

# Moving into Work

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



An information sheet for parents and carers of people with learning difficulties

***'What interests me is that my son, when he leaves school, has a future.'***

**Marcella Cooper, parent**

## Introduction

Most people with learning difficulties<sup>1</sup> want to work and have a job. Many could do so given the right support. Parents or carers can play an important part in supporting their sons or daughters to achieve this ambition. This information sheet outlines plans to improve work skills courses and training for disabled learners who are over the age of 16. It also offers suggestions of ways that parents and carers can be involved in supporting this transition into work.

## What is the current situation in further education for people with learning difficulties?

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is the body that funds most education and training courses for learners over the age of 16.<sup>2</sup> Providing courses and training that support disabled learners to move into work is an LSC priority. The LSC recognises that many people with learning difficulties on work skills courses and training fail to move on and get a job. It has set a timetable over the next two years to improve the quality of courses for disabled learners:

*Thus, by September 2010, the LSC will no longer fund providers to deliver work-preparation programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that do not focus on learning in the work place and the supported employment model. (LSC, 2006)*

## What is the supported employment model?

Many learners with learning difficulties need support to make the move from college to work and this help needs to continue once they are in a job. Courses and training that provide this level of support are based on a 'supported employment model' (LSC, 2006). Currently, only a few courses or training schemes offer this level of support.

However, a study completed in 2002 did find some examples of courses where people with learning difficulties were successfully moving into work and holding down jobs (NIACE, 2002). This was happening where education and training organisations were:

- working with local supported employment agencies;
- working with their local social services department employment services; or
- providing support to move into work and on the job, as part of the course.

1. In education the term 'people with learning difficulties' is used whereas in health and social care the term 'people with learning disabilities' is much more common. On the whole the terms have the same meaning.

2. The LSC funds education and training in colleges, adult education, work-based training and voluntary sector organisations.

## What is supported employment?

Supported employment services specialise in working with disabled people to help them find and keep work<sup>3</sup>. Supported employment services are provided by:

- voluntary sector organisations such as Mencap Pathways services;
- supported employment services provided by social services departments;
- organisations such as Remploy which deliver a number of Government funded employment programmes for disabled people.

One of the principles of supported employment is a strong belief that no one who wants to work is unemployable. The focus is usually on finding 'real jobs in the community' rather than sheltered employment. Supported employment develops support packages with and for the person they are helping.

## Supported employment

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

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

Supported employment agencies are non-profit organisations. In some areas, supported employment services are part of social services departments. Mencap Pathway services specialise in providing supported employment services for people with learning difficulties.<sup>4</sup> Supported employment agencies deliver government-funded employment programmes for disabled people. These are not specifically for people with learning difficulties and some may offer support that is more appropriate for people with learning difficulties than others. They include:

- Access to Work
- Workstep
- Work Preparation.

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.

Disability Employment Advisors who are based in Jobcentre Plus can advise on the different programmes.

3. For information about Supported Employment Agencies in your area visit the British Association of Supported Employment website [www.base-uk.org](http://www.base-uk.org)

4. [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

## Case study – College-based supported employment services

Bolton Community College has been able to develop its own in-house supported employment roles to support more disabled learners into work. The college has an Employment Placement Officer who finds work experience placements and jobs with local employers. Job coaches from the college support learners on work experience placements and those who have moved into work.

## Valuing People

Increasing the number of people with learning difficulties in paid work is also one of the aims of *Valuing People* (DoH, 2001) and the updated strategy, *Valuing People Now*, the Government's strategy for services for people with learning difficulties. It is the job of Learning Disability Partnership Boards in each local council to take forward the recommendations of *Valuing People* at a local level. The partnership board brings together local providers of services for people with learning difficulties. On each board there are two people with learning difficulties and two parent/carers. Many partnership boards have subgroups that focus on employment services and education/training opportunities for people with learning difficulties. Most boards will have a plan to develop person-centred planning and reviews.

## Progression through Partnership

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

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

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

Progression through Partnership acknowledges the LSC's challenge to providers in Learning for Living and Work to adopt the supported employment model by 2010 and states its commitment to work with the LSC to:

*"agree how the new model for supported employment will be implemented."*

A Joint Delivery Plan to take forward the work outlined in Progression through Partnership is due to be published in 2008.

