

Moving into Work

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



An information sheet for employers

Purpose of this information sheet

This information sheet is designed to alert employers to impending changes within the education system that aim to see more people with learning difficulties and disabilities employed.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has responsibility for funding post-16 education and around £1.5bn is spent annually to fund further education and work-based learning for disabled learners. The LSC's strategy, *Learning for Living and Work* (LSC, 2006), makes some radical recommendations to ensure that more disabled people learn about the world of work and move into sustainable employment.

Many employers are already heavily committed to providing learning and employment opportunities to disabled people. This paper aims to publicise the aims of the new LSC strategy and encourage employers across all sectors to play a part in ensuring that disabled people have a positive start to their working lives. It suggests ways you can do this by:

- offering work experience opportunities and nominating mentors to support disabled people on placements;
- developing partnerships with education and training providers;
- making adjustments in the workplace and in recruitment procedures;
- advertising vacancies in places where they will be seen by disabled people;
- involving your staff in discussions about disability;
- linking up with other employers for information on best practice.

Who are we talking about?

The LSC strategy refers to people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is estimated that over 11 per cent of learners have some form of disability (LSC, 2005). The term 'learning difficulty' or 'learning disability' applies to people who have a general cognitive learning difficulty that hinders their ability to learn and cope independently.¹

About half of all disabled people are in work and it is estimated that only one in ten people with learning difficulties is in any type of employment. Most people with learning difficulties want to work. 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).

1. This information sheet is not focusing on people who have what are known as 'specific learning difficulties' such as dyslexia or on physical or sensory disabilities. However, some of the issues highlighted may be relevant to other disabled people.

The current position

There is currently an emphasis from the Government on vocational skills training and the drive to support disabled people off Incapacity Benefit and get them into employment. Increasing the number of people with learning difficulties in paid work is a Government objective highlighted in *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001), the Government's strategy for services for people with learning difficulties. The Government recognises that employment for disabled people is:

both a route out of poverty and a route to social inclusion... (Witcher, 2007)

It is a requirement of the 14–19 curriculum that young people undertake work experience to raise their awareness of the world of work, understand the needs of employers and develop the range of skills required. Too few people with disabilities are getting a chance to experience high quality work experience as part of their learning programmes. This may be for a variety of reasons, including the practicalities of arranging a workplace, the time staff need to make these arrangements, support and travel to the placement. It is also thought that many educational staff have too low expectations of disabled learners. Research shows that this pattern continues in further education. Despite many vocational courses and training opportunities for people with learning difficulties, very few of the learners go on to move into work at the end of their course.

Learning for Living and Work, LSC strategy

The LSC strategy for improving education and training opportunities for disabled learners highlights three key priority work areas: investing in provision; raising the quality of provision; and 'increasing economic participation through sustainable employment' (LSC, 2006). Central to any LSC activities are the measurable benefits to learners as well as the social and economic benefits:

Employers will also benefit. Increased attainment at Level 2 and Level 3 by individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and greater employability skills will support the increased productivity of current and future employees. These activities will also seek to contribute to addressing skills shortages in each region. (LSC, 2006)

The LSC strategy states 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.

What is supported employment?

Supported employment is a type of individualised support based on mentoring and meeting identified needs of employers and jobseekers. It typically involves a range of actions aimed at securing the most appropriate employment for a disabled jobseeker. Developed in the USA over 40 years ago, it was introduced to the UK in the late 1970s and is now delivered by supported employment agencies across the country.

Supported employment services specialise in working with disabled people to help them find employment and provide ongoing support once they are in a job. 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 agencies develop individualised support packages with and for the person they are helping. These agencies may be public or voluntary sector organisations. You can find details of your nearest supported employment service at 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)

Some colleges are working in partnership with supported employment agencies or developing their own in-house supported employment practices. In these cases, people with learning difficulties are much more likely to make a successful transition into work.

Case Study – Employing people with learning difficulties

Havering Adult Learning Disabilities Team employ a young person with learning difficulties from The Rose Project at Havering College. They are convinced of the benefits of working with people on Supported Employment Schemes. As the Team Supervisor said:

“Getting the job coach helped Betty settle in and really took the pressure off us. The Job Coach idea was excellent. It takes the pressure off the employers, and is absolutely key.”

What sort of support is there?

The Government funds a variety of welfare to work programmes that cater for people with disabilities, but many young people need a period of work experience and preparatory learning before they are ready for employment. Jobcentre Plus funds several support programmes for disabled jobseekers; some of these are more relevant to the particular needs of people with learning difficulties than others:

Workstep is a programme that funds ongoing support for disabled workers. It can be used with new workers or with people whose jobs are at risk because of a disability or long-term health condition. This roll-on/roll-off programme funds supported employment services to provide support to employers and disabled employees to ensure that they are able to progress to become as independent as possible within the workplace. It is the only Government-funded programme to fund ongoing support within the workplace. Workstep is available through a range of local and national agencies including Remploy.²

Tip: Information

Further information is available from the Disability Employment Advisor at your local Jobcentre.

Work Preparation is a six-week programme funding supported work experience for people new to the workplace or who are returning after an extensive period away from work.

