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Doing things differently:
Step changes in skills & inclusion

National
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Forum

BLACK &
MINORITY
ETHNIC
LEARNERS
OFFENDERS &
EX-OFFENDERS
PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES

a policy connect activity

‘Skills have a crucial role in (i) raising employment and productivity and (ii) in addressing inequalities between groups in the UK’

KEY STATISTICS

The Learning & Skills Council strategy, *Learning for Living and Work*²⁷, outlines the importance of skill development for disabled people.²⁸ It is not only concerned with enabling disabled people to participate economically in the labour market, but also with developing self-confidence and helping disabled people to live autonomously and contribute to the wider community.

Progress has been made, but there are still many long term issues which need to be addressed. Given the ageing population it is probable there will be a rise in the number of people with acquired disabilities. This will make the need for a more inclusive skills policy for people with disabilities ever more important.

It must also be noted that disabled people do not constitute a single homogenous group and that the type and severity of disability must be considered within skills policy. The impact of skills policy on the differentiated needs of specific disabilities is beyond the scope of this report, but participants in the Inquiry said that further research in this area is needed. As Peter Little, Independent Chair of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' LLDD Advisory Group, comments: "the range of disabilities, and the range of individual needs of individual disabled people vary hugely, and it is vital that this is not neglected".

Overview:

- More than 40% of those of working age with disabilities possess no or only low skilled qualifications.²⁹
- 31% of disabled people are not qualified to Level 2 and around 23% of disabled people lack functional literacy.³⁰
- Young disabled people between the ages of 16 - 19 years old are twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET), as their disabled peers; rising to three times less likely to be in work or a training or education programme by the age of 19.³¹
- The employment rate for disabled people is only 48%.³²
- The employment rate for people with learning disabilities is only 10%.³³
- It is estimated that raising the employment rate of disabled people to the national average would boost the UK economy by £13 billion.³⁴

27 Learning & Skills Council, *Learning for Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with Learning difficulties and/or disabilities*, p.5 (2006)

28 NB: All references to 'disabled people' or 'people with disabilities' in this report should be read to include people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD).

29 Lord Leitch, *Prosperity for all in the Global Economy - world class skills*, p.104 (2006)

30 Stephen Evans, *Disability, Skills and Work: Raising our Ambitions*, p.5, p.18 (2007)

31 *Ibid*, p.14 (2007)

32 HM Government, *Valuing Employment Now: real jobs for people with learning disabilities*, p.4 (2009)

33 *Ibid*, p.2 (2009)

34 Stephen Evans, *Disability, Skills and Work: Raising our Ambitions*, p.20 (2007)

ACCESS

Apprenticeships

Participants to the Inquiry identified rigid entry requirements and a lack of flexibility within learning frameworks as a major barrier to accessing apprenticeships for disabled learners. The functional skill entry requirements for apprenticeships can particularly penalise disabled learners. As the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development points out: 'a blanket requirement for GCSE English may disadvantage a person with a hearing impairment whose first language is British Sign Language'. Skill: National Skills Bureau for Students with Disabilities suggested that such functional skill requirements be re-evaluated to ensure they are not set at an unnecessarily high level above what is required to participate in the apprenticeship. Participants also agreed that greater inclusivity is needed in the definition of 'functional skills', to allow disabled learners to evidence their abilities in alternative ways.³⁵ This does not mean that entry criteria should be lowered for disabled learners, rather that a 'wider portfolio of skills' should be included, which recognises ability and attainment outside of formal qualifications. Madeleine Durie, Director of Policy Performance and Funding at the NAS said: "it is important that disabled access into apprenticeships is not unnecessarily restricted as long as they can still evidence their ability in a way which safe guards the quality of the apprenticeship".

