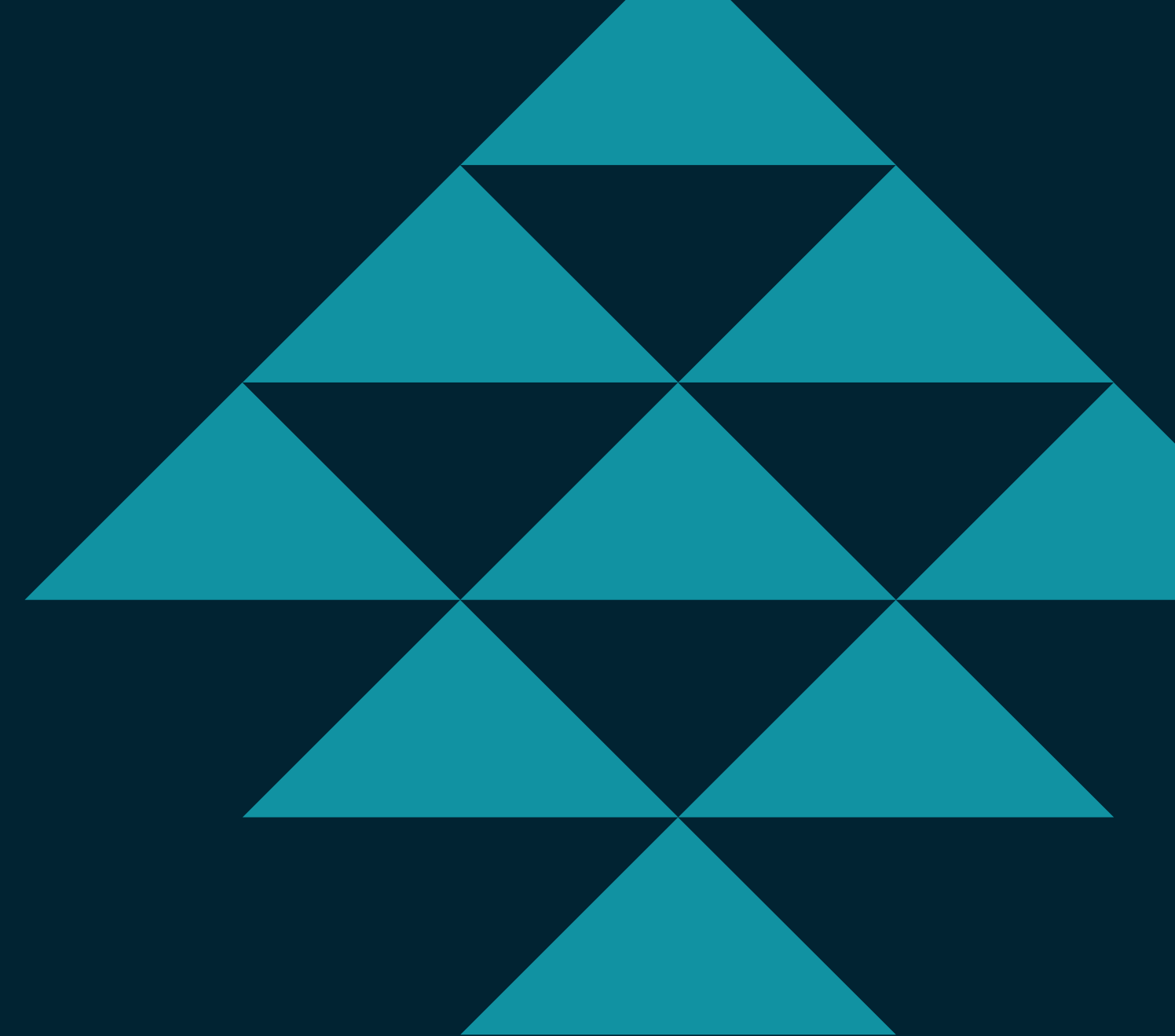




INCLUSIVE INNOVATION:

Unlocking Entrepreneurship Opportunities for People
with Disabilities

Lead Partner:

**Motability
Operations**

Founding Partner:



Powered by





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Powered by Motability Operations

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FOREWORD

Entrepreneurship is overwhelmingly perceived as a force for good among people with disabilities in the UK. But, based on our research, one in three disabled people see entrepreneurship as a career path that's inaccessible to them. Our goal with Tech Nation's Creo programme is to change that.

When Founders Forum Group acquired Tech Nation, we knew we wanted to progress our mission to support founders at every stage of their journeys and that includes creating truly inclusive pathways to entrepreneurship.

We launched Creo, in partnership with Motability Operations, to offer the first springboard platform for disabled founders as well as neurodiverse founders and entrepreneurs innovating around disability, connecting founders and providing them with the knowledge and resources to scale.

This year, we welcomed our first cohort of Creo founders from across the UK, innovating in industries ranging from AI and VR to health and education. Like Demetria's Lorna Maclean, who has created an AI-enhanced radiologist tool for endometriosis; or Love Disfigure's Sylvia Macgregor, who runs a talent agency supporting people with disabilities and differences; or XRAI's Dan and Lara Scarfe, who are using AR to transform speech into real-time subtitles.

In this report, Inclusive Innovation: Unlocking Entrepreneurship Opportunities for People with Disabilities, we seek to champion disabled entrepreneurs and, through our comprehensive survey of nearly 700 people with disabilities, we explore their perceptions of entrepreneurship, the barriers, the potential solutions, and how to widen access.

Their voices, representing a wide spectrum of disabilities and experiences, paint a clear picture: while the desire to innovate is strong, systemic challenges and stigmas continue to create an unequal playing field for founders with disabilities.

One in four founders in the UK are disabled or neurodiverse, however they are 400x less likely to receive VC funding. And yet, breaking down barriers for disabled entrepreneurs could unlock an additional £230b for the UK economy.

At the end of 2023, the employment rate of disabled people in the UK was 54%. The employment rate for people who are not disabled was 82%.

By bringing communities together, championing disabled entrepreneurs, and providing them with access to the networks, funding opportunities, mentorship, and support systems to scale their businesses, we can unlock the full potential of entrepreneurship in the UK, close the disability employment gap, and foster a tech ecosystem that truly serves and represents all members of society.

Read on to discover our key findings and our recommendations for unlocking entrepreneurship opportunities for disabled founders in the UK, and beyond.



Carolyn Dawson OBE
CEO, Founders Forum Group



A MESSAGE FROM OUR PARTNER



Within the disabled community lies a wealth of untapped entrepreneurial talent. This report shines a light on the entrepreneurial spirit within the community and highlights the systemic barriers that too often stand in the way of success.

At Motability Operations, we believe that everyone should have the freedom and independence to pursue their goals. We have over 40 years’ experience of running the Motability Scheme, which currently provides good value, all-inclusive vehicle leasing packages to over 800,000 disabled people, connecting them to work, education, and healthcare. As a company that sees the transformative power of inclusion every day, we know that true independence achieves more than just participation in society; it provides agency, opportunity, and empowerment.

Our experience of working to help improve the lives of disabled people means that the findings of this report are no surprise to us. We know from our regular contact with our customers that they face problems, day in, day out. This report highlights the importance of championing disabled entrepreneurs and supporting inclusive innovation.

That's why we are partnering with Founders Forum and Tech Nation on Creo – it’s a natural extension of what we do.

The report's findings emphasise the urgent need for change. While there is a strong desire to innovate among disabled people, a lack of access to funding, mentorship, and accessible resources creates an uneven playing field.

The financial strain on disabled entrepreneurs is immense, with 60% receiving no support when starting their business and facing average additional living costs of £570 per month. We understand the importance of financial accessibility, and we echo the call for greater funding opportunities and tailored support for disabled entrepreneurs.

The report also highlights the critical need for accessible training and educational pathways. Many disabled entrepreneurs face unique challenges in navigating the complexities of starting and scaling a business. Providing accessible resources and mentorship opportunities is essential to empowering disabled founders to thrive.

Creo's focus on connecting founders with industry experts and providing tailored support is a significant step in the right direction.

The recommendations put forward in this report provide a clear roadmap for policymakers and industry leaders. By transforming financial support systems, building comprehensive support networks, and fostering a culture of inclusivity, we can unlock the full potential of entrepreneurship in the disability community and create a more vibrant and representative tech sector.

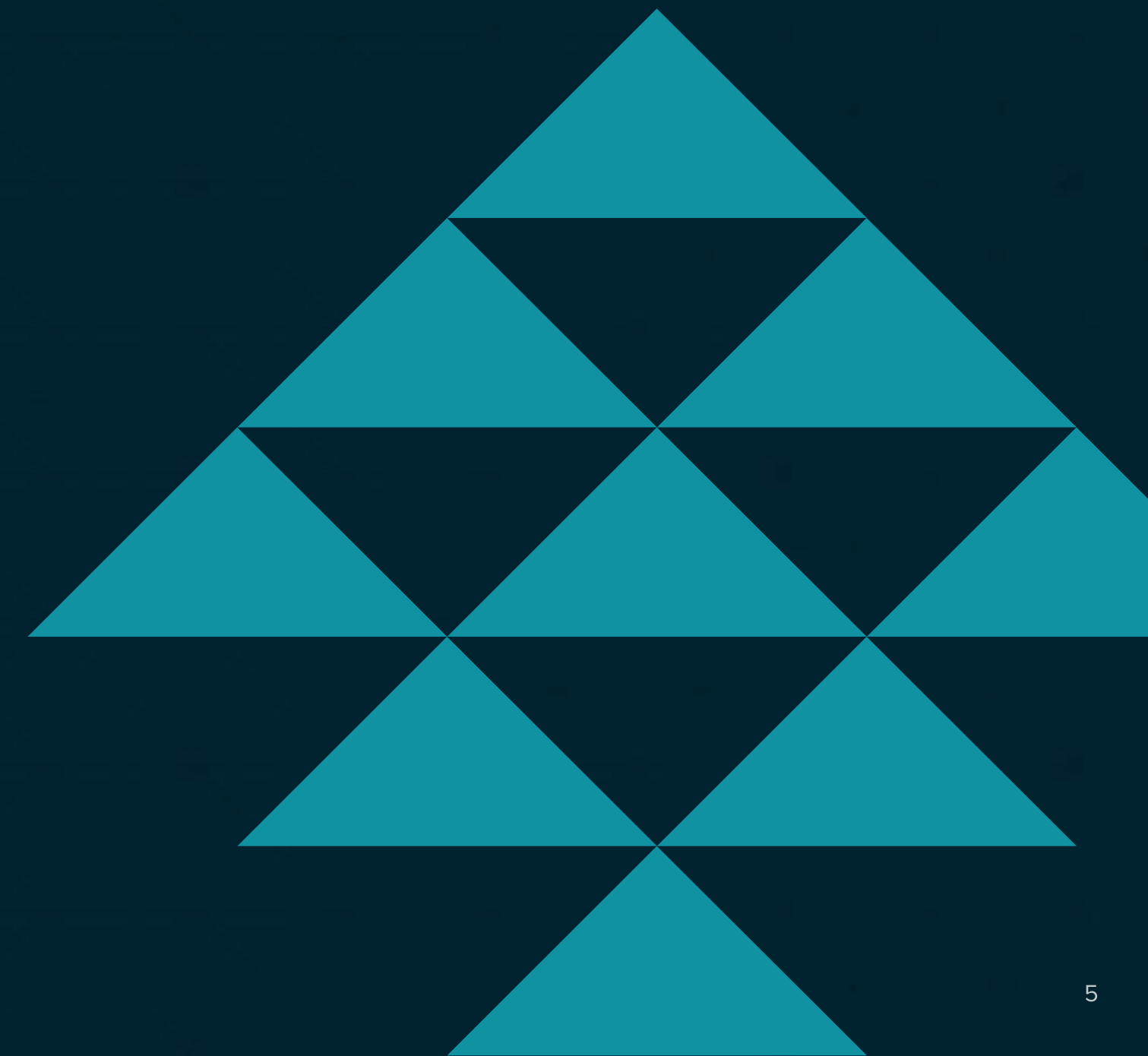
At Motability Operations, we are committed to working alongside Creo and our partners to drive this change. By empowering disabled entrepreneurs, we can not only unlock significant economic potential but also create a society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.



Andrew Miller
Chief Executive, Motability Operations



KEY FINDINGS





How can we unlock entrepreneurship opportunities for people with disabilities? In our survey, powered by Motability Operations, we asked 675 disabled people living in the UK about their sentiments towards entrepreneurship, the perceived barriers, and how they could be better incentivised and supported to pursue entrepreneurship as a career path.

1



People with disabilities generally view entrepreneurship positively and acknowledge its ability to drive employment opportunities and innovation.

60%

of respondents view entrepreneurship positively, (28% very positive, 32% somewhat positive).

3 in 4

say entrepreneurship is important for creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

PERCEPTIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

2



More than one in three of the disabled people we surveyed feel entrepreneurship is inaccessible to them and many lack the confidence to pursue it as a career option.

46%

are sceptical of their ability to start and run a business.

1 in 3

have considered starting a business, but decided not to pursue it.

OVERCOMING PERSONAL CHALLENGES

3



Physical accessibility issues, a lack of support systems, and discrimination or bias are seen as the biggest barriers to entrepreneurship.

65%

physical accessibility issues

65%

health-related challenges

55%

discrimination or bias

55%

lack of financial resources

IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS

4



People with disabilities say greater access to startup funding, mentorship, and training schemes would make them more likely to pursue entrepreneurship.

46%

are sceptical of their ability to start and run a business.

1 in 3

have considered starting a business, but decided not to pursue it.

FINDING THE SOLUTIONS



OUR SURVEY: UNLOCKING ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

POWERED BY MOTABILITY OPERATIONS





PERCEPTIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

People with disabilities generally have a positive perception of entrepreneurship and recognise its ability to create employment opportunities, narrowing the disability employment gap and presenting real potential for innovation in the UK.



Kate Hallward
(Motability Operations)



Alex Papanikolaou
(Freedom One Life)



60% of the disabled people we surveyed view entrepreneurship positively.

