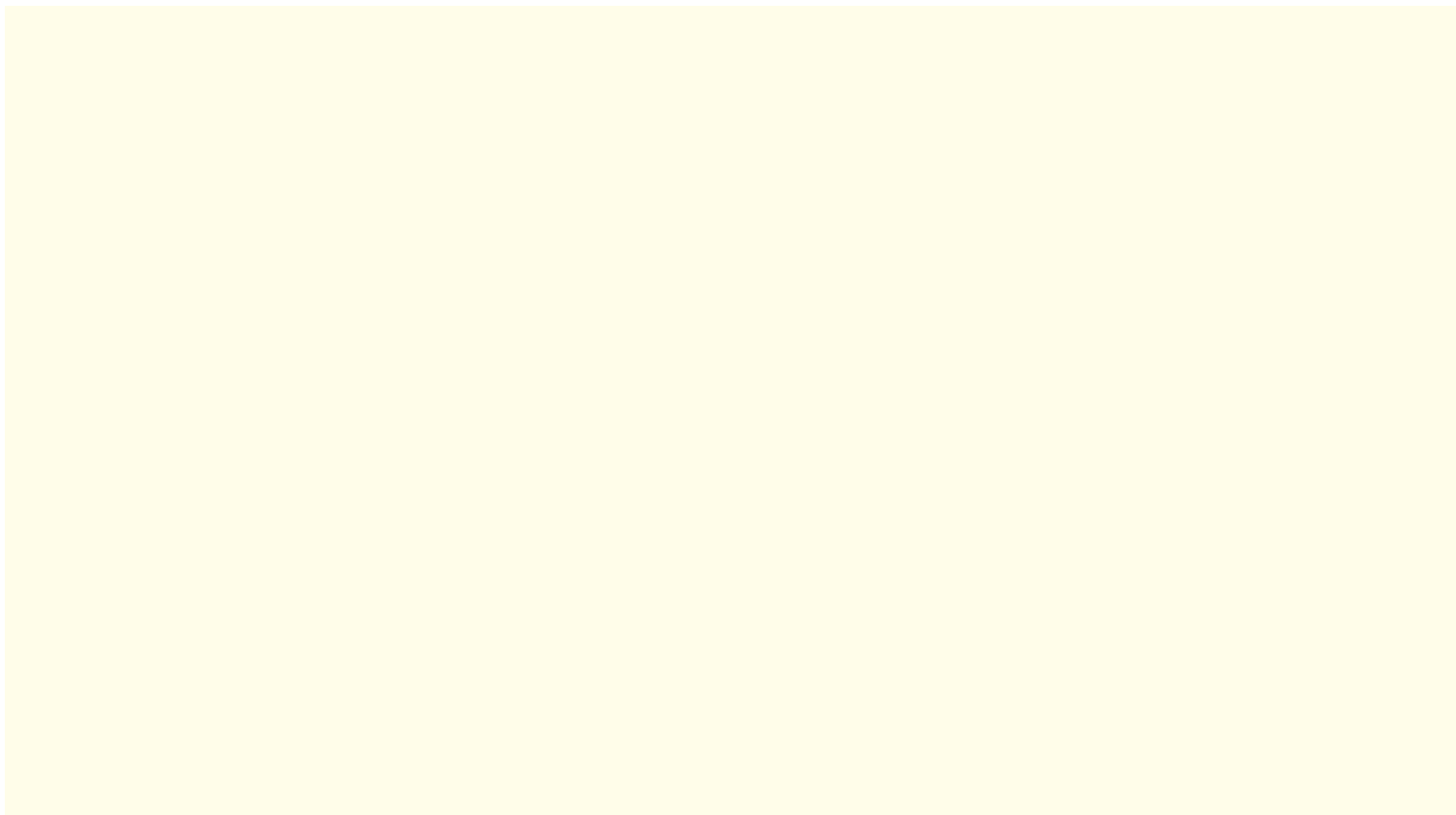Guidance for colleges and other post-16 education providers on implementing the Disability Discrimination Act

learning and skills development agency

Support into employment for young people and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities

Liz Maudslay

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Further information
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Contents

Introduction

This guidance document has arisen out of work carried out in a series of action research projects – DDA Taking the work forward – managed by a consortium including LSDA, Skill and NIACE. The guidance addresses the issue of how best to support disabled people into employment, which was a consistent theme in several of the projects' work. The guidance will draw considerably from the Project 13 report on work experience, the Project 14 report on supporting young people with learning difficulties and disabilities into work and the Project 15 report, which looked at promoting access to employment for adults with learning difficulties. It will also look wider than these three projects. Successful support into employment will often require a multi-agency approach, hence the guidance will refer to programmes which are not funded by the LSC. However, its primary audience is seen as being practitioners who work with learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties on LSC-funded programmes, whether these be work preparation courses for people with learning difficulties, people who work on e2e programmes or people who work on apprenticeship programmes. While primarily addressing practitioners, the guidance will also, at the end, include recommendations for both policy-makers and managers. The aim of this guidance is not once again to list the blocks which can so often thwart disabled people entering employment – these have been written about in several of the works cited here. Instead it aims to look at creative solutions which certain providers have attempted to put in place.

The cohort of 'people with disabilities and learning difficulties' is a wide one, and the kind of provision needed to support people into employment will vary from group to group. Young people may have different needs from older adults, while people with a learning difficulty might have different requirements from those with disabilities. The sections in this guidance will try to reflect some of these differences while acknowledging that some common issues pertain to the whole group. Sections will include:

■ an overview of the range of support programmes available to disabled people

■ support for adults with learning difficulties

■ support for young people working below Level 2

■ issues relating to young people and adults with disabilities but without a learning difficulty

■ generic sections on working with employers and work experience.

Each section will be followed by a question checklist for practitioners.

