
Valuing People:

Briefing paper for Learning Disability Partnership Boards



Briefing paper for Learning Disability Partnership Boards (LDPB's) on the role education could play in contributing to the aims addressed in Valuing People

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Post-school education has a very important role to play in contributing to the aims addressed in Valuing People. Many people with learning difficulties will wish to acquire new skills or improve existing skills. They may wish to do this so that they can improve their chances of gaining employment; they may wish to learn skills which can allow them to lead more independent lives; or they may wish to try out new areas of non-vocational learning purely for its own sake. Learning new skills in further or adult education can also bring additional benefits as it allows learners to experience a new environment, meet new people and make new friends.

This paper begins by looking at the current options in post-school education for people with learning difficulties and also examines the barriers to successful access. It then gives a brief overview of recent policy and legal changes in post-school education which affect people with learning difficulties, and ends by looking at ways in which education could work more closely with the Learning Disability Partnership Boards and so enhance the role it could play in delivering the aims laid out in Valuing People.

Current range of post-school educational options for people with learning difficulties

1. For school leavers

Further education has a long history of providing for school leavers with learning difficulties and nearly all colleges now have some kind of provision for this group of learners. Sometimes this will take the form of supporting these learners onto a regular college course (often NVQ learning programmes) but more often colleges run specially designed, two year, full-time courses. These often focus on life skills and aim to enhance learners' independence. Some of the courses take learners between the ages of 16 and 19. However, in many cases where young people

with learning difficulties stay at school until 19, they attend college from 19 to 21.

2. Progression routes from these two year courses

The picture is more diverse for older learners with learning difficulties and the educational provision they receive depends very much on the area in which they live. Some colleges have good progression routes for those who finish a two year course, and will support learners onto other college learning programmes (often NVQ courses). Other colleges may have specific work preparation courses for people with learning difficulties, sometimes run in conjunction with other agencies (see the NIACE publication *Making The Jump*). In a few cases learners may move onto a work based learning programme run by a work based learning provider, for example Birmingham Rathbone provide a range of work based learning programmes which include learners with learning difficulties. However, for many learners there is no clear progression route when they come to the end of their two year course.

3. Adult and community learning

Adult and community education is currently managed by the Local Education Authority (LEA). The distinctions between provision delivered by further education colleges and that delivered by adult and community education can be blurred, but generally speaking, further education colleges tend to run more full time programmes which may have a vocational bias, whereas adult education classes are more often part time and can include non vocational areas. Adult education has for many years been running learning programmes for adults with learning difficulties. Some of these learners will have previously attended college courses. Others will be older adults, including some who may have attended long stay hospitals, and this will be their first introduction to education. They might attend courses designed specifically for adults with learning difficulties in a range of subject areas (art, cookery, basic skills, health studies, self advocacy etc.) or they might take part in a non-specialist adult education class, maybe with additional support, from for example a specialist support worker, if this is required. Provision varies from one LEA to another with some areas providing considerable, high quality provision and others very little.

4. Specialist residential colleges

Across the country there are many specialist residential colleges. These are often run by voluntary organisations (e.g. RNIB, Mencap). Several of these cater for people with learning difficulties. The Learning and Skills Council which currently funds all further and adult education (see section below) will fund learners to study at a specialist residential college but only if it can be established that an individual is unable to have his or her educational needs met by the local further education college.

Barriers to access and success

1. Under-represented groups

Certain groups of people with learning difficulties are still under-represented in post-school education. This is particularly true of those with high support needs and also true of people with a learning difficulty who come from a South Asian background. NIACE has produced a publication which examines under-representation in post-school education (*All things being Equal*). More recently Skill has been running two three-year research projects. One of these looks specifically at post-school provision for people with high support needs (*Enhancing Quality of life*). The other, still in progress, is looking at people with a learning difficulty from a South Asian background.

