

Moving into Work

Supporting people with learning difficulties to make the transition from vocational education and training into employment



An information sheet for managers of vocational courses and training provision in further education colleges, adult education services, work-based learning and voluntary sector organisations

Introduction

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Annual Statement of Priorities 2007/8 states the purpose of further education and training for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities:

...is as much about enabling economic participation (where appropriate) as it is for all other learners. (LSC, 2006a)

Do you offer effective vocational provision for people with learning difficulties¹; that is, provision where learners move on to employment at the end of their course or training? Most learners with learning difficulties need support to make the transition to work and on-going support once they are in a job. This model of provision is referred to by the LSC as the 'supported employment model' (LSC, 2006b).

Four good reasons why you need to develop vocational provision based on the supported employment model

- 1 The LSC has stated that by September 2010 it will no longer fund vocational provision for disabled learners that does not have a focus on the supported employment model or learning in the work place:

The LSC will now support the FE system to move away from programmes that do not have clear progression outcomes and intentions. This will occur over the next three years. As such, the LSC expects that work-preparation programmes will be re-focused to adopt a supported employment model that will deliver the skills and knowledge to assist people into part-time and full-time employment. (LSC, 2006b)

- 2 Progression through Partnership

In June 2007, the Department of Health (DoH); the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and what was then the Department for Education and Skills, launched *Progression through Partnership: A joint strategy between the DfES, DoH and the DWP on the role of further education and training in supporting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve fulfilling lives.*

The strategy stresses the importance of joint working between the three departments to develop more sustainable and seamless services, and for this collaborative working to be reflected:

"...through our delivery agents and partners so that we make a telling and lasting contribution to people's lives."

Progression through Partnership acknowledges the LSC's challenge to providers in *Learning for Living and Work* to adopt the supported employment model by 2010 and states its commitment to work with the LSC to: *"agree how the new model for supported employment will be implemented."* A Joint Delivery Plan to take forward the work outlined in *Progression through Partnership* is due to be published in 2008.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/progressionthroughpartnership/docs/LearnerDisabilityDocument.pdf>

1. The term learning difficulties is being used in this context to refer to individuals who have a cognitive learning difficulty that hinders their learning and their ability to cope independently. This set of information sheets is not focusing on learners whose learning support needs are primarily focused on 'specific learning difficulties' such as dyslexia or on physical or sensory disabilities. However, some of the issues highlighted may be relevant to other disabled learners.

3 Foundation Learning Tier

The developing Foundation Learning Tier will reform provision below level 2. It has important implications for post-16 education and training provision for people with learning difficulties. Within the Foundation Learning Tier four Progression Pathways will be established as stepping stones to positive outcomes. One of the Progression Pathways will be:

“to independent living or supported employment.”

A 'wrap-around' service of information, advice and guidance is to be developed and this will be essential to the success of the Foundation Learning Tier, which will embed transition work provision for people with learning difficulties so that it becomes an integral part of the curriculum. At the time of writing this (June 2008) the Foundation Learning Tier remains very much policy in the making. To keep up to date with developments, visit the QIA Excellence Gateway for information: <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/flt>

4 A key finding of a 2007 OFSTED inspection report on college provision for 16–18 year olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was that:

...learners' progression to employment, vocational programmes and further training remained underdeveloped. Colleges placed insufficient emphasis on developing learners' work-related skills. (OFSTED, 2007)

Most people with learning difficulties are motivated to get a job but too often this goal is not achieved. A national Government survey of nearly 3,000 people with learning difficulties found that only 17 per cent of those interviewed who were of 'working age' had a paid job. The same survey found that 65 per cent of those who were unemployed wanted to work (Emerson et al, 2005).

What is supported employment?

Supported employment services specialise in working with disabled people to help them find employment and provide ongoing support once they are in a job.² In supported employment the focus is usually on finding 'real jobs in the community' rather than sheltered employment. One of the principles of supported employment is a strong belief that no one who wants to work is unemployable. Supported employment develops individualised support packages with and for the person they are helping.

