

ASK Webinar: Apprenticeships for individuals with additional needs

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Anna Morrison:

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to today's webinar where we're going to be discussing apprenticeships for individuals with additional needs.

My name is Anna Morrison. I'm the founder and director of Amazing Apprenticeships, and you will see on the screen today I'm being joined by the brilliant Ian Turley from the Department for Education. So I'll get Ian to come on very shortly.

We're just going to go through a couple of bits of housekeeping with you for today. So we are using the webinar function today, which means that we cannot hear you or see you. However, we would still love you to get involved, please. So you will see on your screen there is a Q&A box and you are able to click on that and submit your questions. So please do send them in as we go through the webinar because anything that we've covered will filter out. But it's really useful to have your thoughts as we go. Thank you to those of you who have submitted questions in advance, we have a big sheet of questions, so we're going to get through as many as we possibly can. I know some of you will have some particular questions, perhaps about the support needs of young people that you're working with, whether that's your child or if you're in a school or college, perhaps about particular students. So it may be that we're not able to cover some of those questions today within the Q&A without getting into a lot of detail. But we're going to do our best to signpost you at the end of today's webinar to where we feel you will be best able to receive that individual support. So I hope that's okay.

Now we are recording today's webinar as well, so please don't worry if there's something that we go through and you think you missed it, or if you want to receive a copy of the slides afterwards as well. Everything is going to be sent out to you so you can re-watch it and you can share it with anyone as well that you think might find it useful or interesting.

Okay, before I bring Ian in, we just have a quick poll that we're going to launch. We'd be really interested to know from our audience here today how knowledgeable you feel about the flexibilities that are available for apprentices with additional needs. 0 being not very knowledgeable and 5 being very knowledgeable. And that's really useful for us to just get a really good feel of who's in the room, your level of expertise. Don't worry, it's not a trick question. You know, this is an area of rapid change I would say, you know, Ian works within the Department for Education and is at the forefront of a lot of those policy changes and we'll use a lot of examples and feedback from yourselves through various groups and networks to help to positively influence some of that policy direction. But it means it's an ever changing landscape. So please don't feel worried if you are not scoring yourself as a 5 at the moment. You may do by the end of the webinar.

Okay, so just looking at those stats, we've got 16% of our audience today on 0, 19% on 1, 32% on 2, 26% on 3, 7% on 4 and no one on 5. Okay. Right. We're going to do our best to address some of that today. Our aim, our vision, is that you leave today feeling much more informed about some of the flexibilities and some of the areas around apprenticeships that may well support individuals that you're working with or perhaps an individual yourself looking at apprenticeships to really understand where are those flexibilities, what can be done differently if I need that extra support or something to be flexed within the system to better support my needs.

So we're going to be looking through kind of finding opportunities, how do we go about identifying opportunities, through to then understanding some of those flexibilities. So what are the bits that can be changed and how can they be changed? And we're going to have a good amount of time for Q&A at the end as well. All within the next 25 minutes. So, without any further ado, I'm going to hand over to the brilliant Ian Turley, who is going to take us through a bit of a presentation. So thank you, Ian, for joining us. Over to you.

Ian Turley:

Thank you very much for having me. It's always awkward to see a photo of your own face on these things, so thank you for having me. I am Ian Turley from the Department of Education. I work in our skills policy area, trying to ensure that people with learning difficulties, disabilities, neurodivergences and all the other types of additional needs are able to access skills courses and training and their support and assistance for them as they travel through their education and skills journey into employment and onwards. Here at the Department of Education, we describe ourselves as the Department for Opportunity. We say that we're committed to building skills for opportunity, for growth, so that every young person can follow the pathway that is right for them. This includes a focus on children and young people with special educational needs, disabilities, SEN, whatever you want to call it, we count all of those together and apprenticeships are a fantastic thing that bring together all those elements of training, of learning, of working into one package. So I'm really happy to be here today to talk about apprenticeships and the support which is available for people who go on them.

So, I'm going to talk about looking for apprenticeships first, looking for where to, what to do, because there's lots, there's loads of apprenticeships out there, all kinds of different jobs, ranges of different businesses. Lots of people still have this old fashioned idea that an apprenticeship is bricklaying and plumbing and those sorts of things. And it can be, but it could also be working on space technology and things like that which are in there. There's everything in between as well. There's loads of different sorts of apprenticeship out there, different qualification levels all the way across the country.

