

Training and working in the fitness and leisure sector

Guide A: For Disabled People



An evidence-based guide published by

Aspire

Informed by independent
leisure sector research



UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH



Durham
University

Forewords

The Aspire Leisure Centre has been employing disabled people in a variety of staff roles since the early 1990's.

In addition to being a national spinal injury charity and inclusive community leisure facility, Aspire pioneered a pan-disability leisure workforce programme, called, 'InstructAbility'. The programme enabled hundreds of disabled people with physical, sensory, cognitive and mental health difficulties, to gain industry qualifications and subsequent employment with a vast range of leisure operators.

We know disabled people can become talented fitness and leisure professionals, but we also know there can be barriers to gaining qualifications and work in the sector. We have

created this Guide, based on research with disabled people and those involved in leisure sector training, recruitment and employment. It is full of recommendations and practical advice, for every step of the journey.

We have also created Guides for training providers and employers so they can ensure the sector becomes more accessible and inclusive.

If you are a disabled person who is passionate and committed to supporting other people to get and stay active, the sector needs you!

Brian Carlin

Aspire CEO

Hilary Farmiloe

InstructAbility Strategic Lead



“ To reduce the unacceptable participation gap that exists between disabled and non-disabled people we need a more diverse workforce. This programme has been a game changer, providing career opportunities to disabled

people and creating more accessible and welcoming training environments and places for people to be active. We are proud to have invested in ‘InstructAbility’ and will strive, alongside our partners, to ensure these guidelines, based on extensive research

with disabled people, are a key tool to enable our sector to become more diverse. ”

Tim Hollingsworth
Sport England CEO

“ CIMSPA is the professional development body for the UK’s sport and physical activity sector, committed to developing and enabling professionals and organisations to succeed and, as a result, inspire our nation to become more active. As your chartered institute, we are here for the whole sector’s development, working to make sure

that we represent a diverse sector that everyone wants to be a part of. Working alongside Aspire, it is important to us that we can help everyone find a course and support their journey to employment in inclusive, accessible and welcoming training environments. CIMSPA are supportive of Aspire’s new guidelines which are a great toolkit for ensuring

that the sector is accessible to everyone working in it. It’s essential as a sector that career opportunities are accessible and that our workforce footprint is representative of the society that we serve. ”

Tara Dillon
CIMSPA CEO

“ ukactive exists to improve the health of the nation by promoting active lifestyles. We do this by supporting our members with services to help them grow, and facilitating partnerships for a broad range of organisations, all of which support our mission to get more people, more active, more often. We want to encourage and celebrate

inclusion and diversity, and are committed to ensuring that more people from all backgrounds are more active. And that is why we support Aspire’s Industry Guidance and ‘InstructAbility’ programme with the ambition to create a sector that is equally and freely accessed by disabled people, enabling them to participate

in whatever capacity they wish. Together, we can make sure that everyone has the opportunity to discover and enjoy the mental and physical benefits of physical activity. ”

Huw Edwards
CEO ukactive



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Using this Guide



This Guide is one part of a three-part publication:

- **Guide A:** For disabled people.
- **Guide B:** For training providers & awarding organisations.
- **Guide C:** For fitness and leisure sector employers.

Guide A is for you if you are:

A disabled person wanting to:

- Become a qualified fitness professional and / or gain other industry-specific fitness and leisure qualifications.
- Gain voluntary or paid employment in the fitness industry.

This Guide is also a useful reference for an individual or organisation that advises disabled people about training and employment.

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this Guide is to offer information and recommendations for undertaking training and seeking employment in the fitness and leisure sector. We will refer to the fitness and leisure sector to mean training and job roles related to physical exercise (e.g., gym instructor, personal trainer, swimming teacher, group exercise leader). The research evidence for the content of this document (**see Section 15**),

and the examples, quotes and case study, are drawn from this industry. Some of the content, however, might also be useful if you wish to pursue training, apprenticeships, or employment in the wider professional sport and coaching sector.

Other information

Throughout this Guide we will refer to 'disabled people' to mean:

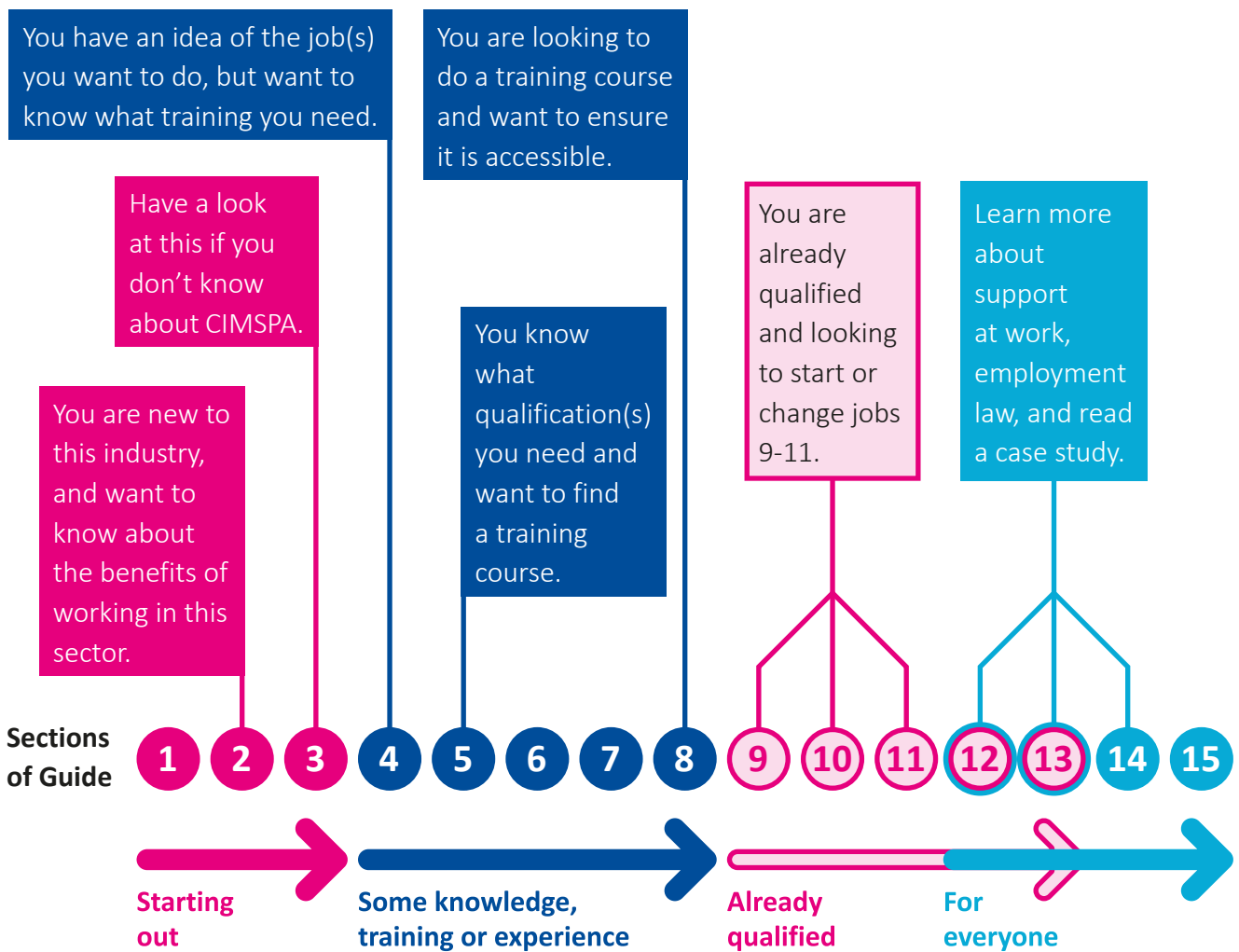
- People with a visible or non-visible impairment, illness, health condition or differing function,
- in combination with social and material barriers,
- that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' adverse effect on their ability to perform typical day-to-day activities.

