



Social Mobility
Commission

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APPRENTICESHIPS THAT WORK FOR ALL

A practical toolkit for employers, training
providers and apprenticeship practitioners



Social Mobility Commission

About the Social Mobility Commission

The Social Mobility Commission monitors progress towards improving social mobility in the UK, and promotes social mobility in England. It is an independent statutory body created by an Act of Parliament.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission

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We are immensely grateful to our incredible contributors who have shaped this toolkit in significant ways

– apprentices, employers, training providers, end point assessment organisations, quality assessors, charities, education providers and policy makers working across different industries.

Their sustained engagement is a marker of how committed people across the apprenticeship system are to improving socio-economic diversity and inclusion and how actively so many of them are working towards change.

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¹ Social Mobility Commission (2020) [Socio-economic diversity and inclusion Employers' Toolkit: Cross-industry edition](#).

This toolkit has been endorsed by:



It's what we do



INTRODUCTION

Apprenticeships are one of the best mechanisms available to employers to build diverse, talented and committed teams from the ground up. People who start their careers on an apprenticeship scheme are likely to stay longer and gain invaluable knowledge of different aspects of the organisation as they progress. There is also a mountain of evidence on the benefits apprenticeships offer to workplace learners – such as enhanced career earnings, continued education and richer, more fulfilled working lives.

Our research² has shown that the apprenticeship system in general needs to do more to meet its promise for social mobility. We have found that since the apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017 to support a shift to higher quality employer-led standards, it has funded a higher proportion of higher-level apprenticeships more likely to be taken up by learners from more privileged backgrounds than people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds³ who would benefit more. We also uncovered that



DID YOU KNOW?

One in ten of the working population has completed or is currently doing an apprenticeship.

36% of apprentices are in professional occupations, **28%** in intermediate and **36%** in working class professions (analysis based on 2019 labour force survey data).



Apprenticeships are not a nice to have, they are a must have – a proven way of getting both young and older people into the workplace, develop skills, progress careers and broaden diversity. With a little structured support apprentices can become your valued colleagues of the future.”

Steven Cooper, CEO, Aldermore Group

disadvantage gaps exist at every stage of the apprenticeship journey, from the initial selection of candidates by employers to the quality of training.

2 Key figures in this toolkit are based on Social Mobility Commission (2020) [Apprenticeships and social mobility: fulfilling potential](#) unless otherwise stated.

3 We define disadvantaged apprentices as those from the 20% most socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).

COVID-19 has further exacerbated these dynamics. In the period of March – July 2020, overall apprenticeship starts dropped by nearly half compared to the previous year, with sectors such as retail and hospitality, where disadvantaged learners are overrepresented, seeing up to a 70% decline.⁴ With many remaining apprenticeships moving online, unequal access to IT equipment and a stable, unlimited internet connection has created additional barriers for many people.

More than ever, we need an apprenticeship system that delivers not only skills and opportunities but also social mobility. The delivery of high-quality apprenticeships requires a range of expertise, and many different people are involved in making them possible. This toolkit has been shaped and improved by the invaluable feedback from apprentices, employers, training providers, end point assessment organisations, quality assessors, charities, education providers and policy makers working across different industries.⁵ Our wider evidence base, conversations with policy makers and practitioners across government as well as our work with employers across industries helped inform the guidance laid out here.⁶

“**You don’t have to have a massive budget to set up an apprenticeship, you have to have the willingness, the organisation and the setup, but you don’t have to start big. You can start small, start with small numbers and grow the scheme organically over the year.**”

Ruth Frost, Recruitment Leader,
Companies House

This toolkit is designed as a roadmap for anyone working in apprenticeships who is committed to improving socio-economic diversity and inclusion – whether you are starting out on this journey or want to further develop your strategy. Wherever you are, we hope the tips, guidance and encouragement offered here will help you make changes in your organisation that will benefit the wider society and the economy.

Please use it as a toolbox rather than a handbook. All the elements we describe here (from culture to data and progression) are part of a cycle and feed into each other. Depending on where you are in your journey, you may start with

4 HM Government (2021) [Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics](#) [accessed October 2021].

5 In May and June 2021, the Social Mobility Commission hosted three in-depth feedback workshops attended by 12 current and former apprentices, 12 private sector employers, 14 public sector employers, 7 training providers and 10 charities. Additional interviews with apprentices, employers and intermediary organisations helped generate case studies and quotes for the toolkit.

6 Social Mobility Commission (2021) [Background to the research informing the employers’ toolkits](#).

a particular chapter and jump to other sections at a later date. Not everything will apply or be possible in your context, so use what speaks to you and leave the rest.

Thank you for being on this journey with us and for your commitment to making apprenticeships work for all. We hope you will find this work deeply rewarding and see it ripple out into your organisation, sector and society as a whole.

“**Fundamentally, organisations must use this toolkit to initiate change internally and recognise the major benefit apprenticeships bring in addressing diversity and social mobility.**”

Isa Mutlib, CEO, BAME Apprenticeship Alliance; Founder, Apprenticeship Diversity & Social Mobility Forum



Apprenticeships and social mobility (research published June 2020):



Disadvantage gaps exist at every stage of the apprenticeship journey: employer selection; the 'value' or quality of training; the probability of apprentices progressing to higher levels of training or education; and career earnings.



The selection gap: Between 2015/16 and 2017/18, apprentice starts collapsed. Hardest hit were disadvantaged learners, whose numbers fell 13 percentage points more than learners from more privileged backgrounds (36% vs 23%).



The quality gap: The quality of training is not equal, even within the same industry and at the same level. Disadvantaged apprentices planned to receive between 1.5–3 months less training in 2017/18 than their peers in three notable industries: construction, engineering and information communication technology (ICT).



The levy gap: Disadvantaged learners are less likely to be levy funded by three to five percentage points. The apprenticeships that are most commonly levy-supported are also the apprenticeships where the disadvantage gap is greatest.



The progression gap: Only 32.7% of disadvantaged men with an intermediate apprenticeship progressed to a higher qualification compared with 39.7% of others.



The earnings boost: Disadvantaged learners earn less than their peers on average but they get a bigger boost. Disadvantaged women with an intermediate apprenticeship at age 28 report a 16% earning boost from completing an apprenticeship compared with 10% for non-disadvantaged women.



Apprenticeships have the potential to promote social mobility, but only if targeted at disadvantaged learners. For more insights from our research, see Appendix A.



STRATEGIC APPROACH



WHAT IS SOCIAL MOBILITY?

Social mobility is the link between a person's occupation or income and the occupation or income of their parents. In other words, social mobility is about ensuring your socio-economic background doesn't determine your outcomes in life.

Not only are apprenticeships a brilliant way for people from less privileged backgrounds to show their true potential, they also provide a fantastic opportunity for organisations to develop the leaders and skills they need for the future. Apprenticeships can:

- enable people to learn while they earn.
- offer an entry route into a different career.
- enable re-skilling after redundancy.

Organisations can benefit hugely from apprentices' knowledge of moving through different layers of the business, fresh perspective and new ideas. If designed with inclusion in mind and supported well, they can be a very effective driver both of social mobility and to address skills gaps in organisations.



DEFINITIONS OF OCCUPATIONS

An individual's socio-economic background is defined by their highest earning parent's occupation according to the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC)⁷.

High socio-economic or professional backgrounds are defined as NS-SEC 1 and 2 occupations. Examples include: accountants, nurses, engineers, CEOs, software designers, police officers, teachers and solicitors.

Intermediate backgrounds are defined as NS-SEC 3 and 4 occupations. Examples include: retail and restaurant managers, secretaries, clerical workers, call centre agents and nursery nurses.

Low socio-economic or working class backgrounds are defined as NS-SEC 5, 6, 7 and 8 occupations. Examples include: sales assistants, postal workers, security guards, catering assistants, HGV drivers, farm workers and cleaners.

For more information on how to measure socio-economic background, please visit the section on data starting on page 20.

7 Office for National Statistics (2020) [SOC 2020 Volume 3: the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification](#) [accessed October 2020].

Why should you focus on socio-economic background?

Forward-looking organisations across all industries are realising the benefits of employing and working with people from a range of backgrounds.⁸ They recognise that an active and integrated approach to diversity and inclusion is key to creating a representative, cohesive and fulfilled workforce. Apprenticeships are a great way of achieving this by recruiting people who are keen to learn and, ideally, also progress in the organisation, industry or profession after their training.

Raise your ambitions. Genuinely diverse teams think more creatively, understand their audiences better and come up with more innovative ideas.

Increase your reach. With many more people looking for jobs and career changes, particularly those who have lost work due to COVID-19, it is a great time to go beyond your traditional recruitment sources and find brilliant people from all walks of life who bring fresh ideas, perspectives and skills to your organisation.

Improve representation. Applicants will be more attracted to an organisation if they see people there who look, speak and act like them across different levels of seniority.

“We’ve learnt a lot as a business from having apprentices join us, we’ve challenged them to share their thoughts on what we could be doing better and some of the ideas that have been brought in from fresh thinking have been amazing and changed things for the better.”

Bradley Burgoyne, Head of Talent, Jardine Motors Group

“When we trialled the apprenticeship scheme, we found such amazing people, and all the concerns some of our more traditional colleagues had disappeared. We just found brilliant people that we wouldn’t have come across if we had done things differently and widened our talent pipeline. It gained momentum and changed the way people thought about talent.”

Nancy Lengthorn, Global Chief Inclusion and Culture Officer, MediaCom

⁸ For a list of the top 100 apprenticeship employers in 2020, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/top-100-apprenticeship-employers-announced>.

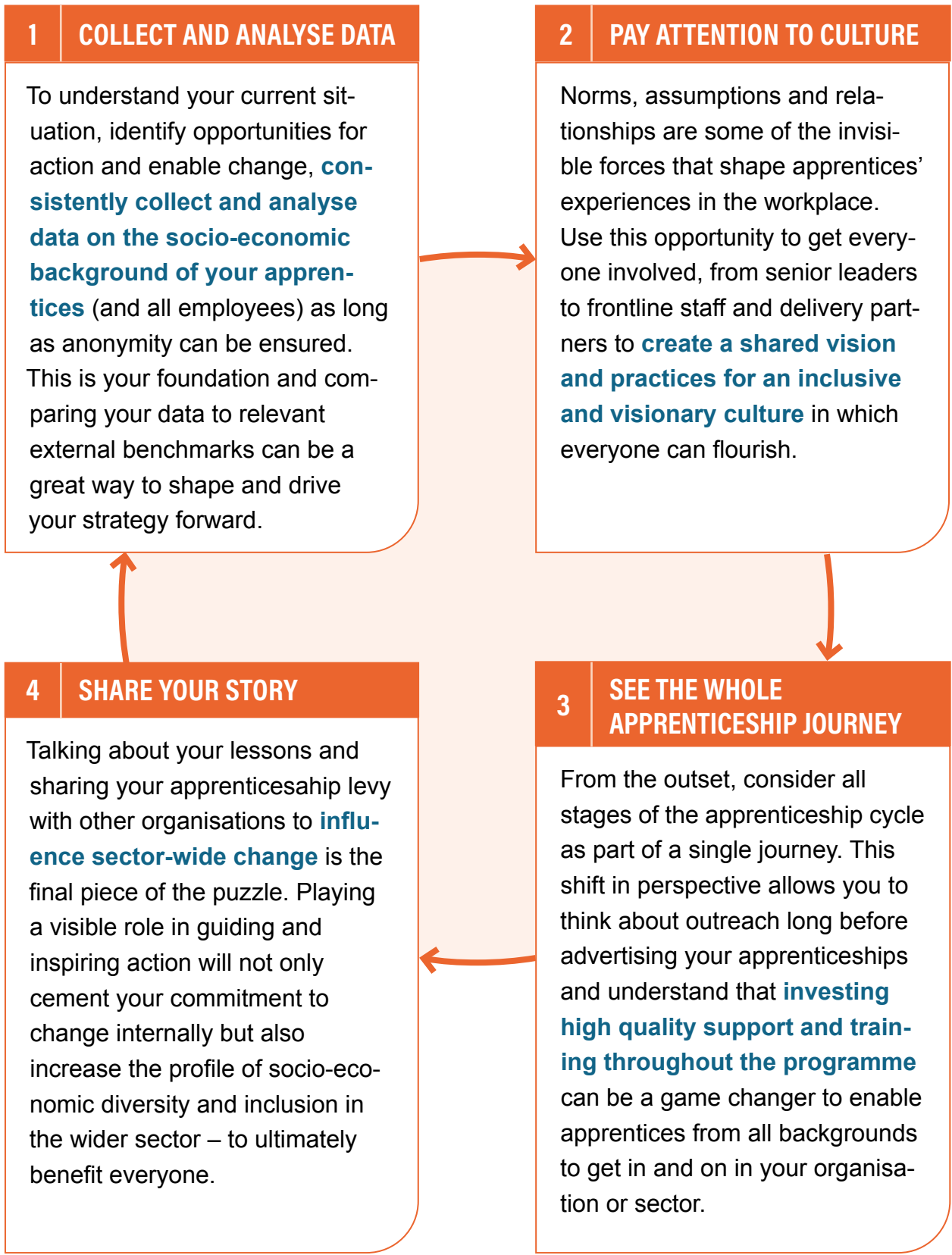
“**We work with customers UK wide, and by default our workforce should reflect that kind of society we’re working in. We can only meet their needs when our workforce is reflective of them.**”

Martyn Flynn,
Head of Resourcing,
Companies House

Embed your values. Organisations that have diversity and inclusion at the heart of their values and culture often benefit from higher staff engagement and lower turnover.

