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Leading learning and skills

Learning for Work: Employability and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

A report following nine regional conferences (Held January – April 2008)

Yola Jacobsen, NIACE and Peter Little OBE

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Of interest to those supporting and involved in the transition of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from education and training to employment

Further information
For further information, please contact the
appropriate Learning and Skills Council office.
Contact details for each office can be found on the
LSC's website: **lsc.gov.uk**.

Learning and Skills Council
National Office

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
T 0845 019 4170
F 024 7682 3675
lsc.gov.uk

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Executive summary

In its national strategy, *Learning for Living and Work* (2006), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) stated its intention to cease funding, by September 2010, vocational provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that does not use either the supported employment model or learning in the workplace. The LSC reiterated its commitment to supporting the further education (FE) system in meeting this target and also to developing a secure foundation of knowledge and practice to take forward when the Young People's Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency inherit its remit.

Between January and April 2008, each of the nine regional LSCs hosted a conference with the theme 'Learning for Work: Employability and adults with disabilities'. The aim was to bring together partners from each region to focus on the development of policy and practice in the LSC's priority area for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to 'increase economic participation through sustainable employment' (LSC, 2006:11).

The target audience was composed of representatives of:

- regional and local LSCs

- adult and community education services

- Connexions

- information, advice and guidance (IAG) services

- disability employment advisory services

- education business partnerships

- employers

- FE colleges

- independent specialist providers

- Jobcentre Plus

- local authorities

- schools

- supported employment agencies

- work-based learning providers.

This report summarises the key messages that emerged from the regional conferences. It also sets out 12 recommendations for the LSC and other stakeholders on how the FE system can more effectively enable learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop employability skills and support their progress into sustained employment.

The voice of the learner was a central feature of the events, with learners giving keynote presentations at each conference. A compilation of learners' presentations forms the Learner Voice report (publication no. LSC-P-NAT-090129).

Key themes

Key themes that emerged were:

- supported employment

- funding

- partnerships and planning

- employers.

A summary of the discussion for each of these appears below.

Supported employment

- It is important for FE providers to develop their understanding of supported employment and to acknowledge the implications for provision of embedding this approach across the system

- There is a need for information about the existing range of employment and skills initiatives and partnerships

- The supported employment approach, when embedded in the FE system, must be inclusive, with particular reference to learners with mental health difficulties

- When working with young people with learning difficulties and/or diabilities, we need to focus on employment whilst they are still at school

- Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are under-represented in Apprenticeships and should have better access to this form of provision

- There was great interest in any information about the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) and how it might support the development of a supported employment approach

- We were advised not to neglect employability for adult learners aged over 25

- Delegates expressed concern that funding for recreational courses is disappearing. Such provision is seen as a valuable route to mainstream vocational provision.

Funding

- Strategic partnership work is essential for the development of the supported employment model. Strategic-level agreements are needed so that resources can be pooled

- Only sustainable, long-term funding can support the progression into work, and is vital to the success of supported employment

- Paid employment is not the only valid outcome and we should acknowledge the role of voluntary placements and social enterprise firms as part of the overall approach to supporting people into work

- Funding that is linked to accreditation rather than the goal of getting a job will limit the effectiveness of a supported employment approach

- Delegates were concerned about the high cost of individual support for work experience and in-work support, both of which are recognised as crucial components of provision that sees learners make a successful transition into employment.

Partnerships and planning

- The existence of established partnerships that were focused on supporting learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into work varied between regions

- Delegates suggested that local area agreements could be a suitable framework to support planning by agencies and business partnerships

- Effective strategic partnerships are an important component of collaborative implementation at the local level, for example in joint commissioning by social services and health provision

- There is already enormous expertise in supported employment, so education and training providers need to work with existing agencies and services to benefit from this experience.

Employers

- Remploy's employer-led approach was widely welcomed by delegates, who recognised that the connection between educational provision and employers' needs must improve

- Providers were keen to know how to develop stronger links with employers and Jobcentre Plus

- There is a need for coherent, co-ordinated regional and local targeting of employers in ways that combine all the relevant learning and skills initiatives, such as Apprenticeships, Entry to Employment (E2E) and Train to Gain, while also making sure learners within learning difficulties and/or disabilities are included

- It was generally felt that employers need educating about the benefits of employing people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- The LSC, and other major employers such as local authorities and National Health Service (NHS) trusts, were urged to lead by example and employ more staff with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Employers spoke at each of the conferences. The main themes of their presentations were as follows:

- Employers rate interpersonal skills, communication, problem-solving and teamwork as the most important employability skills. Literacy, numeracy and technical abilities were ranked below these softer skills

- Employers stressed the importance of employees being able and willing to learn and adapt quickly to the pace of change in the workplace

- Updating or improving skills at college whilst in work was recognised by employers as an important way for employees to develop and progress in their careers

- Employers' motivation to employ people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities includes corporate social responsibility, access to a pool of untapped recruits and better responsiveness to customers as a result of having a more diverse workforce

- Employers can take a proactive approach to recruiting and supporting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by providing work experience, adapting the recruitment process and making reasonable adjustments in the workplace

- Employers need to challenge stereotypes and question policy and procedures that work against people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The LSC should research existing examples of social firms and enterprises in the regions with a view to publishing a good practice guide for post-16 education and training providers that will raise awareness and encourage involvement in this area of work.

Recommendation 2:

The LSC should develop a section on the Excellence Gateway, now hosted on the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) website (www.lsis.org.uk), that focuses on employability for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and development of the supported employment model. This would provide a platform for providers to obtain information and share approaches and ideas.

Recommendation 3:

The National Apprenticeship Service should make funding available and give priority to improving participation and completion rates in Apprenticeships by learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Recommendation 4:

The LSC should promote an inclusive supported employment model in the FE system for learners of all ages. Funding protocols are needed that will consider using Train to Gain and the Adult Advancement and Careers Service to reflect this inclusive model.

Recommendation 5:

The LSC, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and other stakeholders need to ensure that providers are kept informed and consulted on the development of the FLT and its ties with the supported employment model. They should monitor these developments within the progression pathways pilots in order to ensure that they are offering realistic routes into work.

Recommendation 6:

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) should extend the duty on local authorities to provide travel arrangements for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 25. It should also promote and fund training to help learners travel independently to learning and to work.

Recommendation 7:

The LSC and QCA should clarify and produce a suitable funding model for the progression pathways to supported employment and independent living.

Recommendation 8:

The LSC should restate its intention that it '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 workplace and the supported employment model' (LSC, 2006:26). It should work to ensure that this is carried through in the transition to the new arrangements post-2010 with local authorities, the Young People's Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency.

Recommendation 9:

The LSC, local authorities and Jobcentre Plus should action objective 7 in the *Progression through Partnership* strategy to 'agree new strategic planning protocols between LSC, local authorities and Jobcentre Plus to include specific plans for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities' (HM Government, 2007:27).

Recommendation 10:

Regional LSCs should ensure that their employability and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities networks and partnerships include Jobcentre Plus as a key partner in the development of the supported employment model.

Recommendation 11:

The LSC needs to build on the contribution of Remploy[1] and the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE[2]) and their employer contacts to run employer events that explore how the good practice exercised by large employers can influence medium- to small-sized enterprises in employing more people with disabilities.

Recommendation 12:

The LSC skills teams at national and regional levels should engage with this agenda by nominating individuals to take the work forward. Such work would include better involvement by learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Apprenticeships and Train to Gain.

[1] Remploy is one of the UK's leading providers of employment services and employment to people with disabilities and complex barriers to work.

[2] BASE is the trade association for providers of supported employment.

1: Background

1   In May 2007, the chairman of the LSC, Chris Banks, chaired the national NIACE Remploy conference on 'Employability and Adults with Disabilities'. The conference aimed to consider the implications of government policy on practice when supporting adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in their transition from education and training to employment, with a particular focus on the LSC's national strategy for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, Learning for *Living and Work* (LSC, 2006).

