

Engage to Change briefing: What policy changes are required to provide people with a learning disability or ASD equal access to the labour market in Wales?



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Barriers at the best of times

People with a learning disability or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face many challenges in finding, getting, learning and keeping a paid job. The outcome of having a learning disability and/or ASD will vary greatly and so it is difficult to predict the result of such a disability on learning and employment. This does not mean that people cannot work. It means they need the correct form of support.

We can see that, without the right support, the employment rates for our two key groups remain very low. Only 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work.¹ Wales is likely to be a similar figure. Just 15% of adults with ASD are in full time employment, 9% in part time employment and 66% are not working at all. 26% of graduates with ASD are unemployed and over 60% of all people with ASD are financially reliant on their families.² There is evidence that employment figures for people with ASD in Wales are lower still.³ This is while 53.2% of people aged 16 to 64 with any type of disability in Great Britain, and 81.8% of the general population, were in paid work pre-Covid-19.⁴ It is in this context that

¹ NHS Digital 2018: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-social-care-outcomes-framework-ascof/current/enhancing-quality-of-life-for-people-with-care-and-support-needs/1e-proportion-of-adults-with-a-learning-disability-in-paid-employment>

² Rosenblatt, M. (2008) I Exist: The message from adults with autism in England. London: National Autistic Society.

³ Townsley R, Robinson C, Williams V, Beyer S and Christian-Jones, C. (2014) Research into Employment Outcomes for Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

⁴<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilityandemploymentuk/2019#employment-by-disability>

Engage to Change is trying to demonstrate what can be done for young people when we get the model of support right.

Engage to Change is a five-year project funded through Welsh Government and the National Lottery Community Fund to help young people with a learning disability and/or ASD tackle these barriers and get people a paid job. Led by Learning Disability Wales, it brings together ELITE and Agoriad Cyf supported employment agencies to deliver job coaching, paid placements and paid jobs in ordinary workplaces. They are supported by self-advocates from All Wales People First and researched by the National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) at Cardiff University.

Our research, along with wider studies, has shown that the solution to many of these individualised challenges is supported employment using a job coach within a supported employment model.^{5,6,7} People with a significant learning disability and/or ASD need help to find a job to overcome the challenges they face by:

- Spending time understanding people's job interests, what they are good at, and the work types and environments they need.
- Using job placements and try-outs to aid vocational decision-making.
- Finding and negotiating a job that meets the person's detailed talents and needs, not just any available job.
- Informing and supporting employers to make interviews accessible, helping them to induct and supervise their employees.
- Planning well with people and families, and helping people who receive welfare benefits to measure their transition to work to ensure they will be better off in work.

⁵ Beyer, S. and Meek, A. (2020) The opportunities and barriers to different employment models for persons with disabilities. Brussels: EASPD.

⁶ Beyer, S. and Beyer A. (2017). A systematic review of the literature on the benefits for employers of employing people with learning disabilities. London: Mencap. <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-06/2017.061%20Benefits%20of%20employing%20PwLD%255b1%255d%20%281%29.pdf>

⁷ Beyer, S. and Beyer A. (2016). *Economic impact of inclusion of disabled persons in the labour market*. Saarbrücken, Germany: Editions Universitaires Europeennes and EASPD. <http://easpd.eu/en/content/easpd-report-economic-impact-inclusion-open-labour-market-persons-disabilities>

Research carried out by NCMH as part of the Engage to Change project, and recently presented to the Joint All-party Group on Disability and Autism, has demonstrated that people with significant disabilities can find paid work placements and paid jobs, and that they can keep those jobs for industry standard periods of time, through the supported employment and job coach model.

The project has delivered significant results to this point, delivering:

- 610 referrals
- 388 paid placements
- 224 paid jobs
- 454 employers engaged.

86% of jobs found have been sustained for 13 weeks or more. Within Engage to Change, 43% of our clients have a learning disability, 57% ASD and 36% have specific learning difficulties (with significant numbers experiencing combinations of issues). The average age of the young people referred was 21. The majority of people were not in education, employment or training (NEET) at referral, with the exception of DFN Project SEARCH participants and supported interns. Only 5% of participants had no work or volunteering experience before coming to Engage to Change. It was not having no experience that made a difference getting people into work, it was the support they had received to turn any experience into a paid job. 66% of the people we have worked with were reliant on some form of welfare benefit income, primarily Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) [24%] or Universal Credit [10%] before they joined the project. Over 50% were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP). These data suggest that the job coach approach taken by Engage to Change is relevant to people with learning disabilities, ASD and people with significant specific learning difficulties, and those with a range of welfare benefit situations.