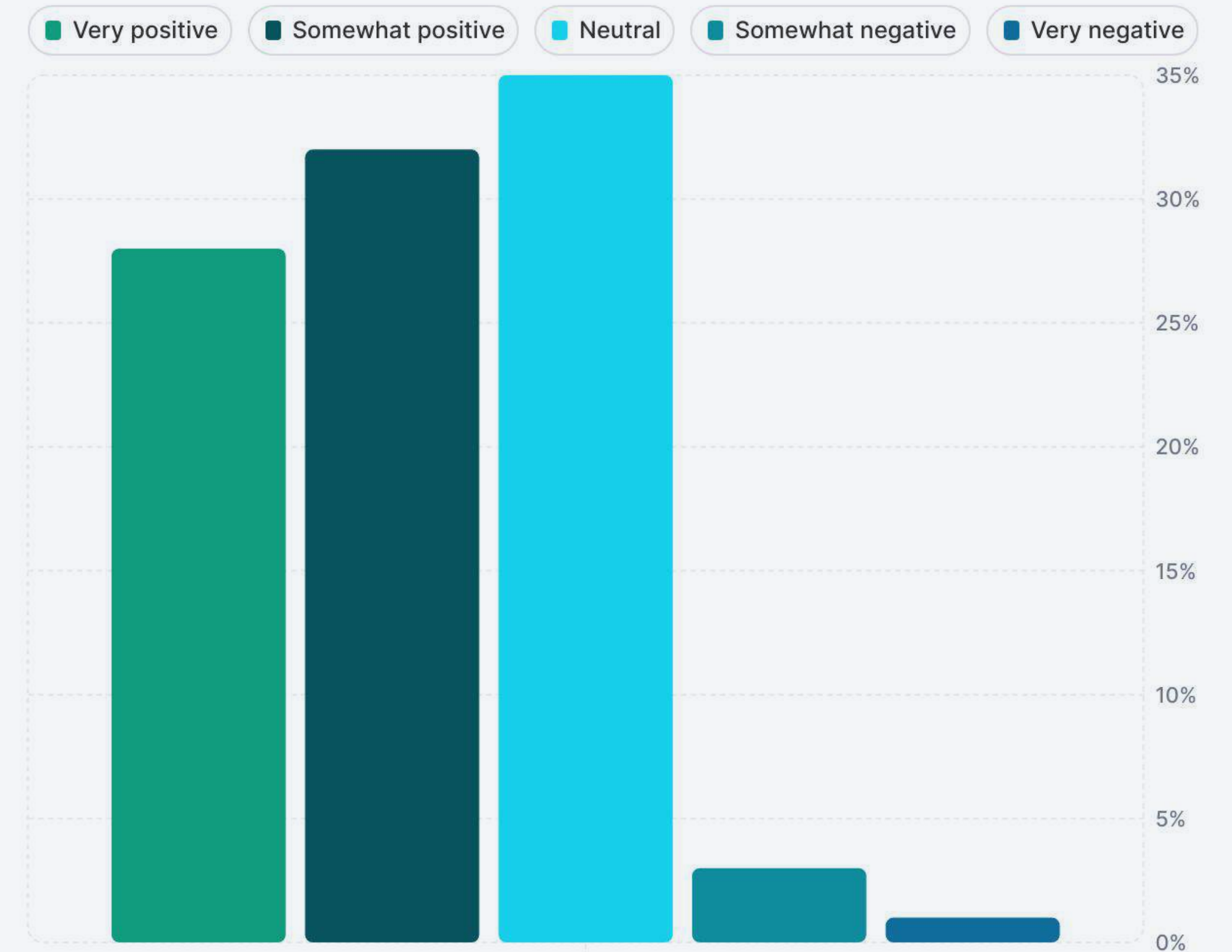
Just 4% of respondents hold a negative or very negative view towards entrepreneurship.

Those who are employed tend to view entrepreneurship especially positively, with 39% of the employed people we surveyed feeling very positive about entrepreneurship compared with 25% of those who are unemployed.



“Living with a disability can make you more adaptable and resilient to change, both of which are good traits for entrepreneurs.”

How do you view the idea of entrepreneurship?





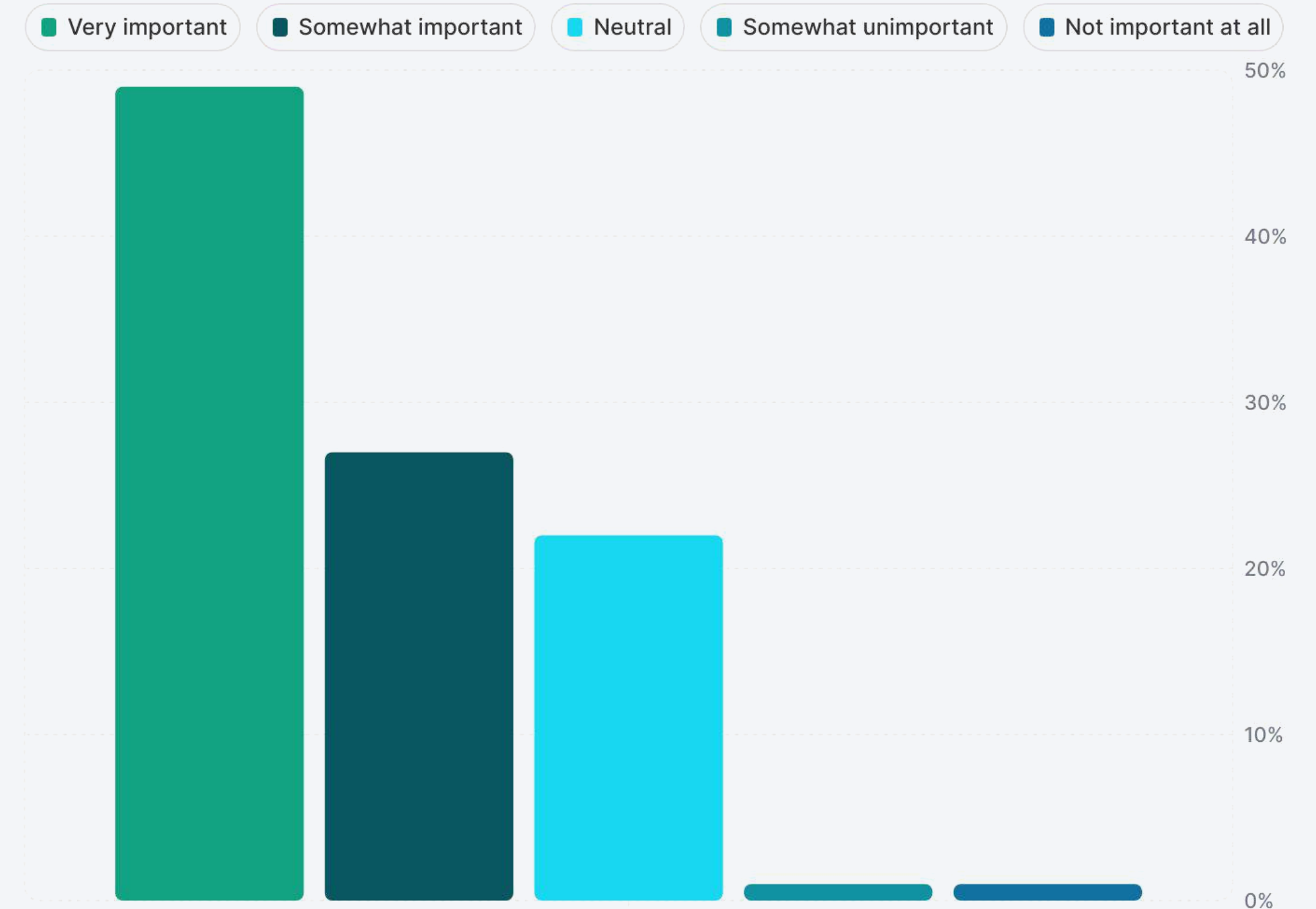
76% say that entrepreneurship is important for creating employment opportunities.

Opening access to entrepreneurship for people with disabilities is crucial in closing the disability employment gap. One in two say entrepreneurship is very important for employment opportunities.



“Running your own business is very demanding but also gives you flexibility which is helpful, I found, with a disability.”

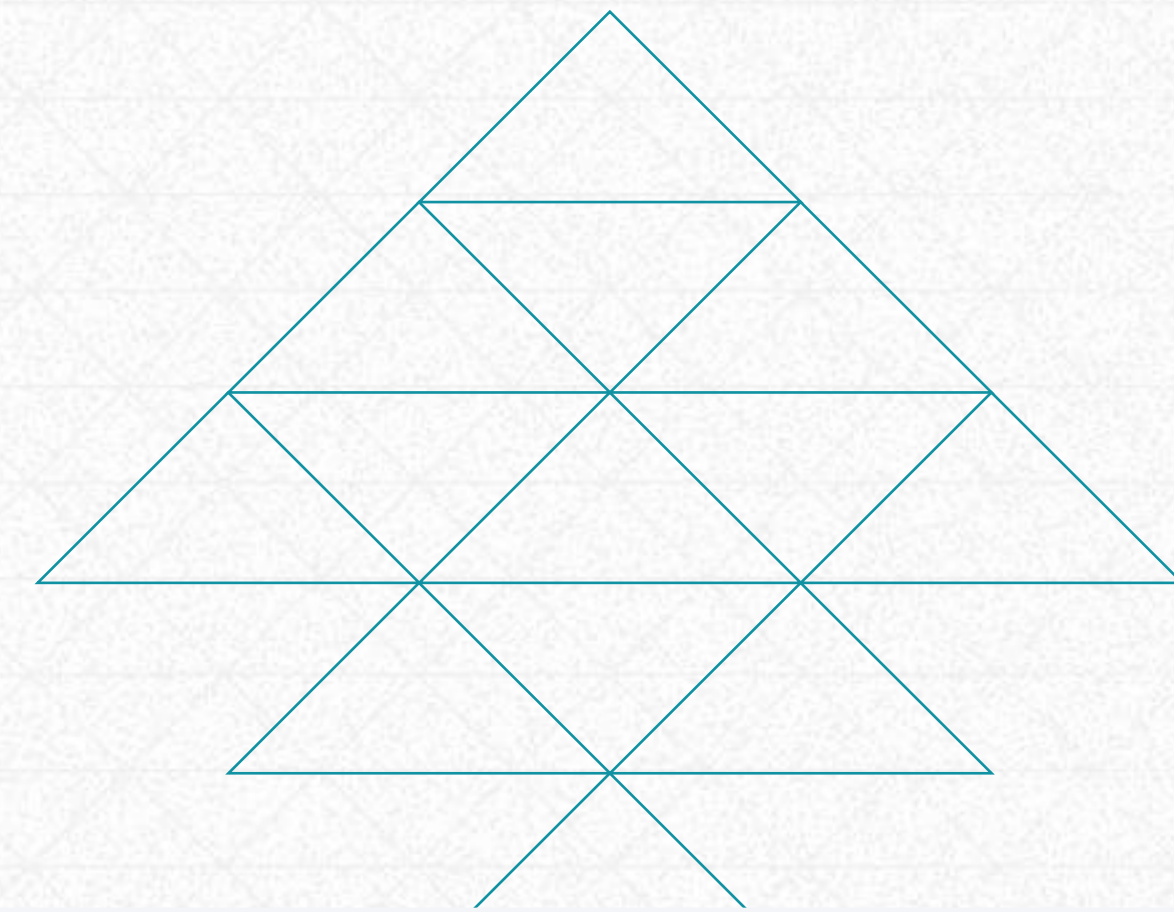
How important is entrepreneurship for employment opportunities?





The disabled founders we surveyed are innovating in e-commerce, services, retail, and more!

Disabled people actively seeking work are more likely to enter self-employment than non-disabled job-seekers, and many people with disabilities demonstrate a strong entrepreneurial drive, based both on passion and need.



The disabled entrepreneurs we surveyed are innovating in:



Online/digital business

E.g., e-commerce, digital goods

20%



Service-based business

E.g., coaching, tutoring, IT support

18%



Retail/product-based business

E.g., physical stores

12%



Nonprofit organisation

E.g., disability advocacy

11%



Consulting or freelance work

E.g., design, copywriting

14%

Survey Respondents at a glance:

85%

describe themselves as physically disabled.

27%

describe themselves as having a neurological disability

24%

describe themselves as having a mental health condition.

34%

are unemployed and unable to work.

12%

are employed. They work mostly in Office/Administrative work, Technical/IT work, and Management roles.



OVERCOMING PERSONAL CHALLENGES

Despite the positive perceptions of entrepreneurship, many of the disabled people we surveyed expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to own and scale a business.

Fiona Jarvis
(Blue Badge Style)



Eric Kihlstrom
(Centaur Robotics)



More than 1 in 3 of the disabled people we surveyed feel that entrepreneurship is inaccessible to people with disabilities.

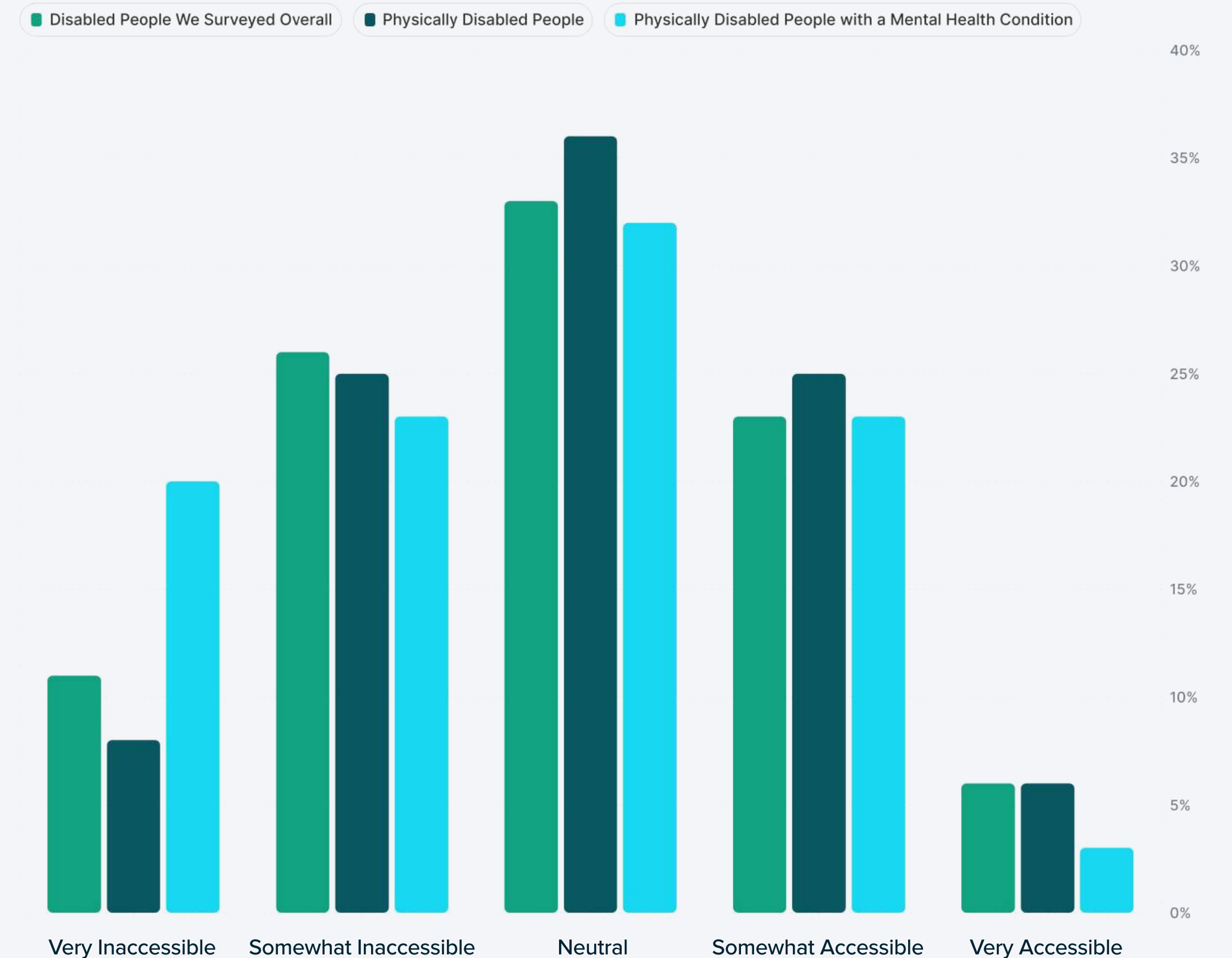
This feeling is especially strong among the unemployed people we surveyed, with one in two describing entrepreneurship as somewhat or very inaccessible. Only 6% of our survey respondents overall feel that entrepreneurship is very accessible to people with disabilities.

