

Submission by the British Association for Supported Employment to the Work and Pensions Committee's Inquiry into the Disability Employment Gap.

Introduction

The British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) is a national membership charity representing 180 organisations providing specialist employment support. BASE promotes the principles and delivery of high quality Supported Employment services. The definition of Supported Employment includes Individual Placement and Support (IPS) provision. Our members span the public, voluntary and commercial sectors and are based across the employment, social care, health, and education sectors.

The Association's primary concern is the sustainable employment of those people who are most disadvantaged in the labour market because of the nature of their impairment or other disadvantage. However, we believe that many of the techniques used within Supported Employment can be used within the wider context of disability and disadvantage.

BASE welcomes the Government's ambition to halve the disability employment gap by supporting 1.2 million people with disabilities into work. The employment gap remains stubbornly wide and any measures to reduce it are to be welcomed.

Most people with a disability wish to work. Some will be able to secure work by themselves but many will need additional support, personalised to their needs. We know, for example, that most people with learning disabilities or autism conditions wish to work¹ but they will require appropriate and effective support to achieve their aspirations given the employment rates of these groups remain stubbornly low at 6%. The employment rate for people with long-term mental health conditions is also low at 6.8%.

The commitment is ambitious and we cannot see how it can be achieved without more substantial investment in personalised support across Government departments and a shift to a more encouraging benefits regime. The existing programmes and initiatives being delivered in silos simply cannot achieve the Government's ambition.

It is our view that to achieve the ambition of halving the disability employment gap, Government will need to focus on three areas:

1. Supporting young people with disabilities from education into sustainable employment
2. Supporting working age people with disabilities who are unemployed and/or economically inactive into employment
3. Preventing people with disabilities from dropping out of work through job retention activities

BASE has contributed to a range of task and finish groups over the last three years as the Government develops its Disability & Health Employment Strategy. We have previously submitted evidence² to the original call for evidence and also³ to the subsequent discussion paper⁴. BASE would welcome the opportunity to provide verbal evidence to the Committee.

¹ <https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/what-we-campaign-about/employment-and-training>

² http://base-uk.org/sites/base-uk.org/files/page/13-01-disability_employment_strategy_consultation/base_-_des_proposals_web_version.pdf

³ http://base-uk.org/sites/base-uk.org/files/page/13-01-disability_employment_strategy_consultation/des_-_base_response_feb_2014.pdf

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-disability-and-health-employment-strategy-the-discussion-so-far>

Steps required to halve the disability gap

Supporting young people with disabilities from education into sustainable employment

There have been numerous reports over the years concerning the employment of people with a disability. Almost all have highlighted the lack of ambition across the system and the low aspirations for disabled people and their families. We shouldn't be asking young people whether they want to work but instead should be working with people to identify the jobs that they are best suited to.

BASE welcomes the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms contained within the Children and Families Act. It places a much needed emphasis on achieving life outcomes as well as qualifications. Employment is one of the key outcomes and it is supported by the Department for Education's Preparing for Adulthood strand of work.

BASE has worked in partnership with NDTi on a DfE-funded project to identify, develop and disseminate best practice in the transition of young people with disabilities from education to employment⁵. This has resulted in the recent publication of short best practice papers for post-16 providers and local authorities. We discovered some excellent practice within three Berkshire schools (Manor Green School⁶, Castle School and Brookfields School) who are all using supported internships and other supported employment techniques to prepare young people for work. Participating employers commit to offering employment to successful students and one school, Brookfields⁷, is achieving 40% job outcomes for its pupils. They have achieved this through tailoring the curriculum, engaging effectively with employers and providing excellent support through trained job coaches.

Supported Internships offer a valuable route into the workplace as long as they are focused on job outcomes and are delivered by trained job coaches. They offer a practical alternative for those young people who do not have the required level of functional skills to be allowed onto an apprenticeship. We welcome the use of Access to Work to support the funding of job coaches within supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships. A number of large employers have embraced the supported internship model, including National Grid, GlaxoSmithKline and Siemens, and they are enthusiastic about the supported employment techniques used to support them and their interns.