2   Under Chris Banks' direction, a challenging agenda was produced as a framework for taking this work forward. It had the following components:

- Engage with employers regionally and locally and gain practical experience of what it means to be 'employer-led'

- Develop flexible funding arrangements that recognise job outcomes as a mark of success, and support collaborative work on employability among providers and, more widely, other agencies

- Recognise the achievements of learners from Entry level and beyond

- Develop a better understanding of the supported employment model

- Further to the LSC's mental health strategy (LSC, 2009), focus on employability for people with mental health difficulties

- Embed support mechanisms for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on vocational provision rather than having bolt-on arrangements

- Develop the FLT to ensure a stronger focus on employability skills.

3   In a keynote address given four months later at BASE's 2007 annual conference, Chris Banks spoke of his concern about the slow progress in this area of work, which is a priority for the LSC. He emphasised the importance of taking the work forward on a collaborative basis, joining up national, regional and local developments and involving employers, providers, the LSC, government and supported employment organisations. Provider feedback to the LSC had stressed:

- the need for a better understanding of how to target employers in order to support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities entering work

- concern that current funding was limiting the development of new and innovative approaches.

Regional conferences

4   NIACE organised nine regional events, in close liaison with national and regional LSCs, Remploy and BASE. The conferences were funded by the regions, with support from LSC National Office and Remploy.

5   All nine events were well-attended and several attracted well over the target of 100 delegates. This reflects a keen interest in this area of work.

6   The aims of the events were to:

- provide an update on national developments, including the cross-departmental strategy (HM Government, 2007) on the role of FE in supporting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve fulfilling lives

- review national and regional LSC progress on the priority area of increasing economic participation through sustainable employment for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- learn about current practice in this area of work regionally

- explore the supported employment model and the LSC's requirement to reach this by 2010

- consider specific employability issues for learners with mental health difficulties

- explore learner and employer perspectives

- propose ideas and develop plans for taking this work forward.

Audience

7   The target audience for the regional events was:

- regional and local LSC staff with a lead in either skills or provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- staff from adult and community education services

- Connexions

- information, advice and guidance professionals

- disability employment advisors

- those involved in education business partnerships

- employers

- FE college staff with responsibility for this area of work

- independent specialist providers for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- Jobcentre Plus

- local authority officers, particularly professionals with responsibility for transition and person centred planning[3]

- representatives of schools

- members of supported employment agencies in the public and voluntary sectors

- work-based learning providers.

Programme

8 The conference programme was developed by NIACE and LSC National Office in consultation with Remploy, BASE and regional LSCs. Most regions used this programme as a framework for their individual conference, in some cases adapting it to suit their particular circumstances.

9 Each event opened with a welcome from the chair, Peter Little OBE, and a senior representative of the host regional LSC.

10 The first presentations were by learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who spoke about their experiences of learning for work (see The Learner Voice report). This was followed by a session by an employer, in which perspectives and requirements in respect of the employment of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were set out. The conference chair outlined pertinent national policy developments and a regional LSC colleague updated the audience on related local projects. This was followed by an opportunity for questions and answers and a round-table discussion to consider the following question: when developing skills for employment and embedded in-work support, what can we learn from existing work in the region?

11 The afternoon session started with a presentation from NIACE's development officer for learning and health on improving employment opportunities for people with mental health difficulties. This was followed by a presentation by BASE on the perspective from supported employment organisations. The final presentation was by the head of learning at Remploy, who spoke on ways of linking colleges with supported employment. Delegates had another chance opportunity to consider how education and training organisations can work better with supported employment practices. The day ended with feedback on the main points and further questions.

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[3] Person centred planning: a process that places the individual at the centre and focuses on what is important to them from their own perspective. It looks at what they want to do with their lives and then works out how they can be supported to achieve this.

2: Policy Context

12 In 2004, the LSC commissioned Peter Little OBE to conduct a national review of the planning and funding of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This resulted in the Little report, *Through Inclusion to Excellence* (LSC, 2005), which included 40 recommendations. A number of these highlighted the importance of progression for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through learning into employment. This in turn informed the LSC's response with the publication of its strategy *Learning for Living and Work* (LSC, 2006).

13 The LSC's strategy reflected the context of the widening government agenda for skills and employment, including:

- the Leitch review (Leitch, 2006)

- 14-19 reform (DfES, 2005)

- Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People (Strategy Unit, 2005)

- *A New Deal for Welfare* (DWP, 2006).

14 The LSC's strategy identified three priority areas for the period 2006 2010. The third of these priorities, to 'increase economic participation through sustainable employment' (LSC, 2006:11), was the focus of the conferences.

15 In July 2007, the joint strategy *Progression Through Partnership* (HM Government, 2007) was launched by ministers in three departments (Work and Pensions, Education and Skills, and Health). It remains a blueprint for action and describes itself as 'the government's own response to the Little Report' (HM Government, 2007:12). Again, its third priority is to look at how pathways to work can be made more flexible for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A more detailed description of the policy context appears in section 2 of *Progression Through Partnership*.

16 A further joint report on welfare reform, *Opportunity, Employment and Progression*, was published in November 2007 (DIUS & DWP, 2007).

17 The policy context is never static, and even before the conferences took place, the Machinery of Government changes of 2007 and the Prime Minister's major announcement on Apprenticeships in January 2008 were impacting on policy priorities. The latter announcement challenged LSC regions with ensuring that people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have better opportunities to participate in and complete Apprenticeships.

18 Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 16-18 are twice as likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) as their non-disabled peers; this rises to three times as likely at age 19. The policy context for these young people is therefore between the ages of 14 and 25 rather than 14-19. Policymakers and funding agencies/departments will need to take this into account in any new arrangements, including the FLT, if the aspirations of the government's strategy to improve the life chances of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are to be realised.

19 The announcement in March 2008 of new commissioning arrangements from 2010, including the role of local authorities and potential new agencies, will further influence development. However, the policy context must also take full account of the role of employers, whether in the context of Apprenticeships, Train to Gain or the wider world of work. What also needs to happen to translate policy into actual increased economic participation by people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a greater engagement by those working to develop the skills agenda, allied closely to employment.

20 The policy imperative must now be to build on the momentum of the past four years. Since the conferences took place, there have been significant contributions, including a report by Nick Wilson on the London perspective (Wilson, 2008). The LSC has issued a draft of the *Prospectus for Progression Pathways* (LSC, 2008), which responds to many of the concerns raised by delegates at these conferences and elsewhere.

21 We must ensure that the wider economic turbulence does not mean that the aspirations of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities - young people and adults - are overlooked. Key government targets rely on the success of the policy to increase economic participation by people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the FE system has an essential role in this. In particular, there is a huge potential contribution from the LSC skills group, which could be developed at both national and regional levels. In summary, there is much to learn from the outcome of these regional conferences and allied work as the policy context continues to develop.

3: Key Themes and Recommendations

22 Each regional event gave participants the opportunity to consider and discuss the following questions:

- When developing skills for employment and embedding in-work support, what can we draw from existing work in the region?

- How can education and training organisations work better with supported employment practices?

23 Key themes emerging from the events were fairly consistent. Edited quotes from delegates are used throughout this section of the report to underline prevailing perceptions. The recommendations appear throughout this section in proximity to the areas of work to which they relate.

24 Key themes have been grouped under the following headings, although naturally there is some overlap between them:

1: The supported employment model

2: Funding

3: Partnerships and partnership working

4: Employers.

Key theme 1: The supported employment model

25 This theme covers:

- the supported employment model

- information

- an inclusive model

- vocational provision

- FLT

The supported employment model

26 *Learning for Living and Work* (LSC, 2006) states that to continue to receive funding, providers must adopt a supported employment model by 2010 (LSC, 2006:6),

without however providing a specific definition of the model. On the one hand, this offers organisations an opportunity to work together to find a model that best suits their situation (indeed, this is exactly what has been happening for several years in some regions). On the other hand, providers who lack experience in developing provision using supported employment approaches are unsure what the model entails and how they can develop this way of working.

27 The regional events provided an opportunity for nearly 1,000 people to focus on employability and the supported employment model, learn from existing practice in their region and consider how to develop their own practice. It was evident that knowledge about supported employment among providers in the FE sector and key organisations such as Jobcentre Plus varies hugely. Many supported employment organisations do not yet understand what the FE sector has to offer and vice versa. Presentations from BASE and Remploy at each conference provided examples of current projects and an explanation of what supported employment involves. Two key points were emphasised:

- There is no point in reinventing the wheel in terms of developing supported employment models; the expertise already exists in supported employment organisations and a standard for good practice is well established

- Cross-sector partnership working and work with employers is the key to developing a successful supported employment model.