Our findings also show how mental health conditions can compound feelings towards entrepreneurship. 8% of people with physical disabilities who we surveyed described entrepreneurship as very inaccessible, compared with 20% for physically-disabled people who also have mental health conditions.



“I find that whenever I've been in a wheelchair, people treat you differently. I think it would likely count against you if you were trying to sell an idea.”

How accessible do you think entrepreneurship is for people with disabilities?





1 in 3 have considered starting a business, but then decided not to pursue it.

27% have started their own businesses or are currently planning to.

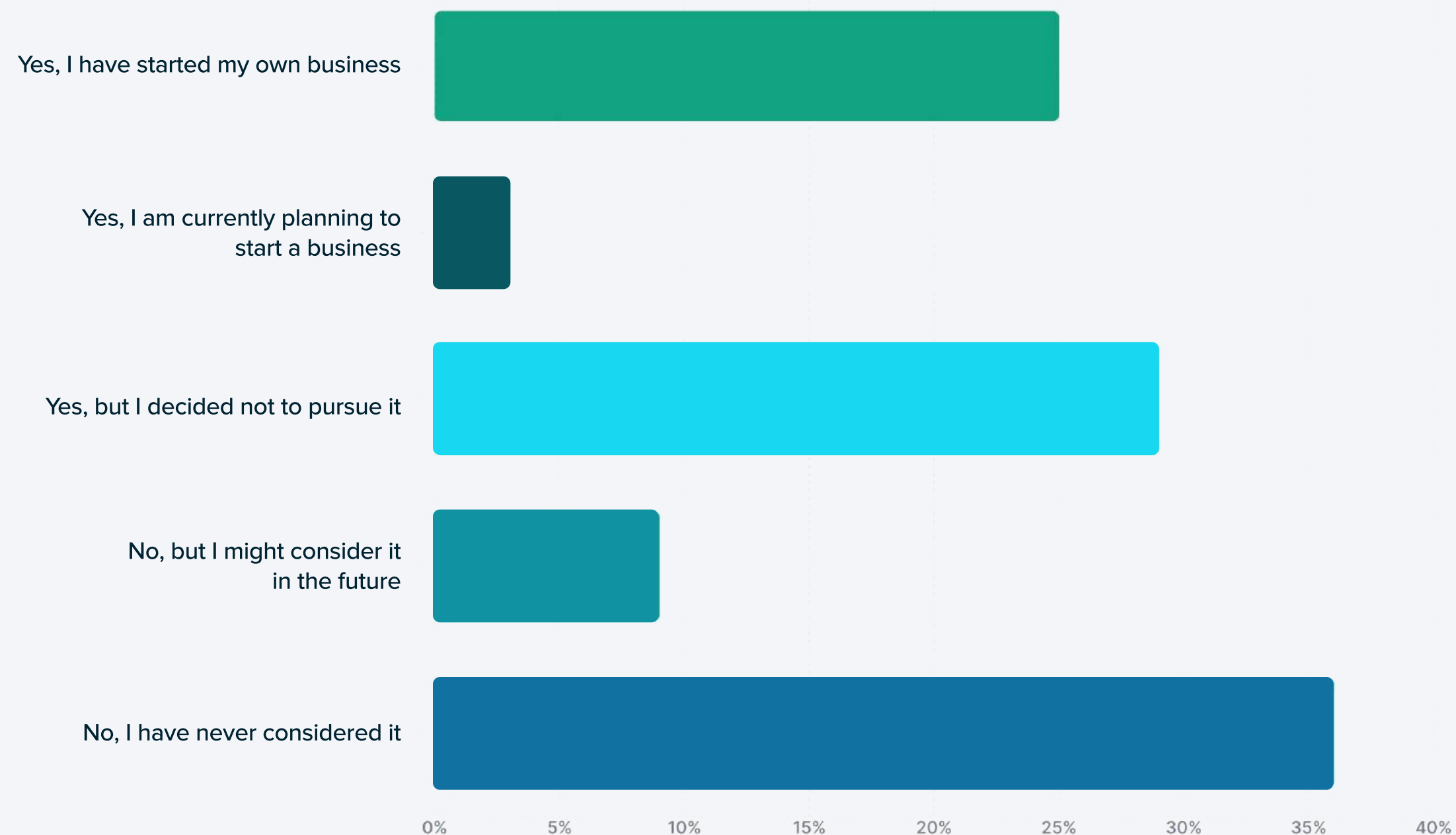
This compares to 38% of the overall British population that own, or have seriously considered starting, a business.

Almost half say they lack confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities.

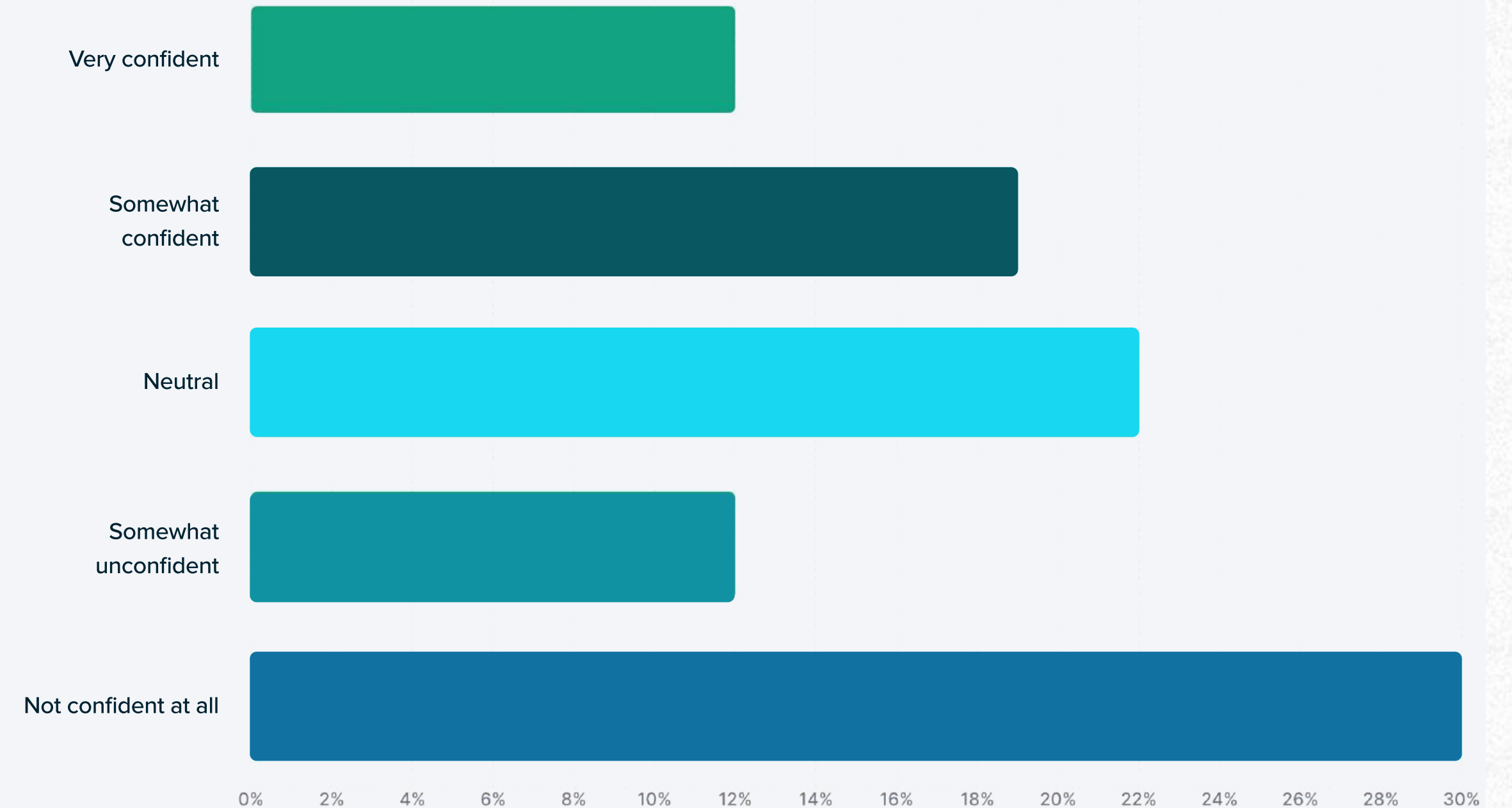
46% lack confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities. 33% are not confident at all, while only 13% feel very confident about their ability to start and run a business.

This compares to over 40% of the UK working age population feeling like they have the skills, knowledge, and experience to start a business.

Have you ever considered starting your own business?



How confident do you feel about your ability to start and run a business?





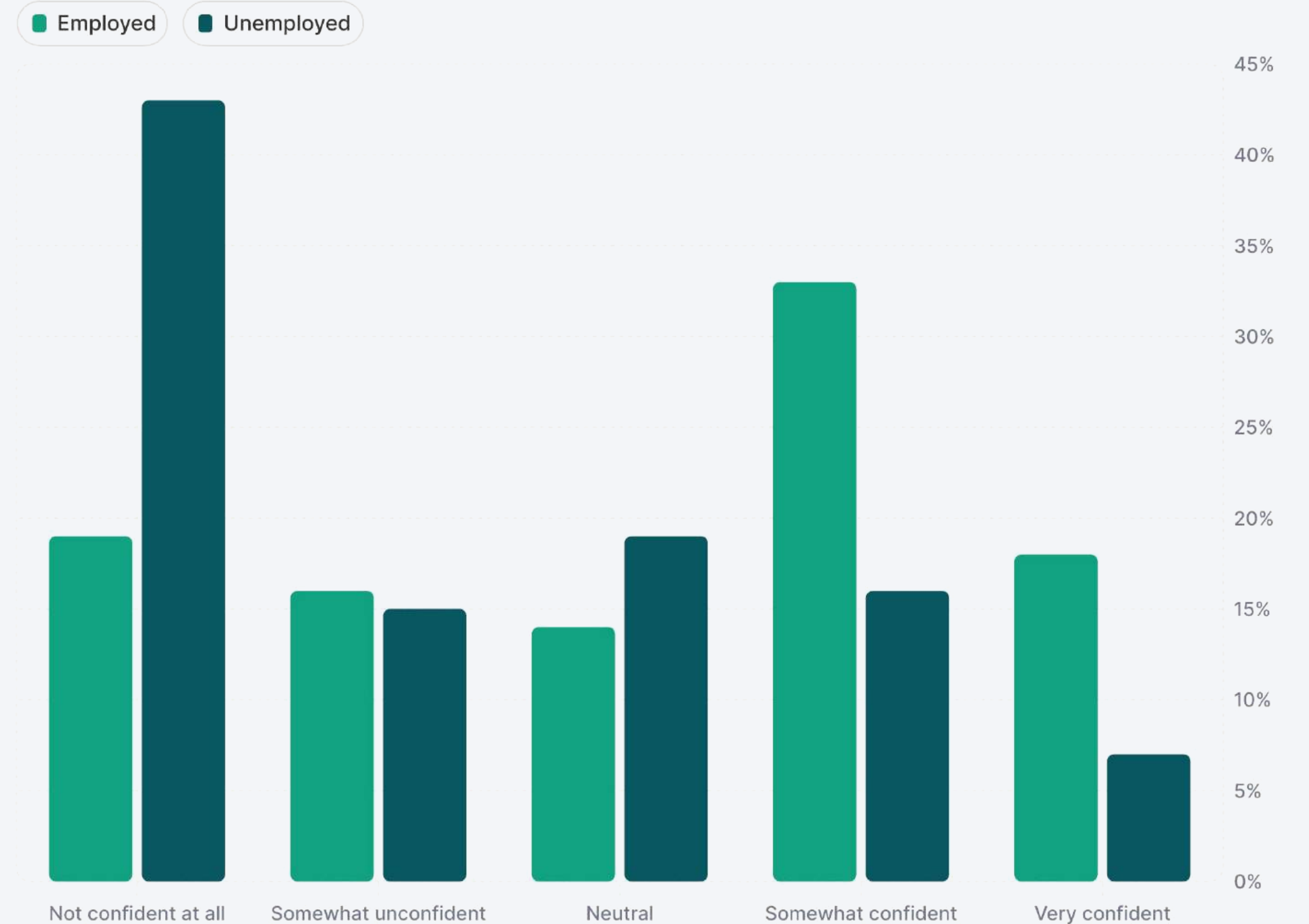
Disabled people who are unemployed are especially lacking in confidence about their ability to start and run a business.

43% of the unemployed people we surveyed say they are not confident at all in their ability to start and run a business, compared with 19% of those who are employed.



“The difficult thing is other people’s attitudes to working with people with disabilities – it’s hard for others to understand the challenges.”

How confident do you feel about your ability to start and run a business?





1 in 3 of the people we surveyed overall say their disability has made them less likely to consider entrepreneurship.

Although 38% say their disability has not influenced their perception of entrepreneurship and 9% say it has made them more motivated to become an entrepreneur.

23% of the physically disabled people we surveyed say their disability has made them less likely to consider entrepreneurship, compared with 40% of physically-disabled people who also have a mental health condition.



“There is a wealth of talent that is hidden with people with disabilities. Given access to the right support would make a world of difference and would or could encourage people to take idea's forward.”

How has your disability influenced your perception of entrepreneurship?





IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS

There is a largely untapped pool of talented, creative members of the disabled community who are thinking about entrepreneurialism who are currently excluded from contributing to our economy.

