



Skills Funding Agency

# Supporting learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities to Access European Social Fund Priority 2 and 5 Provision

Evidence report August 2013

January 2014



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# Supporting learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access European Social Fund Priority 2 and 5 provision

Evidence report August 2013

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## Executive Summary

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This research aims to gather evidence in order to explain the apparent under-representation of learners declaring a learning difficulty and/or disability (LDD) in ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision that was identified during the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the programme. Alongside this the work aims to interpret the evidence into relevant actions and guidance to support the learning sector to address the apparent under-representation of learners with an LDD on ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision.

The methodology for this work consisted of: a rapid evidence assessment; analysis of Individualised Learner Record data; an online survey of providers; eleven qualitative interviews with providers and staff from the Skills Funding Agency; five provider case studies; and three action learning events.

### Key findings

It is difficult to estimate non-disclosure of LDD and whether there is an issue of under-representation because different statistical sources give different estimates of the number of people with an LDD in the working population. However the LDD disclosure rate for ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision in 2011/12 is approximately the same as that cited in the ESF Priority 2 and 5 EIA and in line with the rate of declaration of LDD among apprentices and among employer responsive provision during the same period. This would suggest that there is something about being in employment, or having been recently been in employment, that mitigates against disclosure.

### Engaging learners with LDD (in employment)

There was low awareness among providers that the target group for ESF Priority 2 and 5 funding was people in employment. Several providers held Response to Redundancy contracts under ESF Priority 2 and 5, which could have made the

message of target groups more blurred as these contracts were designed to engage learners who were facing redundancy or who had recently been made redundant (and were in receipt of benefits). Even among those providers who had contracts for workplace learning, we saw greater use of the funding to support people out of work than might be expected. Providers increasingly have flexibility to use funding to support the needs of the learners and employers in their locality rather than being required to respond to centrally set targets. It is possible that these flexibilities have made it more difficult for the ESF Priority 2 and 5 funding stream to retain its distinctiveness among providers.

Providers had either engaged with employers directly or through referrals from other organisations. Among those providers that engaged employers directly, there was a feeling that this had become particularly challenging in the economic climate of the past few years. In general, providers tended to use their existing employer networks to engage employers with whom they had a relationship and a track record. Providers offering Response to Redundancy contracts under ESF Priority 2 or 5 spoke about primarily engaging employers through referrals from partner organisations.

## Encouraging LDD disclosure

Providers reported several factors influencing learners' disclosure of an LDD. In particular, the perceived negative stigma around LDD could discourage some potential learners from disclosing. Different groups (for example different ethnic communities) may also have different perceptions of different conditions (such as mental health).

It was also important for all parties to have an understanding of what constitutes an LDD. For learners in particular this was connected with how they perceived themselves and their condition. It was also associated with awareness of different types of support available and therefore what benefits could be associated with disclosure.

Providers also identified that fear of discrimination or previous experience of discrimination could affect how willing learners were to disclose their LDD. This was a factor for learners of all ages and employment statuses as discrimination or negative experiences could have happened at schools, other training providers or in the workplace. Experience of discrimination in the past can affect confidence and instil fear in learners that their LDD will count against them, hold them back or that their confidentiality will be broken.

Providers reported that the system or process associated with attracting learners and enrolment onto courses was influential, either positively or negatively, in encouraging LDD disclosure.

## Recommendations for providers

The following recommendations should be read alongside the guidance for providers produced to accompany this evidence report: *Engaging individuals with learning difficulties and disabilities in workplace learning*.

### Engaging employers

ESF Priority 2 and 5 seems to have had difficulty in directly engaging employers on LDD issues and identifying prospective learners in the workplace. In workplace learning the provider's relationship is with the employer in the first instance and they are the gatekeeper to prospective learners. In order to engage more learners with LDD in employment, providers need to engage more effectively with employers. To do this, providers could:

- use and build on existing employer relationships, either that they have with employers, or that their partner organisations have with employers
- take a holistic approach, offering other services such as recruitment and other training alongside the ESF Priority 2 or 5 offer
- sell the business benefits to the organisation of workplace training.

### Engaging learners with LDD

The approaches outlined below were felt to be effective ways to engage with learners with an LDD, although they are largely untested by evaluation:

- **Inclusive marketing and communications**, such as an accessible website, making clear the support available to learners and their legal rights. This may also include providing **evidence of the support available** to learners declaring LDD, with examples.
- **High quality information, advice and guidance** to engage learners, particularly in the early stages of recruitment to learning.
- **Set out the potential benefits to the learner** of taking up support. Including, for example, stressing that support would help them to achieve to the best of their ability, and to potentially progress in work and learning.

### Encouraging disclosure

The research highlights several approaches that were felt to be effective in encouraging disclosure of LDD amongst learners:



- **Use appropriate categories** of learning difficulties, health problems and disabilities in declaration forms and be aware of the language that is used. Use the language of wellbeing rather than ill-health. Open questions help to gather information about the bigger picture and learner needs.
- **Ensure that there is a discussion of needs with all learners.** As well as encouraging disclosure, discussing the support needs of learners can help to draw out previously undisclosed LDD. Disclosure should also be possible at different stages of enrolment and learning. This could include working with other organisations to ensure that information is shared at referral stage.
- **Increase awareness of support available for learners** and encourage an organisational culture that supports engagement by learners with LDD. This can help to make sure that learners are confident that their needs will be met if they disclose. Make use of role models and ambassadors to share positive experiences.

## Recommendations for Relationship Managers

Our evidence suggests there are a number of things that Relationship Managers could consider in order to support providers to encourage LDD disclosure and participation in learning. The following should be read alongside the internal guidance for Relationship Managers produced to accompany this evidence report:

- **Discuss with providers how their bid compares to delivery:** Our research shows that practice does not necessarily match proposals. While there may be good reasons for this, to ensure that the intended target population of ESF Priority 2 and 5 is reached (ie employed learners), discussions with providers around whether and how delivery matches bids, making use of ILR data to inform this, could help to ensure the focus of ESF Priority 2 and 5 is maintained.
- **Broker links with employer networks:** Research shows that providers can find it time-consuming and expensive to work with individual employers to engage learners with LDD, and need this type of activity to be funded. Relationship Managers may be able to help encourage other approaches to building links between providers and employers, for example through Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- **Signpost providers to the guidance developed alongside this research:** Support providers to develop their practice of engaging people with an LDD in workplace learning and encouraging them to disclose by using the suggestions detailed in the guidance document for providers accompanying this report.

## Recommendations for the Skills Funding Agency

Our evidence suggests there are a number of things that the Skills Funding Agency could do to increase the proportion of learners in the workplace that ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision engages and supports. These include:

- Increasing awareness among providers that people with an LDD are a target group for ESF provision.
- Ensuring that delivery is in line with providers' proposals and to understand any reasons for any divergence, for example in target groups.
- Raising awareness of good practice in engaging learners with LDD and promoting the guidance for providers developed alongside this evidence report through Relationship Managers and more widely.
- Reviewing the data capture around LDD in the Individualised Learner Record and the nature and language of the categories used.
- Supporting Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to learn from existing practice and to encourage diversity in participation in European programmes when the LEPs oversee the implementation of the EU Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme.



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# 1 Introduction and background

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This chapter provides an overview of disabled people in work and learning before providing details of the remit and priorities of European Social Fund (ESF) Priority 2 and 5 provision and the involvement of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the programme. Lastly, it sets out the aims and objectives of this research.

## 1.1 Disabled people in work and learning

The Census 2011 found that 7.2 per cent of people in employment declared that they have a long-term health problem or disability that limits their day-to-day activities either a little or a lot. The Annual Population Survey (APS) has a more defined set of questions around disability which encompass both the Disability Discrimination Act definition and disabilities that affect the work an individual could do (work limiting disability). In 2012, the APS found that 14.4 per cent of people in employment aged 16 to 64 declared themselves as disabled. This illustrates the complexity of defining and measuring disability through statistics.

The term Learning Difficulty and/or Disability (LDD) encompasses a wide variety of conditions. Older people are more likely to be disabled (Meager and Higgins, 2011), while among apprentices, those aged 16-18 are more likely to have declared a learning difficulty or disability than those aged 19-24 or over 25 (BIS, 2011a:10). There is variation in terms of LDD representation on apprenticeships according to the specific impairment (Little, 2012).

A DWP report on work-related training using Labour Force Survey data found, somewhat unexpectedly, that workers with a disability, whether work-limiting or not, were in fact *more* likely to receive training (Cheung and McKay, 2010:53). Meager and Higgins, also using LFS data, found that while the numbers of non-disabled people receiving work-related training are equal, disabled people are much more likely to receive training if they are educated to a higher level. Disabled people educated to Level 4 and above are more likely to be trained than

non-disabled counterparts (Meager and Higgins, 2011:40). This analysis demonstrates some of the complexity of the relationship between LDD and skills.