28 To this, we could add the important role of social enterprises and firms whose purpose is to employ people who are disadvantaged in the labour market.

29 NIACE's Making it Work project, which began in April 2008, is developing and piloting a training pack for staff working with people with learning difficulties in the post-16 sector. The pack will include methods of embedding supported employment practices in vocational education and training. The final pack is due to be launched in March 2010. There is a great deal of interest in the project, but feedback from the events suggests that this is needed now, with many requests for further guidance and information.

> **Recommendation 1:**
>
> **30** The LSC should research existing examples of social firms and enterprises in the regions with a view to publishing a good practice guide for post-16 education and training providers that will raise awareness and encourage involvement in this area of work.

Information

31 Some regions felt it was necessary to map their current provision in order to plan, encourage more partnership working and provide useful information on what is available.

32 Feedback also suggested that people would value from a central information point that would include information and advice about resources, services and key contacts to help local and regional development of the supported employment model:

> *We need improved communications and networking with providers – could do with a centralised point to link with different initiatives – referrals both ways – some vacancies are not filled because of lack of referrals – website?*
>
> *Could all the issues that come out of the conferences be put on the Excellence Gateway so people can look at the examples and contact others?*

33 As an example of effective communications, Bristol City Council has an integrated employment and enterprise initiative which provides a database and IAG service network. This provides learners with access to the most appropriate placements and support, and is a model that could be adopted and used by other services.

> **Recommendation 2:**
>
> **34** The LSC should develop a section on the Excellence Gateway, now hosted on the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) website (www.lsis.org.uk) that focuses on employability for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and development of the supported employment model. This would be a platform for providers to obtain information and share approaches and ideas.

An inclusive model

35 Under this heading, the needs of people with mental health difficulties were considered. Such people are at more than double the risk of losing their jobs than their peers. Poor mental health can also be a major barrier to getting a job. The likelihood of moving back into work is less to do with the severity or duration of mental health problems than the multiple disadvantages people face, including practical and financial barriers.

36 Partnership working is key and has to involve service users[4] and learners, employers, providers, employment services, the voluntary and community sector, and health and social care providers. There needs to be a Person centred approach[5], not 'one size fits all'. Agencies should consider share funding to support individuals in keeping well, finding work and remaining in sustainable employment.

Vocational provision

37 Courses that are described as 'recreational' are crucial stepping stones to mainstream provision for many learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly adults. Delegates were concerned that the depletion of funding for such courses is closing a valuable route into vocational provision for these learners. Much of the discussion at the conferences focused on the 16-25 age group, although there were also regularly comments and questions that highlighted the employability needs of adult learners.

38 One theme that emerged strongly was the importance of starting the focus on employment with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities whilst they are still at school. Delegates stressed that employment must be on the agenda as key part of the young person's future in review meetings from year 9 onwards, in order to raise the expectations and broaden the horizons of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents or carers.

39 The following questions were raised by delegates:

- What is being done to raise the issue of employability with young people at their year 9 transition reviews and their year 10 review meetings?

- Does Connexions attend the reviews and ensure that employment is on the agenda?

40 It was stressed that Person centred approaches should be at the core of this area of work. It should also include early links with schools, for example introducing school-age children to the concept of employment.

41 Person centred planning and reviews using a multi-agency approach were identified as crucial to making this happen, as was funding for provision targeted at year 11 leavers (16 year olds) with learning difficulties and social and/or behavioural problems.

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[4] Service users: the term referring to disabled people who use services provided by social services or health services. These individuals may be key people running user led organisations who the Learning and Skills sector need to work in partnership with.

[5] Person-centred approaches: enable individuals with learning difficulties to have a greater say in the design and delivery of services. Valuing People (DOH, 2001) said that services should use person–centred approaches to planning for everyone who needs services.

42 Apprenticeships and E2E provision was identified as a key route into further vocational provision for young people. It was recognised that learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities could achieve on Apprenticeships, but too often are not given the opportunity of doing so. Such provision, it was argued, needs to be much more inclusive of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and take account of a range of abilities:

Pre-entry Apprenticeships are needed – not everyone can attain Level 1 or 2 but would still do a trade.

Recommendation 3:

43 The National Apprenticeship Service should make funding available and give priority to improving participation and completion rates in Apprenticeships by learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Recommendation 4:

44 The LSC should promote an inclusive supported employment model in the FE system for learners of all ages. Funding protocols are needed that will consider the use of Train to Gain and the Adult Advancement and Careers Service to reflect this inclusive model.

Foundation Learning Tier (FLT)

45 The conferences were held in the context of the publication of the *Prospectus for Progression Pathways* (LSC, 2008; revised since) and there was a keen interest in any information available on the FLT. There was a good deal of speculation as to whether the FLT could go some way towards providing a framework for an inclusive supported employment model, particularly for learners at pre-Entry Level. Delegates had many questions, concerns and observations about the FLT. This included the need for clarification about the role of progression pathways in the FLT. Things have moved on since the conferences, and many of the issues that arose were addressed in the *Progression Pathways Prospectus* release of September 2008. The quotes below provide a snapshot of issues that were raised at almost all of the events:

Will [the FLT] support the inclusion of learners currently pre-Entry and recognise personalised needs by not being too prescriptive?

FLT developments will require staff development, curriculum support and management review.

Can steps towards Level 2 be recognised as achievement targets for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in programmes such as Train to Gain?

FLT doesn't cater below Entry Level so will not help all – 13 credit level is too high. There needs to be accreditation of currently non-accredited provision.

We are worried that the focus of the FLT is Entry Level 3 upwards.

We must make sure that existing good practice is not lost in relation to non-accredited provision quality assured by RARPA (recording and recognising progress and achievement), particularly where this involves the development of soft skills that are valued by employers.

Recommendation 5:

46 The LSC, QCA and other stakeholders need to ensure that providers are kept informed and consulted on the development of the FLT and its ties with the supported employment model. They should monitor these developments within the progression pathways pilots in order to ensure that they are offering realistic routes into work.

Key theme 2: Funding

47 This theme covers:

- funding the supported employment model

- sustainable funding

- funding the curriculum

- funding the supported employment model.

48 Partnership working is essential for the development of the supported employment model and strategic level agreements are needed to enable pooling of resources:

Local strategic partnerships ought to take a holistic view and encourage major players to divert core funding to meet local needs.

49 Funding protocols for effective and sustainable collaborative working at an operational level will have to be sufficiently flexible to allow the development of a variety of approaches to establishing a supported employment model. For instance, in some localities there may be an established supported employment agency or service that can work with an FE provider. In other areas there may not be and the college will need to look to developing supported employment approaches in-house:
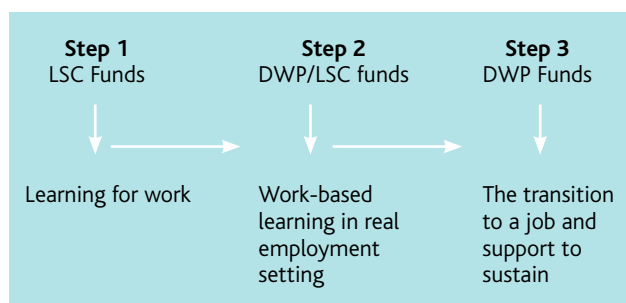
Eliminate funding difficulties between educational establishments and supported employment agencies so they can buy in services such as using supported employment agencies to take on work placement and work experience.

50 More knowledge of other funding streams (such as DWP) that can be used in conjunction with LSC funding is needed. A lack of adequate funding to support the progression into work was identified as a major issues at all of the nine Learning for Work events.

51 One suggestion was for employers to use Train to Gain funding to fund job coaches to support the learning and development of employees with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

52 The model in Table 1 was offered as a basic structure of a funding mechanism for the supported employment model.

Table 1: Suggested funding mechanism for supported employment model

Step 1 LSC Funds	**Step 2** DWP/LSC funds	**Step 3** DWP Funds
↓ →	↓ →	↓
Learning for work	Work-based learning in real employment setting	The transition to a job and support to sustain

Sustainable funding

53 Some providers in the post-16 education and training sector have many years' experience of using short-term funding such as European Social Fund (ESF) grants to develop vocational provision that helps learners with additional support needs to move from vocational courses or training into employment. Indeed, short-term funding has resourced some creative and effective transition to work provision over the years.