2. Positive progression routes

Too often courses for learners with learning difficulties do not result in meaningful progression. Learners can either move into a vacuum, or they can get on a seemingly endless conveyer belt which might include periods in a Day Centre, repeating educational programmes or moving from course to course without ever achieving a real outcome. People with learning difficulties attend post-school education for many different reasons. Some may wish to learn purely for pleasure and self-development but many learners with learning difficulties state that they do want to find meaningful employment. However, in many cases the progression routes to support them into employment do not exist.

3. Contradictions in Government messages

The Government is currently stressing the importance of widening participation in post-school education and emphasising the importance of education reaching all groups of learners. However, at the same time, they are also

emphasising the importance of raising standards in education which is often interpreted as making sure increasing numbers of learners achieve NVQ Levels 2 and 3. There can be a contradiction in these two messages when an emphasis on all learners achieving recognised qualifications results in the exclusion of learners with learning difficulties who cannot achieve these standards. More work needs to be done on defining what constitutes achievement for learners with the whole range of learning difficulties.

4. Lack of liaison between education and other agencies

Too often education can work in isolation from other agencies and this can mean that a person's experience in education is less fulfilling than it could be. Of course individual learners might expressly wish there to be no contact between their education tutor and staff who they might work with from other agencies. However, there can be other times when this kind of isolation can be counter productive for the learners. For example:

A person with a learning disability is making considerable progress in an adult education numeracy class learning how to use money and budget expenditure. However, this information is never passed on to the group home in which he lives and so never reinforced when he is not in the class.

A person with very little verbal communication attends an adult education art class. Although she has very little spoken language social services staff who work with her have developed an individual system of signing which enables her to communicate certain key wishes very effectively. This information is never passed on to the adult education tutor, hence the woman's experience at her class is far more limited than it could be.

5. Transport

Difficulties with transport can mean that adult learners with learning difficulties cannot always attend educational provision. Access to transport varies in different authorities. If post-school education is to be a viable option for people with learning difficulties improvements need to be made in access to transport.

Recent policy initiatives and organisational and legal changes

1. Current organisation of post-school education

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 established the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) which funds all further and adult and community education as well as much of work based learning. The Learning and Skills Council is made up of a national council, based in Coventry, and 47 Local Learning and Skills Councils. Individual LEAs, although no longer the direct funder of adult and community education, still play a large part in organising and managing this provision.

2. The legal framework

a. Learning and Skills Act 2000

The Learning and Skills Act contains two sections which refer specifically to people with disabilities and learning difficulties. It has a duty to:

'have regard to the needs of people with learning difficulties' (Section 13)

and a duty to:

'have due regard to promote equality of opportunity between disabled and non disabled people' (Section 14)

The Learning and Skills Act also allowed for the establishment of the Connexions Service. The Connexions Service acts as an advice and guidance service for all young people. Connexions Personal Advisers work across different agencies in order to try and address the holistic needs a young person may have. While the Connexions Service usually works with young people up to the age of 19 it has the power to work up to the age of 25 with young people who have a disability or learning difficulty. Section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act states that all school leavers who have a statement of special educational need must, in their final year of school, be provided by the Connexions Service with a written assessment of their likely support needs as they move on to post-school provision.

The changes listed above may seem small and it is of course up to the Learning and Skills Council how they chose to implement them. However, they do indicate both a broadening and deepening of the responsibilities of post-school education to people with learning disabilities.

b. Disability Discrimination Act Part 4

The second big legal change to post-school education for disabled learners is the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. This Act, which began to be implemented in September 2002, brings education under the

Disability Discrimination Act as DDA Part 4. Its duties are not on the LSC but on individual providers – further education colleges and LEAs providing adult and community education. Under DDA Part 4 it will be illegal for these providers:

- to treat disabled students less favourably on account of their disability
- or
- to fail to provide ‘reasonable adjustments’ for disabled students

These duties began to be implemented in September 2002. Duties relating to ‘auxiliary aids and services’ come into place from September 2003 and those relating to ‘physical features’ from September 2005. These new duties are ‘anticipatory’. This means that providers cannot just wait until a disabled learner enrolls on a course but need to be putting changes in place before they enrol.

