

Written evidence submitted by Disability Rights UK (DR UK)

Disability Rights UK (DR UK) is a national organisation led by Disabled people. Our vision is a world where Disabled people have equal rights, opportunities, and access to power. Our work is rooted in the lived experience of Disabled people. We are a membership organisation and work closely with organisations led by Disabled people, across the UK.

This response was drafted in collaboration with the DR UK Disabled Apprentices Network.

I. Careers advisors need to provide a menu of options rather than push students down one route.

Many Disabled apprentices shared with us that, rather than providing all the information available so students can make their own decisions, advisors often don't share all the information available and make students feel pressured to take a certain post-16 path.

One apprentice shared with us that because they were achieving high grades, they were told not to do an apprenticeship but to do A-levels instead. The advisor refused to acknowledge that the student was choosing an apprenticeship because it was the more accessible option for them and continued to argue that they were making the wrong decision. If this student wasn't so certain on the path that was right for them, this meeting could have changed their mind and left them in a less accessible environment.

It's essential that advisors provide students with a full menu of options, empowering them to make their own decision – rather than push them down the path they believe is correct. Advisors also cannot be motivated by biased assumptions – particularly when it comes to the presumed ability of Disabled students.

II. Ableist assumptions are an issue.

Pushing students down one specific path is even more concerning when the advisor's assumption is based on ableist misconceptions.

Disabled students are often discouraged from taking the A-Level/Higher Education route because the assumption is that BTECs are the only route appropriate for SEND students. Equally, as highlighted in the example above, sometimes students' access needs are ignored because the assumption is that high attainment levels can only go towards A-Levels and not apprenticeships.

Any assumptions about a student, or what they should do at post-16, is unhelpful – especially if those assumptions are motivated by ableist attitudes.

III. Agency staff don't know the students personally.

Careers advisors often visit from external agencies, and therefore don't know the students they're meeting with.

This can mean that time is wasted when students need to explain their background, but it can also often lead to unhelpful assumptions about their ability and what post-16 route they should be taking.

IV. SEND specific advisors could be beneficial.

Although bias across careers advisors must be tackled, SEND careers advisors could also be beneficial. Not dissimilar to the specialist advisors for those with disabilities at the Job Centre - students could have the choice to meet with a SEND careers advisor who would have a better awareness of all the support options available in the next step of education.

Additionally – all careers advisors should receive training on this so they're aware of all the options available to a Disabled student.

V. Currently students experience an inconsistent journey with careers advisors.

One of the main issues raised in our Disabled Apprenticeship Network was the fact that students aren't given enough opportunities to see a careers advisor. Often students meet with an advisor once or twice in their entire education career.

Students should first meet careers advisors in year 9 (as they choose their GCSE options), and then as many times as they'd feel it would be useful throughout their education and/or apprenticeship/traineeship. Regular opportunities should be made available should a student want further advice, particularly if they decide to change their options and want advice on a new path. The information provided online should also be regularly updated, as it is often out of date and no longer relevant.

March 2022