



Qenable

Breaking Barriers



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Breaking Barriers is a ground-breaking partnership, enabling young people who have learning disabilities the opportunity to attend one of the leading business schools in the UK, achieve an accredited qualification, and gain real work experience with some of the country's largest employers.

Founded by Enable, the University of Strathclyde Business School, and ScottishPower, the flagship programme has now expanded to the University of Strathclyde's Faculty of Science, partnering with Balfour Beatty for its work placements, and Edinburgh Napier University, where students work with corporate partner, EY. The programme has also welcomed corporate partner, Dayforce.

The pioneering initiative gives young people the opportunity to access the life-shaping experience of university and aims to create equality of access to the opportunities that educational institutions and partner organisations can provide.

“ Breaking Barriers is a pioneering demonstration of the power of public, private and social sector organisations working in partnership to address societal challenges. Ensuring we open opportunities to everyone and do not exclude people from realising their talent is essential not only to being a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive society, but also to our national economic prosperity.”



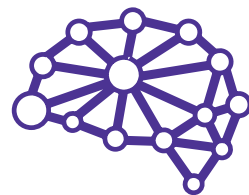
Theresa Shearer, FRSE
CEO, Enable

“ There is no programme which ScottishPower runs that delivers greater impact or that has given me more pleasure to support. Thank you to Enable and the University of Strathclyde Business School. Breaking Barriers – it does what it says!”



Keith Anderson,
Chief Executive, ScottishPower

The Scale of the Challenge



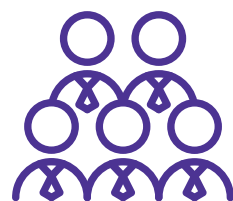
It's estimated that **20% of people in the UK** are neurodivergent with **30-40%** of them **currently unemployed**



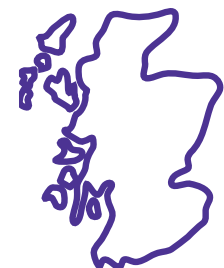
The disability employment gap is growing. **Only 45% of disabled people** are in employment, compared with **81% of non-disabled people** in Scotland



There are an estimated **175,000 people** who have a learning disability in Scotland – that's just over **3% of the population**



Around **14,000 school pupils** in Scotland have a learning disability



This means that there are more than **100,000 people** who have a learning disability in Scotland who need support to get into work – and stay in work



Only **8.6% of school leavers** who have a learning disability go into university education, compared with **45.1% of all school leavers**

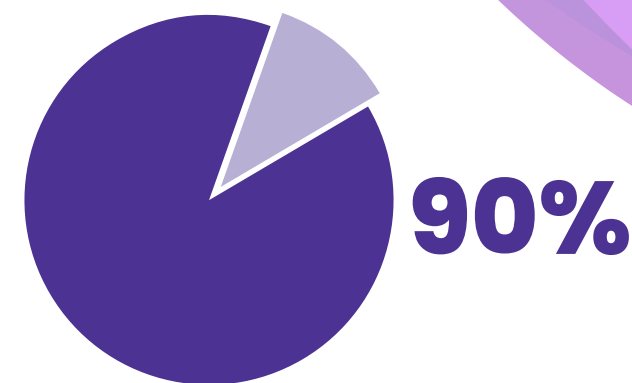
Impact of Delivery

Since Breaking Barriers first began in 2018 the programme has supported more than 163 young people* with learning disabilities and barriers to employment. Students have graduated from the University of Strathclyde Business School with a certificate in Applied Business Skills, Science Faculty with a certificate in Applied Science Skills and, in 2022, the programme expanded into Edinburgh Napier University's Business school where 14 students graduated.

Prior to joining the course, these young people were nervous about what the future would hold. We know from speaking to students that many of them now feel more confident and empowered, with clearer goals for their futures, and equipped with the tools they need to reach them.

Following graduation, students receive continued support from their Enable Employment Coordinator to plan their next steps with many considering options in Higher Education, Further Education, Apprenticeships and employment opportunities.