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

## Person-centred planning

Person-centred planning is a specific way of planning increasingly used in schools to support people with learning difficulties in their transition to adult services. It is also being used in adult social care services. Person-centred planning places the individual at the centre and focuses on what is important to them from their own perspective.<sup>5</sup>

### Case study

Marcella's son had a person-centred review when he was at school in year 9:

*'His person-centred review was amazing, for the first time my son was in the review. I thought he's not going to do it, he's not going to stay in the meeting for 1.5 hours and he did. I saw him grow in confidence, when all the people there said what they like and admire about him and what is working for him and what is not.'*

Marcella feels that person-centred planning takes the focus away from the parent or carers and makes them think about what their son or daughter wants and how to make changes. She wants her son to be as independent as possible and to have a job:

*'A lot of education establishments, I think, don't believe that he can get employment. What I am thinking of is not a 9–5 job; one day a week as a first step. I know one woman worked 2 hours a week and gradually increased her hours.'*

*'I want his skills matched to a job that he can do...linking his ability to something... a person-centred approach.'*

Marcella's son now has a person-centred plan. It contains information about him, including details of his wishes and aspirations for the future and records of his past education. It is kept in an interactive computer file based on the transactive format developed by her local Mencap.<sup>6</sup>

For one mother whose son attended mainstream school, there was not nearly enough support in the transitional time between school and college. After a series of unsuccessful experiences on college courses that were not suitable for her son's needs he:

*'...lost his way. He felt that he was the one in the wrong.'*

It was only through her own determination, after finding a suitable residential college on the internet, that she managed to get her local LSC to agree to fund a college placement for her son who has mild learning difficulties. She feels that there is too much emphasis on parents having to be a key part of the transition process at a point when they may be 'running out of steam'.

5. For more information on person-centred planning and approaches visit [www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk)

6. [www.trans-active.org.uk](http://www.trans-active.org.uk)

## Work training and courses – what should parents/carers look out for?

Where courses and training are successfully supporting people with learning difficulties into work:

- Staff on the course or training recognise that employment is a realistic goal for people with learning difficulties and there is an understanding that a job, even if it is a part-time job, can be an important part of a person's life.
- Person-centred learning approaches are used. Staff find out at the start of the course what kind of work the learner is interested in and what their hopes are for their future career.
- There is knowledge of the local employment situation and work opportunities available.
- There are supported work experience placements in real work settings and placements should happen throughout the course not just towards the end.
- There is evidence that organisations involved in supporting an individual to move into employment are working together: supported employment agencies; day centres; employers; self-advocacy organisations; Disability Employment Advisers; parents and carers; Benefits office; Employment Service; Jobcentre Plus; Social Services and Connexions.
- People have actually been placed in jobs and have successfully stayed in work.
- There are active links with the local Learning Disability Partnership Board on issues to do with employment and people with learning difficulties.
- Support for the employer is available either from supported employment agency staff or staff from the college, to provide long-term support for the individual once they are in work.
- Parents and carers are involved and consulted and the importance of the help and practical support they can offer is understood.
- There is access to specialist advice on benefits through the local supported employment agency or the local Disability Employment Advisor at the Jobcentre. The benefits system is quite complex and very often the information staff have about benefits and how work might affect benefits is incorrect or misleading.

## Moving into work – how can parents and carers be involved?

The support of parents and carers is recognised as being crucial for individuals to make the transition to work. A parent's belief in their son or daughter's ability to hold down a job can do a huge amount for their self-esteem and confidence. Practical help with, for instance, getting up and out of the house to work on time and with transport are also important.

Parents need to be a key part of transition-to-work planning for their son or daughter and should be appropriately involved at all relevant stages. This may be once their son or daughter is on a vocational course at college or whilst they are still at school. A recent report to the Department for Work and Pensions on improving work opportunities for people with learning difficulties has stressed:

*...recognising the importance of employment whilst still at school is critical. Ensuring effective individualised transition planning and implementation from education to employment could have a dramatic and long lasting effect on the life experiences of this group and other services. (Corporate Document Services, 2006)*

### Case study

One mother, Nicky, explained how from the time her son was at school she made it clear that:

*Work was always an expectation. I tried not to be a pushy parent but equally never say never.*

In this case the school provided opportunities for work experience placements and for the students to have mock interviews and receive constructive feedback. Once her son Michael went to residential college Nicky was involved in his action plan each year:

*It was a two way process... the college knew that employment was on the agenda from the start.*

Her son's ambition is to be a film archivist. The college set up a number of work experience placements that involved video cataloguing, filing, printing and researching databases. Michael explained:

*I liked going on the computer and typing up tasks. I might want to work as an admin assistant – but want to be a film archivist.*

Part of the success of the placements was that Michael gained the confidence to work as part of a team and get on with people. The people he worked with on the placements were very supportive. If they needed help with Michael they rang the college. On some placements Michael had support from a job coach who helped by showing him how to do things and reminded him to sit down when he felt stressed.