54 However, short-term projects can only have a limited (if any) long-term impact. The crunch always comes when funding ceases. Managers then have to consider how the provision can be sustained and embedded into their organisation's core offer. To do so, providers may:

- use accreditation to draw down funding and sustain the provision they have developed

- seek further short-term funding.

55 The second of these strategies leaves the existence of the provision fragile; in addition, a good deal of time is spent chasing resources. Pursuing different sources of short-term funding can also lead to valuable partnerships being lost through discontinuity.

56 Where accreditation is used to continue funding provision, the focus changes to accredited outcomes, rather than supporting learners to make the transition to employment. The transition to work is inevitably no longer the priority, and the measurable outcome becomes achieving accreditation. This also applies to new provision. If the supported employment model is to be successfully developed in the post-16 sector, funding needs to be long-term, sustainable and flexible, and the recognised success criteria equally accommodating. Transition to employment has to be recognised as a successful outcome, regardless of when in an individual's career this transition takes place. As one delegate put it:

> *If the learner has found employment from college before the end of his or her time there, the college should be rewarded, not penalised.*

57 We might also question the validity of only paid employment being recognised as a successful outcome: voluntary placements and social enterprise, it was argued by some delegates, can be equally valid outcomes and a means of acquiring valuable skills and work ethos.

58 Funding linked to accreditation can severely limit the opportunities for learners who will not attain qualifications at Level 1 or 2. Many such individuals are able, with support, to hold down jobs. They want to work and earn money, to lead meaningful lives and be valued members of their local communities. Often it is this same group of learners who will not be working 16 hours a week or more, which means they cannot access DWP employment programmes such as Access to Work.

59 In order for the supported employment model to include all learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the funding criteria (for instance in relation to progression pathways) will have to address a range of needs and meaningful outcomes other than accreditation. This was summed up by one delegate:

> *There should be recognition for achievement of progression from an individually focused and flexible approach which is realistically funded against the support, such as job coaching, required.*

60 Case study 1, which was prepared by the service manager at Mencap in the North East region, illustrates the obstacles to a supported employment model that can arise from current funding mechanisms.

Case study 1: Sustainable funding

Mencap's supported employment service is delivering City & Guilds 3802 (Personal Progression) through a qualification in practical life and work skills with Bishop Auckland College.

The learners enrol at the college and after a brief induction move into real work settings with local employers. There are 20 learners, all with different employers in the County Durham and Darlington areas. This approach makes it impossible to apply the true definition of a guided learning hour (glh) since all the learning takes place outside college in different locations, following a supported employment model.

Mencap currently receives the support of the local LSC to apply some flexibility to the definition of a glh. This means that Mencap and the college can claim funding to support the model they use even though it is not classroom based and the traditional register system does not apply.

When the qualification moves to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), it will need attract the equivalent of 700 glh per learner in order to deliver the qualification. If the model being used attracts a lower number of glh, providers will not have sufficient funding to provide the necessary staff to support delivery.

Mencap is currently working with City & Guilds to reformat the qualification to try to make the situation less complex. However, this reformatting will still need to incorporate the fact that the cohort of learners studying for this qualification may be in many different locations and environments, over a large geographical area, and all requiring differentiated support at different times.

It follows from this example that the LSC should consider how best to fund long-term supported employment courses that demonstrate real progression routes into paid employment or voluntary work in order to end the revolving door process currently experienced by many learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

One option would be to amend the definition of guided leaning hours or learner entitlement for long-term provision to include 'time in placement' and 'additional support', the latter covering benefits support, employer engagement, upskilling staff in the employment setting, and support for parents and carers.

61 British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)[2] saw the best use of Investment for Change funds regionally as being to support providers in rescoping their LSC-funded programmes and to develop links with supported employment agencies, ensuring these programmes can, in the future, be funded from providers' core allocations. Funding for the supported employment model must, BASE urged, become more realistic as progress so far had been slow. BASE suggested that a stronger central LSC lead was needed and that more knowledge about the FLT was key.

Funding the curriculum

62 Much of the feedback on funding focused on the need for resources to strengthen a curriculum that reflects and underpins the different stages of the supported employment model, such as dedicated placement officers. There were concerns about the high cost of individual support for work experience and real work, but this was recognised as a crucial component of provision if learners are to make a successful transition into employment, as illustrated by these comments from delegates:

Encourage work placements that are part of the curriculum and which have the potential to lead to jobs.

Work-based learning and qualifications should be incorporated into courses in colleges Courses need to be relevant to the local labour market and attract buy-in from local employers.

63 Key features of a curriculum for the supported employment model were identified as:

- independent travel training

- provision of transport, particularly for rural areas

- programmes delivered at times that reflect the workplace rather than the academic year

- fit-for-purpose provision that reflects what employers need, for example transferable and soft skills

- reflective of the local employment market

- the development of wider life skills as a shared responsibility with parents, carers, social services and learning providers.

Recommendation 6:

64 (DCSF) should extend the duty on local authorities to provide travel arrangements for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 25. It should also promote and fund training to help learners travel independently to learning and to work where possible.

Recommendation 7:

65 The LSC and QCA should clarify and produce a suitable funding model for the progression pathways to supported employment and independent living.

Recommendation 8:

66 The LSC should restate its intention that it '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 workplace and the supported employment model' (LSC, 2006:26). It should work to ensure that this is carried through in the transition to the new arrangements post-2010 with local authorities, the Young People's Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency.

Key theme 3: Partnerships and partnership working

67 This theme covers:

- partnerships and planning

- collaborative work

- challenges and benefits of partnership working.

Partnerships and planning

68 The existence of established partnerships that focus on supporting learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress varied from region to region. In some regions, collaborative work had a particularly strong presence, while in others, partnerships may need support to become stronger. One observation was that developing partnerships can be more difficult in rural areas.

69 Local area agreements were suggested as a framework that could support planning across agencies and business partnerships. The creation of a process toolkit to create an 'engagement partnership strategy' for collaborative working was another suggestion.

70 It was broadly recognised that a local partnership to support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into work could provide:

- a single point of contact for employers, avoiding a fragmented system and lots of different organisations approaching the same employers

- clarification of networks and employer availability locally

- cross-organisation quality standards.

Collaborative work

71 Collaborative work by post-16 providers with organisations outside the FE system is essential to the development of a supported employment model. Partnerships at a strategic level within and outside the sector can support existing expertise and develop capacity.

72 Delegates at the Learning for Work events were clear that effective strategic partnerships are an important support for collaborative implementation at the local level. Joint commissioning of services by key senior people in organisations who can make strategic decisions for instance social services and health trusts was one example mentioned. This strategic and parallel operational partnership work is the key theme of the cross-governmental strategy Progression through Partnership (HM Government 2007).

73 The London conference provided an opportune moment for the region to launch its strategy for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LSC – Learning for Living and Working in London 2008) The statements of support at the start of this strategy illustrate the range of partners involved, and suggest which postholders should be included at a strategic level in driving this work forwards. They included:

- Jobcentre Plus

- London Central Connexions Service

- London councils

- London Development Agency

- Care Services Improvement Partnership

- London East Advice Partnership

- Skill, the national bureau for students with disabilities

- London primary care trusts

- London Skills and Employment Board

- Valuing People Support Team.

Challenges and benefits of partnership working

74 Whilst partnership working can be a challenge, delegates were well aware of the danger of working in isolation and not accessing existing expertise in the field. Indeed, one of the key points that colleagues from BASE made at each event was 'not to reinvent the wheel'. There is a wealth of expertise in supported employment already and education and training providers have no need to try to learn to do this themselves: rather they should collaborate with existing supported employment agencies and services.

75 Another danger of not working in partnership is, in the words of one participant, that:

competition between providers of services is actually reducing opportunities for individuals, not increasing them. We must work in true partnership.

76 Many of the regions stressed the importance of working with, and learning from, existing partnerships such as:

- local employment partnerships

- mental health and employment partnerships

- learning disability partnership boards

- valuing people regional advisors

- LSC provider networks

- local government partnerships.