Engaged to Change has offered a range of paid placements where an employer receives an Employer Development Grant. This can pay for up to 100% of a young

person's wage over a period of six months. Our experience has been that this allows the employer to gain confidence in the worker, for the job coach and employer to find the right training style and support and has been successful in leading to permanent paid jobs. Practice has evolved and now involves the Employer Development Grant tapering over time, perhaps representing 100% of the person's wage in the first month but tapering down to zero by the 6 month point, encouraging the employer to commit to a permanent paid job at the earliest possible moment.

The worst of times: Covid-19 Challenges

Wales now faces an unprecedented crisis due to the Covid-19 virus and while attention has necessarily been on the health and social care response to this crisis, we are clear that there will be serious consequences over the next few years for the real economy. This will represent an unprecedented challenge for employers and employment support providers.

Economists are forecasting a 3.5% international shrinkage in the global economy. Estimates of the impact this year on the UK economy suggest a reduction in GDP by 30% and an economy 7.5% smaller by the end of the financial year. The impact on unemployment is unclear but likely to be very significant, possibly with unemployment rising as high as 10.5%.⁸

The reduction in economic activity and the increased numbers of people seeking work will place a high demand on those agencies and organisations helping people back into work. Our research reports that it takes 105 hours of job coach time to place a person with a learning disability or autism into a paid job, representing a significant draw on agencies likely to be severely stretched, some with little or no expertise in delivering jobs for these clients. The danger for disabled people is that of being pushed to the end of the queue. People with a learning disability or ASD are

⁸ National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) Annual Report April 2020.

particularly at risk of unemployment. We have seen in mainstream disability employment programmes that ‘cherry picking’ can happen when performance targets on support agencies exist, and jobs are hard to come by.

Support for employment

The current programmes available to help disabled people into employment are likely to be insufficient for such a challenge, particularly for people requiring more support to enter the labour market such as people with a learning disability, ASD or mental health problems. The UK government’s Work and Health Programme, scaled down from its predecessor in terms of numbers served, has already recognised that its service is not appropriate for people with a learning disability or ASD. This has led to the development of an alternative programme, the Local Supported Employment (LSE) Trailblazer, that was due to begin in April 2020 in a second pilot rollout. It is notable that in the original “Proof of Concept” trial of LSE, no local authorities in Wales came forward for partnerships and to receive pilot funding. This was despite overtures from agencies such as ELITE Supported Employment Agency to create partnerships and to bring innovative funding into Wales. Local authorities are not well placed to mount employment campaigns for people with complex disabilities in the current climate. However, they are a necessary part of the solution in partnership with Welsh Government and other providers.

While the proposed LSE programme has many of the features that are required to find, get, train and keep a paid job for these particular groups, the pilot nature of this initiative is unlikely to meet the challenge we face in Wales. The plan was for a ring fence of only two programmes to be allocated to Wales out of a national programme of twenty. The scale of each funded project is probably in the order of 40 to 80 placements per year. No revised start date has been announced.

Welsh Government has itself pursued a radical approach in their Employability Plan⁹, aiming to deliver individualised support to a wide range of people in the categories of NEET or long-term unemployment. The Careers Wales Gateway services are in place but sadly the commissioning of the Job Support Wales programme has been delayed twice and the future of the scheme is unsure. As a major funding initiative with relevance for the employment of people with disabilities, Job Support Wales may well need to be re-designed and re-budgeted to ensure that it provides support for all in Wales who need it, given the extreme challenge posed by Covid-19.

Central to any redesign must be the provision of supported employment for people with a learning disability or ASD, including job coaching, of a significant intensity and quality to support those most distant from the labour market and who do not easily develop skills to work through pre-placement training or qualification.

Any employment recovery plan, or replacement for the Job Support Wales scheme, should include ring fenced resources for a National Job Coaching Service to ensure people with autism and/or learning disabilities are not left behind in the competition for new jobs post-Covid-19.

