Lack of accessible learning materials
  - Having to commute
  - Lack of accessible training facilities
  - The practical adjustments to enable learning

*“A member of staff discovered that they had dyslexia when they were training for a professional qualification. We got first rate help and advice from Access to Work.”*

*“First port of call would be the training provider with whom we have a very good relationship.”*

*“We have lots of internal mechanisms but we would like more support from our training provider. They could help to train other staff as mentors to understand people’s learning styles.”*

**Challenges faced by apprentices/graduates with a disability**

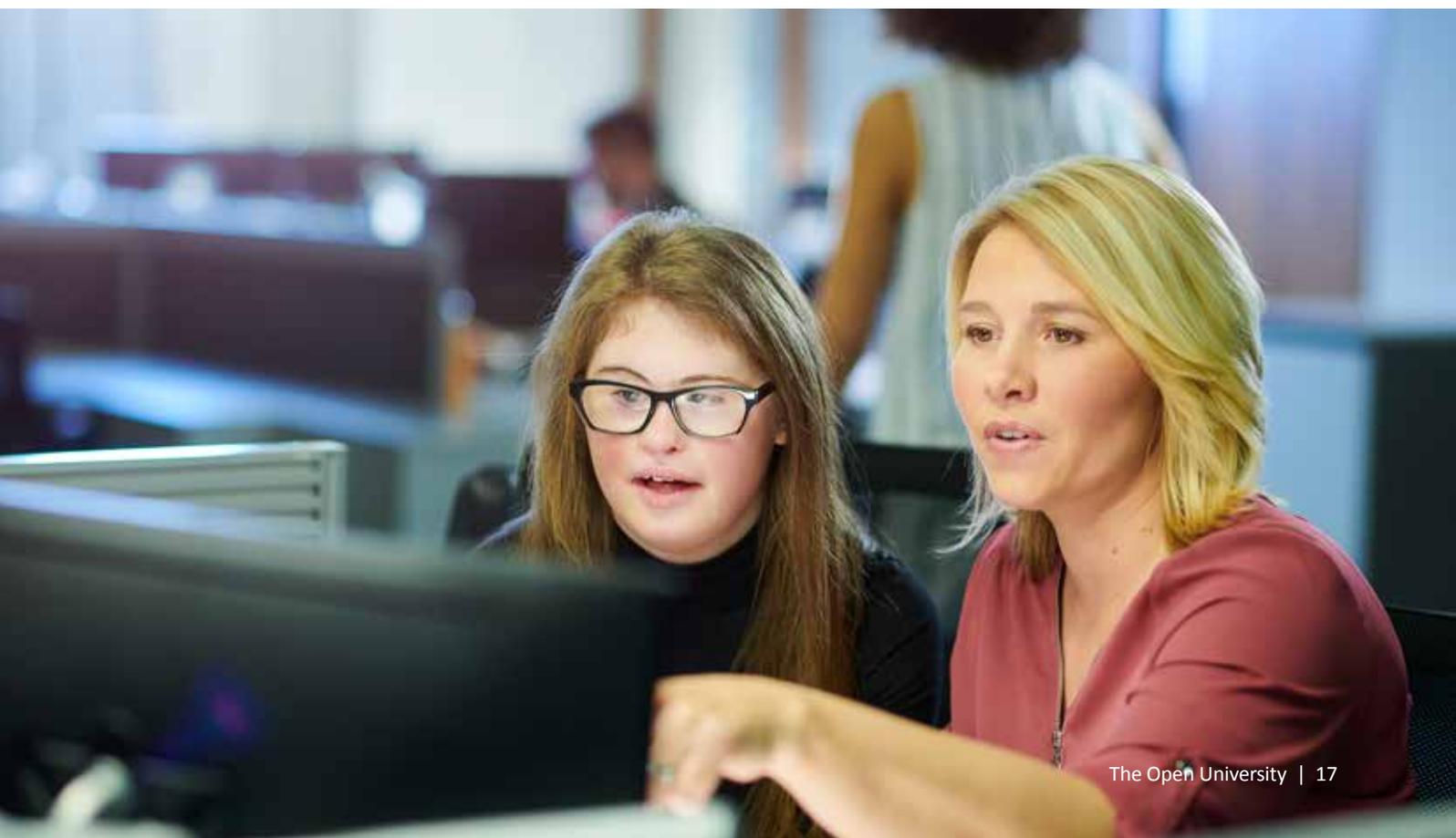
The challenges faced by apprentices/graduates with a disability	% of apprentices/ graduates
Having to commute or travel to attend training	31%
Practical adjustments to enable learning	27%
Dropping out of the programme/study	27%
Lack of one-on-one or face-to-face support available	25%
Pace of teaching/learning	26%
Accessibility issues at the training location	23%
Lack of accessible learning materials	22%
None of the above	14%

### The experiences employers face

The perceived implications of hiring people with declared disabilities was similar amongst both public and private sector employers, large and small.