77 Further refinement of partnerships is needed to focus on issues such as where the broker role sits within existing partnerships and the need to change the mindset concerning funding:

Partnerships come together to look for money. That needs to change, and we need to be better at utilising the resources we already have.

78 Regional partnerships were particularly evident at the East of England event. A Jobcentre Plus contact who is an active member of a local employment partnership explained that the forum:

- offers extra support to employers to encourage them to employ people with disabilities or those from disadvantaged groups

- supports employers and provides links into DWP employment programmes.

79 In the same region, a colleague from the local care services improvement partnership is also a member of a mental health and employment partnership that has four priorities:

- exemplar employers

- vocational services

- commissioning

- employer engagement.

80 Several of BASE's members already work in partnership with education and training providers. More are keen to do this and work with providers to help refocus vocational provision and adopt a supported employment model. BASE suggested that post-16 education and training provision has to change so that it:

- provides where required specialist programmes for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that involve an element of in-work support

- builds on effective practice

- develops partnerships with supported employment agencies that have considerable knowledge and expertise in this area, rather than trying to reinvent the wheel as far as supported employment practices are concerned.

81 Delegates across all regions expressed an eagerness to develop partnerships. Suggestions for taking this forwarded included:

Learning for Living and Work partnership forums or specific supported employment forums could develop this type of provision.

Could local employment partnerships have learning difficulties and/or disabilities brokers, working both with education providers and employers?

Recommendation 9:

82 The LSC, local authorities and Jobcentre Plus should action objective 7 in the *Progression through Partnership* strategy to 'agree new strategic planning protocols between LSC, local authorities and Jobcentre [Plus] to include specific plans for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities' (HM Government, 2007:27).

Recommendation 9:

83 Regional LSCs should ensure that their employability and learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities networks and partnerships include Jobcentre Plus as a key partner in the development of the supported employment model.

Key theme 4: Employers

84 This theme covers:

- employer-led approach

- raising awareness

- barriers.

Employer-led approach

85 Remploy is a national organisation that provides employment services and employment to people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and people experiencing complex barriers to work. Remploy's head of learning spoke at each of the nine regional conferences and outlined the employer-led approach that is fundamental to Remploy's way of working.

86 Remploy starts by researching the needs of the local labour market. It works with several colleges where it uses labour market information supplied by the college to influence the curriculum. In this way, learners can develop skills for jobs that are available in their local area.

87 This approach was widely welcomed by delegates, who recognised that the connection between providers and employment needs must improve and that more courses should meet local labour market needs. However, it was stressed that this approach had to be carefully balanced with person-centred approaches to working with individuals.

88 Providers were keen to know how best to develop stronger links with employers and Jobcentre Plus, especially in relation to learners' aspirations.

89 There was a recognition of the need for coherent, co-ordinated regional and local systems for targeting employers in order to join up all the relevant learning and skills agendas, such as Apprenticeships, E2E and Train to Gain and to make sure that learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are included.

Raising awareness

90 Employers, it was felt, needed educating about the benefits of employing people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for example by:

- promoting positive images of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at work

- giving employers more information about the in-work support available on DWP employment programmes

- educating employers on disability-friendly recruitment processes

- hosting skills fairs to get employers, training providers and learners all in one place.

91 The LSC was urged to lead by example and employ more staff with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In areas where local authorities and the NHS are the main employers, they too could lead by example.

92 At the East of England conference, delegates were particularly inspired by a presentation by Andy Kent on his encouragement to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to train and work at his garage (see Case study 3 following paragraph 110). They felt that he was a good role model for other employers, and that his enthusiasm and commitment would encourage other employers to recruit people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and provide work experience placements for them.

93 At the West Midlands conference delegates felt that Shelforce could offer similar awareness-raising to other employers (see Case study 4 following paragraph 110).

Barriers

94 Several providers reported that their attempts to persuade employers to offer work experience placements were thwarted when employers said they could not meet health and safety requirements in the workplace if they employed people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It was recognised that this is probably illegal and such attitudes should be challenged. However, this would not help with the immediate matter of finding placements that may lead to jobs, since providers rely on the goodwill of employers.

95 Speaking at the London event, a spokesperson from the supported employment organisation Sabre & Associates questioned the common perception that employers are the problem. Instead, he argued, the challenge is to make work an expected outcome for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from an early age, integrating employment as a core part of life planning as it is for their non-disabled peers. He went on to argue that it was unreasonable to expect employers to offer employment as an extension of activity-based therapies or purely as an occupational activity. The onus is for supported employment practices to offer the right advice and expertise so that people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported to:

aim high, aim for a lifetime of 'work' not a lifetime of 'work experience' or 'worklessness'.

96 Research undertaken by Remploy in the West Midlands reported the following five key messages in relation to employers:

- Employers are not the key barrier. Most are open to the employment of people or learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but would like support services to be available

- Employer-related barriers can be addressed through existing service provision

- Most employers would like job applicants to have had some kind exposure to the real work of work

- Curriculum content needs to match the primary skills needs of employers

- Employers see training in the workplace as important and would value qualifications more if they felt they were more relevant to their business.

Recommendation 11:

97 The LSC needs to build on the contribution of Remploy and BASE and their employer contacts to run employer events that explore how the good practice exercised by large employers can influence medium- to small-sized enterprises in employing more people with disabilities.

Recommendation 12:

98 The LSC skills teams at national and regional levels should engage with this agenda by nominating individuals to take the work forward. Such work would include better involvement by learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Apprenticeships and Train to Gain.

4: The Employer Message

99 The employers who spoke at each of the conferences represented a range of organisations, from a small car repair business to a multinational high street retailer and a university. Some of the businesses represented had a particular focus on employing people with disabilities. Others spoke about their experiences of employing people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as part of a strategy to encourage the development of a diverse workforce.

100 In four of the LSC regions, employer representatives were recruited with the help of Remploy, while four other regions recruited their own speakers. At the London event, Sabre & Associates, an organisation that runs training in supported employment practices and disability equality, presented the employer perspective.

101 Employers were asked to base their presentation on the title: 'The employer voice: What do employers want and what can they do?'

Employability skills

102 Employers highlighted the importance of general employability skills such as good interpersonal skills, knowing when and who to ask for help, problem-solving and teamwork. Specific desirable qualities were:

- punctuality and regular attendance

- trustworthiness and honesty

- a positive attitude: *A can-do approach to work can be carried through to job tasks and has a positive impact on reliability*

- adaptability and teamwork

- a desire to learn.

103 Research by Remploy in the West Midlands produced the ranking of qualities shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Highest ranked skills (rated as 'very important') by employers

Timekeeping	(74%)
Positive attitude	(73%)
Attending work regularly	(69%)
Willingness to learn new skills	(56%)
Communications	(51%)
Getting to work	(49%)
Literacy	(40%)
Appearance	(30%)
Numeracy	(28%)
Technical skills	(15%)

Source: Remploy research, 2007.

104 Employers want an individual to have the minimum skills and qualifications required to carry out the job, such as essential IT skills or skills for professional roles and trades. Employers will also look at transferable skills and those acquired informally. One example was that if an individual had been out of work but involved in a parish council, it could be accepted that he or she has experience of management and communication skills.

105 Ability and willingness to learn quickly to keep up with the pace of change in the workplace were emphasised. It was recognised that people with learning difficulties may need to involve support workers to help them if the employer cannot offer all the support that is needed. Union learning representatives may have a role in ensuring that in-house training is accessible or in offering advice and guidance if an individual wants to return to college part time to update his or her skills. Updating or improving skills at college whilst in a job was recognised by employers as an important way for employees to develop and progress in their careers.

Employer motivation

106 The motivation for employers to employ people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was explained as a sense of a corporate social responsibility and a commitment to work positively in the wider community.

107 Marks & Spencer (M&S) also saw it as a good public relations exercise and a key part of its strategic plan. M&S offers short-term work experience placements and recognises the mutual benefits for employer and employee alike (see the learner presentation for the South East in the Learner Voice report). Employees act as buddies or mentors to individuals on placement. These buddies benefit from their involvement as they learn new skills in working with people and, in the words of the speaker from M&S: *it makes them feel motivated by the involvement.*

108 Employers were also motivated to employ people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as they can:

- access a pool of untapped recruits

- add value to the business since a diverse workforce will draw on a variety of life experiences and this can help them respond better to customers who are themselves from diverse backgrounds.