Socio-economic diversity and inclusion is complex, and change in this area requires a strategic and holistic approach. The recommendations below highlight some of the key elements for developing a robust strategy, drawing on the lessons learnt and best practice developed by pioneering apprenticeship practitioners.





The following pages include practical guidance on how to translate these elements into practice – whether you are new

to apprenticeships or want to deepen your understanding and pioneer new practices.

Wherever you are on this journey, we are so glad you are here.



APPRENTICESHIP TOOLKIT



THE FOUNDATIONS: THE 'MUST HAVE' INTERVENTIONS

This toolkit provides a step-by-step guide for developing inclusive practices for each stage of the apprenticeship cycle – from data collection to outreach, hiring, culture and leadership, progression and advocacy.

These stages all feed into each other, so while they are presented in a particular sequence here, this is not meant to suggest a linear process. Use this toolkit in whatever way is most helpful for your context. If you are just starting

to think about apprenticeships and social mobility, even if you are a small business, here is a summary of what we see as the most important first steps. If you can only do a few things to begin with, we recommend that you start here.



DATA

Ask the right question – we have distilled into a single question the most reliable way to ask someone about their socio-economic background.

Explain why you are asking it – people can understandably feel hesitant to disclose their socio-economic background, so explaining why you are collecting this data and how you will ensure anonymity is key.

Use your data to inform changes – break down the data on socio-economic background by apprenticeship applications, starts, levels and completion (see page 25 for more) to help you understand where barriers might exist.



CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Understand your current culture – think about how people bond in your organisation, the norms and rituals you have and ways in which these might be excluding people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Have conversations and listen – speak with senior leaders, apprentices, line managers, staff networks, delivery partners etc. to learn, practise and evolve together as you create a more inclusive organisational culture.

Move apprenticeships into coldspots – where possible, move apprenticeships (as well as other roles) into social mobility ‘coldspots’⁹ so you can attract a wider range of candidates; our research shows people from low socio-economic backgrounds on average cannot or do not want to move to London or the south-east for work.

9 Areas with particularly lower social mobility. For a list of local authorities and regions, see Social Mobility Commission (2017) [State of the Nation 2017: Social mobility in Great Britain](#), page 5.



OUTREACH

Start early – look at how you can build relationships with the people you want to engage before they leave school, look for a new job or think about progressing in your organisation; connecting with them only when you have vacancies available doesn't always work.

Offer apprenticeships to all staff – including existing frontline workers and in ways that everyone can engage with; connect apprenticeships to future progression opportunities; ensure flexibly designed apprenticeships (e.g. part-time apprenticeships) are clearly communicated; this will help you identify and recruit talented individuals from within your existing workforce.

Address barriers upfront – make your outreach efforts accessible to more people by considering the time, place, content, language and expenses associated with participating in your activities.

Don't go it alone – work with external partners such as schools, colleges, charities, job centres and community organisations to help co-design and deliver your outreach programme (you can find many in our directory¹⁰).



HIRING

Make your apprenticeship inclusive – where possible, build in flexibility around location and working hours, pay apprentices the voluntary living wage and link the programme to tangible progression opportunities; this will give candidates confidence that your apprenticeship is the right step for them.

Remove qualification requirements – because they often exclude applicants who may not have had access to many opportunities but will thrive on your apprenticeship programme.

Use encouraging language – such as “We're looking for a spark of potential. Don't worry if you don't think you have it – we're good at spotting it.”

Support your applicants – find ways to cover travel, childcare and other expenses related to the application process and provide candidates with the necessary equipment for virtual interviews.

¹⁰ See www.socialmobilityworks.org/organisation-directory/.



PROGRESSION

Develop progression pathways – whether that is a higher level apprenticeship or a job in the organisation or the wider industry, be active in enabling apprentices to achieve their career goals and apply the skills they have learnt in your programme.

Talk with your apprentices about their next steps – don't leave this until the last minute, start conversations regularly and from early in the programme to figure out what apprentices' next steps might look like.

Actively support apprentices in their learning – protect their 20% off the job time, offer extra time and support for studying during the end point assessment and make sure further training opportunities are accessible to all apprentices, including those working on the frontline.



ADVOCACY

Take people with you – use a range of channels to talk about why this agenda matters to you and involve leaders, staff, partners and peers to help move it forward.

Tell your story – use your position to talk about your lessons and practices in creating inclusive apprenticeships so others can learn from you and be inspired to do the same.

Share your levy – if you are a large employer, you can transfer any unspent apprenticeship levy to smaller businesses in your supply chain or in social mobility 'coldspots' so they can offer high-quality apprenticeship programmes in their location.



GENERAL

You don't need a huge budget – start small, prove the concept, learn and go from there.

Start with the right mindset and commitment – you will have challenges and hurdles to overcome. Ground your approach in your values and conviction; this will get you over the bumps along the road.



DATA

Why is it important?

It's hard to figure out where you need to concentrate your efforts if you don't know where the barriers are. Data is an important foundation of your work because knowing the socio-economic background of your applicants and apprentices will allow you to understand where you are doing well and where you need to improve.

How do I go about it?

TIP 1

Understand the question you're asking

Finding out the socio-economic background of your applicants and existing apprentices doesn't have to be complicated, though it needs to be done in a sensitive way (see below). You should use this simple key question:

What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were about aged 14?

Modern professional & traditional professional occupations

such as: teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil / mechanical engineer.

Senior, middle or junior managers or administrators

such as: finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager.

Clerical and intermediate occupations

such as: secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker, nursery nurse.

Small business owners

who employed less than 25 people such as: corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner.

Technical and craft occupations

such as: motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver.

Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations

such as: postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff.

Long-term unemployed

claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year.

Other such as: retired, this question does not apply to me, I don't know.

I prefer not to say.

PROFESSIONAL

or high socio-economic backgrounds

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

37%

INTERMEDIATE

socio-economic backgrounds

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

24%

WORKING CLASS

or low socio-economic backgrounds

NATIONAL BENCHMARK

39%

Target: Aim for a 66% response rate



EXPLAINER

This one **key question** is a robust measure to assess someone's socio-economic background. It's **easy to understand**, **gets the highest response** rates in testing and is **applicable** to people from all ages and countries.



It's really important that you collect this data as an anonymous screener at the application stage for both internal and external candidates, so that you can see the distribution of socio-economic backgrounds among the people applying. If your cohort is large enough to preserve anonymity (10 and above), ask your apprentices for their socio-economic background, ideally within your HR system, to understand who is getting in and on (more on this below).



MORE

Offer additional guidance if this question doesn't apply

Parental occupation is the most accurate measure available to assess socio-economic background. It is widely used and endorsed by academics because of its ability to produce a distribution of socio-economic background. However, there may be some circumstances where this question does not apply; for example, for apprentices who have grown up in foster care or have been refugees. We recommend you offer the following additional guidance:

- encourage people to respond to the question as best as they can based on their circumstances and emphasise that it's totally fine to use the 'other' or 'prefer not to say' option if it isn't possible or they don't feel comfortable answering.
- explain that the reason the question asks for 'about age 14' is because that is the time when most people's parents' or carers' jobs have stabilised; however, it doesn't have to be exactly 14 if it is hard to remember or there was a temporary change in occupation around that time.

“Data has been really useful in grounding conversations and setting them up. No one can argue with that data, it's 'here are the facts, here's what's going on.'”

Anna Morrison, Director, Amazing Apprenticeships

TIP 2

Be sensitive about how you ask the question and ensure anonymity

Bear in mind that this question can be very personal for people, and some might choose not to disclose for fear of stigma or negative career impact, so taking the time to build trust in the process can help increase response rates. A few things that can help with this:

Make sure people understand why you are asking the question and why it's important. Communicate your vision for a more diverse and inclusive workforce, why it matters to the organisation and how you will use this data to work towards it. Get senior leaders involved to demonstrate commitment across the company; for example, by writing a statement or recording a short video that can be shared on internal channels.

“ I felt awkward filling in the question about my background. This was my first role, and I didn't want to be judged.

Apprentice workshop participant

Anonymise data when reporting results and explain to people that it will not be used for appointment or promotion decisions. Have strong protocols about how this information will be stored and

who will have access to it, and ensure data is handled according to GDPR best practice.

Make sure people cannot be identified from the data by not going below the anonymity threshold of 10. If your cohort of apprentices is smaller, make sure you still collect the data at the application stage from all candidates (including internal applicants) and look at trends over time to find out whether you are attracting people from a range of backgrounds. We also recommend employers collect this data from their whole staff body, including apprentices.



EXAMPLE

The [Sutton Trust Employer Guide](#) offers this draft text for organisations to use and adapt:

“Our organisation is committed to ensuring everyone has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background. Research shows that someone's socio-economic background (the social and economic circumstances a person grew up in, including the social class and financial resources of their family, and the type of school they attended) can sometimes disadvantage them in the workplace. We want to understand more about this issue in our workforce, so that we can remove any barriers, open up opportunities within our organisation and ensure we are making full use of the talent available.”

Make it clear to all staff that everyone is being asked this question, not just apprentices. This is part of a wider effort to increase socio-economic diversity and inclusion across the organisation.

Provide several opportunities for apprentices to answer this question. They might feel more comfortable doing so a few months into the programme or as part of their end of year review. Do this annually to make the collection of diversity data a normalised practice and to ensure you have up to date information on changeable characteristics such as gender, disability or faith.

Align data collection efforts between employers and training providers to avoid duplication and ensure this is done with apprentices' consent. Sometimes, apprentices might feel more comfortable giving this information to their training providers or even an independent charity partner (such as [Multiverse](#) or [Apprentice Nation](#)) because of concerns that it will affect their performance in the job. Work out a shared strategy and let apprentices know about it.

TIP 3

Cut your data in different ways

You can now use your data to understand whether different socio-economic groups are over or under-represented in your apprenticeship programme and if there is any correlation between socio-economic background and appointment, completion, progression etc.

We recommend breaking the data down into the following categories, where applicable:



MORE

Take an **intersectional approach** by exploring the crossover between socio-economic background and other characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, disability, faith and sexuality. This will offer you deeper insight into how intersecting barriers might be affecting outcomes, including completion and progression rates.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	WHY	TARGET
APPLICANTS*	Who applies to your apprenticeship programmes (broken down by different stages, if applicable) – make sure you collect data from internal applicants as well.	This can help you assess your organisation’s outreach strategy and whether you are attracting the people you intended, including among internal candidates.	Proportionate to the national benchmark, unless you are purposefully trying to increase apprentices from lower socio-economic backgrounds as part of a wider diversity and inclusion strategy.
STARTS	Who gets an offer and starts on your programme.	Comparing this with the data on applications is an important indicator of how inclusive your recruitment process is (e.g. if there is a significant drop in one socio-economic group that correlates with a particular stage in the application process, this might point to a barrier).	Proportionate to the national benchmark, unless you are purposefully trying to increase apprentices from lower socio-economic backgrounds as part of a wider diversity and inclusion strategy.
OVERALL MAKE-UP OF APPRENTICES*	Who is currently on your apprenticeship programme.	Before you analyse your data more granularly, you need to know the overall socio-economic make-up of your current cohort of apprentices so you can understand your baseline.	Proportionate to the national benchmark, unless you are purposefully trying to increase apprentices from lower socio-economic backgrounds as part of a wider diversity and inclusion strategy.