Currently, if a person is disabled or has a learning difficulty they are far more likely to be unemployed than those who are non-disabled – '50% of working-aged disabled people are economically inactive, compared with 15% of non-disabled people… It is estimated that there are one million disabled people who want to work but are not working' (Able to Work, 2005 NEP report). This is at a time when there is relatively high employment in this country. However, the majority of people with a disability or learning difficulty clearly state that they want to work. It can be argued that the shift from manual to more highly-skilled jobs has resulted in fewer employment opportunities for those people with difficulties in learning – the site from Project 14 in Yorkshire certainly cited this as a reason for low employment of their e2e cohort. However, there is still a range of jobs which do not require a high skill-level, and the shift to more skilled work does not explain the high number of people with a disability but without a learning difficulty who are unemployed. Clearly, despite the introduction of the DDA in 1995, which gives employers legal duties not to discriminate against disabled people, as a country we are getting something wrong and failing people in not enabling them to fulfil their employment aspirations.

I am beginning this document not with an example from one of the projects, but with a very positive example of employment of disabled people I experienced when I was living for nine months in Nepal. Near the beginning of my stay I was in a restaurant in Kathmandu and noticed that one of the waiters was deaf. After some enquiries I was told that another restaurant in this chain was staffed entirely by deaf waiters and waitresses. I visited this, and managed to talk at some length with the restaurant owner. He was an extremely successful entrepreneur who owned a number of cafes and restaurants which were considered to be some of the most stylish in Kathmandu. I asked him whether he had a personal interest in employing deaf people but he said no, it was a purely business decision in that he had felt they would be good employees. He had organised three to four months of on-the-job training after which the deaf staff were employed in exactly the same way as any other staff in his organisation. His decision was not misplaced. On a subsequent visit six years later, the same staff were all in employment and several other deaf waiters and waitresses had been employed.

Of course there are many differences between the situation in Nepal and that in the UK, and good practice which has been successful in one culture does not always translate directly to another. However, I am mentioning it because it illuminates a clarity and simplicity of approach which we can appear to have lost in this country. In our concerns to negotiate the plethora of LSC and DWP funding streams, and the complexities of the benefit system, it can become easy to lose sight of the simple fact that we are dealing with people who both want to and can work, and that the best place for them to learn these skills is in real work situations.

Practitioners will be aware of the range of LSC-funded programmes which include Entry to Employment (e2e), Apprenticeships, NVQs and post-school education courses specifically designed to support people with disabilities or learning difficulties into employment. However, as has been stated above, successful support into employment may involve collaboration between LSC and non-LSC programmes. It is therefore important to start with a very brief overview of the different schemes available.

In the area of advice and guidance every Jobcentre Plus will have a **Disability Employment Adviser (DEA)**. DEAs provide support to disabled people who are having difficulty in getting a job because of their disability, and also to employed people who are concerned about losing their job because of a disability.

Within Jobcentre Plus there are a number of programmes open to people on incapacity benefit. These include:

New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP): NDDP Job Brokers provide help with looking for a job and any support or training that is needed.

Job Introduction Scheme: This is a grant paid to an employer for the first few weeks of a disabled person's employment, helping pay towards wages or other employment costs.

WORKSTEP: This provides supported job opportunities for disabled people facing more complex barriers.

Access to Work: This provides advice and support for disabled people to follow an employment route. This can include an assessment of needs and also details of grants (available through Jobcentre Plus) that may be available towards any extra employment costs that result from a disability – such as costs of transport, of additional equipment or additional personal support.

Pathways to Work: This is a government initiative being piloted in certain regions which provides people on incapacity benefit more in-depth advice and a 'return to work credit' in order to help them move from benefit to employment.

More details of all of these programmes and how to access them in your local area are available from the government website www.direct.gov.uk. The website also gives details of the benefits available to disabled people who gain employment, as well as giving advice on how to identify disability-friendly employers and advice on declaring a disability to an employer.

In addition to these programmes there is a range of local **Supported Employment Programmes**. These are not government programmes, and can be funded in a variety of ways. Further details are available from The Association of Supported Employment at www.afse.org.uk. Valuing People, the Department of Health White Paper on people with learning difficulties, also places high priority on the importance of supporting people with learning difficulties into employment.

The appropriateness and effectiveness of these different programmes for individual disabled people varies. However, a clear message for practitioners is to be aware of how these various programmes work in your locality and whether they might be able to support you in helping your learners to progress to employment.

1 █ Supporting adults with learning difficulties into employment

'It's better being at work than talking about work.'

The quote above was from a learner in DDA Project 15, which looked at promoting access to employment for adults with learning difficulties. It is certainly true that some adults with learning difficulties have a lot of opportunity to 'talk about work'. College staff have coined the terms 'recycling' or 'warehousing' to describe the number of adults who move from course to course in an attempt to prepare them for employment without ever actually achieving the outcome of a job. Making the Jump (2002), a research project which studied preparation for work courses for adults with learning difficulties, found that very few of these learners actually succeeded in moving on into employment:

A familiar story tells of individuals remaining at college for years, sometimes repeating courses or returning to the training centre from which they were referred, only to come back to college a few years later.

(Jacobsen 2002, p25)

While a practitioner reported:

Those of us visiting neighbouring colleges soon gain an uncomfortable feeling upon recognising previous students now enrolled on a course very similar to the one they have just left.

(Vickers, 2003)

In such a situation, staff involved in Project 15 recognised the need for a radical shift in emphasis in the ways in which they approached the issue of supporting learners into employment.

All of the sites in the project looked at developing models based on the principles of Supported Employment. Supported Employment, which has a history both in the US and the UK, stresses the importance of learning in work rather than learning to work:

Supported Employment focuses on work, not getting ready for work, not on having the skills before going to work and not on meeting human services criteria before entering the competitive job market. The individual must simply want to work.

(Wehman and Kregal, 1998, p153)

Supported Employment can be characterised by the phrase 'place and train' which differs from the more traditional vocational preparation models that tend to use job readiness approach characterised by 'train then place'.