This new legislation has of course to be tested in the courts. However, in giving disabled students, for the first time, legal rights in relation to their access to post-school education, it has many implications for adults with learning disabilities.

3. Recent initiatives in post-school education for people with disabilities or learning difficulties

a. Inclusive learning

One of the most significant initiatives relating to students with disabilities and learning difficulties was the establishment, under the previous funding council, the Further Education Funding Council, of an Inclusive Learning Committee chaired by Professor Tomlinson. In 1996 this Committee produced the influential report, *Inclusive Learning*. Inclusive Learning puts forward an approach which avoids seeing ‘the difficulty or deficit’ in the student and instead sees ‘people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties first and foremost as learners’. It emphasises the need to move away from a situation where disabled learners are merely the responsibility of a few specialist staff to a situation in which the entire organisation is developed in a way which allows it to respond to the requirements of all learners including those with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Inclusive learning is an ongoing process. While many providers have made significant improvement to their provision for learners with learning difficulties there are still many changes which need to be made. This is particularly true in the area of adult and community education which has never received the same additional funding and inclusive learning training which has been available to colleges. There is a particular need for all providers to address the specific requirements of learners with high support needs who are often still excluded from post-school learning. Also some providers still see their role as simply providing specialist classes rather than looking at how they can open their whole offer to the full range of learners.

b. Basic Skills

Another initiative which relates directly to learners with disabilities and learning difficulties is in the area of basic skills. Many people were concerned that the current basic skills curriculum contained little reference to disabled learners. In response to this the DfEE convened a group who produced a document **Freedom to Learn** (DfEE 2000) which stated changes which needed to take place if learners with disabilities and learning difficulties were to gain access to the basic skills agenda. This resulted in a substantial DfES funded project, the Basic Skills Inclusive Learning project, managed by a consortium led by the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education and the Learning and Skills Development Agency. This consortium has produced several documents relating to basic skills and people with disabilities and learning difficulties (for details of these see reference section). The consortium has also been funded to deliver a substantial programme of staff development.

c. Individual learning plans

Recently post-school education has placed far more emphasis on the importance of ensuring that the individual wishes and aspirations of learners are met. All learners now have to be provided with an individual learning plan jointly negotiated between staff and learners. These plans have much in common with the person-centred planning advocated in *Valuing People*. An obvious starting point for bringing together work between different agencies for adults with learning disabilities would be to ensure that links are made between an individual’s person-centred plan and his or her individual learning plan.

d. Additional Learning Support Funding

Finally, it is important to realise that there have in recent years been several important developments in addressing the additional funding needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. For several years further education colleges have been able to access Additional Support Funding for these learners. This funding stream covers any extra personal support a disabled student might require, for example a personal support worker, and also helps towards funding additional materials and equipment. The LSC is currently reviewing this funding. Skill and NIACE are emphasising that some additional funding needs to be in place soon so that adult and community education providers can meet their duties under DDA Part 4.

Positive benefits of LDPBs and education working more closely together

1. Person-Centred Planning

Valuing People places a strong emphasis on the importance of listening to individual people with learning difficulties and designing programmes which respond to their own wishes and aspirations rather than having them fit into pre-determined programmes. It is important that education providers learn from this approach and work with other agencies to ensure that the programmes they offer are relevant to individual aspirations. The historic structure of current education provision which tends to be focused around the notion of specific, time-limited programmes of learning does not always lend itself to adhering to a person-centred approach. There may in the future be a need for different patterns of provision which respond more appropriately to the needs and aspirations of people with learning disabilities. Time needs to be given to exploring, in conjunction with people with learning difficulties and with other agencies, such different ways of working.