### The impact on employers

The impact on employers	% of employers
My organisation has had to spend more money to ensure that training was suitable	30%
My organisation has had to spend money to provide practical adjustments	30%
My organisation has had to spend money to provide additional one-to-one support	28%
My organisation has had to spend money to ensure that training was accessible	25%
My organisation has lost talented employees because of the strain they experienced	23%
My organisation is concerned about investing in external training for disabled employees	22%
My organisation has lost money because of the issues faced by disabled employees	18%
My organisation believes that apprenticeship training is unsuitable for disabled apprentices	16%
None of the above	8%



## Apprentice case study

**Laney Stemp, an apprentice at an NHS Trust, is an excellent example of how employers and providers are able to work in partnership to deliver successful apprenticeship programmes for learners with disabilities. Laney works for Devon Partnership NHS Trust, which provides a wide range of NHS services to people with mental health and learning disability needs in Devon, the wider South West region and nationally.**

Laney has cerebral palsy and works as a support worker at the Trust. She was given the opportunity to start The Open University Higher Apprenticeship in Health (Assistant Practitioner). Laney is now close to completing the programme and awaiting her End Point Assessment. During the programme, Laney has been promoted to the role of Assistant Practitioner (Mental Health).

"I've always worked in healthcare. Having cerebral palsy myself, I wanted to help other people, but from a different perspective.

"My condition varies from day to day. Some days I wake up and I can't move and other days I'll feel differently. There is also a mental health side to living with cerebral palsy.

"If I have a day when I wake up in the morning in pain, it isn't easy to get to a classroom, so The Open University is a good fit for me. I sometimes find it difficult to talk about how I'm feeling over the phone so I've built up a relationship with my Open University tutors where I am able to email and explain how things

are going. Face-to-face and telephone contact is also available, but I find email works best for me and that communication has developed over time. It's really helpful and the support I've received from the OU has been fantastic."

Unlike classroom-based learning, blended learning provided by The Open University allows apprentices such as Laney to approach their learning in a more flexible manner – around her condition, her shift work and her workplace needs.

A supportive employer is also vital for apprentices with disabilities. Laney explains:

"My manager is really good. There might be days where I'm in work but not physically able to walk as much so I'll do fewer walk-rounds and more administration tasks. Sometimes I might change a shift if that helps. We adjust things as and when needed.

"I'm coming to the end of the programme now and studying with the OU has been a big part of my life and it will seem strange to have finished the programme. Both me and the team will be readjusting to just having a job on the ward helping patients, but it's great that the apprenticeship has helped me achieve my goal to be an Assistant Practitioner to help others through my work at the Trust."



**Devon Partnership**  
NHS Trust

## Survey findings (continued)

The rise in mental health and wellbeing issues amongst existing apprentices and graduates has had a range of impacts on both small and large organisations. The greatest impact is seen in increased sickness and absence, with 34% of SMEs and 40% of larger employers impacted in this way.

Some employers also say increased mental health issues have led to higher attrition (turnover of employment) and heavier workloads for other colleagues.

### The impact of mental health issues in the workplace

	All Employers	SME Employers	Large Employers
Increased sickness or absence	37%	34%	40%
Higher rate of attrition (turnover)	24%	25%	24%
Lower productivity	27%	28%	26%
Increased workload for line managers or HR teams	27%	22%	32%
Lower staff engagement	21%	20%	22%
Poorer company culture	17%	17%	18%



Employers utilise a wide range of support initiatives for both new recruits and existing colleagues including resilience training, wellbeing programmes, occupational health support and training for line

managers. Businesses of all sizes deploy these activities although wellbeing programmes and line manager training are more prevalent in larger organisations.