References to additional useful information have a website address and a direct hyperlink to the page for those using digital devices. If the page is moved on an organisation's website the link will no longer work. In this instance, we suggest you contact the organisation directly for the information.

References and links to websites in this Guide do not imply endorsement or support of any of the linked information, services, products, or providers.

Using different sections of this Guide

This Guide takes you from the beginning to the end of a journey. It starts with information about training and qualifications and ends with information about being employed within the fitness and leisure sector. Depending on your previous experience you may not need to read it all. You can use the different sections over time, and in any order, as necessary.



Benefits of working in the leisure sector



The fitness and leisure industry in the UK has over 7000 fitness facilities, more than 10 million memberships and a £5.1 billion market value. An estimated 500,000 individuals are employed in the sector. There are many varied roles and opportunities at every level, for everyone.

1. Work in a large, diverse, fast-growing and secure industry.
2. Join a professional industry where qualifications are recognised by a chartered institute.
3. Improve your own, and other people's health and well-being.
4. Use your life experiences to engage and encourage others to be physically active.
5. Work in a fun, fast-paced and dynamic environment.
6. Engage with a wide range of different people.
7. Develop and apply your knowledge of health, fitness, science, psychology and management.
8. Challenge yourself and develop leadership skills.
9. Follow clear and progressive career pathways.
10. Work flexibly and independently.
11. Apply any unique knowledge and skills (such as British Sign Language, alternative technologies, adapting exercise).
12. Be a role model for others who want to get active or work in the sector.
13. Have your unique experience of disability and exercise valued by an employer.



What disabled employees say...

What leisure operators say...

The training changed my outlook and the way I do things now, for myself and others. I have improved myself and learnt new things.

I love my job as a fitness instructor. It has changed my life and helped me feel better about myself.

I didn't want to go to the gym because it was awkward, intimidating and everyone looked the same. If other disabled people see me working here, then I hope they will want to come more.

From the comments I have had about my classes, I think I have made a difference to other disabled and non-disabled people.

I think it's a savvy business move to actively seek somebody with experience of disability to work in a gym.

I can contribute. I can do this job. And so can many others in the same position.

Our disabled receptionist is serving customers at the front end and if it's your first time or you're disabled yourself, it just makes you feel at ease and more comfortable.

There are no issues that would make us think 'oh no it's not a good idea' to hire a disabled person. It shows that we're an inclusive facility, and our customers have staff they can relate to.

There was probably lots of disabled people that just wouldn't even dream of coming to the gym, and I think having disabled gym instructors is breaking down some of those barriers.

Job roles in the sector



Getting started

If you are new to the industry we suggest following these steps to get started:

1. Look at what different job roles involve (this section).
2. Check what training and qualifications you need (see Section 4).
3. Find out how to gain the training and qualifications (see Section 5).

Job roles

The fitness and leisure industry offers opportunities to train and work in many roles as an instructor or coach as well as a diverse range of leadership positions. See examples on page 11.

Getting started in the sector might also lead to other leisure related careers such as; journalism, marketing, events, technology, manufacturing & retail, human resources etc.



Sport & Physical Activity Sector Roles

Education

- Primary PE Co-ordinator
- Secondary PE Teacher
- College Tutor
- University Lecturer
- Academic Researcher
- Tutor/Assessor

Fitness

- Gym Instructor
- Fitness Instructor
- Personal Trainer
- Group Exercise Leader

Health & Wellbeing

- Tai-chi/Yoga/Pilates Instructor
- Exercise Therapist
- Exercise Health Specialist
(e.g., GP referral, cardiac, stroke, cancer)
- Special Population Instructor
(e.g., pregnancy, older age, disability)
- Health Trainer

Leisure

- Receptionist
- Recreation Assistant
- Lifeguard
- Swimming Teacher
- Pool Plant Operative

Outdoor

- Outdoor Activity Instructor
- Outdoor Activity Leader
- Mountain Leader

Community Sport

- Activity Leader
- Community Activator
- Assistant Sports Coach
- Senior Sports Coach

Elite Sport

- Performance Coach
- Strength and Conditioning Coach
- Performance Analyst
- Sports Physiologist/Psychologist

Entry Manager

- Membership Co-ordinator
- Duty Manager
- Team Leader

Operation/Department Manager

- General Manager
- Facility Manager
- Sports Development Manager

Senior Manager

- Chief Executive Officer
- Director of Operations
- Managing Director

Other related roles

- Journalist
- Sports Agent
- Sport Lawyer
- Marketing
- Human Resources

Understanding job roles

To get an idea of what the job entails and what the training will include try the following:

1

You can view the CIMSPA Professional Standards ¹ required for a range of job roles.

2

View training course descriptions on training provider websites.

3

Look at current job adverts ([see Section 9](#) for where to look) to find out more about the skills, experience, qualifications and career pathways for different roles.

4

Look at case studies about other disabled people's experiences and achievements.

[InstructAbility](#) ², [Activity Alliance](#) ³ and [Disability Sports Coach](#) ⁴ websites.

There is also a case study at the back of this guide.

If you perceive any barriers to doing the job, try to keep an open mind and think about what adaptations/adjustments could be made to make the job accessible. Be prepared to discuss these with a potential employer. There may be some jobs that may be less feasible (e.g., a visually impaired person undertaking lifeguard duties).