2. For information about supported employment agencies in your area visit the British Association of Supported Employment website www.base-uk.org

Supported employment

Supported employment agencies, 'will typically be able to offer a *combination* of:

- Helping people identify their skills and preferences through the development of a **vocational profile**;
- **Job development** to find the person's preferred job through contact with employers;
- **Job analysis** to find out more about the workplace, co-workers, and the support the individual might need in that environment;
- **Job support** to ensure that both the employee and employer receive 'just enough' creative assistance, information and back-up to achieve success, with this support continuing as long as it is needed;
- **Career support** to help people think in the longer term about career progression.' (YPS, 2001)

Supported employment agencies are voluntary sector organisations. In some areas, supported employment services form part of social services or departments. Mencap Pathway services specialise in providing supported employment services for people with learning difficulties.

Case study – Employer and employee support

Steve from Westcombe Supported Employment Services in Peterborough supports people with learning difficulties to get jobs. A company that cleans occupational health equipment had been trying for some time to get people to do an equipment-cleaning job with no success.

Steve talked to the company about working with people with learning difficulties and explained that there would be support available. He makes a point of saying upfront to employers that if a placement works, he would like to look to it being a permanent job. Steve supported John in the placement for the first two weeks:

...to assist the employer with the new staff member, to help them with an employee with learning disabilities. Support for the employer is just as important.

Through a process of job analysis, Steve broke down the various tasks in the job and supported John to learn at his own pace. Now he comes in once a week to monitor how John is getting on. Steve explained that:

...for the individual being supported the most important thing is their attitude. If they want to work it may not matter if they can't read or write. People develop their own strategies; it's a kind of lateral thinking.

Steve liaises with the local college which has adapted the curriculum to suit the needs of people who are on work experience or in work. For example, they have supported an individual to think about their appearance if this has been a problem at work:

The link with the college and day services is really useful. We can put forward issues that we come across regularly.

Supported employment agencies and organisations such as Remploy deliver a number of government-funded employment programmes for disabled people. These are not specifically for people with learning difficulties and some may offer support that is more appropriate for people with learning difficulties than others. They include:

- **Access to Work** – offers advice and practical support for disabled people and their employers to overcome difficulties in the workplace caused by disability.
- **Workstep** – run through Jobcentre Plus, this programme provides individually tailored support for people who face complex barriers to getting and keeping a job.
- **Work Preparation** – a programme run through Jobcentre Plus that supports disabled people's return to work following a period off sick or being unemployed.

The Government has announced major changes to its welfare to work reforms with effect from 2008 and a new programme will replace Workstep and Work Preparation in 2009. There are now to be major changes to welfare benefits as well. Incapacity benefits are to be replaced by an Employment Support Allowance for those people deemed to have a limited capability to work, while a support component will be paid to those people who are deemed not to be medically fit to work. Many people, including supported employment services, believe that most people are capable of working if they are supported to find appropriate work and provided with ongoing support mechanisms.

Supported employment and person-centred approaches

Supported employment practice focuses on one-to-one support, working with the individual to look at what they really want to do, the training they need to do this and the support they need when they are on work experience placements and once they are in paid employment. Support for the employer is also crucial. This person-centred approach has been identified as one of the key factors in supporting progression in learning for people with learning difficulties (NIACE, 2006).

Person-centred planning is a specific planning process increasingly used in schools to support people with learning difficulties in their transition to adult services and in Social Care services. Person-centred planning places the individual at the centre and focuses on what is important to them from their own perspective³.

Guidance from the DfES outlines how person-centred approaches can be used when working with people with learning difficulties in the FE system (DfES, 2006a). Five questions provide stages in a person-centred planning and assessment cycle that can produce a person-centred learning plan:

- Who am I?
- What do I want to do?
- How am I going to get there?
- How am I doing?
- What next?

3. For more information on person-centred planning and approaches visit www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk

How is the supported employment approach being developed in post-16 provision?

A study completed in 2002 found that in all cases where learners with learning difficulties were successfully moving into work and sustaining their employment, significant elements of the supported employment approach underpinned the education and training provision (NIACE, 2002). There were examples of education providers:

- working in partnership with local supported employment agencies;
- working with supported employment services that are part of their local social services department;
- incorporating into the course or training some of the key roles of supported employment such as researching the local employment market, finding local jobs and on-the-job support.

