



Being something that I've always wanted to be

An evaluation of a supported employment service for adults with learning disabilities

Sarah Wellard

Acknowledgements

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Sarah Wellard
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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report explores the outcomes of participating in supported employment for adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities and makes recommendations for future policy. The model of supported employment evaluated is known as "individual placement and support" whereby disabled employees are placed in real jobs with mainstream employers alongside non-disabled workers, following a process of job matching and work-based training. Ongoing support is available for both employee and employer as needed.

The study took place over a ten month period in 2006 - 2007 and is based on in depth semi-structured interviews with six supported employees and their employers, job trainers, relatives and support workers. The disabled employees are supported by Trafford Supported Employment, a service funded by Trafford Borough Council and run by the national charity United Response.

Summary of key findings

The findings of the study indicate that participating in supported employment - even just for 3.5 or 8 hours a week - results in many beneficial changes in the lives of adults with a learning disability. These include increased confidence and self-esteem, greater social contact with non-disabled people, greater independence, a sense of playing a valued role and a more structured life.

Even though benefit rules mean that most participants are only £20 better off through working, they still regard earning money as an important aspect of work both in terms of material benefit and self-esteem.

Employers' attitudes are highly significant in people's ability to be successfully integrated into the workplace. Job coaches play a significant role in this process.

"Soft skills" including appropriate workplace behaviour, punctuality and personal presentation, and support for overcoming difficulties in these areas, are critical to successful employment. Lack of subtle soft skills, rather than cognitive incapacity, can be a barrier to people entering and remaining in work.

“ It feels great to be paid...
Before I was in debt...Now
I can treat myself. ”

Disabled employee

Context

Historically, people with learning disabilities have been regarded as incapable of real work. During the 1980s however there was a growing awareness that many people with a learning disability wanted to work and could do so. Supported employment based on the model of "place and train" developed in

the United States began to gain ground in the UK, with central government, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations acting as commissioners or providers.

In 2001, the Government White Paper *Valuing People* identified enabling more people with learning disabilities to participate in employment as a key policy objective. Despite this, a review carried in 2007 by the Social Care Institute for Excellence found funding for supported employment to be "fragile and fragmented" and provision to be "patchy, targeted primarily at people with mild or moderate learning disabilities".

While the benefits of supported employment for people with mental health problems has been well documented, research on outcomes for people with learning disabilities is limited and focused mainly on US experiences.

Evaluations of UK employment related programmes have tended to concentrate on the cost effectiveness of programmes rather than broader social outcomes.

Aim

This study was undertaken to explore the impact on the lives of people with moderate to severe learning disabilities of participation in supported employment and to gain insight into the barriers which lie behind low employment rates for this group.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

What changes does participating in a supported employment programme have on the lives of adults with learning disabilities? Does participating in the programme and entering employment increase people's confidence and self-esteem and their integration into the community? Does it reduce social exclusion?

What are employers' attitudes to employees with learning disabilities? Do they find them effective employees and are they accepted by their colleagues?

How does the support of the job coach enable employees with learning disabilities to retain jobs?

What light does the experience of participants shed on the barriers to successful employment for people with learning disabilities?

Findings

This study finds that there are significant benefits for people with learning disabilities of participating in supported employment. These include:

- increased confidence and independence both in and outside of the work setting.

greater self-esteem from feeling that they are playing a valued role, manifest through evident pride in their work.

a wider network of friends and more social contact with non-disabled people through working in mainstream settings.

improved physical and mental wellbeing. Respondents reported feeling happier and one experienced a marked improvement in her arthritis and weight.

increased incomes: most were on low incomes before working and so even though benefit rules mean that they are only £20 a week better off in work, this makes a real difference.

having a greater structure to their day: all participants highlighted the benefits of keeping busy and their relatives noted the positive effect that increased structure was having on other areas of participants' lives.

“ Working makes me feel more important...It helps me to be meeting people. I'm being something that I've always wanted to be...”

Disabled employee

The study also finds that there are wider benefits to society from people with learning disabilities participating in supported employment. These include:

All but one of the employers interviewed view their experience of employing someone with a learning disability through supported employment as positive. Half rated their employees' attitude to work as “very good” or “excellent”. One employer highlights their employee's ability to pick up new tasks, describing them as “streets ahead” of some of their other (non-disabled) staff.

Dispelling negative stereotypes about incapacity. Employers report that other members of staff become more positive towards people with learning disabilities as a result of working with disabled colleagues.

The study also finds factors contributing to successful supported employment include:

- a positive attitude from employers and colleagues towards the abilities and needs of the individual. A focus on what the person can do rather than their incapacity and a willingness to allow the employee to try out new things is helpful,
- careful job matching, training and advocacy for the supported employee to ensure they are placed in a position suited to their interests, abilities and needs and that they are provided with effective training for the job. Good communication between the job coach and supervisors and colleagues about the person's needs and capacities is also important,
- ongoing monitoring and support as needed for both the employee and the employer from an external job coach. Most supported employees needed only occasional support, but even so most of those interviewed believe the job coach has an important continuing role even once a person is settled into a job. For one person, the ongoing support of the job coach was vital in enabling him to keep his job. Employers report finding job coaches a vital source of ongoing support and advice.

Although all but one of those interviewed have very positive experiences of supported employment, the study reveals that there are significant barriers to successful supported employment for people with learning disabilities. These include:

- discriminatory assumptions among some employers about the abilities of people with learning disabilities,
- some disabled employees' difficulties with soft skills, for example, behaviour appropriate to work settings and punctuality,
- a lack of suitable work opportunities, due in part to reduced demand for low-skilled labour in the economy,
- limited resources for supported employment, which restrict the number of people with learning disabilities who can benefit,

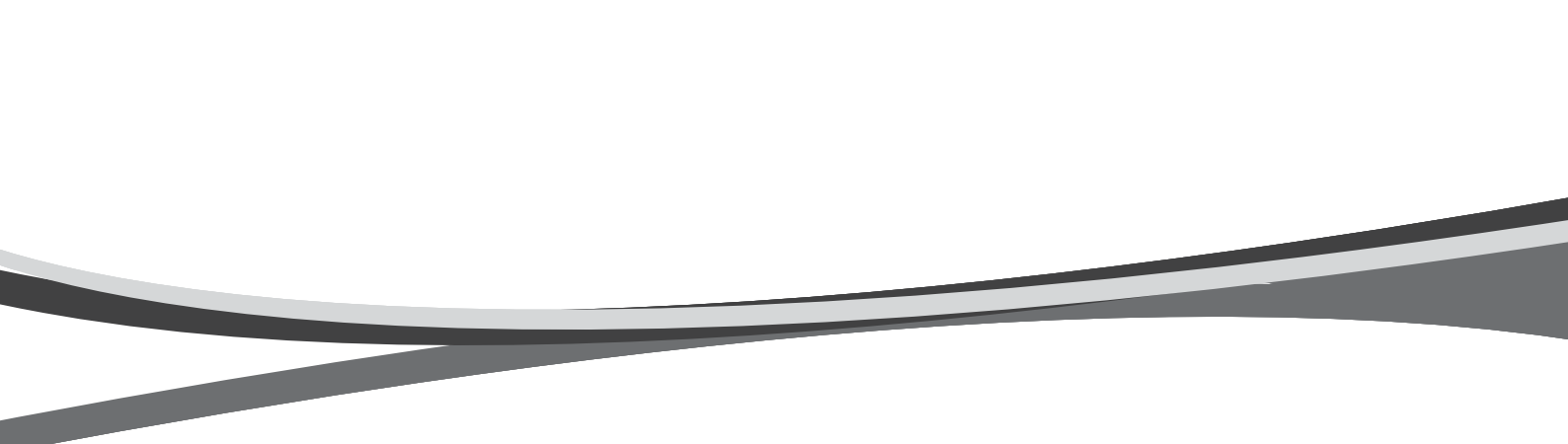
- perverse incentives in the welfare benefit system, and fears that people will be worse off financially if they work,
- attitudes of parents and carers: low expectations and lack of support at home or unrealistically high expectations make it difficult for a person to thrive in supported employment,
- poor preparation for work by schools and colleges with courses failing to focus on soft skills needed for real jobs,
- needing more time and support to carry out routine tasks than non-disabled people and “being busy” can be a barrier to people working longer hours.