Pathways to Work is a Government-funded programme designed for people on Incapacity Benefits who are returning to work. It is a compulsory programme for new Incapacity Benefit claimants and is currently being rolled out across the country. It is delivered by a variety of organisations including Jobcentre Plus, private and voluntary agencies.

Access to Work is a particularly flexible funding mechanism that can be used to fund support workers, workplace adjustments, travel to work and other forms of support that enable a disabled worker to retain their employment.

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.

As well as Government-funded programmes, there are many employment schemes funded by local authorities or health trusts. These organisations are able to advise employers about any issues relating to work experience and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Case study – Partnerships and transition to work

Phil is a 19-year-old student (Year 14) at New Bridge Learning Centre in Oldham. The Transitions Service of supported employment agency TiE currently has a partnership agreement with both New Bridge Learning Centre and the Connexions Service to deliver work experience to students in Year 14. After vocational profiling and discussions with his parents, it was identified that Phil was looking to move directly into employment on leaving school. He was interested in retail work, particularly at a Tesco Store.

A work experience placement was arranged at the local Tesco store with which TiE had developed an excellent working partnership through previous work experience placements. Phil was fully supported by the Transitions Officer.

As Tesco is opening a new store in the locality where Phil lives, he was supported to apply for a position within the store. He attended the interview with video evidence of his abilities and was successful in securing a position for 22 hours per week. Phil has now been allocated an Employment Mentor through TiE's WORKSTEP Programme.

Phil is still at school and day release will enable him to attend the Tesco induction where they are working with all prospective employees in preparation for the store's opening in August 2007. Phil's positive outcome is attributed to the good communication and excellent working partnership between all partners.

What can you do to help?

There are a number of ways in which you as an employer can support the LSC strategy and assist in increasing the numbers of disabled people in employment.

Perhaps the most obvious is to offer work experience opportunities. Some employers may have apprehensions or concerns about how this might work out. There are many myths and assumptions surrounding disabled people in the workplace. These include the following:

- 'It will take up too much of my staff's time.'
- 'We're too busy here to ensure proper health and safety.'
- 'We have too much machinery.'
- 'Our workplace has too many steps and there are forklift trucks going around.'
- 'We're not insured for that.'
- 'It will upset the staff and there's a lot of swearing around – it's not fit for people with disabilities.'

In fact most employers find very few problems associated with offering a work placement and support is available from your local supported employment agency to overcome any difficulties. There is no evidence to suggest that disabled workers are any less productive; any more likely to have an accident; or any more likely to have sickness absence. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that the opposite is more likely.³ A Personnel Manager for a large retail store commented on the experience of employing one particular man with learning difficulties:

It is beneficial and it brings the team together to support him. We shouldn't just be dismissing these people. It is a benefit to all of us in terms of education for the rest of the staff. It is hard work catering in the stores and this has knitted it together more. People see it as a hassle but having seen it right through, it's been educational for myself. People don't realise what benefits it can give.

Case study – Working with employers to make workplace adjustments

Over the years Matalan Stores and Warrington supported employment agency, SPARC, have built up a good working relationship. Sarah, a 23-year-old woman with Downs Syndrome, is a college student working on the City & Guilds Preparation for Employment qualification. Sarah had been on placement with Matalan and SPARC kept in contact with the store to secure her paid employment. SPARC took the employer's induction and training handbooks and converted them into simple language and pictures. They then took Sarah through the packages on a one-to-one basis. Next they took the basic job description and looked at the skills that Sarah has and carved out of it a new job description matching her abilities. They sold this new job description to the Matalan management by outlining their ability to keep another member of staff on the tills (the proportion of the role Sarah is unable to manage due to her lack of understanding of money and number skills) for a greater proportion of time. It took time and many meetings, but eventually Matalan agreed to this option and to pay Sarah for three hours of work per week. Matalan had developed a good knowledge of Sarah's skills from her initial placement activity and knew there would be support available from SPARC and so were convinced that they would be taking on a valuable and able employee.

3. DuPont has carried out studies into its employment of disabled workers since the 1950s.

Tips for doing it well

- Form long-term partnerships with education providers and supported employment services. This will enable you to influence the design of support programmes and tailor them to your requirements.
- Nominate someone to lead on this piece of work. It will allow them to develop their skills and confidence in this area, will enhance communication and encourage a consistent approach.
- Nominate mentors or work buddies for learners who undertake work experience with your company. This is a very effective way to help new staff and learners to settle in. It encourages social integration, helps teamwork and offers responsibility and helps with staff development.
- Consider where you advertise vacancies. Are they going to be seen by disabled people? In a tight labour market, it may give your company an edge if you are able to tap into a wider pool of labour.
- Consider your job descriptions, person specifications, and selection criteria. Are they up-to-date, accurate and relevant? There is a wide range of anti-discrimination legislation that now makes the content of adverts very important. If necessary, get advice from others as to how to recruit effectively.