Supported internships will not be the answer for all young people with SEND however and we would like to see better access to apprenticeships for young people who have the required levels of English and Maths. There has been a low take-up of apprenticeships by young people with special educational needs and disabilities⁸ and we believe that this is because of the academic requirements coupled with a lack of understanding by some training providers about how to support apprentices who have a disability. NIACE has produced an excellent guide⁹ to support employers but more guidance is needed for training providers so that they can attract and retain apprentices with disabilities. We would support the idea of developing a Level 1 apprenticeship route but there needs to be a greater awareness of how supported employment can be embedded within apprenticeships. The Vulnerable Learner project¹⁰ in Kent is a good example of where support is offered to disadvantaged groups to encourage their involvement in apprenticeships.

⁵ <http://base-uk.org/projects/eeb2016>

⁶ Manor Green YouTube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvdVZWeZ4Qs&index=11&list=PL1JRKHIDkpG1fUIm0WSQ7CDrUbFRzcYrG&spfreload=10>

⁷ <http://brookfieldsschool.org>

⁸ <http://feweek.co.uk/2016/03/11/special-needs-support/>

⁹ <http://www.employer-toolkit.org.uk>

¹⁰ http://base-uk.org/files/knowledge/Evaluation%20of%20the%20Vulnerable%20Learner%20Apprenticeship%20Project/final_vlp_eval_july2012.pdf

Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans enable employment aspirations to be built into the transition planning for all young people with disabilities. We think that DWP must ensure that its provision dovetails with the SEND reforms.

Supporting working age people with disabilities who are unemployed and/or economically inactive into employment

The Work and Health Programme is due to be tendered shortly but its design is unfinished. BASE welcomes the continued funding that is being made available to support people with disabilities into work as well as the support to the long-term unemployed and people with health conditions. We hope that the tender process will make it much easier for specialist providers, many of these small providers for those with disabilities and/or disadvantages to get fully involved in delivering it and appropriately funded for their contribution. Previous programmes such as Work Choice have been very problematic for providers as they have had to write multiple expressions of interest in different formats for the various prime contractor bidders. There have been widespread accusations from specialist providers of being used as bid candy, not receiving an adequate flow of referrals for it to be financially viable for them to be involved and of having to pay excessive management fees within contracts. We believe that the outcome of the Work Choice tender exercise directly led to the loss of many public sector specialist employment services.

Supply chain commissioning has led to extensive parking and creaming within mainstream programmes and there are indications that the same is happening within Work Choice. There has been a confusing overlap in referrals to the Work Programme and Work Choice with two-thirds of customers referred to Work Choice receiving Jobseekers Allowance. Work Choice now appears to be largely focused on people with health conditions as opposed to the groups of disabled people it was intended for.

BASE has long argued that the Work Programme offered insufficient support to people with disabilities and the outcomes achieved by such generic provision have been unacceptably low. There are signs that outcomes are improving as the demographics of referrals changes but a programme with a focus on disability is to be cautiously welcomed. We continue to have concerns that finances and targets on the Work and Health Programme will continue to encourage creaming of customers and that people with substantial disabilities will find it difficult to access.

We welcome the increased budget for Access to Work but steps need to be taken to make it much easier to apply for and to claim payment. It remains difficult for employers to find out what support is available to them as publicity for the programme is very limited. BASE frequently hears of jobs being put at risk because of the time taken to process claims and to make payments.

We have been told that the Department for Work and Pensions wishes to make better use of specialist providers and to integrate with wider local provision. This makes sense to us though steps will be needed if this is to become a reality. Specifically, we would like to recommend:

- The reintroduction of Disability Employment Advisors across the country, managed through district teams.
- The use of the Flexible Support Fund to reward outcomes achieved through the local commissioning of specialist employment support funded through education, health, and social care.

BASE is currently working up proposals for DWP to reward job outcomes obtained through locally commissioned employment support and we are pleased that DWP is receptive to the idea. The concept would encourage local commissioners to sustain their investment in specialist support and would recognise the contribution that local support makes to the Government's objective of halving the disability employment gap. Those areas with devolved powers would then feel secure in being able to build this provision into their overall frameworks for supporting disabled people into work.

