

A new approach to get adults with learning disabilities into work

27th August, 2020 by [Katharinet](#)

Digital Unite is leading a new skills programme to help adults with mild or moderate learning disabilities into work and enable organisations to benefit from a thriving and valuable workforce.

There are an estimated 800,000 working age people with mild-to-moderate learning disabilities in the UK but only 17% are in work¹. The onset of Covid-19 means that people with learning disabilities are at further risk of being excluded from work opportunities due to the increasing reliance on digital skills, the move to remote working and rising unemployment.

Many people with learning disabilities want to work to have a fulfilling and independent life and, with the right support, they can provide organisations with a motivated and reliable workforce.

Digital Unite's new programme, DCN Aspire, has been funded by the Ufi Charitable Trust, and created in partnership with [Mencap](#) and [RIX](#), the specialist research and development centre. DCN stands for Digital Champions Network, Digital Unite's award-winning online learning platform. Aspire defines the way the collaborative programme aims to modernise traditional workplace training for people with learning disabilities and enable them to be part of new and changing work environments.

Realising new workplace opportunities for employers and people with learning disabilities

DCN Aspire will offer flexible and expert online training for people with learning disabilities and organisations who support or employ them.

The programme will have two key aspects:

- Training people with learning disabilities as coaches and mentors (Champions). By helping

them develop important social, digital and workplace skills, they will gain confidence and knowledge to move into work placements and volunteering roles as a vital stepping-stone towards long-term employment. As they progress, they'll collect accreditation, certificates and badges to create a tangible record of their achievements for prospective employers.

- Mobilising and training a wider network of Champions, from all backgrounds and abilities, who can provide enhanced one-on-one support to people with learning disabilities. Staff, carers, volunteers and families will learn how to help them overcome common personal challenges and develop essential vocational skills such as job searching and building CVs. It will help organisations to maximise the potential of these excellent employees and strengthen and diversify their workforce.

The proven success of a Digital Champion approach

Digital Unite has been providing digital skills support for 25 years. Its Digital Champions Network was launched in 2013 and is used by hundreds of organisations to train thousands of staff and volunteers as confident and effective Digital Champions.

Existing Champion programmes show that both the training and volunteering develops many skills needed in work and allows someone to build an employment portfolio of experience and capability. The Network already has relevant training credentials with its existing online course on supporting people with learning disabilities being recommended by 96% of the 738 people who have completed it to date.

"I recommend this course as I have a learning disability myself and also anxiety. It's helped me be more confident in helping others with disabilities and I hope to get a job soon" Cheryl Ann, Digital Champion

In 2019, Digital Unite also worked with Mencap and other organisations on a six month discovery project to understand the specific needs of people with learning disabilities, organisations and employers in a Champion model. This study confirmed that a Champion role is both feasible and useful for a person with a learning disability and that it can lead to employment opportunities.

Kathy Valdes, Programme Director at Digital Unite said: "We are very excited to be developing this new training and skills programme and to explore the benefits of a Digital Champion approach for people with learning disabilities. Being a Champion or mentor gives them the chance to show what they can do. Having Champion support enables them and their employers and supporters to realise their potential. Both approaches inspire confidence amongst individuals and organisations and help people with learning disabilities get one step closer to their goal of paid employment."

Be part of DCN Aspire

If you are

- an organisation supporting people with learning disabilities,
- a supported employment agency, or
- an employer looking to recruit people with learning disabilities into your workforce

then get in touch to find out how DCN Aspire can help you.

Contact the Digital Unite team at du@digitalunite.com or 0800 228 9272.

↑Measures from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, England 2017-18