Your Chartered Institute

A great place to start is with The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA). This is the professional body for the UK's sport and physical activity sector. CIMSPA provides leadership and support for professionals working in sport and physical activity. Click on the 'For Individuals' tab on the [CIMSPA website](#).⁵

It is recommended that all individuals striving to work in the industry should become a member of CIMSPA and be listed in the directory of qualified exercise and fitness professionals recognised by CIMSPA.

Here is a direct link to the [CIMSPA Directory](#).⁶

Career advice

We recommend you take this Guide with you to any appointments. Most career advisors do not have specialist knowledge about working in the fitness and leisure industry. This Guide may help you consider your options together.

Organisations that may be able to offer advice include:

- [National Careers Service](#).⁷
- A work coach at your local Jobcentre can arrange an interview with a disability employment advisor. [JCP Disability Employment Guide](#).⁸
- [Guidance about Looking for Work if Disabled](#).⁹
- [MyPlus Students' Club](#)¹⁰ is a careers website for disabled students looking for further training, jobs and career / networking events.
- Awarding organisations and training providers offering fitness and leisure industry qualifications provide information about careers in the sector. You might find the following links helpful:
 - [YMCA Awards](#).¹¹
 - [ActiveIQ](#).¹²
 - [Swim England](#).¹³
 - [The Training Room](#).¹⁴

Section 3 References

- www.cimspa.co.uk/standards
- www.instructability.org.uk
- www.activityalliance.org.uk
- www.disabilitysportscoach.co.uk
- www.cimspa.co.uk
- www.cimspa.co.uk/directories
- <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>
- www.jobcentreguide.co.uk
- <https://www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/work>
- www.myplusstudentsclub.com
- www.ymcaawards.co.uk
- www.activeiq.co.uk
- www.swimming.org
- www.thetrainingroom.com

Training requirements



The journey to becoming a fitness and leisure professional begins with completing one or more of the numerous qualifications available. You don't always need to start at level 1. For some courses you can start at Level 2, or start with a Level 3 course that includes Level 2. Check each course for specific entry criteria.

6-8

Level 6-8 includes Senior Management roles such as Group Manager / Chief Executive Officer / Chief Operating Officer.

Standard: You will work to a level similar to a degree (BA, MA, PHD).

4-5

Level 4/5 includes Entry / Middle Management roles such as Duty Manager / Centre Manager and specialisms such as long term health conditions. e.g., Obesity & Diabetes, Cardiac Care, Lower Back Pain.

Standard: You will work to a level similar to vocational qualification levels 4-5, foundation degree, HND.

3

Level 3 is an advanced level qualification that builds upon Level 2 training. **Qualifications** include Personal Training and working with special populations such as GP referral, Aspiring Manager roles such as Fitness Manager and Team Leader.

Standard: You will work to a level similar to A Level.

2

Level 2 is an entry level qualification, which is usually the minimum level required to work unsupervised. **Qualifications** include Lifeguard, Sports Coach, Swimming Teacher, Gym or Group Exercise Instructor. Once qualified you can take additional Level 2 courses such as Kettlebells, Studio Cycling and Circuit Training to widen your skill set.

Standard: You will work to a level similar to GCSE grade 9-4.

1

Level 1 is an introduction to working in the sector and qualifies you to assist with session delivery. **Qualifications** include Assistant Swimming Teacher, Assisting Health Related Activity.

Standard: You will work to a level similar to GCSE grade 3-1.

Look on the [government website](#) ¹⁵ for more information about what the levels mean, and to determine what level is suitable for you to begin at. Once you have decided what qualification you need to suit your level of learning, existing qualifications and desired job role (see also **Section 10** for current job adverts which will outline the qualifications required), you can start searching for the right training course for you.

Section 4 References

15. www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels

Finding a training course



Types of courses

There are different routes to gaining a qualification with varying eligibility, content, timing and funding. These include:

- A stand-alone course with a private training provider, such as Level 2 Gym Instructor Course which can be completed within 2 weeks or longer depending on the study option. Also available at colleges.
- A further education college course such as Level 2 Leisure which is at least 1-year full time or equivalent.
- A university degree course such as Sports Science / Sport Development / Sport and Leisure Management which is at least 3 years full time or equivalent.
- An apprenticeship, which is a paid employer-based training programme for at least 1-year full time or equivalent (see Section 7).

Training providers

- Many training providers exist all across the country, and offer a wide variety of courses to suit all levels and interests. They vary in type of organisation and include schools, colleges, universities, commercial training providers and work-based organisations.
- You can find CIMSPA endorsed training providers listed in the [CIMSPA Partner Directory](#). ¹⁶



Awarding organisations

■ An awarding organisation is a body that creates and awards the qualifications. Awarding bodies do not deliver the training courses that lead to the qualification - that is the role of the training provider. But importantly, the awarding organisation provides the approval process to ensure that training providers (that deliver the qualification to you) maintain the quality and standards of the qualification at the highest level. Awarding bodies, in other words, help you know that a training provider is good and trustworthy. It is recommended that you carefully read about the awarding organisation.

- You can find CIMSPA endorsed awarding organisations in the [CIMSPA Partner Directory](#). ¹⁷ Click to see more details on each awarding organisation, and a list of the qualifications offered. You will then be able to click to that specific awarding organisation's website and find out more about:
- The content of the courses and the types of assessments that you will be required to complete.
 - Training providers (sometimes called training centres) who deliver the courses.
 - Their policy on adjustments. If you cannot find it contact the awarding organisation.

Section 5 References

16. www.cimspa.co.uk/directories
17. www.cimspa.co.uk/directories



Other things to consider

Training providers can offer the same courses and qualifications, or sometimes very similar sounding ones. Disabled people who have completed fitness and leisure industry qualifications recommend you consider the following when deciding on a course:

- ▀ **Qualification:** Does successful completion of this course offer a specific recognised qualification? Some courses may be Continued Professional Development (CPD) courses and may not offer a formal qualification at the end. Consider whether you require a recognised formal qualification and if so, choose a course which provides this.
- ▀ **Course delivery:** What are the teaching methods used during the training? Will it be classroom and / or practical based (e.g., in the gym, swimming pool, studio)? Is the course delivered via face-to-face contact, or are there any distance learning or online elements?
- ▀ **Other training requirements:** Are you required (or do you have the opportunity) as part of this qualification to do any work placements or outreach / community-based work?
- ▀ **Course timings and location:** When does the course start and finish? What are the days and hours of the training course on a day-to-day basis? What location(s) will you be required to go to for training and assessments?