(Everatt, 2002)

Such an approach challenges the more traditional belief that skills can be taught in an educational or training situation and can then be transferred when a person goes to work:

Supported Employment challenges the efficacy of conventional work readiness approaches where people develop transferable skills within vocational training or simulated work environments prior to employment.

(Pozner, 1997, p43)

Instead the message is that, particularly for adults with learning difficulties, the best and maybe the only way to prepare for work is to prepare in work. In the light of their discussions about the Supported Employment model, all of the sites in Project 15 reviewed their programmes for adults with learning difficulties to see how they could ensure that they gave more opportunity for the learners to 'learn in work' rather than 'learn about work'. Some of the different ways in which they approached this are given below.

Questions for providers, especially those working with adults with learning difficulties:

■ *How much does your provision allow learners to learn in work rather than talk about work?*

Working with Supported Employment Agencies

Supported Employment Agencies work with disabled people, including people with learning difficulties, to help them prepare for and find work. They work closely with employers to 'match' the right person to the right job. Typically they will be able to offer a combination of:

■ 'helping people identify their skills and preferences through the development of a vocational profile

■ job development to find the person's preferred job through contact with employers

■ job analysis to find out more about the workplace, co-workers, and the support the individual might need in that environment

■ job support to ensure that both the employer and the employee receive 'just enough' creative assistance, information and back-up to achieve success, with the support continuing as long as it is needed

■ career support to help people think in the longer term about career progression.'

<div align="right">(Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2001)</div>

Project 15 found that while 'all of the sites are developing support for learners based on the principles and practices of Supported Employment' they did this through two different approaches. While some colleges provided the support themselves others worked closely with and made use of the support of an external Supported Employment Agency.

Interestingly one college site (Lewisham) began the project by planning to develop its in-house support for learners. However, on hearing a talk from the project external adviser, who herself worked for an SEA, they decided that the best way to progress was to make links with SEAs in their catchment area:

In many ways we did not anticipate this as an outcome as we entered the project with a dream of setting up our own college-based Supported Employment Agency. However, during the project we gained a deeper understanding of the way SEAs work and in particular that it is not necessary to have knowledge and experience of working with adults with learning difficulties to progress them into paid employment. We had to change our thinking from looking at the needs of learners to looking at the needs of employers. With a number of SEAs already in the locality, to set up another one seemed counter-productive.

The liaison was not without its problems. To begin with, SEAs work in local authority areas, whereas the college took learners from a number of different boroughs, hence would need ideally to liaise with several different SEAs. SEAs vary in their quality, and several of them place a greater emphasis on finding employment for people with physical and sensory impairments rather than for those with learning difficulties. Also, voluntary sector SEAs often rely on short-term funding, and so lack the stability to develop long-term plans. However, the message to colleges is clear: do not assume that your staff are necessarily the most appropriate people to provide support into employment; it may well be preferable to employ some of your resources to build up effective working relationships with other agencies in your locality.

Questions for providers:

- *Have you explored the Supported Employment Agency opportunities in your area?*

- *Would it be possible and beneficial to try to establish closer working links with an SEA?*

Employment support from within the college

Another project site, Joseph Priestly College in Leeds, was already providing support into employment from within the college, and had created what another site member described as 'an SEA based within college'.

Joseph Priestly has managed to be extremely successful in gaining a variety of LSC funding to resource its project, including, in 2003, gaining LSC and European Partnership funding (recently converted into core college funding) to extend its own Access to Community and Employment (ACE) project to include all six of the Leeds group of further education colleges. Not only does the funding cover Supported Employment workers, it also provides for a training allowance for employers who participate in the programme. Much of the workers' time goes in building up good relationships with employers, which includes a commitment from them that if a placement is successful it will be turned into a permanent job. The only criterion for entry is that the learner really wants to work. Last year 60% of ACE learners made the transition to paid employment. Following supported employment principles the ACE project has four main stages:

Stage 1

Following a detailed Welfare Rights Assessment, the learner starts on a number of core modules, but these are very much geared at finding the right employer, arranging a meeting and getting started. There are always difficulties, and in the absence of a job coach, the employer receives a training subsidy to help the student at work by providing a foster worker. This initial training will last ten weeks.

Stage 2

By now the learner is settling in at work, owning some tasks and taking on some small amount of responsibility. The college tutors visit regularly and adjust the college programme to suit the skills needed for that job. This can be done in all manner of practical ways and doesn't involve the learning of interview skills, completing curriculum vitae or photocopied worksheets! This period of consolidation and growth of confidence will last no more than twenty weeks.

Stage 3

The employed stage. Students can gain Permitted Earnings if part of a Supported Employment programme and work up to 16 hours a week without loss of benefits. Or, if the job is more than 16 hours, an application for Disabled Persons Tax Credit is made which tops up the wage with a direct payment. There is even a subsidy for the employer at this stage through the local Jobcentre. The employer gains Job Introduction Subsidy. All this will be in line with the original Welfare Rights assessment, and, when it's all added together, it is a hard package to turn down!

Stage 4

Getting a job has been one journey, keeping it is another. This journey is longer and trickier, but the ACE programme provides an advocacy service which helps identify small problems before they become mountainous. The opportunity of real work also brings with it a range of life chances: **where we live, what we choose to do, friendships and other relationships**. This stage helps the new employee to come to terms with these issues.

A partnership approach is used at this stage, enabling the college to get on with the planning for the next group of ACE students.

(Pete Vickers, site report for Project 15, Appendix One)

Joseph Priestly College used the DDA Project to develop, in conjunction with learners, a framework for a detailed action plan as a communication tool which can be shared between the learner, the college and the employer. The development of a plan which can be understood by learner and employer alike has proved extremely beneficial to the project. It has also had additional benefits. It provides important evidence for the LSC to show that even though learners on this programme do not receive any accredited outcomes they are making real progress. It also gave evidence of the value of a second year on the programme for those learners who did not achieve employment in their first year. (NB: More details of the development of this action plan are given below in the section on Working with Employers).