One of the major impacts of Covid-19 has been the movement of many workers from paid work into welfare benefit receipt, usually Universal Credit. For people with complex disabilities who are in work, this in itself is a complex task, involving unravelling in work benefits and re-notifying incomes, as well as securing existing arrangements with Job Centre Plus and Access to Work to ensure people continue to receive support if and when they return to work. This is a skilled process taking up many resources. Further, people's skills may have reduced while at home and some work will be needed to help them back to full job engagement. These arrangements

⁹ <https://gov.wales/employability-plan>

will have to be re-negotiated and secured as lockdown sees many people going back to work and supported employment resources are needed for this task.

The overall picture of unemployment under Covid-19 remains unclear for disabled people. However, it is likely that not all people who had a job before lockdown will return to it and this will create a large amount of work to ensure people move back onto a welfare benefit and to then make a plan to help people back into employment.

Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) initiatives in the area of disability are unlikely to be enough to protect the opportunity for people with a learning disability, ASD or those with complex disabilities who can work. However, concentration on a job coach supported employment offer in Wales can provide a catalyst for drawing down LSE funding in the future, expanding the offer to people in Wales as they would both be using the same model.

The direction of travel within DWP is to deliver more autonomy locally on the running of employment schemes, allowing for greater innovation, flexibility and responsiveness to local circumstances. In this situation, the provision of a National Job Coaching Service in Wales would provide a significant framework that could take advantage of local autonomy over DWP funding to be responsive to Welsh needs. Individualised work with people with a mental health problem would be possible as an extension using an Individual Placement with Support¹⁰ (IPS) methodology, which is in turn based on job coach supported employment with enhanced health liaison.

¹⁰ There is an extensive research literature demonstrating the success in gaining employment for people with a mental through use of IPS: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/what-ips>
See also the major a commitment has been made in the NHS's "Five Year Forward View for Mental Health" to employ 20,000 people with mental health issues in jobs by investing regionally in IPS services: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf>

Supporting employers in a crisis and the case for local action

The challenge for employers post-Covid-19 will be to maintain current staffing levels, and to make effective decisions in any future recruitment they undertake. We have argued previously that there is significant, specialised work that needs to be done to bring furloughed and laid off workers with a learning disability and/or ASD back into the workplace. There will be a backlog of people who have lost their jobs, who are clearly close to the labour market but who need urgent work to get them back into employment. These tasks will need a significant resource to deliver.

Sadly, people with a learning disability and/or ASD are not regarded generally by employers as a priority for recruitment. We know from previous research that there are benefits for employers to employ people with a learning disability.¹¹ If employers are to recruit more disabled people in a very tight labour market, significant work will be needed to promote to employers the benefits of employing disabled people, including cost savings, positive work performance ratings, low sickness and absence, positive impacts on wider workforce productivity and positive public reaction. Engage to Change employers report high rates of satisfaction with workers and are open to recruiting similar workers **if the same level of support is available to them**. We also know employers are open to employing people but initially need reassurance and support to do so. Research also shows that once they have experience of employing a person with a learning disability or ASD they become positive advocates and are largely open to repeat recruitment.

When faced with the recession employers, particularly SMEs, will be reticent in their employment decisions. Recruitment decisions are more likely to be made locally from within networks of known people and are less likely to be advertised widely. The imperative to make the right recruitment decisions becomes stronger. It is therefore important to help employers reduce uncertainty in recruitment processes.

¹¹ Mencap (2017) Good for Business: The benefits of employing people with a learning disability. <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-06/2017.080.1%20LDW%202017%20guide%20DIGITAL%20V2.pdf>
Stephen Beyer, Andrea Meek, Elisa Vigna, NCMH, July 2020

In the circumstances, employers are less likely to take a chance on a disabled employee, unless additional support and services are made available that make the decision even safer than an open market recruitment. Job coach supported employment can help make an effective job match between a person and a job, can provide free assistance with induction and on the job training, and can provide additional services around diversity and disability awareness. For us, it seems essential to provide this level of detailed support if people with complex disabilities are to have any chance of getting a job in this challenging labour market.

Engaging employers to recruit is best done directly on an employer by employer basis, particularly where they have a relationship with the supporting organisation. Offering supported employment and job coach services are crucial to gaining employment for people with complex needs in a tight labour market.