Recommendations for policy

- 1. To challenge negative stereotypes of people with learning disabilities, there is a need for greater promotion of the practical implications and benefits of employing disabled workers, including challenging the assumption that they cannot be as efficient as other workers.
- 2. Greater flexibility should be introduced into the benefits system to remove barriers to work for people with a learning disability. The £20 a week Income Support disregard for people in supported permitted work should be increased to the equivalent of one day’s pay on minimum wage.
- 3. More investment is needed to increase provision of supported employment for adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities. A stable funding and commissioning environment is required for supported employment which currently falls outside the 16 hour minimum rule for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded Workstep programme. This rule should be reviewed for people with a learning disability, who may need to increase their hours gradually and who may never be able to work 16 hours a week. Learning and Skills Council resources should be redirected away from college provision towards effective supported employment.

“ We didn’t think she’d pick things up so quickly... You only need to tell her something once. ”

Supervisor

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- 4. Sufficient flexibility should be retained in the procurement of specialist learning disability employment services, including supported employment programmes, to enable good quality provision to flourish. This may mean local level procurement as opposed to the regional contracts being introduced by the DWP.
 - 5. Quality control should be introduced for supported employment providers to ensure all are conforming to the highest standards.
 - 6. The education and training of young people with learning disabilities should focus more on preparing them for employment. This might include offering them the kind of work experience opportunities available to non-disabled young people to enable them to learn about work and to learn crucial “soft skills” such as punctuality and appropriate behaviour in the workplace.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Employment and learning disability

Employment is increasingly viewed as a route to social inclusion, including for groups historically disadvantaged within or excluded from the labour market. Since the 1990s, political discourses within the European Union and in the UK have emphasised the importance of programmes to increase labour market participation for disabled people in order to contribute to national productivity, reduce their dependency on the state and generally open up opportunities for their social inclusion (Knapp, 2006). As well as providing income, work offers a number of non-financial benefits, including a sense of dignity and purpose, structure to the day, opportunities to meet new people and develop new skills, all of which boost confidence and self-esteem (SEU, 2003).

Historically, people with learning disabilities have been deemed incapable of work. However, during the latter part of the twentieth century some people with learning disabilities were provided with opportunities for 'therapeutic work', generally in sheltered workshops and other segregated settings such as adult training centres or social education centres. The work provided for people was generally very low paid (if paid at all) and not always real, with a blurring of the boundaries between social care and employment (Goodley and Norouzi, 2005). For example, much of the 'work' entailed repetitive activities aimed at keeping people occupied rather than tasks of any economic value.

The publication of the learning disability White Paper *Valuing People* (DH, 2001), with its emphasis on promoting choice, independence and social inclusion, marked a watershed in policy. For the first time enabling more adults with learning disabilities to participate in employment, and wherever possible paid employment, was identified as a government policy objective.

Other policy changes since 1997 aimed at promoting the individual rights of disabled people, including their opportunities for participating in paid work, include the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission in 2000 and the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which includes a new duty on public bodies to promote the equality of disabled people. The Prime

Minister's Strategy Unit report *Improving the life chances of disabled people* (DfES, DH, DWP, OPDM, 2005) recommends that disabled people should have access to personal support to enable them to work, and that employers should lead a campaign on the business benefits of employing disabled people. A number of new programmes have been established by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) aimed at supporting disabled people into work.

However, a government working group on learning disability and employment criticised much of the DWP/ JobCentre Plus provision on the grounds that it is inappropriate for many people with learning disabilities (DWP, 2006). For example, many people with learning disabilities are unable to meet the threshold of working at least 16 hours a week to access the government supported employment programme, Workstep.

The report comments, "...people with learning disabilities may require a higher and longer-term level of support in order to gain and retain employment – support that Jobcentre Plus is not always able to offer" (pg 36). The report also identifies that whilst welfare benefit rules permit employees working for less than 16 hours a week to retain their incapacity benefit indefinitely, there is no long-term government funding for employment programmes which support individuals who are unable to work for 16 hours a week.

Despite the (new) emphasis on paid work, people with learning disabilities have amongst the highest rates of economic inactivity of any impairment group. Data from the Family Resources Survey 2005-6 indicates that employment rates for disabled people overall remain low, with only 23% of men and 12% of disabled women in full-time employment compared with 60% and 33% for non-disabled individuals. A further 7% of disabled people are in part-time work, half the rate for people without disabilities. Different sources report different employment rates for people with learning disabilities, all of them low: a national survey of adults with learning disabilities found that 17% of working age adults had a paid job of some kind (Emerson et al, 2005) and that 65% of those who are economically inactive said they would like to have a job. *Valuing People* gave a much lower estimate of those in work, at less than 10% (DH, 2001, pg 84).

The White Paper identified a number of reasons for low levels of employment including low expectations on the part of professionals and agencies working with people with learning disabilities, which mean that employment has been

given a low priority by services and that people have not received training and preparation for employment, disincentives to work arising from social security rules (“the benefits trap”) and difficulties in progressing from supported employment into mainstream employment. Significantly, the White Paper failed to identify a clear strategy for increasing employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

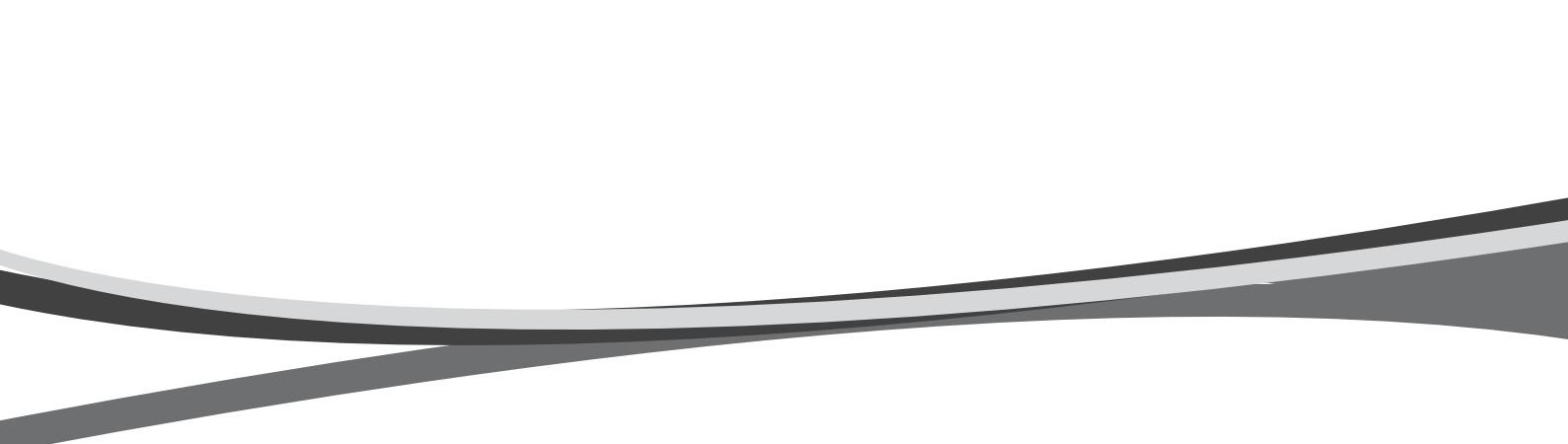
Supported employment programmes

Supported employment is based on the principle of “place and train” whereby people assimilate work-based skills in the workplace (Beyer, 1995). Supported employment programmes were first developed in the United States in the late 1970s, as part of a national system of vocation rehabilitation aimed chiefly at people with learning disabilities (Beyer, 1995). In the UK, supported employment programmes based on the American model have been introduced since the late 1980s.