In written evidence submitted to this Inquiry, the Association of National Specialist Colleges (Natspec) also noted that many disabled people 'require a longer period in further education to achieve their goals than do their non-disabled peers'. This is supported by data drawn from the First Statistical Release, December 2009, which shows that, in 2008-2009, 7,100 disabled learners between the ages of 19-24 and 5,800 over the age of 25, started an apprenticeship.³⁶ As full funding for apprenticeships is only available for those aged 16 to 18 years old, disabled people are being disproportionately penalised. In addition, Peter Little, Independent Chair of the DCSF's LLDD Advisory Group, noted that employers who take on apprentices must achieve minimum level performance targets to retain funding: "these targets can disincentivise providers and employers from taking on disabled apprentices, largely because of a stereotypical perception about the ability of a disabled learner to complete an apprenticeship". It is clear that providers and employers need more support and advice to encourage them to take on and retain disabled apprentices.

Recommendation

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) should undertake a full equality and diversity impact assessment of current apprenticeship funding criteria and apprenticeship frameworks. This should include a re-evaluation of functional skill entry requirements, as well as the possibility of widening such criteria to include a greater variety of ability measures.

35 Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, *Response to Consultation on the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England*, p.5 (2009)

36 Data provided by the National Apprenticeship Service for the upcoming report by Peter Little OBE for the Learning & Skills Council on Apprenticeships for LLDD. This figure includes disabled learners and learners with learning difficulties.

Funding Methodology

Government strategy states that funding allocation should not impose ‘bureaucratic burdens’ on learning providers.³⁷ However, this Inquiry found that funding criteria are often too target driven, making training providers more risk averse. This can often lead to training providers being reluctant to take on disabled learners because of a stereotypical perception about their ability to complete a course. As NIACE stated in its evidence to this Inquiry, there is a tendency for training providers ‘to let the accreditation drive the curriculum offer’. As Simone Aspis, Campaigns and Policy Co-ordinator at Allfie, said: “this can distort provision for disabled learners, shoe horning them into less challenging or segregated courses which might not best suit their needs”. Participants called for greater flexibility within funding criteria to allow for a more person-centred approach to learning.

Machinery of Government Changes

Participants raised concerns that the new funding arrangements for skills provision, brought in under the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009), may have an adverse impact upon disabled learners aged 19-25. For learners within this age range, only those subject to the ‘learning difficulty assessment’ will fall under the responsibility of local authorities, overseen by the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA), while those who are without this assessment will fall under the responsibility of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Participants in this Inquiry expressed serious concerns that this could lead to a two tier funding hierarchy, segregating those who are subject to the assessment from those who are not. As Skill: National Skills Bureau for Students with Disabilities noted in a memorandum to Parliament: ‘the assessment procedure could become a barrier to some disabled learners accessing education and training’.³⁸

In light of this new legislation, recently issued guidance on the ‘learning difficulty assessment’ needs to be updated to include specific references to the new funding agencies and their responsibilities for planning for disabled learners in relation to this assessment.³⁹ The City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development commented that greater transparency is needed to avoid disabled learners ‘falling between funding streams’ when they reach the age of 19, and called for further clarification on the entitlement to this assessment. Madeleine Durie, Director of Policy Performance and Funding at the NAS, also told this Inquiry that: “there is a need for coherency across the machinery of Government changes which straddles pre and post 19 provisions with a common sight for disabled people across the age range”.

Recommendation

In light of recent legislation, the Government should reissue guidelines for local authorities regarding their duty to provide the learning difficulty assessment. The Government should also issue information targeted at disabled learners and their parents regarding their entitlement to this assessment, including how and when this assessment will be carried out.

37 HM Government, Progression Through Partnership, p.8 (2007)

38 Memorandum submitted to Parliament by Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (AS 01) (2009) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmpublic/appren/memos/ucm102.htm>

39 The Department for Children, Schools and Families, Assessments relating to people with learning difficulties: Guidance to Local Authorities (2009)

CASE STUDY

The Healthy Gourmet Café, Lambeth College

The Healthy Gourmet café opened in November 2007 at the Lambeth College Adare Centre in Streatham. Its aim is to provide quality catering services to students and staff as a part of a social enterprise project for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The students complete a Skills for Working Life course which aims to build relevant catering skills combined with work experience in an intensive yet supported environment. As well as running the services in the café the students work on their individual learning plans, which include a number of individually set targets which that help the learners identify and develop important skills as well as their independent needs.