109 As one employer explained, the feedback he received through employing people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was a motivation in itself:

> *It was very rewarding and made me feel that I had really achieved something worthwhile. How often are you told, as I was, that you have changed the course of someone's life?*

What can employers do? case studies

110 There were several examples of employers taking a proactive approach to recruiting and supporting people with disabilities in work. These are described in Case studies 2-4.

Case study 2: Partnership with the FE sector (North East region)

Dickinson Dees (DD) is a law firm that has close links with Northern Counties College's employability project. Work placement opportunities in the administration and IT departments are identified. A representative of DD goes into the college and talks to students about the placements. Students visit the firm, and practice interviews are run for work placement students. The placements run for six weeks and DD staff act as buddies for students on placements. Key factors in the success of this scheme were:

- a strong partnership with the college

- real work

- use of the usual recruitment process

- reasonable adjustments for learners with disabilities

- enthusiasm on the part of DD staff.

The speaker urged that it takes time and proper planning to build a long-term relationship with a college.

Case study 3: A positive philosophy (East of England)

Andy Kent is disabled and runs his own garage. He sees his role as an employer to give people chances and provides work experience placements to disadvantaged young people. His philosophy is based on 'one act of reasonable kindness.'

His is a small, family-run business. Work experience placements give young people the opportunity to come to work and be with others. Individuals with a range of disabilities such as cerebral palsy, mental health difficulties, head injury and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are offered placements. One 16 year old learnt to travel independently through his placement. Homelessness is regarded as a disability and one young man working on placement at the garage now heads up an advice service for homeless people. Other young people on placement move into the motor mechanics trade or go on to other jobs.

Case study 4: Individualised support (West Midlands)

Shelforce, which manufacturers uPVC products such as doors and windows, describes itself as a supported business with a positive attitude to employing disabled people. It regards part of its role as empowering people through the support it provides. Individual support plans focus on the person's abilities. This non-deficit approach shows a strong, person-centred approach. As an employer specialising in the supported employment approach, Shelforce recognises that it had a part to play in educating other employers.

Practical suggestions for employers were:

- link training to the needs of the individual

- look at recruitment processes: interviews are not the only way to recruit.

- learn from people with disabilities both so they understand their needs better and to inform their understanding of customers with disabilities and so offer them a better service

- work in partnership with individuals and support workers to look at how adapted roles can be carved from existing roles using job analysis techniques

- adapt the environment and provide training to meet individual learning styles

- measure performance appropriately using external support staff if necessary.

Raising awareness

111 One message that came over strongly was that employers can lead by example. Employers with experience of employing people with disabilities emphasised the importance of raising awareness with other employers so that they are better informed about disability law, the number of people with disabilities in labour market, and their increasing importance. There also needs to be better awareness of the support available from disability employment advisors, job coaches and the DWP Access to Work programme.

112 As one speaker explained:

For people with disabilities to get work, they need to be employment confident and employers will develop confidence in them. This is a cyclical process.

Changing attitudes and practice

113 Employers need to understand the social model of disability and work with these principles. There has to be a workplace culture that values abilities rather than seeing disabilities and perceives people for what they are, recognising that everyone is different. Challenging stereotypes about what people can do is key, as is questioning policy and procedures that work against people who are disadvantaged. Small changes, for example to standard recruitment processes, can make a big difference.

114 Employers need to:

- have policies and procedures to allow for reasonable adjustments and identify the adjustments needed by working with the individual

Section 5: Reflections

115 These perspectives from the representatives of Remploy, BASE and NIACE reflect their involvement in the Learning for Work events, and show how this has supported developments in their own work as well as the work of regional LSCs.

Head of learning, Remploy

116 The head of learning at Remploy, who spoke at all nine conferences, followed up afterwards with all the employers that attended. Feedback was very positive and employers were pleased to have been involved. Many approved of the move away from a solely Person centred approach towards a rebalancing with employers' needs – personalised solutions within an employment framework. People said this was more pragmatic and realistic than purely personalised approaches tend to be.

117 Following the events, the head of learning has been asked to:

- speak at a QIA event in Kent for local providers

- speak at a local learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities conference organised by LSC Luton and Bedfordshire

- meet the consultant working with the London region to help develop its employability strategy for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- meet the regional director for the North West to talk about Remploy's plans for the North West, with a view to working together

- join the learner progression sub-group in the West Midlands to help move the West Midlands strategy on.

118 This supports the view that the regions are keen to progress their relationship with Remploy on the back of the Learning for Work events.

119 Several organisations new to Remploy have also made contact since the events and while it is early days to judge how effective these new contacts will be, it has certainly helped promote Remploy's profile and people's perceptions of what Remploy does.

120 The perception is that some regions are focused on strategy whilst others seem more intent on local initiatives and pilots. In most regions, there are examples of good practice. What seems to be missing is any kind of strategy

to capture this best practice to enable it to be shared regionally.

121 In all regions, there seemed to be a real need for clarity on who is doing what, who is funding what and so on. In the view of the head of learning at Remploy, each region would benefit from a thorough mapping exercise involving the LSC, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions and the voluntary sector to understand what is happening in each area. The LSC could assist this by making a standard template website available that could be populated and maintained locally.

Overall messages

122 In summary, the overall perceptions from the head of learning at Remploy are as follows:

- There is still a large gap between learning providers and supported employment providers and what they know and understand of each other. The conferences and their follow-up have made a start but there is a long way to go

- The issue of parent and carers is huge and at present there seems not to be any particular approach or strategy emerging for this

- There is a need for huge cultural change across all providers to help develop relationships and build trust. Everyone talks about partnerships but there are only pockets of evidence of where it really does work effectively. This has to change

- There is nowhere near enough focus on employers and the lack of involvement of employers in the agenda is a great concern. The debate needs to move on and engage employers to get their input

- There are talented people in the sector, with huge expertise, but the culture is one where funding is blamed for many of the problems. People seem frightened to take risks, and it is possible that the funding regime has unintentionally encouraged this. One key message for the LSC, therefore, is to give providers space and flexibility rather than over-managing provision, in order to spur innovation and creativity.

Representative, BASE

123 BASE is the trade association for providers of supported employment. Representatives from BASE gave a presentation at each of the regional conferences. The presentation outlined BASE's role and what it can offer the post-16 education and training sector in terms of developing the supported employment model. BASE is enthusiastic about the LSC's Learning for Living and Work strategy and particularly welcomes the emphasis on job outcomes.

Overall messages

124 The BASE representative had the following points to make when reflecting on the events:

- There was a sense that the education and supported employment sectors do not mix

- More needs to be done so that those working in education understand supported employment and the type of support it can provide as well as the range of other services available such as Access to Work

- It is important to raise the expectations of those working with learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities about the great potential these learners have to enter and hold down sustainable employment

- Public services need to lead by example and employ more people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- From the supported employment viewpoint, there is frustration with the lack of clarity about how provision is to be funded.

Development officer, NIACE

125 Generally feedback was positive, and the opportunity to network and pick up new regional contacts was valuable. Since the events, the consultant working with LSC London has approached NIACE and it is now supporting his work on the employment manifesto for the London region.

Overall messages

126 NIACE's development officer had the following general points to make following the events:

- When we talk about employment for people with disabilities, while the end point ought to be the same, the journey is going to be very different

- We need to challenge assumptions: for example, there is a prevailing belief that people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities want specialised, discrete services and support, but what most people actually want is good service from established mainstream providers such as Jobcentre Plus and Connexions.

We may need to clarify who the client group for these organisations is – it was disappointing that only a few people from them were present at the events

- There is no clear idea of who is doing what in each region. It is necessary to have better liaison between FE and Jobcentre Plus staff, and between vocational rehabilitation staff in health care with learning providers, and so on. The present system sees services duplicated and learners missing out on the financial or other support they are entitled to receive

- Similarly, people on the frontline often know very little about other services (and even, in some cases, services offered by their own organisation). The value of events like this is to get people networking and talking, and thinking beyond their own world

- Although they certainly exist, it is hard to locate examples of good practice, and there is no central point to find them. These could be used to develop benchmarks or the features of exemplary provision of supported employment

- There is a need for research on expectations and success, and also follow-up on new ideas, such as the emphasis in the North East on social enterprises

- The events indicated a hunger for this kind of input, so the next step must be employer-focused conferences or workshops.