Supported employment has been defined by Beyer, Kilsby and Shearn (1999) as “real work in an integrated setting with ongoing support provided by an agency with expertise in finding employment for people with disabilities” (pg 138). O’Byrne et al (2000) identify the following key features of supported employment: the person is hired and paid by a real employer; the job meets the employee’s individual needs and the employer’s requirements and both employee and employer receive ongoing support from an external agency to ensure success. Beyer (1995) identifies the following stages to effective supported employment: job placement, on the job training and advocacy, continuing monitoring, follow-up and retention¹.

¹Job placement involves finding the right job for a person in the light of their work-related interests, abilities and needs. This requires an analysis of the job description and working environment to match the job to a person’s interests and capacities. It may also involve training a person to use public transport and ensuring support is available at home to reinforce appropriate social behaviour (e.g. dress and hygiene).

Job training and advocacy involves specific training for the job and ensuring effective communication with the supervisor and colleagues, including briefing co-workers about the person’s needs and capacities. It requires a balance between specialist support from a job coach and encouraging “natural support” to develop. Involvement of the job coach can inhibit social interaction between disabled employees and their co-workers, and the development of natural support (Beyer, 1995).



In the UK supported employment is provided by the DWP under the programme known as Workstep, by local authorities and by voluntary sector organisations. Workstep supports around 6,500 people with a learning disability (DWP, 2006) but not all of these places were in integrated settings: some of these were provided in sheltered or segregated settings. There are no official statistics on the numbers of people participating in local authority and voluntary sector programmes, however it is reported that there has been significant growth in supported employment for people with learning disabilities since the 1990s (Jones, Morgan, Murphy and Shearn, 2002). Despite the government's *Valuing People* objective of enabling more people with learning disabilities to participate in employment, a research review carried out for the Social Care Institute for Excellence (Cole and Williams, 2007) describes the funding for supported employment as "fragile and fragmented" (pg 28), and states that provision is "Patchy, targeted primarily at people with mild or moderate learning disabilities".

Research on the Effectiveness of Supported Employment

There is clear research evidence on the effectiveness of supported employment for people with mental health problems (Crowther et al, 2001). However, in relation to people with learning disabilities the evidence base is weaker, (Knapp et al, 2004). Much of the research on effectiveness of supported employment was conducted in the US in the 1980s and 90s, reflecting the greater coverage of supported employment there. An overview of American research reported that most disabled people participating in supported employment programmes found their experience economically and socially rewarding, with increased interaction with other people in their community (Wehman and Kregel, 1995).

Continuing monitoring involves monitoring of the worksite and employee performance and communication with employers and supervisors. Identifying problems in the worker's performance or in the workplace, and responding quickly to requests for help for the employer have both found to be crucial in maintaining the job (Beyer,1995).

Evaluations of UK employment related programmes have tended to focus on the (cost) effectiveness of programmes in terms of enabling individuals to enter work. The extent to which programmes promote social inclusion more broadly, in terms of social contact and participation in normal social activities, has received less attention. One evaluation of different models of supported employment across impairment groups found that employment advisers identified increased confidence, independence and self-esteem as important benefits of supported employment, with people with learning disabilities gaining the most benefit (Beyer, Thomas and Thornton, 2003). Disabled employees themselves reported that supported employment helped them make friends at work and develop confidence.

Barriers to successful employment

Lack of experience and confidence, difficulties in getting a job to suit their disability and problems in getting an interview have been identified by both disabled workers and employment advisers as barriers to getting a job (Beyer, Thomas and Thornton, 2003). Research conducted in the US found difficulties in fitting in socially a factor in the breakdown of work placements (Beyer, 1995). Chadsey and Beyer (2001) argue that people with learning disabilities may face difficulties of social adjustment that threaten their jobs. They argue that "either better job matches need to occur initially so social problems are not an issue, or more effective interventions need to be designed so that social problems are minimised" (pg 129).

Research on employability (Moss and Taylor, 1995) emphasises the importance of "softer skills" in accessing the labour market, i.e. the ability to interact with customers and co-workers (teamwork, the ability to fit in, spoken communication skills, appearance and attire) and also motivation (enthusiasm, positive work attitude, commitment, dependability and willingness to learn). Lack of subtle soft skills, rather than cognitive incapacity, may be a barrier to many people with learning difficulties entering and remaining in work.

Research carried out on behalf of the Rowntree Foundation identified a number of key behaviours which helped people with learning disabilities to be successful in supported employment. These included dressing smartly, being punctual, having the right attitude to work such as working hard and being willing to learn, getting on with different people in the work situation and being polite (Jones, Morgan, Murphy and Shearn, 2002).

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the impact on the lives of people with moderate to severe learning disabilities of participation in supported employment and to gain insight into the barriers which lie behind low employment rates for this group.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What changes does participating in a supported employment programme have on the lives of adults with learning disabilities? Does participating in the programme and entering employment increase people's confidence and self-esteem and their integration into the community? Does it reduce social exclusion?
2. What are employers' attitudes to employees with learning disabilities? Do they find them effective employees and are they accepted by their colleagues?
3. How does the support of the job coach enable employees with learning disabilities to retain jobs?
4. What light does the experiences of participants shed on the barriers to successful employment for people with learning disabilities?

Chapter 2: Findings and analysis

1. What changes does working have on the lives of people participating in the supported employment programme? Does participating in the programme and entering employment increase individuals' confidence and self-esteem and their integration into the community? Does it reduce social exclusion?

The views of disabled employees and trainees

Most disabled interviewees found it quite difficult to articulate comparisons between their lives before they were working and now. However, all the participants spoke about their work with evident pride and said they enjoyed working. They were able to respond to specific questions about the advantages of work, such as having more money, feeling they are playing a valued role, mixing with (non-disabled) people and making friends.

All the employees identified material benefits of working. Most were on low incomes before working, and so even though benefit rules mean they are usually only £20 a week better off in work, this makes a real difference to their lives. Paul, who has been working for almost two years, comments, "I'm in a pension scheme with work. Before, I couldn't afford holidays. Now I can go to Pontin's." Earning money engenders feelings of pride and self-esteem, as Victoria for example comments, "It feels great [to be paid]. It helps pay the bills. Before I was in debt. Now I'm not. I can treat myself."

Participants all identified more social contact and meeting people as important benefits of working. Ian's views are typical: "I like meeting people and keeping busy. I like mixing with people – I like being helpful." Most of the group also mentioned making new friends as important personal goals or achievements.

“ It feels great to be paid...
Before I was in debt...Now I
can treat myself. ”

Disabled employee

Other benefits included keeping busy (mentioned by all the disabled people interviewed) and helping people (mentioned by 3 people). Victoria, who works as a cleaner and social therapy assistant in a care home, as well as a volunteer in a charity shop, spoke of being "at home all the time just looking after the cat and being bored" before she began working, in contrast with her now busy life. David, when asked what benefits he gets from working, proudly mentioned receiving free lunches and wearing a company uniform and badge.

“ Working makes me feel more important...It helps me to be meeting people. I'm being something that I've always wanted to be...”

Disabled employee

The financial aspects of employment are also important to Stephen and Jacky, who were not yet working. Jacky mentioned needing a job to pay bills, do her flat up and afford a holiday. At the time of the second interview with her, when it was looking likely that she would shortly be offered a paid job, she also stressed non-financial benefits:

“Working makes me feel more important. I feel better and calmer in

my own life. It helps me to be meeting people. I'm being something that I've always wanted to be.”

Stephen, who at 22 is the youngest of the people interviewed and living at home with his mother said, “[earning money] is very important. I want to buy my own house and car. I want to come off benefits. It's taking off other people.”

Views of relatives

Relatives of employees and trainees identified increased confidence and self-esteem, greater independence and increased social inclusion, especially in terms of social contact with non-disabled people as the main changes in people's lives gained through working or work placements.