The café relocated to the Brixton centre in September 2009 after two pioneering years in Streatham, and is providing a busy hospitality service to students and staff and up to an extra 30 meals per day for the children in the College nursery.

Since the café opened the students have provided food for a number of special events including the EID celebration at the end of Ramadan and food to celebrate Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. For the Chinese New Year Celebrations in February 2009 the Café worked on a mouth-watering selection of Chinese food, including shrimp and sweet corn patties, vegetable and cashew nut chop suey, Chicken Chow Mien, Chinese fishcakes in sweet and sour sauce and lime mousse with mango.

The team have also catered for corporate hospitality events, one of which was a planning meeting of the influential 157 Group in Further Education. Lunchtimes are incredibly busy and the café is hugely popular with staff and students alike.

As student Debbie Twiner commented:

“

Since being on this course I have learned so many things and I never thought I would gain so much confidence in such a short time. It’s such a buzz!

”

PROGRESSION

Low Aspirations

This Inquiry found that careers education and guidance for disabled learners is often inadequate, and fails to challenge stereotypes about the learning and career pathways open to disabled people. Participants said that these inadequacies are often magnified when guidance is given on vocational learning pathways. According to a poll by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), 23% of disabled young people did not think they had enough information to make informed choices about their future.⁴⁰ A lack of aspiration for these learners is often reinforced through training providers and parents alike, reiterating negative stereotypes. Jacqui Henderson, Director of CLASS Ltd, said: “We need to be better at acknowledging what [disabled] people can do rather than what they can’t do”.

Evidence to the Inquiry recognised the need to address this lack of aspiration through specialised disability awareness training for both careers advisors and teaching staff. As the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development told this Inquiry: ‘evidence shows that a lack of awareness by professionals of the potential of young disabled people means that young people are directed into sectors or options based on pre-conceived ideas of what they are able to achieve’. Participants agreed that greater specialised training is needed with the option for careers advisors to develop expertise in provision for disabled learners. Lewisham College called for ‘comprehensive and expert guidance’ through ‘stronger professional standards for those working with people with disabilities and learning difficulties’.

Recommendation

Disability awareness training for teachers and careers advisors should be further extended, with the introduction of specific qualifications for careers advisors who choose to specialise in provision for disabled learners.

Fragmentation of skills system

Participants told this Inquiry that a major barrier to skills progression for disabled learners is a fragmented skills system, with poor commissioning and coordination of provision. This is exacerbated by the lack of data available on the different attainment and employment levels for disabled people. As the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development noted: ‘without adequate data in the sector it is difficult to identify what factors impact positively or negatively on learners’. Natpsec also note in its evidence to this Inquiry that such data is rarely differentiated by severity or type of disability.

The machinery of Government changes introduced in the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009) will transfer responsibility for 16-19 commissioning (and 16-25 for disabled learners) to the local level. Lewisham College raised concerns about the new arrangements suggesting that ‘local authorities may take different approaches to the needs of this group of learners and an inconsistent offer could become a barrier in some areas’. Peter Lauener, Chief Executive Designate of the Young

40 Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Staying On, p.34 (2009)

People’s Learning Agency, suggested that inconsistency could be mitigated against “through the provision of high quality data throughout the system”. Participants in the Inquiry said that robust and accurate data will be vital in helping local authorities to monitor the progression of disabled learners. This would help to identify the varying patterns of need in order to more effectively target resources. The publication of such data would also help to increase accountability at the local level.