Kim To
(Flair)

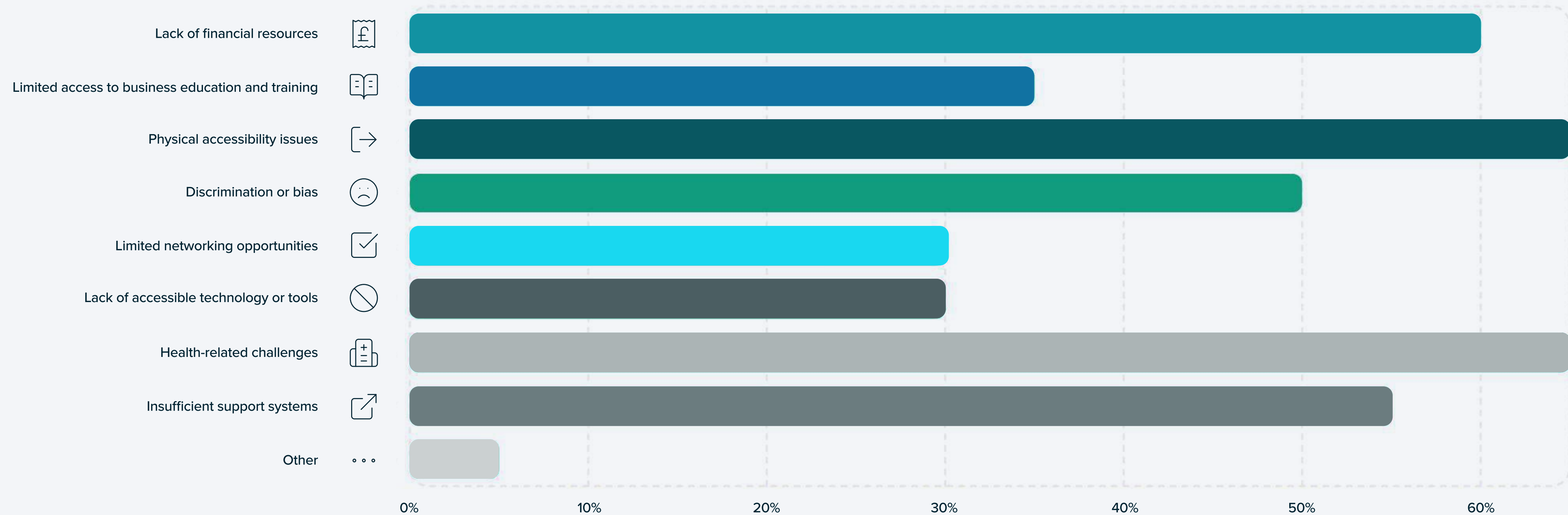


Zareen Ali
(Cogs AI)



The key barriers to entrepreneurship identified by the people we surveyed include accessibility issues, health-related challenges, and financial concerns.

Which do you perceive as barriers to entrepreneurship?





55%

of the disabled people we surveyed say
a lack of financial resources is a key barrier.



This includes access to investment.
Access2Funding has found that disabled
founders are 400x less likely to receive
VC funding.



According to disability charity, Scope, those
who obtain government benefits worry that
this income would be lost if their business
became profitable.



Disabled entrepreneurs are also less likely than
non-disabled entrepreneurs to use banks as a
form of business support.



Scope also found that households with at least
one disabled adult or child need an additional
£975 a month to have the same standard of living
as non-disabled households, piling on further
financial pressure on top of the high living costs in
the UK.



“The downside to entrepreneurship
for disabled people is that the
government doesn’t understand it.
The Department for Work and
Pensions makes it very difficult to
maintain self employment.”



➔ **66%**
are concerned about physical barriers.



The lack of accessibility in traditional workplaces is a persistent issue. Penketh Group found that 27% of disabled people lack wheelchair access in their office.



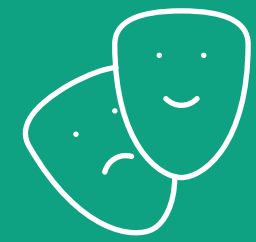
The UK transport accessibility gap also currently stands at 38%, which means that disabled people take 38% fewer trips than those without disabilities, distinctly limiting commuting access to potential business hubs.



“Being an entrepreneur is a non-starter for me as I can’t get up stairs and my wheelchair is bigger than most doorways.”



The Business Disability Forum found that just 37% of disabled employees feel their employer is genuine about removing all disability-related barriers and making the workplace inclusive for disabled employees.



55%

say they are held back by discrimination or bias and 53% say there are insufficient support systems.



23% of disabled business owners have experienced discrimination or negative treatment, according to Business Without Barriers.



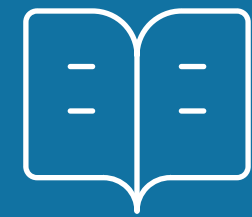
In the same report, 72% said they lacked appropriate role models to look up to.



According to Lloyds Bank, 56% of disabled small business entrepreneurs have no external support when starting their business.



“I currently run a small craft business and would like to expand it via the web but I’m not sure how to market a website effectively.”



34%

pointed to a lack of access to relevant training and education.



Many existing entrepreneurship training platforms for people with disabilities may not be accessible due to physical or digital accessibility challenges.



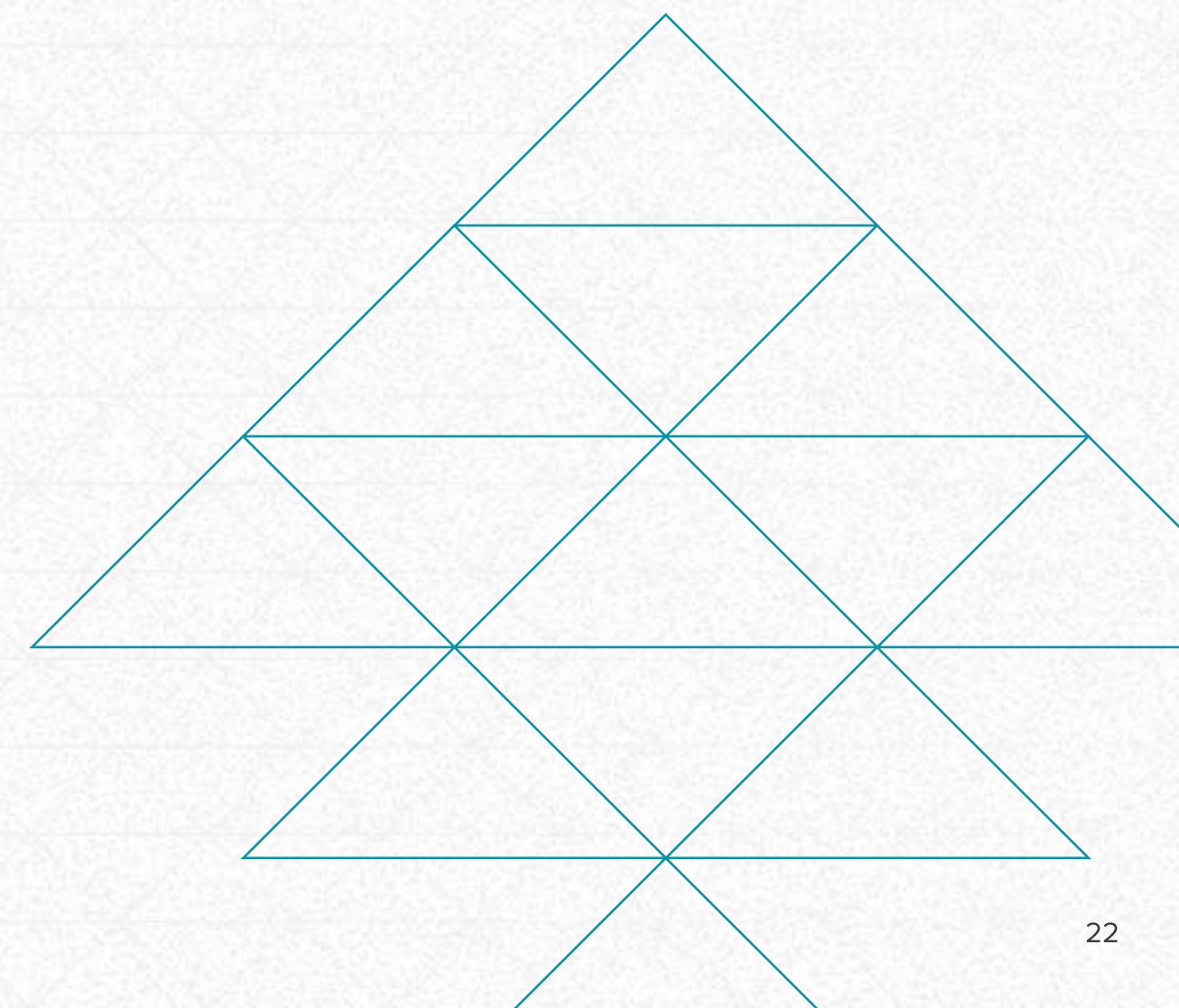
The Lilac Review has called for disabled training and support platforms to be radically simplified to meet the needs of disabled founders.



“Disability and chronic health conditions mean you have to have a more flexible working schedule, and the people and support around you needs to cater to that.”

These are just a few of the existing social, physical, and economic barriers to entrepreneurship felt by the disabled community across the UK.

Generally, it is clear that there is a lack of appropriate support initiatives, leading to unfair and discriminatory conditions that shut disabled people off from business ownership.





FINDING THE SOLUTIONS

What are the solutions? The disabled people we surveyed call for a widespread change to existing platforms and the availability of resources to create a more accessible and equitable entrepreneurial environment in the UK.



Chantelle Young
(Tech Nation)



Lorna Maclean
(Demetria)



The disabled people we surveyed say that greater access to funding, mentorship opportunities, supportive government policies, and more disabled role models in the media would make them more likely to explore entrepreneurship.



“What works for one individual, may not work for another. With this in mind, everyone's needs, support and guidance won't necessarily be the same. There needs to be flexibility.”

While people with physical disabilities put a greater emphasis on the need for accessibility in business environments, overall the findings are consistent across our survey respondents.



Financial Support

53%

say access to startup funding would make them more likely to explore entrepreneurship.



“Financial help to secure higher level education and qualifications would have been a great help to me.”



Accessibility & Technology

32%

call for greater access to adaptive technologies, and **27%** call for improved accessibility in business environments.



“There needs to be far more advocacy for different styles of working, rather than making people who are unable to work traditional office hours feel like they are not contributing to society.”



Supportive Ecosystem

37%

would be more likely to explore entrepreneurship with supportive policies for disabled entrepreneurs, including **29%** wanting networking events for disabled entrepreneurs, **28%** needing guaranteed health insurance coverage, and **25%** emphasising the importance of family and community support.



“It would be wonderful to have access to a support network that helps disabled founders and is collaborative so that businesses can thrive across differing disabilities.”



Business Training

31%

identify specialised business training as especially helpful in encouraging entrepreneurship, specifically marketing and promotional assistance (**25%**) and legal and regulatory support (**26%**).



“I think help and support is the biggest thing any person with a disability needs to give the confidence and physical help to dare to move forward.”



Mentorship and Representation

42%

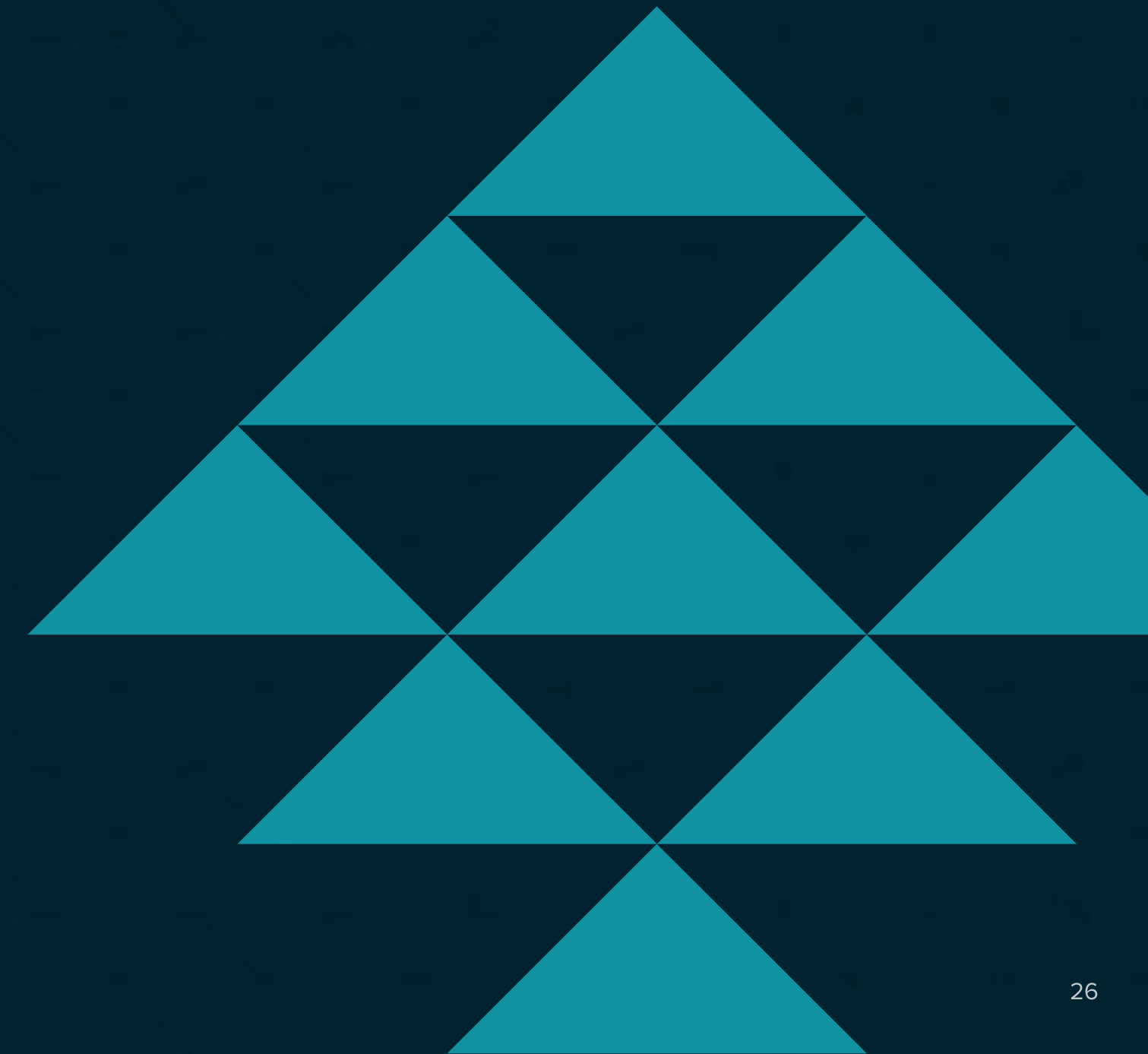
would be more likely to explore entrepreneurship with mentorship from successful entrepreneurs with disabilities, whilst **31%** mentioned that having increased media representation would make them more likely to explore the idea.



“Promoting self-belief amongst disabled people is a great starting point to build on in my view and therefore having inspirational disabled role models can be really beneficial.”



INTRODUCING CREO





Why Creo?

Forged in partnership with Motability Operations, Creo exists to amplify and connect disabled and neurodiverse founders, and entrepreneurs innovating around disability, to provide them with the knowledge, connections, and tools to scale their startups.

Creo is a first-of-its-kind springboard programme for founders, based on openness and intimacy. It is where honest conversations happen about what it means to be a disabled or neurodiverse founder and what it takes to succeed. It consists of industry expert-led workshops and content, peer-to-peer support, and coaching sessions.

What are the benefits?



Exchange

Join a lifelong community of Creo and Tech Nation alumni for skill-sharing, nuanced discussion, and support.



Build

Develop mutually beneficial relationships with larger corporates and the disability, neurodiversity and tech founder ecosystem.



Grow

Be supported to understand, demystify and access venture capital and angel investors.



Upskill

Gain access to vital knowledge and skills that will help you take your company to the next level.



Learn

Hear from industry experts and Tech Nation alumni who have lived experience of foundership.



Connect

Build deep and valuable connections and leverage peer-to-peer support within your cohort.



Creo companies have:



At least one founder that self-identifies as disabled or neurodiverse – this member must have a majority/equal equity stake in the business.



OR the company must be innovating around disability or neurodiversity.



HQ in the UK.



A product or service, ideally within the tech sector but not essential.