The emphasis of the LSC Strategy is for providers to work in partnership with supported employment agencies or services and integrate the supported employment approach within the vocational course or training:

We do not expect that individual providers will need to change their own skills base to address this focus, but instead that they build on effective practice, and also develop partnerships with the wealth of supported employment agencies that have considerable knowledge and expertise in this area. (LSC, 2006)

The LSC strategy identifies 'increasing economic participation through sustainable employment' as one of its three key priority work areas. There is funding to pump prime provision in the priority areas. £35 million will be made in additional investments up to 2008. In 2007/8 the LSC's National Employer Service will work with LSC regions to pilot the supported employment model.

Case Study – Supported employment: A partnership approach

Working in partnership with Mencap Pathway Employment Service, Colchester Institute provides a comprehensive programme of study for people with learning difficulties wanting to find work. Mencap takes ownership of the employment side of things, providing job coaches, setting up interviews and finding jobs. The college wrote the programme of study itself, and funds it under Skills for Life:

"basic skills is embedded in everything we do, so we can claim funding under Skills for Life."

Colchester Institute started its Work Plus Project in September 2007 in response to needs in the community and developing LSC policy, in *Learning for Living and Work*. It knew that its students with learning difficulties wanted to work, and the Institute wanted to set up a truly person-centred, individualised service.

Vocational provision has been funded in a variety of ways including:

- using the Additional Support budget to pay for a contract with a local supported employment agency;
- funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), a European Union initiative that supports activities to extend employment opportunities and develop a skilled workforce;
- grants from local businesses have enabled support employment agencies to work with colleges;
- government programmes such as Work and Preparation;
- working in partnership with social services employment services;
- working in partnership with Connexions.

How can you develop provision based on the supported employment model?

- Recognise that employment is a realistic goal for people with learning difficulties. This may mean challenging the attitudes of managers, employers and, in some cases, parents and carers. A job, even if it is a part-time job, can be an important part of an individual's life.
- Use the person-centred learning approaches to develop, with the learner, training packages to suit their individual needs. Find out at the start of the course what area of employment the learner is interested in and what employment opportunities are available locally. Supported employment agencies are particularly well placed to have knowledge of the local job market. The DfES *Skills for Working* guidance (DfES, 2006b) provides a step-by-step approach to working with employers, which combines the needs of the employer with the preferences of the individual learner.
- Provide supported work experience placements in real work settings where there is good communication between what is happening on the job and the learning provider. Long-term, unsupported work experience placements with no clear progression plan hinder the transition to work.
- Foster good working relationships between the different agencies involved in supporting an individual's transition to work. The 2002 study of transition-to-work courses found that education providers were working in partnership with a range of organisations and people including: supported employment agencies; volunteer centres; day centres; employers; self-advocacy organisations; Disability Employment Advisers; parents and carers; Benefits office; Employment Service; Jobcentre Plus; Social Services and Connexions.
- Work with your local Learning Disability Partnership Board. They exist in every local authority, usually within Social Services, and are the main drivers to take forward the Government's Valuing People strategy for services for people with learning difficulties. Most will have an employment subgroup that will bring together local service providers to look at employment issues for people with learning difficulties. Each partnership board includes members who are parents or carers and people with learning difficulties.

- Provide support for the employer. This can come from supported employment agency staff or staff from the college and is as essential as organised long-term support for the individual once they are in work. The following case study illustrates this and highlights the importance of the support of senior managers to the development of transition-to-work provision for people with learning difficulties.

Case study – Support in the workplace

The Employment Placement Officer at Bolton College was contacted by the manager of a café who had concerns about an ex-student that had a permanent job at the café. A job coach from the college made a visit and was able to see what the issues were. The young person was changing hot chip fat without consulting or asking for help. The Employment Placement Officer was clear that she did not 'want to stop him using his initiative but there were real issues for health and safety'.

She worked with the ex-student, who had limited literacy skills, and developed a booklet using signs and pictures:

'The booklet used signs to show what he can do and where he has to stop and ask for training.'