Breaking Barriers has supported a number of graduates into further employment in organisations such as Barclays, as a Graduate Apprentice Accountant and the Scottish Government, as a Policy Officer. Many former graduates have gone on to shape their chosen career path and secure employment and additional training opportunities in fields such as filmmaking, para-medicine, cyber security, financial services, digital music and fashion.



* of all students have gone on to secure further employment, education and training opportunities since graduating from the Breaking Barriers programme.

Case Studies: Introduction

Hear our stories of those who have successfully journeyed through the Breaking Barriers programme - demonstrating how public, private and third sector can work collaboratively to improve diversity, equity and inclusion in education and in the workplace, and to advance our shared ambition of a truly inclusive society for all.

We are proud of each one of our graduates paving the way to make it possible for even more students who have a learning disability to access the life-shaping experience of university that is a rite of passage for so many, yet it is currently available to so few disabled young people.



Case Study 1: Anna

Anna has a number of barriers; autism, severe anxiety and mobility issues, however her journey with Breaking Barriers has been transformational.

Anna struggled in a school/learning environment with her mobility issues, using her walker made her feel uncomfortable and acted as a barrier to her development. Feeling isolated that many of her friends would leave her behind, going to university or college, she was keen to connect with people that understood her barriers. Her autism, a fairly new diagnosis, offered some clarity on Anna's feelings and understanding about taking part in the programme, attending university and the work environment.

In the first two weeks, Anna's anxiety meant that she was unable to attend university with her mum sitting in on lectures to take notes for her. However, week-by-week, her confidence grew so much that she attended on her own; reached out to other young people on the cohort; and consistently offered answers and feedback to her lecturers. Her turnaround came in starting to see a future for herself within a further education environment as previously she didn't see herself achieving the same pathways as her friends. Anna's confidence, belief in her own abilities, and possibilities for the future meant that she successfully transitioned onto a college to attend Newbattle Abbey covering all areas of social science.

“Anna has responded positively to both Napier University and her work placement at EY, and I believe Anna has gained the most.

She is motivated and excited about her future. Overall, we are so pleased with the confidence and skills that Anna has developed through the Breaking Barriers programme and we are excited to see what the future holds for her.”

Anna's mother

“I feel more confident and I no longer feel on my own. Meeting so many new people who have similar experiences has helped a lot. I previously put off pursuing any further education such as college but since, I have attended college to study social science and think about what career I would like.”

Anna



Case Study 2: Matthew

Matthew's aim was to study for a certificate in Applied Science at Strathclyde University, however he was worried that his condition – autism and dyspraxia – could hinder his ability to perform practical lab tasks.

A referral to the Breaking Barriers programme from Enable Works was coordinated to support his educational journey. Matthew engaged in weekly lab sessions during his semester at Strathclyde University's Science Faculty; participated in Enable workshops with other students to develop his communication skills and confidence; and completed a six week work-placement with Balfour Beatty.

Within this supportive environment, Matthew thrived and completed lab-based practical tasks with ease, overcoming his dexterity barriers with the knowledge that he had time and support if needed, and gained on site experience within the sustainable energy sector.

Following completion of the programme, Matthew received one-to-one employability support from Enable helping to secure a six-month paid traineeship with SSE, followed by securing a year placement with ScottishPower, a founding partner of Breaking Barriers.

“ Before enrolling on the programme, I was struggling with anxiety and low esteem brought on by struggling to find long-term employment. Part of the reason for this was that my lack of work experience limited the jobs I could apply for. My confidence and social skills have increased massively thanks to the support provided by Breaking Barriers. I am ready to enter the workplace now, with a year-long traineeship with ScottishPower.

Overall Breaking Barriers has been a great experience for me, improving my confidence massively and giving me the skills I need to go forward in life and my career. It's also a great way to meet people, improve your social skills, and I would recommend it to anyone looking to further their education or job opportunities.”