David's sister-in-law believes that working in a mainstream setting is particularly important and believes this is the most significant change for

David. "What he was doing before was appalling...when he was attending the daycentre five days a week he was doing packaging and making paper hats. He was doing it for years. I think he must have found it brain-numbing." She also mentioned the benefits of paid work in terms of more social contact, more structure to his time and a sense of satisfaction and playing a valued role.

“ It’s not stigmatised.....
He really enjoys his job and is
much happier than before he
was working. ”

Sister of a disabled worker

Ian’s sister identified working in a regular rather than sheltered setting as very important, "It’s not stigmatised...He really enjoys his job and is much happier than before he was working." She also mentioned increased self-esteem and a sense of playing a valued role as important changes.

Paul’s sister identified fewer clear changes in Paul’s life as a result of working, possibly because she felt he was already leading a full life. She mentioned increased self-esteem and sense of pride in his work as being important.

At the time of the interview with his mother Stephen was no longer working, having been ultimately unsuccessful in being offered a job after a year long placement. She felt there were many benefits for her son in working, especially more friendships and social contact, increased self-esteem, greater structure to his life and a sense of playing a valued role. She contrasted these advantages with her worries about him now that he is not at work, "I’m frightened of him thinking that he’s not good enough. He doesn’t go out and just stays at home winding us up...He got on really well with the staff. He really needs work to give him the next step up...When he’s structured he’s great. Now he’s at home all the time, apart from once a week when he goes to football, and once a week when he goes walking with my mother. But it’s all older people."

Views of employers

Several employers volunteered information on how their disabled employee had changed during the period of employment, mentioning confidence and self-esteem.

Victoria's employer (deputy chief executive of a social care provider), who has known her for many years, commented on Victoria's increased confidence: "There's been a big increase in her confidence and self-esteem. Earning money is so important for her. She is a much more confident lady." Victoria's employer also comments on her greater calmness and concern for personal appearance: "She could be quite volatile. Now her energy is channelled... Sometimes I say to her 'that jumper needs to go in the wash' and she takes it on board."

“ There's been a big increase in her confidence and self-esteem. Earning money is so important for her. She is a much more confident lady. ”

Employer of a disabled worker

Ian's employer commented on his increased independence and confidence:

"When he first started he was quite shy and didn't recognise me if I was out of uniform. His confidence has grown enormously and he loves working with the lads."

Jacky, who had been in her work placement for about 6 weeks at the time of the interview, had also increased in confidence according to her employer.

Views of support workers and other learning disability professionals

Support workers identified increased confidence and self-esteem as the most significant change in people as a result of working for all the supported employees, with the exception of Paul. In Paul's case this may be because he was regarded as very confident before beginning work.

The manager of the daycentre which David attended regularly before he began working and who has known David for many years, commented on his increased independence and social inclusion: "[working] has had an enormous impact. His independence has come on quite dramatically. He's increased his work days recently. I knew him when he was living with carers when his mum died and now he's on minimum support. He's one person for whom things have improved quite dramatically. His appearance, his confidence. He used to be

quite a nervous person and he's got so much more confident that it's like talking to a different person."

In contrast with David's sister in law, who believes his accommodation move was most significant, the manager is clear that the changes are largely due to working. "I'd say it was about 80% the job. He wasn't that confident at first but then things started to take off and he moved to his flat." David's support worker agrees that there have been significant changes in David which are attributable to his working. She identifies having his own money to spend and mixing with non-disabled people as significant factors leading to his increased confidence and self-esteem.

All the support workers interviewed stress the benefits of having a more structured day. Paul's support worker identifies this as the most important change in his life, even though he only works one day a week. "Once college stopped he had no structure in his life. He wasn't really doing anything and we were struggling to give him support."

Victoria's support worker identifies improvements in her physical health: "She's lost weight, her arthritis is better, her knees were bad and she used a stick." She also mentions her promotion to social therapy assistant, "With her job she's progressed over time."

Jacky's former support worker identifies the importance of belonging to an organisation and the social contact entailed in working as particularly important for her: "She loves having meaningful occupation and the interaction with other people."

Possible bias in the selection of subjects

The findings of the impact of participating in supported employment are overwhelmingly positive. There is a possibility that bias in the selection

“ He used to be quite a nervous person and he's got so much more confident it's like talking to a different person. ”

Care manager

of individuals for the case study contributed to this positive picture, as two individuals who were originally considered as possible subjects were subsequently excluded because they were experiencing difficulties.

In one instance a young man became extremely anxious several weeks into his training placement and continued to experience mental health difficulties some months after terminating his placement. The job coach's view, based on his parents' comments to her, was that he had not coped well with the transition from leaving college. The other employee who had experienced difficulties seemed to be coping well in her job by the end of the study period.

2. What are employers' attitudes to employees with learning disabilities? Do they find them effective employees and are they accepted by their colleagues?

Six people acting in the capacity of an employer were interviewed to gauge the attitudes of employers to the employees and trainees with learning disabilities. In some cases the individual interviewed was the disabled person's line manager or supervisor, sometimes they worked in human resources and in two instances were deputy managers. For the sake of brevity the term "employer" is used to describe all of these different roles.

“ Some of the staff maybe wondered if we were making a job especially for him. Team members now realise he can do as much as them. ”

Employer of a disabled worker

Attitudes of colleagues

The responses of employers indicated that other members of staff generally became more positive towards their colleagues with learning disabilities as a result of working with them, often dispelling negative stereotypes about their incapacities. Ian's employer comments, "I think [working with Ian] has probably made a difference to some of the

staff who maybe wondered if we were making a job especially for him. Team members now realise he can do as much as them.”

Jacky, who works in a large shopping mall with many colleagues, was the only disabled participant who commented that not all of her colleagues were helpful, “A lot of [colleagues] are friendly. Some of them are very nice. One or two people don’t talk to you when you ask them where something is.”

The employers interviewed, with one exception, have a very positive attitude to their disabled employees and trainees. Employer’s attitudes have been analysed under the following headings:

- (a) The employer regards the disabled person no differently to other employees, making relatively minor adjustments for them, and assesses their performance on this basis;
- (b) the employer has a discriminatory attitude to his disabled employee, and makes prejudicial assumptions about them;
- (c) the employer goes to considerable lengths to accommodate the disabled person.

(a) The employer regards the disabled person no differently to other employees, making relatively minor adjustments for them, and assesses their performance on this basis.

David’s employer, the manager of a fast food outlet manager, might be classed under this category. He rates David as a “very good” employee with a “very good” attitude to work in terms of punctuality, politeness and being hardworking and conscientious. The employer comments, “He’s a good crew member. He offers good hospitality. He’s always very punctual and he’s very integrated with the crew.”

The fast food outlet recruits staff following a trial session working in the restaurant, at which David performed well. When asked why it was decided to employ David, the employer answered that he had not been the manager at

the time of David's recruitment but that: "It was almost certainly because he came across as a good potential employee."

Ian's employer, a human resources manager in a large DIY store, takes a similar view, rating both his performance and attitude to work as "very good" and emphasising Ian's capacity to perform at a comparable level to other employees and downplaying any differences.

Victoria's employer has a background working in social care and finds it relatively straightforward to make minor adjustments to allow for Victoria's disability. In Victoria's case, the adjustments relate primarily to softer skills rather than to the kinds of tasks Victoria is required to perform. "Sometimes when she's cleaning you need to keep her on task. She will start talking about other things." She also rates Victoria as an effective employee with a very good attitude to work: "She's fabulous. She gives a lot. There are some things she doesn't do [in her social therapy assistant role] because she hasn't had specific training, but we are not babysitting her at all."

“She's fabulous. She gives a lot...we are not babysitting her at all.”

Employer

Jacky is working as a trainee assistant in the food court of a large shopping mall, cleaning, tidying and clearing tables. A conversation between her job coach and the supervisor, training manager and head of catering services is revealing of how a positive experience of working with a disabled trainee can change employers' and supervisors' attitudes towards people with learning disabilities. The training

manager commented, "We aren't as aware as we should be of the needs of people with learning disabilities [customers as well as staff]. That's why I jumped at the chance of giving Jacky a job. People don't know how to talk to someone. It can be a bit daunting and they think, 'am I going to say the wrong thing?' They think there's more of an issue than there is. Now [the supervisor] has a good relationship with her."