Case study – Removing barriers from the recruitment process

A woman with a learning disability attended an interview as a housekeeper and was accompanied by someone from her local supported employment agency. During the interview she was asked how she would ensure the safe treatment of hazardous substances. She didn't know what this meant or how to answer the question until her support worker clarified that she was being asked how to store chemical cleaners like bleach. She replied that she kept it locked up in the store cupboard. She got the job.

- Link up with others who are considering the same options. There are a variety of employer forums and networks⁴ available across the UK who can help you to pick up best practice and reassure you with information and other resources.
- Consider making adjustments within the workplace and to your recruitment procedures. Many employers are realising that the vast majority of adjustments are inexpensive and can make working procedures easier for all staff.

4. See Resources section at the end of this information sheet.

Case study – Supporting individuals through changes at work

Having worked for several years in a NHS trust, Nancy discovered her job role was to change. In her new role she would need reading and writing skills. Nancy has a learning difficulty and in the past her reading and writing always proved difficult for her to improve on.

The union learning representative supporting Nancy through this change looked at literacy and numeracy training available, but felt that the training was at too high a level to support his colleague in developing the skills for her new role. He contacted a helpline for disabled students and was given the following advice:

- contact a local support employment agency and find out if they can offer advice and/or support, or the organisation who originally supported this person into work may be able to offer some help
- if the individual works over 16 hours it is possible to apply to the Access to Work scheme that provides funding for support
- under the Disability Discrimination Act there is a duty for the employer to make reasonable adjustments on behalf of this worker. They need to consider: how necessary is it for the individual to read and write? Could systems or training be put in place to support the worker in this role, e.g. colour coding files for recognition; is there another different role that would suit this worker better?

- Working interviews are an increasingly common way of selecting new staff and can work in tandem with traditional interviews. Many disabled jobseekers perform badly at interview and human resources staff are aware that interviews are a lottery that test interview performance rather than potential workplace performance. A working interview is a short placement of a week or so within the company that allows a person to demonstrate their skills and be assessed against the selection criteria by the employer. It may also be extended to allow a potential worker to pick up the necessary skills prior to assessment.
- Consider how you conduct your recruitment and selection procedures. Some companies have opted for group interviews or telephone interviews, but these can be extremely stressful for some people who would be more than capable of undertaking the job being advertised. Be flexible in how rigid you are with your selection procedures.
- Involve your staff in discussions about disability. You may need to provide them with background information and raise their awareness of some of the issues involved. They may be apprehensive about saying or doing the wrong thing. You can get support with this from local disability or supported employment organisations.

Tip: Networking

Many services are developing employer forums such as that run for the last five years by Bury EST. Here employers can learn best practice from each other. For further information see www.buryest.org.uk/forum

References

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- LSC (2005) *Through Inclusion to Excellence*, London: LSC
- LSC (2006) *Learning for Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities*, London: LSC
- Witcher, S. (2007) Speech given by the Deputy Director of the Office for Disability Issues at the NIACE conference on 'Joined up strategy for disabled learners' on 8 February 2007
- YPS (2001) *A Framework for Supported Employment*, York, YPS

Resources

Publications, information and advice

Learning disability (learning difficulties)

Employing People with Learning Disabilities: A Handbook for Employers

By Susan Hemmings and Jenny Morris

Available from Joseph Rowntree Foundation www.jrf.org.uk

Making it Work – A Guide to Employing People with Learning Disabilities

Available from Mencap www.mencap.org.uk

Valued in Public - Helping People With a Learning Disability to Work in Public Bodies

By Anne O'Bryan and Stephen Beyer, November 2005

Published by Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP)

www.valuingpeople.gov.uk

Visual impairment

Information, advice and guidance

Available from the RNIB www.rnib.org.uk

Available from Action for Blind People www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Hearing impairment

Information, advice and guidance

Available from RNID www.rnid.org.uk

Available from Deaf and Creative www.deafandcreative.ac.uk

Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

Information, advice and guidance

Available from the National Autistic Society www.nas.org.uk

Head injuries

Information, advice and guidance

Available from Headway www.headway.org.uk

Mental health

Managing for Mental Health: The Mind Employers' Resource Pack

Available from Mind Publications www.mind.org.uk

A Toolkit for Mental Health Promotion in the Workplace

(Mentality) Available from Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health

www.scmh.org.uk

Action on Mental Health: A Guide to Promoting Social Inclusion

Available from the Social Exclusion Unit. Ref. 04 SEU 02593

Dyslexia and other neurodiversity conditions

Information, advice and guidance

Available from Dyslexia Action www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk

Available from British Dyslexia Association www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Available from Key 4 Learning www.key4learning.com

Available from British Stammering Association <http://www.stammering.org>

Useful websites

www.equalityhumanrights.com

On 1 October 2007, the three equality commissions merged to form the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

www.base-uk.org

The British Association of Supported Employment has information about supported employment and local agencies.

www.employers-forum.co.uk

The Employers Forum on Disability has guidance on the recruitment and retention of disabled workers.

www.scmh.org.uk

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health has a range of resources around mental health issues.

www.hse.gov.uk

There is a wide range of employer information about work experience and about workplace stress on the Health and Safety Executive website.

www.downs-syndrome.org.uk

There is an information sheet for employers that can be downloaded from this website.

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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