Matthew



Case Study 3: Enoch

Enoch joined the Breaking Barriers programme after being referred by a community support worker. They noted that they felt Enoch would benefit from joining the cohort to develop his communication and social skills. At the beginning of Enoch's Breaking Barriers journey, he was hesitant to interact with the other young people in the group. However, after week two, Enoch settled into the group and formed close friendships with his peers. Enoch's confidence grew week-to-week, where he truly found his voice. Enoch is now looking forward to exploring a career in gardening. The programme allowed Enoch to gain clarity in his career path and map out a vision for his future; testament to the strength of the programme demonstrating how young people can flourish in the right environments, with the right support.

With only **8.6%** of school leavers who have a learning disability going onto university, Enoch is breaking the mould with the support of our partners and his support network.

“ It demystified the world of work and it shows that in the workplace some people are embracing diversity which is good to know. Before now, he couldn't get into any programme and he felt rejected, but since this programme his confidence has grown. He knows if he puts in the effort, he is able to achieve something good. I see him smiling all the time and I'm happy and grateful to Enable and the Breaking Barriers programme. It has been a truly inclusive journey for us.”

Enoch's mother



Case Study 4: Joe

Initially Joe enrolled in a one-year nursery teaching course after school. Unfortunately due to mental health challenges and a lack of suitable support, he decided to leave the course.

Joe has a learning disability that impacts his motor skills, balance, speech, communication and learning processes. Following his decision to leave college, he began to receive one-to-one employability support through Enable. Together with an employment coordinator, they worked to improve his CV, honing his interview skills and applying for jobs before introducing Joe to the Breaking Barriers programme. Initially hesitant, Joe spoke with the Programme Lead and past cohorts, who shared their experiences, motivating Joe to apply for the course.

Joe successfully completed a semester at Strathclyde University's leading Business School, where he attended lectures and completed assignments. Tailored support such as one-to-one mentoring from a fourth-year student - who assisted Joe during and after lectures with note-taking, clarifying lecture content and planning out assignments to ensure he had the tools and guidance needed to succeed.

From Strathclyde Business School, Joe undertook a work placement with ScottishPower where he worked with different teams across the business to gain a greater understanding of operations. He secured a position within ScottishPower's HR team as an administrative assistant following graduation. Joe fulfilled the contract before securing a permanent administrative assistant role within Enable's Legal and Corporate Governance team. Since 2020, Joe has thrived in this role for the organisation, transitioning from part-time to full-time work where he continues to excel.

“ Joe's journey through Breaking Barriers exemplifies the profound impact that tailored support and a nurturing environment can have on an individual's personal and professional development. We are proud of Joe's achievements and look forward to seeing him continue to grow in this role at Enable.”

Lewis Robertson
Programme Lead, Enable Works

“ Before Breaking Barriers, I was a nervous wreck. I lacked confidence but I wanted to take the next steps in my life, and look at me now. Completing Breaking Barriers and the work placement at ScottishPower was the best thing that could have happened to me.”

Joe
Enable employee



Case Study 5: Lucy

Lucy's journey with Enable started back in her school days where she attended Boclair Academy. Her first encounter with the charity was attending Enable's Youth Group where she helped to campaign for change in schools through the charities anti-bullying and inclusion campaigns, *Be the Change* and *Included in the Main*.

Lucy took up the role of campaigning in her school against bullying where her journey with Enable continued. After leaving school, she went to College where she completed a programme to assist with moving onto work. Lucy learned about Breaking Barriers through a family connection and a meeting with CEO Theresa Shearer where she was invited to find out more about the programme and application process.

Lucy completed the programme including all coursework at Strathclyde University and her work placement at ScottishPower. This was during a nationwide lockdown with all activities exclusively moving online. Undeterred she successfully gained a business diploma and describes the opportunity as life-changing.

Lucy is a valued colleague at Enable as a Membership Ambassador continuing to advocate for change through our Self-Advocacy forum and promoting the work we do to work for an equal society.

“ I never thought I would ever get a chance to go to university, but Breaking Barriers gave me that opportunity as part of an inclusive and supportive community. I learned things that I never knew before - including about myself and my potential - and the support from Enable and ScottishPower was tailored to make sure I achieved the best I could.”

Today I have a paid job with Enable, doing what I love, getting people with a learning disability engaged with our campaigns, and taking our message to politicians, to government officials, and into the community.”