So the best place to start your search is the Find an Apprenticeship website. This is the official UK government service for people in England who are looking for an apprenticeship. It includes, allows individuals to search for apprenticeship opportunities. So you can go into there and you can search by keywords, key terms, location, sector, level of the apprenticeship, things like that, and you can find out all the details about the vacancy. So each listing will provide things about the role, about the employer, the location, where it's based, the duration of it, what are your required qualifications, the salary, all that sort of stuff is in there. So if you go in and search for things. You can also create an account which allows you to save your searches and track your applications as you go through. So that's your main hub for finding lots of things about an apprenticeship.

But one of the top tips for people who've got a disability, learning difficulty or whatever you want to call it, is you're able to search for employers who are described as Disability Confident through this website. For those who don't know, Disability Confident is a scheme which is an initiative from the UK government designed to encourage employers to sign up and they recruit, retrain, develop young people, well, all people with disabilities, long term health conditions. It's voluntary, so the employers sign up for it and by signing up they're making a commitment to challenge attitudes towards disability, to encourage more inclusive and understanding workplace culture, removing barriers for disabled people, ensuring people have the opportunity to fulfill their potential and stuff like that. So if you go onto the Find an Apprenticeship website and you search, there's a little box you can click on there to find a Disability Confident employer that should bring through the ones that are linked onto there. So you know that those employers have made a commitment to support people. Of course, not all employers are part of the Disability Confident and just because they're not part of that scheme doesn't mean that they won't be supportive of people with additional needs. So there's also fantastic resources available across the internet. But obviously right here, with Amazing Apprenticeships, there's lots of

information available on how to find an inclusive employer that will support your needs. Next slide, please.

So, entry requirements. Apprenticeships, as I say, range from level 2 qualification all the way up to a master's degree level. The level, the entry requirements for an apprenticeship can vary significantly depending on the level of the apprenticeship and the specific employer's requirements and things like that. But there are some general rules that fall into there, you must be over 16, there's no upper age limit, so anyone over 16 living in England can apply on there. And even those people, if you've got people or yourselves still at school, you can still apply as long as you're 16 by the end of the summer holidays. So you can start your apprenticeship on that. English and maths is an important thing. Everyone would agree that or all, you know, we'd like to have everybody have a good standard of English and maths. And if you don't have your GCSE in English and maths, you might be required to work towards it or to achieve it as part of your apprenticeship. But there's some flexibilities which we've introduced, which has stopped this becoming too much of a barrier to people with learning difficulties and disabilities and I'll come on to those a little bit later.

A little bit more about the role of the training provider. The training provider is one of the crucial roles in an apprenticeship. They're the key person that goes in between the apprentice and the employer. And as the name suggests, they provide the training, often what we call the off-the-job training as well as those sorts of things. So in essence, the training provider is responsible for equipping the apprentice with the knowledge and the skills to successfully do their apprenticeship and they work closely with the employer to make sure that the training aligns with the needs of the business that you're working with and support any, you know, needs and guidance to the, to the apprentice to make their journey through there. But the training provider also has a really important role in identifying and assessing the needs of the apprentice and what they might need for their apprenticeship. At the very start of the apprenticeship, the training provider conducts what's called the initial assessments. Here they're looking to make sure that this apprenticeship is the right thing for you and to identify your current level of knowledge and skills and things like that, to make sure that this is the right thing for you. But they're also looking to assess the support you might need for your individual circumstances. We're all individuals and even people who have identified learning difficulties and disabilities will have different individual needs. No two people are the same and that's a really important message. So the training provider will assess your needs as an individual. Even if you've already told them that you've got a disability or learning difficulty, even if you've got EHC plans and all that sort of documentation, they will still assess your, your needs as an individual. They might do it for conversations, they might do it through some computer software and stuff like that, but they will assess your needs and they'll be making sure that you've got the right information, that they've got all the information they need to make a right decision on how to support you. The more that they know about you, the better they can support you. So it's really important that you share as much information with your training provider as possible. And I know that's not always something that everyone's comfortable at doing. Sometimes we don't like to talk about ourselves in those ways. And some people are very good at hiding or disguising the true extent of your own needs, what we call masking. And there's lots of reasons for that. But the training provider can, if they can clearly understand how your condition impacts you as an individual in your day-to-day life, in the way that you learn, in the way that you things react, how you react to situations, they can put more things into place and support you better. So we really do encourage people to be open and honest with their training providers.