The model created by Joseph Priestly College requires considerable development of normal college teaching roles. If practitioners decide to develop a similar programme they need to ask the questions:

■ *What additional staff roles will need to be created or bought in – eg Welfare Rights Guidance, supported employment workers, advocacy service?*

■ *Have you developed a detailed action plan which can serve as a communication tool between learner, college and employer?*

Curriculum implications of the supported employment model

Whether an educational organisation chooses, as Lewisham did, to collaborate with an SEA, or whether it organises support into employment internally, there are clear implications for curriculum development. In many ways this change can be summarised by Everatt's quotation above, not 'train then place' but 'place and train'. Within this context, there is no real place for traditional work preparation courses as the need is for learning which supports rather than prepares for employment. It is important to recognise how such a change can at times feel threatening to staff who are used to having sole control over their curriculum offer. 'Place and train' means relinquishing some of this control as the curriculum becomes directed not just by the teacher but by the learner and the employer.

Sites working on Project 15 explored different ways of altering their curriculum offer. Staff at Peterborough Regional College modified their Certificate in Life Skills course by:

■ focusing on realistic transferable work-based skills

■ changing from theory-based courses to a greater flexibility and desire to include work skills as part of the course

■ an increase in vocational emphasis.

Lewisham College has for several years been developing creative ways of allowing adults with learning difficulties to learn through taking part in practical employment-related activities. They have a programme based around a flower arranging industry whereby learners do flower arrangements and sell their products either at a stall in the college or by getting contracts to provide floral arrangements both within and outside the college. Other examples of practical employment-based curricula include making and selling cards for key events such as Valentine's Day, and providing a car-cleaning service for staff. Other colleges have arranged for learners to run college tuck-shops.

Other sites recognised the need to be far more flexible in the way in which they allowed their curriculum to change according to individual learner placements:

As for influencing and making changes to the college curriculum, each placement has been different. One example of this is how we have had to implement food hygiene and health and safety in college time, with the student, specifically for the student's individual placement, in order for them to be part of the workforce. The employer has greatly appreciated this, and it has definitely helped towards Steven being employed there.

(Joseph Priestly College)

Of course, a supported employment model does not preclude the importance of educational support in helping learners take the first step towards employment. Staff in the project saw CV production as being an essential part of this. However, rather than getting learners to compile a standard CV, they looked at innovative ways of involving learners in presenting information about themselves:

During the first term the learners create CVs to take to meetings with potential employers. These can be videos (although not all employers have the resources to look at these in the workplace) but the most successful CVs have been in the form of a poster. The student has drawn (and maybe written) about themselves – skills, experience, interests, etc on a large piece of paper which is then laminated and can be rolled up and taken to the employer as a basis for discussion. Photographs have also been used.

(Joseph Priestly College)

Information on and discussion about benefits was another area in which colleges saw they had a key role. The benefits system is complex, and many learners and their parents resist the move into employment because of their perception that they might be worse off financially if they take a job. Joseph Priestly College addressed these fears by employing, out of ACE funds and on a casual basis, a Welfare Rights Officer so that she can talk to learners and also visit individual families to support them through the labyrinth of benefits information.

One very interesting perception on what was and was not needed in a curriculum offer which aimed to support learners into employment was the observation by the Lewisham member of staff on how easy it was to 'over teach' in a work-based curriculum. On her visit to Joseph Priestly College she became aware of the need to stand back and observe the areas in which learners may require further development:

A particularly interesting point was made about changing ways of teaching in relation to preparing students for work. There has always been an emphasis on teaching and learning but the tutors at Joseph Priestly College are trying to stand back. The students are set a group task. There is a brief description of the task, the example given was 'you as a group are going to make a large, colourful collage of a fish'. Most of the necessary materials are in the room but not laid out. The students then have five minutes to ask questions after which the teacher cannot give any more information. The students then execute the task while the teacher observes and fills in a pro-forma for each student. From this, feedback is given and personal targets set.

(Lewisham site report)

Personal and social behaviour is an intrinsic part of successful employment. Staff will often report that a work placement for a person with a learning difficulty breaks down not so much because of their difficulty actually in carrying out specific work-related tasks but because of difficulties in social aspects, such as working with others or joining in appropriately at lunch or tea breaks. However, in the example above, the response is not to devise a personal and social curriculum but to stand back and observe the areas in which learners may have difficulties so that a targeted, individualised programme can be created.

Questions for practitioners are:

■ *Have you reviewed your curriculum in terms of its balance between theoretical and practical work? How might you bring in more practical employment-related activities?*

■ *How can you build in greater flexibility to your curriculum offer so that the immediate and individual needs of learners who might be in work or work placement some of the time can be addressed?*

■ *How might you explore creative ways of CV writing?*

■ *Have you looked at the possibility of bringing in a Welfare Rights worker as part of your curriculum offer so that learners, and maybe their parents too, can find out more about how their particular benefit situation would be affected by going to work?*

■ *Do you feel your course is 'over taught'? If so how might you find different ways of enabling learners to develop their personal and social skills independently along the lines of the example from Joseph Priestly College?*

2 | Supporting young people with learning difficulties into employment

One of the LSDA action research projects focused specifically on promoting access to employment for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. While several of the messages mentioned above in the section on adults are also relevant to young people, there are also certain differences in providing appropriate work-based learning for young people. Young people, unlike the groups of older people with learning difficulties, have not been through a range of preparation for employment provision and are likely to require the focused support of some kind of coherent training package before making the passage to employment.