Regional Learning for Work events and updates

This section summarises the key points from each region's conference and provides an update on action taken in respect of employability and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the three months following.

LSC region and conference date	Regional context	Regional priorities for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Exemplar provision: key features	Update (Jun-Aug 2008)
East of England **21 April 2008**	• Our implementation framework (LSC East of England, 2007) complements the national priorities (LSC, 2006). • The regional commissioning plan procured vocational opportunities for learners including work experience from Entry Level onwards, supported and open employment, and job coaching and mentoring. • Subregional partnerships with supported employment agencies are planning a more coherent offer with better spread across the region.	• Improve the mix and balance of provision. • Support providers in developing progression routes. • By 2010, have a fully qualified workforce in the FE system. • Increase employer engagement, identified in the 2007 needs analysis as a particular challenge.	**NIACE, National Mental Health Development Unit (NMHDU), Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) and LSC** • Promoting participation and success in learning by people with mental health difficulties. • Linking the regional action plan to our single equality scheme. **City College Norwich** • New regional centre for learners with autistic spectrum and Asperger's. **Hertford Regional College and RNIB** • Supporting staff working with blind and partially sighted learners, e.g. on equipment and in visual awareness training. • Learner assessment, guidance and counselling.	• We will work with education business partnerships to develop links with employers. • Further efforts will be made to develop work-based links to meet the skills demand. • We will build on successful social enterprise projects. • There will be more help for providers developing supported work environments as a route to employment. • A pilot partnership with the third sector will extend supported employment opportunities.

LSC region and conference date	Regional context	Regional priorities for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Exemplar provision: key features	Update (Jun-Aug 2008)
East of England 21 April 2008 (continued)	• We are piloting a resource allocation tool to explore the use of individualised budgets and direct payments, in collaboration with adult social care and the local authority. • We are brokering links between providers, housing associations and social enterprises to improving access to independent living and employability skills.		**Cambridge, Peterborough and Huntingdon Colleges** • Project in social enterprise.	
East Midlands 8 Feb 2008	• Our mission statement is 'Better skills, better jobs and better lives, helping people with learning difficulties and disabilities to help themselves.' • There is a strong awareness of local labour market conditions, and recognition that these need to be communicated to providers and learners.	• Develop a curriculum that supports disabled learners in progressing to work. • Meet more complex and diverse needs. • Support for transition from school to college and beyond.	**Derby College** • Job shop for disabled learners. • Transition officers supervise work experience and transition to supported employment/voluntary work. **Leicester County Council** • Stepping Out focuses on independent living skills, community engagement and transition planning for post-19 learners for whom FE is not appropriate. **RNIB College Loughborough and Loughborough FE College** • Specialist support for learners with moderate learning difficulties to access mainstream provision. **Lincoln College and Mencap** • Supported work experience offers transition planning to appropriate employment.	• One point raised at conference was the need for an employment broker for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and who might fund and recruit to this role. • At a strategic level, there is analysis of demand and supply, and better partnership working. • Entitlement (funding) is a key part of strategic planning.

LSC region and conference date	Regional context	Regional priorities for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Exemplar provision: key features	Update (Jun-Aug 2008)
East Midlands 8 Feb 2008 (continued)			**Leicester City Council** • Embedding assistive technology into mainstream and discrete programmes. **Canto Ltd** • Careers programme to increase employer engagement, job trials and participation in Apprenticeships. **EMFEC** • Disability placement officer liaises with employers, identifying required skills and matching needs. • A database is under development.	
London 29 Jan 2008	• There has been only a slow rise in the employment levels of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, something that might in part at least be attributed to low expectations and aspirations. • Similar models of job coaching/brokerage are used across the region, but different funding models and sources continue to produce discontinuities, for example in FE and DWP funding streams to support direct payments. • There are discontinuities when clients change providers, and advice is not consistent across the region.	• Embed a learner-centred approach. • More recent priorities have focused on the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) and providers establishing robust partnerships with supported employment providers.	**South London Learning Partnership** • Partnership project to understand what learners need to gain and sustain employment. **Barnet College** • Support for people with mental health difficulties entering learning and employment. **Lambeth College** • Whole-college approach to employability. • Social enterprises. • Flexible provision. • Evidencing learners' employability skills.	• Two models have been identified: the large provider model (e.g. Remploy's plans to open eight employment centres) and a small, organic network of supported employment agencies. We propose to map both onto our existing network of learning and skills centres of expertise. • We have received 15 bids for Skills for Jobs funding. We are exploring how we can better engage with Apprenticeships, and plan a pilot in autumn.

LSC region and conference date	Regional context	Regional priorities for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Exemplar provision: key features	Update (Jun-Aug 2008)
London **29 Jan 2008** **(continued)**			**City Lit** ● Pilot of skills for work classes. ● Partnership with three local boroughs. **Merton College and London West Works** ● Licence to Skill, a tool to help multi-agency work tackle low skills/ worklessness and support employability and inclusion. **North London Consortium** ● Employer toolkit covering disability awareness training, health and safety, assistive technology, strategies for integration and flexible schedules. **Lewisham College** ● Remploy employment advisor hosted in college. ● Identification of learners with high support needs. ● Personalised transition plans.	● Our employability manifesto will link employability models with responsive funding mechanisms, and propose a cross-London model of brokerage and (possibly) entitlement.
North East **6 March 2008**	● We launched a regional employment framework in 2006 with the aim of 'better enabling inactive/disengaged people to move into and progress in sustainable jobs with training'.	● Focus on employability in the current economy. ● Understand the labour market and analyse sector skills needs, skill shortages and recruitment difficulties. ● Align services to support the individual's journey from training through work placement and into sustainable employment.	**Social Firms and Enterprise (SFENE)** ● Employment opportunities with social enterprises. ● Regional entrepreneurs club for disabled people offers training, networking, information and practical help.	● SFENE, Economic Partnerships Ltd and COPE Ltd have developed a website for providers, learners and carers to access information on social firms and resources to support entrepreneurial activity.

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North East 6 March 2008 (continued)	• We have combined strategic programmes, including the ESF regional framework 2007 2013, single programme funding 2008 2011, DWP commissioning strategy and LSC's Skills for Jobs. • Demand is greatest from young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who consider help with gaining work to be the most important reason for continuing in post-16 learning.	• Meet needs and raise aspirations, as per our strategy (LSC NE, 2007).	**Bishop Auckland College and Mencap** • Evaluating models of pathways. • Links with local employers. • Real work environments leading to employment/voluntary work. **East Durham and Houghall College** • Transition pilots combine learning with support for prospective employers in catering and hospitality, care and retail. **New College Durham** • Identifying barriers to employment. • Meaningful work experience. • Appropriate skills-led training. • Support to overcome the barriers. **Newcastle College** • Real work environment in recycling facilities supports learners gaining skills in a safe and structured setting. **Remploy Sunderland and Tees Valley** • Defining employer demand. • Mapping research findings against curriculum content. • Transition planning using the same findings to prepare learners. • Full-time advisor works with colleges.	• Train the Trainer was an SFENE-sponsored project to train day-centre officers and learning support workers. • A learning providers' forum allows professionals to share experiences. • An employability project is being rolled out across the region. Finchale College is bidding to extend this offer to learners with autism spectrum disorders. • A new employment agency, run as a social firm, is getting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into jobs in the ethical business and health and social care sectors. • Middlesbrough Council has outsourced day-care services to independent social firms, beginning with pilot projects to gauge success.

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North East 6 March 2008 (continued)			**Stockton Riverside College** • Identifying work opportunities and attitudes to employees with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. • Employer management information system cross-references learners with provision. • Personalised learning. **Percy Hedley Foundation and Northern Counties College** • Developing employability opportunities for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. • Close liaison with the Employers' Forum on Disability. **Finchale College** • Engagement of learners with mental health difficulties using a learning foundation programme and transition support plan.	
North West 24 Jan 2008	• Leitch (2006) and LSC (2006) form the basis for the NW regional action plan (LSC NW, 2007). • We have 49,000 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, with over 40,000 of these in FE colleges.	• Invest in provision, understand demand and build capacity with particular reference to the NEET group and those for whom there is no local provision. • Raise the quality of provision. • Increase economic participation through sustainable employment, underpinned by partnership work with Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and employers.	**Bolton Community College** • Job coaching. • Supported employment officer. • Progression paths. • Links with adult services.	• We have issued invitations to tender for £5 million (ESF) to establish partnerships between supported employment organisations, providers and other agencies.