- **Further qualifications:** Does the training provider offer follow-on qualifications if you wish to continue with further training after you have completed your chosen course? What other courses are offered and are discounts available for enrolling on further courses?
- **Provision of information:** Does the training provider have a good website and strong social media profile offering enough information? Have you got all the information you need about this course?
- **Application and selection process:** When do applications open and close and what do you need to do to apply? What criteria are applications judged on? Are there any qualifications or skills that you need to have before starting the course? Will there be any selection tests or interviews?
- **Terms and conditions:** Does the training provider have a document of terms and conditions that you need to be aware of? This may cover things like what to do if you want to change courses, cancellation periods if you change your mind about completing a course, payments of fees, and options for reassessments if you fail exams.
- **Testimonials:** What are current learners saying about the courses, the tutors, the assessments, their own experiences of learning and what the course / qualification has led them to achieve?
- **Funding:** Does the training provider offer any funding opportunities to support learners, and if so, what criteria are you required to meet? **See Section 7** on funding for information about financial support.
- **Accessibility:** Will this course be accessible? Are the training provider's website and social media accessible for your impairment / condition? For more information about accessibility considerations when selecting a training course please **see Section 8**.

Once you have found a potentially suitable training course, take your time to ensure it is right for you. If in doubt about any of the questions above, find a contact telephone number or email address and get in touch with the training provider (centre) directly. Many training providers have specific advisors trained to assist potential new learners. They will be able to support you in making the right choices. You might want to use the above questions to guide your conversations with them. Ask if they can send you any additional information that you can digest in your own time to help you make an informed decision.

Funding for training

Many disabled students have reported that they would have found it difficult to complete training courses without some financial support. Below are some potential funding streams that you may be able to access to support your learning.

It is, however, important to note that each option may have:

- Open and closing dates for applications, and that some funding options may not always be available.
- A number of eligibility criteria (and therefore not all learners will be able to access the support), for example:
 - Course length, level and full- or part-time status.
 - Your income and personal circumstances.
 - Availability for students living in certain geographical regions.
 - Previous training or education level.



- A requirement to pay back the loan in a certain manner or once you meet a certain income level.
- Conditions that you progress into a relevant paid or voluntary role (or complete a set number of job applications) within a specific period of time following completion of the training course.

You can check these details by contacting the training provider directly or by seeking advice from the organisations listed in previous **Section 3** on **career advice**.

Find out if there is any support, such as bursaries or loans towards tuition and / or examination fees, towards specialist equipment, or fee payment plan.



Potential funding options

1. Government 16-19 bursary fund

If you are aged 16-19 and studying in a publicly funded college in England (not a University), or are completing unpaid work experience, this bursary may offer financial support towards education-related costs, for example clothing, books, equipment and travel.

If you are over 19, you can apply for a discretionary bursary if you are either continuing on a course that you started aged 16-18, or if you have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Find out more at:

[Bursary Fund.](#) ¹⁸

[Special Educational Needs.](#) ¹⁹

2. Government advanced learner loan

This type of loan is non-means tested (i.e. does not depend on your income and credit checks), and is available if you are 19 or over, and undertaking a Level 3, 4, 5 or 6 course with an approved college or training provider in England. You do not need to borrow the total cost of the course, you can borrow as much as you need, and pay for some yourself. You will need to check with the specific training provider that your chosen course qualifies for this loan. For more information visit: [Advanced Learner Loan.](#) ²⁰

Some training providers might have information about these loans on their websites. For example, see [YMCAfit.](#) ²¹

3. Student tuition fee loan and maintenance loan

New full-time or part-time students attending college or university in England may be able to apply for a tuition fee loan and / or a maintenance loan to support their learning. More information can be found at: [Student Loan](#) ²² and [Student Finance.](#) ²³

Additional financial support may be available for students with a low income, students with children or dependent adults, and for disabled students (see point 4 below).

[Extra Help.](#) ²⁴

4. Government disabled students' allowance

This type of allowance may be available on top of your other student finance (described in point 3 above), to cover some of the extra costs because of a mental health condition, long term illness or any other impairment. You will not need to repay this allowance back. Find more information at [Student Allowances.](#) ²⁵

5. Learner support

If you're aged 19 or over, on a further education course and facing financial hardship, you could apply for learner support directly through your training provider. To get learner support you must be studying with a training provider funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (check with your training provider). Funding depends on your personal circumstances and can be used to pay for accommodation and travel, and course materials and equipment. For more information visit [Learner Support](#).²⁶

6. Charitable funding

Some charities might allow individuals to apply for grants to support their learning. Seek guidance from disability charities and organisations specific to your impairment or locality.

7. Apprenticeships

A number of fitness and leisure industry organisations offer apprenticeships where you gain training and qualifications while getting paid to do the job. For more information go to the [apprenticeships website](#).²⁷

Additionally, you can search online for apprenticeships in your area, using keywords such as fitness, leisure and sport. You can also narrow the search to show disability confident organisations. To conduct a search for current apprenticeship opportunities, visit [Apprenticeships](#).²⁸

Some training providers also list opportunities for apprenticeships with their industry partners, for example: [Lifetime Training](#)²⁹ and [YMCA Training](#).³⁰

Section 7 References

18. www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund
19. www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help
20. www.gov.uk/advanced-learner-loan
21. www.ymcafit.org.uk/courses/payment-funding/advanced-learner-loan
22. www.gov.uk/get-undergraduate-student-loan
23. www.gov.uk/student-finance
24. www.gov.uk/student-finance/extra-help
25. www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas
26. www.gov.uk/learner-support
27. www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships
28. www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship
29. www.lifetimetraining.co.uk/apprenticeship-vacancies/fitness-vacancies/
30. <https://www.ymca.co.uk/apprenticeships/fitness-leisure-apprenticeships>



Accessibility of training

If you are likely to require any support or adjustments it is highly recommended that you discuss this with the training provider before you book onto a course and pay any fees. Sharing information about your impairment can help you in a variety of ways even if you don't anticipate needing any additional support / adjustments **(see Section 11)**. Whilst the onus is on the training provider to provide adjustments where required, we suggest the following steps to help you and the training provider understand what is required for you to be able to complete the training and gain the qualification:

- Contact the training provider directly by telephone or email to ask any questions or discuss concerns.
- Be open and confident in speaking about your impairment / condition, and ask about what support and adjustments they can provide.
- If you have completed any training / qualifications before, think about what adjustments you required previously, and let the training provider know about some specific examples of how they can best support you.
- It might be that the training provider has not had a learner with your specific impairment before. You are best placed to know what you need. Tell them as much as you are able, so that they can support you throughout.
- Find out how the adjustments and support are identified and recorded.

Questions to ask

Other disabled people who have undertaken fitness and leisure industry qualifications also recommend asking the following questions (dependent on your specific impairment and requirements):

Questions about booking process, selection process and induction:

- Are the resources and information available in an accessible format that suits me?
- Can I book on a course via a method that suits me e.g., online, hard copy via post, over the telephone?
- Can any pre-course selection, induction assessments or interviews be made accessible for me in a suitable location and environment?