Entry to Employment

All of the sites working on the DDA project were using the Entry to Employment (e2e) framework. All of these sites were very positive about the e2e framework. They welcomed its potential for an inclusive approach and the way in which the framework allowed for the flexibility to create individual programmes which placed young people at the centre and took account of their own views and interests (see **Framework for Entry to Employment Programmes**, LSC, 2002). These views reflect those expressed in the 2005 **Adult Learning Inspectorate Report on e2e**. The report welcomes the way in which e2e has been successful in engaging disengaged learners, a high proportion of whom experience difficulty in learning which in many cases results from a hidden disability such as a mental health difficulty or dyslexia. The ALI report also recognises that, while only a small proportion of e2e learners (6%) progress onto an apprenticeship programme, a significant number (34%) progress onto further education, training or employment while an even higher number (59%) are successful in achieving one or more of their learning aims. The report is clear that e2e has achieved considerable success in developing softer outcomes such as greater 'self-confidence, self-discipline and self-worth'. It also notes that learners with a self-declared disability or learning difficulty are as successful in their outcomes as other learners.

However, participants in the LSDA DDA project expressed real concern that recent LSC advice on recruitment might lead to a tightening up of entry criteria. They were very concerned that there might be more pressure to reduce the number of participants who required an extended timetable and increased pressure on providers to only accept those who were likely to progress quickly onto an apprenticeship programme. They felt that there was a real danger that this would reduce the number of participants with learning difficulties and mental health difficulties for whom this programme has been so successful. This issue will be taken up in the recommendations for policy-makers at the end of this guidance.

Working in Partnership

The ALI report includes many positive examples of creative ways of using the e2e framework, and some of these are discussed in this and the subsequent section. It states that e2e has achieved most success with disadvantaged groups when funding has been used flexibly to include a range of different partners with specific areas of expertise. It makes specific mention of the importance of close links with the Connexions Service to address the holistic needs of learners. Links with a range of specialist partners are particularly important in supporting young people with disabilities or learning difficulties. It states that, although in many cases young people with dyslexia have not been so well supported, specific projects have worked with specialist organisations; for example it gives an instance of project money being used to buy in dyslexia diagnosis and another where staff from different organisations received joint training on initial assessment. In the area of mental health, it gives examples of projects buying in counselling expertise, and shows how valuable a short period of counselling can be to learners who face particular challenges. It also shows how some providers have made creative use of the flexibility of e2e by allowing learners who have real problems with full-time attendance to attend on an individually-designed part-time basis.

Questions for providers are:

■ *Are there ways in which you might make better use of the potential flexibility of the e2e Framework?*

■ *Do you work with other agencies and buy in specialist support, eg counselling support, if a particular learner would benefit from it?*

Creating an integrated programme

E2e has three main aims: to develop learners' personal and social skills, their vocational knowledge and skills and their literacy, language and numeracy skills. The ALI report states that a failure of many providers has been to separate these three strands, and shows how the most positive results have been achieved when the three strands are closely integrated. The report gives a case study of a project at Juniper Training in the Black Country, where providers have created The Street, a local newspaper:

Learners join the newspaper team right at the start of their training, working on the classifieds section before electing to work on the lifestyle, news or sports sections. During an eight-week period, their skills are assessed regularly. Staff at Juniper Training work with each learner on developing a learning plan to build on these skills and map out ways of learning new ones. The range of skills that learners develop is excellent. As well as learning to work as a team and communicate with people at all levels, some useful practical skills are learnt, such as skills in using computer software and hardware. Carrying out research and producing text allows learners to work on their reading and writing skills in a relevant and meaningful context.

Another positive example of integration of the three strands occurred in Northern Ireland, where e2e learners designed and painted a mural:

The whole project was based on fostering community responsibility and a sense of belonging and citizenship, and learners found that these concepts could be taken back to their own communities. Some learners found that using art as a medium allowed them to express themselves more openly and improve their communication skills. Ideas of valuing diversity and understanding other cultures were developed.

Questions for providers are:

■ *How closely do you feel your programme integrates the three elements of e2e?*

■ *Are there projects that you could devise that might form a basis for a more integrated approach?*

The ALI Report found that in many cases one of the weakest strands of e2e was the vocational training and links with employers:

Too often, however, planning of the vocational element is haphazard. Many providers offer a poor choice of vocational options. Others offer plenty of options but fail to accredit learners' vocational skills. Some providers do not place enough emphasis on learners getting real work experience. Opportunities are missed for learners to use evidence from work towards their national vocational qualification.

One of the report's final recommendations is that providers need to:

improve the range of vocational options available to match more closely the needs of young people and those of the local economy.

This was certainly a finding both of the LSDA DDA project on promoting employment opportunities for young people, and on a parallel DDA project on finding work experience for young people with disabilities and learning difficulties. Shropshire County Training, which was working on one of the projects, stated:

The biggest obstacle to young people with disabilities is employer inertia, fear and lack of information.

This was a finding that was reiterated in several other sites. These projects therefore devoted a considerable part of their action research to looking at better ways of engaging with employers.

How to reach employers

Several sites mentioned the value of working closely with Supported Employment Agencies as a means of brokering links with employers. As we have seen earlier, this was a key message from the project working with adults with learning difficulties. When trying to make direct links with employers all sites found that, while being time-consuming, the only real way to engage employers was through direct contact. General mail shots were tried but found to be ineffective; for example, one site sent out 500 questionnaires and received only 1 response. However, another site found:

a short concise telephone survey… produced fast results with an excellent response rate. We needed to ensure everyone has the same information from introduction to consolidation and prepare a 'script'.

Another site, Foxes Academy, is a small specialist college which runs a hotel staffed by people with learning difficulties. Because of the way in which it is established, Foxes Academy is able to provide learners with continuous real work experience and hence has a good record of moving learners on into employment. However, they recognised the need to widen their pool of potential employers and, as part of the action research project, started offering 'free lunches' to local employers. They found that even those who had previously never thought they could offer work or work experience to people with learning difficulties would often dramatically change their minds on actually seeing the young people at work:

Our fourth visitor was the big challenge. Not only was the employer totally new to the idea of having one of our students, she was also sure that her establishment would not be able to offer paid work. In other words, she saw it as a charitable gesture rather than a real working situation. However she had started to change her attitude after only a few sessions. She was full of praise for the students and very impressed with the hotel.