* We consider these to be the most important dimensions to focus on if you are just starting out.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	WHY	TARGET
LEVELS	Who is training at which levels, including degree apprenticeships.	More Level 2 and 3 apprenticeship places tend to be offered to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (regardless of age) compared to Level 4 upwards, which tend to be dominated by more privileged apprentices. Data can help you recognise whether you are replicating the same pattern.	Proportionate to the national benchmark, unless you are purposefully trying to increase apprentices from lower socio-economic backgrounds as part of a wider diversity and inclusion strategy.
FUNCTIONAL SKILLS	Who completes the Functional Skills Qualification (FSQ).	The Functional Skills requirements can be a barrier, particularly for older learners who may have struggled with these subjects in school, those with a learning disability or apprentices with a migration background. Linking the socio-economic background data to FSQ can reveal whether the support system you put in place is working to enable everyone to complete their qualification.	Comparable completion rates across all socio-economic groups within your apprenticeship programme.
COMPLETION	Who completes the apprenticeship, including end point assessments.	Our research shows apprentices from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to drop out at higher rates, often because they are unsupported, feel excluded or face financial difficulty. Use your data to find out if this is happening in your programme too.	Comparable completion rates across all socio-economic groups within your apprenticeship programme.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	WHY	TARGET
PROGRESSION	Who receives a promotion, goes onto a higher level of training, salary or a job after they finish their apprenticeship.	Comparing this data across your apprentice cohort can help you identify if there are barriers that are limiting upward mobility in your organisation. You should also look at progression for apprentices compared to general progression rates to see if apprenticeships are helping give people a boost, as they are designed to do.	Comparable progression rates across all socio-economic groups within your apprenticeship programme.





MORE

For a more precise and nuanced analysis of the socio-economic backgrounds of your apprentices, you can add the following questions:

Question 2: Which type of school did you attend for the most time between the ages of 11 and 16?

- ✓ state-run or state-funded school
- ✓ independent or fee-paying school
- ✓ independent or fee-paying school, where I received a means tested bursary covering 90% or more of the total cost of attending throughout my time there
- ✓ I attended school outside the UK
- ✓ I don't know
- ✓ I prefer not to say

National benchmark

7.5% of people went to an independent school

Question 3: If you finished school after 1980, were you eligible for free school meals at any point during your school years?

- ✓ yes
- ✓ no
- ✓ not applicable (I finished school before 1980 or went to school overseas)
- ✓ I don't know
- ✓ I prefer not to say

National benchmark

15% of pupils at state-funded schools are eligible for free school meals

Question 4: Did either of your parents attend university and gain a degree (e.g. BA/BSc or equivalent) by the time you were 18?

- ✓ no, neither of my parents attended university
- ✓ yes, one or both of my parents attended university
- ✓ I don't know/I'm not sure
- ✓ I prefer not to say

National benchmark

65% of graduates are the first in their family to attend university

Target: Aim for an overall response rate of at least 70%

For more detail and guidance visit www.socialmobilityworks.com/toolkit/measurement.



CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Why is it important?

Many aspects of an organisational culture may be invisible, but culture plays a huge role in how welcome and included people feel.

Norms, attitudes, values, behaviours, assumptions, relationships – they all shape whether apprentices feel like they belong in your workplace.

Leaders set the tone and model that culture. For an entire organisation to take socio-economic diversity and inclusion seriously, this must be more than an HR story and go beyond the apprenticeship programme. Although you might start your efforts there, social inclusion has to

become an issue that is at the forefront of your whole organisation's strategy, leadership and culture – changing mindsets, behaviours and norms alongside formal processes while involving all staff, at every level.

Laying this foundation is critical to create the conditions for everyone in the business, particularly apprentices, to feel they have a stake in its future and are welcome and supported to participate.

How do I go about it?

The steps below are suggestive and don't represent a linear process. Each context is unique, so please use them as a menu

of ideas and suggestions to draw on as you develop your work in this area.

TIP 1

Take a good look at your existing culture

Whether you are an employer, training provider, end point assessor, work coach – no matter what your involvement in the apprenticeship journey, your organisational culture will show up in the way you interact with apprentices.

Having an inclusive approach can be a game changer in supporting apprentices to complete and do well in their training. Creating and sustaining such a culture requires sustained effort but is incredibly rewarding in the long term, because it is the values, rituals and relationships that will carry you and your colleagues through

difficult patches in the process. Ask yourself the following questions:

What makes up your internal culture and in what ways is it excluding people from lower socio-economic backgrounds?

Create an initial diagnostic by thinking about the ways people form relationships in your team and with clients, such as:


- **What kinds of subjects you bond over:** If you are frequently talking about foreign holidays, high-end cultural references or what school or university

you went to, this can be exclusive for people who have not had access to those things. You may not realise this because people might feel ashamed to say so and dodge questions or disengage from such situations¹¹. Become intentional about ensuring informal conversations are more accessible to everyone, for example, by talking about people's favourite foods or seasons or what tradition they loved the most growing up. Be curious about who your colleagues are and concentrate on what connects them.

- **What your typical social outings such as office parties or leaving dos involve:** Being expected to pay for drinks, meals or taxis home can cause a lot of stress or prevent people without access to such funds from attending altogether. Be upfront about who is paying in advance and avoid expecting staff to foot the bill for any events that are organised by the employer or training provider.

MORE

Create opportunities for apprentices to practise expected behaviours in the work environment (e.g. by hosting a mock networking event). This can make a big difference to people's confidence when they find themselves in new situations.

 **The first work thing I went to was a gala event. I only had one suit from a funeral. Nobody gave me a prep talk or anything. It was fine in the end, but I was definitely quite nervous.”**

Apprentice workshop participant

- **What social norms prevail in different spaces:** Don't assume that everyone is familiar with the cultural norms, dress codes, behaviours etc in professional spaces – whether that is in the office, during site inspections, at conferences, school visits, talking to the media etc. These can be highly stressful experiences for someone who hasn't had any prior exposure to these environments. Provide specific guidance and financial support where needed.

How are you equipping line managers to be inclusive? Make sure you offer diversity and inclusion training to all line managers that covers socio-economic background. Together, explore ways in which line managers can contribute to creating the necessary psychological safety that enables apprentices to ask questions and discuss their needs (e.g. if they don't have the necessary clothing to participate in an event) as well as share honest feedback about their experience on the programme.

11 For more detail on this, see Social Mobility Commission (2021) [Navigating the labyrinth: Socio-economic background and career progression in within the Civil Service](#).

What pastoral support are you offering apprentices?

- Actively nurture relationships with your apprentices and offer them a wider range of support than you would have done in the past, particularly during times of additional pressure. Early on, ask them what support they need in order to do their best work, including any reasonable adjustments.
- Think about providing a range of contact points for apprentices across different levels of the organisation; for example, through staff networks, mentoring programmes or buddy schemes. There might be questions apprentices would rather ask a peer than a senior manager

EXAMPLE

In 2020, Amazing Apprenticeships and Hertfordshire County Council launched [Project Positive](#), which delivers training for Hertfordshire employers to help them support care leavers in apprenticeships.

Employers learn about the care system and how trauma, attachment and adverse childhood experiences can impact people in the workplace. Line managers and mentors meet monthly to share what works and receive additional support.

The programme has been highly effective and will be scaled to offer similar support to apprentices from a range of backgrounds.

– help create an ecology of support that can cover different needs.

- Educate and train managers to offer pastoral support to apprentices, particularly where people might have complex needs. For example, if you work with apprentices who are care leavers, the Learning and Work Institute offers the following guidance: The same could be true for older apprentices who may be experiencing anxiety related to the job or dealing with a complex situation in their personal lives-

“Don’t forget that care leavers may need support about things other than the apprenticeship role [...] If [apprentices] don’t turn up at work and don’t phone in, try to find out why. Don’t just assume the worst and give up on a young person. They may be extremely worried about something at work but are avoiding discussing it; they may be having a difficult time in their wider life, with their health or moving out to live independently for example. Take the time to find out the situation and see if you can help. However, avoid asking about their personal circumstances or history of being in care. They may choose to bring it up themselves but you should not broach the subject [...] yourself.”¹²

¹² Learning and Work Institute (date unknown) [Fire It Up – Employer Apprenticeship Flyer](#).

- **How are you linking your apprenticeship programme with your work on socio-economic diversity and inclusion?** If apprenticeships are a key enabler for you in this work, make sure you avoid labelling the programme or its learners as ‘social mobility apprentices’. This can create stigma and make people feel they are

only there because of their background. While it’s important to talk about the efforts you’re making around socio-economic diversity and inclusion, value, recognise and engage with your apprentices the same way you do with all other staff. Emphasise the message that anyone can achieve and benefit from an apprenticeship, at any level.

TIP 2

Heavily engage your leaders and partners

Getting senior leaders and delivery partners on board is crucial in moving this forward as they have the decision-making power to enable changes internally and can influence others in the wider industry.

Engage members of the senior management team in more in-depth training on socio-economic diversity and inclusion in order to establish a baseline of knowledge and a shared language to talk about these issues.

Make sure senior leaders regularly discuss socio-economic diversity and inclusion alongside more established issues such as gender, disability or ethnicity, for example, by making it a standing agenda item.

Have conversations with your delivery partners (employers, training providers, end point assessment organisations, schools, colleges, charities etc.) about your vision for social mobility and how you can work together on it.

Develop a culture of accountability with strong processes to support it. This not only helps accelerate and facilitate change; it can also increase people’s sense of safety and engagement when they see there is a long-term commitment. As part of this, you could:

+ MORE

This guide developed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education’s apprentice panel includes [10 tips to create a three-way partnership](#) between training providers, employers and apprentices.



MORE

Set up a **reverse mentoring scheme** so that senior managers hear and learn directly from apprentices.

- **Make one or more senior leaders accountable for their leadership on this agenda**, including regular progress updates. Let the rest of the organisation know who they are and how to get in contact with them.
- **Have regular catch ups with your delivery partners** to discuss shared goals and review how you are each contributing to them.
- **Include socio-economic background in your anti-discrimination policies** and make sure all senior team members are aware of and actively working with this.
- **Set realistic and achievable targets** using internal and external data benchmarks and analysis and provide regular updates to all staff.
- **Link managers' accountability for diversity and inclusion targets to their performance review and progression** in the organisation.

Have visible role models from different backgrounds who are passionate about social mobility to create greater visibility and understanding of what social mobility is. They may also be social mobility champions from outside your organisation. Ensure you adequately support and compensate role models to do this work, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, as it can be emotionally draining. Be careful not to position them as representative of their whole demographic – there are a plurality of stories and experiences, and it is vital that people are able to retain their sense of individuality without feeling the burden to represent an entire section of society.



We learnt that the apprenticeship is a real step from the world of education to the world of work, and how can we make that step work, particularly for those joining in that virtual environment. We haven't been afraid to ask those questions, to offer extra support, to say there are lessons we've learnt from cohort 1 to 2. Everything we've learnt has improved the process."

Ruth Frost, Recruitment Team Leader,
Companies House

Listen to your staff and be prepared to be changed by what you hear. Leaders in businesses with the strongest outcomes listen to their workforce as much as they talk to them. This might involve hearing some uncomfortable truths that hold the keys for the transformation required.

In order to enable this, be intentional about creating a culture and forums in which it is acceptable for all staff to challenge received wisdom without fear of repercussions, regardless of their background.

TIP 3

Create opportunities to involve all of your staff

A truly inclusive and sustainable culture is co-created by everyone, not just those who directly work with apprentices. Consider the following:

Offer training to all staff, including apprentices, on socio-economic diversity and inclusion to increase understanding and develop a shared language and practices. Make sure the training provider takes an intersectional approach and also addresses the types of behaviours and practices that can be exclusive or make people feel stigmatised (e.g. jokes about someone's accent or perceived levels of education or economic privilege). Offer this training at a time and place all staff can engage with, including frontline workers, and actively promote it so everyone is aware of its importance and how to participate.

Make sure all staff understand the different routes into the organisation and treat apprentices the same as any other staff and learners such as graduate trainees or interns.

