

**WHY DIVERSIFYING YOUR WORKFORCE  
IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS**  
EMPLOYERS TALK ABOUT THE BENEFITS



**CREATING A KINDER AND  
MORE INCLUSIVE WORLD**

Did you know that having a diverse workforce is actually good for your business?

Let us highlight a talent pool that you may not have considered. Across the country, young disabled people are making their way in the world, creating the lives they hoped for by using their knowledge and skills. Meaningful employment can be a fundamental component of having a happy and successful life. In this publication, we feature employers who have recognised the potential of this often-untapped source of potential.

Sadly, the employment rate of disabled people remains lower than what we would hope for in an accessible and inclusive world and we hope that by featuring stories from employers we might persuade more employers to get on board. We know that when we learn and work alongside each other, we begin to understand each other's lives. This benefits not just our learning and work spaces, but our communities and wider society.

As we publish this, we are adjusting to the world following the coronavirus pandemic. By working together, education and training providers and employers can create a kinder and more inclusive world by providing opportunities for all of our young people to achieve their aspirations and become tomorrow's leaders.

Teresa Carroll

National Head for Inclusion, Education and Training Foundation

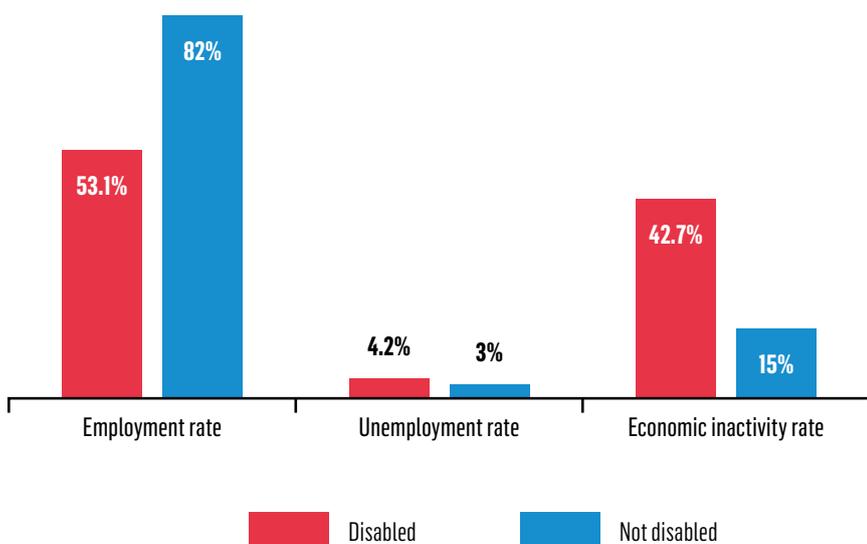
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**In this publication we hear from employers on what they're doing to support learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), how this benefits young people, and how it can benefit you as employers.**

While some praise the passion and skill of the people they have worked with, others emphasise how working with learners has increased disability awareness among their staff, enhanced accessibility for customers or increased rates of staff retention. These stories demonstrate how a diverse workforce not only holds benefits for the individuals involved but also makes excellent business sense, including examples you can draw from to make your businesses more inclusive. This is crucial to addressing the unprecedented staffing shortages<sup>1</sup> following the coronavirus pandemic and tackling the disability employment gap.

## Key labour market statistics by disability status

Age 16 - 64, October - December 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey (Feb 2022) A08: Labour market status of disabled people.

## The disability employment gap

**The employment rate of disabled people is considerably lower than that of non-disabled people. As the chart above shows, between October – December 2021, only 53.1 per cent of people with disabilities were employed compared to 82 per cent of non-disabled people. Recent Labour Force Survey data indicates that the disability employment gap for autistic adults is wider still, with only 29 per cent in any kind of employment<sup>2</sup>.**

In 2021, The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) extended its Centres for Excellence in SEND offer by commissioning eight new 'employer spokes' across the country. The spokes are hosted by Further Education (FE) providers with particularly strong relationships with a wide range of employers, including those with a track record of employing learners with SEND. They bring together FE providers with employers from different industry sectors to show how businesses can benefit from diversifying their workforce. This publication features some of the employers involved in this work, to highlight their experiences of employing young people with SEND.

1. Labour Force Survey (Feb 2022) A08: Labour market status of disabled people.

Available at [ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/labourmarketstatusofdisabledpeoplea08](https://ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/labourmarketstatusofdisabledpeoplea08)

2. House of Commons Library (Apr 2021) Research briefing: Disabled people in employment. Available at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7540/](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7540/)



**Leeds Museums and Galleries is the largest council-run museums service outside of London. The trust has around 250 employees across nine different museum and gallery sites in and around the city of Leeds. As well as Leeds Art Gallery and Leeds City Museum, venues include historic buildings and a working mill.**

Run by Leeds Museums and Galleries, 'Careers for All' is an award-winning programme, designed to create career-inspiring activities for young people with SEND. The programme includes outreach in schools, career taster days and work experience placements. Learning and Access Officer, Carl Newbould, gave an overview of the different roles on offer:

“ There are lots of transferable roles you don't really associate with museums. People tend to think of curators, tour guides and security but there's also education, social media and marketing, facilities, conservation, and digital.