Even with the provision of more intensive employment support, there may be a case for further incentivising employers to level the playing field for disabled people. The recently announced £21m allocation to Wales to offer a £1000 grant to employers offering traineeships is welcome for the general population of young people, but it will make competition for the attention of employers to place people with a learning disability even harder, taking up work trial spaces that might at one time have been offered to disabled people.

Engage to Change has had positive experience with the use of Employer Development Grants. We have set out above how these grants can be used on a short-term basis to assist employers in getting to know a new employee, giving time to build relationships with limited financial risk and reducing uncertainty in that recruitment decision. It would offer a higher premium to employers to take on people with a learning disability or ASD into a six-month placement than a traineeship £1000 offer and again help to level the playing field.

Most recently, the Chancellor has announced significant funding across the UK for young people aged 18-24 who are in receipt of Universal Credit. The "Kickstarter" job

scheme will cover the cost of 25 hours' work per week at the National Minimum Wage. The UK Government's aim is to allow young people "the opportunity to build their skills in the workplace, and to gain experience that will improve their chances of going on to find long-term sustainable work". The scheme will open in August and run until December 2021 with the option of being extended. The Future Jobs Fund (FJF) did try this approach in 2012.¹² Relatively few people with a disability were involved. It yielded an increased probability of paid employment for participants of +10% in the two years following participation in the scheme.

If it is available, people with a learning disability or ASD in Wales should have access to it. However, without the availability of job coaching they are unlikely to get these placements or be able to access this money. This strengthens the need for a National Job Coaching Service. The Kickstarter scheme is about skills development with a hope that jobs will follow. Our use of Employer Development Grants as part of Engage to Change is linked to sustainable jobs, not just work experience and work skills development. Our experience and the supported employment approach, together with an employer subsidy, can ensure that this subsidy works for longer-term jobs and not just deliver transitory experiences.

Information so far suggests that 18-24 year olds on Universal Credit will be eligible. While we hope the scheme will extend to equivalent welfare benefits, many of our clients remain on ESA and may therefore not be eligible. That means there is still a case for Welsh Government to create a wage subsidy scheme for people with learning disabilities or ASD that includes those on ESA. Without access to this funding they will be outbid for vacancies at every turn by this grant and also the already announced employer subsidies for those on traineeships. Competition for placements will be fierce and without a level funding playing field for employers, people with a learning disability or ASD will not be able to compete.

¹²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/223120/impacts_costs_benefits_fjf.pdf

We believe that there is a case for Welsh Government to offer an Employer Development Grant to offset wages of disabled people in the early stages of a job to help overcome competitive pressures employers may face to employ non-disabled people.

The delivery of short-term Employer Development Grants does not remove the need for job coach support. The Engage to Change project has found an average job coach input of 91 hours is needed to deliver a paid placement, prior to a paid job.

Inclusive apprenticeships

Creating inclusive apprenticeships is another key objective of Welsh Government. It is accepted in the Implementation Plan that including more people with a learning disability or ASD in apprenticeships will require the use of on-site job coaching to help them to get and learn a job. Further, at the end of a period of apprenticeship people still need job coach assistance to make the transition into a permanent paid role. This will require adequate funding from Additional Learning Needs (ALN) resources to ensure skilled and timely job coaching, and integration with the use of Access to Work payments to ensure support is of the correct intensity and quality.

The provision of a National Job Coaching Service will underpin progress on inclusive apprenticeships, allowing more people with a learning disability or ASD to take advantage of flexibility in other aspects of the scheme.

Supported internships

Mainstream adult employment is not the only area where people with significant disabilities are likely to be disadvantaged post-Covid-19. Many young people will have disrupted transitions from school into adult life and employment. The transition from school or college into employment is poor in the best of times. Research has shown that movement from post-16 education into employment is low and not well supported in terms of individual job coach support by agencies close to the labour

market. While there are changes in the national curriculum in Wales that are very positive, moving towards more practical solutions for disabled people entering into the labour market, individualised support is still crucial to their success. Within Engage to Change, 63% of participants had previously had a Statement of Special Educational Need, School Action, or School Action Plus status. All are well represented in paid employment outcomes using our job coach model. The provision of a funded job coach resource in Wales would underpin the equality of access for disabled people to effective transition to employment.