Evidence to the Inquiry also identified a need for greater collaboration between the new agencies created by the legislation. As the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development noted: ‘a smooth running of funding provision will depend heavily on the working relationship between the Young People’s Learning Agency and local authorities’. Paul Warner, Director of Employment and Skills at the Association of Learning Providers, also commented that: “collaboration will be crucial in ensuring that disabled learners do not fall between the cracks at the various interfaces between these new agencies”.

Recommendation

Government should ensure that local authorities, within their new skills commissioning role, collect and publish robust and accurate data regarding the skills attainment and employment rates of disabled learners in their area, and ensure that this data is effectively used for planning, commissioning and oversight.

CASE STUDY

Posyganza Programme, Lewisham College

Learners with Learning Difficulties and/ or Disabilities are leading the way on personalised learning at Lewisham College with their focus on contributing to college life as well as the wider community. The college has a large provision for this cohort of learners who come from three south east London boroughs.

Some years ago Lewisham College developed vocationally contextualised courses that gave their students (who have been assessed as having severe learning difficulties) the opportunity to progress and rehearse work skills. Lewisham College wanted their learners to have a high profile in the College.

The first of the courses was established fifteen years ago - Posyganza – a Team Programme company under the Young Enterprise scheme. The company offers a fresh flower service to the College and to the wider community beyond.

The main goals in setting up Posyganza:

1. It offers students with severe learning difficulties the opportunity to develop work skills and gain an understanding of the demands and responsibilities placed on people at work.
2. It challenges stereotypical attitudes - within the College and beyond - towards people with learning difficulties, by offering a framework within which students are seen to run a professional service of consistently high quality.

Lewisham College's experience of running the Posyganza enterprise programme gave their learners a high and positive profile in the College. Their students condition, wrap and deliver bunches of flowers to over 40 customers on a weekly basis. Key skills are embedded in the curriculum and the whole college is used as a learning resource. Most importantly the learners are learning by doing and having fun, within a realistic and challenging working environment.

Lewisham College said



We believe we are getting our learners work ready, not job ready and have worked with many supported employment agencies to progress our learners. Work readiness is not just about application forms and practicing interviews for this cohort of learners, it is more about learning to take responsibility and raising expectations – both for themselves and their families. Work is not always easy, it can demand a lot physically and mentally and for people who are used to being 'done to or for' this is a crucial piece of learning and one which is embedded throughout our curriculum and which we want to maintain and develop.



EMPLOYMENT

Supported Employment

This Inquiry observed that there are numerous barriers to employment for disabled learners besides a lack of formal qualifications. This is evidenced by the fact that disabled people with Level 3 qualifications have similar employment levels to non disabled people with no qualifications whatsoever.⁴¹ Employability does not depend on qualifications alone. The importance of 'soft skills' must not be overlooked for disabled learners. Participants said that these 'soft skills' such as interpersonal, communication and team working skills, are often highly valued by employers. This is supported by a Remploy survey which found that 52.6% of employers did not think that qualifications alone would give reassurance that a disabled applicant was capable of fulfilling a role.⁴²

Remploy advocate the benefits of work experience and supported employment courses in helping disabled learners to develop the skills needed to improve their employability. Remploy told this Inquiry that there should be more opportunities for 'learning to take place in the work environment' for disabled learners. The City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development agrees that training which is contextualised and job targeted is more effective in helping disabled learners access sustainable employment. However, as stated in the Learning & Skills Council report, *Through Inclusion to Excellence*, 'supported employment agencies are on the margins of LSC funding and are not seen as an integral part of the provider network'.⁴³ This was also highlighted during this Inquiry by Joyce Deere, HM Ofsted Inspector, who said that: "many of the most effective programmes which provide support for work and getting into work do not fit in with mainstream funding".