Some of the learners with SEND involved in the programme went on to form a self-steering youth panel. The panel opted to produce a 'visual story' of the museum buildings – an easy read document enabling visitors to familiarise themselves with the setting ahead of their arrival. This has been hugely beneficial to the organisation through making the exhibitions more accessible and encouraging a more diverse range of people to visit Leeds Museums and Galleries.

Learners on work experience placements have also advised curators on how to make displays easier to understand and have helped the trust to make their recruitment process more accessible. Others have helped to design and deliver autism information sessions for staff, allowing them to increase their awareness of the potential needs of both visitors and colleagues.

Carl strongly encourages other employers to consider the benefits of working with young people with special educational needs and disabilities:

“ The staff understand better how to adapt their work to make our museums and collections more accessible. It's been fantastic to see the positivity coming from many of the people that I work with. A diverse workforce gives you new perspectives. It shouldn't be seen as something that is difficult but should be seen as an advantage... don't worry about it being something that is hard but rather see it as a positive, see it as an opportunity instead.

**FIND OUT MORE**  
[MUSEUMSANDGALLERIES.LEEDS.GOV.UK](https://museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk)

# An array of opportunities at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust



**With 10 hospitals and around 28,000 staff, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest of its kind in the country. The trust has been running a supported internship programme in partnership with Oldham College for the past 10 years. During this time, the programme has gone from strength to strength, now hosting four different cohorts of learners across the different hospital sites.**

Jamie Bytheway, Head of Widening Participation at the trust, explains:

“

Having a diverse workforce is important to us at Manchester University NHS as we believe our staff should reflect the communities and patients that we serve ... As a health organisation we support everyone, including a lot of people who have learning difficulties and disabilities, as many people need medical and clinical support as part of managing their condition.

”

Learners take on a wide variety of different roles. Some work with the facilities team, supporting with housekeeping and domestic tasks. Others support with food preparation, managing stock rotation, delivering food across the hospitals or working in the cafés and restaurants. There are also roles on the wards, in the pharmacies and in stores and deliveries. Occasionally, learners gain employment with laboratory teams.

The trust has found many benefits associated with employing learners with SEND. For example, learners can help improve the quality of service which the trust offers to patients:

“

Some young people are really sociable and friendly and that is really important for our context. No one really wants to go to hospital, unless they are having a baby, so having young people who are friendly and approachable and like to have a chat is great. Our patients feel really well looked after as they get that one-to-one attention and that conversation and support... it also frees up time for our clinical staff to stay focused on making them better.

”

Employing learners with SEND also helps the organisation cut costs by improving staff retention. They have found that people who enter employment via the supported internship route are much less likely to leave as they have clear expectations of what the work will involve and have already been with the organisation for at least a year when they take on paid employment.

To any other employers considering diversifying their workforce, Jamie has this advice:

“

There is some work involved in setting these programmes and there is work involved in supporting someone, but what you will get out of it is much more than what you put in and there is a lot of support available from various supported employment organisations that will do 90 per cent of the leg work for you.

”

**FIND OUT MORE**  
MFT.NHS.UK

# Fostering a positive working environment at Milestone Infrastructure



**Milestone Infrastructure delivers a range of essential infrastructure to the transport sector. With around 1,500 employees, the company currently holds 10 highway maintenance contracts, six for street lighting maintenance and a variety of large complex civil engineering projects across southern and central England.**

The company has embedded social value into the core of its operations and delivers long term benefits to the local communities, economies, and environments where it works. One of their initiatives is the Step Up For Work programme, which aims to engage and support learners with SEND to become 'work ready'. Delivered in partnership with the Minstead

Trust, the programme provides support with work experience, CV writing, and interview skills. On completion of training, those who are ready to begin work progress through a work experience programme, building up their working hours gradually. Some are then recruited, typically as store assistants on a fixed-term basis. The aim is to use the role as a 'revolving door', enabling learners to develop the skills and confidence needed to go on and secure paid employment elsewhere.

Social Value and Communications Manager, Charlie Green, explains how working with learners helps Milestone to foster a positive work environment, and to attract and retain talent:

“

Having a more diverse workforce creates a more purposeful work environment, it gives people pride in that you are delivering as a business more than just bread and butter. It gives our workforce that extra edge to stay with us.