We will soon see another cohort of people with additional learning needs transitioning from further education to adult life and the labour market. Without specific measures being put in place to help them with that transition, we are likely to see very high rates of unemployment for these groups. It would be unhelpful for colleges to provide further courses for these graduates, even if they had the capacity to do it, given that there may be reduced capacity to provide places for school graduates due to on-going requirements for social distancing.

Additional measures will be needed to accelerate access to inclusive apprenticeships for people in this age group with additional learning needs, and to make available the individualised support they will need to take up any opportunities that are offered. It is unlikely that large numbers of people with learning disabilities or ASD will be the first through the doors of any inclusive apprenticeship programme offered, as much work still needs to be done to demonstrate that they can be supported successfully within an apprenticeship framework. The recently announced £1000 grant to employers offering traineeships in Wales will make it harder to find employers willing to recruit supported interns where they receive no financial incentive. Further work-based training opportunities may therefore be needed to deal with the immediate problem of college leavers with ALN becoming NEET.

The Engage to Change project has demonstrated that job coaching and the supported employment process can deliver good jobs for people with learning disabilities and/or ASD through a one-year supported internship programme.

Through five such programmes our most recent data from Engage to Change shows that 61 interns have taken part in the first three years of the programme and that 58% had entered into paid employment by the April after graduation. Positive evaluations of intern performance have been received from in-house managers and mentors as well as from families and participants. There is a potential here for immediate impact on graduates leaving college this year who will become NEET without an additional pathway into employment. Any such programme will build on recent Welsh Government “Creative Solutions” funding that has been testing non-accredited learning in the ILS curriculum.¹³ Engage to Change has been working in partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd to deliver a supported internship programme for young people with ALN, providing joint funding with Creative Solutions to the college. The programme has been successful and is being extended. A more general move to a centrally funded supported internship programme in Wales is completely consistent with these early successful pilots of the job coach supported process.

Developing a National Supported Internship offer that enhances college and school transition to employment for people with a learning disability or ASD and that draws on a National Job Coaching Service, would go some way to fill a gap in current provision. If implemented soon this could help reduce negative impacts on ALN college leavers this year.

The important role of Access to Work funding

Access to work is a DWP scheme that provides flexible funding for disabled people entering work. In England it is used comprehensively to underpin supported internship programmes for people with a learning disability. The Engage to Change project was successful in introducing Access to Work funding for supported internships, in particular through the use of its DFN Project SEARCH schemes. Access

¹³ Coordinated by CollegesWales.

to Work payments for continuing job coaching have provided a significant resource for Engage to Change, helping the project to support more people than through its main grant funding alone. Access to Work funding has also enabled additional job coaches to be employed within its supported internship programmes in Wales.

We have successfully adapted working in Wales through the development of a Relationship Team within DWP, giving direct access to specific contacts who solely deal with Engage to Change or our internship applications. This relationship has been crucial to our success with this funding. **We would recommend that this arrangement be taken forward for any future Welsh Government national programmes of job coaching or supported internship.**

We have previously argued for a National Supported Internship programme to be developed in Wales. We believe it is critical for such a scheme to be in place to support a cohort of ALN college leavers from the new term in September. We are aware however that Access to Work and the current regulations may not be available to support interns in this crucial first term. This is because host employers are still battling with new requirements of social distancing, and in Wales are largely reporting that they will be unable to create face-to-face internship placements in the first term. There is much work to be done during this period for job coaches funded through the Access to Work programme in preparation for future in work placement. Education can continue, but job coaches are needed.

There is a need for Access to Work and the DWP to be flexible over their arrangements for job coach funding if supported internships are to benefit from this national funding source in the 2020-2021 academic year. There is also a need for Access to Work to remove arbitrary regulations that only apply in Wales, such as a cap on payments related to each Welsh intern, restrictions on what payments can be used for, and on accounting regulations. These need to be removed to create a level playing field with England.

We need additional liaison by Welsh Government with DWP and Access to Work on internship programmes to ensure flexibility in payments for personal support and equality with English schemes.