Regularly invite anonymous feedback from all staff on what they appreciate about the internal culture and what needs to be improved and how.

Learn from other networks, including your own staff networks. Make sure you link efforts around socio-economic diversity and inclusion to other initiatives such as creating an environment in which LGBTQ+ colleagues to feel able to be out in the workplace¹³. There may be a lot to learn here and an opportunity to join up. Creating a sense of community and belonging to something bigger is a powerful driver of change and helps create trust and resilience for when challenges arise.

¹³ unionlearn (2020) [LGBT+ inclusive apprenticeships: A resource for union negotiators and reps.](#)

Support and resource an apprentice network and link it to other staff networks. Smaller employers or training providers could signpost to existing apprentice networks (such as the [Association of Apprentices](#), the [BAME Apprentice Network](#), the [Disabled Apprentice Network](#), the [Young Apprenticeship Ambassadors Network](#) (YAAN), [Apprentice Nation](#), [Multiverse](#) or the [National Society of Apprentices](#)) to give your learners an opportunity to connect with peers. Co-create any changes you make in collaboration with the apprentice network.

Create informal opportunities to build relationships. The most interesting encounters at events often happen in the coffee breaks. These unstructured though still somewhat engineered spaces are important for people to connect at a more personal level, which is crucial for building trust. Think about ways in which you can enable them in your workplace – whether it's speed networking, random coffee matches between staff, team lunches or an all staff quiz, create opportunities for people to strengthen the relationships that make up the fabric of your organisational culture.

+ MORE

Create peer to peer support opportunities through a **buddying for mentoring scheme** between apprentices and staff who are not members of the senior leadership team as a space where they can raise questions they might feel uncomfortable asking senior colleagues.



Apprenticeships as the default entry route



Ministry
of Defence

The Ministry of Defence employs around 60,000 staff and 198,000 military personnel across the **Armed Forces** worldwide (which includes the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force). Across the Armed Forces, apprenticeships are embedded into initial trade training with over 90% of new entry-level recruits undertaking an apprenticeship at levels 2, 3 or 4. There are currently around 21,000 apprentices in the Ministry of Defence in the UK and abroad.

By making apprenticeships the default as opposed to the exception, the Armed Forces have benefitted from a very high completion rate driven by a common culture that supports an individual regardless of their background and starting point. Apprentices have accessible and knowledgeable role models who have been through similar training programmes and can provide support and guidance when needed. The progressive and supported nature of the Armed Forces apprenticeship programme thereby ensures that all apprentices are afforded equality of opportunity and are highly valued within the organisation.

“**Our apprentices are serving members of the Armed Forces. Their apprenticeship is the bedrock on which they build their career. This endures far beyond the apprenticeship journey and enables them to reach their full potential. The skills and experience they gain from that initial apprenticeship will be further enhanced by continual professional development to ensure their knowledge remains current in a fast-changing world.**”

Lieutenant Commander
Norma Muyambo, Skills Policy,
Ministry of Defence



OUTREACH

Why is it important?

You may well meet your most capable apprentices in the least obvious places. If you want to attract candidates from a range of backgrounds, you also need to adapt your outreach strategy in order to connect with future apprentices where they currently are.

A progressive recruitment policy, for both internal and external roles, means reaching out beyond what's familiar to you and creating innovative paths of entry for people from all backgrounds. It also means challenging yourself to see

outreach participants (people you encourage to apply to your apprenticeship programme) as the future of your business and treat them as such – investing effort, time, resources and energy in building relationships with them.

How do I go about it?

The steps below are suggestive and don't represent a linear process. You know your context and needs best, so please use

these as a menu of ideas to draw on as you develop your outreach work.

TIP 1

Check if your outreach programme is accessible and relevant

Investing some time at the start of your outreach to develop a coherent approach, even when you want to jump straight into action, will pay off with much better outcomes. Consider the questions below to take off to the best possible start.

Think about which age group is the best fit for your programme and whether taking on younger apprentices could be an option for your organisation.

Who is your outreach for? Develop a clear picture of who you want to reach and how this relates to your organisational goals; think about their backgrounds, experiences and locations (including where they might be in the business if you are also recruiting existing staff). Although apprenticeships are open to all ages, there has been an underinvestment in apprenticeships for younger people.

Where and how can you connect with the people you want to reach? To employ people who are not in your current network, you need to widen your horizon. Rather than expecting them to come to you, do your research and partner with relevant organisations in social mobility 'coldspots'¹⁴ or areas with high levels of free school meals whenever possible (see more in step 2 below). You may also consider specialist platforms such as the [BAME Apprenticeship Alliance portal](#).

¹⁴ Areas with particularly low social mobility. For a list of local authorities and regions, see Social Mobility Commission (2017) [State of the Nation 2017: Social mobility in Great Britain](#), page 5.

Be creative and make use of different channels, including public spaces and social media.

When does your outreach start?

Connecting with potential applicants starts much earlier than the time they leave school or are looking for new work. Explore ways in which you can build relationships earlier on, for example, through things like [employability programmes](#) offered by charities such as the Prince's Trust, work experience placements, open days, career education in schools and colleges or reverse job fairs (see box) or events to explain more about what the apprenticeship involves. This also goes for engaging potential internal candidates. If you are looking to attract school leavers, start advertising in the spring.

What will make your outreach programme relevant and accessible for the people you want to engage?

Consider the context, place and challenges people might be facing as well as the apprenticeship type and level you are offering. Tailor your outreach activities accordingly. Putting current or former apprentices from varying backgrounds in the driving seat of designing your outreach programme will increase its quality and make it more relatable to future applicants if they see themselves represented in the organisation. And don't be afraid to seek advice from a relevant partner on this.



EXAMPLE

A **reverse job fair** turns the tables between employers and job seekers – candidates set out their stalls showcasing their skills and experiences for employers to visit. It puts the people looking for work at the heart of the process and allows for a more person-centred approach. **Croydon Council** has successfully run several [reverse job fairs](#) to match local businesses with disabled candidates.



Smaller businesses might not have time to invest in a really complex recruitment process. But there are many ways for SMEs to open up their doors to introduce people to their business throughout the year, and these can also be excellent for attracting a more diverse pool of potential employees. Work experience, traineeships and kickstart are all relatively easy ways you can bring individuals in, get to know them and see if there's that connection."

Anna Morrison, Director, Amazing Apprenticeships

What barriers to participation might there be and how can you address them?

Working with current or former apprentices or relevant partner organisations can help you think this through. Consider factors such as:



EXAMPLE

Since late 2020, **West & North Yorkshire Learning Providers (WYLP)** have been partnering with OneFile and Pudsey Computers to **wipe, upgrade and distribute donated devices** to apprentices and learners in the FE sector so they can continue their programmes from home. WYLP have also supported local training providers to include digital literacy in their curriculum.



DO

Co-design your outreach programme with current and former apprentices. Honour their expertise and use this as a development opportunity for everyone involved.

- **Place:** Is the venue accessible? Easy to get to? Has good transportation links? Doesn't feel intimidating for someone who has never been there? If you are doing virtual engagement, do you know whether candidates will have access to a computer, high-speed internet, a quiet place to be on a call, the technical skills to engage?
- **Time:** Are you running activities during a time that makes it possible for people to engage who are working, parents or carers? Are you able to offer multiple time slots and shorter sessions to increase the possibility for people to attend? Also make sure to avoid running activities during school and religious holidays.
- **Content:** Are your activities accessible for disabled people, neurodivergent people and people with a learning disability? Are you offering a range of formats and modalities that suit different learning styles and give people choice in how they want to engage?
- **Language:** Are you describing your programme in a way that is relevant, simple and clear for applicants, including those whose first language isn't English? Can you avoid jargon? Are you addressing concerns people may have, such as needing a prior qualification to be considered for an apprenticeship (e.g. by saying "we are looking for potential, not polish")?
- **Money:** If you can't go to where people live, are you able to cover travel expenses, childcare and offer meals for the duration of in-person activities? Are you able to offer support with equipment, internet connectivity and access to an appropriate environment to engage in virtual activities? Are you proactively offering support with any other adjustments people need to be able to participate? Can you find organisations to help you if you are not in a position to do this yourself?

TIP 2

Partner with others to deliver your outreach programme

Don't go it alone. Partnerships are indispensable for effective outreach work, because apprenticeship providers are only a part of a complex web of people and organisations that play a role in making them happen. Find out who the organisations are that operate in your outreach area and invest in good, collaborative relationships with them to achieve a shared goal. Use our directory¹⁵ to find delivery partners. Consider working with:

Education providers such as non-fee-paying schools and FE colleges that have more diversity in their student bodies.¹⁶ Where schools and colleges have limited capacity, engage with career hubs and explore ways in which your outreach work can add value to what they are already doing. Engage teachers, parents and carers in conversations about the value of apprenticeships and challenge any suggestions that they are a lesser choice compared to university.

Community organisations such as charities, community cafes, sports clubs or youth centres. Consider the ages and backgrounds of the applicants you're trying to connect with, and find people who can be relatable role models for them.

Job centres. They are the place many people go to in order to look for work and receive benefits and a great way to advertise apprenticeships more widely, particularly for bulk recruitment.

“**Collaboration is key, it's so important in this whole agenda because it is complex. Not one of us has the answers to everything, but if we can bring the right people around the table and try to work through the challenges then collectively we stand a better chance of being able to make a difference.**”

Anna Morrison, Director, Amazing Apprenticeships

¹⁵ See <https://socialmobilityworks.org/organisation-directory/>.

¹⁶ The Social Mobility Foundation have produced guidance for employers on this and recommend consulting the departments for education of each country for school-level information (although data is not available for all schools): [England and Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#), Scotland ([secondary schools](#), [primary schools](#)).

Career coaches. Offering free bespoke careers advice as part of your outreach work can be a great way to help people figure out if a place on your apprenticeship programme is for them. You can also use this to identify and put in place any support candidates might need for the application process.

Employers, particularly SMEs that work in the same area. SMEs have a strong presence in social mobility ‘coldspots’ and deliver more apprenticeships in these areas than other employers, often on a small budget. Larger employers or training providers partnering with SMEs, or several small companies pooling resources together can unlock new possibilities.



TIP 3

Don't miss your golden lessons

Outreach activities can be very enjoyable and engaging for the entire company, and they come with huge opportunities for learning. Make the most of this by putting processes in place that can help you capture important lessons. This will allow you to improve not just future outreach activities, but also other parts of your apprenticeship programme.

Collect anonymous data from

all participants (including internal candidates) about their socio-economic background to assess whether you have engaged the group of people you have intended (see data chapter above for more detail):

- analyse this data to understand how participation converts into appointment and how this varies between groups.
- identify key impact metrics and measure your activities against these (use our scorecard for ideas¹⁷).

Gather feedback from participants

to understand:

- whether they feel they have benefitted from your outreach activities.
- if they would recommend them to peers.
- how activities can be improved.
- whether they felt included as part of the organisation.

Gather feedback from delivery staff

to understand:

- what worked well and what can be expanded.
- what needs to be changed and improved.
- what support they need to run another outreach programme.

+ MORE

Follow participants to understand how engagement with you has affected their long-term career outcomes and whether they progress into roles in your organisation or the wider sector.

17 Social Mobility Commission (date unknown) [Social mobility scorecard](#).

CASE STUDY

Offering inclusive apprenticeships across the entire creative sector in the North East



Sage Gateshead is a music centre and charity in the North East, and one of the largest cultural organisations in the country with 500 staff in administration, orchestra, music teaching, leadership, front of house and back of house work.

They partnered with Gateshead College to create inclusive entry routes into the sector by building relationships with smaller creative venues and supporting them to take on apprentices. The aim was to offer inclusive apprenticeships in a wide range of cultural organisations in the region.

They employed a designated Apprenticeship Coordinator to offer tailored support to partner venues, for example, by helping them understand the job requirements and process for taking on apprentices. They also launched an inclusive recruitment campaign, which highlighted the benefits of apprenticeships and was shared by a broad base of networks within Newcastle Gateshead. In addition, candidates were offered a phone call before applying to ask any questions. Over 30 organisations have now collaborated as part of the initiative, and more than 100 apprentices have benefitted from the combined effort.





HIRING

Why is it important?

Recruitment is complex and involves many moving parts. Many traditional recruitment practices make it much more difficult for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to demonstrate their capabilities.