”

Having a clear and demonstrable social value also helps the company to win contracts, as they are able to better differentiate themselves against their competitors.

Increasingly, contracts are won not just on price and quality but on the ability to demonstrate a positive social impact, which Milestone have excelled at since beginning to work with learners with SEND.

“

Having a specific programme to support people from hard-to-reach groups is becoming quite a unique identifier. And it's really having quite a resonating impact with prospective clients who can see the tangibility of that.

”

**FIND OUT MORE**  
[MILESTONEINFRA.CO.UK](https://www.milestoneinfra.co.uk)



**Molino Lounge is a part of a chain of around 200 café-restaurants spread around the UK. They are a rapidly growing brand and their ethos is to be the hub of the community. They call themselves a lounge because they want people to come in to relax and enjoy themselves, whether students doing some work on their laptops or a group of friends enjoying some cocktails.**

Molino Lounge has taken on learners with SEND on a number of occasions. There is a lot of role flexibility in the hospitality industry, so they are able to vary the amount of responsibility given to learners and can adapt tasks according to their capabilities.

Danny Sanderson, a spokesperson for Molino Lounge in Oldham, explains how learners have the opportunity to develop skills according to their own interests.

“

Our customers love our young people with SEND and often ask about them when they come in. We get a lot of positive feedback from our customers around what we are doing so that is great for the business as well as the learners.

”

The company's ethos is that everyone is welcome, so working with learners with SEND allows them to put that into practice.

Danny feels that he has gained a lot from employing learners with SEND in Molino Lounge and wants to encourage other businesses to take the plunge:

“

First, look at why you wouldn't and then try and break down the barriers, because the world is changing and we have to change too ... You haven't got anything to lose, you can only gain from it. Every learner I have taken on has had a great attitude, they want to build and develop their skills, it's really refreshing and it motivates the rest of the team.

”

**FIND OUT MORE**  
[THELOUNGES.CO.UK/MOLINO](http://THELOUNGES.CO.UK/MOLINO)

# Supported intern is a great asset at Koderly

**Koderly provides bespoke software development and IT services to medium and large enterprises, mainly market-leading travel brands in the self-accommodation sector. Key services include travel technology, bespoke development, and database administration and support.**

Koderly recently took on an intern with SEND who is working one day a week supporting their systems team. The learner in question is particularly good at focused work, often helping colleagues solve network or computer hardware problems. His presence has had a hugely positive impact on team motivation and has also allowed them to work more efficiently. Rebecca Lawton, Head of Partnerships and Marketing, explains:

“

Our intern is a great asset in our systems team. He can pick up tasks independently, allowing other team members to concentrate on more complex work. He is hardworking, diligent, and thorough.

”

Mentoring an intern has also allowed the lead systems team to develop their leadership skills.

Rebecca says that working with learners with SEND has increased awareness and understanding across the company, further enhancing Koderly's welcoming and inclusive working environment.



“

Taking on an intern with SEND has had such a positive effect on our colleagues and community, whilst also helping him to gain experience to help him in his future career.

”

**FIND OUT MORE  
KODER.LY**

# Diversity reduces bullying and harassment at Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



**Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a medium-sized NHS trust with hospitals in Andover, Winchester and Basingstoke and total of around 6,000 staff. The trust is setting an example for others to follow, by actively trying to widen participation in the labour market and creating a more diverse workforce.**

One important initiative at the trust is 'Project Choice', a supported internship scheme. Each year around 10 to 12 people are recruited to a year-long internship placement aiming to get people 'job ready'. Project Choice participants spend one day a week at a local college developing functional and employability skills, with the rest of the week spent on placement within the hospital. The placements are chosen to accommodate individuals' preferences and learning needs. These are unpaid roles, so from a manager's point of view, workers are an asset even if they are not working at full capacity.

The programme prepares participants for paid roles, with many progressing into stable employment within the hospital, often taking on roles in

departments where they have already completed placements. Learners with SEND are offered the opportunity to complete supported apprenticeships in a range of departments including medical records, pharmacy and administration. In these roles, the trust itself acts as a training provider, having become certified to do so in 2018. The supported apprenticeship scheme is relatively new, but all who have graduated so far have passed their End Point Assessment with a Distinction.

Associate Director for Apprenticeships for Hampshire Hospital Foundation Trust, Jude Davison, explains the benefits of the scheme:

Having a diverse workforce is important as it allows us to draw from a wider set of talented people. In having a more diverse workforce our culture changes, so, in employing learners with SEND, we see a culture shift reducing bullying and harassment. People are more empathetic. Having a more diverse workforce also better reflects the general populous.