It is important to remember that employers employing fewer than fifteen people have only recently had duties under the DDA. One way of encouraging links with them might be to offer a short awareness-raising/training event for them. In this way they would be able to meet disabled learners at the same time as gaining information and skills that would be of benefit to them in fulfilling their new legal duties.

A question for practitioners is:

■ *Do any of the examples above suggest to you new ways in which your organisation might be able to engage with employers?*

How best to support employers

Sites in all the employment projects recognised that employers needed to be properly supported if they were going to employ or take on work placement a learner with a disability or learning difficulty. Sometimes this took the form of ensuring that employers had access to clear and helpful information about the needs of people with particular disabilities. It is important here to be aware of the valuable literature which is already available on this. The **Employers' Forum on Disability** offers advice and guidance through its publications, briefings, website and helpline. It has created a series of very informative leaflets specifically designed for employers which cover issues related to a range of disabilities, including hidden disabilities, and gives practical advice on how employers might best make adjustments for different people in their workplace. Their work includes information on how to obtain Access to Work funds which are available to support all disabled employees who are in full-time or substantial part-time work.

In addition to this, a recent publication brought out by Joseph Rowntree, **Employing people with learning disabilities, a handbook for employers**, 2004, gives excellent advice on what employers can do to ensure that the employment of a person with a learning disability is a success. This handbook is very clearly laid out under a series of headings:

■ Recruitment

■ Induction and initial training

■ The job

■ Management and day-to-day supervision

- Appraisal and performance monitoring
- Helping people progress in employment
- Dealing with problems

Each section discusses the issues, gives examples of good practice, and ends with a checklist for employers. It shows how very simple adjustments – eg altering the times when employees work so that they do not need to travel in the busy rush hour, or taking time to ensure that employees have fully understood instructions given to them – can make an enormous difference to a person's ability to succeed in employment. A final section contains additional information, including where employers can go to if they require extra support. Included at the end are some simple, detachable information cards covering the main points raised in the body of the text.

Resources such as these can be immensely reassuring to potential employers. All the resources listed are presented in ways which make them easy to copy, so they could easily form part of an information package to give to prospective employers.

As well as recognising the importance of well-presented, general information about employing people with disabilities and learning difficulties, project sites also recognised the importance of ensuring that employers were supported by having individual information about the people working with them. As we saw in Section One, Joseph Priestly College used the action research project to compile a format for an individual action plan which was a document owned equally by the college, the learner and the employer. Employer responses to these action plans were extremely positive, and they emphasised the importance of their involvement in the whole process. As one employer who was involved with the process of drawing up the action plan format said:

Many points come up when Paul is at work. As we have never had this action plan with us we are unable to make a note of and keep up to date with what Paul needs to improve. An example of this is that Paul often makes mistakes but doesn't tell anyone about them and the little mistakes get bigger and bigger because he won't ask for help. This causes him to become very stressed and causes problems for the business. If we had the action plan here, each time anything happened we could make a note of it and set targets for Paul to try to rectify the problems.

Another employer, a large multi-national retail organisation, was particularly interested in what the action plan revealed about softer and more personal aspects of the learner:

It is helpful because it supplies me with lots of information about the student. I can tell from this that I could leave him working on his own for short periods of time. The assessment about facts, feelings and future; that's really useful to me. I can tell the student is interested in getting a full-time job. What I really like is the bit about negative feelings. It is important to know if he gets easily stressed, then I can avoid high pressure sites for him.

The last part of this quote is especially revealing. So often, in their anxiety to get learners placed in employment, college and training staff are concerned to present everything in a very positive light. However, this quote shows how understanding a learner's difficulties as well as their strengths is far more likely to result in a successful placement.

Questions for providers include:

■ *Are there ways you could better support employers?*

■ *Do you make use of existing resources to provide some kind of package for new and potential employers?*

■ *Do you create individual action plans for learners as a means of communicating with employers?*

■ *Do these cover softer outcomes and more personal aspects as well as skills?*

Work placement or work experience

Working on the projects made several sites analyse the way in which they supported learners when they were on work placement. They realised this could often be *ad hoc* and one college drew up more formal guidelines to support disabled learners when they were on work placement. These included procedures for choice of employer, initial assessment of the job and frequency of visits to be carried out by college staff (see also DDA Briefing Sheet on work experience).

Some sites, particularly those working with young people, were very positive about the development of mentoring or buddying schemes as a means of supporting both the young person and the employer. As one site reported:

When a mentoring system was suggested to employers they were much more open to the potential recruitment of young people with disabilities. The majority of employers who said they could not employ someone with a learning disability said they would be prepared to consider it if they could access a 'buddying system'.

Another site, a college in the work experience project, began to investigate the potential of recruitment and training of volunteers to support people with a learning difficulty on work experience. These ideas of workplace support, whether coming from someone outside the work place or through a 'buddy' within it, certainly deserve further exploration.

Questions for providers include:

- *Have you drawn up guidance for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties when on work placement?*

- *Have you explored the possibility of creating a 'work buddy' scheme for learners on work placement?*

Making the case to employers

Throughout the three projects the question of how best to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities and learning difficulties constantly arose. It is true that the DDA has, since 1995, made it illegal for large employers to discriminate against disabled people in the workplace and, since 2004, these duties have been extended to smaller employers and been developed to also include people on work placement when it is part of a vocational training programme. However, sites believed that the best way to approach employers was not merely to emphasise the need for compliance with legislation but to stress the business case for employing disabled people. As it says in one of the information cards in the recent Rowntree Handbook, under the question Why should we do it?:

It's good value: research shows that people with learning disabilities generally stay in the job, are very committed, and have low absentee rates. It is often possible to make just a few simple and inexpensive changes to make sure it works. It is good for business: customers generally appreciate seeing a well-trained workforce which properly reflects the community. Employees generally also like working in a well-managed diverse workforce.

B and Q, a company which has done more than most to ensure that it employs a diverse workforce, shows in its publicity that there is no contradiction between its employment policies and its market aims. On the contrary, the employment of more disabled people leads automatically to more business, as not only do disabled staff make good employees but also they encourage more disabled customers to shop in B and Q.