Seed to pre-Series A funding stage. If bootstrapped, your annual revenue is below £1.5m.

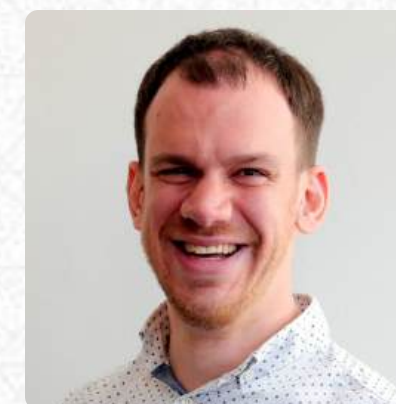


A commitment to community – be able to demonstrate a willingness to support your founder community.



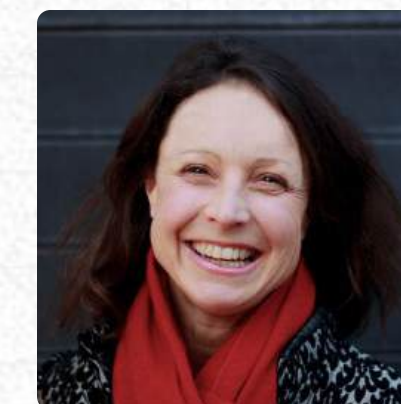
Proof of impact – the company must be working on a venture that has a positive socio, economic or environmental impact or if innovating around disability or neurodiversity this should be to improve life, community, equity, or inclusion of disabled and neurodiverse people.

Key advisors



Alex Papanikolaou

Founder
Freedom One Life



Christine Hemphill

Founder
Freedom One Life



Shani Dhanda

Disability Inclusion & Accessibility
Specialist, Social Entrepreneur and
Broadcaster,
@Shanidhanda



Michelle Ovens

Founder
Small Business Britain



Srin Madipalli

Founder, People & Robots, Former CEO/
Co-founder
Accomable (sold to Airbnb)



Martyn Sibley

Co-founder, Purple Goat Agency &
Disability Horizons Magazine & Former
Co-founder
Accomable (sold to Airbnb)



Chantelle Young

Programme Lead, Tech Nation

Head of Creo Programme

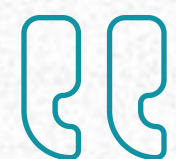
Get in touch:



Partner with Creo

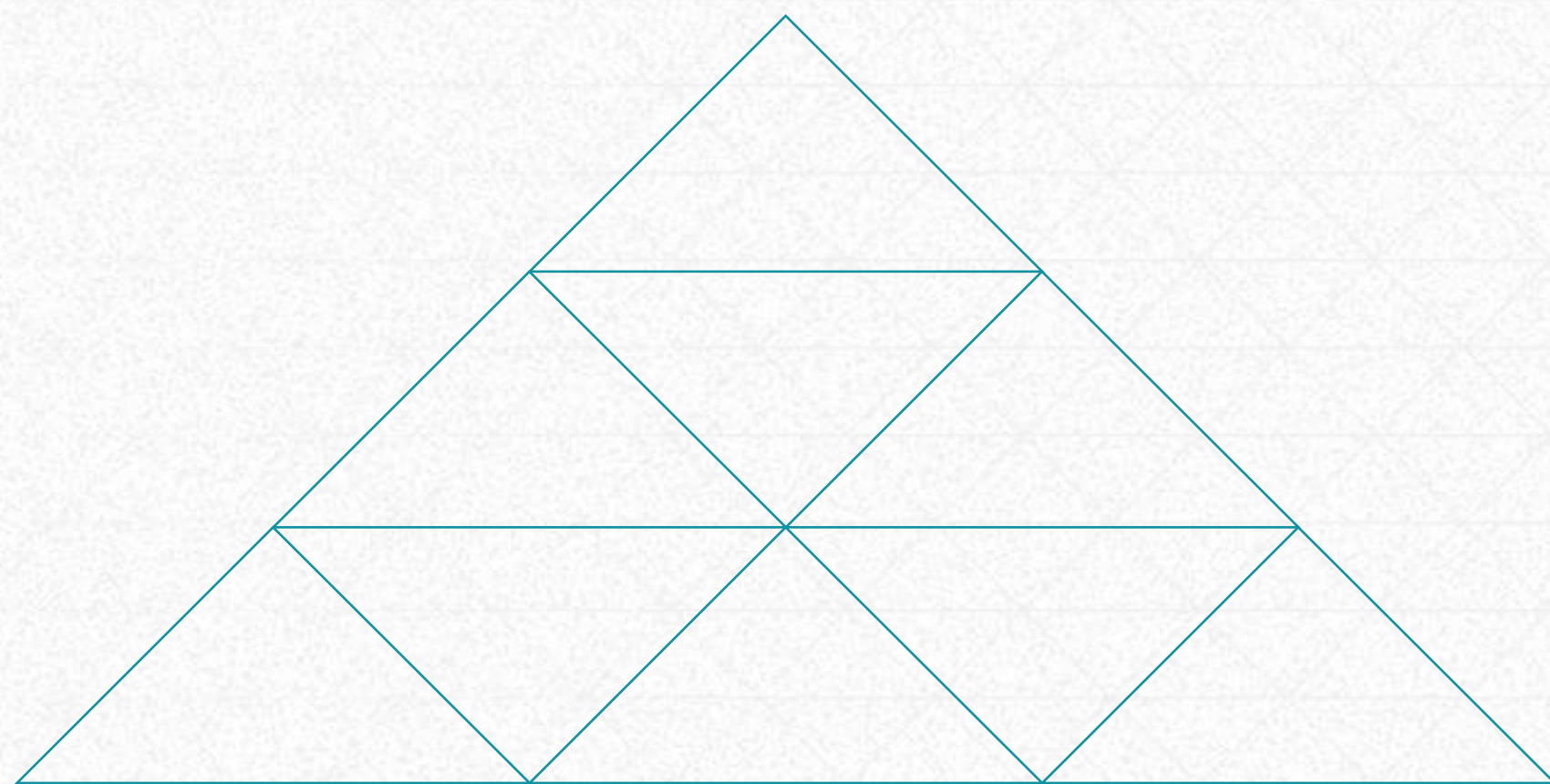


Pre register your interest for Creo 2025



“I’m incredibly proud of the work we’re doing to unlock and drive entrepreneurship for disabled and neurodiverse founders throughout the UK. This inaugural cohort demonstrates the immense potential that disabled and neurodiverse entrepreneurs bring, with innovations spanning assistive technology, health, and education.

Together with our partners, advisors and mentors, we’re championing meaningful change in the tech industry, where disabled and neurodiverse founders have the tools and networks to succeed and make a lasting impact.”

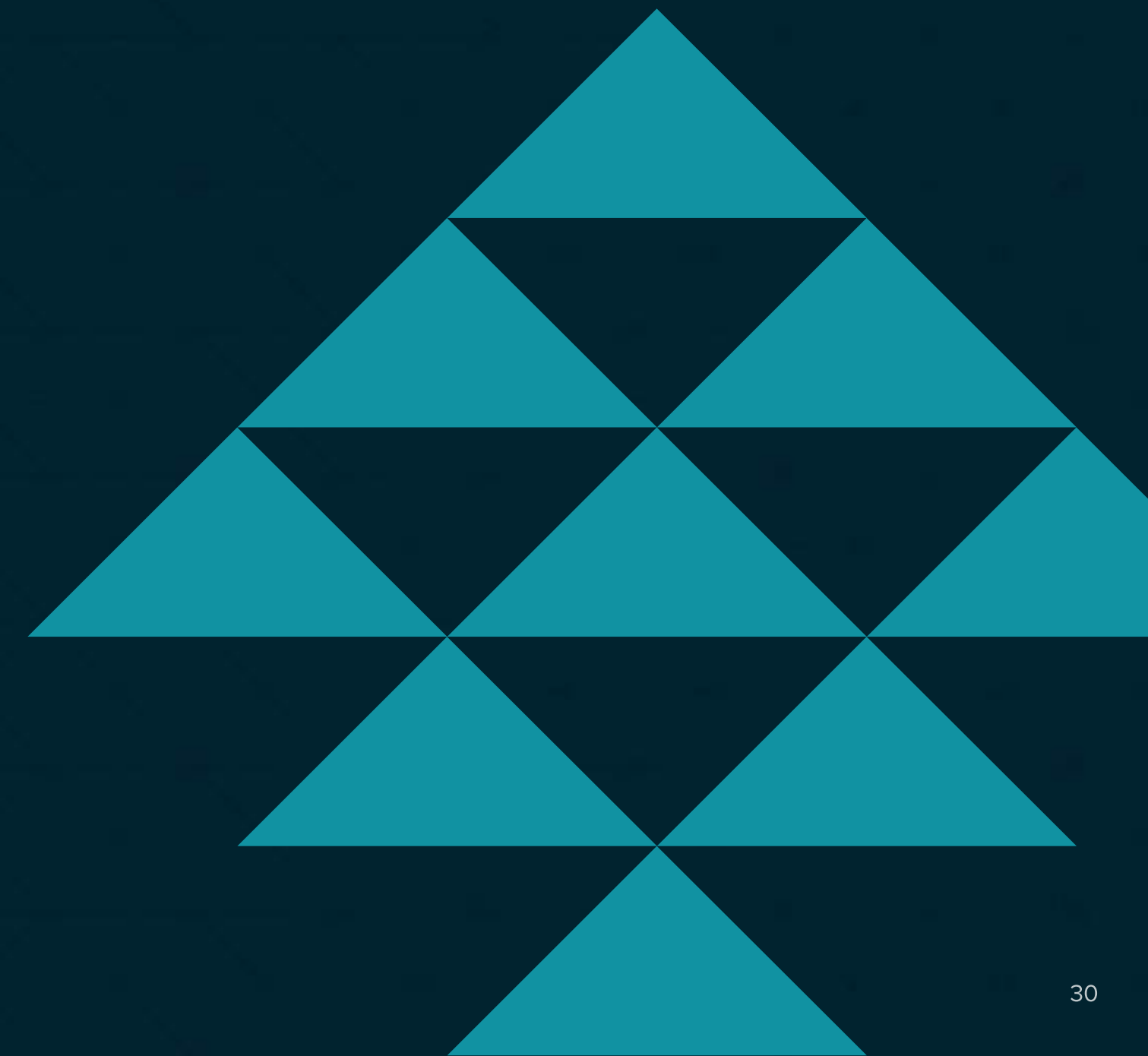


TECH NATION
CREO



MEET THE COHORT

Our inaugural Creo cohort are championing disabled and neurodiverse entrepreneurship, blazing a trail in AI-powered assistive technology, innovating in health and education, and widening access for disabled people in the UK and beyond.





ABLE2BOOK

Founded by
Jessica Lloyd

Able2Book is a one-stop shop for finding and booking venue tickets for disabled people and their carers based on their needs and the disability evidence they hold.

Founded:	2023
Company HQ	Bristol
Industry	Ecommerce

 The Story

I am creating an online booking platform where disabled people can book accessible tickets, hassle free. Until now, there has been no streamlined process for disabled people to reliably book accessible tickets, so it's come from a personal frustration I have experienced as someone with a mobility impairment. I've struggled to find the information I need, have had to take additional steps to enquire about accessible ticket policies and have experienced delays with responses which have sometimes caused me to miss out on tickets altogether. I know that this is a widespread problem for the disabled community with the current processes taking a lot of time and energy.

 Overcoming Challenges

I have a background in HR, so I felt a little unsure in terms of the business strategy so I have been trying to upskill over the last year and grow my business knowledge. I've been going to workshops which teach how to set up and run a business, how to market things, funding, all sorts of things like that.

I think in general, barriers to equal opportunities for disabled people exist because there's a lack of awareness and there's still a lot of stigma around disability, which might subconsciously feed through a lot of things in society. Disabled people as a community have enough trouble navigating the world, because it's not built for them. And part of the reason I started Able2Book, was to remove one of those barriers and make life a little bit easier and enjoyable.

 Learning Along the Way

You need to be open minded and realistic in terms of your trajectory. There are down times and your self-doubt might creep in. Your mission and passion will be your driving force to carry on - you get nowhere without trying. I know that I am not going to know everything, so don't get bogged down trying. I also know that I can bring certain skills and my own lived experience as a disabled person.



WeWALK

Founded by
**Gökhan Meriçliler and
Kürşat Ceylan**

Chief Innovation Officer:
Jean Marc Feghali

By leveraging cutting edge tech and AI, WeWALK creates revolutionary mobility tools for visually impaired people, driven by lived experiences.

Founded:	2020
Company HQ	London
Industry	AI

(INTERVIEW WITH JEAN MARC FEGHALI)

The Story

We're a team of over 20 people with lived and professional experience of visual impairment. Those experiences led us to realise that, using the right technology, we could do so much more with today's existing mobility tools for visually impaired people. We help visually impaired people get from point A to point B by inventing revolutionary products, like our WeWALK Smart Cane and WeASSIST visual interpretation service.

Today, we've developed technology that's reached users in over 60 countries and earned a TIME Best Invention and the King's Award for Innovation.

Overcoming Challenges

Visually impaired people often have a 'toolbox' of aids that are used to assist with daily tasks. The challenge for us is making sure that, as we build our products, we're filling in as many empty gaps in this toolbox as possible. We're addressing the needs of cane users, but we know that visually impaired people aren't just cane users, they could be guide dog users, or partially sighted people who might not use anything.

As a startup, everything is limited, so you can't just throw out 10 products and see what works.

We're extremely systematic with this process of user testing. Most who purchase prefer to get in touch with us and we will run them through training, so it is very personal. We go further by conducting controlled trials with visually impaired product users, partnering with Imperial College and the Royal National Institute of Blind People to capture the widest range of user requirements

When we approach potential partners and investors, people appreciate the fact that our disability makes us understand our product market fit better. But at the same time, we remain considerate that our needs don't necessarily represent the needs of the entire community and we have to back our products with a solid, equitable business model. Having successfully closed both a Seed and pre-Series A round, it's gratifying to know that we've transformed our own challenges into a reliable solution for the community.

Visual impairment is a specialised field, so we recognise that not everyone will appreciate that this is a fundamental issue, and perhaps overlook the market size. But with the right investors, you can show them that, actually, it's 253 million people worldwide, 2 million in the UK, growing to 4 million by 2050.

We also carefully consider the partners that we work with because we need them to understand our community and impact. It's why our investment board includes incredible organisations like Nesta Impact Investments and KHP Ventures who support us with their highly relevant expertise and network.

Learning Along the Way

Reflecting on our Seed round in 2020, we took on lots of advice on adjusting our deck and value proposition, each with its own perspective on what would make it just right. We therefore learned the importance of presenting our vision as clearly and confidently as possible, even amongst varying opinions. Additionally, our team has come to believe that it's crucial for startups to avoid rushing, taking on unnecessary capital, or expanding too quickly. A thoughtful, measured approach truly builds a stronger foundation for sustainable growth.



Founded by
Ersin Güray

PoiLabs provides an indoor location platform that enhances accessibility for visually impaired and blind individuals by delivering high indoor location accuracy and compatibility across multiple platforms.