### What support do employers use?

	All Employers	SME Employers	Large Employers
Resilience training	19%	18%	19%
Support from development or training partners (for example, apprenticeship training providers)	23%	24%	22%
Mentoring support or coaching	33%	32%	34%
Occupational health support	29%	23%	35%
One-to-one counselling or therapeutic support	29%	23%	35%
Access to online wellbeing tools or advice	26%	23%	29%

### How do public sector and private sector employers compare?

The survey revealed many similarities between public sector and private sector employers in both their plans to diversify their workforce and the challenges they face. However, there does appear to be a greater level of ambition and confidence amongst public sector employers when it comes to employing individuals with disabilities:

- 37% of public sector employers state that they have always sought to hire individuals with disabilities versus only 25% of private sector employers

- 57% of public sector respondents felt their organisation had enough resource to support colleagues with disabilities compared to 47% of private sector organisations
- 33% of public sector respondents felt that their line managers were very prepared compared to 24% of their private sector counterparts

When it comes to who should provide support and what support is needed, there is very little difference between the sectors, with all employers wanting more financial and non-financial support from both the UK Government and training providers:

- 54% of public sector respondents said they would like more financial support from government compared to 56% from the private sector
- 34% of public sector respondents said that they would like more non-financial support with reasonable adjustments compared to 31% in the private sector

The challenges and impact of employing apprentices or graduates with disabilities are largely comparable across the public and private sectors, although private sector employers did indicate that there are greater financial impacts providing one-to-one support (32% in the private sector compared to 21% in the public sector).

There has also been a rise in the number of apprentices and graduates declaring mental health conditions, with a slightly larger proportion in the public sector (37%) compared to the private sector (32%).

**37% of public sector employers have always sought to hire individuals with declared disabilities**





## Conclusions and recommendations

This survey clearly demonstrates a strong desire on behalf of all employers to recruit more people with disabilities into apprenticeships and to close the gap in employment between those with and without a disability. Employers recognise that they often do not have the expertise or resources required to achieve their ambitions, and that more support is required. The Open University is therefore making four key recommendations to the UK Government about apprenticeships in England:

### 1. Enhance recruitment support

The UK Government needs to do more to support employers to promote apprenticeship vacancies to people with disabilities through their campaign activity and their vacancy service. Consideration should be given to the following:

- How employers can utilise the Apprenticeship Service to show that they are disability-friendly
- How employers can promote roles that are suitable for individuals with different types of disabilities
- How employers can identify disability-friendly training providers and specialist third sector organisations who can help identify and onboard candidates

### 2. Provide more transparent Information, Advice and Guidance

As declarations of mental health conditions and physical impairment amongst new and existing recruits increase, it is vital that both the UK Government and training providers provide clearer Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to employers, and in particular to SMEs, around the support available to recruit and develop apprentices with disabilities. This should be easily accessible and cover the following:

- The support available to help identify and recruit apprentices with disabilities
- The financial support available to employers to make reasonable adjustments and who can access this financial support, for example training providers, employers or individuals
- The non-financial support available to employers, training providers and individuals
- The financial support that can be made available via training providers to support assessment and additional learning needs. Clearer eligibility criteria is needed for this provider-related funding

The above could be delivered via the online Apprenticeship Service or via a helpline such as the one in place for SMEs.

*“They [Government] should do more to actively encourage disabled people to apply for positions by promoting the support they can access as well as the rights they have.”*

*“More information on how to support disabilities would help, ideally mapped out so you cover all the areas you need to think about”*

### 3. Simplify the funding and clarify the eligibility and assessment processes to ensure every individual receives the support they deserve

The Department for Education should consider how the current funding model for individual learners, providers and employers seeking additional learning support can be radically simplified. Consideration should be given to the following:

- Common needs assessment process for all new apprentices as part of the sign-up process
- Consideration should be given as to whether the current Additional Learning Support funding should be realigned to the Levy as a “top-up allowance” available to each apprentice where a potential additional learning support need is identified. This allowance would be drawn down on top of the standard funding cap by training providers based on new simplified and clear eligibility criteria and could fund the following:
  - Additional assessment activity e.g. tests for specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia
  - Additional one-to-one support from training providers
  - Additional staff training to support apprentices
  - Minor adjustments, for example, equipment to support learning activity

Large-scale workplace adjustments would continue to be the responsibility of employers and be levy funded via the Access to Work

programme, but clearer guidance should be provided to employers and providers as to how to access this and the eligibility criteria for support.

*“We need provision [of funds] for equipment, training for staff working with people with disabilities including for other members of the team, so that they can develop an understanding of life from the disabled person’s perspective.”*

### 4. Improve education and training for employers

It is vital that all those working with apprentices with disabilities are fully trained and able to support individual needs to help them to succeed. A common programme of education should be considered for all employers recruiting apprentices with disabilities along the lines of the Mental Health First Aid programme. The programme would help educate line managers of apprentices about the different types of disability and how to support their employee, with recognition that every employee/apprentice will have very different needs. This could be delivered by training providers.

