

Valuing Employment Now: Real jobs for people with learning disabilities

A response to the Government Strategy Paper from NIACE
(The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)

1. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent non-governmental organisation and charity. Its corporate and individual members come from a range of places where adults learn: in universities, further education colleges, workplaces, local community settings, prisons and in their own homes via technology. The ends to which NIACE activities are directed can be summarised as being to secure more, different and better quality opportunities for adult learners in the UK and across the world. It is particularly concerned to advance the interests of those who have benefited least from their initial education and training.
2. NIACE welcomes the recent publication of *Valuing Employment Now: real jobs for people with learning disabilities*¹ and recognises the importance of this being a cross-government strategy which has sign up from six departments of state and the Office for Disability Issues.
3. It will be important to ensure that a similar commitment is generated among providers of post-16 education and training (Local Authority Directors of Education; Chief Executives of colleges etc) as the document is disseminated and its vision of cross-departmental is to be realised at grassroots level.

The vision

4. NIACE agrees wholeheartedly with the document's statement that there is a need for a:

“Major change in approach throughout the whole system: from health and social care, to early years, schools and colleges, employment agencies and employers’ families and people with learning disabilities themselves... underpinned by the fundamental belief that people with learning disabilities can work, starting with the messages given when people are born.”

5. Since 2002 NIACE has worked in partnership with the Valuing People Support team and more recently the Office of Disability Issues *Getting a Life* programme, to bring together staff from education, social care and Connexions services to promote a joint-working, person-centred approach towards supporting people with learning disabilities.

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http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_101401

6. NIACE believes that the Valuing Employment Now target for 2025 of having 45,000 more people with moderate and severe learning disabilities in work is ambitious, but rightly so. There are less people with learning disabilities in work than any other group of people in society, including other disabled people.
7. It is important that the measure for as many as possible of these jobs to be at least 16 hours a week is set and constantly reinforced, so that most people getting work will be better off financially and achieve greater inclusion in the workforce and in society generally. NIACE is aware that there is a danger of perpetually underestimating what people can achieve and thereby not supporting individuals to achieve their full potential. This is the core function of those working with people with learning disabilities in the post-16 education and training sector. Setting such an ambitious target can stimulate and encourage those working in the sector to improve the quality of vocational provision and work with partners to ensure individuals progress on to employment.
8. To increase economic participation through sustainable employment by improving education and training opportunities for people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities is priority 3 of the Learning and Skills Council 2006 *Learning for Living and Work strategy*. NIACE has worked extensively with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to take this priority forward with the FE sector. NIACE is concerned that the demise of the LSC from next year and its replacement by the Young People's Learning Agency, a new role for local authorities in the education and training of people 19- 25 who are subject to a learning disability assessment disabilities and a new Skills Funding Agency for adults, may cause some problems for providers of education and training. In dealing with large-scale change there is a real danger that arrangements for learners with learning disabilities will become sidelined or marginalised until bigger issues are resolved. We urge Government to ensure that this is not the case.

Key actions for government departments

9. The Valuing Employment Now strategy identifies a number of key actions for the DCSF that include; promoting real work experience; incentivising employment outcomes from learning providers and using Foundation Learning (formerly the Foundation Learning Tier) to embed supported employment models.
10. Post March 2010, the remit of the DCSF with the Young Peoples' Learning Agency and Local Authorities is to plan and fund provision for learners who are subject to a learning disability assessment up to the age 25. NIACE believes that all adult learners with learning disabilities should have more and better opportunities to learn beyond 19 not just those with assessments. Therefore it will be important for the DCSF to work together with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Skills Funding Agency so all people

with learning disabilities who want to progress into work are supported to do so. We hope that the forthcoming Skills Strategy will give consideration to this.

Project Search and Apprenticeships

11. The introduction of 10-12 sites for the Project Search model as a route into apprenticeships is potentially a very exciting development. NIACE has concerns however, that the evaluation of the two current sites in Norfolk and Leicester using the Project Search model, are not yet complete. Lessons learnt from these evaluations will be crucial to laying strong foundations for effective work for the new sites and because of the timing this opportunity maybe lost.
12. It is useful that the strategy draws attention to the fact that that Train to Gain can be accessed by people in work. Case studies of this being used to fund support for instance through job coaches for people with learning disabilities would be very helpful as currently funding for Train to Gain is based on qualifications rather than support. In order for Train to Gain funding to be more flexible there would need to be some fundamental changes to this funding.

The Adult Advancement and Careers Service

13. NIACE agrees that BIS must ensure that the new Adult Advancement and Careers Service is fully inclusive - including those at some distance from the waged labour market. NIACE particularly welcomes recognition that there is a need for a small pool of specialist advisers to support people with moderate, severe and the most complex learning disabilities. It will be important to support staff to develop skills and BIS will need to work closely with LLUK (the sector skills council) and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service to do this.
14. Ensuring that any new skills accounts are inclusive for all people with learning disabilities is important. Information about the skills accounts and the methods used to access them should be easy to use for all learners.

Workforce Development - Job Coaches

15. NIACE welcomes the proposal to encourage the relevant Sector Skills Council to develop qualifications for job coaching as this will help increase the number of job coaches to support people with learning disabilities progress from education and training into work. The proposal to use Additional Learning Support (ALS) funds as one funding stream that can be used to pay for Job Coaches is noted. However, Additional Learning Support funding is not bottomless and is already under pressure.

16. It will be important that the assessment procedures used for ALS can accurately capture the correct level of support needed by individuals. Support from job coaches in an ordinary workplace is significantly different from the type of support needed in a classroom setting.
17. NIACE is currently producing a pack and training for staff to teach people with learning disabilities in the post-16 sector how to embed the supported employment approach. This will usefully underpin and complement the actions for workforce development in Valuing Employment Now.
18. NIACE welcomes the commitment from the DWP to offer 400 jobs by end of 2010/11 and a similar DCSF commitment. Role modelling recruitment and retention of people with learning disabilities in public sector can send out a powerful message. NIACE recommends that the Young People's Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency be encouraged to adopt this approach once they are established in 2010.
19. NIACE recognises that partnership with family carers is vital to the aims of this strategy and that if people with learning disabilities are working, carers themselves may well want to return to work. Access to education and training for carers has been a focus of NIACE work for some time now. NIACE has recently written a report with the National Extension Collegeⁱ which presents framework for meeting the needs of carers in further and adult education. NIACE plans to work with the DCSF and other partners to take the recommendations of this report forward. As the national delivery team for Valuing Employment Now plan to include a post for a family carer, it will be important to liaise with this person.

Conclusion

20. NIACE would be pleased to elaborate on any topic discussed in this response. In the first instance, please contact Yola Jacobsen (yola.jacobsen@niace.org.uk).

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ⁱ *Including Carers: towards a framework for meeting the needs of carers in further and adult education.*

http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/230709_Including_Carers_Report_final.pdf