Relevance to Welsh Government learning disability and ASD policy

The Improving Lives programme for people with a learning disability¹⁴ was launched in 2018 as part of the Welsh Government’s developing work on Prosperity for All. The key deliverables agreed within the Improving Lives programme included supporting partnership working, in particular linking up education, social care and health, and creating **employment opportunities** that supported traineeships were relevant to this goal. Crucially, the report acknowledged the role of job coaching, highlighting “The need for sustainable employment opportunities and targeted support for the employed (for example, induction training being geared to individual needs) (page 14). The document also looked for services to “Explore options for individuals with a learning disability to access employability support, including through the new Working Wales Programme” and to “Explore possibility of introducing supported paid work placements into Wales and disseminate good practice” (page 20).

The original review also highlighted that funding under the Working Wales Programme was relevant to this goal and will be met from the Employability and Skills Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) (4496).¹⁵

A national job coaching strategy, and a paid placement scheme, would be fully consistent with the employment aspirations and targets of Welsh Government’s Improving Lives programme.

¹⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/learning-disability-improving-lives-programme-june-2018.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/improving-lives-programme-cab%2817-18%2937.pdf>

In its Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan for 2017-18, Welsh Government underlined that the support needs of people with ASD will change at different times in their lives and according to their abilities and needs. Feedback from stakeholders had consistently shown employment support as an area where improvements were necessary and where there were gaps in services across the age range included.¹⁶ In its Key Life Course Issues and Challenges, it looked for more “focus on employment, community engagement, quality of life chances and opportunities particularly from 14 years on.”

Welsh Government acknowledges that many autistic adults can have difficulties in finding and maintaining employment. As part of the national approach to improving employment outcomes, the Welsh Government had put forward the Employability Plan (2.10). The plan promotes the use of individualised support to give autonomy and flexibility to address the needs, strengths and ambitions of the person preparing for work. Employability Plan programmes (2.11) should be accessible to all, particularly those with protected characteristics, and an equalities review of core programmes was promised to ensure that their operations are inclusive and sensitive to the needs of people with additional support needs. The Engage to Change project, with its job coaching approach, was specifically identified as an approach consistent with the ASD Delivery Plan (2:13).

A national job coaching strategy would be fully consistent with the employment aspirations and targets of Welsh Government’s ASD delivery plan.

Well-being agenda

Having a resource that can help young people move from education into employment can also provide a contribution to Welsh Government’s well-being agenda. In particular, employment for people with a learning disability or ASD addresses targets in the areas of prosperity and the quality of jobs people have,

¹⁶ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/autistic-spectrum-disorder-strategic-action-plan-annual-report-2018.pdf>
Stephen Beyer, Andrea Meek, Elisa Vigna, NCMH, July 2020

resilience in people and families, equality in Wales and a healthier Wales.¹⁷

Employment can also help to reduce costs to social services who so often pick up the resourcing of people if they are not able to go into employment or if they have no other activity or education post-16. If adequate resources were dedicated to getting these particular groups into paid employment this would represent another contribution to Welsh Government's agenda.

Localising support for people and providers

We have noted that jobs for people with a learning disability rose during the economic recession of the late 1980s through job coaching and supported employment. Job gains were much higher in the US than the UK because of greater investment in supported employment nation-wide from 1986. Our understanding of why this happened can be summarised as individualisation of approach. There was a job coach support structure to help employers employ people with a learning disability with confidence. There was local knowledge of employers and their needs and it was easier to develop relationships between support organisations and employers for repeat employment. There were state and national agreements with large employers to enable open access for support agencies to find jobs that people could do, and free training for those employees that helped overcome employer resistance.

We need to build on these approaches in Wales. In recent years, employment programmes have largely been delivered through prime providers, the emphasis being on large multi-national companies front-loading costs for a return on reduced welfare benefit receipts. The creation of the Local Supported Employment Trailblazer by the DWP is in part a reaction to this. It recognises that large centrally led programmes do not deliver job outcomes for people with a learning disability or ASD. Instead, the LSE favours job coaching and partnerships between local

¹⁷ An effective provision of support to help people with a learning disability or ASD into work helps meet Well-being Act measured in these areas: through supported employment- 16, 18, 19, 20, 21; through supported internship- 22; and through work increasing physical and mental health- 29, 30.