Founded:	2022
Company HQ	London
Industry	Proptech/Retail Tech

The Story

We founded PoiLabs back in 2015, but started our current solutions in 2018 with the mission to make indoor spaces accessible for the visually impaired and blind, allowing them to be more independent. Our mission aligns with UNDP's sustainable goals, focusing on reduced inequalities. We've created a mobile application-based solution that's available across numerous digital platforms.

We have customisation options because not all visual impairments are the same. Some have partial sight, some have no sight, so they can change the visuals accordingly. We have multiple support levels and they can adjust navigational features depending on their needs.

Overcoming Challenges

One of our biggest challenges is addressing diverse user needs. Everybody wants something specific for themselves, but to have all the options available in one app is very challenging. We try to do workshops, get feedback, and find solutions that cover most needs.

The second challenge is the commercial side. Social impact is really good and has PR value, but when it comes to the financial part, it's often unreasonable for venues to make the investment. To overcome this we've also introduced commercial solutions for the venues in the form of maps available for all visitors. For example, we work with an airport to use the accessibility part for all visitors for digital signages and websites.

We're also focusing on additional accessibility features for people with physical disabilities, creating accessible routes that avoid steps, narrow places, or any inaccessible areas. We've also made adaptations for people with cognitive disabilities, as almost 90% of people with challenges can't read well, so we try to have more easily understood icons.

Learning Along the Way

I think collaboration is very important in this sector. There are many companies working on similar projects, but since they're very small, there's no economies of scale. For example, reaching out to blind people is a challenge. In Turkey, we cooperated with a telecom company that already had millions of users and provided audiobooks and audio descriptions. We included our services through their app, so we didn't have to separately reach out to find a community. Everybody is solving a part of the problem, but I think the problem can only be solved when we work together.



Founded by
Kayva Jain

Sensei builds low tech, easy-to-install, and universally designed tactile surfaces that empower visually impaired individuals to navigate indoor spaces independently.

Founded:	2021
Company HQ	London
Industry	Assistive Technology

The Story

We are trying to make spaces more inclusive and accessible for people with vision impairment. Currently, we are looking into public spaces, working with schools, hospitals, care homes, to make it more navigable for people with vision impairment so that we can support their growth, as well as give them the independence and confidence to just do a basic task as just going around the space.

We have built a community of over 400 friends, parents or caretakers of visually impaired people. They are actively involved in the designing and testing of our products so that our solutions are as user-friendly as possible. We started selling sample kits and have tested it in 10 schools. Students need a safe environment to thrive in - something as basic as just knowing where they're going and how to differentiate different rooms, or even just to go to the washroom on their own - should be a priority.

In the last six months, we got two Innovate UK grants - Creative Catalyst and Women in Innovation, which is starting soon. We are looking to fundraise now to properly get a team so that we can scale our impact.

Overcoming Challenges

When walking into a room and you are the only one who's talking about disability, and being a female founder, and not being from here, every room feels very overwhelming to me. I know that change takes time, and people are increasingly aware about improving accessibility and inclusivity, but for them to implement change, there is a huge cost. It requires a lot of stakeholders to make that decision actually go forward.

This journey has taught me a lot of patience. Even though this is something emotionally I'm connected with, this might not be people's top priority. I have to balance my emotional investment in the product, and my understanding of people's varying priorities towards helping the visually impaired community.

It is interesting that a lot of the time, people aren't engaged with an idea unless it's directly related to them. Until a close family friend partially lost their sight, I wouldn't have thought that the public spaces around us are not accessible. It is important that people are understanding, sympathetic, but also eager to learn and engage with these social issues to promote change.

Learning Along the Way

Be patient, because this is gonna test you every single day. Resilience is also key, as there will be a lot of things that you are not prepared for. It took me a long time to grow that confidence.

I'm a very introverted person, but I've been learning more how to get my voice out there, because that's the only way I'm going to get anywhere. Do everything at your own pace, try and have those important conversations and try not to get disheartened or take it personally if someone doesn't see the value in your idea.



Founded by
Dan Scarfe (CEO)

COO:
Lara Scarfe

XRAI leverages the power of augmented reality to transform speech into real-time subtitles, all in an innovative app.

Founded:	2022
Company HQ	London
Industry	AR/Technology

The Story

We want to break down barriers to communication. By leveraging the power of augmented reality, our innovative app transforms speech into real-time subtitles, displayed directly on any smart device.

We've built the software now, we've launched it. We've had over 30,000 people around the world experience it, and we've had some incredible stories from people about how they've been able to leave the house for the first time in years, or how they've been able to listen to the radio for the first time, or have a phone call - these things that we all take for granted.

We are working with theatres, banks, airports and other global companies. Anywhere where someone would miss an announcement, potentially miss their flight or miss what a doctor's telling you because you couldn't bring a physical person with you - it's the idea that you can give back independence.

Overcoming Challenges

Dan: The biggest problem with writing a piece of software is you have to actually create it. Professional services, you can set up on day one and start selling. Software, you've got to wait two years, and then when you get to two years, then people will only pay quite a small amount. We're just at that awkward kind of teenage years between having something now and actually having it start to create momentum by itself.

Lara: Coming from my background in big tech, going from specialist to generalist has been a challenge. You have to do everything all the time. And if you don't know how to do something, you have to very quickly go and learn how to do that something.

Dan: Globally, there is no impetus for VCs to go down an accessibility track, but if you think of the hearing aid industry, it's a beyond multi-billion dollar industry. There are people who will absolutely pay to be able to go out to a restaurant with family or pay to be able to be further included, and businesses who absolutely should enable their staff to do their very best work.

Learning Along the Way

Lara: The advice I always give myself, which I ignore every single day, is focus and don't try to do too many things. Don't be too hard on yourself - we make so many mistakes and we own them, and we very quickly move on. 'Fail fast' - that's what I live by. There are things that don't work - stop doing them. It might be a hire, it might be a revenue stream, it might be a product, but fail fast and move on.



Founded by
Lorna Maclean

Demetria is reducing endometriosis diagnosis from 9 years to 9 minutes, from invasive surgery to a simple AI-enhanced ultrasound.

Founded:	2024
Company HQ	London
Industry	AI/Femtech

 The Story

Our mission is to transform the landscape of endometriosis diagnosis—a deeply personal goal driven by lived experience. It affects 1 in 10 women globally, yet the average diagnosis period is 9 years, whilst the disease progresses and can spread to other organs and cause irreversible damage—endometriosis is the leading cause of infertility. We’re here to change that by using AI to bypass the surgery and general anaesthetic, taking the speed of diagnosis from 9 years to 9 minutes, non-invasively.

My own journey to diagnosis spanned 15 years. It took 61 GP visits, 50 ultrasounds, 180 days of missed work and school, and £30,000 out-of-pocket before I finally received my diagnosis. As a former healthcare management consultant, I realised that if I faced this battle—despite knowing how to navigate the system—millions of other women were likely facing even steeper barriers. When I started working in an AI startup I had a brainwave that AI could do something for endometriosis. I spent that weekend going down a rabbit hole in all the scientific papers and realised that I could really build something, and I left my job to become a founder..

 Overcoming Challenges

The early days of any startup are filled with challenges, and one of the first major decisions is knowing when to leave a full-time job and fully commit to a venture. Making that jump is crucial, and Cambridge’s Impulse programme played a pivotal role in helping me make that decision. Through 1:1 sessions with some of the UK’s top entrepreneurs who rigorously tested my business idea, I gained a clearer understanding of the long and challenging road ahead.

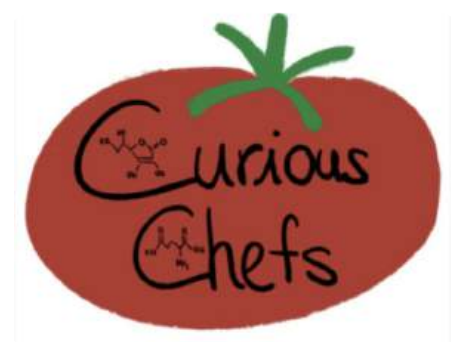
Once you're full-time, the next challenge is understanding how long to bootstrap before seeking investment. It’s about striking the right balance between funding and sustainability. With medtech, the long road through regulation, which means you often have to bootstrap for longer than most.

As the complexity of the business grows, managing your health becomes even more important. For me, living with endometriosis means prioritising stress management. Stress exacerbates the condition, so I’ve had to learn to recognise when it’s time to step away, shut my laptop, and recharge. Setting these boundaries is essential for long-term well-being and productivity.

 Learning Along the Way

I think the first thing is actually understanding how much things are going to cost, how long and complex the journey is, and whether you're prepared to do that.

However, know that there is an unbelievably supportive startup ecosystem, not just in the UK, but around the world, that has got your back. Already, just a few months into startup life, I cannot count the number of brilliant entrepreneurs who have been willing to step in and help move the needle on my startup.



Founded by
Mia Jones

Curious Chefs Club is an online platform to improve food education for children by teaching them the principles of cooking through science.

Founded:	2024
Company HQ	London
Industry	Food Science

The Story

When I started learning how to cook, I was glued to recipes. I thought that every step had to be followed to the word, and I realised that was because I didn’t understand the reasoning behind those chemical processes. I found that the way children are taught to cook is by following steps, rather than the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ of the cooking process.

When I started my chemical engineering degree, I discovered food science and realised that the incorporation of that into education would be invaluable. Food education in schools would increase positive attitudes for those who are intimidated by science, as well as promote healthy eating habits.

Overcoming Challenges

I was diagnosed with ADHD whilst at university, which is my main challenge as well as my main asset. I would say I’m very creative and have lots of ideas I want to incorporate, but struggle to streamline and set priorities as I get really hyper-focused on certain ideas.

One of the challenges is that the product ‘users’ are the children at the end of the day, but the users are also the teachers, and then the customers are the schools. But then schools have limited funding from the government, so the government needs to care about food education. So despite being a product for children, it actually involves a huge, top-down network.

I was a lot harder on myself before I was properly diagnosed, as I couldn’t understand why my brain worked differently to others. But now my peers are really understanding of the way I work, and I also understand myself a lot better. The Imperial Enterprise Lab has been amazing, and I bounce my ideas off of those monthly calls so I don’t feel alone in the process.

Learning Along the Way

My idea has been adapted multiple times since its inception, and those kind of brainstorming and refining processes are really important in the journey. Continuously talking to potential customers and users, I realised what needed to improve, so don’t be afraid to take on criticisms.



LENDOCARE

Founded by
Solomia Boretska

Lendocare aims to bring customers easy access to at-home medical equipment and technology rentals.

Founded:	2024
Company HQ	London
Industry	Product-as-a-Service

The Story

We're digitising the rental and subscription of at home medical equipment, starting off with mobility equipment, making it easy, flexible, and affordable for ageing and disabled communities to access the equipment they need.

We launched a national self propelled wheelchair hire service in March, and that started growing 45% month on month. Then we hit a bottleneck, which was that we needed more stock. So now we're speaking to investors about raising cash to keep growing that, hoping to launch nationwide. We want to end the postcode lottery of healthcare. Everyone deserves the same level of service and equipment all across the country.

Overcoming Challenges

It's definitely been a learning curve. It is also not just a matter of the customer booking a wheelchair, and then using it. We have to be really conscious about people's needs in regards to their mobility and the whole experience of usage, not just the booking process.

Investors are starting to understand that this is a growing market and that the accessibility industry is far behind other industries in terms of digitisation. Our ageing population as well as the disabled community aren't just a small percentage of the population, and it should be a social norm to think about these issues.

We've been very lucky to receive some funding through the Atomico Scout fund, helped by the former head of accessibility at Airbnb, who is a lifetime wheelchair user and saw the problem straight away. His advocacy helped us show that this isn't just a 'nice-to-have' product, it is a social need on a global scale.

It's been interesting to see the difference where some investors are disinterested, but then those whose mothers or fathers have had accidents or strokes and suddenly need a wheelchair, it has been impossible to get the equipment.

Learning Along the Way

It's a shame that we have to get people to go through these difficulties for them to understand the importance, things are starting to change.

Definitely go after the revenue. Most people are chasing the numbers to scale and not really thinking about whether your business is one that can not only thrive but survive. You don't want to be in a position where you're dependent on other people funding your growth.

Think about your business model early, because if you want to truly create a business that can bring these kinds of services to the market, you've got to create one that can pay for itself, rather than one that becomes constantly in need of investment for it to get anywhere.



1 | TRAINOR JIM

Founded by
**Jim Kelly and
Lee Trainor**

Trainer Jim enables easy exercise for everyone with the ‘Shuffler’, an affordable and user-friendly seated exercise device aimed at enhancing mobility and physical activity for ageing and sedentary individuals.

Founded:

2018

Company HQ

Kent

Industry

Health & Wellbeing

The Story

Lee: Trainer Jim is an at-home physio roller-frame system to help improve the mobility of disabled and elderly people, simultaneously preventing injury and relieving the pressure on the NHS.

Our idea started when my mother in law fell and found herself in need of a knee replacement. This is where the problems began - she needed physiotherapy after her replacement but the pain meant she couldn’t drive, so became very sedentary and anxious. My background as a rail engineer meant that I could make her a small system which allowed her to sit in her armchair whilst rolling her feet over some aluminium bars. After 4 weeks she could drive her car and after 7 weeks she was signed off from physiotherapy altogether. We knew that there must be so many people in the same position, so I turned to Jim and we put our heads together to establish Trainer Jim. We’re now at the manufacturing stage for the first 1000 sets to go out.

Jim: My background is in the NHS, so I knew that most musculoskeletal issues don’t require surgery, so straight line, non-impact strengthening techniques are increasingly important in the healing process. The price and bulkiness of exercise bikes and rowing machines meant that many of my patients don’t bother to train, so the idea of a set of roller frames that allows somebody to shuffle their feet back and forth whilst seated, is the perfect antidote. We put a UK patent on the idea, and the prototype has now evolved into an affordable, lightweight, portable frame which anyone can easily incorporate into their daily routine.

Overcoming Challenges

Jim: I’m a GP for over half the week so my biggest challenge has been time. Also, we’re in a place of wanting to secure investment and get our first customers but we also have an easily copyable, physical product. Trying to protect that has been a big balance between being cautious and also showing it off and attracting potential customers.

Lee: For me, the biggest challenge has been refining the manufacturing process to get it to a stage where it’s affordable and we actually trust them.

Learning Along the Way

Lee: Don't believe everything you hear. When you're talking to someone that's saying they can do something, always check it out. You're going to spend a lot of money, and they can't always produce what they claim.

Jim: Start small and learn fast, but do it by prototyping and testing your idea. Try to avoid focusing on rabbit holes and dead ends by product testing in a small-scale and cheap way, allowing you to find your customer first, and then address the pain points. Once you've got that product market fit, then you will have to commit - not only time but also money. And find a co-founder. I think both of us would have struggled if we didn't have each other, just to pick each other up on the down days.



DisMantle Initiative
Proactive Inclusion

Founded by

Sarah Arch

DisMantle is an award-winning initiative that helps businesses to identify and dismantle barriers in the workplace that affect disabled people.

Founded:	2023
Company HQ	Ipswich
Industry	Training and Consultancy

The Story

I'm trying to neutralise the stigma around disability by changing the language and mindset surrounding it, helping people to understand that being disabled is not inherently negative. I provide training, consultancy and auditing all around disability, inclusion, and accessibility.