Questions about the training venue:

- Is the venue accessible to me?
- Is there accessible parking or public transport links?
- What are the different areas I will be using and can I easily get around?
- Will I have access to lifts / toilets / changing room / lockers?

AccessAble ³¹ is a free online accessibility checker offering detailed Access Guides for thousands of places across the UK including training and leisure centres.

Also see **Activity Alliance** ³² which has a list of accessible gyms.

Questions about the timetable:

- Do the start and finish times enable me to travel to and from the location easily?
- Can rest breaks be provided if I need them? (e.g., to take medication, use the toilet, have some rest or digest information.)

Questions about classroom teaching:

- Are learning resources such as manuals, diagrams, handouts, available in alternative formats such as large print or digital versions?
- Can I access online e-learning portals? Are they compatible with any specialist technology I use?

- Can I receive PowerPoint slides in advance or following the session if required?
- Can I use a laptop or recording device or any other equipment I require?
- Can my support worker assist me?
- Do they have any other additional materials or equipment I need?
- How will the training provider support me during online / distance learning elements?

Questions about practical-based teaching:

- How much of the course is practical work. e.g., in the gym, studio or pool?
- Is the practical environment accessible to me?
- Are there any elements that might require adjustment due to noise levels, poor lighting or busy environments?
- What adjustments do I require for the teaching and assessments that happens in these locations?
- Do I need additional support for a hearing or visual impairment?
- Will the training provider / tutor consider any physical impairments when designing the practical teaching activities and assessments for this course?

Questions about assessment:

- What are the assessment methods?
- How are assessments submitted or conducted?
- Can I submit coursework in a different format (online or in a hard copy)?
- Will I be given extra time or a reader / scribe support during examinations?
- Will I need adjustments to be made, or additional support to be available for practical examinations in a gym or pool setting?

Other impairment-specific questions:

- Is there a hearing loop installed at the training location?
- Will it be possible to bring my Assistance dog?
- Will I be able to access refreshments?
- Are there functioning lifts and accessible toilets if I am required to use facilities not on the ground floor?

- What if I need to miss a day of training because I feel unwell, or have an appointment? What if I need to postpone my training because I become ill or require an operation? Ask about the training provider's policies for supporting candidates who miss sessions or need to rearrange training and assessments. Ask whether there are any implications for the length of time to complete the qualification or cost of the course.
- Will the tutors be supportive of my impairment / condition? Do they have any experience of delivering training to disabled people?

Any training provider endorsed by CIMSPA would be expected to be inclusive in their approach and make reasonable adjustments where required. If you experience an issue that you are unable to resolve with the training provider you can contact CIMSPA. If a resolution isn't found you can follow [CIMSPA's formal complaint process](#).³³

Section 8 References

- 31. www.accessable.co.uk
- 32. <http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/get-active/inclusive-gyms>
- 33. <https://www.cimspa.co.uk/about/governance/member-and-partner-codes-and-policies>





Finding a job

It is important to consider your next steps to employment in the industry as soon as possible. Ideally do not wait until you have finished your qualification to start looking.

- Ask your course tutors and training provider advisors if they know about any placements or job opportunities.
- Some training courses might be delivered at fitness and leisure centres, so enquire with the venue directly about potential placements or job opportunities that you could undertake during or after your training course.
- Enquire with other fitness providers (gyms, leisure centres, swimming pools, sports centres) local to you about potential placements or job opportunities.
- Consider a work placement. This is a good starting point for employers to see what you are capable of and it can also provide you with a useful reference for future job applications. Agree a set time period for the placement with a discussion about job opportunities at the end.
- Be available for cover work. The more flexible you can be, the more chance you will have of picking up shifts as a casual member of staff. You are then likely to be considered when more hours or a full-time or part-time role becomes available.
- Ask about volunteer roles - If you would rather be a volunteer rather than an employee find out what opportunities exist or suggest some yourself. You may choose to provide extra support to disabled clients or gain skills in another area such as marketing.
- Prepare your CV early so you have information to provide potential employers when making enquiries. If a traditional CV alone doesn't showcase your personality, your abilities, and / or your ideas, then think about how you might be creative to show your skills. For example, creating a YouTube video to share with potential employers along with your CV.
- Look for job adverts on fitness and leisure centre / company websites as well as fitness and leisure sector websites below:
 - Leisure Jobs. 34
 - Leisure People. 35
 - Leisure Opportunities. 36
 - Health Club Management. 37
 - Sports Management. 38
 - UK Coaching. 39
 - UK Sport. 40



Section 9 References

34. www.leisurejobs.com/jobs/fitness-jobs/
35. www.leisurepeople.com/
36. www.leisureopportunities.co.uk
37. www.healthclubmanagement.co.uk/health-club-management-jobs
38. www.sportsmanagement.co.uk/jobs.cfm
39. www.ukcoaching.org/opportunities
40. www.uksport.gov.uk/jobs-in-sport



Before applying for a job

Once you have found a potential job, find out as much as you can about the organisation, the workplace and the job role before you apply. You might do this via the links below, by visiting the venue, and / or contacting the employer to discuss the job role and workplace. Some things to consider include:

The organisation

Find out if the organisation is signed up to any of the following:

- Disability Confident Employer Scheme. ⁴¹
- Mindful Employer Charter. ⁴²
- Equality Standard for Sport. ⁴³

Search the organisation website to see what statements or documents they have on diversity such as:

- Equality policy & statement.
- Diversity action plan.

The workplace

- What travel journey might be required to get to the job location, and is accessible transport / parking available?
- The [AccessAble](#). ⁴⁴ link discussed in **Section 8** might be useful.

- Does the facility have Quest Module G37 Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) Accreditation? This will tell you how accessible and inclusive it is to disabled customers. You can view the details of the [Module Gplus37](#). ⁴⁵
- Check if the organisation is on the Activity Alliance website [list of inclusive gyms](#). ⁴⁶
- Visit the venue to get a feel for the environment, and maybe use the facilities as a customer (enquire if they offer a pay as you go option for customers who don't have a membership).
- If possible, and if you feel comfortable doing so, talk to staff at the venue and find out how they feel about working at the centre, and how they feel about working for that organisation.
- Search the centre website to see how accessible it is, and whether any accessible or inclusive sessions, activities or equipment is offered. This might offer clues as to the organisation's capacity / willingness to make their centre and services accessible and inclusive for disabled customers and employees.

The job role

- What are the desirable and essential criteria for the job?