Going back to the thing I mentioned earlier about English and maths, that's definitely a thing that's part of the system on here, that if you talk to your training provider, there's often things that they need to know about. So for an apprentice who hasn't got their level 2 qualification in English and maths, so that's your GCSE pass grade 4 to 9, A to C as it used to be called in your GCSEs, there can be a requirement to work towards it or achieve it as part of your apprenticeship depending on your age and things like that. But we know that for some people,

achieving that level of English and maths can be a real barrier. And even with all the adjustments and things I'm going to talk about in a bit, that could still stop people doing it. So we've brought in a flexibility where if your training provider agrees that there's enough evidence that the level 2 qualification would cause a barrier for you, we can offer a lower level of English and maths. It's called entry level three. It's still stretching, it's still doing lots of practical, useful maths and English, but it's a step down from, or steps down from the, the level two English and maths. So we hope that that removes some of that barrier to people doing an apprenticeship. So that's a really good example of talking to your training provider, making sure they understand your needs and being open with them so they can look at whether that flexibility is right for you. But there's more adjustments.

Next slide, please. I think. It's stuck, I'll carry on anyway and the slides can catch up. Ah yes, there you go. First thing, all your adjustments, like that, if you make sure that you discuss these as early as possible. So all employers, education providers, training providers and everybody else that's involved in providing a service have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled apprentices. So not placed at any, can't say it, any disadvantage compared to non-disabled apprentices. This includes people with learning difficulties and neurodivergences and all those sorts of things.

This is a duty set out under Section 20 of the Equality Act 2010. So it's the law, it's not just us saying this, it's actually the law that people make these adjustments for you. So they can cover various aspects of the apprenticeship, including the training, the assessment, workplace environment. There's lots of different adjustments can be on there and different ways they can support the individual's needs through reasonable adjustments. It could be getting specialist equipment or software or modified workspace, but it could also be having extra time for your assessment, alternative formats of learning styles and different ways of communicating and having flexible scheduling. There's a long list of reasonable adjustments.

No two people, as I say, will have exactly the same need and it's really important that your training provider understands what your individual needs are so they can put these reasonable adjustments into place. And they'll also work with your employer as well to share them across. So on the slide, there it is: 'How and when'? Openly, and at the start of your apprenticeship is a great time to do it. But as you progress through your apprenticeship, your training provider will assess and review your needs. So even if you don't realise you need something or you don't mention something at the very start, it can be picked up on later. So it's always important if you think, oh, it's too late now, I'm six months in, I should have mentioned this before. It's not too late. You can mention these things and look at what's going on in there. So, yeah, and support available. So you could have, those of you, those people who've had support in schools can talk about the things that they've had there, but it's also just talking about your, your own individual needs. So there are things that support this. Health Adjustment Passports and things like that can be useful for just being open and as honest with your training provider as possible is useful.

Next slide, I think, please. Can I come back to that one? Oh no, that's the same one, isn't it? I'm going to go off script here. I'm going to talk about the other person. I may have missed my cues on the slides, I may have made them out of order. But the other important role in here is employers, was the employers the next one? There you go. So the other important role in apprenticeship is obviously the employer. They support the apprenticeships not just by providing a job. They have the active engagement and steer the apprentice's learning and development, creating supportive inclusive environments and ensuring they have all the opportunities you need to survive, not survive! To succeed and thrive, sorry! So employers that are involved in apprenticeships, they're all different sizes as I mentioned before. Some of them will be nationally known international companies, some of them will be very small. Lots of them maybe who are doing apprenticeships are engaged in employer networks where they discuss the how they work with employers, with apprentices

across different employers in their local area or regional areas. And they share best practice on how to support people with additional needs. Some of them also have networks for people working there, so they'll have support systems or mentoring systems and things like that set up to support people in their apprenticeship, not just for people with learning difficulties or disabilities. We'd like mentoring and support systems for everybody. So that's an important factor on this. So your employers are providing the on-the-job training and teaching you these things. It's important to remember that an apprenticeship is an actual real job, working with the employer. So the employer will align the work to the training and vice versa and provide a safe working environment that fulfils everyone's needs. It's paramount that they look at those reasonable adjustments we talked about before with the training provider as well, because they may be different in the classroom environment to what you need in the work environment.

So talking again to your employer, being open with them as much as you can around how things impact you, your own individual needs and as you work through what works and what doesn't work as you go through there. Your employer should also help you with any adjustments and assistance during the recruitment process. So in your application process and any interviews and stuff like that. So it's important to be open and honest about these things. I think about it as discussing what things you need to be really good rather than focusing on things that you can't do and stuff like, because often you get into a negative space and you think you can't do these things. It's like, this is just things that I need to do the best that I can do to open those opportunities for me.