authorities and specialist job coach providers. The emphasis here is on local knowledge. In an economic downturn it is even more likely that jobs for these groups of people will only be found through local knowledge and relationships. This is why we are recommending that commissioning of any National Job Coaching Service should enable local partnerships of Welsh providers to bid with confidence as it will be their existing networks of employer relationships and knowledge of local candidates that will deliver job outcomes in these testing times. This is completely in line with the Welsh Government's and the Wales TUC's "Better Jobs, Closer to Home" strategy for localising the availability of jobs and individualised packages of support.¹⁸

There will no doubt be Welsh Government measures to increase the supply of jobs through assisting existing companies to maintain jobs and help to create more jobs. In their Better Jobs, Closer to Home strategy, Welsh Government has also envisaged using the spending power of public procurement and, through the use of reserved contracts, the use of that lever to create jobs in areas of high employment need. How Welsh Government assistance is delivered can ensure equality in recruitment practices that would help secure jobs for disabled people. To this end, providing a free job coach support service to employers hiring people with learning disabilities and/or autism into paid work, inclusive apprenticeships or supported internships, would provide help to overcome any additional natural friction on the part of employers to the recruitment of people with special needs. The provision of a funded one-year supported internship programme would provide a longer time period for young people with more complex needs to build specific, relevant, applicable work skills and for employers to hone their supervision and management skills for these workers.

We believe that when commissioning any job coach supported employment support for people with a learning or ASD Welsh Government should encourage

¹⁸ Statement by leader of the house on the update on the Better Jobs Closer to Home programme: <https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/4987#A43887> Pilots are operating in Wales in 2020. Stephen Beyer, Andrea Meek, Elisa Vigna, NCMH, July 2020

the use of specialised indigenous providers from within Wales to ensure effective job matching and engagement of local employers.

We believe that there is a case for Welsh Government to ensure that any prime contractors bidding for public contracts are required to satisfy any specific specialist disability requirement within DWP or Job Centre Plus contracts through specialist indigenous providers based in Wales.

Engage to Change: Its learning and its role in response to the crisis

The Engage to Change programme has played a significant national role over the last three years exploring how people with significant needs can get into paid employment. It has provided strong lessons on what works. The programme has had to overcome major barriers in terms of staffing, changes in welfare benefit regulations, and sector employment problems to produce these outcomes. Engage to Change is well placed to play a role in helping people back to work, but also in identifying developments in practice that are needed in response to the Covid-19 crisis and that can ensure people with a learning disabilities and/or ASD are not discriminated against in the path back to employment.

The case for a National Job Coaching Service

If people with complex disabilities are not going to be excluded from the labour market in the harsh conditions prevailing post-coronavirus, then we would argue that a more radical approach to employment support for these groups is required:

- We need to re-design Job Support Wales to ensure that adequate provision for people with significant needs is included in the target for funding.
- Commissioning of services for people with significant disabilities should be based on delivering services that conform to a recognised model of supported employment that has been shown to work.

- Funding will need to be adequate for each person to be able to place, train through the involvement of a job coach, and to provide maintenance over a period of time.
- It is unlikely that the services can be delivered through payment for outcome contracting, and there will be a need to establish full service contracts so that these services can hit the ground running in terms of delivery.

We have yet to see what DWP will do with its LSE programme, and whether it will scale it up to full provision. It is likely that this will be linked to local authority leadership. This does not mean that there should not be a full Welsh response to the issue of employment for these particular groups. Clearly the focus of LSE is on supported employment and job coaching. Any delivery of a National Job Coaching Service in Wales would have synergy with this type of DWP funding and lead to the joint funding of an effective service in Wales.

Access to Work continues to be an important source of individual funding to people and employers to assist them into work. The use of this for internships and apprenticeships within Wales should continue to be secured and expanded.

Internship is also a key pathway for people that can link into apprenticeships and work. Engage to Change has experimented with supported internship models and found success in moving young people into employment. This is creating excellent co-working with further education colleges in Wales and has helped to make their transition to employment more effective. This cannot be successful without a supported employment and job coaching approach and it would benefit greatly from a national job coaching initiative.

The role of local authorities is unclear. Our understanding is that local authorities have limited bandwidth to deliver employment, and have more core business to attend to post-crisis that could limit their sponsorship. It remains crucial that local authorities in Wales are engaged in the employment of people with a learning disability and/ or ASD, not least because it can reduce calls on their services in the

future, and be a major contributor to their well-being agenda. Any National Job Coaching Service should ensure that there is representation and service linked to each local authority in Wales.

