



Considerations for disabled applicants to higher or degree apprenticeships

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1. Foreword

To apply for a higher or degree apprenticeship is a life-changing decision and deciding what area to pursue your career in and where you will do this is one of the biggest choices you will make.

Higher education is an opportunity that should be available to all those who can benefit from it and no student should be disadvantaged in respect of access and support. It is therefore the responsibility of all universities, colleges and independent learning providers delivering the learning element of higher and degree apprenticeships to ensure that they are supportive and equitable so that all students can succeed in their apprenticeship and prepare for their long-term careers.

It is crucial that all applicants have the information that they need when applying for a higher or degree apprenticeship, and it is particularly vital that disabled applicants are sufficiently informed so that they can make the choice that is right for them. This is why the Disabled Students' Commission has put together this guide for disabled applicants applying for a higher or degree apprenticeship; to help you through the process of asking the important questions of, and making sure you have the necessary support from, the university, college or independent learning provider from the outset of your journey. This is the first such guide for disabled applicants to higher and degree apprenticeships.

As a disabled applicant, it is important that you have the assurance and confidence you need that your requirements will be met to ensure you have the best possible experience of your higher or degree apprenticeship.

Geoff Layer

Chair, Disabled Students' Commission

2. Introduction

As a disabled person applying for a higher or degree apprenticeship, you may feel unsure if your requirements will be met in both your work and learning environment. Whether you are applying for higher or degree apprenticeships or have already been offered a place on a higher or degree apprenticeship programme, this publication aims to help you by providing pointers and questions to ask, to help ensure a smooth learning journey.

Employers work with universities, colleges and training learning providers to design and deliver higher or degree apprenticeship programmes. If the apprenticeship is funded by government it will be designed in line with the [Education and Skills Funding Agency rules](#) which are reviewed annually.

Both your employer and the university, college or independent training provider that provides the learning element of your higher or degree apprenticeship (off-the-job training) are required to provide adjustments and support in line with the duty to make reasonable adjustments under the disability provisions of the Equality Act 2010. The Department for Work and Pensions can support this in the workplace with Access to Work (see page 13).

In universities, colleges and independent training providers many of these adjustments are made through inclusive provision for all students, however, additional or bespoke adjustments for individuals may also be provided.

In employment, it is likely that some adjustments, beyond physical access, will be made on an individual basis.

Therefore, working with your employer and university, college or independent training provider to ensure that reasonable adjustments are implemented from the outset of your apprenticeship can reduce the likelihood of you encountering barriers.

This document contains a number of considerations which aim to help you pre-empt any barriers that you could encounter and help to ensure that reasonable adjustments are implemented. The employer to which you are applying or have an offer of a higher or degree apprenticeship from and the university, college or independent training provider that provides the learning element should help you explore the considerations.

Your line manager or the staff member with responsibility for human resources and your learning provider's disability and wellbeing services will be able to assist you. Disability and wellbeing services are likely to sit within student services but universities, colleges and independent training providers will have different names for their services. If you are unsure of the person or service to approach, ask the student services or admissions team.

At the outset of applying for a higher or degree apprenticeship, it is important to bear in mind that even if you have previously managed without reasonable adjustments in previous employment or at school or college, or if you know exactly what adjustments you require, the adjustments or support that you previously had may not be appropriate in your new workplace or in a higher education context. A higher or degree apprenticeship can be different in terms of an increased focus on practical work, the equipment you may need to use, as well as the teaching, learning and assessment methods you will encounter.

Some time may also have elapsed since you were last assessed for reasonable adjustments and technology as well as what is considered reasonable, may also have evolved. Having different adjustments or having individual level adjustments for the first time may be necessary to enable you to flourish.

All elements of your higher or degree apprenticeship will need to be considered when determining which reasonable adjustments are most appropriate, including the work environment, learning environment, field trips, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies requirements and methods of learning, teaching and assessment.

2.1 Providing information about your impairment

When you apply for your apprenticeship you are applying for a job and are likely to want your application to be assessed on your knowledge, existing qualifications, skills and experience alone. However, if your impairment has impacted on your previous employment, your ability to gain work experience or your prior learning, providing information in your application may be good evidence of perseverance, time management, planning and other attributes that apprenticeship providers and universities, colleges and independent training providers are looking for.