One of the things that's available for people in employment and in apprenticeships is Access to Work. This is a government scheme. It provides financial support to help people with disabilities into work, to stay in work, to progress in work, and they cover the costs of some of the adjustments which may not be covered directly by your employer. So again, that could be specialist equipment, software adaptations to the workplaces. It could also be support workers, job coaches and British Sign Language interpreters. Could be awareness support for colleagues and communication support. Loads of different things get covered in this, so it's important to apply through the Access to Work online spaces. Best thing about Access to Work, it's a non-repayable grant. So this money that you receive from Access to Work doesn't need to be paid back and it doesn't affect any of the other benefits that you may be receiving for you and your family. Next slide. Is it the previous slide on flexibilities? Ah flexibilities, there we go.

So I've talked about the reasonable adjustments a lot. There's other flexibilities which are part and parcel of an apprenticeship which are fantastic. So I can see, I saw earlier that someone mentioned the first question on the side, can people do part-time apprenticeships? Yes, you can. And they offer a really valuable and flexible route for gaining the qualifications and work experience without having to commit to a full-time role. They may take a bit longer obviously, but they provide you with the same qualification, the same skills, knowledge as a full-time apprenticeship.

In an apprenticeship as well, that may be possible to take a learning break, which is a temporary suspension of the training. This allows you to step away from that training for a period. That has to be agreed obviously, with your training provider and your employer. So working out what the break is for, it's agreed for the duration and the reasons for it and stuff like that. But it can cover things like personal circumstances, it can cover your employer's needs, your needs, the training provider's needs or wellbeing reasons as well. So it shouldn't have any impact on you, well, it doesn't have any impact on your employment and you should be able to pick up your apprenticeship where you left off. So it's just a quick snap break in there that can be agreed just to give that extra bit of flexibility.

The other thing I saw also listed in the questions before I started talking was something that we're very excited

to talk about at the moment, which is the foundation apprenticeship. These are a new thing which is being launched later this year. So, as I say, we're very excited about it. We're starting to release some of the information about this this week. So I have to be a little bit careful about some of the things that I say because otherwise I'll get my fingers slapped and be called a government leak source or things like that. We can see some of the details on there. They're aimed at people 16 to 21, if you've got an EHC plan up to 24. There's no Functional Skills exit requirements, but you should be looking at the English and maths that we talked about before. And the idea of these foundation apprenticeships is they're going to be looking at the core skills and boosting industry awareness and giving people a little bit of a taster of what it's like in specific industries. The foundation, they're going to be targeted to certain key elements. The part of our work to look at areas like construction, digital, engineering and manufacturing, health and social care and those sorts of things. So they're really good. We're hoping that they can be a stepping stone onto more further apprenticeships or into work and give people that extra flexibility and way of entering the space of work and employability.

I think that just about covers all the things I've written down to talk about today. There's loads of resources, as I say, available on the internet, especially through Amazing Apprenticeships' website here. So I hope you found this interesting and I hope that you're encouraged to explore apprenticeships further and looking into the support that we have available for people. Any questions?

Anna Morrison:

Any questions, we've had a bumper response! We've got loads of questions going down the side, so our team are trying to answer all of the ones that we can and some of the points that you've touched on already Ian. Thank you firstly so much for setting out really clearly some of those flexibilities, because literally as you were talking, those questions were coming in and we were able to get some of them answered.

One of the areas that it might be worth just unpacking a little bit more is around support for learners with undiagnosed needs and anxiety and you talked a little bit about training providers being able to undertake additional assessments now to be able to support the identification of where we think some of those needs might be and then be able to apply further flexibilities to the program. Would you be able to just go back over that for us, just so the audience is totally clear? Thank you.

Ian Turley:

Yes. So Education, Health and Care plans are allocated to young people with disabilities in schools and local authorities identify them. But we know that lots of people who have a significant learning difficulty or disability and would face barriers, might not have an EHC plan. They're not given out to everybody and they're applied differently across the country. But we do know that people have a barrier regardless of, of those. And we know as well that there's long waiting lists in some parts of the country to get identified and to get diagnoses on various different, you know, learning difficulties and neurodivergences and stuff like that. So we've been taking steps, we encourage training providers to, as part of their assessments, look at the individual's needs. So if you turn up with an EHC plan or a diagnosis or medical notes or all those sorts of things, they should be taken into consideration, obviously. But the training provider should be looking at what are your individual needs regardless of those things, too.