Lucy
Enable Ambassador



Positive Progressions

When we launched Breaking Barriers in 2017, **only 56 young people** who have a learning disability, across the whole of Scotland, went on to university education. Already, we have exceeded this number across the cohort of young people who have participated in Breaking Barriers. Following graduation from Breaking Barriers, **90%** of young people have gone on to achieve positive progressions into further employment, education and industry training opportunities.

The Fraser of Allander Institute undertook a year long research programme into the socio-economic outcomes for people who have a learning disability in Scotland. It confirmed a very poor picture nationally of their employment status. However, in a positive sense, the report highlights Breaking Barriers as 'evidence of what works.'

“Breaking Barriers is changing the employment prospects of young people with a learning disability, and enabling employers to engage with potential recruits and meet their corporate social responsibility objectives¹.”

The Fraser of Allander Institute found that:

“Very few school leavers with a learning disability go on to attend higher education institutions. There is little evidence that this will improve without more direct intervention and Breaking Barriers helps to achieve this by providing a pathway to the experience of higher education and, ultimately, employment for people with learning disabilities. We interviewed Breaking Barriers graduates and it is clear that they had never considered higher education until this programme became an option. This feeling, and a more general lack of ambition for young people with a learning disability, has been cited as a reason for poor employment outcomes².”

The report concluded that:

“Meaningful progress cannot be made by government alone. It requires all stakeholders, including employers, to take active steps towards more inclusive working environments.

This presents an opportunity for government and employers to invest in the support that will unlock the potential of people with a learning disability... To change the employability landscape in the long term, more programmes like this [are] needed³.”

The independent report goes on to say that 'the key challenge is replicating success at scale'.

“As the ‘place of useful learning’, Strathclyde is committed to being socially progressive. This also means being inclusive and opening higher education to all, so we are delighted to be pioneering the Breaking Barriers initiative.”



Professor Sir Jim McDonald
Principal & Vice Chancellor of University of Strathclyde

“Programmes like Breaking Barriers show people what’s possible. They provide opportunity. It really brings to life what we mean by an inclusive community. One of our values at Edinburgh Napier University is inclusion and so I hope that others will see the types of programmes that we offer, the success of the students that come and the opportunities that are open to them in the future.”



Professor Andrea Nolan
Principal & Vice Chancellor of Edinburgh Napier University

“At Balfour Beatty, we are committed to creating a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture – continually seeking new ways to break down the barriers people face in both education and employment.

Through our partnership with The University of Strathclyde and Enable, we are going one step further than before; providing an unrivalled opportunity for people with disabilities to expand their skills and knowledge whilst working on some of the most exciting construction projects in Scotland.”

Hector Macaulay MBE
Managing Director of Balfour Beatty's UK Construction Services business in Scotland

^{1,2,3} <https://fraserofallander.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Learning-disabilities-employment-final.pdf>



“The level of enthusiasm that it generated within EY meant it was oversubscribed with people wanting to lend their support; we can break barriers together.”

Phil Milne
Partner, EY

“Dayforce’s partnership with Breaking Barriers enhances the lives of both the students and our employees. We have each learned from one another as it fosters a more inclusive working environment. We must be open to the possibilities that everyone brings to be a truly inclusive employer.”

Steven Holdridge
President, Dayforce



Plans for the Future

As we head towards the 8th year of delivery of this highly impactful programme, we continue to increase equality of access to education and employment. In 2025, we will expand Breaking Barriers into the remaining two faculties at Strathclyde University, Engineering and Humanities. This will provide a gateway into higher education across all sectors and fields of study. As part of this expansion, we look forward to welcoming our new Corporate Partner, Amey.

Our Breaking Barriers programme is not just about the young people of today, it’s about creating a much more equal society for generations to come. We are in discussion with several universities across Scotland, the wider UK and internationally. As one of the founding members of Inclusion Europe, we are hopeful that those organisations across Europe will work with us on the Breaking Barriers programme. We see a clear pathway for internationalisation and for Breaking Barriers to be one of the great exports from Scotland in future generations.



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