Another recent LSC report notes the potential of the new Foundation Learning Programme, to be rolled out in 2010, in aiding FE providers to embed the supported employment approach within the system through the funding of supported work experience and job coaches.⁴⁴ However, as Huw Davies, Chief Executive of the British Association of Supported Employment commented: "information about Foundation Learning is lacking with confusion amongst supported employment providers about how job coaching and courses linked to employability will be funded within this framework". NIACE also raised concerns that funding linked too closely to the requirements of the accreditation will miss the overall goal of the course, which is to help the disabled person into employment.

Participants in the Inquiry called for greater flexibility within funding to allow training providers to tailor learning to the needs of the individual. Participants welcomed the UKCES's emphasis on 'simpler and more flexible funding', and its recommendation to give greater autonomy to training providers to enable them to be more responsive to learner demand.⁴⁵ The recent Government skills strategy which allows outstanding colleges enhanced freedoms to use their resources more flexibly, was welcomed.⁴⁶ However, participants argued that these freedoms should be widened to include those colleges which perform well on provision for disabled learners.

41 Stephen Evans, Disability, Skills and Work: Raising our Ambitions, Chart 1, p.7 (2007)

42 Remploy, Employer Research- Key Messages, p.3 (2008)

43 The Learning & Skills Council, Through Inclusion to Excellence, p.5 (2005)

44 Yola Jacobsen and Peter Little OBE, Learning for Work: Employability and adults with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities, p.3 (2009)

45 UKCES, Towards Ambition 2020: skills, jobs, growth p.27 (2009)

46 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Skills for Growth, p.16 (2009)

Recommendation

Training providers who score highly on equality and diversity provision within their Ofsted reports should be rewarded by Government with a more flexible funding allocation. Government should also publish clear guidelines and develop training resources for Further Education colleges on how the Foundation Learning framework can be used to fund work placements and supported employment programmes. Specific attention should be paid to the use of the Additional Guided Learning hours.

Employer Attitudes

Employer attitudes also contribute to low employment rates for disabled people. In a survey by Leonard Cheshire Disability, 52% of respondents reported a belief that they had been discriminated against in the workplace, and 36% believed they had been turned down for a job because of their disability.⁴⁷ However, as evidenced in a survey conducted by the DWP: 42% of employers who had experience of recruiting disabled staff felt that there were advantages in doing so; 37% reported a marked improvement in company image to customers; and 30% noted improved staff morale.⁴⁸

NIACE argues that employers need to be educated about the benefits of employing disabled people and that public bodies and local authorities should lead by example by increasing the proportion of disabled people within their workforce. The Equality Bill, currently passing through Parliament, includes a duty on public bodies to consider the diverse needs and requirements of their workforce when developing employment policies through the extension of positive action measures. This potential duty was welcomed by participants who noted that “the public sector should walk it as well as talk it”.

The Inquiry also noted that disabled people are clustered within stereotypical work sectors. As the LSC comments in its evidence to this Inquiry, apprentices with disabilities are ‘particularly under represented in electro technical, plumbing, active leisure and learning, vehicle maintenance and repair’ work sectors. Poor careers guidance and poverty of aspiration have already been identified as causes of this concentration of disabled learners in particular work sectors. However, negative preconceptions amongst employers about the perceived abilities of disabled people are also a key factor.

Both the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development and the EHRC suggest that Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) should play a greater role in changing employer attitudes. SSCs, particularly those in work sectors where disabled people are underrepresented, should actively promote equality and diversity issues by encouraging employers to target disabled people through outreach programmes to local learning institutions, as well as through the expansion of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for people with disabilities.

47 Leonard Cheshire, Disability Review, p. 21 (2008)

48 Department for Work and Pensions, New Deal for Disabled People: Survey of Employers, p.40-42 (2005)

Barbara McIntosh, Director of the Foundation for People with Learning Difficulties, also noted that there are many exemplary businesses who employ and train disabled people and that “these employers should be used as role models to inspire others”. A recent report by the LSC also noted that employers with experience of employing disabled people could play an important role in raising awareness within the business community.⁴⁹

Recommendation

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) should encourage employers to promote equality and diversity in their employment practice and to specifically target underrepresented groups within their sector. SSCs should champion those employers who are successful in engaging with disabled people.