Preventing people with disabilities from dropping out of work through job retention activities

The budget for the Work and Health Programme is similar to that of Work Choice. Work Choice is currently delivering outcomes of around 60% leading to approximately 12,000 jobs per annum¹¹. Assuming continued employment projections, this will not by itself achieve the Government's ambition to achieve 1.2 million new job starters. It is to be seen where the remainder of the jobs will come from but job retention has to be a priority so as to reduce the numbers of people falling out of work.

Many people with disabilities are dropping out of work for a multitude of reasons; worsening health, bullying, lack of support, changing job roles, changes to line management etc. Many could be supported to retain employment if they were offered timely and effective support.

Again, a range of services will be useful to support people whose jobs are at risk. These will include the telephone-based support services offered to people experiencing mental distress. The Fit for Work Service offers telephone-based occupational health support to SMEs and this is very welcome. Remploy's Mental Health Support Service, funded by Access to Work, appears to be successful in retaining people's employment but there are concerns about it being delivered by a single provider and that it is focused on milder mental health conditions.

Many people prefer a face-to-face conversation and we have concerns about an over-reliance on telephone-based support. Some services have piloted the placement of vocational advisors within health centres so that referrals can be made directly by GPs. This allows for a quick response to staff absence and relieves the burden on GPs. Support and mediation can be offered at an early stage and this is often enough to retain employment. Pilots have seen over 90% of people retain their employment or be redeployed into alternative job roles.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) has the potential to be a key contributor to job retention but access must be rapid and any accompanying therapies need to be concurrent.

Reporting on progress

An ambition of this scale will need monitoring. We recommend that an annual update be produced detailing progress made against the objective. The report should highlight the steps taken, together with information on the demographics of those finding/retaining work.

Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Human Rights of People with Disabilities makes a number of requirements on Governments. It includes the following:

- d. Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
- e. Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;

These requirements apply to all persons with a disability, not just those perceived as nearest to the labour market. Government will need to implement a range of actions to support and encourage people with a disability to secure and retain employment as part of a lifetime of career development. This will include providing appropriate support, geared to the needs of each individual, as well as creating a climate that recognises the valuable contribution that people with disabilities can make in the workplace.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/work-choice-statistics-number-of-starts-and-referrals--2>

BASE hopes that the additional funding allocated alongside the Work and Health Programme and to the Innovation Fund will be used to test out innovative support to ensure equality of access to high quality employment support.

Support for Employers

Employers are frequently blamed for not recruiting disabled jobseekers. While this may be true for some, we believe that the lack of previous contact and fear of the unknown are powerful obstacles to successful recruitment of people with disabilities. Human Resources professionals are often risk-averse and seek to protect their companies by avoiding innovative recruitment practice.

We are not really engaging with business on a corporate basis. Where change has been achieved it has mainly been through the influence of individuals rather than as a result of well-thought corporate strategy.

BASE fully supports the Disability Confident initiative. This is an opportunity for the coordinated engagement of employers and could be a place where employers go to discover information, advice and resources. Many large employers such as National Grid and Sodexo are taking a lead in promoting the employment of young people with substantial disabilities and this is very welcome. They have the potential to be disability champions within their sectors.

We were disappointed with the initial national emphasis on veterans and paralympians for inspirational stories but there have been many subsequent local events that have worked very successfully. Disability Confident has to be expanded so that it reaches out to small and medium-sized enterprises knowing that SMEs have played a key role in employing people with disabilities¹². The local events offer an excellent opportunity to engage with SMEs using the recognisable badging of Disability Confident. This should be backed up by a user-friendly interface that brings together key information for employers. The current portal on gov.uk is not very attractive or user-friendly and we would hope that Government will develop this further as a primary source of employer guidance.

Effective Employment Support for Disabled People

Supported Employment¹³ is an internationally known model of intervention that has existed for over 50 years. It includes Individual Placement & Support (IPS) and evidence indicates that model fidelity is an important factor in maximising outcomes and efficiency¹⁴. The model relies on two key activities to aid good quality job matching; a vocational profile is used to get to know the jobseeker's skills, ambitions, wants and needs and a job analysis is used to fully understand the employer's requirements within a vacancy. The quality of these activities will influence the quality of jobmatching and the subsequent sustainability of jobs. Supported Employment is frequently described as a "place, train and maintain" model. What is happening too often in the UK at the moment can only be described as a "place and pray" model.