The Equality Act 2010 prevents employers asking you if are disabled prior to your being offered an apprenticeship. They can however ask if you require reasonable adjustments for any part of the recruitment process and they may ask you to complete an equalities monitoring form which should be separated from your application.

If you have not been asked if you require reasonable adjustments but are invited to undertake an interview or selection tests, it is advisable to contact them at the earliest opportunity to let them know.

Providing information about your impairment is a personal matter and it is up to you when you tell your employer that you consider yourself to have the protected characteristic of disability. However, the sooner you do so the quicker they will be able to implement support and ensure that it is also provided at your university, college or independent training provider. You could choose to tell the university, college or independent training provider providing the learning element of your apprenticeship that you have an impairment and request that they do not inform your employer.

You may feel that there is no reason for your employer or university, college or independent training provider to know that you have a disability because you have not had any issues at school, college or in previous jobs. However, you may have been benefiting from inclusive provision and you may be moving away from your usual support networks, the work may be different or your impairment could change. While universities, colleges and independent training providers do offer inclusive teaching and learning and many are making their teaching and learning environments more inclusive, you may require individual level

adjustments in higher education as well as in employment or may simply require initial support.

It is advisable to contact the university, college or independent training provider delivering the learning element of your apprenticeship prior to starting as they are likely to be able to talk to you in advance of your application about the inclusive adjustments that they provide. You can attend one of their open days at which there is likely to be specific information for disabled students. You can also contact their admissions or the disability and wellness team.

2.2 Deciding if the apprenticeship is right for you

You will have spent considerable time thinking about what type of career you want to enter and the best route for you. It is just as important to consider the facilities, services and support available to you and their accessibility while undertaking a higher or degree apprenticeship.

Higher or degree apprenticeships are likely to vary in terms of where you will study and work, the pattern of work and study, whether you will be within a cohort of degree apprentices or not and if you will need to travel between locations or not.

You will be an employee throughout your course and your employer and your university, college or independent training provider will have an agreement in place outlining their respective responsibilities in relation to your support in line with Education and Skills Funding Agency requirements.

These are the types of factors you may want to explore to ensure that you flourish in your apprenticeship, provided in a checklist format:

<p>What is the location of your workplace and your learning? Consider, accessibility of transport including parking, the local area, buildings, facilities and services. If there are any barriers, discuss with your employer and your university, college or independent training provider how they can be mitigated.</p>	
<p>If learning is delivered at a college or university rather than on site at your employer, when are the open days for the university, college or independent training provider? For a full list of questions to ask when visiting a college or university see page 20 of Disability Rights UK guidance Into Higher Education 2019.</p>	
<p>What specific provision does your employer and your university, college or independent training provider have to support disabled apprentices' and are there any networks or societies you can get involved in?</p>	
<p>What flexibilities can your employer offer to ensure that you receive the minimum of 20% off-the-job training which is a requirement of all apprenticeships? (This could include study days, block release)</p>	
<p>Government funded apprenticeships must comprise a minimum of 20% off the job training. The off the job training can be provided on your employer's premises by your university, college or independent training provider or at a different location.</p>	

<p>How will your employer liaise with the university, college or independent training provider to ensure your requirements are met? Will a support plan be developed related to your individual learner record?</p>	
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<p>Is teaching and learning delivered online and face to face or is it primarily face to face or online?</p>	
<p>An end point assessment tests that an apprentice is occupationally competent before they receive their apprenticeship certificate. You can find out information on the end point assessment for your apprenticeship by looking at the 'assessment plan' section of your apprenticeship on the Institute for Apprenticeship and Technical Education's website. You can ask your employer and university, college or independent training provider about the reasonable adjustments available to your end point assessment.</p>	
<p>What types of assessment method are used and what types of reasonable adjustments are available? For further information on End Point Assessment please see: www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/employers/end-point-assessments.</p>	
<p>Are you expected to attend fieldtrips as part of your apprenticeship and who will be responsible for reasonable adjustments on these?</p>	