Bias is rarely intentional, but to dismantle ableism and speak about disability in neutral terms, we need to educate society and reach what I call 'disability neutrality'.

Overcoming Challenges

My biggest obstacle is myself. I have various chronic illnesses and ADHD, which at times interact in an unproductive way, as I struggle to pace myself and then my body crashes and my fatigue and pain flare up. It's something I just have to learn to live with and try to manage as best I can.

Culture and resources are so important when it comes to disabled founders achieving success. Lots of disabled founders become founders because they have experienced other workplaces that don't meet their needs. That was my experience. I had worked for over 20 years for other people and it didn't suit the way my body worked.

Disabled founders are often really quite innovative and creative, because they have to be, because we live in a society that doesn't meet our needs. But the resources aren't there to help - support and funding is hard to come by, but the demand is out there. I was really lucky that I found a business coach that pointed me in the direction of a grant which I got and was a massive help.

Learning Along the Way

Find a community that can support you. There are programmes everywhere - when I first started, my local university was running a boot camp for people who wanted to start a social enterprise, and that was really helpful.

Naturally, I struggle with imposter syndrome, and getting knock backs is hard. You have to be strong and surround yourself with people who champion and support you.



Founded by

Chris Lynch

Diverse Made Media is a disabled-led, London-based TV & Film Production house that works across digital and broadcast, providing content for brands, agencies and broadcasters.

Founded:	2011
Company HQ	London
Industry	Film, TV & Advertising

The Story

During my career working in TV and film I had seen a real deficit of minority groups behind the camera, leading me to set up Diverse Made Media in 2022. There are existing initiatives that cater for emerging talent, but no one is really shining a light on those established professionals who potentially haven't had the support in terms of diversity and inclusion, so we're innovating production solutions focusing on every spectrum within D&I.

For example, as a wheelchair user who loves being hands-on with camera operating, I've developed a prototype we call Caerus, taken from the Greek god of opportunity, where you can record steadily without needing to simultaneously hold your chair and camera, allowing people with mobility disabilities to become camera operators.

My ultimate goal is to be integrated into a major company and work on big productions while training cohorts of disabled creatives looking to enter the industry and supplying our camera units to different productions and studios globally.

Overcoming Challenges

Our current challenges are financing and space. It is hard to get loans and grants. I'm trying to get a loan from the Great British Business Bank after being rejected from the Innovate Catalyst Fund last year, but you don't get any feedback, which makes it hard for a startup trying to understand how to grow and improve.

We also need proper premises where we can record content and develop our own marketing. We've been given some desk space by an advertising agency, but we don't have any storage space. I've got a small studio apartment in East London with two wheelchairs and about £50,000 worth of production equipment around me.

Learning Along the Way

Try to seize the moment and just drive things forward - don't ever wait for something to happen. Having clarity helps, and I guess it helps that I've been in the industry for a long time. I know how it operates, how to scale it, who to have conversations with.

The finance side has been the biggest hurdle, and there's no real signposting or support specifically for disabled entrepreneurs until now with things like Creo. But you have to keep pushing forward and making your own opportunities.



LOVE
DISFIGURE
TALENT

Founded by
Sylvia Macgregor

Love Disfigure is a talent agency representing people with differences and disabilities. By finding work in modelling, acting, and public speaking, it aims to create more inclusion and representation for everybody.

Founded:	2023
Company HQ	London
Industry	Fashion & Media

The Story

After suffering an accident as a child which left me with scars, I struggled through my teen years and adult life to feel like I belonged. I didn't see any representation of me in the press, media, or society. Nothing online seemed to show real bodies, so in 2017, I decided to create campaigns, photoshoots, and protests to change the way society sees disfigurement.

Now, we support our community by opening pathways for them to find work as models, actors, and speakers, roles in which they are often overlooked. Under the motto 'All Bodies are Different, Unique, and Beautiful', we aim to create more inclusion and representation for people that are not usually seen in the limelight.

Overcoming Challenges

My ADHD means I often find it hard to focus and streamline my productivity. I also don't have a co-founder or team so that has been difficult when trying to balance workload.

Agencies have troubled representations as so often they treat their talent badly and take an unfair cut of their salaries and so on, and I want to change that. I have built relationships with my talent - as a disabled founder I know I can be understanding of their needs, whether it's an accessible audition space or casting, simple things like that make the agency so special.

Applications for grants and funding for D&I projects are extremely oversaturated and it is very difficult to receive any money. I have spent hours filling out forms and I get very little response, which is what I thought would be the easy bit.

It is also just a matter of getting your foot in the door, but for people like myself it is a real challenge to get those connections with production companies, directors, producers, and be part of that network, so any kind of opportunity to meet people is important.

Learning Along the Way

Anything is possible. My disability makes certain times of day extremely difficult, I often have to lie in bed, making evenings very hard to work. However, I've learnt that being a founder you can work on your own time schedule. Society needs to understand that many disabled founders will not be able to operate in the same way and on the same schedule as other business owners, but that is not a detriment to their efforts and skill. Anyone who wants to run a business needs to be confident and believe in themselves.



Founded by

Alex Jamieson and
Lillie Jamieson

Send it to Alex is an award-winning B Corp virtual employment support service created by neurodivergent people for neurodivergent people.

Founded:

2023

Company HQ

London

Industry

Diversity Equity and Inclusion

(INTERVIEW WITH LILLIE)

The Story

As neurodivergent women, we set up Send it to Alex as an employment support service to improve the occupational support that is provided to people like ourselves. Our mission is to bridge the disability employment gap and make employment truly inclusive by empowering organisations and individuals to better understand what neurodiversity is, what the challenges are, and how to overcome them.

We have three core services: training to help organisations understand the differences and support strategies; workplace assessment to identify support needs and solutions; and our one-to-one support worker service, where we provide human support to overcome the practical day-to-day challenges.

Overcoming Challenges

You've got one challenge of actually getting the business going, but there's so many moving parts and you have to wear so many hats. My background is in executive assisting so I've supported other founders and businesses, but managing all the elements first hand has been difficult, but we have a great team.

The success and traction our business has gained so far can be attributed to assessing what barriers we face in our work, and identifying and implementing the right support solutions to overcome those challenges. As an autistic and dyslexic individual, having the right support strategies in place enables me to perform on an equal level with others—and that's exactly what we strive to achieve. Without providing equity to embrace and support differences, we miss the opportunity to thrive collectively.

Organisations must foster open conversations about neurodiversity, actively engaging with staff to build a deeper understanding of differences. Providing targeted training is essential to improve communication and create inclusive workplaces. It's equally important to establish clear pathways to support employees who face challenges. Many neurodivergent individuals remain excluded from the workforce, contributing to the disability employment gap.

This often stems from a lack of understanding and support among managers and organisations, making it easier to overlook or not hire them altogether. By implementing the right support strategies, we aim to serve as an example of how inclusivity can lead to meaningful change and equitable opportunities for all.

Learning Along the Way

Don't worry about what you don't know. We're going through a diversification going from a service-led business into digital, and at first I was apprehensive but I know that we'll work it out. You'll find out the answers as you go on your founder journey, don't get caught up and spend too long trying to find the answers to everything!



Founded by
Remi Ray

Tracq is an AI-powered platform that transforms workplace inclusivity and performance management by addressing unconscious bias and providing tailored support for diverse employees.

Founded:	2021
Company HQ	London
Industry	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Story

I was diagnosed with dyslexia at 19, so my university and career experiences have involved a long history of working in organisations that don't really understand neurodiversity or inclusion. These experiences are not unique, so we are building out a piece of tech that can support these people and eliminate some of the unconscious (or conscious) biases that exist.

Our solution not only improves productivity and retention but also reduces legal and reputational risks, positioning companies as leaders in inclusivity. Inclusivity isn't just the right thing to do—it's a business imperative. By addressing the needs of disabled employees with innovative technology, we are setting the benchmark for equitable workplaces globally.

Overcoming Challenges

I have often struggled in corporate settings with navigating conversations with managers, and have experienced friction in reviews. I never received negative feedback about my performance, but it was clear that leaders often lack an understanding of different brain behaviours.

Often diverse individuals lack confidence as they've gone through education with an expectation to be good at reading, or maths, and are seen to fall short if they're not. The workplace emulates those kinds of expectations. Most organisations and managers don't have the infrastructure or support to be able to help people like myself, and they are so often overlooked, so I'm trying to turn that around through education and support.

It is no surprise that disabled founders often solve an issue that they've encountered themselves, as others may simply be blind to it. Not because society is evil, but because you don't know what you don't know. A lot of workplaces don't really understand accessibility, and few programmes think of small but important details such as the colourways of their presentation, or using certain backgrounds or fonts.

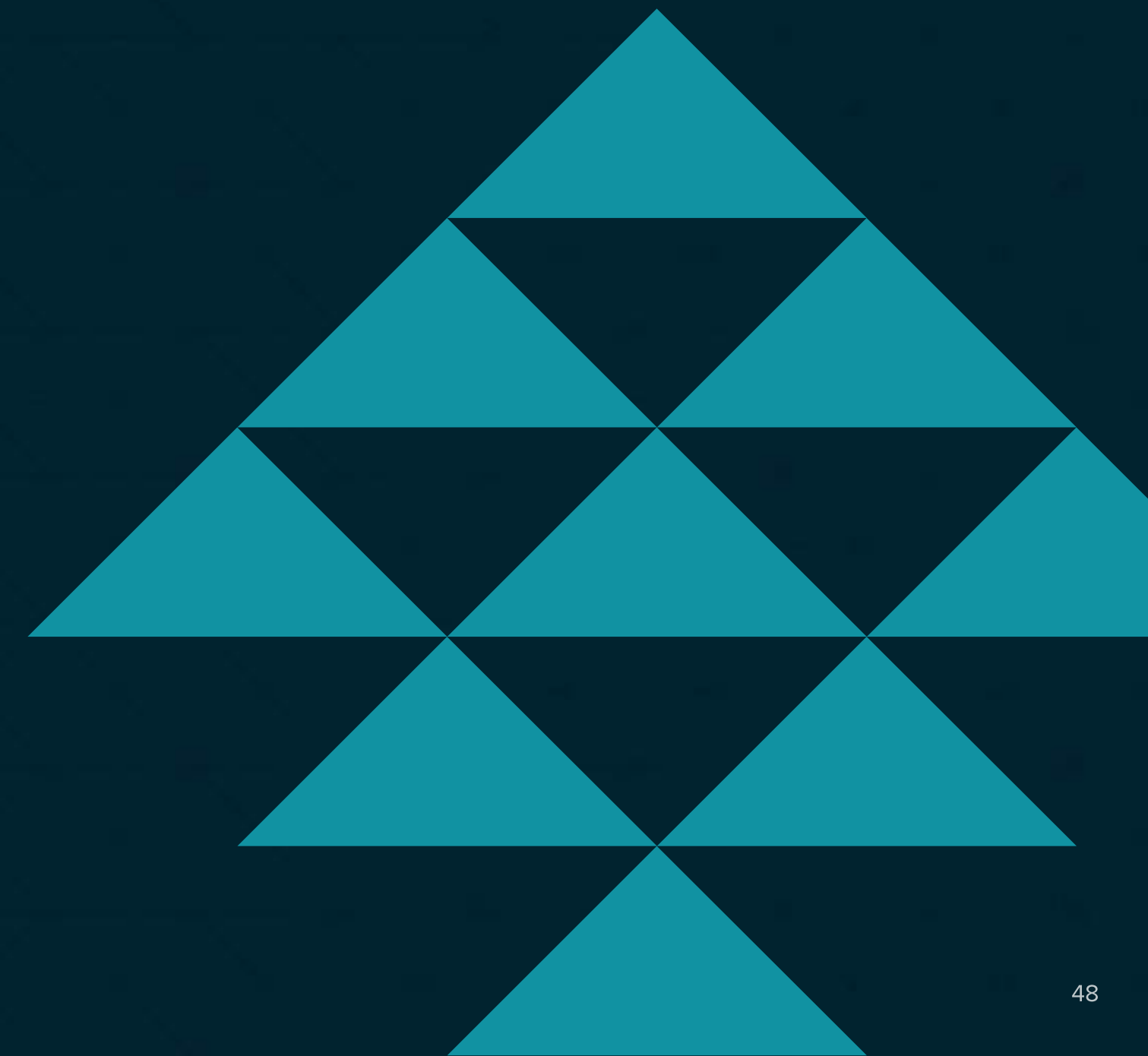
Making people realise the importance of this initiative is hard but we are definitely being invited to the table, so things are starting to change.

Learning Along the Way

It's crucial to get involved with any programs, coaches, or mentors that can support you with just unlocking some of those layers in terms of your mindset. I'm dyslexic, but not stupid, and I've learnt to use my mind in a powerful and strategic way in terms of my network, accessing the right spaces, and showcasing my value. That mindset shift is important.



OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS





How can we overcome the barriers, promote the potential solutions, and unlock entrepreneurship opportunities for people with disabilities in the UK?

Based on our research, data insights, and conversations with our Creo programme founders, we have five key recommendations for policymakers and industry leaders to create a more inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Want to join us? Get in touch:



Partner with Creo



Pre register your interest for Creo 2025

1 Transform financial support and funding opportunities for disabled entrepreneurs.



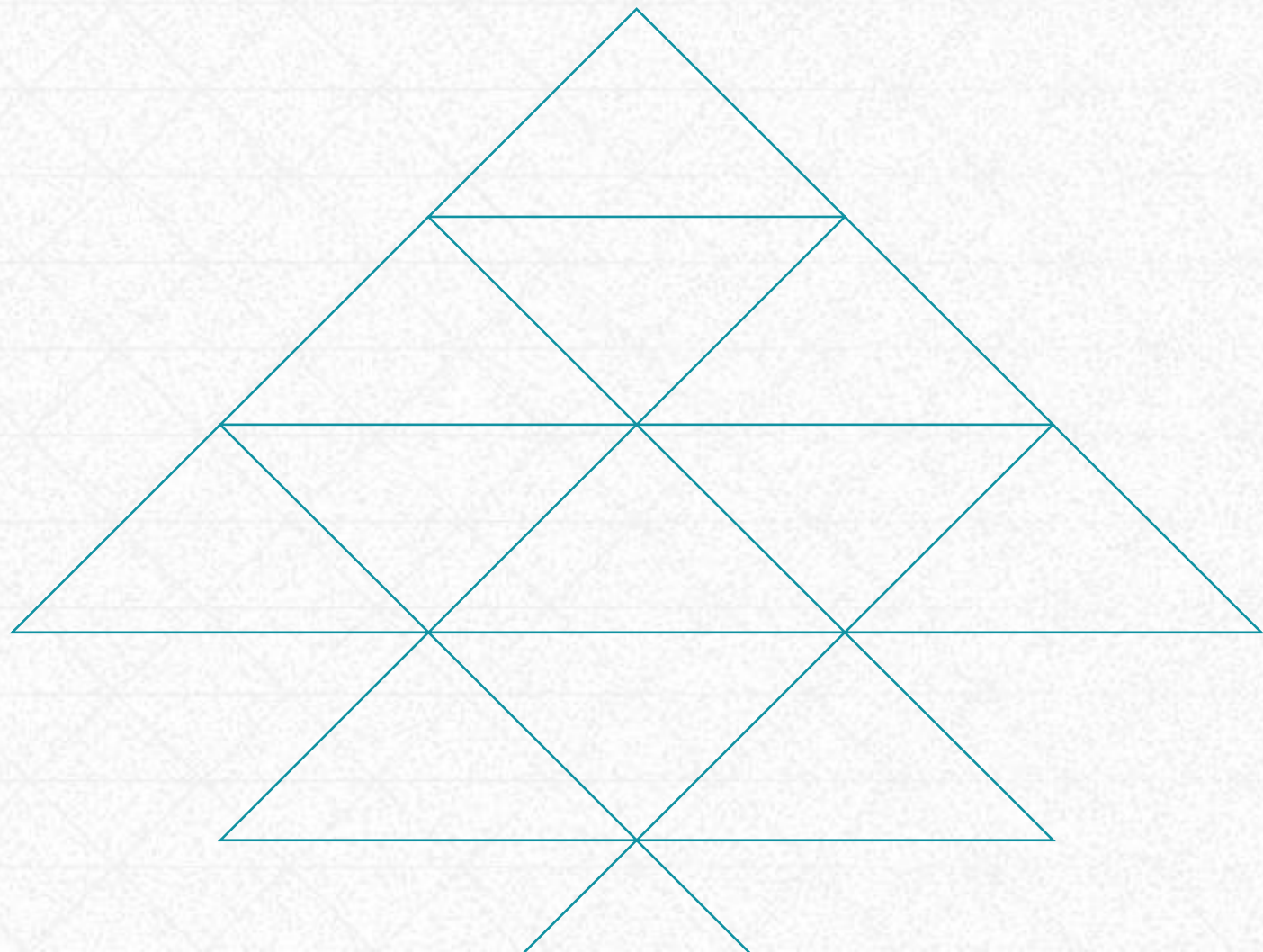
Disabled founders face higher startup costs and greater financial risks. The majority of the disabled people we surveyed want to see more financial support for entrepreneurship, including easier pathways to grant funding. With 60% of disabled entrepreneurs receiving no support when starting their business, and disabled people facing average additional living costs of £570 per month, we need a comprehensive reform of financial support systems to level the playing field.