Question for providers:

■ *How might you best go about making the case for employing people with disabilities and learning difficulties to prospective employers?*

Provider as employer

It is easy to complain about 'employers' not being willing to employ people with disabilities and learning difficulties while not looking at one's own organisation's employment record. Lewisham College, a site in the project looking at employment for adults with learning difficulties, became aware of this and, during the timescale of the project, looked to rectify the situation. The college had begun to realise that it required a recycling manager post, and decided to make this post available to a learner who had completed their employment preparation course for learners with severe learning difficulties. A recruitment process was drawn up and two young men were accepted on a jobshare basis with very positive results.

Under the Disability Equality Bill currently going through parliament, it is very likely that, from autumn 2006, public sector organisations will have new duties under an amended DDA. Public sector organisations will include further education colleges, LEAs providing adult and community learning and the LSC, and will all have to fulfil specific as well as general duties. This means that they will have to produce a Disability Equality Scheme which, along with other requirements, will mean that they will need to analyse the number of disabled staff they are employing and, if these numbers are low, create targets for improvement. Public sector organisations have not always been at the vanguard in employing disabled people. Hopefully, these new legal requirements will help to redress this situation. (For further information on new duties see the Disability Rights Commission's Draft Code of Practice.)

Questions for providers:

■ *What steps do you need to take to ensure that your organisation is prepared for its new legal duties, particularly in relation to the employment of disabled people?*

■ *Who in the organisation do you need to talk with about this?*

Supporting young people with disabilities into employment

Many of the sites involved in the DDA action research projects were working primarily with learners with learning difficulties. However, several of them, in particular those working for training providers, recognised that there was a significant need to increase access to employment for young people who might not have any difficulty with learning but did have a physical or sensory disability. These sites recognised that there was a problem with the reliability of data as to how many young people on apprenticeships had a physical or sensory disability. While numbers self-declaring as having some kind of 'disability, learning difficulty or health problem' are relatively high, these figures are not broken down to establish the nature of the difficulty. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that, although some people with physical and sensory disabilities do gain entry onto and succeed in apprenticeships, these numbers are not as high as they should be - an issue which the project leader has raised with National LSC as requiring further research.

In a series of regional events carried out by LSDA to disseminate the project findings, it became apparent that delegates from the work-based learning sector, in particular those working with apprenticeship learners, had far less experience and received far less support in working with disabled learners than their counterparts in colleges. The issue becomes a 'chicken and egg' cycle – disabled people do not get referred to apprenticeships, so expertise in supporting them is not built up, therefore few get referred, etc, etc. One of the sites, Chelmer Training, stated:

A large percentage of our learners are interested in manual and construction trades.

However:

Many young people… are not being prepared early enough for the requirements needed of them to access trades which they expect to enter after leaving education.

Two clear messages come out of this. The first is that practitioners, both schools and advice and guidance workers, need to be aware early on of the work aspirations of young people with disabilities, and support them to reach the required entry criteria for appropriate work-based learning programmes. The second message is that there needs to be far more support given to the work-based learning sector on how best to support disabled learners – an issue which LSDA/LSN has been addressing in some detail in its current tranche of DDA work.

Question for schools:

Are you finding out early on whether disabled students are particularly interested in following an employment-based route, and if so are you ensuring that they are being prepared for the entry requirements of this route?

Question for Connexions Service:

Are you making clear to disabled young people the option of their following a work-based programme when they leave school and not automatically assuming that they will progress to a college course?

Questions for those working on Apprenticeship programmes:

What more can you do to make clear in your publicity that your programme welcomes disabled applicants?

What do you need to do in terms of auditing your policies, procedures and practices, reviewing the accessibility of your programmes and the extent of your support for disabled learners and arranging staff development, in order to develop your ability to include disabled learners?

5 Supporting adults with disabilities into employment

Many older people with disabilities will have sought work through the New Deal for Disabled People. This programme has now been running since initial pilots in 1997, and several evaluations of it have been carried out. These show that it has been relatively successful in the fact that a large proportion of disabled people are aware of the programme. Of those who took part in the early schemes 32% gained employment although disappointingly only 39% of this group sustained their employment (**NDDP First Synthesis Research Report**). When asked what was most important to them in terms of their returning to work, a high proportion stated the importance of being able to return quickly and easily to their original benefits if their job did not work out. Other responses included an ability to decide the number of hours they worked, the possibility of home working and the opportunity to take breaks during the day when they needed them. While appreciating the support given to them by their Job Brokers, disabled people were concerned that the Job Broker did not provide more help in actually making links with employers. The evaluations suggest that the output-related funding of NDDP has made it difficult for small voluntary providers (who may have particular skills at working with certain groups of disabled people) to participate in the programme, and also may have resulted in providers taking on easier-to-place clients.

Other older disabled people may well have received support via the government's new Pathways to Employment programme which is a more intensive approach to helping incapacity benefit clients involving specialist personal advisers, additional work-focused interviews and a 'return to work credit'. The government is positive about the results from the initial seven pilots and has extended the Pathways pilot to a further 14 Jobcentre Plus districts. While statistics do show Pathways to Employment leading to an increase in the numbers of disabled people gaining employment, there are concerns that the main impetus behind the programme is to reduce numbers of people on incapacity benefit, and that disabled people are not always placed in working environments which properly match their skills and needs.

People who are receiving incapacity benefit may well have a lower skills level than the rest of the population – almost 40% of disabled people over 19 lack a Level 2 qualification, compared with 23% of non-disabled 19 year olds, and over 40% of disabled people have no qualifications at all (**Able to Work**). Such a discrepancy may well be the result of disabled people having missed out on or been poorly supported in education and training earlier in their lives. While it is important, as stated in the earlier e2e section, that proper training opportunities are made available for those who may never reach a Level 2 qualification, it is equally important that disabled people on incapacity benefit who could, but have never had the opportunity to, gain a higher-level qualification, should be encouraged to do so. Both the recent document from the Strategy Unit, **Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People, and Able to Work**, the report of the National Employment Panel's Employers Working Group on Disability which fed into the Strategy Unit report, say:

The Learning and Skills Council should have specific objectives to increase the number of disabled people studying towards vocational training at all levels.