Meager and Higgins (2011) found that despite considerable policy intervention, disabled people continue to be disadvantaged in the labour market. Only half the working-age disabled population is employed; disabled people receive lower rates of pay than their non-disabled counterparts; and employer discrimination remains a significant barrier. Their research also found that disabled people have a different skills/qualifications profile from non-disabled people:

- They are twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no qualifications, and only two thirds as likely to have qualifications at Level 4 and above.
- There is a complex two-way relationship between disability and qualifications. Disability may result in people acquiring fewer qualifications, but equally early educational disadvantage raises the likelihood of becoming disabled later in life.
- The qualifications gap is a major cause of poor labour market outcomes among disabled people.
- Although disabled people are less well-qualified than non-disabled people, there is evidence of under-utilisation of disabled people's skills (due to employer discrimination, or to a narrower range of jobs being available to disabled people).

### 1.2 The European Social Fund: Priority 2 and 5

The European Social Fund (ESF) was set up to improve employment opportunities in the European Union (EU) with the aim of helping people fulfil their potential by giving them better skills and better job prospects. It supports the EU's goal of increasing employment by giving unemployed and disadvantaged people the training and support they need to enter jobs. ESF also equips the workforce with the skills needed by business in a competitive global economy.

ESF funding is spread across the EU focussing primarily on countries and regions where economic development is less advanced. There are two primary objectives: the Convergence Objective is for areas where the economy is lagging behind the rest of the European Union, this only applies to Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly in England; and the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective which covers the whole of the rest of England.

The two main priorities in the 2007-13 ESF programme in England are:

- Priority 1 (and 4 in Convergence): 'Extending employment opportunities'. It supports projects to tackle the barriers to work faced by unemployed and disadvantaged people.
- Priority 2 (and 5 in Convergence): 'Developing a skilled and adaptable workforce'. It supports provision to train people who do not have the basic skills and qualifications needed in the workplace.

Priority 2 and 5 provision (the subject of this research) focuses resources on people in the workforce who lack basic skills or good qualifications, in particular, those who are least likely to receive training. It aims to help people gain relevant skills and qualifications needed for their career progression and for business growth and innovation in the knowledge economy. Priority 2 and 5 also supports training for managers and employees in small firms, as well as people made redundant or at risk of redundancy.

In England, the 2007-2013 ESF programme is investing £5 billion over seven years; £2.5 billion from the ESF and £2.5 billion national funding (Skills Funding Agency, 2012). In England, the funding is the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the funds are then distributed via DWP, the Skills Funding Agency and the National Offender Management Service.

The Skills Funding Agency uses ESF to provide additional investment to support and enhance its mainstream activity enabling disadvantaged people to access and benefit from employment and skills opportunities.

In 2014 to 2020 the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development will be brought together into an **EU Structural and Investment (SI) Funds Growth Programme**. The Growth Programme's priorities are: innovation, research and development, support for SMEs, low carbon, skills, employment, and social inclusion (BIS, 2013). Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) will be responsible for designing and delivering strategies on how best to use this funding. Each LEP area will receive a notional allocation from the funds which must be spent in line with a set of overarching priorities set out in the EU regulations. LEPs will be responsible for ensuring outcomes are delivered by working with a range of local partners, although how exactly the Structural and Investment Funds will operate in practice is still being refined. Skills, and workplace learning, will be competing against other priorities. A recent BIS Select Committee found that skills should be a core priority of LEPs, but that some needed to have this as a stronger priority. They recommended that LEPs be required to demonstrate their levels of engagement with local education, in particular with skills and apprenticeship providers, FE colleges and schools (House of Commons BIS Select Committee, 2013). It will be important to ensure diversity of beneficiaries within these new

arrangements and that the funds engage with and support people with LDD (in employment).

From the bids reviewed for this research there are two strands of activity funded under recent ESF Priority 2 and 5 contracts (2011/12): workplace learning and skills support for redundancy.

The **workplace learning** contracts offer a package of support aimed at employees with low skills (defined as qualifications below Level 2). In these, the contract specification makes clear that there should be a strong focus on in-work progression; through learning measured through starting an apprenticeship, starting on a Qualifications and Credit Framework-regulated skills training at a higher level, moving into secure employment with the same or different employer, or promotion of increased responsibility. Providers delivering this stream need to develop strong links with employers in order to help them to identify employed learners meeting the funding criteria.

The **skills support for redundancy** contracts primarily set out how a provider is expected to work with employers and other private and public sector organisations to make a co-ordinated response to redundancy. The eligibility criteria for learners include those under consultation of redundancy, under notice of redundancy and those likely to be affected by downsizing or company closure. However, it also includes individuals who are 'newly unemployed'<sup>1</sup>. It does not specify whether individuals need to have been made redundant in order to qualify for support.

The contracts of ESF Priority 2 and 5 providers are overseen by the Skills Funding Agency's Relationship Managers. The amount of involvement a Relationship Manager has with a provider is determined by their performance. All providers have quarterly Review Meetings as part of the Provider Management Process. The management information about learners participating in ESF Priority 2 or 5 provision is reported through the Individualised Learner Record, using the same systems as mainstream provision.

### 1.3 LDD in ESF Priority 2 and 5

The Skills Funding Agency procures ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision in line with wider provider flexibilities where providers have responsibility to determine and to respond to the learning needs of the communities they serve. Provider contracts do not stipulate specific targets for working with learners from different

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<sup>1</sup> This is defined as an individual who is aged 18 or over, not in paid employment or self-employment and actively seeking work.

demographic groups. Overall, however, the ESF programme has diversity targets. The target relevant for LDD is 15 per cent of all beneficiaries to declare an LDD.

The programme monitors this, and also examines it as part of the Equality Duty which came into force in 2011. The Equality Duty requires those carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves, among other things, encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low. It is therefore necessary for organisations to understand the effects of their activities on different people. Where these are not immediately apparent, it may be necessary to carry out some form of assessment or analysis, in order to understand them, such as an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

A recent EIA of ESF procurement examined representation of groups with protected characteristics on ESF. The Equality Impact Assessment found that six per cent of Priority 2 participants and ten per cent of Priority 5 (Convergence area) participants had a disability or limiting long-term illness (LLTI), compared with targets of 15 per cent and 17 per cent respectively (DWP, 2011:23). Priorities 1 and 4 (with 4 being the Convergence area) both exceeded their targets for the proportion of participants with a disability/LLTI (DWP, 2011:24), suggesting that there may be particular issues around up-skilling people with a learning difficulty and/or disability (LDD) who are already in the labour market.

The evidence gathered to inform the Agency's Single Equality Scheme reported that although the proportion of adult learners declaring LDD increased between 2008/9 and 2010/11 to 11.2 per cent, this seemed lower than might be expected given the number of disabled people in the population. In relation to apprenticeships, in 2010/11 8.4 per cent of apprentices declared an LDD (Skills Funding Agency, 2012b). The Single Equality Scheme outlines that the Agency will work with its providers and colleges to improve the representation and participation of under-represented groups.

Our analysis of the ESF Priority 2 and 5 data for the year 2011/12, shows that eight per cent of learners on ESF Priority 2 and 5 programmes declared themselves to have an LDD, with a further four per cent not providing any information. It is not clear from the ILR specification whether this is an active choice (ie the learner was asked and preferred not to say), or whether the provider did not seek this data. It is also unclear as to whether this figure represents genuine under-representation of learners with LDD since this figure is broadly the same as that reported in the



ESF Priority 2 and 5 EIA and is in line with the rate of declaration of LDD among apprentices.

## 1.4 Research aims and objectives

First, this research aimed to gather relevant evidence in order to try to explain the apparent under-representation of learners declaring an LDD in ESF Priority 2 and 5. In order to do this it specifically sought to:

- identify providers with high levels of LDD declaration
- identify success factors in improving LDD representation and levels of disclosure.

Second, the work aimed to interpret the evidence into relevant actions and guidance to support the learning sector to address the apparent under-representation of learners with an LDD on ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision. More specifically to produce:

- internal guidance for the Skills Funding Agency to support and challenge the ESF Priority 2 and 5 and mainstream providers with which they work
- guidance for learning providers to increase engagement with people with LDD and encourage disclosure.

There are therefore three outputs from this research. This report presents the evidence gathered from the various methodological strands (see Annex for details of the method). This report should also be read alongside the short guidance document produced for learning providers. Skills Funding Agency Relationship Managers should read it alongside the internal guidance produced for them.

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## 2 Engaging people with LDD (in employment)

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The research found good practice related to how providers engaged learners with LDD in mainstream provision, but uncovered less evidence of good practice in engaging learners with LDD that was specific to ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision. The chapter identifies what works in engaging learners with LDD, drawing on the evidence we uncovered in ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision, and on wider examples of what works in engaging LDD groups more generally, across all forms of provision.

### 2.1 Engaging learners with LDD in ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision

#### 2.1.1 Engaging employers

Given the target group of ESF Priority 2 and 5 (employed people), it was anticipated that providers would primarily work directly with employers to engage learners (including those with LDD) onto ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision. However, our research uncovered little evidence of activity to engage employers to develop their understanding of LDD or to progress employees with LDD in the workplace.

In general, providers had a relatively low awareness that employed people were the target group for ESF Priority 2 and 5 funding. Several providers held Response to Redundancy contracts which could have made the message of target groups for the programme more blurred as these contracts were designed to engage learners that were facing redundancy or who had recently been made redundant (and were in receipt of benefits). In the main, Priority 2 (or 5) contracts tended to be smaller compared to mainstream contracts. For example, our analysis of ILR data for the academic year 2011/12 shows that only around 30,000 learners were supported by

ESF Priority 2 and 5 and that the duration of most of the provision was fairly short (typically between one and two months). This could also have contributed to the level of awareness among providers that employed people were the target group for ESF Priority 2 and 5.