Jacky's supervisor made some adjustments for her when she started working. "When she first started she needed someone to go out with her, but now she completes all of the tasks alone...Since she's not been with [the job coach] she's

been having to work think things out for herself. She's streets ahead. We didn't think she'd pick things up so quickly... You only need to tell her something once. Some staff you haven't got that luxury with."

(b) The employer has a discriminatory attitude to his disabled employee, and makes prejudicial assumptions about them.

Only Stephen's employer could be described as discriminatory. The manager interviewed is deputy manager of a large retail outlet and took the decision not to offer Stephen a job. However he was not involved in the original recruitment of Stephen. He was unwilling to comment on Stephen's individual performance or why he was not offered a permanent position. In response to a question about the kinds of adjustments he makes for disabled employees he said, "As a business we make reasonable adjustments but we have to ask, 'Could the person do the job on an equal basis?' There's a multitude of tasks that people do. Everyone has to be up to speed and we can't carry anyone. Working in retailing is demanding. On a Saturday it gets very busy and we have people queuing to the door. All our staff are till trained and have to be able to cope with that."

At face value, the manager's response does not appear to be discriminatory. However, in the light of the fact that Stephen was not offered a paid position after a year's apparently successful job placement and the views of both the Stephen's mother and job coach, his behaviour does seem discriminatory. Stephen's mother commented, "The problem [with the job] was the new manager. He didn't give him a chance to try out the tills. He just assumed Stephen wouldn't be able to do it. Stephen's good at figures – better than me. I don't know how he'd be at rush hour and they needed to give him a chance to try it."

The job coach is convinced that Stephen's experience is a case of discrimination and that he was just being used as free labour. She described how when she went in to assess Stephen's performance with his supervisor he was rated very highly: "He was ticking all the boxes. They just kept shifting the goal posts."

Stephen's mother also believed that Stephen was being exploited, "He's got lots of abilities. He'd be a good employee. He'd be there on time and he's good at following instructions as long as it's fairly simple."

Stephen's case contrasts sharply with that of Ian, also working in the retail

sector, whose manager responded when asked whether she has made any special adjustments for Ian, "Not really – just a few minor things to do with health and safety. We don't ask him to use the timber saws or the forklift truck but there other people who don't do those particular tasks for various reasons - one person has got a bad back. We helped him with his timekeeping a bit and gave him a picture of a clock with 9 o'clock on it. We didn't create this job especially for him."

(c) The employer goes to considerable lengths to accommodate the disabled person

Paul's employer, who manages the admin department of a national trade magazine, described how she has tailored the job to meet Paul's abilities:

"I wasn't involved in actually recruiting Paul but I was asked my opinion and I said yes, there would be something we could find that would be suitable for someone of Paul's abilities. My opinion at the time was that for somebody the size of us we must be able to provide for somebody like him."

Paul's employer explained that Paul works on the morning when subscriptions are being packed ready for distribution. "Paul first of all worked in the sales office and he didn't quite fit in. Because he's very loud and animated he'd be shouting and happy when people were on the phone to clients. That's why he came to work in the admin department. All the subscriptions are done on Wednesdays and on other days the girls do the invoices and that would be too difficult for Paul. Answering the phone would be too much for him – we take several hundred calls an hour. I know Paul can't do that because we've tried him."

As well as fitting the job to Paul's abilities and needs, Paul's employer has gone to considerable lengths to accommodate his behaviour which can be very challenging: "His weakness is his continuity, and I mean continuity in a big way as he just won't turn up to work one day....I can now understand that if he has something going on in his private life it will impact on his work life." The employer describes some specific instances of his difficult behaviour including losing his temper and throwing a mug against the wall and throwing his spectacles in the canal.

Despite these periodic difficulties, Paul's employer rated him as an excellent

employee with an excellent attitude to work (on a good day). She commented, "He's challenging but so are other people. We've got more difficult people working here than he is."

In interpreting these findings it is important to bear in mind that individual employers were selected by a process of job matching by the supported employment service, in other words because they were judged likely to offer a suitable placement for the particular individual concerned. A strong degree of self-selection is involved, with only employers willing to support an employee with a learning disability participating.

.....
: **3. How does the role of the job coach facilitate the disabled person entering** :
: **and remaining in employment?** :
.....

For all of the employees supported by the programme, the job coach and the employment service played a crucial role in negotiating their entry into the job and providing on the job training. Trainees vary considerably in the length of time for which they are supported by the coach in placements before they become paid employees, and in the amount of support they need both during the placement and paid employment stages of their supported employment. Factors affecting the amount of support a person needs include the availability of natural support from colleagues and the person's capacity to conform to expected standards of social behaviour as well their level of social and cognitive functioning.

During the period of collecting data, two people were experiencing particular difficulties in their jobs. Marie, who has a severe learning disability, has been working as a cleaner in a care home for about 12 months. She spends much of her time at a day centre for people with learning disabilities, and either walks to work with a support worker or travels in a taxi booked by the day centre. Her job coach commented that she can be an efficient and effective worker, but easily becomes bored and demotivated and needs a lot of encouragement to get on with her job, "Marie can be quite challenging. The job works because the employers are used to working with people with learning disabilities and are very supportive and understanding." The job coach was able to help resolve these problems by encouraging the managers to be stricter with Marie and clearer in their expectations of her.

The second person experiencing difficulties was Paul, a sociable, articulate and in many regards able man. His difficulties in the job lie in relation to softer skills. The job coach has supported Paul's line manager in dealing with issues which have arisen. For example the line manager has telephoned Becky about personal hygiene: "I say to her, what would you do if it was any other person, and she says 'take them to one side and have a quiet word'. I encourage her to treat Paul exactly the same."

Stephen's behaviour in the staff room at lunch time provides another example of where the intervention of the job coach was significant in enabling a trainee to fit into the workplace, although ultimately Stephen was unsuccessful in the placement. His mother commented, "He was being silly in the canteen – rhyming and laughing loudly. Becky sorted out his silly behaviour – got him to take a notebook to work so he could write down his daft ideas."

The job coach can also be instrumental in ironing out minor issues over communication. David failed to turn up at work one day and Becky received a call asking where he was: "He'd just moved to his new flat and the support staff hadn't let them know he was ill. I spoke to them and said that they needed to ring his work if he was ill and couldn't go in."

For most of the supported employees only a limited amount of support is required once the person is established in the workplace, and natural support from colleagues takes over.

Paul's employer has developed confidence in dealing with most issues that arise with Paul without the need to go to the job coach for advice, but displays a degree of (apparently unconscious) ambivalence in her capacity to deal with Paul without Becky's support. On the one hand she has learnt that: "Paul sees any kind of meetings as authority and assumes he's in trouble. He gets anxious so we don't tell him. That's the way we've learnt to deal with things.

On the other hand during a period of emotional turbulence in his private life when Paul became very challenging at work, she needed Becky's support: "I wouldn't know how to calm him down. We wouldn't know how to get him back to quiet if he threw something. I'd tell him 'no, you can't do that in the office.' I'd tell him to put his coat on and go home, and then I'd call Becky and ask her to call him into her office."

Most of those interviewed believed that the job coach has an important continuing role even once a person was settled into the job. Michelle, the manager of the independent living service providing support with domestic skills to Paul, Ian and Victoria believes that for Paul the role of the job coach has been vital in protecting him from losing his job, but that it is also important for Victoria and Ian whose experiences have been much less problematic. Speaking about Ian, she observed, "I do think he still needs the job coach to help him review things from time to time and see how he's doing and whether he's still liking the job and to see if there are any problems he might not be able to talk to anyone else about."

.....
: **4. What light does the experiences of participants in Trafford Employment** :
: **shed on the barriers to successful supported employment for people with** :
: **learning disabilities?** :
.....