It is also important to bear in mind that the government is very clear that it wishes to reduce the number of people claiming incapacity benefit, and is likely to bring in changes to the incapacity benefit system in 2008, with the aim of supporting far more disabled people into employment. While DWP programmes, such as Pathways to Work, might be appropriate for some of these people, others are likely to have had a considerable amount of time not working and require a first step which might best be provided by a college or adult education provider. In a recent, as yet unpublished, series of interviews with disabled learners carried out by Skill, several learners, particularly those with mental health difficulties, spoke of how they had benefited enormously from a period in non-accredited learning which had then given them the confidence to progress to vocational training or employment. Wigan and Leigh College in particular provides individually-devised staged programmes for adults with mental health difficulties; they start with appropriate outreach work and liaison with local health trusts and then support learners in moving onto non-accredited learning before making the step to vocational training or employment. It is clear that education providers need to be thinking ahead to these changes to incapacity benefit and preparing for the role they can play in supporting disabled people onto a vocational path.

Questions for education and work-based learning providers include:

■ *What steps do you need to take to ensure that disabled people are properly represented across the full range of your vocational training programmes?*

■ *Does your organisation recognise the need for a staged process back into employment for certain disabled adults, and is this reflected in its planning?*

Conclusions and recommendations for policy-makers and managers

This guidance began by looking at the discrepancy between the high numbers of people with disabilities and learning difficulties whose aim was to achieve employment and the low numbers who actually managed to achieve this aspiration. It has attempted not merely to reiterate the blocks which prevent disabled people from entering employment – these have been listed in several recent reports (see Bibliography) – but instead to focus on creative solutions which have been achieved by providers working in the LSC-funded sectors. The overriding message is the need for a shift from 'training for work' to 'training in work', from a focus on employability to a focus on employment, and for far more proactive links between education and training providers and employers, whether this is carried out directly by the education or training provider or through the brokerage of a third party, such as a Supported Employment organisation.

The guidance has been aimed primarily at practitioners working with learners with disabilities or learning difficulties. However, it is clear that fundamental change requires support both at a policy and at a managerial level. The final part of this report contains recommendations for developments which need to be carried out at these two levels.

At the level of policy

It is clear that the successful support of disabled people into employment requires collaboration between different agencies. Such collaboration will only be effective at practitioner level if it also occurs at governmental level. To this end there needs to be:

- greater collaboration between DfES and DWP on how both agencies need to work together to ensure better access of disabled people into employment

- clear guidance on ways in which organisations across departments can work more effectively together and, where appropriate, share resources.

Post-school education clearly has an important role to play in supporting disabled adults back to work. This includes the important role of non-vocational education in enabling people to take a first step back into learning before moving onto more vocational training. Particularly in the light of forthcoming changes to incapacity benefit:

■ DfES, DWP and the LSC need to recognise this and ensure that disabled people can have access to a staged programme of return to work.

Practitioners in the LSDA DDA projects reflected a widespread concern that changes to recruitment guidance for e2e might result in this positive framework becoming less accessible to young people with disabilities and learning difficulties who may require longer to achieve their learning aims and who might never progress to a Level 2, even though they could in time gain employment:

■ The LSC needs to recognise the needs of this group of learners and ensure that appropriate work-based learning programmes are available to them.

The LSDA DDA projects also raised concern that learners with the full range of disabilities might not be gaining equal access to apprenticeship programmes. With forthcoming changes to the DDA and the implementation of the Disability Equality Duty, the LSC will need to carry out a full analysis of its data in relation to disabled people. It needs to:

■ analyse its disability data in relation to apprenticeships, and ensure that the full range of disabled people are gaining access to and succeeding on apprenticeships and, if this is not the case, take steps to rectifying the situation.

Engaging employers is crucial if disabled people are to be equally represented in the work place. The recent DfES Skills Strategy Consultation, **Getting on in business, Getting on at work**, gives central importance to engaging employers. It is important that:

■ current work on employer engagement includes the importance of ensuring that employers are aware of their duty towards disabled employees and are supported in carrying out these duties.

Practitioners often refer to the way in which concern over losing benefits can result in disabled people, particularly people with learning difficulties, being reluctant to enter employment. Despite the fact that DWP has attempted to address some of these barriers it is clear that the results of this are not always apparent to individual disabled people and their families. It is important that:

■ expert advice is available to disabled people and their families to guide them through the complexities of the benefit situation when they are considering entering employment.

At managerial level

Managers too have an important role to play in ensuring that collaborative work is effective. The LSDA DDA projects, both those referred to above and others, make clear that inter-agency collaboration is far more likely to be effective if it has strong support from above. They also show how collaboration takes time. Managers in post-school education and work-based learning need to recognise:

■ the importance of inter-agency collaboration in supporting disabled people into employment and give it their active support

■ that it takes time, and ensure that this is reflected in practitioners' work plans.

The examples in the guidance show the importance of learners having the opportunity to learn work skills in real life situations. Managers need to:

■ be creative in the curriculum guidance they give to practitioners and ensure that learning can move beyond the confines of the classroom.

The proposed changes to incapacity benefit for 2008 are likely to result in more disabled adults requiring support into employment. Education managers need to:

■ recognise the place that their offer, including their offer of non-vocational learning as a first step towards entering vocational training, can play in supporting disabled adults into employment, and reflect this in their plans.

Finally, managers need to look at the make-up of their own workforce. Under the new Disability Equality Duty, education providers will need to collect data on their workforce and address any inequalities. In preparation for this managers need to:

■ look at how well disabled people are represented in their workforce and take steps to redressing any inequalities.

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