Among providers that had ESF Priority 2 or 5 contracts for workplace learning (as opposed to Response to Redundancy), we saw fewer examples of the funding being used to support workplace learning, and a greater use of it to support people out of work, than might be expected given the target group of the funding stream. Providers increasingly have flexibility to use funding to support the needs of the learners and employers in their locality rather than being required to respond to centrally set targets. It is possible that these flexibilities have made it more difficult for the ESF Priority 2 and 5 funding streams to retain their distinctiveness among providers. For example, a few providers in our qualitative interviews were using ESF Priority 2 (or 5) funds to provide job search and employability skills for unemployed people, under the (mistaken) impression that Priority 2 and 5 allowed a degree of flexibility for this.

Of the providers that had undertaken employer engagement, they had either engaged with employers directly or through referrals from other organisations, depending on their delivery model.

Among those providers that engaged employers directly, there was a feeling that this had become particularly challenging in the economic climate of the past few years. Contributors to the provider workshops also discussed the difficulties of trying to engage with employers in what they felt was now a 'saturated market', with employers being approached by several organisations about workforce development. In general providers tended to use their existing employer networks to engage employers with whom they had a relationship and a track record.

Despite trying to use these 'warm' contacts, one case study provider reported that it was still difficult to engage employers with ESF Priority 2 provision because it was not easy to identify employers that would have learners meeting the eligibility criteria. This provider set out to identify employers in sectors they felt would be likely to employ staff with relatively low skill levels. They found it challenging to find employers with enough staff to make an intervention of this type cost effective to deliver and discussed trying to work with larger small and medium-sized organisations. In addition, once a relevant employer had been identified it could take lengthy negotiations to gain access to the employer and sometimes could result in finding that employees were not eligible after all. The provider explained:

*'After about three months of negotiations and IAG you find out how many of the employees who qualify for this type of provision, so when you get there you find out*

*that only three or four are eligible. It's a long process, and there doesn't seem to be a mechanism where you can identify LLDD learners apart from going through that route with employers'.*

Wider evidence also indicates barriers or other reasons for challenges engaging employers in ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision, including; reluctance from employers to allow staff time off to take part in ESF-supported training, employers' views on the quality and relevance of existing provision, and difficulties with delivery in rural areas, (Dickinson and Lloyd, 2010:3; 63). Indeed a provider case study in a rural area spoke about the challenge and cost of visiting employers throughout their rural geographic area to try and engage them with their ESF Priority 2 project. In this area the majority of businesses were small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and this provider and others in the workshops, discussed the particular challenges of engaging SMEs in training as many of the barriers, such as the costs of staff taking time off to train, were felt more keenly by small organisations.

Another case study had worked with employers to try to offer work placements, but they did not recall trying to engage them in their workplace learning contract. There are potentially many organisations trying to engage with employers covering a range of activity and support areas (recruitment, training, business advice for example). One provider, specialising in working to support people with disabilities into employment, discussed the importance of working holistically with an employer. Their services included supporting the recruitment process, working with employers to encourage applications from people with LDD, helping employers to understand the Equalities Act and providing training. They also felt it was essential to demonstrate the business benefits for employers from engaging with any programme.

Providers offering Response to Redundancy contracts under ESF Priority 2 spoke about primarily engaging employers through referrals from partner organisations. For example, one Response to Redundancy case study reported delivering general training to people who were unemployed alongside working with employers who were looking to recruit new staff. They had engaged with these employers, who were new to working with the college, through partners, including Jobcentre Plus. The college designed a training package with input from the employer. Employers supported the learning by offering a guaranteed job interview to participants and induction training to successful participants. Another case study provider also used referrals from Jobcentre Plus of employers making redundancies to engage employers in their ESF Priority 2 work.

### 2.1.2 Engaging prospective learners (with LDD)

The specification and invitation to tender issued by the Agency clearly stated priority target groups. However providers do not have contracted targets relating to priority groups of learners to work with and, as such, learners with LDD are not necessarily seen as a target group for providers. This meant that some providers saw learners with LDD as a target group for their provision, while others did not. The online survey found that a higher proportion of providers *without* an ESF contract had LDD as a target group for their provision than ESF Priority 2 and 5 providers (although these data should be treated with some caution as only 37 responses to the survey were received). When asked whether learners with LDD were a target group, 20 out of 21 respondents from non-ESF providers said that learners with LDD were a target group. For ESF Priority 2 (and 5) provision, four out of seven providers said that learners with LDD were a target. Some providers interviewed also noted explicitly that learners with LDD were not a priority group for their ESF Priority 2 provision, whereas others emphasised the ways in which they sought to engage prospective learners with LDD. This mixed picture about whether or not learners with LDD constitute a priority could reflect a provider's assessment of the needs and requirements of learners and employers in their locality.

As noted above, providers were expected to engage with prospective learners of ESF Priority 2 provision primarily through these learners' employers. However, very little evidence of this type of employer engagement was uncovered by this research. Some providers discussed other means by which they sought to engage learners with LDD, such as the importance of making an explicit and visible commitment to equality and diversity generally in order to encourage engagement from prospective learners with LDD. For example, one case study provider felt their organisation had a strong commitment to equality and diversity. They regularly monitored and reviewed the demographic characteristics of their applicants. Through this process they realised that they were not engaging with the Pakistani section of their community to the extent that could be expected. They did some research and then undertook engagement work to increase the number of learners from this community.

Another case study provider outlined how they advertised their Equality and Diversity policy and stated their Equality and Diversity policies on the front page of their website. Their front page says:

*'We do not discriminate against any person with a disability. In the case of clients with disabilities we will make every effort to accommodate these clients wherever possible. We have full wheelchair access and various computer aids can be arranged, such as over sized monitors and keyboards, trackball mice, adjustable work stations etc.'*

On the back page of their ESF Priority 2 brochure (which advertised redundancy workshops), they also had an Equality and Diversity statement which stressed their commitment to providing an equitable service. The Equality Act sets out that employers and training providers must ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to support disabled workers to undertake the training. While learners with LDD may not be a priority group for all providers it is important that providers make their equality and diversity policies clear, as well as translating what these policies and statements might mean in practice for the learner in order to encourage prospective learners from all backgrounds to participate in learning.

Table 2.1 outlines the responses from the online survey of providers in relation to their current practice in encouraging engagement from learners with LDD, both those in employment and more broadly. Information, advice and guidance and working with referral agencies were the most frequently used types of support for encouraging LDD participation, with 30 out of 35 respondents using these, followed by outreach activities, used by 23 respondents. No respondents gave details about 'other' support offered on ESF Priority 2 or 5 provision, or other ESF provision. For mainstream provision, types of 'other' support mentioned included contact with supported employment providers and work experience.

**Table 2.1: Types of support currently used to encourage the participation of LDD**

	No. of provider responses
IAG	30
Working with referral agencies	27
Outreach activities	23
Tailored marketing materials	16
Tailored/targeted recruitment methods	12
Promotion of Access to Work	10
Other	8
N	35

*Source: IES, 2013, Provider survey*

Aside from these methods, ESF Priority 2 and 5 funded learners have been engaged typically through intermediary organisations such as Jobcentre Plus or their employer. There was little evidence from the research about the learner 'offer' for the ESF Priority 2 and 5 programme, the practices used to engage with learners in the workplace, or any kind of 'typical' model for engaging learners. This stems mostly from how providers engaged with employers, but also the extent to which providers saw learners with LDD as a target group for their provision. There is therefore little substantial evidence from the research about

what constitutes good practice in engaging people in work (with LDD) through their employers.

What the research did uncover were a number of barriers to participation in learning among people with LDD. The most frequently cited response in the online survey completed by providers was low self-confidence of prospective learners with an LDD (Table 2.2). Factors more in control of the provider, such as methods of enrolment/assessment and access to information were cited least frequently (by 7 and 15 out of the 35 respondents respectively).

**Table 2.2: Learner barriers faced in encouraging LDD participation**

Barrier	No. of responses
Low self-confidence	30
Lack of finance/funding for support	27
Lack of learner awareness about available support	24
Health barriers	21
Attitudinal barriers of learners	20
Caring responsibilities	15
Access to information	15
Methods of enrolment/assessment	7
Other	6
N	35

N = total number of responses

*Source: IES, 2013, online survey of providers*

The relationship between the prospective learner and the intermediary organisation is likely to affect the learner's engagement. In the case of the employer-employee relationship the literature suggests that employees with LDD have a low awareness about their rights and the support available to them. In a study of apprenticeships, Ecotec (2012:13) found that many people did not know about their rights involving reasonable adjustments in the workplace. Without knowledge of the support which is guaranteed by law to disabled workers, it is conceivable that people will be discouraged from pursuing training. Another study (Adams and Oldfield, 2012) found that workers had concerns that employers might be unable to afford to make reasonable adjustments, or that those seeking such support would be branded as troublesome. Again, there was a lack of awareness on the legal rights to this assistance. Indeed, one study of barriers to education and training more broadly found that a lack of information regarding opportunities is seen as the most discouraging factor for people with an LDD (Spielhofer et al, 2010: 61).