The young person has a couple of hours a week of support from the college even though he is employed and is no longer attending the college. Senior management recognises the importance of providing this on-going support, firstly for the individual's continued success and secondly to maintain good working relations with employers, who will be approached by the college for further work experience placements for future learners. The Employment Placement Officer explained:

'It is vital that every now and again I put support in. There is no one else. At the end of the day I've got to find the time.'

- Involve parents/carers in the process. They can offer practical help such as helping their son or daughter leave the house on time to get to work. A parent's belief that their son or daughter has the right to work and can work can be critical for the individual's self esteem and confidence.
- Make sure you have access to specialist advice on benefits through your local supported employment agency or the local Disability Employment Advisor at the Jobcentre. They can provide guidance on ways to ensure that an individual earns a decent wage for the work they are doing, without being exploited and whilst protecting the levels of benefits they receive. Often the perceived effect of wages on benefits received can be a real barrier to an individual moving on from college to employment. The benefits system is quite complex and very often the information staff have about benefits and permitted work rules is incorrect or misleading.

- The LSC *Learning for Living and Work* strategy is committed to some interesting and exciting developments in vocational provision for disabled learners over the next few years. The LSC has clearly stated that support with the transition to work has to be part of what your provision offers. If it is not, it will not be funded by the LSC beyond 2010 (LSC, 2006b). Now is the time to start making changes.

Further information

There are six information sheets in this set which are aimed at a number of different key players who need to be involved in the process of supporting people in their transition to work: people with learning difficulties; employers; practitioners in the FE system; managers and co-ordinators of vocational training and courses; information, advice and guidance bodies; parents and carers. Collaborative working between different partners is an essential component of successful vocational provision for people with learning difficulties. Copies of the information sheets can be downloaded from: www.niace.org.uk/research/HDE/documents.htm

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Resources

Adults with learning difficulties and employment

**You can work it out!*

Supporting you into work

**I want to work*

A guide to benefits and work for people with a learning disability

With a foreword by Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled People, Department for Work and Pensions.

**I can get a job*

A step-by-step guide to getting a job. This guide is for you and the people who support you

With a foreword by Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled People, Department for Work and Pensions.

Valued in public

Helping people with a learning disability to work in public bodies

Anne O'Bryan and Stephen Beyer, November 2005

With a foreword by Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled People, Department for Work and Pensions

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To order email valuing.people.info@dh.gsi.gov.uk or visit www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/employment.htm

*Written in an accessible style aimed at people with learning difficulties.

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Skills for Working: Supporting the Development of Literacy, Language and Numeracy Skills for Learners with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities in a Vocational Context

Ref: SFW

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Putting Good Practice into Practice: Literacy, Numeracy and Key Skills within Apprenticeships

Skills for Life Quality Initiative Embedded Teaching and Learning Booklet

Available free of charge from the NRDC. Visit www.nrdc.org.uk and go to 'register now' to register your details. This will allow you to view and download or order all publications.

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Sue Southwood

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Making the Jump: 'Transition to Work' – Supporting People with Learning Difficulties Make the Transition from Education and Vocational Training to Employment

Yola Jacobsen

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Yola Jacobsen

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Both available from Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities. Visit <http://www.skill.org.uk/shop/shop.asp> or telephone 020 7450 0621

Support into Employment for Young People and Adults with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

Liz Maudslay

Ref: 062450

Available free of charge from the Learning and Skills Network. Visit <http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/> and go to 'publications'

Useful websites

www.niace.org.uk – NIACE – The national adult learning organisation

www.esf.gov.uk – the European Social Fund, a European Union initiative that supports activities to extend employment opportunities and develop a skilled workforce

www.lsc.gov.uk – The Learning and Skills Council

www.base-uk.org – British Association for Supported Employment

www.lsneducation.org.uk – Learning and Skills Network

www.mencap.org.uk – Mencap Pathway and Work Right

www.skill.org.uk – Skill – The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

www.remploy.co.uk – Remploy – Finding jobs for Disabled People

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

www.valuingpeople.gov.uk – Information about Valuing People and Valuing People Now

www.shaw-trust.org.uk – Shaw Trust – Provides employment services for disabled people



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