If any other employers were considering offering employment to diverse learners his message would be:

Find a way to do it. And it is absolutely doable. That is my headline! But the second thing is, you need to find out what resources are available and tap into them to make it happen in a sustainable way.

Project Choice has been hugely important in making employment accessible to more learners, giving them the opportunity to develop their capabilities and confidence gradually. The scheme also facilitates 'job carving', whereby parts of a role which are suitable for learners with SEND can be separated out from the parts of a role which are less suitable, addressing vacancies which have been difficult to fill.

**FIND OUT MORE**  
[HAMPSHIREHOSPITALS.NHS.UK](http://HAMPSHIREHOSPITALS.NHS.UK)

# Young people with SEND working on the jobs of the future at SE Recycling



**Founded in 2013, SE Recycling is a sustainable electronic recycling company specialising in the recovery, refurbishment, and recycling of IT and communication equipment. The company is based in Wythenshawe and employs around 35 staff. As well as welcoming learners with SEND, SE Recycling works extensively with charities and schools and has a training and skills programme for the long term unemployed.**

Learners usually at begin on work experience placements, with many later progressing to apprenticeships or jobs. Sales Director, David Tattersall, believes they can be a great asset to the company if matched to jobs that suit their skill set. For example, some learners with autism he has worked with take great enjoyment from carrying out repetitive tasks which require accuracy, consistency, and attention to detail:

“

Certain people who you might consider to be disadvantaged educationally, they are absolutely tailor-made for the job. They may take a little while to understand and learn, but then once they're doing it you can trust them because you know they will do it to the exact standards.

”

Working at SE Recycling has led some learners to increase dramatically in confidence and to improve their communication skills. This may explain why the company has observed particularly high staff retention rates among this group.

In order to encourage learners with SEND to join the company, SE recycling have reviewed their recruitment processes. Instead of traditional interviews, learners attend work experience days where they can immerse themselves in the environment and get a taste for the work. This too, has helped improve retention rates.

David has the following advice for other employers considering working with learners with SEND:

“

Speak to a local [further education provider], explain to them specifically what you do as a business and what the learners would actually be doing in the role, they can then match the best learner to the role, to give it the best chance of success. Give it a go!

”

**FIND OUT MORE**  
SER-LIMITED.COM

# Young people with SEND indispensable at Lily & Lime Café



**Lily & Lime is a social enterprise run by Minstead Trust - an organisation working to support people with learning disabilities to achieve greater independence and live happier, healthier lives.**

Established in 2021, the café is located within Portsmouth Central Library and serves a selection of coffees, cakes, panini and sandwiches. Its aim is to give learners with SEND the skills they need to gain employment in catering and other customer orientated businesses. Working at the café are three paid junior managers and four paid apprentices. Christopher Hillman, Head of Employability for the trust, explains:

“Everyone has unique skills, understandings, and different ways of dealing with problems... their way of wanting to work is always beneficial to us. It's always a different way of looking at a problem and we have found that the process of making reasonable adjustments has made it easier, not only for the people we support, but for the rest of the team as well.”

Learners perform a range of tasks including serving customers, managing the restaurant, and training new starters in the skills they need to provide a high standard of service at the site. Peer-to-peer learning is really valuable in this context, the apprentices with SEND even run the barista training program themselves.

“It inspires them to be the best that they can be ... The adjustments we have made allow them to be better teachers than we are now.”

The café also acts as a day opportunities provision for people with SEND who don't yet have the capacity to thrive in paid employment. Being surrounded by learners who have progressed to this level gives them the opportunity to see that these roles are within their sights.

The programme has enabled learners to gain qualifications and employment with employers such as Marriott Hotels and Greene King Pubs, others have secured paid employment within Minstead Trust itself.

“They have taken on so much responsibility and done so much good work that we were left with no option. We were genuinely concerned that these cafés would not function if they left!”

**FIND OUT MORE**  
[MINSTEADTRUST.ORG.UK/LILYANDLIME](https://minsteadtrust.org.uk/lilyandlime)

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# Conclusion

The employers featured in this publication demonstrate some of the many ways young people with SEND can benefit your business - from attracting a diverse customer base, to sourcing dedicated and loyal employees, and improving disability awareness among staff. We have seen many examples of the different types of roles young people with SEND can excel at – examples which you can draw from to make your own businesses more inclusive.

There is a wide range of support available for education providers and employers looking to employ young people with SEND. If you are an employer considering diversifying your business, and don't know where to start, the first step is to join up with a local school and/or further education and training provider.

The Education and Training Foundation offers free bespoke support to education and training providers and employers interested in creating more inclusive organisations through our three [Centres for Excellence in SEND](#) and our [employer spokes](#). Do get in touch, so that together we can build a more inclusive world.

# **YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND CAN BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS**



**OUR PARTNERS**



**THANK YOU**

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