Participants in the workshops commented that it was more difficult to provide information, advice and guidance in employment situations, as it was difficult to secure access through a third-party. The cross-government review of IAG (Centre for Guidance Studies, 2007) found that workforce and career development practice is less common in SMEs where there is generally less 'infrastructure' and fewer 'support' functions, and more generally that the management of individual career development in the workplace effectively requires an understanding of how best to align individual, wider workforce and business development agendas in a company and to see the relationship between individual and organisational learning. A critical issue is reconciling individual and business needs in the delivery of workplace IAG.

## 2.2 What works: engaging learners with LDD

This research found relatively little evidence detailing what is effective at engaging employed learners and encouraging employees with an LDD to engage in learning. Given this, we draw on wider good practice that was reported by ESF and other providers more generally in engaging learners with LDD. The outlined approaches are typically untested by evaluation.

### 2.2.1 Engaging employers (of individuals with an LDD)

The research highlights some of the broader challenges in engaging employers, particularly those whom providers have not worked with before. Where providers are developing a relationship with an employer, they are perhaps less likely to challenge them about engaging a range of learners, particularly if only a small number of employees are eligible for funding. **Using established relationships** or drawing on the relationships of others, via a **referral** (for example from Jobcentre Plus or another partner), seems to have been an effective way for providers to engage employers. Research into ESF Priority 2 training found that developing links with referral agencies and forming personal relationships with employers could improve engagement with employers and learners involved in ESF-funded training (Dickinson and Lloyd 2010:47).

Another successful way of engaging employers is through **wider employer networks**. One work-based learning provider attended forums and events held by their local Chamber of Commerce to encourage employers to recruit, support and train people with an LDD. Looking forward, Local Enterprise Partnerships and their networks offer providers an opportunity to use networks to support their employer engagement.

**Employer-employee case studies** of success stories and the business benefits of learning were felt to be an effective way to engage with employers by some



providers. It was useful for employers to hear positive messages and results from other employers as these are most salient. Other providers were keen to **celebrate success** by hosting employer (and learner) events with prizes, for example where training a member of staff with an LDD had made a difference to the business.

Specialist providers advocated engaging employers in the topic of LDD by providing a **complete service** to support them and their staff. For example, one provider discussed how, alongside training, they review employer application forms and recruitment processes for accessibility and the extent to which they encourage disclosure and discuss with employers how they can accommodate LDD (eg through reasonable adjustments).

### 2.2.2 Engaging learners with an LDD

Some providers have **inclusive marketing and communications** materials to encourage engagement of learners with LDD. This includes the provider's website and making it accessible in order to engage prospective learners with an LDD, including the use of pictorial information and 'have a go' activities, and clear signage. Providers also reported the need to make clear the support available to learners and their legal rights. Dickinson and Lloyd (2010: 46-7) found that offering responsive and relevant provision, and preparing to be flexible in delivery, facilitated engagement with learners on ESF-funded training.

One of the provider case studies offering Response to Redundancy support emphasised the importance of **high quality information, advice and guidance** to engage learners, particularly in the early stages of 'recruitment'. This starts quite broadly, due to the prospective learner's circumstances (post redundancy), as there might be other pressing concerns, such as debt or mortgage payments, before an individual is ready to consider a redundancy workshop. They use IAG sessions to discuss in depth how the provider can accommodate any LDD within their provision. In discussions with the individual, a training plan is then developed based on their support needs. Other providers in the workshops emphasised the importance of IAG for engaging prospective learners, and particularly for building confidence and trust between the provider and prospective learner.

**Publicising the support available to learners declaring LDD with examples** also emerged as an effective way of engaging learners with LDD. For example, at open events make available the computer hardware that can be used by learners so that they can see the types of support available. As written work can be challenging for learners with LDD, one successful solution used in apprenticeships is to provide support with assessments and exams (Little, 2012:44). In another example from the literature, a learner was assisted in undertaking an apprenticeship through one-to-

one tuition for written aspects of the programme (Ofsted, 2012:23). In some cases, assessors have visited apprentices with learning difficulties and read exam questions aloud to negate the need for written tests which would have been difficult for these candidates (Ecotec, 2012:9). These forms of assistance are examples of how barriers to engagement through concern about being able to participate effectively can be overcome by illustrating and demonstrating the variety of support available and how this can be tailored to individual needs. A more radical approach has been taken in Wales. In response to lower LDD apprenticeship enrolments and completions, exam content is 'contextualised' according to the learner in question. It has been suggested that exam contextualisation for apprentices could constitute a 'reasonable adjustment' as required under the 2010 Equalities Act, although the legal basis for this in England is unclear (Coulter and Sharman, 2012).

Some providers found it effective to **set out the potential benefits to the learner of taking up support**. This included, for example, stressing that support would help them to achieve to the best of their ability, and to potentially progress in work and learning. One provider used case studies in promotional material to illustrate the experiences that their disabled learners had had with drawing on support.

**Overcoming workplace barriers** to participation among people with LDD by designating staff to certain conditions, for example appointing a dyslexia 'champion' who advises colleagues and supports learners, using adaptive technology, and seeking specialist advice from external experts, was found to be effective in a review of 15 employers with strong records of providing apprenticeships for people with LDD (Ofsted, 2012:21).

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## 3 Encouraging LDD disclosure

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The research gathered information about the barriers to disclosure of learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and how providers have tried to encourage LDD disclosure. Whilst the research related to working with employed learners on Priority 2 and 5 provision, the findings can be applied across all engagement activity. This chapter firstly considers the factors influencing disclosure of LDD that were identified from the survey of providers, from the qualitative interviews with providers, and found in the literature. This evidence is taken from the starting point that the learner has already engaged with the provider, whether in the workplace or outside of it. There was little consensus among providers about what differentiates ‘standard’ from ‘good’ practice, but the chapter explores the approaches that have been taken to encourage disclosure of LDD by learners.

Declaration rates of learners with an LDD are similar across ESF Priority 2 and 5 and employer responsive provision (8.1 per cent compared to 7.9 per cent). However, more of a difference becomes apparent when looking at those who prefer not to say or provide no information. For ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision this stands at 3.7 per cent of learners compared with 1.5 per cent on employer responsive provision, suggesting that there could be either be a difference between the learners on the two types of provision, or it could reflect differences in how providers ask questions relating to disclosing LDD. How to encourage disclosure is explored in this chapter.

### 3.1 Factors influencing disclosure of LDD

Respondents to the online survey were asked to indicate which factors they saw as influencing learners considering disclosure of an LDD. This survey item allowed participants to select multiple options. The most frequently cited factor was perceived negative stigma around LDD, with 32 of 37 respondents highlighting this reason (see Table 3.1). A lack of understanding as to what constitutes an LDD, experience of previous discrimination and low level of awareness around support

were also commonly mentioned, with around three quarters of respondents pointing to these issues. One provider observed that students, having coped with their condition, did not see the significance of disclosure. Another said that employees were reluctant to disclose, although unfortunately did not elaborate on why this might be. Others also said that they do not feel disclosure is an issue.

**Table 3.1: Factors influencing learners disclosing learning difficulties and disabilities**

	Count
Perceived negative stigma around LDD	32
Experience of previous discrimination	27
Lack of understanding as to what constitutes an LDD	29
Low levels of awareness around available support	27
The enrolment system	13
Other	6
N	37

*IES, 2013, Provider survey*

### 3.1.1 Stigma

In a study of workplace disclosure, Irvine (2011:7) found that ‘perceived stigma, discrimination and taboo’ were commonly cited as reasons for restricted or non-disclosure. The qualitative provider interviews and case studies also shed light on the issue of perceived stigma and fear of discrimination that some potential learners have. Although this included evidence not directly related to ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision and LDD declaration, one provider found that young offenders were reluctant to disclose their status as they were keen to move on from this label and make a ‘fresh start’ and avoid stigmatisation.

In particular, the interviews highlighted the difference in perception of different conditions and for different groups. Case study interviewees found that there is: *‘more stigma around mental health’* and that *‘it’s different for those born with a disability, compared to those diagnosed later’*.

Some providers thought that there were conditions that were more stigmatised in some communities than others. For example, some Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities were reported to be more reluctant to admit to mental health conditions and one case study provider found that young people discuss such conditions more freely when their specific condition was discussed rather than a generic ‘mental health’ label. Another case study provider thought that disclosure rates could improve if perceptions of disability improved more generally.

### 3.1.2 Previous negative experience

Previous discrimination was frequently mentioned by the providers in the online survey. The providers in the qualitative interviews provided more insight as to why this may be the case.

Providers cited the experience of learners who had had previous negative experiences. For example, some employed learners had declared in a previous job and not been given the support they needed and several providers found that young people had negative experiences at school or had not had their conditions formally diagnosed. The evidence from providers highlight that previous negative experience can be drawn from either the workplace or from school and so affect learners of all ages.

#### Lack of confidence

One consequence of negative experiences in the past is that it affected the confidence of learners in declaring an LDD to a new provider. This could affect learners on Priority 2 or 5 provision in particular as people could feel vulnerable at the point of being made redundant and therefore less likely to declare an LDD.