The Government's Disability & Health Employment Strategy highlighted the evidence base for Supported Employment, including Individual Placement & Support (IPS). *"Internationally, some of the strongest evidence of effective specialist employment interventions is for those that follow the Supported Employment model. This can cover a range of approaches, including Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programmes, a type of Supported Employment programme combining health and employment approaches*

¹² http://www.fsb.org.uk/LegacySitePath/policy/assets/publications/fsb_2012_back_%20to_work.pdf

¹³ <http://base-uk.org/about/about-supported-employment>

¹⁴ The Cost Effectiveness of Employment Support for People with Disabilities (NDTi, March 2014 p96)

for those with severe mental health conditions. The OECD concluded that there was 'unequivocal' evidence of the effectiveness of Supported Employment in helping disabled people gain and retain employment."¹⁵

Despite the evidence, the Government has never commissioned Supported Employment provision in the UK. The only provision available to jobseekers is funded through charities, local authorities, education and Health Trusts and is increasingly being cut as a result of financial cutbacks. This is precisely the sort of provision that the Government should want to see but it is not statutory and is extremely vulnerable to funding cuts.

Specialist employment support was designed into the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) Programme and commissioning guidelines have indicated the need for employment specialists within Community Mental Health Teams. However, this employment expertise has gradually been withdrawn. A recent report commissioned by DWP gives ideas as to how IPS can be better integrated into IAPT provision¹⁶. The RAND Europe¹⁷ report also highlighted the need to build employment outcomes into IAPT commissioning. IAPT has the potential for being a major contributor to job retention.

We believe that elements of the Supported Employment model can be used with a wide range of disadvantaged groups to offer personalised support. Our members have supported people with a wide range of disabilities, young people leaving care, ex-offenders and people recovering from addiction as well as other disadvantages.

As Supported Employment is such a personalised service, it is vital that jobseekers can access whatever additional interventions may be needed. These might include confidence-building activities such as those delivered by Status Employment¹⁸ which prepare people with mental health needs to prepare for the idea of working. CBT techniques, mindfulness, peer-support and resilience-building all have a role to play depending on the individual.

ESA reforms

The work-related activity category of ESA is meant to identify those for whom employment is possible in the future. The definition is problematic as many of those in the ESA support group also aspire to employment. We believe that the Work Capability Assessment needs a fundamental overhaul so that it identifies the support needs of jobseekers as well as allocating them to a benefit entitlement.

There are many individuals with complex needs due to autism conditions, mental illness or learning disability who are found fit for work but will be very unlikely to secure or sustain employment without significant support.

BASE believes that Government should be more encouraging in its stance on welfare benefits. Potential jobseekers are tempted to keep their heads down rather than explore employment as a positive choice. We believe that a safety net should be in place so that individuals can try out work, with appropriate support, without fearing that they will lose benefit entitlement if their employment isn't successful. We would recommend that the 104-week linking rules are restored so that individuals can try out work without fear.

¹⁵ The disability and health employment strategy: the discussion so far (DWP, Dec 2013 p70)

¹⁶ An Evaluation of the 'IPS in IAPT' Psychological Wellbeing and Work Feasibility pilot (Work Foundation, March 2015)

¹⁷ Psychological Wellbeing and Work: Improving Service Provision and Outcomes (RAND Europe, January 2014)

¹⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/jun/11/trapeze-classes-women-depression>

Workforce Development

Welfare to Work services have had a high turnover of staff. We believe that provision delivered by trained staff deliver a higher quality service. Workforce development for the sector hasn't been a priority but if support is to be delivered more professionally then a framework of accredited qualifications should be encouraged. The Institute for Employability Professionals delivers a range of accredited training courses and, following the publication of National Occupational Standards¹⁹ for Supported Employment, BASE has developed a Level 3 Certificate for Supported Employment Practitioners.²⁰

Further Information

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¹⁹ <http://base-uk.org/knowledge/national-occupational-standards>

²⁰ http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/Qualification/Details/600_9892_2