If we are to commission effective services in Wales we need to be clear about the commissioning model, the resources needed to deliver an effective service, and the elements of the model being commissioned that are crucial. The concept of model fidelity in commissioning has been used in the trials of the LSE and needs to be a part of any commissioning strategy in Wales. In summary, resources need to pay for vocational profiling, effective job matching, skilled on-the-job training, employer liaison and follow-on support, with funding for the management and infrastructure that underpins these frontline services.

There is a strong link to the needs of employers here. Research has shown significant employer benefit from employing people with learning Disabilities and/or ASD. Research also suggests that people with these conditions are good workers with very few downsides if placed in the right way with the right support. Evidence would suggest that employers gain secondary benefits through advice and guidance from supported employment agencies, from positive public recognition of their equalities position, and even financial savings from employing these client groups. However, raising awareness, equalities legislation, and charter mark schemes do not alone increase the number of disabled people in work. Employers need direct support around individual worker placements if they are to make concrete steps in employing people. Employers too will benefit from a National Job Coaching Service.

The case for a Welsh National Supported Internship offer

The total number of people with learning difficulty or ASD enrolled in further education colleges in 2018-19 was 4395 (36% had a primary diagnosis of ASD).¹⁹ If

¹⁹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Further-Education/uniquelearnersenrolledfurthereducationinstitutions-by-primarydisability-gender>
Stephen Beyer, Andrea Meek, Elisa Vigna, NCMH, July 2020

between one third and one half of these students left at the end of an academic year, then this would represent a significant number of people without secured placement. We know from Welsh Government's own research that the number of students transitioning from college into paid employment is low for people with ASD and likely to be lower still for people with a learning disability.²⁰ A National Supported Internship offer in Wales would help 2020 graduates with a learning disability and provide a strong option between college and inclusive apprenticeship as the latter develops.

The nature of supported internship delivery is the partnership between the college education provider, the host business and the supported employment job coach provider who delivers onsite support and follow-on employment support. For a programme of supported internship to be successful there is a need for much wider availability of skilled job coaches and follow-on supported employment support. The success of any National Supported Internship offer is dependent on a successful National Job Coaching Service.

Recommendations

There are a number of specific areas that we believe would help secure an employment future for people with a learning disability or ASD in this crisis:

- Ring fenced funding for a National Job Coaching Service to provide the support people and employers need to get people with a learning disability or ASD into paid employment. This should be underpinned by a set of delivery standards to ensure quality.
- Developing a National Supported Internship offer that enhances college and school transition to employment for people with a learning disability or ASD

²⁰ Townsley, R., Robinson, C., Williams, V., Beyer, S. and Christian-Jones, C. (2014). [Research into Employment Outcomes for Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorders](#). Social Research 50/2014. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
Stephen Beyer, Andrea Meek, Elisa Vigna, NCMH, July 2020

and that draws on a National Job Coaching Service. If implemented soon this could help reduce negative impacts on ALN college leavers this year.

- Accelerate arrangements for inclusive apprenticeships and underpin a stake in this for people with a learning disability and ASD through the support of skilled job coaching mentioned above.
 - Additional liaison with DWP on Access to Work for internship programmes to ensure flexibility in payments for personal support. They need to match delays in employers offering places in the new academic year due to phased reintroduction of staff after lockdown. This will help retain skilled employment support staff during the phased return to placements.
 - Expansion of the proposed Job Support Wales scheme and the use of an element to contribute to a ring-fenced National Job Coaching Service to ensure people with learning disabilities or ASD are not left behind in the competition for new jobs post-Covid-19.
 - Explore the creation of an Employer Development Grant to offset wages of disabled people in the early stages of a job to help overcome competitive pressures employers may face to employ non-disabled people.
 - We believe that Welsh Government should encourage in any commissioning of job coach supported employment for people with a learning disability or ASD the use of specialised indigenous providers from within Wales to ensure effective job match and engagement of local employers.
 - Ensuring that any prime contractors bidding for public contracts are required to satisfy any specific specialist disability requirement within DWP or Job Centre Plus contracts through specialist indigenous providers based in Wales.
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