2. Planning which spans different agencies

Provision for people with learning difficulties is often less effective than it could be because of a lack of planning based on a collaborative, inter-agency approach. Many of the areas addressed in Valuing People are ones in which education is already playing a role. For example Learning Disability Partnership Boards have a particular role to ensure that people with learning

disabilities have better access to advocacy and self advocacy services, health services and employment. Some further and adult education organisations are already doing considerable work in these areas – for example running learning programmes in self advocacy, health studies and employment skills. Learning Disability Partnership Boards need to ensure that education is included in the development of any overall strategy in these areas.

3. Provision for under-represented groups, particularly those with high support needs

School leavers with high support needs have often been excluded from post-school educational provision. This group, perhaps more than any other group of people, require seamless collaboration between different agencies. A recent action research project carried out by Skill and Cambridge University (Enhancing Quality of Life: transitions for people with profound and complex learning difficulties) found that practitioners rated close and effective collaboration between agencies as one of the most important factors in developing successful provision. This is an area of work in which Learning Disability Partnership Boards could very effectively bring together different agencies, including education, to create a holistic strategy for developing progression pathways for this group of people.

4. Supporting individual learners

As was seen above the experience of an individual person with a learning disability in education is often less fulfilling than it could be because of a lack of liaison between education workers and other staff working with the individual. Practitioners working in education welcome the statement in Valuing People that ‘by Winter 2002 people with learning disabilities who make substantial and long term use of publicly funded services should have a named person to act as their service co-ordinator.’ The LDPB in conjunction with educational providers needs to ensure that this person and education tutors have time to liaise together so that relevant information is exchanged and education does not take place in isolation but supports other areas of a person’s life.

The Way Forward

1. Education representation on Learning Disability Partnership Boards

It is essential that education is represented on the LDPB's and this is an active and participative representation. It is harder to say who should represent education (someone from the LLSC, from the LEA or from a key provider such as a college), and this may vary from one area to another. However, it is very important that there should be clear lines of communication from this person to those who work in post-school education with people with learning disabilities across their geographical area.

2. Assessing current education provision

LDPB's need to be aware of the extent of current educational provision for people with learning disabilities in their area. An LDPB sub-group on education could be set up and could audit current provision and look at how education could be more actively engaged in contributing to the aims of Valuing People.

3. Pilot projects

This group could then set up one or two pilot action research projects. These projects could explore creative ways in which education could work collaboratively with people with learning disabilities and other agencies and their findings could then be disseminated across the LDPB area.

4. Working together

From April 2003 to April 2004 Yola Jacobsen NIACE project officer, will be working as a special advisor on post-16 education with the Valuing People Support Team. This will be an opportunity to develop the role of post-16 education in the Learning Disability strategy. Valuing People Support Team website: www.doh.gov.uk/vpst

References and Further Reading

Enhancing quality of life: transitions for people with profound and complex learning difficulties. Richard Bryers et al. Skill, 2002. ISBN 1869965639

Freedom to learn : basic skills for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Department for Education and Employment, 2000 www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/freedomtolearn

Inclusive learning : report of the Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee. Further Education Funding Council. HMSO, 1996. ISBN 0113613415

Learning and Skills Act 2000. Chapter 21. Stationery Office, 2000. ISBN 0105421006 £13.45
www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000021.htm

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Chapter 10. Stationery Office, 2001. ISBN 0105410012 £7.50
www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010010.htm

Valuing people : a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century. Department of Health (2001a). Department of Health, 2001 Available from Valuing People Support Team website: www.doh.gov.uk/vpst

NIACE Publications

NIACE has published a number of books and packs on education for adults with learning difficulties. Additional information about these publications can be found on the NIACE website: www.niace.org.uk

Making the jump : transition to work : a guide to supporting adults with learning difficulties make the jump from education to employment and Making the jump : 'we can do a good job': a pack for adults with learning difficulties who want to work. Yola Jacobsen. NIACE, 2002 Making the jump set. ISBN 1862011435 £60.00. We can do a good job. ISBN 1862011443 £15.00