25% of small business owners are disabled or have a medical condition. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) suggested implementing a permanent Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) rebate system to help SMEs to deal with the costs associated with long-term sickness absence. Despite MPs calling for a modest increase to SSP this year, it still fails to provide adequate support. Models, like the Minimum Income Floor, should better account for fluctuating income in early-stage businesses. Grant options, traditional lending criteria, and funding streams, like VC options for disabled founders, should also be reviewed and expanded.

2 Build comprehensive support networks and mentorship programmes.



Almost half of the disabled people we surveyed said they would be more likely to pursue entrepreneurship with support from a mentor. Our survey respondents also noted that limited networking opportunities as a fundamental barrier to entrepreneurship. We need to create dedicated mentorship programmes and peer support networks to build up confidence and encourage entrepreneurship. These should include industry-specific networks, accessible training programmes, and opportunities for knowledge sharing. And we need to make existing business support services more accessible, so they can be accessed by everyone.





3 Overhaul policy frameworks to enable and empower disabled founders.



As well as opening up more funding opportunities, we need policy to act as an enabler rather than a barrier to entrepreneurship for people with disabilities. We need ambitious government targets to grow the number of disabled founders. Awareness of initiatives is also key. According to the [FSB](#), only 13% of disabled business owners have used the government's Access to Work scheme, while 35% have not heard of the scheme at all.

Also, administrative tasks such as company registration and compliance currently require complex paperwork and reporting. These should be streamlined, with free support available for regulatory compliance and other government-backed processes such as personal loans for disabled founders. Policymakers generally need to promote conversations about disability and make sure access and inclusivity is at the forefront of policy-making.

4 Create accessible education and training pathways.



Many of the disabled founders we spoke to said they struggled with business strategy and gaining the knowledge required to operate and scale a business when starting out. From marketing and promotional assistance to legal and regulatory guidance, we need more accessible training programmes aimed at disabled founders.

This includes tailored support through multiple channels, both online and in person, at a pace and consistency that can be met by the programme participants. Digital accessibility has opened opportunities for many disabled entrepreneurs, but we need to ensure all websites meet the [POUR principles](#) for accessibility. Education providers must also consult disabled entrepreneurs when designing programmes to ensure they meet real needs rather than assumed ones.

5 Foster culture change through representation and awareness.



Prejudice remains a significant barrier for people with disabilities, with 55% of the people we surveyed acknowledging discrimination or bias as a deterrent to entrepreneurship. However, many of the disabled founders we spoke to also regard their disability as having a positive impact on their entrepreneurial abilities, heightening their problem-solving skills and creativity. The issue lies in the stigma and preconceived perceptions of disabilities across society.

We need to challenge traditional perceptions of entrepreneurship and celebrate disabled founders' successes. This includes increasing media representation, championing role models, and educating the broader business community about the value of inclusive entrepreneurship. Support organisations must review their unconscious biases, with business advisors trained to see disabled founders as entrepreneurs first, focusing on their business potential rather than their disability. By breaking down societal stigmas and showcasing successful disabled entrepreneurs, we can inspire the next, broader, and more inclusive generation of UK startup founders.

METHODOLOGY



Our Survey, Powered by Motability Operations



We surveyed 675 people with disabilities living in the UK in an online quantitative survey, powered by Motability Operations, to discover how to unlock opportunities for disabled founders.

The survey was provided by Motability Operations' Strategic Insights team in collaboration with Tech Nation's Creo Programme and conducted between 4 and 6 October 2024.

The Motability Scheme offers an affordable way for disabled people to lease a new car, wheelchair-accessible vehicle, scooter or powered wheelchair. Ipsos UK manages the online customer community, Headlight, on behalf of Motability Operations.

The survey was exclusively answered by members of the online customer community, Headlight, made of Motability Scheme Customers or their appointees who signed up to an online community of ~6,000 members.

The responses to the survey were provided to Motability Operations, along with the overall data tables of the survey results. The data has not been weighted and due to the opt-in nature of the community, the results are not representative of the views of all Motability Scheme Customers and/or appointees.

Language Used in This Report

Throughout this report, we adhere to and follow the definition of disability as outlined in the [Equality Act 2010](#). We recognise that experiences vary significantly for each individual under the Equality Act's definition of disability. Respecting each individual's preference is vital and we acknowledge that many entrepreneurs, including neurodiverse founders, do not define themselves as disabled.

Although the reality of each individual's lived experience is different, when it comes to entrepreneurship, we've found that the challenges people with different disabilities face are similar. That's why, when we say 'disabled people' or 'people with disabilities' for the purposes of this report, we refer to our survey respondents and the disabled community as a whole.

With this report, as well as our Creo programme, we've chosen to address the challenges head-on, sharing diverse experiences and discovering real solutions to widen access and promote a more inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Survey Respondents

Out of the people we surveyed:

- 85% describe themselves as physically disabled.
- 46% describe themselves as having a chronic illness.
- 27% describe themselves as having a neurological disability.
- 24% describe themselves as having a mental health condition.
- 8% describe themselves as having a cognitive disability.
- 5% describe themselves as having a hearing impairment.
- 5% describe themselves as having a visual impairment.
- 34% are unemployed and unable to work.
- 12% are employed. They work mostly in office/administrative work, technical/IT work, and management roles.
- 4% are self-employed. They mostly work in or run online/digital businesses, service-based business, retail/product-based businesses, nonprofit organisations, and consulting or freelance projects (e.g. design, copywriting etc.).
- 52% are retired.

While the nature of the Motability Scheme skews more to people with physical disabilities, as well as retired individuals, close analysis of our survey data reveals very minimal differences in survey responses when segmenting and comparing by physical vs other disabilities and/or employed vs retired people. We have therefore mostly referred to the survey respondents as a group of people with disabilities who tend to hold similar opinions and noted specific areas where opinions differ.



RESOURCES

Support For Disabled Founders

[Blind Business Association Charitable Trust \(BBACT\)](#) - Supports blind or partially sighted entrepreneurs.

[City Bridge Foundation](#) - Support and services for Deaf and disabled people with an average grant size of £115k.

[Disabled Entrepreneurs](#) - Offers 1-2-1 or collaborative disabled business mentoring.

[DisabledPreneurs](#) - A community that offers monthly roundups of exclusive content and ways to get involved.

[Disability Rights UK's Into Enterprise](#) - Provides business advice, mentoring and networking opportunities specifically for disabled entrepreneurs.

[Fredericks Foundation](#) - Charity that helps disadvantaged people to set up or expand their own business.

[Hatch](#) - Supports disabled entrepreneurs in the UK to launch and grow their businesses.

[London Catalyst](#) - Offers large grants with priority given to projects that will tackle the effects of poverty (and/or) improve the health and well-being of people with a limiting health condition or Disability.

[The Kaleidoscope Group](#) - Supports disabled entrepreneurs to start their own business and build investable ideas, having supported over 1,300 disabled entrepreneurs through their 12-week incubator programme.

[The King's Trust](#) - Free Enterprise programme designed for 18 to 30-year-olds with a business idea. It provides a network of support and business funding grants up to £30k.

[The Stelios Award](#) - For Disabled Entrepreneurs in the UK, run in partnership with Leonard Cheshire Disability, which recognises and supports disabled entrepreneurs.

[UnLtd](#) - The leading provider of support to social entrepreneurs in and around the UK.

Research

[Disability and Entrepreneurship Report](#) - A collaborative report between Small Business Britain and Lloyds Bank to understand the world of entrepreneurship in the UK through the lived experiences of disabled founders.

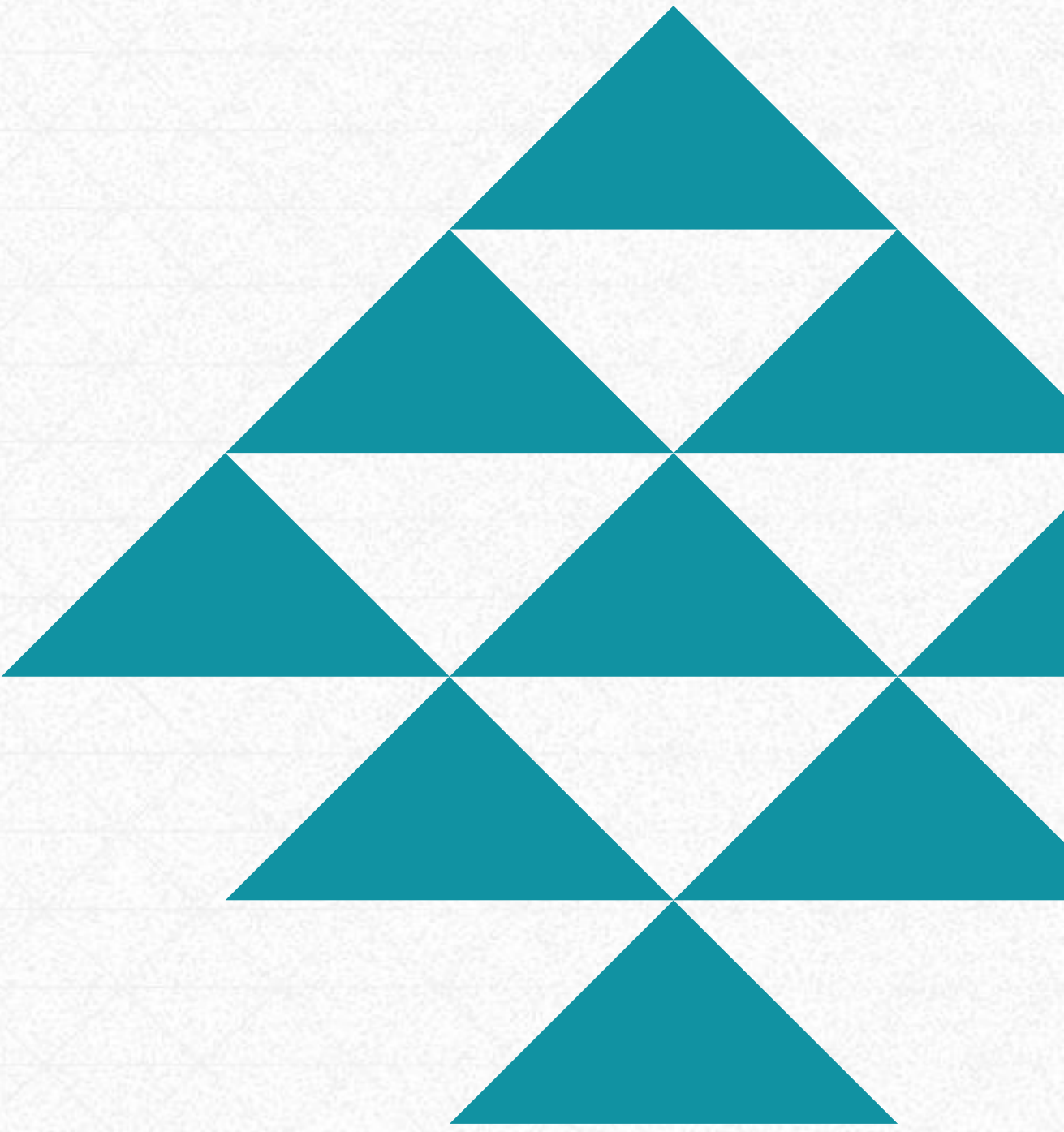
[FSB Business Without Barriers](#) - Based on a survey and interviews, it explores the issues impacting disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.

[House of Commons Library - Disabled People in Employment](#) - Describes the ONS's employment statistics for disabled people and the government's programmes to support disabled people in work.

[The Lilac Review](#) - An independent review, tackling the inequality faced by Disabled founders and aiming to level-up entrepreneurial opportunity across the UK.

[The 2023 Accessible and Inclusive Transport Report](#) - Innovate UK report advocating greater accessibility and inclusion in transport.

[Village Capital Disability Innovation Report](#) - delves into the current state of the disability innovation ecosystem, highlighting the accomplishments and the importance of innovation leaders to create change.





OUR PARTNERS

Lead Partner:



Motability Operations deliver smart, sustainable solutions that improve our customers’ mobility in a fast-changing world.

Founding Partner:



HSBC Innovation Banking provides commercial banking services, expertise, and insights to the technology, life science and healthcare, private equity, and venture capital industries. HSBC Innovation Banking UK is a subsidiary of HSBC Group, benefiting from its stability, strong credit rating, and international reach to help fuel its growth.



Powered by Founders Forum Group, Tech Nation is the leading platform for tech insights, growth support and talent, supporting ambitious founders and their teams with the access and knowledge they need to scale successfully.

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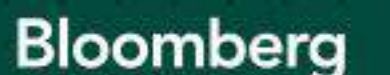
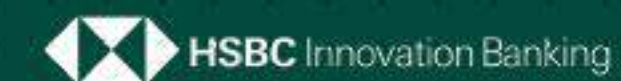


Content



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As our community grows, Founders Forum Group continues to expand via incubation, investment, acquisition, and partnership.

We welcome collaborations with individuals, organisations, and governments who share our mission in promoting entrepreneurship and *driving positive change through technology.*