Employer attitudes

The evidence of this study indicates that positive attitudes on behalf of employers are crucial to people with learning disabilities being successfully incorporated into employment. The attitudes of employers have been described in section 3 of this chapter. Five of the six employers interviewed took a very positive attitude to their disabled employees and were willing where necessary to make adjustments to the requirements of the job to accommodate the person's capacities. In Ian's case, the employer was willing to exempt him from certain tasks which she judged on health and safety grounds were not appropriate for Ian to carry out, but she pointed out that he is not the only one – other people are exempted from lifting duties because of bad backs. Paul's employer designed his role around his capacities and in effect created a job for him – albeit one which needed to be done.

Victoria, Marie and Paul's employers displayed flexibility in their response to behaviours which are generally regarded as inappropriate in a work setting. In Victoria's case this involved helping her to remain on task rather than allowing her to be distracted from her work by chatting. For Paul, this involved considerable effort on the part of the employer to accommodate his mood swings and to deal effectively with behaviour such as throwing away his glasses and other strategies to avoid working.

Stephen's experience illustrates how discriminatory assumptions may prevent disabled candidates for jobs from being employed, although we do not know the manager's true reason for not employing Stephen. It appears likely that discriminatory assumptions played a significant role, particularly in the light of the manager's comments about the need for being till trained and his unwillingness to allow Stephen the opportunity to learn.

Lack of softer skills

Softer skills have been identified as crucial to individuals' employability. The evidence of this study illustrates how deficiencies in relation to softer skills constitute potential barriers to successful employment for people with learning disabilities, and how crucial is the willingness of employers to make adjustments to accommodate people's difficulties and help them overcome them.

As has already been observed, we do not know the true reason for Stephen's failure to be offered a job in the retail chain where he successfully worked as a trainee for almost a year. But we can surmise that part of the explanation may lie in his tendency on occasions to lapse into behaviour which his mother describes as "silly" but which is regarded as characteristic of people with autistic spectrum disorders such as rhyming, switching lights on and off and loud laughter.

There are other instances of difficulties with softer skills which might potentially cause barriers to employment: Victoria's tendency to talk too much at work or to occasionally turn up in a dirty T shirt, Ian's difficulty with telling the time, Jacky's history of being sometimes unreliable because of mental health difficulties and Paul's tendency to behave inappropriately at work. Becky said that Paul will sometimes talk about subjects inappropriate in a work environment and embarrassing to his younger female colleagues, "There's an element of ongoing social skills training. I've told him that you can't do this or you may lose your job."

“ There's an element of ongoing social skills training. I've told him that you can't do this or you may lose your job. ”

Job coach

Lack of suitable opportunities to work

The issue of availability of suitable opportunities for work is only touched on in this study, because the focus is on people who are either working or being supported in placements. However the reduction in demand for low-skilled labour in the economy (Leitch, 2006) means people with learning disabilities are in direct competition with others with low skills, as well as with migrant workers who may have limited English but be well-educated, have excellent soft skills and be highly motivated. Stephen's difficulty in finding another job after his retail placement ended illustrates that even with the support of a job coach in a specialist service finding suitable placements can be problematic.

Responses to the researcher's enquiries about whether people would like to work longer hours reveal lack of suitable opportunities for people with learning disabilities. Paul's employer said it would be hard to offer Paul more hours – or to employ more than one person with a learning disability, because only a limited number of suitable tasks are available within the company. Ian's employer commented that she would be happy to offer Ian more work but that at the moment no extra work is available for anyone. David is keen to work more, and he talks about getting a job in a café or stacking shelves in a supermarket – in addition to his work in a fast food outlet. His former support worker describes how she had been to talk to his employer about his working longer hours but that none were available.

Resource constraints

The employment service would like to be able to support more people into work, but job coaches are constrained by limited resources as to the number of people they can support at any one time. In terms of its cost-effectiveness, one drawback is that people working for just one or two half days a week require similar levels of support as people working longer hours, as well as ongoing support when they are settled in the job.

The job coaches expressed frustration at the time spent finding placements, and agree that a more efficient way of working would be to have someone working full-time on approaching suitable placements, but limited resources prevent this. "We don't cherry pick people. It's against the principles of the way we work. If someone has only just been referred and a job comes up which they could do it would be unfair to pass over someone who has been waiting

longer. From the initial assessment it's hard to know how much support a person may need. It might take six months before they are being paid."

The service is the only one of its kind working in the local authority in question and has a waiting list. At the time of writing the report eligibility criteria for all adult social services provision in the local authority were being tightened, reflecting the position nationally (CSCI, 2008). A possible outcome of these raised thresholds for support could be that many people with moderate to severe disabilities who stand to benefit most from supported employment but whose needs are not judged to be "critical or substantial" by social services will in future not be eligible to participate in the programme.

Perverse incentives of the welfare benefit system

The 'perverse incentives' imposed by the UK benefits system is identified in the literature as a key factor in explaining why supported employment has not performed in cost-benefit terms as well in the UK as in the US (Cole and Williams et al, 2007). None of the people participating in this study work for longer than 8 hours a week, and some people only work for 3.5 hours a week. Supported permitted work rules in themselves constitute a barrier to people moving off supported employment into open employment, as disabled employees would no longer be entitled to their £20 a week income support disregard.

When relatives and support workers were asked to identify barriers to people working longer hours, only one mentioned potential loss of benefits. Ian's support worker commented, "I'm not aware of barriers stopping him working more. I don't think he'd be bothered about losing benefits as long as his income didn't go down." Nevertheless, it is clear from the comments of staff in the employment service that both perceived and potential loss of benefits is a major barrier to people working longer hours. The hours worked by employees supported by the service are negotiated by the job coach with employers, and one of their explicit aims is to avoid them being in a worse financial position than if they were not in work, as became clear in the discussion between Becky and Jacky's employers.

Similarly, Becky explains that Ian is able to work 8 hours a week because he gets Income Support Carer's Premium which is worth £28 a week for providing care to a man with physical and learning disabilities whom he lives with. Becky

believes that without the Carer's Premium working 8 hours would mean he would lose housing benefit.

Attitudes of parents and carers

The employment service staff identify attitudes of parents and carers towards employment as critical. Low expectations and lack of support at home and also unrealistically high expectations make it less likely that a person with a learning disability will thrive in supported employment. The service manager describes how parents can be over-protective, or fearful of the impact of loss of welfare benefits on family income. "Some parents will say 'my child can't work' because they see the benefits as their own income. For some it's a blatant abuse of the system but for others it's understandable because it's been a battle for them to get the benefits [for their adult child]. Support at home is important, to remind the person to get up in the morning, have clothes ready, catch the bus. It can be very hard in families where no-one else is working."

The service manager explains how families and carers may also have been put off supported employment by poor past experience. "There's been some very poor practice out there. People have been dumped in placements and not given support. Bad experiences have a negative effect on employers, parents and carers also disabled people themselves."

Poor preparation for work in schools and colleges

The supported employment service manager and the job coach both identify poor preparation for work by schools and further education colleges as a factor affecting the employability of people with learning disabilities. Whilst further education colleges do run work readiness courses covering softer skills such as travelling to work, personal presentation

“ Work preparation courses don't focus on real skills needed for work. It could be that colleges do cover things like what an employer would expect, but if it's not reinforced next week then it's not real. ”

Service manager

and punctuality, people with learning disabilities often find it hard to apply the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to real life settings. The service manager comments, "Work preparation courses don't focus on real skills needed for work. It could be that colleges do cover things like what an employer would expect, but if it's not reinforced next week then it's not real." She adds, "If college tutors don't believe the students will ever get jobs, then why are they on the course?"

"Being busy" and other aspects of their lives

Participating in activities other than work, needing more time and support to carry out routine domestic tasks than non-disabled people and "being busy" are identified by several interviewees as reasons for people not working longer hours. Ian's support worker for example commented, "He works two half days – the 4 hours is quite a big chunk out of the day and he doesn't have time to do anything else that day. On Thursday's he's with us for most of the day [receiving support with activities like shopping, cleaning his flat and dealing with bills]. One day he works at the hospital [as a volunteer]. He does cooking at home for Ray – he's like Ray's carer."