Lack of confidence was felt to be more prevalent in LDD learners in any case, and described as a 'huge issue', as one learner said:

*'I think if people are quieter and in their shell, and haven't been out, maybe for them they would need more encouragement or feel less comfortable talking about it'.*

### 3.1.3 Self awareness/perception

A further barrier to disclosure noted in the online survey was lack of understanding as to what constitutes an LDD. This can be an issue for the individual learners who may not be aware of a condition they have (undiagnosed) or it is possible that workers may not realise that any difficulties they are experiencing may go beyond 'normal' everyday stress and extend into mental ill health (Irvine, 2011:10). Decisions about declaring an LDD may revolve around whether others will regard the difficulties in question as 'legitimate' (Irvine, 2011:13). That young apprentices with an LDD believe training providers are not good at listening to their concerns (BIS, 2011b:30-1) could conceivably exacerbate these anxieties.

Self perception, along with fears over stigma and lack of confidence were also all cited by the providers and case studies.

*'The main barriers in trying to get people to disclose is fear of negative stigma, lack of confidence and people not seeing a 'need' to declare since they have been in work up to the point of redundancy.'*

### 3.1.4 The enrolment system

In addition, the online survey also found that the enrolment system itself could be a barrier to disclosure. The provider interviews and case studies highlight in more detail why this may be the case.

One reason that was given by a provider was that the process of ensuring the right funding was in place could take time and this could be very de-motivating for the learner, who would then be at higher risk of dropping out.

Also, the way that the information is often gathered does not encourage people to declare. It is often led by the need to gather data for the ILR rather than a discussion of needs and so becomes an administrative exercise. It has been suggested that while collecting information on learner needs in a format which fits with ILR categories can be convenient for providers in terms of data management, this is not necessarily the best way to encourage learners to disclose. In encouraging declarations, the needs of the learner should take priority over the simplification of data storage (Rose, 2006, 36). This is discussed in more detail in the next section - 'What works'.

Another reason providers cited was the lack of linkage with schools. Transfer of information about the support requirements of young people was described as 'frequently patchy' despite it being useful in order to provide continuity of support. Providers thought that schools often held very useful information about diagnosed conditions, statements and support that had been provided. One provider had recognised a need for additional work on this and was funding positions to improve the transfer of information between institutions. Several case study providers were critical of having to 'start from scratch' in gathering information about support needs and developing learner profiles.

Although not directly relevant to ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision focussing on employed learners, this could still have implications for linking with other organisations such as employers or other providers, or even links within a provider organisation. Providers also highlighted the difficulty of putting in place a seamless transition for the learner in terms of support available when a learning programme involves a number of tutors. As one provider described, having specialist support operating within one department could mean that different departments or provider sites could be operating 'in different silos'.

### 3.1.5 Fear it will count against them

The literature reviews found that apprentices could be deterred from disclosing an LDD by concerns that it could count against them in the application process. Apprenticeships are known to be very competitive and some applicants may see declaration as detrimental to their application (Little, 2012:40; Ofsted, 2012:21). One provider that delivers courses including provision specifically for people with LDD supported this view:

*'Some see it as something that would hold them back, even on courses like ours.'*

A review of the literature on disclosure found that people in employment fear negative consequences, such as job loss, for revealing an LDD (Pennington, 2010:55). Another discouraging factor was employers being unresponsive to expressions of distress, with workers tentative about declaring an LDD if they felt that their employer would be uninterested or unsympathetic (Irvine, 2011:9). People are clearly tentative about declaring at both the application stage and once in work.

The case study findings support this evidence about the reluctance of employed learners to make declarations of LDD. One case study provider reported that a lot of employees will not declare until their condition starts to become an issue in the workplace. Another case study provider has also found that employees can be reluctant to declare LDD, as people could see it as a barrier to gaining employment in the first instance, and a barrier to progression once in work.

### 3.1.6 Fears over confidentiality

Some people have reservations about disclosing impairments because they fear what would be done with the information (BIS, 2011b:30-1). Some sector stakeholders highlighted that employed learners in particular could be concerned about their employer, or other colleagues, finding out about a previously undisclosed LDD. Providers also described how employed learners can be embarrassed to declare in front of their colleagues and worry that if they declare to a learning provider then their employer may find out. It therefore seems important that assurances over confidentiality are given, especially if fears over the impact on advancement prospects are as pervasive as the evidence suggests.

## 3.2 What works: approaches for encouraging disclosure

The 2010 Equalities Act stipulates that employers must make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, and this includes access to work-based training. The employer and training provider must also ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to enable disabled workers to undertake the training. The



adjustments could entail altering the physical environment to accommodate disabled staff, or supplying auxiliary aids such as assistive equipment. Employers and training providers need declarations so they can make appropriate arrangements for accommodating workers and learners (Irvine, 2011:7).

Within the literature examined there were lots of suggestions about how to increase LDD declarations, but little evidence proving how approaches had been successful. One might expect this to be the case; as, for example, declarations among apprentices have fallen (Little, 2012:24), attempts to increase disclosures on these programmes on a national scale have clearly yet to succeed.

Respondents to the online survey were asked to share approaches to encouraging declaration on provision (not just Priority 2 and 5). Several mentioned that enrolment processes enabled learners to disclose immediately. One college reported emphasising the high levels of LDD among its learners and the support available to prospective students pre-enrolment. Others encouraged disclosure through ongoing activities to build rapport, or identifying needs through workshops and activities. One provider seemed to focus on declarations once learners had joined a programme, with drop-in services, face-to-face appointments and IAG. Another mentioned a buddy system, and an in-house equality policy, with designated staff responsible for disability, was also noted. Overall, while the onus appears to be on encouraging declarations as early as possible, significant effort also seems to be devoted to offering the opportunity to disclose on an ongoing basis.

Similarly, approaches to encouraging disclosure on ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision included both enrolment procedures and on-course support. One provider noted that enrolment forms were tailored to enable incoming students to declare a condition and specify their needs. For learners already enrolled, one-to-one private discussion and focussed support, specialist IAG and ensuring appropriate support for frontline staff were also mentioned. For ESF provision generally, one-to-one mentoring services, offering multiple disclosure points before and after enrolment, and using a simple skills scan which is not too onerous were all given as examples.

This chapter will now go on to look at these different approaches in turn with evidence from the provider interviews and case studies.

### 3.2.1 Appropriate categorisations/language

One difficulty people have faced when considering whether to declare an LDD is how it should be categorised. Individual Learner Records could be improved by a national change in the fields expanding the options available for LDD declaration, as people may not declare if they regard all options as inappropriate (Little,



2012:12). This information could be helpful to employers and training providers, who would be able to assess individuals' needs more accurately. For example, one study found that declarations of autism have increased (Berkeley and Casey, 2010:12). This research was supported by the providers who felt that they had seen an increase in awareness, recognition and diagnoses of learning difficulties on the autistic spectrum. This specific information can be used in devising support strategies which can be targeted better than broader approaches.

Providers who took part in the action-learning workshops also noted that using language associated with wellbeing, rather than ill-health can encourage more people to consider whether they have any support needs that should be declared. Considering the way questions are worded can also encourage more people to disclose. For example asking 'do you have anything that could affect your learning *or the learning of others?*' can encourage people to think differently about why it may be necessary to declare an LDD. Open questions help to gather information about the bigger picture and learner needs and this way of phrasing questions can help staff to get an idea about the support that is required, not just gathering management information.

### 3.2.2 Not just data collection, a discussion of needs

As mentioned above, it has also been suggested that while collecting information on learner needs in a format which fits with ILR categories can be convenient for providers in terms of data management, this is not necessarily the best way to encourage learners to disclose. Some may have undiagnosed conditions, or have needs which they find difficult to explain through a tick box system. In encouraging declarations, the needs of the learner should take priority over the simplification of data storage (Rose 2006, 36). Training providers and case study interviewees were in consensus about this and put forward the view that information gathering for systems such as ILR should be done as part of a wider conversation about learning needs and support.

Waters et al (2012:13) suggests that information, advice and guidance could do more to emphasise the benefits of disclosure, but had no evidence to confirm the effect of this. The qualitative interviews from this research have shown that providers certainly think there is a role for IAG in encouraging disclosure. Face-to-face discussions could be one-to-one IAG sessions. Interviewees highlighted the need for the people delivering these sessions to be fully trained and qualified IAG advisers (e.g. to at least Level 3 Matrix standard), with excellent interpersonal skills. Face-to-face discussion can enable potential or new learners to talk about themselves informally and if forms and data sheets are used as prompts or questions, they can be clarified and the reasons for asking explained. These sessions can be an opportunity for the employee or learner to ask more detailed

questions about the support on offer and to raise any concerns about undertaking learning they might have. Training provider staff can reassure learners to understand that it is a good thing to disclose because it means the provider can better meet their training needs and can also be beneficial to their employer if their support needs are identified and addressed, as one provider explained:

*'We actively encourage disclosure to ensure that support is in place.'*

A learner at this provider spoke about how he disclosed his Asperger's as part of a wider discussion with an adviser before enrolment:

*'We were just talking about what I was like as a person and so I said about my disability.'*

One case study provider had used ESF Priority 2 funding to pay for additional support, in the form of a tutor who offered one-to-one meetings to discuss any problems and IAG, as well as mentoring support once on the course. Staff at this provider thought that this additional support and mentoring had helped to encourage a higher rate of disclosure among participants. Providers highlighted that these sessions must go beyond encouraging declaration, and result in offering support.