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North West **24 Jan 2008** **(continued)**			**Blackpool College** • Links with social services/agencies. • Strong supported employment links. **Tameside Supported Employment** • Identifying gaps in pathways. • Council work placement system. **Coppice** • Identifying gaps between curriculum and employment/FE provision. **St Helen's College** • Realistic work environments. • Job skills bureau. • Connexions advisor. • Links between college and special schools. • Links with chamber of commerce, with designated staff member sourcing work placements. • Multi-agency work. **Cheshire Disability Services** • Use of volunteers to stretch funding. **Bury Supported Employment** • LLN curriculum in the workplace. • Tutors visit employers.	• £800,000 of Investment to Change funding has developed partnerships in Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Cheshire and links between providers and a national supported employment organisation in Greater Merseyside. • A training café in Warrington is operating in partnership with the local authority and MacIntyre. There are plans to sustain the café as a commercial enterprise. • A recurring theme at conference was the need for multi-agency work, and the difficulties of marrying funding across organisations. • LSC to consider allocating further ESF to extend supported employment projects across the region.

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North West 24 Jan 2008 (continued)			• Relevant curriculum. • Real work skills. • Cost-effective one-to-one learning. **Nelson and Colne College** • Learners find their own work placements. • Partnership work with Connexions and social services.	
South East 24 April 2008	• We emphasise employability and support in all our projects. • The role of providers is central to our vision. Providers have demonstrated good practice in building capacity, increasing participation and developing progression opportunities.	• *Action for Inclusion*, our inclusion strategy (LSC SE, 2007) aims to extend the choice of high-quality learning opportunities by embedding inclusive learning and building capacity.	**Chichester College, Breakaway Supported Employment Service and The Aldingbourne Trust** • Use of national guidance (LSC, 2005). • Help for learners 'stuck' in provision to take first steps towards employment. • Individualised support in work environments to overcome difficulties of knowledge transfer across settings. • Impact on college culture. • Information about the supported employment process. **Newbury College and Pathways to Employment** • Employability for people with mental health difficulties. • Two learners from the project took part in the conference workshop.	• We will expand and roll out existing employment-focused projects, supporting 15 projects involving the voluntary and community sector and supported employment agencies. These projects involve a full range of learners, including those with mental health problems. • Employer engagement and sourcing work experience opportunities are ongoing. Provider groups will disseminate good practice in this area. • We are improving communications between providers and supported employment agencies: BASE is assisting in this, for example by attending Action for Inclusion events.

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South East 24 April 2008 (continued)			**Nescot College and local employers** ● Providing work experience with local employers. **Hastings College and Employment Services** ● FE provider and disability employment services working together from pre-Entry to progression and exit planning.	● We are mapping post-16 provision and employment agencies beside available progression routes. ● Sustainable funding streams may be sought by increasing the flexibility of regional funding and additional learning support, and using the integrated employment and skills programme. In the longer term, this may address the difficulties of sustaining support through transition into sustainable employment and support in the workplace. ● Future plans will have more emphasis on employment-related projects and capacity issues.
South West 12 March 2008	● LSC South West commissioned the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) to carry out a needs analysis. This informed our regional strategy (LSC South West, 2007) and helped allocate priorities. ● The quality and accessibility of provision varies by area. Data was used well locally, but not across the region. ● Work experience was highly valued but poorly resourced.	● Work harder at multi-agency work. ● Ensure value for money, but flexibility in meeting demand. ● Address gaps in provision. ● Share expertise. ● Focus on progression to employment or pathway provision. ● The learner voice is valued: the regional steering group has a shadow learners' group whose representative attends its meetings.	**Remploy and City of Bristol College** ● Identifying labour market trends and skills needs. ● Remploy advisor hosted inside college and integrated with Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) team. ● Provision of local employment IAG to learners. ● Profiling learner skills and aspirations. ● Managing supply and demand. ● Transition to employment via aligned services.	● Feedback on the event was largely positive, with delegates confirming that they had gained new ideas for partnership work, knowledge about Investment for Change funding and valuable networking opportunities. ● Regional priorities have been reviewed and refined. We are focused on better alignment of adult day care and college provision, and better transition from school to FE, and FE to independent living employment.

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South West 12 March 2008 (continued)	• We expect a strong and increasing demand from learners with complex support needs.		• In-work support, including Train to Gain brokering. • Mainstreaming and long-term relationships established. **Somerset and Torbay** • The Getting a Life project is helping achieve the ambitions of *Progression Through Partnership* (HM Government, 2007). **North Somerset Council, Weston College and the Brandon Trust** • Project to develop a B&B facility as a location for life skills training. **Swindon Council** • Opportunities for learners in a social enterprise making wood pellet fuel.	• Following analysis, we will be looking to fill gaps in provision, develop staff and build capacity and supported employment opportunities. • Enhancing specialist 16-18 provision in partnership with local authorities and schools will be a priority. • The improvement strategy includes brokering partnerships to lead improvement, involving LSIS. • FLT will be piloted across a range of providers. • Continuing needs analysis and combining data will help to align the regional strategy with national policy directives.
West Midlands 10 March 2008	• Following a strategic review of provision, LSC West Midlands commissioned Remploy to look at improving transition from FE to supported employment. • In response to national policy (LSC, 2006), our implementation plan was released at the regional supported employment conference in March 2008.	• Support learner progression into employment, economic participation and independent living. • Networking, finding information about supported employment, promoting learners across LSC-funded programmes and linking with other agencies are all important features of our implementation strategy.		• A subgroup of our review group will focus on learner progression and will have representatives from the LSC skills team, BASE, local authorities, Remploy and learners.

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West Midlands 10 March 2008 (continued)				• The group has a remit to look at agency roles and responsibilities, learner eligibility, and meeting the objectives of the West Midlands implementation plan. This commits to working with providers to make specialist support available in mainstream provision. • We will be implementing the findings of the progression pathways pilot and sharing guidance and best practice to help inform provider plans for supported employment and economic participation. • We also aim to engage more directly with Jobcentre Plus.
Yorkshire and the Humber 5 February 2008	• Investment for Change funds have been used to fund pathfinder provision on enhancing employability. • The 2007/08 pathfinder, Progression to Employment, is based in York and North Yorkshire and aims to develop a model of work experience and progression to employment.	• Calderdale Council and the supported employment agency Workwise are running a 2006/07 pathfinder, Re-think. • Partnership working has been identified as a strength. • Supported employment is an important part of the regional plan.	**The Humber** • Subregional project in staff development. • Innovative and sustainable activities to promote employer engagement and offers of work placements and jobs. • Increased access to supported employment opportunities for learners by developing employability and personal skills.	• We have used Investment for Change funds to develop awareness-raising projects, including funding a pathfinder project. Workwise has presented lessons and good practice from the project at regional events.

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Yorkshire and the Humber 5 February 2008 (continued)			**Remploy and Leeds FE College** • Joint supported employment project. **Calderdale Council and Workwise** • Improving transition and curriculum planning. • Customised learning for 16-25 year olds. • Raising quality and increasing choice. • Giving employers and learners the skills to improve productivity, employability and social cohesion. • Joint approaches. • Engaging parents, carers and the community. • Developing and promoting work-based learning. **Mencap, Remploy and Park Lane College** • Personalised approaches developed via the Now project. • Effective multi-agency planning. • Joint Remploy projects in Yorkshire and the Humber. • Employment advisor based in Park Lane College, with a second working with several other colleges in a light-touch approach.	• A second pathfinder partnership with Remploy in Leeds and Huddersfield is embedding supported employment and improving transition rates to sustained employment. This has produced an employer research report and work on transition planning and support for learners in college. • We have funded subregional projects to develop and implement a model of work experience and progression. • The LSC has encouraged providers to link more effectively with employment advisory services. • We have seen good development of transition planning and collaborative work between schools and post-16 providers in some subregions.

Notes

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