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<p>What services provided by your university, college or independent training provider will you be able to use? For example, a few universities give degree apprentices access to their student accommodation in their first year whereas others do not.</p>	
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<p>How will you be able to participate in your apprenticeship in the event you cannot attend the workplace, lectures, seminars, or meet deadlines because of your impairment? Will your university's, college's or independent training provider's mitigating circumstances policy apply? Details of the mitigating/extenuating circumstances policy for the learning element of your course should be provided by student services within your university, college or independent training provider.</p>	
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<p>Is your employer committed to disability equality? For example, is it a Disability Confident employer or does it have the Disability Standard. Both of these initiatives relate to the support provided to disabled jobseekers and employees.</p>	
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<p>Are staff at your employer routinely provided with equality and disability awareness training?</p>	
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<p>Universities, colleges and independent training providers are likely to hold welcome events to enable new students to familiarise themselves with the learning environment at the outset or prior to courses commencing. Find out about the opportunities provided by your university, college or independent training provider. Your employer may also provide opportunities for you to familiarise yourself with your workplace before or at the outset of your apprenticeship.</p>	
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2.3 Funding for reasonable adjustments

Your personal care requirements will continue to be provided by your local authority. If you are moving local authority to undertake your higher or degree apprenticeship you will need to contact your local authority as soon as possible about transitioning responsibility for your personal care requirements to your new local authority. If you are travelling between local authorities for periods of time to undertake the employment or learning element of your higher or degree apprenticeship, the local authority of your home town (eg where you are ordinarily resident) will be responsible for your personal care requirements. Ask your local authority as soon as possible about the support provided when you are in higher education and how you can access it.

There are a number of sources of funding for reasonable adjustments for degree apprentices and your employer and learning provider will need to be involved in claiming those to which you are eligible:

1. Learning Support: is available to meet the costs of putting in place [reasonable adjustments](#) for apprentices with a disability where this affects their ability to continue and complete their apprenticeship. The funding is paid to the provider to cover the costs of reasonable adjustments which could include assistive technology, for example.

Your university, college or independent training provider will be required to carry out an assessment of your support needs, so it is important that you let them know if you think you will require Learning Support. Learning Support is fixed at a monthly rate of £150 per month and is only paid for the months in which support is required.

There is a process for providers to claim for additional costs (below a maximum of £19,000 per annum). This is set out in the [apprenticeship funding rules](#) that providers must ensure compliance with.

2. Exceptional Learning Support: is provided for apprentices who need significant levels of support to start and continue their learning. Apprentices can also access Exceptional Learning Support if their support costs are more than £19,000 in a funding year.

It is important that you speak to your university, college or independent training provider if you think this level of support will be necessary. Your university, college or independent training provider will need you to undergo an assessment of your support requirements in order to apply and complete the required form. For further information see:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/exceptional-learning-support-cost-form.

3. Your employer can support you with [Access to Work](#). This may help cover the costs of travel to and from work and practical support in the workplace. You will need to apply for it and provide details of your employer.

2.4 Implementing learning support

The Education and Skills Funding Agency require universities, colleges and independent training providers to document learning support within the individual learner record. In addition to individual learner records, they may also use student support plans. You can ask for a copy of the information within your individual learner record and any accompanying support plans to check for accuracy.

You should be asked permission, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, for information on your impairment and the support you require to be shared with relevant staff members at your university, college or independent training provider.

If you are unsure of who the information that you provide will be sent to or if you feel that it is being shared too narrowly or widely, talk to your employer or the disability adviser responsible.

2.5 Study skills

People enter higher education at different points in their life and have a vast range of backgrounds.

Many universities, colleges and independent learning providers provide study skills support. This is likely to cover the IT facilities and programmes available, library facilities as well as essay and thesis writing, research and revision skills support.

Even if you have recently studied at school or college and achieved high grades, it is important to find out about the breadth of support available in higher education. This is

because higher and degree apprenticeships are different. An apprenticeship is a job with a significant element of learning which you are required to apply in your workplace. The learning element will require more independent and in depth learning than at school or college.

If your learning is provided on site at your employer, you can still ask your university, college or independent training provider about the support available.

2.6 Student life

The National Union of Students provides the [NUS Apprentice extra card](#) which will entitle you to discounts on the high street and online and helps to fund the [National Society for Apprentices](#).

Many students' unions have a range of clubs and societies covering interests in specific countries, continents and cultures as well as a breadth of sports and the arts.

Most student unions employ staff to advise and support students too.

As service providers, students' unions are obliged under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that their activities are accessible and many have worked with their university, college or independent training provider to ensure that their facilities are accessible too.

2.7 Mental health and wellbeing

Starting an apprenticeship should be exciting. But it can also be a daunting experience as you are meeting new people, are in unfamiliar situations and may be living away from your usual networks.