### 3.2.3 Awareness of support

As seen in the previous section, holding one-to-one IAG sessions with learners can help them to understand the different types of support that may be available to meet their needs as part of discussions about disclosure. One case study in the literature found that awareness of the support available is an important factor in encouraging disclosure (Waters et al, 2012:9). The literature and interviews point to different ways that awareness of support can be raised outside of these discussions.

In a guidance document reviewing good and bad practice surrounding disclosure, Rose (2006) discusses several ways in which providers have attempted to raise awareness of their support.

Declarations during the interview or enrolment process help providers to determine learner needs as early as possible, and numerous techniques have been developed. One provider sends a welcome letter to all who enrol, explaining the purpose of additional support and introducing the support team. Their support statement features on the back of each learner's membership card, with key contact names and numbers (Rose, 2006:8). Another routinely discusses, with all applicants, the adjustments available for disabled learners. They then ask 'would any of this be of interest to you?' This same provider altered this item on the enrolment form to emphasise the benefits of disclosure and the support offered.

These changes caused declaration rates during admissions to increase considerably (Rose, 2006: 23).

A report by unionlearn (2012) highlighted that employed people with disabilities preferred their employer to proactively ask all employees what support they needed, including for learning and progression, and that more support should be available for accessible and distance-learning.

Different types of support from the training provider are also a key factor in helping to encourage disclosure. For example, some people may be conscious of having visible support and so informing people of discreet technologies that can help when using computers can also help encourage disclosure. Having a range of different support methods can mean that people are more confident that, if disclosed, their support needs will be met. Examples of support provided included: specialist tutors, assistive technology and software, a 'disability service' which offered specialist provision for learners with disabilities such as sensory impairment, dyslexia, mental health problems, autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), or a specialist support service department available for students to drop in as and when they required.

It is not just within training providers and colleges that there is awareness of different types of support available for people with an LDD and some providers had seen a knock-on effect of this more general raising awareness of support. The internet can be a great source of information for many ('this makes our job easier') as there is more information available about equality of access and the types of support available.

## **Marketing**

Many use their prospectuses to outline what they offer for learners with an LDD. One college noted in the literature worked with disabled learners and their media department to create a learner friendly disability statement, produced for disabled learners by disabled learners. This approach helps to demonstrate that the provider is welcoming to learners with LDD and understands their needs (Rose, 2006).

Some of the providers in the case studies here also relied on marketing materials and events to portray an inclusive image. This is discussed in more detail in the earlier section on engaging prospective learners.

## **Working with the (LDD) community**

In tandem with this, some of the case study providers spoke of the importance of reputation in attracting LDD learners and encouraging disclosure. As one

stakeholder proposed, providers who are involved in the community, have reach into the community, or who have experience of dealing with LDD, are usually better at engaging people with LDD than those who are not.

Several (all of them colleges) were proud of their reputations within the local community in terms of promoting learning and education to people with LDD and bringing all members of the community into the college environment, either directly for training and courses, or via other routes such as community activities or sports: local reputation '*counts for a lot*' (Education Manager) in terms of encouraging LDD declaration and engagement. Smaller colleges and training providers have limited marketing budgets and so look for other ways to make people aware of the support that they provide. Examples included web-based promotion, e.g. publishing case studies online and using social media, success stories and word of mouth.

### **Open days**

Some colleges hold open days or taster days where potential students can visit their premises. This also allows examples of support to be 'on display' such as assistive technology in classrooms, as well as an opportunity for potential learners to see what the college or training provider can offer. One college was finding that their taster programme provided a useful opportunity for staff to pick up potential barriers to learning.

### **Benefits of disclosure**

Another example mentioned by some providers and also learners was encouraging people to disclose by convincing them to see that doing so would help them. Linked to earlier examples about discussing the support needs of individuals, some providers couched discussion about disclosure around the benefits of disclosure. One learner gave the example of the guaranteed interview scheme exemplified by the DWP two-tick symbol and stated that he declares his disability as it can be beneficial and 'open doors'.

#### **3.2.4 Disclose at different stages**

There should be opportunities to disclose beyond initial registration. Staged disclosure has been proposed as a solution. During inductions at one provider noted in the literature, the support offered to learners with LDD is discussed. Another organisation has concentrated on how the tutorial system can give ongoing opportunities for learners to declare, particularly in one-to-one reviews. One provider, concerned about the number of late disclosures to examinations staff, revised their processes to give an opportunity for disclosure on exam

registration forms. They also distribute a leaflet detailing the adjustments that can be offered for disabled learners during examinations and where learners can go for further information (Rose, 2006).

Staged disclosure at employers entails line managers making an initial approach but then allowing staff to explain more as and when they feel comfortable, or when it is necessary for the task in hand. This is part of a broader call for employers to build the trust needed for candid disclosure (Adams and Oldfield, 2012:39-40), and relates to the general need to create a supportive working environment for staff with an LDD. NIACE (2009) advises those considering whether to declare an LDD to a training provider, that they can reserve the option to disclose later on, when they feel more comfortable in the educational setting. There is no evidence on the effectiveness of such information, aside from the fact that declarations have still fallen in apprenticeships (Little, 2012:24), but given the issues around awareness of rights and support highlighted in the previous section as barriers to participation, further research could be warranted.

The qualitative interviews provided evidence of disclosures happening at different points during the learner journey. This enables learners to disclose their LDD outside of initial registration, or if providers do not conduct the type of IAG sessions discussed earlier in this chapter. For some providers, assessments as part of an induction are standard practice, others conduct these prior to interview. By undertaking the assessment before the interview, if assessment shows they are at a lower level than the course applied for then the tutor can ask additional questions and support can be put in place earlier. Once on the course, regular assessments and one-to-one reviews with tutors can also raise opportunities for disclosure. This may be part of regular one-to-one tutorials or be conducted as a result of learners showing signs of struggling to keep up. As one provider explained:

*'By keeping an eye out and observing the group, you'll see that some people will be struggling to fill in their form or complete the assessment.'*

Providers would prefer that early disclosure is the norm as this ensures that people are enrolled on appropriate courses and support is put in place for the beginning of the course. However, case study providers also highlighted that some learners may disclose later on, when they became aware of, and have observed, how other learners are benefitting from support, or when trust has been built.

### 3.2.5 Open and confidential disclosure

Irvine (2011:5) distinguishes between open and confidential disclosure. This distinction is potentially important considering the reluctance some have towards disclosure for fear of what will be done with the information (Pennington,

2010:55). Disclosure guidance for employers issued by NIACE advises that procedures to ensure confidentiality are important to encouraging LDD declarations (Taylor, 2010: 16-17).

Incorporation of requests for adjustments or identification of barriers, into staff surveys have also been suggested (Adams and Oldfield, 2012:40), although if responses were provided anonymously this would only allow for adjustments to be made on a general rather than individualised basis.

Respondents highlighted that they stress that everything that is discussed is in confidence. This was seen to be particularly important when discussing some conditions such as mental health and some groups who may feel more stigmatised. As seen in the discussion of barriers to disclosure, fear of employers finding out about undisclosed conditions is a particular fear of employed learners and so providers try to create a safe environment for disclosure and reassure learners about confidentiality.

### 3.2.6 Working with other organisations

Around two-thirds of respondents to the online survey (25 out of 37) reported working with partner organisations in the design of recruitment strategies and support for learners with LDD.

**Table 3.2: Work with partner organisations**

	Count
Yes	25
No	10
Don't know	2
N	37

*IES, 2013, Provider survey*

The qualitative research showed that in the main, providers were working with other organisations to get referrals and provide diagnoses or design of support for people with LDD.

Examples from the qualitative research showed that other organisations include: Connexions, special schools, Youth Offending Teams, Local Authorities, the National Careers Service, specialist charities and disability support organisations. In some cases projects had been funded and provided opportunities for colleges and providers to work with other organisations. NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) has produced a series of leaflets that give advice about disclosing mental health difficulties and are available for individuals and training organisations. Other tools that can be used to support learners with issues



around mental health disclosure can be found on the website of MHFE (mental health and further education)<sup>1</sup>.

By focussing on referral routes and pathways colleges and providers were linking with local special needs schools and charities to access a diverse range of learners. However, work with disability charities often resulted in very few referrals onto training courses.

Although perhaps not entirely applicable to working with employed learners such as those found on ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision, providers did think that building trusting relationships with other organisations was a critical success factor in encouraging participation and disclosure.

### 3.2.7 Role models/Ambassadors

Another approach for encouraging disclosure that some providers took was through the use of role models. In some cases current learners with LDD accompany staff on external visits or to open days. Another provider gave an example of a Skills Funding Agency/Education Funding Agency-funded project called 'Roles for All' which had engaged young people with visual and hearing impairments who had successfully completed apprenticeships to act as 'ambassadors' to show what could be achieved and encourage the participation of others with similar LDDs.

During the action-learning workshops providers also gave examples of using role models and ambassadors, for example by recording videos of learners talking about their experiences and sharing them online, or in some cases using employers as role models for other employers. Some providers give learners presentation and media training before making the videos and find that more learners are comfortable with recording their story than presenting 'live'.