Unless intentionally designed in an inclusive way, many traditional recruitment practices make it much more difficult for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to demonstrate their capabilities and prevent recruiters from recognising

their skills and potential. Actively working to address and remove these barriers is critical in enabling people who have not had access to many opportunities to get onto your apprenticeship programmes.

How do I go about it?

The following steps are suggestive and don't represent a linear process. You know what works in your context, so

please use them as a menu of ideas to draw on for your hiring strategy.

TIP 1

Make sure the job itself is accessible

Check that you aren't inadvertently excluding people before they even apply because of how the apprenticeship is designed. Take a moment to consider what you really need an apprentice to be able to do from day one versus what they can learn in the first six months to get the job done. Use that to inform the design of the role and think through the following questions:

What level of apprenticeship are you offering for this role?

- Since 2015, apprenticeships at Level 2 and 3 have dropped, while higher level apprenticeships have increased.¹⁸ They tend to be taken up by people from

more privileged backgrounds, often even recent graduates. Think about what level of apprenticeship can offer the best entry route for people from all backgrounds.

- **Consider offering more Level 2 apprenticeships** as they don't require any pre-existing achievements in English and maths, which can be a barrier for many. This is a great way of creating a pathway for people who have not had access to many opportunities and limit the extent to which applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds will be competing with candidates who may already have multiple qualifications.

¹⁸ National Foundation for Educational Research (2021) [Putting Apprenticeships to Work for Young People](#), page 9.

- **Challenge assumptions that candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds can't excel at degree apprenticeships** and address barriers that make it difficult for them to access higher level programmes (such as awareness, location, barriers in the recruitment process etc).

and the technical skills for virtual working. Proactively offer a budget to purchase any necessary kit, broadband etc. and provide training where needed. Don't assume that everyone will have a laptop they can use, a quiet space to work from or know how to get on a Zoom call.

Where is the apprenticeship located?

- **Is being on site essential to the role?** How much remote working can be enabled? Flexibility around working from home can be a great enabler for people who are parents, carers, disabled, have additional needs or aren't able to relocate. At the same time, having regular opportunities to meet colleagues in person can be a powerful way to create a sense of belonging – think about what a good balance could look like. Ensure your flexible working policies meet CIPD best practice.¹⁹
- Is it possible for the apprenticeship to be offered in a **social mobility 'coldspot'**, particularly if your business is expanding?
- If the expectation is for remote working, what provisions do you need to put in place to **ensure learners'** home environments are conducive to working remotely? This might include checking that they have the necessary equipment, access to high-speed internet, appropriate working conditions

How is the apprenticeship structured?

- **What are the hours you are expecting your apprentices to work?** How flexible can you make them? Consider the needs of parents, carers and disabled apprentices and proactively find a schedule that accommodates their needs. Remember that part-time apprenticeships can be offered if the overall duration of the programme can be extended.²⁰



19 CIPD (2021) [Flexible working practices](#) [accessed August 2021].

20 unionlearn (2018) [Tackling apprenticeship gender inequality](#).

- How are you helping apprentices land in the organisation and making sure they don't feel isolated, especially where remote working is possible or required? (For more on this see tip 1 in the section on culture and leadership.)
- **What adjustments might your apprentices need?** Be proactive in asking apprentices to identify their needs and put any changes or support required in place from the start. This often is neither complicated nor expensive. For example, there are many assistive technologies to support a blind or partially sighted apprentice.²¹ Remember that many disabilities are hidden, including learning disabilities, and apprentices may not feel safe coming to you with their needs for fear that they may impact people's perception of them. So spending time with your apprentices to build a trusted container for these conversations is critical for the success of the programme. [The Disability Confident](#) employer scheme offers a lot more information and guidance.
- **What training might apprentices need?** For some of your apprentices, this may be the first job they have, or they might be re-entering work after a long time or be completely unfamiliar with the sector and type of work. Many apprentices struggle with the Functional Skills requirement, so explore ways of offering extra tutoring in English and

“**We learnt that we made various assumptions about our apprentices, often based on their age. We assumed that they would be okay with contacting us virtually, but the virtual methods and means didn't match with those that they were using. Therefore it was all a learning curve about how could we best reach people and reassure them.**”

Ruth Frost, Recruitment Team Leader,
Companies House

maths to those who need it by engaging a specialist provider.²² In addition to the technical training, think about soft skills, such as how to approach networking or meeting etiquettes, as well as an induction into the culture of your organisation. Remember that what you take for granted (such as working in an open plan office or speaking with clients on the phone) might be completely new to some of your apprentices, so be proactive in offering guidance and don't shy away from the detail (such as what the dress code is for the office or a particular event).

21 Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (date unknown) [Modern Apprenticeships – a case study](#) [accessed October 2021].

22 Find a list of providers on our website: <https://socialmobilityworks.org/organisation-directory/>.

What wage are you paying apprentices?

- We call on all employers to pay apprentices the voluntary living wage wherever possible, which is calculated by the [Living Wage Foundation](#) based on a basket of goods. The National Minimum Wage for apprenticeships is the lowest available pay rate in the UK and is too low to live on. Not offering more will exclude anyone who doesn't have a financial cushion to tie them over.
- Paying apprentices a decent wage is also an important way to create parity of esteem between apprenticeships and other entry routes into the profession. Remember that apprentices are the future of your workforce!



What are the progression opportunities after the apprenticeship? This might be a decisive factor for candidates who are weighing up whether to apply.

- Consider designing progressive apprenticeships from Level 2 up so people can undertake further training.
- Provide examples of routes former apprentices have taken after their training (e.g. securing a permanent job), so applicants have a concrete understanding of what progression could look like for them.

“**Apprenticeship wage poverty is a real and growing concern. The apprenticeship minimum wage is unviable for most adults and off-putting for parents of potential young apprentices who are on income support as this affects their household income. It is so important that employers make a commitment to paying apprentices at all levels and ages decent wages so as not to damage the apprenticeship brand and to encourage further take up from our young people and adults.**”

Alex Miles, Managing Director,
West & North Yorkshire Learning
Providers

TIP 2

Apply the lessons from your outreach to the selection process

Drawing on the insights from your outreach activities, apply what you have learnt about socio-economic inclusion to how you meet, assess and select candidates for your apprenticeship programme. Take time to examine which aspects of your selection process might put people from lower socio-economic backgrounds at a disadvantage, and redesign them as needed. A few questions to guide you in this process:

What is your timeframe for recruitment?

- Considerations around diversity and inclusion often fall by the wayside under time pressure, so ensure there is time to give due consideration to these questions. Start early and put in place a minimum timeframe for recruitment.
- Plan ahead so you can leave plenty of time for candidates to apply. As you start to receive applications, avoid preferential treatment for those who apply early and take all applications through the same process with consistency.

What are your requirements of candidates?

- Qualification requirements can be a huge barrier for people who would otherwise have the skills to do the job. Ask yourself if any qualifications (such



EXAMPLE

Rather than requiring a **CV**, ask applicants behaviour-based questions, e.g. “Tell me about a time you faced a big challenge – how did you try to overcome it?”.

as GCSEs, A-Levels or Functional Skills) are absolutely necessary for the role? Remove them if the answer is no; and where the answer is yes (for example, for highly technical roles), make sure the qualifications are relevant and explain why they are required. Feed this back to unsuccessful applicants, signpost them to where they can achieve these qualifications and encourage them to try again once they have secured them.

- Encouraging applicants to list prior apprenticeships as part of their qualifications is a great way to reinforce parity of esteem. Remember that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may not have had access to some premium experiences such as extra-curricular activities or work experience – which doesn't mean they haven't developed important skills in other ways. Make sure your assessors are aware of this.
- Challenge senior leaders' expectations of recruiting 'ready made talent' and explain why this approach excludes



EXAMPLE

Test people's willingness to learn rather than what they already know. For example, if applicants have access to the internet, ask them to do some research into a topic of their choice as part of the assessment process.

disadvantaged candidates. Emphasise the value of nurturing future leaders internally, starting with apprentices.

How are you testing and assessing applicants' skills?

- Knowing how to demonstrate a skill is a skill in and of itself that not everyone learns at school. So rather than asking candidates about a time when they worked in a team or communicated well, can you explore ways of testing this in real time that creates a level playing field?
- Question the indicators you use that demonstrate someone's ability, such as grades or experience. Use contextualised recruitment to understand a candidate's skills and potential within the context of their environment.²³
- Acknowledge your biases and put processes in place to mitigate against



MORE

Ensure that the assessment process includes a **range of activities that suit different learning styles** (such as Q&A, role play or exercises), are independent of each other and **led by different assessors**.



We purposefully didn't create any barriers to entry in terms of academic qualification. We did look for core competencies in terms of maths and writing skills, but if someone came along and demonstrated the right attitudes and behaviours then let's not get too hung up on their email response because that can be taught. What's difficult is to help someone develop the right attitude. Just because someone has a qualification, that is no guarantee that they will be successful at the role."

Bradley Burgoyne, Head of Talent, Jardine Motors Group

them, such as anonymising application forms before they are given to the selection panel. You can learn a lot here from the work many organisations have done to address racial discrimination²⁴.

²³ See further information on contextualised recruitment in The Sutton Trust (2020) [Social Mobility in the workplace: An employer's guide](#), page 22.

²⁴ See for example: unionlearn (2018) [Supporting Black and minority ethnic apprentices: A resource for union negotiators and reps](#).

“**My employer emailed everyone the details of the assessment activities in advance, so we knew exactly what was going to happen. That really helped.**”

Apprentice workshop participant

+ MORE

Get feedback from a trusted partner such as a local charity or community organisation, and invite their views on your recruitment process before you launch. This is a great way of testing your programme with people who know your audience well and of building a trusted partnership.



TIP 3

Proactively support your candidates

Not everyone has access to the same resources to succeed in an application process, whether that is time, knowledge, money or emotional support to put themselves forward for a position. Below are some important ways in which you can support candidates to make sure everyone is able to fully engage with the process.

Offer to pay for any costs associated with the application process (e.g. travel, childcare, clothing, access to equipment, high-speed internet, an appropriate space for a virtual interview etc) and enable this to be requested anonymously in advance (rather than receiving it as a reimbursement). Letting applicants know this is available to them without having to ask for it themselves is important, because it takes the onus and possible shame away from them and shows you are serious about including everyone.



REMEMBER

The government's [Access to Work scheme](#) offers practical and financial support for disabled people who are 16 or over and in or entering work. This could include purchasing or adapting equipment, travel costs or hiring an interpreter. This can make a real difference to a disabled person applying to your programme.



Apprentices do need a bit more support and guidance. It doesn't have to be labour intensive, but you might need to think outside the box a bit. We engaged with them early so that by the time they joined they'd met their team, their buddy, and had had calls with their line managers. This meant that when they joined, we were better prepared, and they were better prepared too."

Ruth Frost, Recruitment Team Leader,
Companies House

Provide adjustments and support for disabled candidates and people with learning disabilities and train your assessors in how to make these adjustments. Offer guaranteed interviews for disabled candidates that meet the minimum criteria (as part of the [Disability Confident employers scheme](#)).



MORE

Offer applicants the **opportunity to attend an event**, product launch, exhibition or informal visit to your organisation prior to their interview to become familiar with the environment and the people.

Engage a provider to offer candidates support with writing their application

and preparing for an interview. You may also provide candidates with other resources they can use to help them with their application that might be specific to your industry or company.

Check in with your candidates.

Can you provide applicants with a name and phone number they can call if they have any questions or would like to have a chat in advance? A little extra support can go a long way. For example, checking in with applicants who are care

leavers the day before the assessment to make sure they know where to go, have something appropriate to wear, know what to expect etc. and saying you look forward to seeing them at the agreed time can make all the difference.²⁵ Find local community organisations who can provide this support if you are not in a position to do so yourself. Another great way of doing this is to buddy candidates up with a member of staff who is not involved in the recruitment process to speak with before the interview so they can get an idea of the culture in the organisation and ask any questions.

TIP 4

Review your communications

How can you make sure your intention, considerations and practical support offers come through in how you advertise your apprenticeship opportunity? You've done all this work but if your adverts are inaccessible or exclude candidates who don't see themselves reflected they may still not apply. A few tips:

Ensure all apprenticeship opportunities you offer are publicly advertised and posted in multiple places (e.g. online job boards, Job Centres, via career hubs).



