

MAKING CAREER EDUCATION OUTREACH INCLUSIVE



Practical Adaptation Guide for Employers Supporting SEND Learners
Simple steps, quick wins, and confidence-building strategies for inclusive placements and encounters.

Your involvement plays an important role in helping young people build confidence, develop workplace readiness, and take meaningful next steps towards adulthood.

Welcome

Thank you for offering your time, experience, and opportunities to young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This guide provides quick, practical advice to help you feel confident and supported when welcoming SEND learners for encounters, visits, or work placements. You don't need to be a SEND expert — just willing to listen, communicate clearly, and adapt where needed. Small changes make a big difference.

Understanding Common SEND Needs

These descriptions are not labels — they simply highlight the kinds of adjustments that may support participation and progress in a workplace setting.

Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) - Learners may take longer to grasp new information and benefit from clear, structured tasks and repetition.

Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) - Learners may need high levels of support and simplified, hands-on activities with strong routines.

Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) - Learners often have significant physical or sensory needs and benefit from short, sensory-based experiences.

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) - Learners may prefer predictable routines and clear communication; sensory environments can be challenging.

Speech, Language & Communication Needs (SLCN) - Learners may find it hard to process or express spoken language, needing visual support and extra thinking time.

Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) - Learners may experience anxiety, frustration, or low confidence and respond best to positive, consistent relationships.

Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs – Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia) - Learners may have difficulties with reading, writing, coordination, or sequencing but strong verbal or creative skills.

Sensory or Physical Needs - Learners may need adjustments to the environment, equipment, or layout to move and participate safely and comfortably.

Adaptation Ideas by Need

Adjustments are not about lowering expectations — they are about making the experience accessible so that learners can demonstrate their strengths.

MLD

Use step-by-step visual task lists. Repeat instructions and break down complex tasks. Offer practical, hands-on work with routine and structure. Allow extra time to process new information.

SLD

Use concrete, hands-on activities with repetition. Communicate with body language and modelling. Offer one-to-one support or small group tasks. Use familiar routines and sensory materials.

PMLD

Focus on sensory experiences (sound, light, touch). Use simple cause-and-effect activities. Keep sessions short with clear beginnings and endings. Work closely with staff who know the learner well.

ASC

Share photos and a 'what to expect' guide before visits. Keep environments predictable and minimise sensory overload. Provide quiet areas for breaks. Assign a calm, consistent mentor.

SEMH

Offer a consistent adult mentor. Provide positive feedback and celebrate effort. Include movement breaks or outdoor tasks. Maintain structure but remain empathetic.

SLCN

Speak slowly and clearly; avoid jargon. Use visuals or key-word cards. Allow processing time before expecting responses. Model tasks visually rather than explaining verbally.

Sensory or Physical Needs

Ensure full accessibility (ramps, lifts, toilets). Adjust lighting, sound levels, and seating. Provide adapted equipment or assistive tech. Offer flexible pacing and rest breaks.

SpLDs

Provide written info in plain fonts (Arial, size 14+). Use checklists or flow charts instead of long text. Allow verbal or practical responses rather than written. Provide extra time for reading or sequencing tasks.

Top 10 Universal Adjustments that Support Confidence and Progress

1. Visuals over words
2. Consistent routines
3. Plain, concrete language
4. Clear start and finish to each task
5. Predictable schedules
6. Extra time for transitions
7. A calm, patient mentor
8. Movement or sensory breaks
9. Positive feedback for effort
10. Pre-briefs and debriefs every time

Inclusive Communication Tips for Employers

Small adjustments to the way we speak and listen can remove barriers instantly.

✓ Do:

- Speak clearly and slowly. Use plain language, avoid long sentences, and check understanding regularly.
- Use names. Address the learner directly to build connection and trust.
- Give one instruction at a time. Break down information into simple steps.
- Show rather than tell. Demonstrate tasks, use visuals, or model examples.
- Allow thinking time. Pause before expecting a response — silence is okay.
- Use positive body language. Smile, encourage, and stay calm even if the learner hesitates.
- Check understanding gently. Try “Can you show me what you’ll do next?” rather than “Do you understand?”

⊘ Don't:

- Assume comprehension. Always check for understanding rather than asking yes/no questions.
- Use slang, idioms, or sarcasm. Phrases like “pull your socks up” or “give it a shot” can confuse.
- Talk about the learner instead of to them. Always include them in the conversation — they should lead their own experience.
- Overload with instructions. Too much information at once can cause anxiety.
- Raise your voice. If someone doesn't understand, rephrase rather than repeat louder.

How Schools and Colleges Can Support You

You can ask the school to provide the following to help ensure success:

- A short learner profile (strengths, interests, communication preferences).
- A pre-placement briefing call or meeting.
- A named staff contact or job coach during visits.
- Visual task cards or step-by-step lists for learners.
- A clear daily schedule and key contact details.
- Advice on any sensory or physical adjustments required.
- Feedback templates or reflection forms after the encounter.

Remember — this is a partnership. Schools and colleges remain responsible for planning, coordination and ongoing review of support. Your role is to provide real work experiences and honest feedback — not to carry risk alone.

Employer Confidence Checklist - Confidence grows when expectations, support and communication are clear at every stage.

Before the Encounter

- ☐ Received learner profile and contact details from school
- ☐ Confirmed activity, timings and location
- ☐ Checked accessibility and space layout
- ☐ Briefed staff or mentor supporting the learner
- ☐ Prepared visuals or examples of tasks where possible

During the Encounter / Placement

- ☐ Welcomed learner warmly and introduced team
- ☐ Used clear, simple instructions and visuals
- ☐ Offered reassurance and positive feedback
- ☐ Allowed short breaks if needed
- ☐ Checked learner understanding regularly

After the Experience

- ☐ Shared feedback with the school
- ☐ Reflected on what worked well
- ☐ Expressed interest in future involvement

Schools and colleges design:
Preparation + Access
Employers provide:
Experience
Support is shared when needed.

Final Thoughts

Inclusion isn't about doing more — it's about designing experiences that allow every young person to participate, grow in confidence, and take sustainable next steps. Thank you for opening your doors to SEND learners and helping shape their future.

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