DVDs can also show day-to-day experience in the workplace of discrimination or prejudice to flag up what is acceptable and what is not (for use with employers and employees), and how to challenge behaviour.

### 3.2.8 Organisational Culture/Making it a 'norm'

Lastly, the qualitative research also highlighted the need to make organisational cultures that are positive about LDD the norm. Again, there was consensus amongst the interviews that providers and colleges should have an inclusive learning environment with a 'learner comes first' approach and a willingness to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mhfe.org.uk/>

provide support to all learners, regardless of background. Providers should 'normalise' LDD and operate a 'mainstreaming model,' which offered individualised support to learners on mainstream courses rather than separate provision for learners identified with an LDD. This would mean that responsibility for delivering on equality and diversity objectives is viewed as spread across the whole organisation and not solely down to staff with a specific role for working with learners who declare an LDD. One provider also highlighted awareness raising for non-disabled people so that they were more comfortable around people with disabilities.

Another approach is the 'embedded' approach to support, whereby additional support is available for all, even for those who have not declared. In some cases, provider staff had the knowledge and skills to recognise if a learner had additional support needs and so were able put in place some support within the learning programme before the learner disclosed, or despite the learner choosing not to disclose.

Mainstreaming equality and diversity issues and LDD support could be supported by Skills Funding Agency Relationship Managers who could discuss equality and diversity monitoring with providers driven by feedback on data.

This should also extend to the workplace. Providers found differences in the support provided to employees with LDD. For example, they gave anecdotal evidence about some employers providing more effective support for LDD and being more likely to engage with the learner on a more personal level, whereas other organisations were more bureaucratic and where they had reduced budgets, this could impact on learner/employee support.



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## 4 Conclusions

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This chapter draws together the evidence that has been gathered for this research. As discussed in the introduction, the aim of this work is to explore the evidence looking at under-representation of learners who declare a Learning Difficulty and/or Disability (LDD) in ESF Priority 2 and 5 and then summarise the actions providers can take to increase engagement of learners with an LDD and disclosure. Finally we provide some recommendations for the Skills Funding Agency relating to how they can support their Relationship Managers and providers to work towards the ESF Priority 2 and 5 LDD target over the coming years.

### 4.1 Is there under-representation of learners with LDD in ESF Priority 2 and 5?

It is difficult to provide evidence for the reasons for non-disclosure, or determine how widespread it is, since the nature of the topic does not lend itself to research. Some of this apparent under-representation may be explained by population differences between the target groups of the ESF priorities. The proportion of people in employment with LDD is lower than the proportion of people with LDD who are unemployed (see for example the EIA for ESF (DWP, 2012) or IES work by Meager and Higgins, 2011). The Labour Force Survey for 2012 found that 46.3 per cent of working-age disabled people were in employment compared to 76.4 per cent of working-age non-disabled people. There is therefore a 30.1 percentage point gap between disabled and non-disabled people, representing over two million people. The gap has reduced by ten percentage points over the last 14 years and has remained stable over the last two years despite the economic climate.

We can also look to the figures for people who do disclose for some indication of under-representation. ESF Priority 2 and 5 has a programme target for 15 per cent of learners declaring a LDD. Our analysis of the ILR showed the proportion of

learners declaring an LDD to be 8.1 per cent in 2011/12, with a further two years of the programme to run. Data sources show variation in the number of people in employment declaring an LDD, depending on the question asked. For example, the 2012 Annual Population Survey (APS) found there were 14.4 per cent of people in employment who also said they had an LDD. The APS has a defined set of questions around disability which encompass both the Disability Discrimination Act definition and disabilities that affect the work an individual can do (work limiting disability). By contrast, the Census 2011 data, found 7.2 per cent of people in employment recorded themselves as having a long-term health problem or disability that limits their day-to-day activities either a little or a lot. This highlights the inherent difficulties in measuring levels of disability in any population, with differences depending on the question asked.

We can also look to declaration rates on similar workplace learning programmes, or provision which targets those in employment to gauge the extent of under-representation. The 2012 Little report for the Apprenticeships Unit, *Creating an Inclusive Apprenticeship Offer*, noted that although there had been a substantial increase in overall apprenticeship numbers since 2005, the proportion of apprentices with a declared LDD had decreased from 11.1 per cent to 8 per cent, even more so for 19-24 year old apprentices. In a similar vein, the Employer Responsive Provision for 2011/12 had 7.9 per cent of learners declaring an LDD. This is broadly similar to the declaration of LDD on ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision. Table 4.1 shows a comparison of the ESF Priority 2 and 5 data to participants in Employer Responsive provision<sup>1</sup>. It is likely that learners in this funding strand are in employment and therefore similar to the target group of ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision.

**Table 4.1: Proportion of learners declaring an LDD, 2011/12**

	ESF P2 and 5 (%)	Employer responsive provision (%)
Learner considers themselves to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem	8.1	7.9
Learner does not consider themselves to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem	88.2	90.7
No information provided by the learner	3.7	1.5
Total	100.0	100

*Source: IES, 2013, analysis of ILR data*

<sup>1</sup> Employer Responsive provision entry on the ILR captures provision driven by employer choice including apprenticeships for adults (aged over 19) and Further Education (FE) provision delivered on employers' premises. It covers all employer-facing activity, including Skills for Life, Level 2, Level 3 and above and adult apprenticeships.

While the proportion of LDD in ESF Priority 2 and 5 seems to be broadly in line with some other measures of the proportion of LDD in employment or learning, the differences with question wording make the task of direct comparison difficult. The level of ESF Priority 2 and 5 engagement is most similar to the lower estimates of the proportion of people with an LDD in employment and, although the proportion has been increasing, there would be merit in trying to work with providers over the remaining two and a half years of the current ESF programme to encourage further engagement with prospective learners with LDD. Our evidence suggests that there are ways in which providers can work to encourage disclosure, which includes stressing the benefits of disclosure to employees (see the provider guidance document for more details) that could help the ESF Priority 2 and 5 funding streams to increase the proportion of learners with an LDD it supports.

## 4.2 What actions could increase engagement with LDD in employment?

ESF Priority 2 and 5 providers described employer engagement as a difficult task in a saturated market, and in this context prospective learners with an LDD are not always a target group. The provider's relationship is with the employer in the first instance and they are the gatekeeper to prospective learners. In order to engage more people with LDD in employment, providers need to engage more effectively with employers. To do this, providers could:

- use and build on existing employer relationships, either that they have with employers, or that partner organisations have with employers
- take a holistic approach, offering other services such as recruitment and other training alongside the ESF Priority 2 and 5 offer
- sell the business benefits to the organisation of workplace training.

LSIS (2011) has highlighted some possible approaches to engaging with employers, which includes: involving employers in the design of learning programmes; working with other providers and in partnerships; offering a package of delivery that includes publicly funded and commercial training services; and making delivery models more flexible.

Having engaged employers, as the gatekeeper to workplace learning, training providers then need to encourage a diverse range of employees to participate. They could do this by:

- using diverse images on marketing and communications materials and stressing their commitment to equal opportunities, giving examples of what this means in practice

- promoting the available support for learners with LDD, giving specific examples of the equipment and adjustments that have been made to support learners with a range of conditions
- using high quality information, advice and guidance, and taking care to reconcile the needs of individual learners with the needs of their employers.

More generally providers could monitor and review their engagement with people with LDD and check whether the proportion of learners with LDD they engage is representative of the diversity of people in employment in their local area.

### **4.3 What actions are required to increase disclosure?**

Through the evidence from case study providers, a shortlist of 'what works' has been proposed in this report:

- Use appropriate categories for learning difficulties, health problems and disabilities in declaration forms and employ the language of wellbeing rather than ill-health. This helps learners to identify an appropriate option. It is also about how questions are phrased to get an idea about the support that is required, not just gathering management information. Open questions help to gather information about the bigger picture and learner needs.
- Ensure that there is a discussion of needs with all learners. As well as encouraging disclosure, discussing the support needs of learners can help to draw out previously undisclosed LDD.
- Increase awareness of support so that learners are confident that their needs will be met if they disclose.
- Enable disclosure at different stages of enrolment and learning so that no opportunity is lost.
- Ensure confidentiality, especially for employed learners. It is important to stress this for people who have had negative experiences in the past.
- Work with other organisations to draw learners from a wider pool and ensure that, with permission, information is shared to ensure a smooth transition.
- Make use of role models and ambassadors to share positive experiences.
- Ensure that the whole organisational culture supports increased engagement with LDD learners.

## 4.4 Recommendations for the Skills Funding Agency

This section presents some recommendations for the Skills Funding Agency from the findings presented in this report to support their Relationship Managers and providers to increase the proportion of learners in the workplace that ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision engages and supports.

Providers were not always aware that ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision was for employed learners, or that learners with LDD were a target group for the programme nationally. In line with provider flexibilities, the Skills Funding Agency should consider how best to increase awareness among providers that people with an LDD are a target group for ESF provision and that the funding is primarily aimed at employed people (although can include people who have recently been made redundant in some cases).