Michael has left college now and has a job one day a week for five hours at the Libraries' Archive, scanning in photos, archiving and working on the database. He is supported by a job coach from the local Mencap Pathways service.

## Getting a job – a challenge and a threat?

Some parents or carers may be resistant to the idea of their son or daughter going out to work. Parents can find the idea of their son or daughter working challenging for several reasons:

- Going out to work is not as 'safe' an option as attending a day centre or college in terms of security and predictability. There are opportunities but there are also risks involved.
- An individual's benefits are often taken as part of total family income. If a person goes to work this may well have an effect on the family purse. This can be a worrying prospect for parents or carers as they may have less money. This can mean that the son or daughter lacks the backing and confidence to go for a job, realising that their family is anxious about the impact it will have on their income. As one parent commented:

*Yes, fearing loss of benefits – it's a real problem...but I will not be around all the time and I don't want him to be more dependent on people than he needs to be*

- Having a job is a powerful statement of independence. This can be a difficult thing to accept as part of the 'letting go' process:

*A lot of us don't believe that our children are capable of doing it...if they look deeply into themselves and think, if anything should happen to me, do I want my son to be dependent on others or independent like my other children?*

- Work may not ever have been suggested as an option for their son or daughter and it can come as something of a shock that this could be a reality.
- Parents may not accept that their son or daughter has the skills to go out to work. As a college member of staff commented:

*Parents need to feel that there is a system of support; they need liaison points, safety nets and a named person to refer to. It is important to make sure families are happy and know what a person is doing.*

### Case Study – One parent's view

Sylvia's father was very apprehensive about his daughter's future when she left school. He hoped that she might learn to read, write and engage in life skills, but had no idea of what life beyond education might hold for her:

"Of one thing we were sure... it would not be a job, and definitely not paid employment. How wrong we were!"

The local College Supported Employment Project offered what her father described as a 'lifeline' in terms of providing an understanding environment and a safe transition into adulthood. He went on to say:

"Just over two years after coming to the College, Sylvia has been working for some 16 months. Not in a small shop, not some menial task, not a placement, but paid employment in one of the largest Sainsbury's superstores around."

Since coming onto the work project two years ago, Sylvia's confidence has improved in leaps and bounds, as has her ability to communicate.

## Conclusion

The LSC is committed to providing vocational courses for people with learning difficulties that will support them to move into work. Parents and carers of people with learning difficulties have the right to expect no less. The following points were offered by parents as tips:

- Letting go is hard but you are not around forever. Whatever you do you need to think about the future.
- Developing a person-centred plan for your son or daughter helps everyone really listen to what they want and to start to think creatively about how to help them achieve it.
- It is quite important to understand the school's philosophy on gaining employment. Do they talk about it in citizenship classes as a way of making a contribution to society?
- Find somebody who has 'walked the walk' before you; your agenda may be different but you can ask them lots of questions.
- It would be helpful to find out if a college had a small group of parents, whose sons or daughters had been there, with whom you could talk.

## 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](http://www.niace.org.uk/research/HDE/documents.htm)

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## References

Corporate Document Services (2006) *Improving Work Opportunities for People with a Learning Disability: Report of a Working Group on Learning Disabilities and Employment*, Leeds: Corporate Document Services

DoH (2008) *Valuing People Now: From Progression to Transformation*, London: Department of Health

LSC (2006) *Learning for Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities*, London: LSC

NIACE (2002) *Making the Jump*, Leicester: NIACE

YPS (2001) *A Framework for Supported Employment*, York: YPS

## Resources

### Adults with learning difficulties and employment

***\*You can work it out!***

**Supporting you into work**

***\*I want to work***

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

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

***\*I can get a job***

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

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

***Valued in public***

**Helping people with a learning disability to work in public bodies**

Anne O'Bryan and Stephen Beyer, November 2005

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

The above resources are published by Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) Valuing People Support Team. To order email [valuing.people.info@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:valuing.people.info@dh.gsi.gov.uk)

Or visit [www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/employment.htm](http://www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/employment.htm)

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

## Useful websites

[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk) – NIACE – The national adult learning organisation

[www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk) – The Learning and Skills Council

[www.base-uk.org](http://www.base-uk.org) – British Association for Supported Employment

[www.lsneducation.org.uk](http://www.lsneducation.org.uk) – Learning and Skills Network

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk) – Mencap Pathway and Work Right

[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk) – Skill – The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

[www.remploy.co.uk](http://www.remploy.co.uk) – Remploy – Finding jobs for Disabled People

[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

[www.valuingpeople.gov.uk](http://www.valuingpeople.gov.uk) – Information about Valuing People and Valuing People Now

[www.shaw-trust.org.uk](http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk) – Shaw Trust – Provides employment services for disabled people



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