So the flexibilities for English and maths aren't tied to EHC plans anymore, and neither are any of the things around reasonable adjustments and stuff like that. So training providers often look into these things and they can apply for different funding through support schemes and things like that, which would provide additional learning support and things for people. So none of those things at the moment are tied to EHC plans. We promote diversity and inclusion. We want people to be identified with the right things. So not necessarily, you know, you don't have to have a formal diagnosis, you don't have to have an EHC plan, you don't have to have

a, you know, piece of paper or whatever, because some parts of the country may have a different piece of paper to other parts of the country and things like that, and people outside of those, you know, have got lots of undiagnosed things as well. So we accept self declaration, but people would have to still be assessed as part of that, that process. And as I say, there's lots of different ways that they would do this. Training providers are encouraged to not just sit here in front of a computer. We don't want that and say computer says yes or computer says no based on your things, it should actually be an assessment of your capability. So, yeah, it's open to people with or without EHC plans.

You can keep your EHC plan during an apprenticeship, that can stay in place if required. But not having an EHC plan shouldn't be any kind of barrier to any of these things. The flexibilities are the same to people with or without them and also without any diagnosed, only diagnosed conditions.

Anna Morrison:

Thanks, Ian. I think that's a really welcome change in policy and I think one that you have championed, particularly through the work in your department and through the pilot programme you oversaw, and then we saw that come into mainstream practice and apprenticeships which is great to see.

We've had a couple of questions about what happens when a young person with an EHCP joins an apprenticeship. Does it cease to exist? What happens with it? Who takes on responsibility? We've got like two minutes, but could you give us a real quick-fire answer on what happens?

Ian Turley:

Well, local authorities can keep your Education, Health and Care plan. They can keep it live up until you're 24, so it doesn't need to be removed if you start an apprenticeship. Although it's an employment it doesn't need to be ceased when you start an apprenticeship, it can remain in place, but obviously that's up to the local authority on their reviews to judge whether that's in place. Anything that's listed on your EHC plan should be honoured as part of your apprenticeship. Obviously, any adjustments and things, but as I said before, it's not necessary that, you know, if there's things that aren't on your EHC plan or whatever like that they can, you can still be supported. So, yes it remains, yes, it will still be followed, but not having one isn't, doesn't put you at any disadvantage to somebody that does have one, if that makes sense.

Anna Morrison:

Yeah, yeah, really good. Really conscious of time and that we've still got loads of questions coming in.

Ian Turley:

We could talk about this for 4 days.

Anna Morrison:

I know, I know. Do you know what? I feel like we need a 4-day conference to help everyone and unpack it all, certainly more than 30 minutes. So I don't want to disappoint anyone. I think what we will commit to today is to taking away all of your questions that you've submitted before today's webinar and all of the questions that you've submitted today. And I know how great Ian is and the team, and if perhaps we can work together to try and put some questions, some answers in place to all of these frequently asked questions. Or, you know, quite specific questions, you're coming through with some really brilliant examples around things that are changing. You know, we've still got lots of question marks over foundation apprenticeships and we've had quite a few questions about those and, you know, and that's a new programme, so we're going to see it start to roll out from this autumn as Ian said, but what those opportunities look like and how they come through and kind of which employers are going to be offering them and all of that detail is yet to be seen. We only got the funding

rules on Thursday afternoon, didn't we? So it's kind of very hot off the press and everyone's trying to respond

So I don't want to disappoint you, I want to leave you feeling positive. So please give us a couple of weeks. We'll take all of these questions away, we'll do what we can with them and turn them into a kind of a useful guide. And I also commit that we will come back and run another webinar. I think it's really important that we give this whole topic more space so that we can really get into some of the detail and help you to feel like experts. So let's say today was kind of designed to whet your appetite. We will absolutely take this forward.

And just to note as well, for some of you that might be interested, we run a SEND Advisory Network and we meet termly and we do get into quite a lot of the detail on this. So again, we'll include the details of that in your webinar roundup. And if you are working in an education setting, a school or college or any other education setting, and you have that kind of specialist interest, then please do sign up and we'll get you involved in those.

Thank you all for sending through so many questions. Thank you, Ian, for giving up your time and talking us through so, so brilliantly, all of that detail. We will be back, I think. Watch this space and, and we'll get everything back to you. Helen's just showing a few of the different resources that are on the screen. Again, these slides will be coming out to you.

In another area, you might be interested in Higher Technical Qualifications, which are level four and level five, but I know for many of your individuals you're working with will still be relevant.

A few other webinars that are coming up before the end of term and, yeah, and we will be in touch with further details.

So thank you, everyone. Thanks to Ian again and thanks to the team at Amazing Apprenticeships for pulling everything together. Thank you. Take care. Bye. Bye.

Ian Turley:
Thank you all. Bye.

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