Paul's sister said she is not sure that Paul would want to work longer hours, "I know he enjoys his job but he's not someone who likes too much structure and routine. He likes to have the freedom to just go off somewhere for the day – he'll go to York on the train or he'll go to the theatre." However Paul himself said he would like to work more.

Victoria's support worker described how Victoria has become so busy since working one day a week on top of working as a volunteer in a local charity shop that she doesn't always have sufficient time for other priorities. "She was doing that many hours at [the charity shop] – even Saturdays when her husband was off. We've had difficulties trying to give her the support. She still needs to get her support, especially around her finances or she'll lose the service. It's the [charity shop] job. She says 'I'm needed there'. She's cleaning for everybody else but not doing her own cleaning. We had to do a contract with her so that she would come into our office to do her finances."

Chapter 3: Conclusions and policy recommendations

Benefits of participating in supported employment

The findings of the study indicate that participating in supported employment – even just for three and a half or eight hours a week – results in many beneficial changes in the lives of adults with learning disabilities. The benefits include increased confidence and self-esteem, greater social contact with non-disabled people, greater independence, a sense of playing a valued role and a more structured life. For most of the participants, welfare benefit rules mean that they are only £20 a week better off through working. Nevertheless, earning money is important for them in terms of self-esteem and for the material benefits it provides, such as money for holidays and “treating themselves”, and saving for retirement.

There is a strong degree of consensus in the responses of different stakeholders interviewed, although people with learning disabilities themselves found it harder to articulate non-material benefits of working. For only one individual were there clear differences of views between interviewees in terms of the benefits of working, in his case between learning disability professionals, both of whom believe that working has led to the man becoming more independent in other aspects of his life, including moving out of residential care into a flat with only minimum support, and his sister-in-law who felt that the accommodation move was more significant.

Employer attitudes

The study also found that employer attitudes are highly significant in people’s ability to be successfully integrated into the workforce, and that the job coach plays a significant role in facilitating this process. For most of the individuals studied, the job coach supported the employer to become more confident and effective in managing their disabled employee, so that over time the job coach’s role became primarily one of monitoring whilst day to day support was provided by co-workers, supervisors and managers. In only one of the six individuals studied did negative employer attitudes seem to prevent the successful employment of a young man.

Social relationships and 'softer skills'

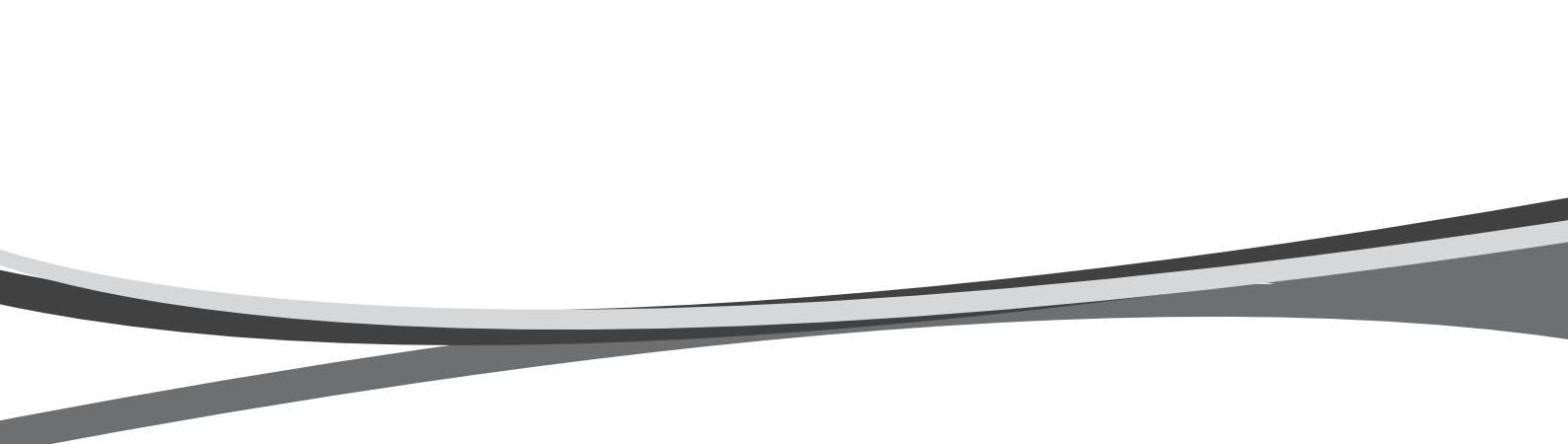
The findings of this study also reinforced existing research that social relationships and softer skills, and support for coping with difficulties in these areas, can be critical in successful employment. The ability to behave appropriately in a work environment appears from this study to play a much more significant role in successful employment than other aspects of cognitive ability. Several supported programme participants had difficulties in relation to conforming to expected standards of behaviour, which in most cases were successfully resolved. The role of the job coach in supporting both employer and employee, and helping employees to modify their behaviour where it was causing problems, is critical. The consensus among respondents was that even once a person is successfully established in work, the role of the job coach remains important in case issues arise which either employee or employer need support with.

Further research

Further research in this field might include a larger study with a comparison or control group, using either a random-controlled design or matched samples to compare the outcomes for individuals participating in different types of programmes or no programmes. It would also be useful to include a follow-up one year or longer after participation in supported employment. Another useful line of enquiry would be to follow up on individuals for whom the job placement was not successful. Research into the role of the job coach in facilitating the development of natural support and in helping employers overcome negative attitudes might also provide insights into how to increase employment for adults with learning disabilities.

Recommendations for policy

1. To challenge negative stereotypes of people with learning disabilities, there is a need for greater promotion of the practical implications and benefits of employing disabled workers, including challenging the assumption that they cannot be as efficient as other workers.

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- 2. Greater flexibility should be introduced into the benefits system to remove barriers to work for people with learning disabilities. The £20 Income Support disregard for people in supported permitted work should be increased to the equivalent of one day's pay on minimum wage.
 - 3. More investment is needed to increase provision of supported employment for adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities. A stable funding and commissioning environment is needed for supported employment that falls outside the current 16 hour minimum rule for the DWP funded Workstep programme. The 16 hour minimum rule under the Workstep programme should be reviewed for people with learning disabilities, who may need to increase their hours gradually and who may never be able to work 16 hours a week. Learning and Skills Council Resources should be redirected away from college provision towards effective supported employment.
 - 4. Sufficient flexibility should be retained in the procurement of specialist learning disability employment services, including supported employment programmes, to enable good quality person-centred provision to flourish. This may mean district level procurement (as opposed to the regional being introduced by DWP).
 - 5. Quality control should be introduced for supported employment providers to ensure all providers conform to the standards of the best.
 - 6. The education and training of young people with learning disabilities should focus more on preparing them for employment. This might include offering them the kind of work experience opportunities available to non-disabled young people to enable them to learn about work and to develop crucial "softer skills" such as punctuality and appropriate behaviour in the workplace.

Appendix: Research design and methodology

A case study design using a qualitative approach was used to allow experiences of a sample of individuals with learning disabilities to be closely examined and because concepts of social inclusion and of the significance of participating in employment are not amenable to quantification. The method of data collection involved semi-structured interviews about each programme participant with a range of stakeholders to gain insights into questions about consequences and meaning of employment: structured interviews might have closed down fruitful lines of enquiry and led to irrelevant, inappropriate or intrusive questions being asked. The methodology facilitated the analysis of inherently subjective material and nuances of meaning, where individuals' interpretations of events are critical.