MORE

Create an **FAQ on apprenticeships**, which candidates can access alongside the job advert.

In your adverts, clearly list:

- salary.
- location (and any flexibility you can offer).
- working hours (including part-time and flexible arrangements).

²⁵ Learning and Work Institute (date unknown) [Fire It Up – Employer Apprenticeship Flyer](#).

- employee benefits (such as pension, holidays, sick leave etc).
- adjustments and support offer (such as purchasing equipment or software as well as mentors, peer networks, counselling etc).
- your [Disability Confident employer badge](#) (if you have achieved one).
- length of the programme.

Talk explicitly about the benefits of apprenticeships – don't assume everyone is familiar with what apprenticeships are, how they work and what they offer in terms of career, qualifications and training opportunities. This can also help parents, carers and teachers to better support applicants.

Be clear about what the application process involves, what is assessed at each stage and what support is available to candidates (such as help from a careers coach, childcare costs etc).

EXAMPLE

Remove qualification barriers by using **encouraging language** in job adverts such as, "We're looking for a spark of potential rather than experience. Don't worry if you don't think you have it – we're good at spotting it."

Use language that is inclusive of all identities, abilities and backgrounds (e.g. by using gender-neutral pronouns²⁶ and plain English).

Make sure your materials are accessible (e.g. in sufficiently large font and size and compatible with a screen reader) and provide details for how to request them in alternative formats.²⁷

Involve role models from a variety of backgrounds in your marketing materials that candidates can identify with. Consider how class intersects with other characteristics such as disability, ethnicity, faith, gender or sexual orientation and how you can represent different experiences that speak to a wide range of people.



26 unionlearn (2020) [LGBT+ inclusive apprenticeships: A resource for union negotiators and reps](#), page 14.

27 unionlearn (2017) [Accessible apprenticeships: A TUC guide for trade union activists on bargaining for accessible Apprenticeships for disabled workers](#).

Starting small and learning fast



Companies House

Companies House is the UK's registrar of companies and sits in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. They have just over 1,000 employees with offices in Cardiff (head office), London, Belfast and Edinburgh. Diversity and inclusion (D&I) is a big priority in the organisation with 16 staff networks advocating for a range of concerns.

After realising they were not attracting the people they were aiming for, Companies House decided to develop an apprenticeship scheme designed for underrepresented groups, including people from working class backgrounds. They started by building relationships with schools in deprived areas of Cardiff, removing all education qualification requirements, [providing accessible information about apprenticeships](#) and adopting a more informal interview style to allow for a greater range of expressions.

Companies House launched the programme in 2019 with only three apprentices. There were many

lessons learnt early on, such as challenging the assumption that all apprentices were digitally savvy, which has led to a much more tailored approach that focuses on understanding and supporting the development of apprentices' specific experiences and skills.

“**The biggest thing that helped us initially was the idea of starting small. Building an apprenticeship that the business felt it could manage, apprentices would be individuals and valued members of the workforce. People we could get to know and really invest in their development and their training and time with us.**”

Martyn Flynn, Head of Resourcing, Companies House

A photograph of two women in an office setting. The woman on the left is seen in profile, wearing a pearl necklace and a dark top. The woman on the right has curly hair, wears glasses, and a light-colored blazer over a white top. They appear to be in a conversation. The background shows office furniture and a window with blinds.

PROGRESSION

Why is it important?

The right apprenticeship can be a powerful vehicle for social mobility when it is linked to concrete progression opportunities, either with the same employer or in the wider industry.

But we have found that at intermediate and advanced levels, progression opportunities work in favour of people from more privileged backgrounds.²⁸ This happens at the cost of apprentices from lower socio-economic and other minority backgrounds as well as employers who are missing out on extraordinary people.

Employers, training providers, end point assessment organisations, awarding bodies, career coaches, mentors – they all play a crucial role in enabling apprentices to complete their training and paving the way for the next step.

How do I go about it?

The steps we have listed here are suggestive and don't represent a linear process. Your organisation and context is unique, so please use these as a

menu of options and ideas to draw upon as you think through your approach to progression.

TIP 1

Design progression pathways

Take a moment to zoom out and imagine the workforce you want in ten years' time. What career pathways will lead people to different roles? Where are they now? What can you do now to enable them to get there? It is essential for training providers and employers to work together on this, and to involve line managers closely. Consider the following questions:

What further development opportunities are available to apprentices?

- Consider offering progressive apprenticeships from Level 2 up

to create a continuous learning and leadership pathway tailored to each role.

- Create opportunities to achieve further qualifications such as a foundation degree.
- If these options aren't available to you, find out if there are courses, leadership training, coaching, volunteering or other personal and professional development opportunities by external providers you could offer your apprentices.

²⁸ Social Mobility Commission (2020) [Apprenticeships and social mobility: fulfilling potential](#), page 63.

What job opportunities are available to apprentices after the training?

- Don't limit your thinking to only new roles apprentices could move into – sometimes existing positions can be re-designed to suit an apprentice once they have finished their training. Explore all options.
- Re-think how apprentices can move between technical and non-technical streams, if applicable (e.g. move beyond administrative roles).
- If there are none or limited opportunities with the current employer, particularly if they are an SME, see if you can establish partnerships with other business in the industry that might be interested in hiring an apprentice after they have finished their training.

What is your progression policy?

- Articulate clearly what behaviours contribute to progression and provide specific guidelines on good practice. For example, our research in the civil service found that people from privileged backgrounds are more likely to use informal mechanisms to get ahead, such as threatening to leave or embellishing their applications for more senior roles.²⁹ Have conversations with managers about the types of behaviours that indicate someone's strength and suitability for promotion and which ones

“ I was left feeling very uncertain, not knowing whether I'd be able to afford rent after my apprenticeship because I didn't know whether I'd have a job afterwards.”

Apprentice workshop participant

do not, and be clear about how candidates can demonstrate these behaviours.

- Reduce informal ways of being promoted that favour people from privileged backgrounds – such as personal networks, access to a senior guide or hidden knowledge of opportunities such as temporary promotions. Formalise this in a progression policy and train your managers on how to follow it.
- Implement rigorous processes for succession planning to avoid rushed hiring decisions to replace leavers, which risk compromising diversity and inclusion. If you have a people policy, think about how progression fits into the picture.
- Make sure line managers have conversations with apprentices about their career options and have them challenge the common perception that apprentices can only do a limited number of roles.

29 For more detail, see Social Mobility Commission (2021) [Navigating the labyrinth: Socio-economic background and career progression in within the Civil Service](#).

TIP 2

Develop a culture of learning

You may have the best progression pathways in place, but if only some people are taking up those opportunities, nothing will change. Make sure you bring your apprentices along with you, particularly those who may not actively put themselves forward for opportunities.

How are you modelling a learning culture?

- Ensure employers and training providers regularly talk about training opportunities and the importance of learning, including in all-staff forums.
- Make information about training opportunities clear and easy to access for all staff and ensure there is time within work schedules to engage in learning and training.

How are you enabling learning?

- Actively protect apprentices' 20% off the job time for studying and emphasise that this is considered working time.
- Have a budget ring-fenced to provide development opportunities at all levels and allow apprentices time to engage with additional training.



DO

Make sure you **offer training opportunities in a way that works for your staff**, particularly people who work on the frontline and might not be spending much time on email or internal portals. Show your staff how further training will help them progress in their career and gain new skills. Monthly meetings with line managers are an ideal place to advertise upcoming training and encourage people to sign up.

- Offer additional support for remote learning as it can present a challenge for people used to classroom learning. Equally support those who struggle with studying as part of a big group and may require a different format to do their best work.
- Provide regular feedback to apprentices on their performance and support them in areas where they need to improve.
- Hold managers accountable for the continued education and progression of apprentices.
- Continue collecting data to track whether training opportunities are taken up equally by all apprentices.³⁰

³⁰ Do not count mandatory occupational health and safety training, as it does not tend to link to career progression and could skew your data.

TIP 3

Provide holistic support

Progression isn't just about securing or retaining a job at the end of an apprenticeship; it starts much earlier. To enable completion, make sure you support apprentices well through their end point assessment. To help their planning, create opportunities early on for them to think about their career interests and ambitions.

How are you supporting apprentices through their end point assessment?

- Make sure all line managers are aware of the end point assessment process, timelines and requirements. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's apprentice panel have produced [excellent guidance](#) on how to prepare and support apprentices during this stage.



MORE

Work with your employer / training provider to create a **vocational profile** for each apprentice, including any adjustments needed, to help plan for their learning and progression.

“I only told my employer I'm dyslexic one week before the exam because I thought they wouldn't keep me otherwise. The online exam was the hardest thing I've ever done.”

Apprentice workshop participant

- Minimise any delays between completion of the apprenticeship and the end point assessment to prevent the need for repeated studying.
- Check in with your apprentices about how they are getting on with preparing for the assessment and offer additional support as required.
- Manage apprentices' workload particularly well during this period to ensure they have time for studying during business hours.
- Tap into funding that is available to employers and training providers to support apprentices who need additional learning support (for example, in English and maths), such as young people, care leavers or apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.³¹

31 Education & Skills Funding Agency (2021) [Apprenticeship funding rules](#) [accessed October 2021].

- If the end point assessment is done remotely, make sure you provide apprentices with the appropriate kit, including the two devices required to enable the virtual assessment to be completed.
- Establish especially good communication practices with your training provider or employer respectively during this time to make sure you are aligned around meeting apprentices' support needs and are actively mitigating any challenges.



MORE

Draw a **careers web** to illustrate all available opportunities and pathways to apprentices. You could use the [occupational maps](#) by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education as a starting point.

How are you supporting apprentices in figuring out their next steps?

- Link apprentices up with a careers coach or mentor early into their training to explore all options available and get ready for the next step.
- Connect apprentices with apprentice alumni to learn from peers who have moved into different roles after their training and to help expand their networks.
- Offer apprentices no-obligation shadowing opportunities within their current organisation or other potential future employers.
- Be clear about expectations (e.g. of an automatic rise to a particular pay scale at the end of the apprenticeship) and what the performance requirements are for progression.



Challenging industry assumptions

MEDIACOM

In an industry that has shown a bias toward traditional forms of education, **MediaCom**'s leadership team has taken a different stance by understanding different backgrounds, life experiences and future potential as more valuable to a business than qualifications.

MediaCom is a large media communications specialist, which employs 1,700 people in offices across the UK (as well as thousands of other employees across the globe). The company has embedded its commitment to social mobility in its apprenticeship programme by removing an emphasis on existing qualifications while elevating apprenticeships as

an invaluable route into the sector. Apprenticeships are also offered to existing employees to enhance their progression opportunities and earning potential.

Over the past few years, MediaCom has supported around 110 apprentices with most of them staying at the agency for several years and progressing quickly within the company. Some have even gone on to look after the apprenticeship programme that gave them their career start. More importantly, this initiative has changed the way people in the business think about what talent looks like and what makes someone fit for the job.



ADVOCACY

Why is it important?

Don't underestimate the impact you can have when you share what you are doing on socio-economic diversity and inclusion with others in your field.

Be at the forefront of promoting better work practices and a more cohesive society by bringing colleagues along with you, advocating for sector-wide changes and supporting campaigns for social inclusion in apprenticeships. This is an opportunity

to develop your track record on social mobility and to inspire others to follow in your footsteps, particularly colleagues and other leaders that may not be aware of the huge opportunities apprenticeships present for their organisation.

How do I go about it?

Every context is different, and there are infinite ways to use your platform and position to advocate for social mobility. If you don't know where to start, here are a few options:

Make a commitment that is linked to your organisational strategy and needs. Before you go wide, take your own people with you. Have conversations across your team, show people why social mobility matters and how it will make the whole organisation better. Use different channels – brown bag lunches, internal newsletters, informal conversations etc. to build up an understanding and vocabulary around socio-economic diversity and inclusion across the business.

Make your commitment public.

Show leadership in creating inclusive apprenticeships to make it easier for others to do the same.

- Benchmark your organisation against others who have published their data

and articulate achievable targets to improve your own.

- Apply to join the [Social Mobility Employer Index](#) to assess and monitor your organisation's progress on social mobility.³²
- Make your [Social Mobility Pledge](#).³³



³² See <https://www.socialmobility.org.uk/index/>.

