

Top tips on Supported Employment

Councils can play an important role in helping people with a disability who are in receipt of social care to find and maintain a job if they want one, at the same time managing future demand for council-funded social care and helping employers to benefit from a more diverse workforce.

People with disabilities are considerably less likely to be in employment than those without disabilities; currently employment rates for disabled people are 31% lower than for the non-disabled population. (Commons Library Briefing, January 2018).

National indicators (NHS Digital 2017) show that the proportion of working-age adults with learning disabilities who are receiving long-term social care support and are also in paid employment has fallen each year over the last three years, from 6.0 per cent in 2014-15 to 5.8 per cent in 2015-16 and then 5.7 per cent in 2016-17. There was a big variation in reported employment rates between local authorities.

In 2016-17, 7% of adults aged 18-69 in contact with secondary mental health services were known to be in paid employment at the time of their assessment or latest review, a slight increase from 6.7% in 2015-16 and 6.8% in 2014-15.

Studies have shown a consistent association between paid employment and better physical and mental health (Public Health England 2018). Research into the cost-effectiveness of supported employment for adults with learning disabilities has shown that supported employment (but not voluntary work experience) is cost-effective in helping people into and maintaining people in paid work (National Development Team 2014). Despite the human and cost benefits, many councils are disinvesting from evidence-based supported employment approaches as budgets tighten.

To help councils provide the best possible support, ADASS has produced the following checklist of top tips:

1. **Ensure consistent engagement with local employers.** Ideally, engagement with local employers should be cross-service (pan disability) to prevent fragmented approaches. A good starting point for getting people with disabilities into work is to set up supported work placements, working with local employers to offer meaningful work experience which aligns with DWP regulations and gives people the experience and confidence to move into paid employment. It is also important to make sure employers are aware at the start of their involvement of the support that is available to enable people with disabilities to work, for example the Access to Work scheme.

2. **Strengthen the commissioning of employment services.** To be good commissioners, council teams need to have a good understanding of the evidence base for supported employment. Providing specialist training for council staff and signposting to information sources would help with this. With a more thorough knowledge of the evidence base, commissioners will be better able to specify the outcomes they require from providers and monitor the quality of internships and supported employment schemes. For example, there is strong evidence that fidelity to Supported Employment and the Individual Placement and Support model achieves better employment outcomes for people (see <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/the-ips-fidelity-scale> and <https://www.ndti.org.uk/our->

[work/our-projects/employment1/employment-commissioning-tool-and-independent-reviews\).](http://work/our-projects/employment1/employment-commissioning-tool-and-independent-reviews)

Assessment and review provides an excellent opportunity to plan alternative pathways into employment, utilising the strengths, ambitions and interests of people.

It is also worth considering strategic joint commissioning with other authorities, as this may widen the employment opportunities available to disabled people across a shared geography.

3. **Model good employment practices.** There is a good deal you can do to lead the way in showing what good practice in employing people with disabilities looks like. Do not be afraid to be innovative and offer flexible routes into employment in your own organisation. Given the difficulty of transferring learning from one context to another, strategies like working interviews, job carving and inclusive apprenticeships are a vital route into work, but councils are too often reluctant to move from highly bureaucratic recruitment processes which may exclude people with a learning disability. You could also offer more supported internships, but with a view to having a paid job at the end of the placement.
4. **Ensure co-ordination between education, children's and adult services.** The message you give out at the point of transition from children's to adult services needs to be 'employment first'. Young people with disabilities can aspire to, move towards and enter into employment as a natural sequence each and every time. To make this aspiration a reality make sure that schools and colleges are giving consistent, high quality careers guidance, to Gatsby Standards (see <https://www.base-uk.org/knowledge/benchmarking-careers-guidance>); that colleges are considering the ongoing support needs of young people who become employed through supported internships and that you are clearly specifying what colleges should be delivering to receive Element 3 funding. Make it a policy to offer better off in work calculations to families when young people are starting vocational courses.
5. **Make sure that funded services employ a well-trained workforce.** Individual Placement and Support specialists, employment advisers and job coaches require specialist skills and training to be able to do their jobs well. It is important that any services your council funds are employing well trained people and are not simply adding employment support onto support worker job descriptions (see www.base-uk.org/nos for the skills and knowledge required).
6. **Be clear about the desired outcomes and cost benefit case for investment in employment services.** There is evidence that supporting people with disabilities into employment can be cost effective, in that employment improves health and wellbeing and reduces reliance on health and social care services (for example, NDTI 2014; <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/what-is-ips>). It is a good idea to model the outcomes you hope to achieve from funding a supported employment service and to translate these into financial savings, to make the case for continued investment. It is also helpful to use grants for their intended purpose, for example Section 31 education grants.
7. **Make use of the Social Value Act in contracting across the council and its supply chains.** The Social Value Act provides an opportunity for councils to create jobs and training opportunities via contracting in their own supply chains. You could use the leverage you have as an agency contracting with third party service providers to encourage and indeed insist that those contracts always include specific commitments aimed at advancing the opportunities for adults in receipt of social care to compete for and win employment opportunities.
8. **Improve information and online support.** Make sure that the information you provide about routes into employment for people in receipt of social care services is clear and user friendly. Consider using a variety of ways to communicate with people who may want to take up employment support, for example by improving the navigability and content of local offer

websites and hosting online discussion forums and peer support groups. In particular, make sure that you have clear and accessible information on preparing for adulthood and the employment support that is available as part of your local offer.

9. **Raise the profile of Supported Employment and Individual Placement and Support within Local Enterprise Partnerships and economic regeneration teams.** Employing more disabled people – a talent pool that is currently largely wasted – can help Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) to achieve their local economic growth targets. Building links with LEPs and with your own economic regeneration teams will help you take a strategic approach to supporting people with disabilities into employment.
10. **Support job retention, progression and career development.** The support you provide should not stop when someone gets a job. The employment services you provide or fund could play an important role in facilitating progression for disabled people within their current or to new employers. At the moment it may seem that there is no advantage to the council in doing this, yet helping people to progress may help reduce the need for people to use council-funded support and help manage demand for social care services. People who are supported to achieve in work are good ambassadors for the future employment of people who have a disability. They also help to challenge restrictive assumptions about ability in our communities.

References

- NHS Digital (2017) *Measures from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework England 2016-17.* <https://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB30122>
- Public Health England (2018) Learning Disability and Employment: Inclusive Growth. Webinar presentation by Chris Hatton and Neil Wood 27th February 2018. <https://tinyurl.com/ihalarchive>
- National Development Team for Inclusion (2014) *The Cost Effectiveness of Employment Support for People with Disabilities.* https://www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/SSCR_The_cost_effectiveness_of_Employment_Support_for_People_with_Disabilities%2C_NDTi%2C_March_2014_final.pdf

Additional resources

- Department for Work and Pensions (2017) *Employing disabled people and people with health conditions*
- British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) www.base-uk.org
- Centre for Mental Health www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk
- Top tips to support the employment of people with mental health needs (ADASS)