If you can't meet all the essential elements listed due to an impairment, be prepared to suggest alternative criteria that you can meet, or an alternative way of doing something that is suitable for your impairment. The employer may not have considered other possibilities. You could use the contact details on the job advert to get in touch with the employer and discuss your ideas.

- What is the contract and pay?
Some roles will be offered on a basic hourly rate, such as a gym instructor. Other roles such as a personal trainer will depend on the number of clients and payment of gym rental fees. Consider the difference between a lower but regular income compared to the opportunity of higher pay but with the need to build up your own client base.

- What are the hours/shift patterns?
Some roles will involve weekend and evening shifts when facilities are most busy and may also involve lone working.
- Are there any compulsory training or assessments that you might be required to complete either during the shortlisting process, or if successful, before starting the job?
- If so, clarify what these might involve, where they will take place, and whether any adjustments for your impairment might be necessary.

Section 10 References

- 41. <https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/>
- 42. www.mindfulemployer.net/charter/signatories
- 43. <https://equalityinsport.org/equality-standard-for-sport/>
- 44. www.accessable.co.uk/
- 45. www.questnbs.org
- 46. www.activityalliance.org.uk

Sharing information about your impairment



During the job enquiry and application stages, many disabled people feel conflicted as to whether to speak to a potential employer about their impairment or not. Other disabled people who have applied for jobs within the fitness industry advise:

- Know your rights. Whatever your impairment or health condition you are entitled to be treated equally, with fairness, respect and understanding. Disabled employees and jobseekers are legally protected against discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. ⁴⁷
- Usually there is a question on a job application monitoring form which invites you to tick 'yes' or 'no' as to whether you consider yourself disabled. You can choose whether to or not. Employers must NOT base decisions about selecting candidates for the next stages of the application process based on your answer to this question.

Additional points to note are:

- Generally, it is unlawful for an employer to ask questions about your health, absences from work or disability before offering you employment. Exceptions are:
 - a) Assessing ability to fulfil essential job functions.
 - b) Positive action to provide assistance.
 - c) Confidential diversity data or,
 - d) If lived experience of disability is a requirement of the job.
- If you choose to share information about your health or impairment, an interviewer or employer must not respond by asking further questions about it. It is therefore your decision of when, what and how much to discuss.



Advantages to informing employers about an impairment

Many disabled people recommend being honest and sharing information about your impairment for a number of reasons. You may choose to do this at any stage in the process.

1. Prior to applying

In the same way you might gather information to choose a suitable training course, you might want to contact a potential employer about a job advert before the application deadline closes. This will give you the opportunity to:

- Ask for the documentation (e.g., person specification and job description) in an alternative format if required.
- Ask for an alternative means to apply for the role (e.g., online, hard copy application, over the telephone) if the application processes are not currently accessible to you.
- Find out more about the job role, the specific duties the successful candidate will be required to complete, and the working hours and environment(s).
- Clarify anything that isn't clear on the job description.
- Discuss your impairment with the potential employer before the application stage, and understand what options for adjustments could be made if required. This could help you decide whether this role is right for you or not. And if not, it will save you the time in completing the application and you can continue to look for something suitable.

2. In your job application / prior to interview

By sharing your requirements upfront, the employer should make every possible attempt to ensure that your needs are catered for at the interview. This might include:

- Reserving an accessible parking space.
- Locating the interview near to an accessible toilet.
- Organising any necessary adjustment or support to undertake a facility tour.
- Providing documents in an appropriate format for you.

If you meet the essential criteria, a 'Disability Confident Employer' will guarantee you an interview.

If you have a visible impairment, it will often be immediately apparent at interview and may take the interviewers' focus away from you. Providing some prior information will ensure interviewers are prepared.

3. At interview

An interview provides an opportunity for you and the employer to have a discussion and ask questions. Sharing information about your impairment prior to, or at this stage will allow you and the interviewer to:

- Openly discuss any reasonable workplace adjustments that you will need to do the job.
- Address any health and safety concerns for yourself, other employees, or customers, and discuss the reasonable adjustments that would protect everyone's well-being.
- Address any assumptions the employer may have about disability and how you as a disabled person will be an asset to them.

4. After being offered a job

You might choose to wait until you have been offered a job before talking about an impairment or health condition. Once an employer has offered a candidate a job, whether unconditionally or conditionally, it is at this point that they are permitted to ask appropriate health-related questions. **See Section 12** for further points that you and your employer can discuss before you start in your role.



5. Considering disability as a unique asset

The research showed that disabled instructors often felt that their personal experience of disability and exercise could provide extra benefits to an organisation.

You may want to consider if any of the following points are relevant to your experience and worth sharing with an employer:

- Adapting exercise either for yourself or a disabled client.
- Introducing more inclusive activities that are accessible to people of all abilities.
- Using your personal story to encourage and engage clients.
- Helping colleagues understand about disability and/or adaptive techniques.
- Contributing to an inclusion and diversity committee.

You could choose to talk about your experience at any stage of the process. For example you could:

- Refer to cases in your application.
- Include client testimonials on your CV.
- Discuss examples during interview.
- Seek to contribute and progress in this specialism once employed.

A number of disabled fitness professionals have used their experience of disability and passion for inclusive exercise, to set up their own businesses. Some examples are:

- Michelle Felix at Michelle Felix Group. ⁴⁸
- Stephen Birkby at DAWS. ⁴⁹
- Sam James at Inclusfit. ⁵⁰
- Sam at Geefit. ⁵¹

Section 11 References

- ⁴⁷ www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance
- ⁴⁸ <https://www.michellefelixgroup.com/about-us/>
- ⁴⁹ <https://www.dawssheffield.co.uk/about>

- ⁵⁰ <https://www.inclusfit.co.uk/>
- ⁵¹ <https://www.geefit.co.uk/about/>



After securing a job

What might the induction process involve?

A typical induction process might include being shown how to do some of the following tasks. Consider whether you might require any adjustments to any of these processes during the induction, and to support your ongoing work.

- Using and maintaining gym, pool and sports equipment.
- Health and safety, including evacuation procedures.
- Class timetables and booking systems.
- Client programme, progress and tracking systems.
- Completing rota and timesheet documents

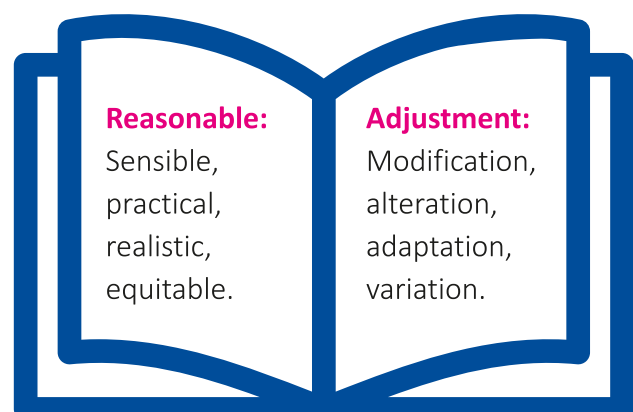
Do you need any reasonable adjustments to be made?