On occasions there seemed to have been a divergence between proposals and practice. While it is important that providers have the flexibility to respond to local needs, the Agency should consider how best to ensure that delivery is in line with providers' proposals (i.e. reaching planned target groups, working directly with employers) and to understand reasons for any divergence.

In order to support providers to engage a proportion of LDD in line with the wider definition of disability and the ESF national programme target of 15 per cent, the Agency should raise awareness of good practice in engaging learners with LDD. It could promote the guidance for providers developed alongside this evidence report, using Relationship Managers to signpost providers to the guidance, and promoting it via the provider online newsletter.

The Agency could consider the data capture around LDD in the Individualised Learners Record and the nature and language of the categories used in order to use the language of health and wellbeing or equality and diversity and limit the extent of it being a 'tick-box' exercise.

The Agency could consider whether and how to support Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) who will have responsibility for overseeing European programmes through the EU Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme in the future. The Agency could share effective practice at developing strategy for and commissioning learning and skills contracts to promote the equality and diversity of programmes.

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## Annex

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### Methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach and involved the following components.

#### A rapid evidence assessment

The rapid evidence assessment aimed to identify barriers to the participation in ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision for learners with LDD and successful approaches to overcoming these barriers.

The review focused on research from 2007 to the present, to correspond with the lifespan of the ESF funding stream. The review searched a range of literature around access to workplace skills and training for those with LDD. The review prioritised UK studies, and searched the following online databases (see Table A1).

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**Table A1: Online databases**

Name of database	Description
ASSIA	Covers various social science disciplines. Updated monthly, it currently contains over 375,000 records from over 500 journals published in 16 different countries.
Google Scholar	Provides a search of scholarly literature across many disciplines and sources, including theses, books, abstracts and articles.
INGENTA Connect	Over 5 million academic and professional research articles from 11,443 publications.
JSTOR	Database featuring more than 1,600 academic journals which also provides access to 15,000 books.

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In addition we sought material from the websites of NIACE (including the Mental Health in FE site), the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the

Government Equalities Office, Disability Rights UK, the Mental Health Centre, Equality and Human Rights Commission, Business Disability Forum, Foundation for People with Learning Difficulties, DWP (and the Office of Disability Issues), LSIS (including the Excellence Gateway), Mencap, Learning and Skills Council, SFA, Young People's Learning Agency, Learning and Skills Network, Learning and Skills Development Agency and National Development Team for Inclusion.

### **Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data analysis**

We looked at ILR data for two time periods - one at the start of the ESF funding period (2008/09) and the most recent year of data (2011/12). This exploration of ILR data linked providers to learners in order to:

- Identify the providers involved in delivering the programme.
- Build up a more detailed picture of this provision, for example, in terms of guided learning hours and course structure.
- Identify the key characteristics of learners accessing this provision, for example in terms of age, socio-economic group, ethnicity and disability (including learning difficulties and disabilities).
- Explore the use of the 'prefer not to say' category in disclosing LDD.
- Examine the absolute number of LDD learners by provider in relation to how they have changed over the funding period of ESF.
- Examine the number of learners with a declared LDD for ESF provision and in provision delivered by that provider through other funding streams.

In order to make a case selection of education and training providers, to be used in the qualitative piece of this project, administrative records were used. At the same time, the Skills Funding Agency provided us with lists of providers which held contracts for provision under ESF Priorities 2 and 5.

The list of ESF contract holders in the academic year 2011/12 contained a total of 139 different providers. In contrast, only 113 providers were found in the ILR dataset of 2011/12 which were providing education and training in the ESF Funding Stream within Priorities 2 and 5 (the latter information identified through the variable Project Dossier Number). Of these 113 providers, 15 were not listed as ESF contract holders in the list provided by the SFA. However, these providers were responsible for a small number of learners under ESF Priorities 2 and 5 (235 altogether, out of 30,228 learners under this provision).

In order to guide the selection of cases for the qualitative research, training provision characteristics of the remaining 98 providers listed as contract holders

and recorded in the ILR dataset of 2011/12 were examined, and the same procedure was followed to examine ESF provision in 2008/09.

In order to study the characteristics of learners under ESF provision within each provider, the dataset needed to be processed and rearranged in order to have one record per learner; originally, each learner's learning aim constitutes a record in the ILR dataset. Usually, this can be achieved using the variable that identifies 'programme aims', which makes it possible to distinguish between these and other subsidiary learning aims. However, this was not feasible in the case of this study because the variable that identifies 'programme aims' is not recorded in the case of ESF provision. Therefore, an alternative method was used. A variable was created indicating the planned duration of each learning aim. Duplicated learning aims records and records with null duration were then removed. Finally, each individual's learning aim of longest duration was selected. The study of the characteristics of learners under ESF Priorities 2 and 5 was based on these records.

This dataset was also used to examine basic descriptive information about the learners under ESF Priorities 2 and 5. Descriptive statistics have been obtained on the basis of all 30,228 learners. The exclusion of the 235 learners who appear with providers not listed as contract holders does not affect the findings, given that they represent 0.8 per cent of all learners under this type of provision.

### **Online survey**

An online survey was undertaken to gather a breadth of data about recruiting and encouraging disclosure of LDD among providers. The survey was open for ten weeks and providers were encouraged to participate through the Agency's 'Provider Update', NIACE's network of providers, letters and the provider workshops. The link to the survey was also sent to all the ESF Priority 2 and 5 providers and follow-up emails were sent to encourage their input into the research.

The survey was designed using SNAP software and questions focused on the provision of advice and guidance, approaches to engagement and disclosure, good practice and a few open questions to allow for more detailed responses that could better illustrate good practice.

### **Qualitative interviews with ESF Priority 2 and 5 providers and staff from the Skills Funding Agency**

Eleven interviews were conducted in total, all of which were completed by phone. Most providers were further education colleges or private training providers. One organisation was a specialist disability support organisation that worked with employers to find work placements and trials for people with LDD and a few were

voluntary sector organisations. Providers were selected to represent a range of geographies throughout England. Questions focused on the design of provision, the target groups, methods of data collection and monitoring of disclosure, engagement and outreach to learners with LDD and what kind of further support providers would find most helpful in engaging learners with LDD.

Two interviews were conducted with staff from the Skills Funding Agency who had a remit on ESF provision and in supporting Relationship Managers. These were conducted over the phone and focused on what they saw as the key research and policy issues for the Skills Funding Agency and how this had evolved in recent months.

### **Five case studies**

While extensive efforts were made to engage six case studies, only five agreed to participate. Case studies aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the practical approaches providers were taking to engage learners with LDD and encourage disclosure. Case studies were selected on the basis of analysis of ILR data from the academic year 2012-13. A shortlist was drawn up based on those providers who had the highest percentage of disclosure among learners on their ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision. This was used as an indicator of good practice. We also selected providers on the basis of geography to ensure a spread across different regions. We also intended to select different types of providers as well as those that had both static, declining or increasing numbers of learners with LDD across the funding period. However, the number of case studies willing to participate in the research was so small that we were not able to apply these criteria.

Providers on the shortlist were invited to participate via a letter jointly drafted by IES, NIACE and the Skills Funding Agency. This was then followed up by email or phone. In order to encourage participation, an invitation to participate as a case study was published twice in the Skills Funding Agency's 'Provider Update' as well as twice through NIACE's own provider network. Attempts to recruit case studies were also made at the provider workshops. IES also worked through the Agency's Relationship Managers to encourage participation.

Case studies consisted of one-day (and in some cases two-day) site visits to conduct interviews with provider staff involved in the delivery of ESF Priority 2 and 5 provision and some learners. In a few cases, follow-up interviews were also conducted over the phone with staff that were unable to be interviewed during the site visit. Questions focused on the design of provision, the target groups, methods of data collection and monitoring of disclosure, engagement and outreach to learners with LDD and what kind of further support providers would find most helpful in engaging learners with LDD. Case studies were written up

anonymously, based on requests for anonymity made by several case study providers.

### **Three action learning workshops: London; Manchester; Birmingham**

Three workshops were held to 'test' the emerging findings from the research, identify further examples of good practice and find out how this might best translate into actionable guidance for providers. The workshops took an action-research/peer learning approach and focused on sharing experiences of engaging learners with LDD and lessons learned from these experiences.

Each workshop took a similar format. The morning sessions presented the emerging 'key themes' of the research to date and break-out groups were encouraged to discuss (and then present to the group) whether and to what extent these themes had featured in their own work, as well as to highlight any additional issues that had featured in their work with LDD.

The participants were then handed a set of 'scenarios' which related to current practice that had been identified in the research to date. These scenarios detailed various practices relating to working with LDD. Participants were asked whether they thought this was good practice, whether they were familiar with it, or were already doing it, what could be improved about the scenario and whether they would consider implementing the actions themselves. This section aimed to draw on providers' views of specific practices in working with LDD and to gauge how extensive these were and whether they were, in fact, 'good practice' at all. This session also presented providers with an opportunity to share their experiences with each other and learn from each others experiences.

The afternoon session of the workshops focused on getting providers' views on what kind of guidance they would find most helpful. Researchers presented participants with a range of good practice guidance and break-out groups had to comment on what they thought were the strengths and shortcomings of a selection of these guides. This provided researchers with a good idea of what guidance providers wanted and the type of guidance that they would actually use, both in terms of format/style but also in terms of substance and content.

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