³³ See <https://www.socialmobilitypledge.org/signatories>.

Share your story. Hearing the stories of employers who have gone on a similar journey is more powerful than any toolkit. Be generous in sharing your lessons, including what didn't go so well, so others can learn from you. You could also allow people to use your experience as a case study and/or spotlight employees who have progressed from an apprenticeship into a full-time role and are willing to share their story.³⁴

+ MORE

Convene **collaborative programmes** with other companies that have similar goals (such as collating and benchmarking cross-sector data on socio-economic diversity) in order to create a wider evidence base.

Use your platform. Consider speaking invitations or interview requests as opportunities to talk about your journey in addressing socio-economic diversity and inclusion in your organisation. Use your voice to challenge and support others to change.

Share your levy. If you are a large employer, you can transfer any unspent apprenticeship levy to smaller employers (for example, businesses in your supply chain and in social mobility 'coldspots') to enable them to offer high-quality

apprenticeships.³⁵ You can also attach criteria to the transfer; for example, that the receiving employer pays apprentices the Living Wage. While these criteria are not binding, they can be an effective way of increasing the social mobility impact of a levy transfer if you find mutual agreement with the recipient employer.



34 For example, you could submit your case study on www.socialmobilityworks.org/success-stories/.

35 Education and Skills Funding Agency (2019) [Transferring unused apprenticeship funds to other employers](#) [accessed October 2021].

Use your levy for good



The Co-op is a large organisation employing over 60,000 colleagues across its grocery stores, funeral care and life services and insurance businesses. Its vision of ‘co-operating for a fairer world’ acts as its guiding north star for all they do; advocating inclusion and bringing other businesses along on the journey with them.

Having used their unspent levy to support apprenticeships at Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue service since 2019, in May 2021 Co-op launched their [national levy sharing scheme](#). The service enables levy paying organisations to donate up to 25% of their annual funds to pay for apprenticeship training costs in other organisations and has been specifically designed to support apprenticeships for individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds or underrepresented groups within their communities. The donating organisation can set criteria for how

their money is spent (for example, by specifying a geographical location or community they would like to benefit from the donation), and employers seeking funding can apply and be matched with a suitable donor.

The levy share is also a great opportunity to build networks and share expertise; for example, experienced apprentices from a larger organisation could mentor those from a smaller company.

“**The D&I piece gives us the who, but social mobility runs through all of that and gives us the where, and some of the how.**”

Danny Matthews,
Apprenticeship &
Community Resourcing
Lead, The Co-op

We are here to help

There are plenty of further resources on our website³⁶, where you can find more success stories of businesses like yours, a list of partner organisations to support you in this work as well as articles and webinars to enrich your understanding and inspire you on your journey.

Remember – the first step is the hardest. But if you start with the right mindset and commitment, you will have the strength and courage to overcome any challenges. Hold on to your conviction and let others be inspired by you. Thank you for being part of this!

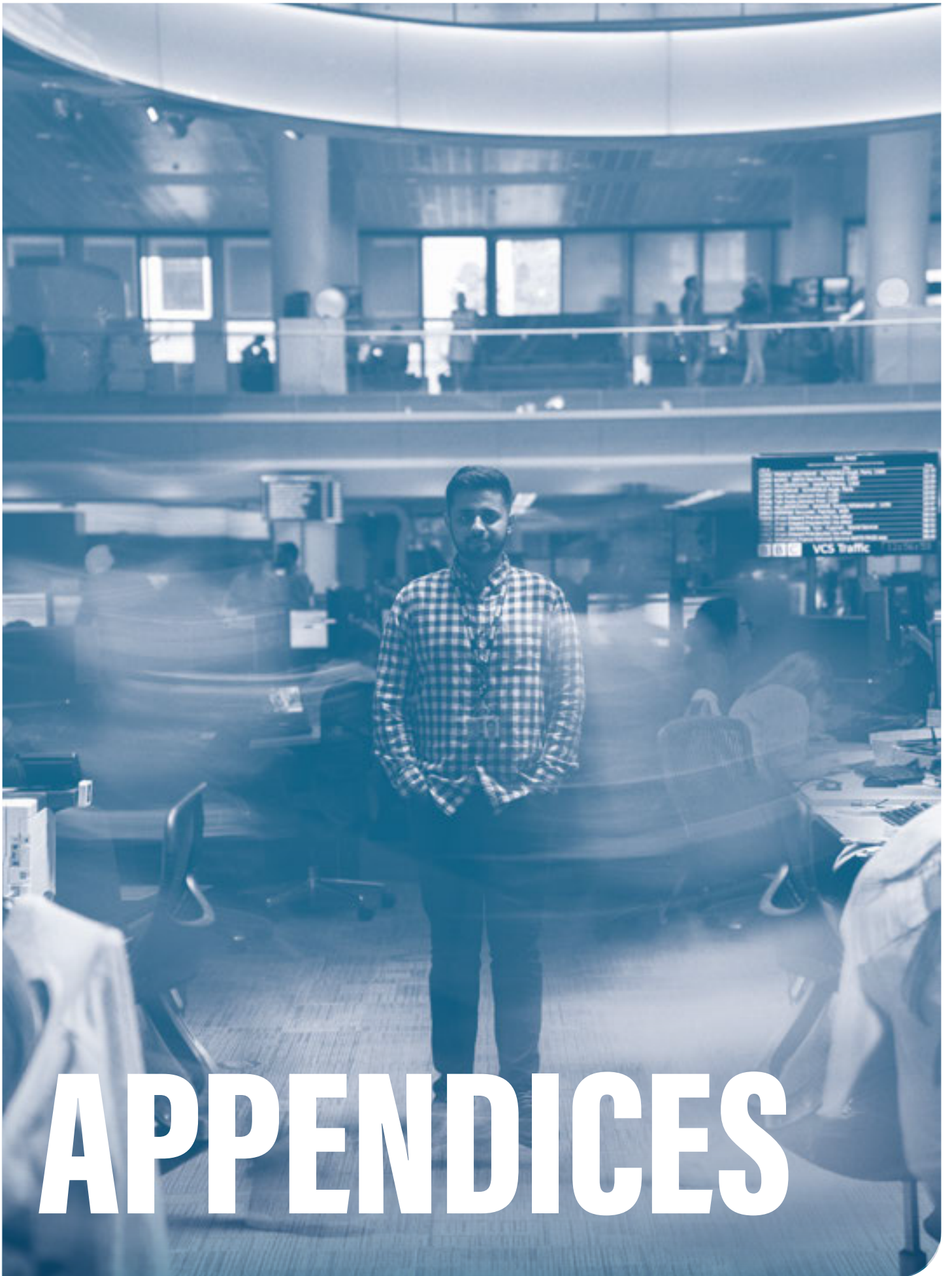


TOP TIP

Start small and grow. Choose one intervention and do it well, prove the concept, learn and build from there.



36 www.socialmobilityworks.org.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Brief Q&A on apprenticeships and social mobility

Here we have addressed some key questions about apprenticeships, drawing on the findings from our research.³⁷

How common is it for people to do an apprenticeship?

Overall, percentage of people who have completed or are currently doing an apprenticeship in England remains low across industries.³⁸ To give a few examples:



10% of the working population in England has completed or is currently doing an apprenticeship



5% of employees in the financial and professional services sector are doing or have done an apprenticeship



6% of employees in the public sector are doing or have done an apprenticeship



5% of employees in the creative sector are doing or have done an apprenticeship



5% of employees in the retail sector are doing or have done an apprenticeship



³⁷ Unless otherwise stated, all figures are based on Social Mobility Commission (2020) [Apprenticeships and social mobility: fulfilling potential](#). Please note that following a review in May 2021, the Commission will be using a 4-digit standard occupational classification (SOC) code instead of a 3-digit SOC code for any forthcoming analysis. For more information, see Social Mobility Commission (2021) [Background to the research informing the employers' toolkits](#).

³⁸ Figures based on all quarters of the 2019 Labour Force Survey (LFS).

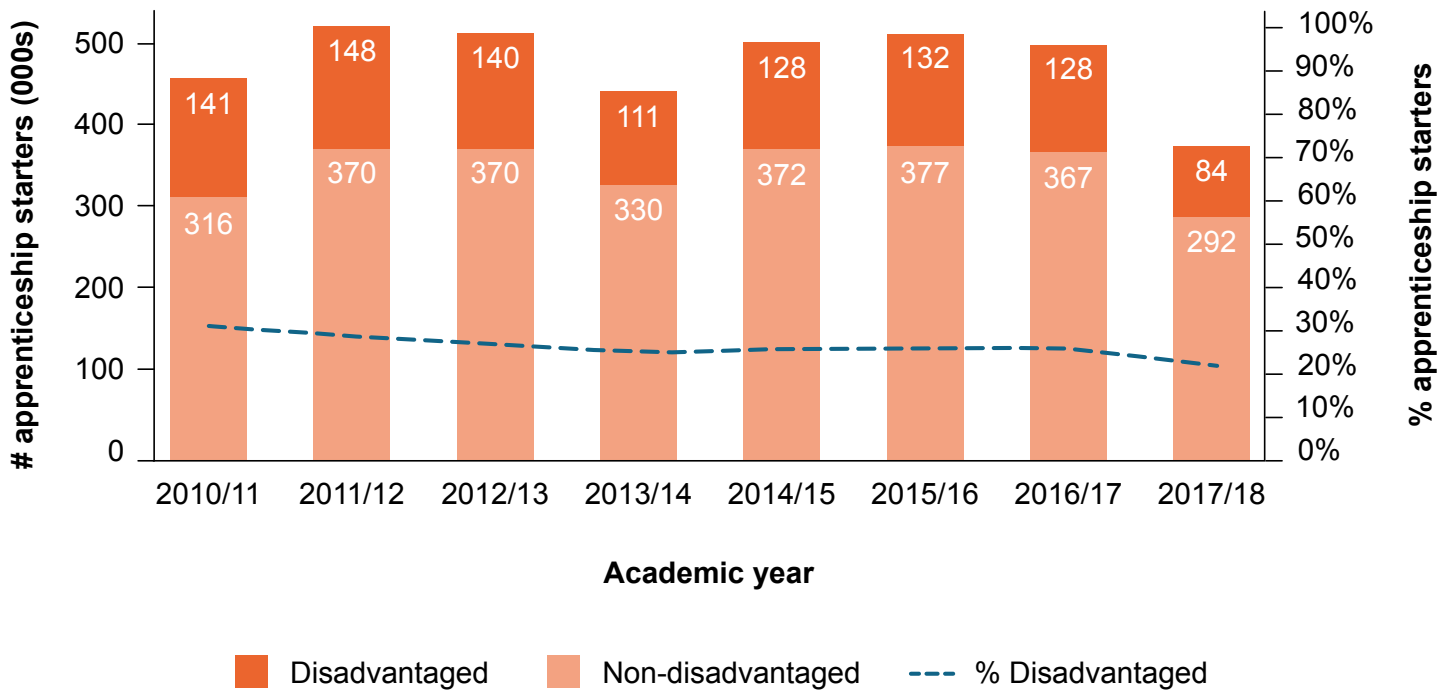
How many people from working class backgrounds start apprenticeships?

The proportion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds who start an apprenticeship has declined steadily over time. This group accounted for 30% of all starts in 2010/11 (141,000), but only 22% (84,000) in 2017/18.

Since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and shift to higher quality employer-led standards in 2017, apprenticeship starts fell overall but this drop was more acute for those from disadvantaged backgrounds decreasing by around 36% between 2015/16 and 2017/18, compared with 23% for non-disadvantaged learners.



Figure 1: Apprenticeship starts over time, by disadvantaged background (2010/11 to 2017/18)



Note: Totals are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Source: London Economics' analysis of ILR (2010/11 to 2017/18) and IMD (2010) data.



What is the overall demographic of apprentices in the UK?

Overall, the apprenticeship workforce is disproportionately male, white and non-disabled.³⁹



Ethnicity

The apprenticeship workforce is overwhelmingly white with only 5% of apprentices being from Asian, Black, Mixed, or other ethnic backgrounds. Among white apprentices, 70% come from a working class or intermediate background, which is more than the 64% among Asian, Black, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds.⁴⁰



Gender

There is an over-representation of men (77%) across the apprenticeship workforce. However, the proportion of male apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds is similar to that of female apprentices.



