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**Closing the disability skills gap: ‘what works’ to enhance skills for future work**

This summary is based on 2 Disability Rights UK reports: a literature review, by Dr Gill O’Toole of London Metropolitan University, and a reflective report setting a path for future policy. They focus both on the skills young disabled people need to get into employment; and on skills for people who acquire impairments or conditions during working life.

**Challenges and opportunities**

There is a significant disability skills and qualifications gap: disabled adults are three times as likely as non-disabled peers to have no qualifications at all[[1]](#footnote-1). Young disabled people are twice as likely to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) and significantly less likely to go to university[[2]](#footnote-2).

Lack of skills impacts on disabled people’s employment opportunities even more severely than on non-disabled people: the gap between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people with no qualifications is 35.7%; with a degree, only 15%[[3]](#footnote-3).

In some areas disabled people’s qualifications are improving: disabled 19 year olds are becoming more likely to get level 3 qualifications; and the number of disabled apprentices is rising (to over 42,000 by 2012-13[[4]](#footnote-4).

If disabled people’s skills rose to the same level as those of non-disabled people it would add billions to the UK economy[[5]](#footnote-5) .

**Incisive lessons**

There are critical success factors from the 2 reports:

1. Careers advice that blends trained independent advisors with online accessible resources; rooted in in-depth knowledge of both the career potential of disabled people (overcoming low expectations) and the job roles of the future economy[[6]](#footnote-6)
2. Skills development that is integrated with employment, offering a range of quality work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships. Colleges, Job Centre Plus and employment support providers have key roles in integrating skills with employment opportunities
3. Peer support and mentoring: sharing the expertise of lived experience
4. Support for the individual, skills provider and employer. Good practice suggests rapid job/work experience search, with flexible and - where needed - ongoing support for employer and learner
5. Incentives to employers to offer apprenticeship and other career development programmes to disabled people (for instance, tax or national insurance incentives).

**Key insights**

There are great examples of good practice, but also significant existing provision that still does not match the success factors above.

For the future, two very significant ideas emerged from the reflective report. Firstly the importance of peer to peer support. Nearly fifty years ago the educationalist Bandura evidenced the importance to learning of self-efficacy – a person’s belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation, best learned from others in social situations. His work is backed by recent evidence and speaks to the present day need for newly disabled people to be connected in informal on-line or face to face learning networks, to gain encouragement from others who have found adaptations and strategies for learning and working.

Secondly there is a need for disabled people to be able to exercise choice and control, being able to contract themselves within their local labour market for the employment support and training that will make a difference to their job prospects.

**Some key evidence that prompted these findings and reflections**.

1. Having qualifications significantly improves the life chances and employment outcomes of disabled people. In 2012, 71% of disabled graduates had gained employment compared to 42% of disabled non-graduates[[7]](#footnote-7).
2. The UK has no direct equivalent of the widely praised Job Access Programme in Australia. This free Helpline and internet service offers thousands of web pages of adjustments and workplace solutions, information on rights and responsibilities and stories of adapted employment. It is available to disabled people, employers and employment service providers.
3. In Austria, Peer Counselling has been recognised as a social profession for people living with disability to provide role models and sources of experienced advice to peers. It is designed to empower disabled people to enable them to lead an independent life, and to participate fully in society including in employment[[8]](#footnote-8) .
4. Employers’ top priority for their new recruits is experience and experience of employment is a strong predictor of securing employment[[9]](#footnote-9).
5. Support that focuses on rapid job search, with flexible support has strong results. A recent evaluation of 15 randomised controlled trials using Individual Placement with Support (IPS) [[10]](#footnote-10) found that 60 % of people with severe mental health issues recruited to IPS obtained competitive employment compared to 25% of those on other types of vocational preparation.
6. Evaluation of the Work Programme suggests providers were able to do more for applicants facing fewer barriers; and support for those requiring more specialist help was less widespread[[11]](#footnote-11).

The reports contain the full references, detailed proposals and a road map for implementation: [www.disabilityrightsuk/](http://www.disabilityrightsuk/) Tel: 0207 250 - 8192

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1. EHRC (2010) How Fair is Britain? [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ODI (2013) Fulfilling Potential: Building the Evidence Base. Notes that 33% of disabled 19 year olds were in higher education compared to 41% of non-disabled peers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ODI 2013 op cit [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/disabled-people-in-apprenticeships-triples-in-10-years [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Social Market Foundation (2007). Disability, Skills and Work: raising our ambition [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2014) Careers of the Future [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ODI 2013 op cit [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Fembek, M., Butcher, T.H., Heindorf, I., Wallner-Mikl, C. (2012) Zero Project Report 2013 Essl Foundation [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2012a) UK Commission’s Employer Perspectives Survey 2012, UKCES [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bond, G.R., Drake, R.E., Becker, D.R. (2012) Generalisability of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment outside the US World Psychiatry Vol 11 (1); pp32-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Newton, B., Meager, N., Bertram, C., Corden, A., George, A.., Lalani, M., Metcalf, H., Rolfe, H., Sainsbury, R. and Weston, K. Work Programme evaluation: Findings from the first phase of qualitative research on programme delivery Department for Work and Pensions, HMSO, London [↑](#footnote-ref-11)