Employers must make reasonable adjustments to make sure workers with an impairment, or physical or mental health condition, aren't substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs. This applies to all workers, including trainees, apprentices, contract workers and business partners.

Reasonable adjustments might include making physical changes to the workplace (e.g., installing a ramp for a wheelchair user), modifying equipment (e.g., a special keyboard or chair for an individual with a physical impairment), or changing the way things are done (e.g., arranging for someone to have their own desk as opposed to hot-desking, or offering flexible working hours).

Reasonable adjustments do not always have to be extensive, complicated, or expensive. You might already have some of the necessary equipment or support, or have ideas about what you need. Be confident in discussing this with your new employer as you are best placed to know what you need.

See the [government website 52](#) for more information, or as a point of reference to start your discussions with your employer.



Access to Work

If the help you need at work is not covered by your employer making reasonable adjustments, you may be able to get help from Access to Work. To be eligible, you need to have a paid job, or be about to start or return to one. You'll be offered support based on your needs, which may include a grant to help cover the costs of practical and / or mental health support in the workplace.

An 'Access to Work' grant can pay for:

- Adaptations to the equipment you use.
- Special equipment or software.
- British Sign Language interpreters and video relay service support, lip speakers or note takers.
- Taxi fares to work or a support worker if you cannot use public transport.
- A support worker or job coach to help you in your workplace.

It is important to note that an Access to Work grant application needs to be made by the individual, not the employer. This can be done online or by telephone.

To find out more, to check your eligibility, and to apply, visit [Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work).⁵³

Further training and progression opportunities

Find out what development opportunities might be available with your new employer. For example:

- Shadowing staff in other roles.
- Additional training such as first aid, health and safety, pool management, lifeguarding, security and alarms procedures.
- Information and training about growing your business as a fitness professional (including skills for client engagement, retention and tracking, managing diaries and booking systems, marketing yourself and your skills, using social media for advertising).
- Career progression routes such as promotion to Lead Instructor, Lead Personal Trainer, or Master Trainer, or management roles such; Gym Manager, Fitness Manager, Pool Manager or Duty Manager.

Aim to keep your CIMSPA membership up to date and collect CIMSPA points by recording all relevant training and qualifications on the online [CIMSPA member account](https://www.cimspa.co.uk/membership).⁵⁴ You can also search for further training with [CIMSPA endorsed partners](https://www.cimspa.co.uk/partners).⁵⁵

Section 12 References

- ^{52.} www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers
^{53.} www.gov.uk/access-to-work

- ^{54.} <https://cimspa.tahdah.me/Account/Login>
^{55.} <https://cimspa.tahdah.me/event>



Discrimination - what to do?

What if I feel I have been discriminated against during the job selection process, or once employed?

- It is against the law in the UK to discriminate against anyone because of disability (in addition to age, gender, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital status, race, religion). Employers however may still discriminate against someone, even if they do not intend to. Discrimination can arise from disability. An example of this is when a person is overlooked for a job because an employer thinks that their visible impairment would make it difficult for them to be taken seriously in a gym or senior role.
- Discrimination can also happen when an employer fails to make 'reasonable adjustments'. Examples of an employer making a reasonable adjustment are when they make changes to the building to ensure it is accessible or when they change a disabled employee's working arrangements, such as moving to more flexible working.

- If you feel you have been discriminated against you can make a complaint to the employer. It is not uncommon for complaints to evoke strong feelings for both the person who has made the complaint and the employer that the complaint has been made against. Raise complaints with a manager or through other contacts, such as the Human Resources department. If possible gather evidence of discrimination.

- Additional advice on discrimination and how to tackle it can be found at:

- ACAS Disability Discrimination. 56
- Citizens Advice Discrimination Checker. 57
- Equality Advisory Service. 58

Section 13 References

- 56. <https://acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1859>
- 57. www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/discrimination-at-work/checking-if-its-discrimination/check-if-your-problem-at-work-is-discrimination/
- 58. <http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/>

Case study

Jude Caunter Fitness Instructor

“ For people saying, ‘I can’t exercise’, I feel compelled to stand, figuratively, and say ‘hang on a minute, yes you can’. I bring that to this job. I think a lot of employers are a bit wary that a disabled employee is going to be on the sick all the time, but that's not true. This Centre is so supportive of me, I know they've got my back, they want me to succeed, I know they see how hard I work. They invested in me by paying for my Level 4 course and my first aid qualification, so I know they appreciate that I'm here. Yeah, I do want to pay them back. ”

Read more about Jude's story and other case studies at www.instructability.org.uk



“ I just love the class. I was so anxious to do it, because I thought, ‘it’s a class, I’m overweight, I’m in a wheelchair, I can’t lift my arm above my head’, sort of thing. I was very self-conscious, but it’s just so light-hearted, Jude makes it so casual and fun, and she adjusts the exercises to suit different people’s limitations because she knows what it’s like, and she has them too. And we brought my brother’s girlfriend, who’s a PE teacher, and she did it, and afterwards, she was like, ‘I’m worn out’. So it’s nice that although it’s seated, non-disabled people can do it too, and still get a workout. ”

Seated SOSA Group Exercise Client

“ Jude has been so valuable to us and no doubt has driven the idea of inclusivity in this Centre. I've managed a number of centres. You might think what you need to do, to be more inclusive, is develop signage or it might be about access and lifts and spaces, etc., but there's nothing better than Jude coming in and making suggestions based on her actual experiences. Who's better placed to come in and say, 'that access for wheelchairs into the gym or the studio is an issue and needs looking at'? Or 'can we look at how we can adapt the programme for these clients'? We have an employee who is physically experiencing our Centre.

We have changed some of our policies and procedures at the Centre because of the insight Jude has provided. Jude is the first wheelchair user employee we've had here. Initially you think, what is that going to mean? And actually, it doesn't really mean anything. It's just a little bit of policy and procedure around, 'OK we've got to think about certain things now, like the gym's upstairs, we need a simple reconfiguration of the office so she can move around, and how do we adapt our fire procedures?' We've done all that now and it was easy and it all benefits every employee, we wouldn't have done it otherwise.

She drove the inclusivity agenda for clients too, maybe not consciously to start with, but naturally saying, 'if we want more of these clients this is where the challenges are'.