Disability

The majority of the apprenticeship workforce is non-disabled (86%). Yet, among disabled apprentices, 47% are from a working class background compared to 43% of non-disabled apprentices from a similar background.

39 Figures based on the July – September quarters of the Labour Force Survey from 2017–2019. A more recent dataset by the Education and Skills Funding Agency shows slightly lower percentages of disabled apprentices and a higher proportion of apprentices from BAME backgrounds. See: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables> [accessed October 2021].

40 The analysis has had to combine employees from intermediate and working-class backgrounds due to sample size constraints in the LFS when looking at the intersectionality between socio-economic background and ethnicity.

Which industries have the most apprentices from working class backgrounds?

Disadvantaged learners are clustered in health and hospitality, and are notably absent in business, law and engineering sectors. This is especially the case at advanced and higher levels (e.g. 42% of starts at higher level among disadvantaged women are in health-related subjects, compared to 31% for non-disadvantaged learners).

Which apprenticeship levels are the most common?

Most apprentices are in advanced level training:⁴¹

- 36% Intermediate Apprenticeship (Level 2).
- 50% Advanced Apprenticeship (Level 3).
- 14% Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4 or 5).

Which apprenticeship levels have the most people from working class backgrounds?

Disadvantaged learners are clustered in lower level apprenticeships; 48% of starts by disadvantaged apprentices in 2017/18 were at intermediate level, compared with 41% for more privileged learners.

Apprentices at higher levels are more likely to be employed in large enterprises.

This is because larger enterprises are generally more likely to operate in the services sector or the health, education and public administration sector where higher-level apprenticeships are more common and because large firms tend to use their levy funds for higher level training. This means people can be overlooked who are at lower levels of the company and who could use lower level apprenticeships to progress up the organisation.

Are there differences in the length of the apprenticeship too?

The length of apprenticeship is shorter for disadvantaged learners than for their more privileged peers, suggesting there is a 'quality gap' in the type of training disadvantaged learners are offered. This is true even at advanced and higher levels and in higher-earning subject areas (such as engineering, construction or information communication technology), when comparing learners at the same level.

Are there differences in the apprenticeship offer between businesses of different sizes?

The fall in apprenticeship starts has been more marked in small enterprises than in large enterprises.⁴² In 2017/18, 55% of

41 Figures based on all quarters of the 2019 Labour Force Survey.

42 Small enterprises: employment of less than 10 people; medium enterprises: employment between 10 and 249; large enterprises: employment of 250 or more.

new apprenticeship starters from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds were employed in a large enterprise compared to 46% in 2015/16. Since the levy's introduction, there has been an increase in the number of higher-level apprenticeship starts in large enterprises, but the increase has been twice as large for privileged learners than for disadvantaged learners.

Which apprenticeships are supported by the apprenticeship levy?

Disadvantaged apprentices are less likely to be levy-supported. This applies to all age groups and men and women, i.e. within the same age and gender group, a smaller proportion of starters from disadvantaged backgrounds were levy-supported than non-disadvantaged starters, though the gap was most pronounced for men under 19 and women aged 25 and above. This suggests that the levy has favoured privileged learners over disadvantaged learners. Some of this is driven by the rise in degree-level apprenticeships, which disproportionately go to more privileged learners.

How many people leave their apprenticeship prematurely?

Apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to complete their apprenticeship than more privileged learners. Only 63% of disadvantaged male apprentices at intermediate level

completed their apprenticeship within three years in 2017/18 compared to 67% of non-disadvantaged apprentices.

The non-completion gap is larger for intermediate apprenticeships than advanced apprenticeships but disappears for higher-level apprenticeships. This suggests that disadvantaged apprentices at lower levels may need more support or face specific barriers that are not being addressed. The main reasons for non-completion are:

- issues relating to the apprenticeship (29% of surveyed non-completers).
- domestic, financial and logistical problems (28% of non-completers).
- move to employment or other forms of training (14% of non-completers).

What prospects do people from working class backgrounds have after completing an apprenticeship?

Young disadvantaged apprentices are about 4% less likely to progress to higher qualifications, suggesting employers should be targeting more opportunities and outreach to young learners to help them navigate future opportunities, post-apprenticeship.

Do people earn more after they have finished their apprenticeship?

On average, apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds earn less than non-disadvantaged apprentices. This occurs at all levels of apprenticeship and for men and women. The wage gap stands at £1,400 and £1,000 for men and women in possession of an intermediate apprenticeship qualification respectively.

However, apprenticeships appear to enable social mobility by reducing the gap in labour market outcomes. Apprentices

from lower socio-economic backgrounds receive a larger boost in earnings after completing an apprenticeship than their privileged peers. This is especially the case at intermediate level. For disadvantaged women achieving an intermediate apprenticeship, the earning boost stands at 16% compared to 10% for non-disadvantaged women. For men, it stands at 23% and 21% respectively. This shows how apprentices can be a powerful tool to help progress people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.



APPENDIX B

Additional guidance and resources

This is not an exhaustive list, but a few places to start if you are looking for additional guidance and support.

Resources for employers and training providers

- National Apprenticeship Service's [employer guides](#).
- National Apprenticeship Service's [training provider finder](#).
- National Apprenticeship Service's [end point assessment finder](#).
- Education and Skills Funding Agency's [apprenticeship statistics](#), which can be broken down by participation, starts, achievement, level, geography and different characteristics.
- Post vacancies on the governments' [Find An Apprenticeship](#) website.
- Amazing Apprenticeships' [Genie programme](#) (Genuine Interest in Equality) is a 12-month executive support programme that empowers and resources apprenticeship professionals to create genuine socio-economic diversity and inclusion within their apprenticeships.
- The Sutton Trust (2020) [Social Mobility in the workplace: An employer's guide](#).
- Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (2021) [Raising the standards: the apprentice guide to quality apprenticeships](#)
- Embracing Future Potential have lots of resources for employers relating [employing apprentices](#) and [inclusion](#)
- The [BAME Apprenticeship Alliance](#) convenes conversations between leaders in business and education focused on promoting apprenticeships in BAME communities.
- West & North Yorkshire Learning Providers' practice-focused blog, [The Provider Insider](#), features interviews with current and former apprentices, training providers and apprenticeship specialists on a range of topics
- Apprentice networks (by and for apprentices):
 - [BAME Apprentice Network](#).
 - [Disabled Apprentice Network](#).
 - [Apprentice Nation](#).
 - [Association of Apprentices](#).

- [Young Apprenticeship Ambassadors Network](#) (YAAN).
- [National Society of Apprentices](#).
- [Multiverse](#).

Resources for parents, carers and teachers

- Education and Skills Funding Agency's [parents' guide to apprenticeships](#).
- Amazing Apprenticeship's [parents' and carers' packs](#).
- Education and Skills Funding Agency's [teachers' handbook for 16–19 year olds](#).
- Amazing Apprenticeship's [resources for teachers and careers advisers](#).

Intersectionality

- BAME Apprentice Network (2021) [Employers Guide to Ramadan](#).
- Mencap (2020) [Apprenticeships for people with a learning disability](#).
- Disability Rights UK (2020) [Get Ahead Magazine Issue 2: Inclusive apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships](#).
- unionlearn (2020) [LGBT+ inclusive apprenticeships: A resource for union negotiators and reps](#).
- National Apprenticeship Service (2019) [Championing diversity in apprenticeships](#).
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APPENDIX C

Key terms

Socio-economic background

Socio-economic background refers to the particular set of social and economic circumstances that an individual has come from. It permits objective discussion of the influence of these circumstances on individuals' educational and career trajectories. It can be objectively measured by capturing information on parental occupation and level of education.

Social mobility

Social mobility is the link between an individual's income and occupation and the income and occupation of their parents. It is about where people end up in comparison to their parents or relative to their peers. It is widely adopted as a way of describing the importance of creating opportunities to enable individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds to become more economically successful.

Social class

Class can be a loaded term. Class encompasses a range of socio-cultural and geographical factors. Objective measures of assessing family income may not necessarily match up with individuals' perceptions of their social class status, and individuals may feel less comfortable talking about social class. However, class can invoke a range of tacit assumptions and practices, from how to dress and talk, to food choices and hobbies, and using it can expose the negative ways that these assumptions affect attitudes and behaviours. In this toolkit, we use the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification groupings.

Those from 'professional' backgrounds are from managerial and professional backgrounds. Examples include CEOs, senior police officers, doctors, journalists, barristers, solicitors, teachers and nurses. Those from 'working class' backgrounds are from routine and manual occupations. Examples include receptionists, electricians, plumbers, butchers and van drivers.

Diversity

This term captures the importance of recognising and valuing difference among individuals, e.g. along the lines of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, age or disability. It generally refers to increasing the representation of groups that are under-represented in organisations. It must, however, be understood alongside 'inclusion'. Diversity in and of itself does not result in an inclusive environment.

Inclusion

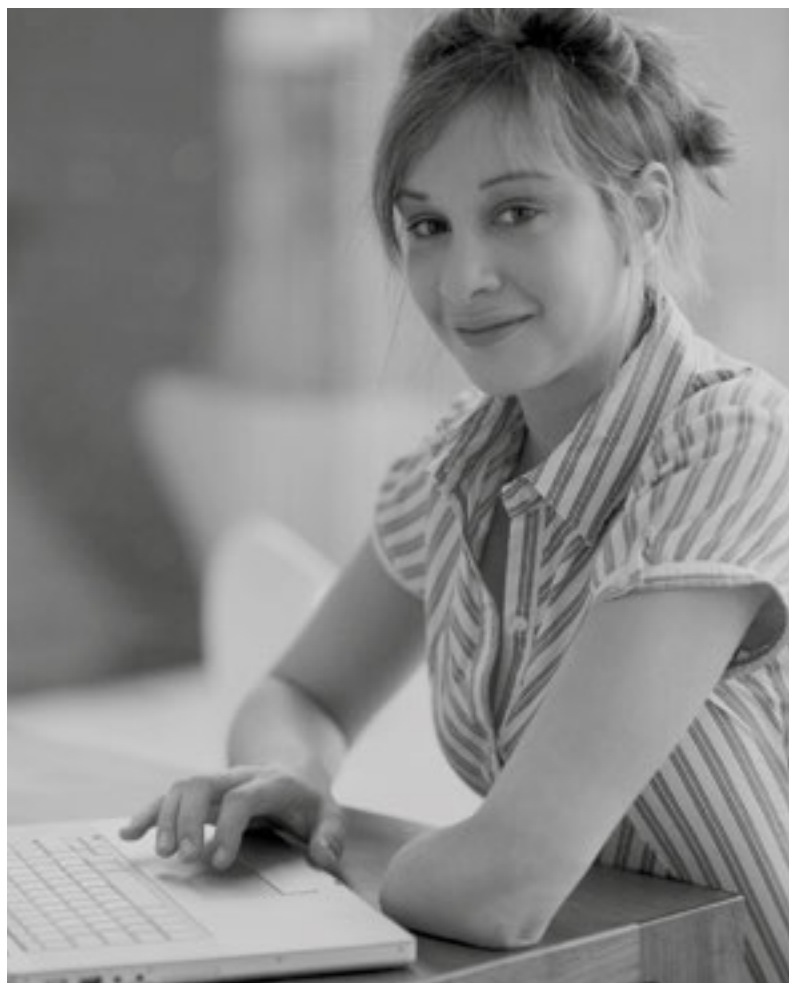
This is the meaningful achievement of diversity. This involves creating the conditions to ensure individuals from diverse backgrounds are valued and treated equitably, feel empowered and are able to progress.

Intersectionality

Individuals do not experience their diversity characteristics in isolation: these characteristics overlap and collide to compound the experience of inequality. For example, patterns of progression in an organisation will vary not only by gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background, but by combinations of all three. Policy and practice need to recognise the convergence of factors and respond accordingly.

Micro-aggressions

These can be defined as everyday words or acts that send denigrating messages to certain groups who are perceived (or perceive themselves) as 'different' (e.g. in terms of ethnicity, gender or socio-economic background). They are subtle demeaning comments or behaviours, which, over time, make individuals feel inferior or excluded. Members of the dominant culture are often unaware that certain comments or behaviours may be causing harm and there is no intention to offend. However, this can build up to become extremely problematic as constant small comments gradually erode employees' confidence, self-belief and sense of belonging.





Social Mobility
Commission