*“Training is always incredibly useful, such as free or subsidised advice on how to support, or written guidance on how to reach potential disabled applicants.”*



## About The Open University

**The Open University (OU) is the largest academic institution in the UK, with a long heritage in flexible distance learning. Since it began in 1969, the OU has taught more than 2 million students, and it currently has almost 175,000 students.**

Over 75% of students are in full-time or part-time employment, and four out of five FTSE 100 companies have sponsored staff to take OU courses. The OU has been delivering work-based learning to organisations for several decades, and has an employer satisfaction rating of 98% for its apprenticeship programmes, according to a recent FE Choices Survey. The OU launched its higher and degree apprenticeships offering in 2016 to provide employers with flexible, technology-enabled apprenticeship training for new and existing staff in leadership and management, digital, policing, social work, healthcare and nursing. It currently has over 1,400 apprentices on programme and works with over 400 employers across a wide range of sectors. It also offers Degree Apprenticeships in Wales and Graduate Apprenticeships in Scotland.

The OU has a wealth of experience in delivering accessible learning ranging from its undergraduate programmes through to its higher, degree and graduate apprenticeships and has over 24,000 students with declared disabilities. The OU can support employers to skill their workforce and access flexible learning tailored to their individual needs.

The OU's mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas means we want to be at the forefront of providing support to apprentices from all backgrounds, up and down the country. We hope this report sparks a debate and continues the conversation around how we can all better support apprentices with declared disabilities and ensure that, whatever an individual's situation, an apprenticeship can be a fantastic way to learn and earn, boost their career and deliver quality outcomes.

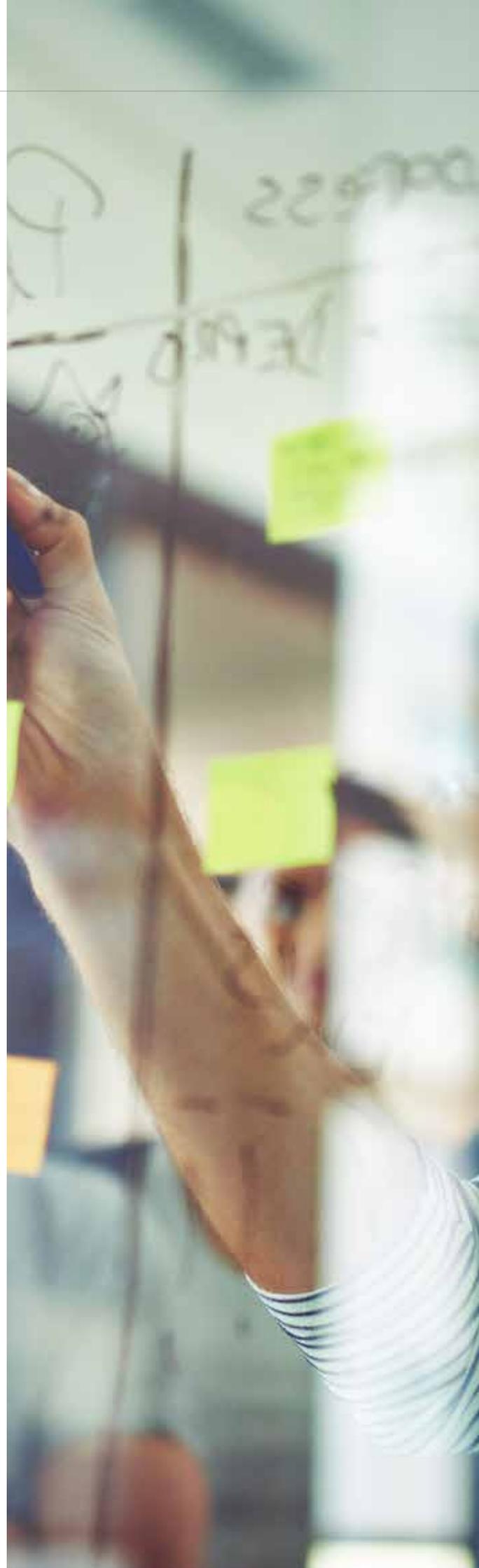
**For more information, please visit:**

[open.ac.uk/apprenticeships](https://open.ac.uk/apprenticeships)

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