Our right to learn : a pack for people with learning difficulties and staff who work with them, based on the Charter for learning. Yola Jacobsen (editor). NIACE, 2002. ISBN 186201 0854 £100.00

Charter for learning. NIACE, 2000 www.niace.org.uk/Research/LDD/charter.htm

Training for change : a training pack to support adults with learning disabilities to become trainers. Jeannie Sutcliffe in collaboration with CHANGE. NIACE, 1998. ISBN 1 86201 052 8 £150.00 (discounted rate of £50.00 for organisations run by and for adults with learning difficulties/disabilities)

All things being equal? A practical guide to widening participation for adults with learning difficulties in education. Jeannie Sutcliffe and Yola Jacobsen. NIACE, 1998. ISBN 186201051X £8.95

Still a chance to learn? a report on the impact of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) on education for adults with learning difficulties. Margaret Macadam and Jeannie Sutcliffe. NIACE, 1996. ISBN 1872941990 £5.95

Enabling learning : a student-centred approach to teaching adults with learning difficulties. Jeannie Sutcliffe. NIACE, 1996. ISBN 1872941915 £100.00

Towards inclusion : developing integrated education for adults with learning difficulties. Jeannie Sutcliffe. NIACE, 1996. ISBN 1872941907 £100.00

Self advocacy and adults with learning difficulties. Jeannie Sutcliffe and Ken Simons. NIACE, 1993. ISBN 1872941273 £7.95

Integration for adults with learning difficulties : contexts and debates. Jeannie Sutcliffe. NIACE, 1993. ISBN 1 87294 118 4 £7.95

Adults with learning difficulties : education for choice and empowerment. Jeannie Sutcliffe. NIACE and Open University Press, 1990. ISBN 0 335 09609 3 £18.99

Literacy, Language and Numeracy Publications

The publications listed below all relate to literacy, language and numeracy for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities. This major national programme was funded by the Department for Education and Skills and ran from September 2000 to March 2001. The work was managed by a consortium jointly led by the Learning and Skills Development Agency and the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

Access for All - guidance on making the adult literacy and numeracy core curricula accessible. Learning and Skills Development Agency and NIACE, 2002. ISBN 185338 695 2. Available from the Basic Skills Agency. Tel:

0870 600 2400. Written to provide advice to staff teaching learners who have range of disabilities and learning difficulties.

Adult pre-entry literacy and numeracy curriculum framework. Learning and Skills Development Agency and NIACE, 2002. ISBN 1853387398. Available from the Basic Skills Agency. Tel: 0870 600 2400. Written for staff working with adults with learning difficulties.

Basic skills for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities : a resource pack to support staff development. Produced by NIACE. Department for Education and Skills, 2003. ISBN 1 84185 574 X.

Living our lives. DfES, 2001. ISBN 1 84185 567 7. Free of charge. Tel: 0845 60 222 60. Prolog reference LOL. Life stories of ten people with learning difficulties, offering a resource for learners and tutors, with an audio CD.

Self-advocacy action pack. DfES, 2001. ISBN 1 84185 5650. Free of charge. Tel: 0845 60 222 60. Prolog reference SAAP. A pack written for adults with learning difficulties on speaking up and self-advocacy, comes with an audio CD.

Skills explorer: practical literacy and numeracy activities for learners at entry level. DfES, 2001. Free of charge. Tel: 0845 60 222 60. Prolog reference SEABS

Skills explorer: practical literacy activities for learners at entry level. DfES, 2001. Free of charge. Tel: 0845 60 222 60. Prolog reference SEBSL

Yesterday I never stopped writing. DfES, 2001. ISBN 1 84185 566 9. Free of charge. Tel: 0845 60 222 60. Prolog reference YNSW Guidance on developing community-based basic skills provision for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities.

NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.
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