Knowing what to expect can help you identify and remove potential barriers that could impact on your mental health and wellbeing.

[Student Minds](#) has found that the more a person knows what to expect and the more familiar they are with their surroundings, the likelihood of mental health issues occurring is reduced. Many universities, colleges and independent training providers offer open days, induction weeks and information on expectations of their students that will enable you to familiarise yourself.

You can also ask your employer for information on what to expect in the first weeks to help prepare yourself. Additionally, even if you visited your workplace for interview and selection activities, you can ask if it is possible to visit again before your apprenticeship commences.

If you currently receive mental health support you can talk to your employer and university, college or independent training provider about the support that they provide.

Many universities, colleges and independent training providers have self-referral and walk in mental wellbeing services and others will operate an appointments based system. Some universities, colleges and independent training providers are also working in strategic partnerships with the NHS to provide support and treatment to students.

[Remploy](#) provides support to apprentices who are experiencing mental health difficulties. In addition, employers have employee support programmes. Mental health is usually covered within these support programmes.

If you are moving away from your permanent residence you should talk to your current GP about accessing NHS mental health services. Will you need to travel back to your permanent residence or will you be able to access your usual support via a different health trust? What are the current waiting times for support? If there will be a gap in your support you can find out if it is possible for the university, college or independent training provider's mental health service to support you while you transition between health trusts.

2.8 Complaints

If you do not feel that your higher or degree apprenticeship application has been handled fairly or you do not feel that reasonable adjustments have been implemented, then you can complain both informally and formally.

You can raise your concerns directly with your employer or the employer to which you applied. Larger employers may have a formal complaints process that you could also use. Formal processes usually have a timeframe and involve correspondence in writing.

If your complaint relates to a university, college or independent learning provider, you can contact the admissions or disability and wellbeing staff in writing or in person and request

that they review your situation. If there is not a satisfactory outcome to an informal complaint you can complain formally.

All universities, colleges and independent training providers should have formal complaints procedures. You will be able to find detail of the complaint procedure on their website or can request to be sent links to the process.

If you make a formal complaint and are unhappy with the resolution, then you are likely to be able to complain to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#). Please note that the OIA cannot look at complaints about admissions processes or decisions, but can look at complaints about what has happened after the apprenticeship has started. You can find out if your university, college or independent training provider is a member of the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#). You must make your complaint within 12 months of hearing the outcome of your formal complaint to your university, college or independent training provider.

[Guidance on the rules of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#) states that:

'An apprenticeship is a job, so someone on a higher education apprenticeship will be employed as an apprentice but will also be a 'student'. If the apprenticeship involves a higher education qualification which is delivered, awarded or assessed by a higher education provider, then the apprentice can complain about what the higher education provider has done.'

You can also contact the National Apprenticeship Helpdesk for assistance:

- + National Apprenticeship Helpdesk on 08000 150 600 or helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk
- + The [Office for Students](#) also has a complaints process

2.9 Quick Links

- + [Education and Skills Funding Agency rules](#)
- + [Disability Rights UK guidance Into Higher Education 2019 \(Page 20\)](#)
- + [End Point Assessment](#)
- + [Disability Confident employer](#)
- + [Employer Disability Standard](#)
- + [Learning Support and Exceptional Learning Support](#) cover reasonable adjustment costs.
- + [Access to Work](#) may help cover the costs of travel to and from work and practical support in the workplace
- + [The National Union of Students NUS Apprentice extra card](#) which will entitle you to discounts on the high street and online
- + [National Society for Apprentices](#)
- + [Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#)
- + [Office for Students](#)
- + **National Apprenticeship Helpdesk** on 08000 150 600 or helpdesk@manage-apprenticeships.service.gov.uk
- + [Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)

About this publication

This publication has been informed by a series of roundtables run by the Disabled Students' Commission (DSC) in July 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Disabled Students' Commission was established by the Universities Minister and is funded by the Office for Students (OfS). The DSC aims to ensure that disabled students have a positive and successful experience in higher education

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Advance HE helps HE and research be the best they can be. We are a member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. We are experts in higher education with a particular focus on enhancing teaching and learning, effective governance, leadership development and tackling inequalities through our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work.

Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address systemic inequalities and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector. We deliver our support through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys and research, providing strategic change and consultancy services and through membership (including accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, knowledge and resources).

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