Poor Employer Knowledge

Poor employer knowledge and understanding of the support mechanisms available for disabled employees was also identified by participants as a key barrier to employment for disabled people. The City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development noted that employers are reluctant to employ disabled people because of a perception that it will be costly to make the necessary adjustments or alterations. This is supported by research conducted by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) which found that 48% of employers are unaware of Access to Work funding to support disabled employees.⁵⁰ Concern was also expressed that the introduction of new funding agencies in 2010 could add to the confusion. A recent LSC report also advocated the need for better knowledge amongst employers of the support mechanisms available, such as ‘disability employment advisors, job coaches and the DWP Access to Work programme’.⁵¹

Participants also said that the complexity of existing funding mechanisms can deter employers from taking on disabled apprentices, particularly because of a lack of integration between the skills agenda and welfare to work support. For example, a disabled apprentice is entitled to funding to support their learning from the NAS, while the DWP Access to Work scheme funds any supported employment measures. Simone Aspis, Campaigns and Policy Co-ordinator at Allfie remarked: “these funding mechanisms are not joined up forcing employers to go through two bureaucratic procedures”. It is clear that employers need more support and advice to encourage them to take on and retain disabled employees and apprentices.

Recommendation

The Departments for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions should work with the National Apprenticeship Service, Skills Funding Agency and Young People’s Learning Agency to simplify funding mechanisms that support disabled people in both learning and work. A more coherent funding system should be developed which imposes less bureaucratic burdens on employers and individuals.

49 Yola Jacobsen and Peter Little OBE, Learning for Work: Employability and adults with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities, p.21 (2009)

50 Royal National Institute for Deaf People, Opportunity blocked: The employment experiences of deaf and hard of hearing people, p.19 (2006)

51 Yola Jacobsen and Peter Little OBE, Learning for Work: Employability and adults with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities, p.21 (2009)

NIACE also commented that paid employment is not the only valid way to combat social exclusion, and it is important to acknowledge the role that voluntary placements can play in supporting disabled people into work. Graham Jowett, Vice Chair of Natspec, remarked that the “presumption of employability should not become a straitjacket”. Participants highlighted the valuable role of voluntary work in offering a clear alternative for disabled people, particularly for those whom employment and supported employment is not an immediate prospect.

CASE STUDY

City and Guilds & Transport for London

Project purpose

The Work Experience Programme for Disabled People aims to help people with disabilities learn transferable skills in customer services and office-based roles and to gain City & Guilds qualifications. The programme, the result of a strategic partnership between Transport for London (TfL), City & Guilds and Four Counties Training, was implemented across London Underground in 2007/08 following a pilot stage.

Project approach

The Work Experience Programme employs a ‘buddy’ approach that enables disabled people to work alongside an experienced member of staff to learn transferable skills that can either be used to gain employment with TfL or with another organisation. Placements in customer services are particularly targeted at disabled people to allow them to learn a range of skills and gain confidence working directly with the public. Buddies support the disabled candidate throughout the placement offering advice on different aspects of dealing with the general public on a day-to-day basis. Placements are unpaid, last for 8 weeks and are open to disabled people aged 18 or over.

Key benefits and impact

- Disabled participants have welcomed the chance to become involved in a prominent organisation like London Underground, to gain skills and develop self esteem.
- Buddies feel they have learnt a great deal about disability in the workplace and that the training they have received will help them in their future job role.
- All 42 disabled candidates who have taken part in the scheme so far have completed their placement with 26 gaining City & Guilds accreditation.
- 7 candidates have secured paid employment since completing their placement.
- Involvement by a large public facing organisation like London Underground as helped to improve the perception and behaviour of staff and customers towards disabled people.