Recently we've been talking about how we communicate and market our offers. When we say something is inclusive or modified, what does that actually mean to people? We're breaking that down and communicating specifically about access and information about sessions and promoting Jude as an instructor now, all to break down barriers. And we're creating our own 'inclusive session' logo to put on programme information. Jude does a lot of networking within the City, for example with a Disability Forum, and outreach work with local groups. Now we get people contacting us to say, 'we hear you're doing great things, can you come and tell our group what they are?' And Jude will say, 'come over and I'll show you', so we're getting new potential clients in.

We support Jude because if Jude's work experience is positive, then when other disabled clients come into the Centre they have a more positive experience. We're already in that inclusive mindset and we've already addressed the little niggles, because Jude's already thought ahead and worked out what the solutions might look like for us. ”

Matt Mason
- Centre Director



“ I can talk all day about the benefits of having Jude here. I don't really see her as a disabled instructor. She's just Jude, part of the team.

She has opened so many doors for the Centre as a whole. We wouldn't have got funding for the new gym equipment, or be recognised as an inclusive gym otherwise. She was instrumental by feeding her experiences into our applications.

We had a customer that was blind and in a chair. By the end of Jude working with him he was walking on the treadmill for 20 minutes. That specialised one-to-one support helping him to overcome barriers and giving him the courage to push himself a little bit more was important. I'm not quite sure whether we would have got the same outcome if Jude hadn't been the instructor sharing her experiences with him.

We have new and more inclusive classes now. Jude has brought in Seated SOSA and the sessions are so popular we've added more to the timetable. By having Jude around we are showing that anything is possible for our customers. If people with an impairment are coming to the Centre then they can relate to Jude, it's opening doors for them. We're showing that they're integrated and it shows that it's a normal everyday thing that everyone can work out together in the same location. ”

Rebecca Spencer
- Line Manager



“ The fact that Jude is in a wheelchair like me, she can help me with ideas of how to get onto the equipment. Another non-disabled instructor could say, ‘use this equipment’, but equipment is often very intimidating to transfer onto. Whereas Jude would come to the piece of equipment and go, ‘okay, this bit can take your weight. You can push on this and this. Don’t lean on this, and this is how I transfer, but maybe for you, it might be better doing it like this’.

I gained a lot of weight when I got in a wheelchair, and Jude understands that more than any other instructor I’ve had, and she doesn’t judge. And also, she doesn’t set specific reps, because she understands that with a disability, you have good and bad days. She says, ‘do a minimum of this, but if you’re on a good day, do a maximum of this. Don’t go over this yet’. So, she gives you the room to, work hard if it’s a good day; if it’s a bad day, she’s just happy you came.

It’s the whole picture really, she also understands that I want to get fit enough to be able to go back to work. She understands that and wants to help me get there mentally as well as physically. She understands the depression side of disability. Now I have come and seen somebody like her who is able to use a gym, who is able to work, and that finds ways around challenges, it’s given me that little bit of inspiration to want to do it too. ”

Individual Gym Client





The research

The research that informs this Guide is a pioneering piece of work that draws together the thoughts, ideas and experiences of disability within the fitness and leisure industry from all layers of the sector.

The evidence gathered from the research was translated into a set of validated guidelines, aligned to the social model of disability (see **Glossary**).

The project was funded by Sport England, which has aims to increase the number of disabled people in the sector workforce,⁵⁹ and in coaching and volunteering.⁶⁰

The researchers:

Professor Brett Smith (Durham University) & **Dr Juliette Stebbings** (University of Portsmouth).

- Professor Smith has over 20 years of experience conducting world-leading research with disabled people and disabled organisations on how to promote physical activity and ensure fitness and leisure, sport, and exercise industries are inclusive.

- Dr Stebbings is a Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology, and conducts research aimed at increasing the levels of community-based sport and physical activity in marginalised populations, including disadvantaged young people, older adults, and disabled people.

Hilary Farmiloe (InstructAbility Strategic Lead) was also a key collaborator throughout the research process.

The research participants included:

- Disabled fitness professionals and their clients (disabled and non-disabled).
- Staff in a range of roles within training provider organisations.
- Individuals from a range of roles and levels within leisure operator organisations. These included senior management, human resources, marketing, media and communications and frontline staff.
- Individuals from other disability organisations and fitness and leisure sector stakeholders.

Section 15 References

⁵⁹ <https://www.sportengland.org/media/13505/working-in-an-active-nation-11-e-version.pdf>

⁶⁰ https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/coaching-in-an-active-nation_the-coaching-plan-for-england.pdf

Glossary of terms

- **Accessibility:** The design of products, devices, services and environments to ensure that they are available and usable by all, and are created in such a way to not exclude a person due to their impairment.
- **Additional needs:** Requirements for products, services, or environments to be adapted, specialised or made more accommodating (e.g., additional / specialised equipment, adjustments to the layout of the physical environment, presence of a support worker) to assist a disabled person to participate fully in day-to-day activities.
- **Disability:** The ways in which a health condition or impairment, in interaction with the wider environment, results in a functional limitation.
- **Disabled person:** Someone with an impairment who experiences the loss or limitation of opportunities to participate in society on an equal level with others because of social, attitudinal, physical or environmental barriers.
- **Discrimination:** Treating a person unfairly, in an unjust or prejudiced manner, because of who they are or because they possess certain characteristics. A disabled person may be disadvantaged, or denied opportunities, compared to their non-disabled peers, because of their impairment.



■ **Equality Act 2010:** The Act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws (e.g., the Disability Discrimination Act 1995). The Equality Act 2010 states that a person has a disability if:

- They have a physical or mental impairment.
- The impairment has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities.

For more information about the definitions of 'substantial' and 'long-term', about progressive conditions and what is not counted as a disability, see [Definition of disability](#).⁶¹

■ **Impairment:** A physical or mental injury, illness or congenital condition which has a 'substantial' and 'long term' impact upon an individual's physiological or psychological function, thereby affecting their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities.

■ **Inclusivity:** The practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised (e.g., disabled people or those from minority groups). An inclusive culture or ethos is one in which there are opportunities for all voices to be shared and heard and valued. Inclusive language is appropriate for all groups, and free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or oppressed views and actions.

■ **Social model of disability:** The social model of disability focuses on the systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) that mean society is the main contributory factor in disabling people. That is, disability is imposed on top of individuals' impairment, because of the way society is organised. Impairments alone do not have to lead to disability unless society fails to take account of and include people regardless of their individual differences.

In summary, a disabled person is a person with an impairment, who experiences disability. This compares to the 'medical model', whereby the individual is expected to overcome their impairment in order to be included in society.

Glossary References

⁶¹ www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010

With thanks to all individuals and organisations that contributed to the research, content, design and publication of this Guide.

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Guide A: For Disabled People

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