The stakeholders interviewed include disabled employees and trainees, their job coach, employers and work supervisors, adult relatives, support workers and other professionals involved in providing personal support. Between three and six interviews were conducted for each programme participant. Interviews were tape recorded and responses transcribed verbatim. Observations from different respondents were compared to gain a fuller picture of each subject. This permitted the triangulation of evidence and was a means of testing the reliability of data collected. Factual errors in responses were readily identified. Interviewees sometimes had different perspectives on the same individual, but most often their comments confirmed the comments of others. Because of the difficulties which people with learning disabilities may experience in reflecting on their own experiences, interviews with support workers and relatives enabled greater insights into the impact of employment to be obtained.

The extent to which the findings are generalisable, in terms of both the extent to which people in this programme are representative of all people with learning disabilities participating in supported employment programmes, and the representativeness of the programme within all supported employment programmes, is uncertain. The lack of a control means that we cannot say what would have happened to individuals had they not been participating in the supported employment programme. Resource constraints ruled out the possibility of a large scale study with a control group.

The supported employment programme

The programme is run by United Response, a national voluntary sector social care provider, and funded by social services. Some employees also receive Access to Work funds from the DWP to pay for transport to work. The programme is relatively small with 13 paid employees, 7 people in placements and a further 15 people on the waiting list and is managed alongside a social enterprise providing sheltered employment and a Workstep programme. It supports people with relatively higher needs and more severe learning disabilities than many other schemes, including those operating under Workstep.

Most people work for only three and a half to eight hours a week, fewer than for many programmes aimed at people with milder impairments. People vary in the amount of support they receive which is determined according to individual needs. Typically participants begin by being supported one-to-one full time by the job coach. Support from the job coach is gradually reduced until the person is working with just natural support from colleagues and supervisors and monitoring from the job coach, which might involve a short visit every two to six months, but with more support indefinitely available if problems arise. Some individuals may require quite intensive support for a few weeks to help them and their employers resolve problems. This model of individual placement and support is widely used both in the UK and the US, however the quality of programmes varies widely.

People are referred to the programme through a variety of routes. Some are referred by a local daycentre or by the local authority's independent living service. Others self-refer after attending open days run by the service, or are referred by further education colleges or self-advocacy projects. These referral methods are relatively unusual compared with Workstep programmes where people are referred through Jobcentre Plus. The funder stipulates that individuals accessing the employment service must be receiving another service from adult social services, such as independent living support, social work, a daycentre place or speech therapy.

The supported employment programme which is the focus of this study was selected because the researcher works for the social care agency running the programme, facilitating access. Directors of the agency were enthusiastic about the evaluation and the programme manager, deputy programme manager and

job coach were very helpful and willing to assist the researcher. A drawback was that the researcher might have found it hard objectively to report negative or critical findings.

Selection of subjects

Six people with learning disabilities were selected for inclusion in the study in discussion with the deputy programme manager (who held records and detailed knowledge of all those participating in the programme). They were selected to reflect the range of people supported by the service, in terms of age, gender, degree of cognitive impairment, level of social functioning and time supported by the agency.

Thus the sample included men and women, people with moderate and more severe learning disabilities (though cognitive impairment was not formally assessed or recorded by the programme), people with additional disabilities (mental health difficulties, mobility impairment and autistic spectrum disorder), people who have been working for a year or more and people just entering the service. Six was felt to be a small enough number for the study to be manageable within the resource constraints and big enough to provide a spread of experiences.

Whilst the subjects selected were broadly representative of all those supported by the service, it is possible that positive bias influenced selection of candidates. Two people encountering difficulties at the time of selection were excluded by the service manager who felt being the subject of questioning might exacerbate difficulties: one of these individuals withdrew from the programme between the service manager proposing the initial list of subjects and the list being confirmed. In attempt to counter this possible source of bias, observations relating to these two excluded candidates are included in the findings of this report, although the reliability of findings cannot be verified by triangulation and depend on the perception of the job coach.

Consent

Before conducting interviews with programme participants or other stakeholders, the informed consent of the subjects concerned was gained.

This was done in two stages, by the job coach initially contacting the person and asking them if they were happy to participate, and then by the researcher meeting them individually and discussing the purpose of the research and what it would involve. It was made clear to prospective participants that taking part was voluntary and that there would be no repercussions if they did not participate and that they could change their mind at any time. It was also made clear that personal information would be treated as confidential, and that no identifying information would be included in the report. The service manager assessed all of the participants as having the capacity to consent in line with the Code of Practice under the Mental Capacity Act.

Ethical guidelines

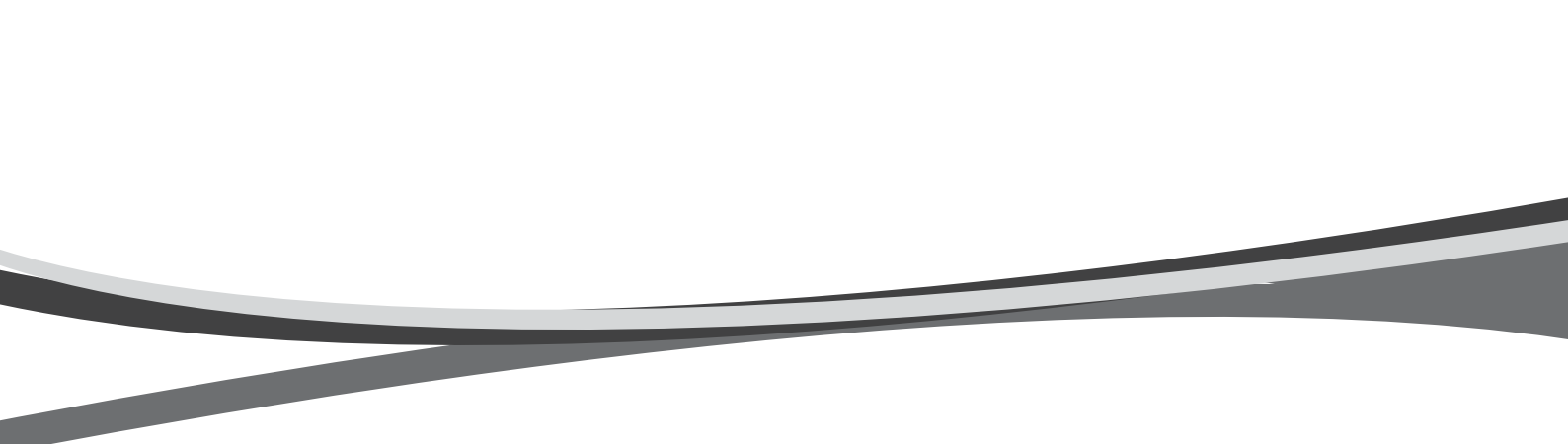
The London School of Economics guidelines on ethical research were followed, as was the social care provider's own good practice in working with adults with a learning disability. In practical terms, working with vulnerable adults requires ensuring the best interests of the person being studied are a primary consideration at all times. On occasions this required departure from conventional neutrality by the researcher, for example in passing on sensitive information to support workers where this was in a person's best interests.

Schedule of interviews

The interviews were conducted between October 2006 and August 2007. Programme participants were interviewed first. One woman who was just entering the programme was interviewed before beginning her placement and again several months into her placement. People who had negative experiences were not interviewed specifically about this because it was judged this would be intrusive and possibly harmful for them. Because other interviewees were able to comment on the impact of negative experiences this did not significantly affect the findings.

Regular discussions were held between the researcher and deputy service manager and other job coaches to keep abreast of developments.

For each subject, at least three of the following people were interviewed:

- 
- programme participant themselves
 - job coach or deputy programme manager
 - employer
 - friend or relative
 - support worker or other learning disability professional

In total six programme participants, six employers, four relatives and six support professionals were interviewed. For two participants, no close relative was available to participate in the study.

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For more information, please contact us:

United Response

☏ 113 - 123 Upper Richmond Road,
London SW15 2TL

☎ Tel 020 8246 5235

☎ Fax 020 8780 9538

☎ Minicom 020 8785 1706

✉ Email info@unitedresponse.org.uk

🌐 Web www.unitedresponse.org.uk

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