

# IEP JOURNAL MAY 2024



ISSUE 11







WELCOME  
TO ISSUE 1

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# A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

LAURA DAVIS

**Supported Employment is an internationally recognised five stage model. The strong values that run through every stage set it apart from other approaches.**

**It focuses on supporting people into good quality careers, within the open labour market, in roles that are valued both socially and financially by employers. Supported Employment recognises all the stakeholders involved, with the jobseeker and employer as equal partners, with their circle of support.**

Supported Employment disregards the concept that disabled people should be grateful for any job. Instead, it empowers people to access good careers and promotes the fact that work adds value to their lives, to their communities, and to business.

**In this 11th edition of the IEP Journal, we have contributors from people working in the Supported Employment sector, driving policy, leading organisations, and delivering services on the front line.**

**It provides an opportunity to explore the research, understand current policy and gain insights and ideas around how to embed the supported employment model as part of the jigsaw of helping the disabled, neurodivergent and disadvantaged people into good careers.**

**We hope it provides an opportunity to consider the role of the wider employability sector as we address the great levels of economic inactivity due to health and disability.**

Historically, Supported Employment has been the greatest postcode lottery, with the sole responsibility being placed on local authorities, health services and the third sector to invest, often driven by the understanding that people accessing good careers reduces the cost to adult social care budgets by £1.63 for every £1 spent. There has been greater investment in the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) for people with severe and enduring mental health issues, but people with a learning disability have remained the group most excluded from the workforce. There has been a gradual shift towards a model fidelity approach, with the introduction of the Supported Employment Proof of Concept and then the Supported Employment trailblazers.

However, as long as Supported Employment was viewed as a 'special thing for special people' policy makers were able to tinker around the edges of investing in good quality Supported Employment. Covid changed that, with the major impact it had on almost all aspects of economic and social life amplifying the already huge health-related economic inactivity that continues to challenge government thinking.

Having a good career is a privilege: even on the bad days, it grants us access to conversations, people, social activities, and health benefits that

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→ Laura Davis has been working to improve the employment outcomes for individuals who are excluded from the workforce for over 20 years.

Passionate in the belief that employment should be for all, Laura has been the CEO of the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) and Inclusive Trading CIC since May 2022.

Previously Laura has set up and led an award-winning supported employment service based across Berkshire and Hampshire.

She's committed to widening the participation of disadvantaged people in the workforce and raising the visibility of inclusive recruitment and the benefits it brings for individuals, community, and society.

Laura is the mother to three teenage daughters who all have disabilities or neurodivergent and is also an experienced foster family.





enrich our lives. Simply said, those with good work, live longer. However, for too many disabled, neurodivergent, and disadvantaged people good work is a privilege that is too often denied from them. People are made to jump through endless employability courses to prove their work readiness, when, if we are honest, how many of us have ever been fully ready for any job? I have certain strengths, got a job and learnt as I went along, usually hoping no one identified that I didn't know what I was doing for at least the first six months.

The Supported Employment 'Place, Train and Maintain (flourish)' model has that principal at the core: we are never fully ready, so get people in the workplace and then support them to layer up their skills on the job.

Parts of the media and some politicians would try and make us believe that people are lazy, or not work ready, when in fact we hear every day from people who are desperate to work. With the zero-rejection policy as a fundamental value of Supported Employment, we start from a position that everyone can work with the right support and right workplace culture.

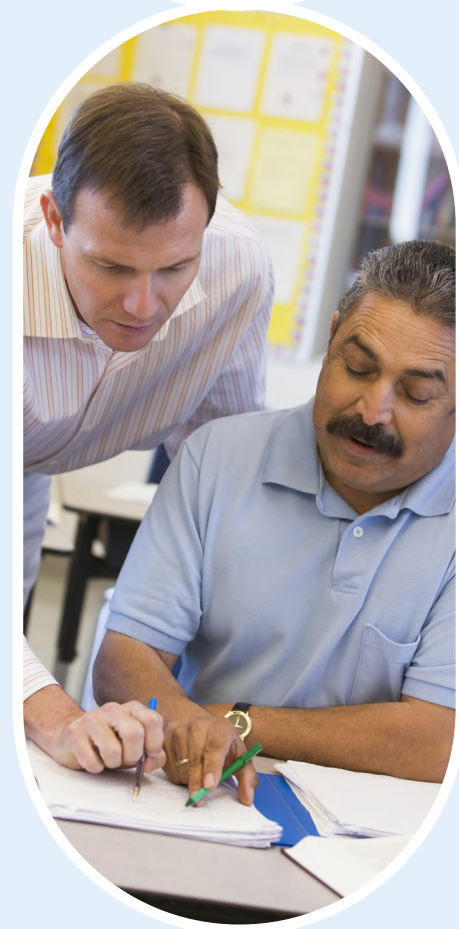
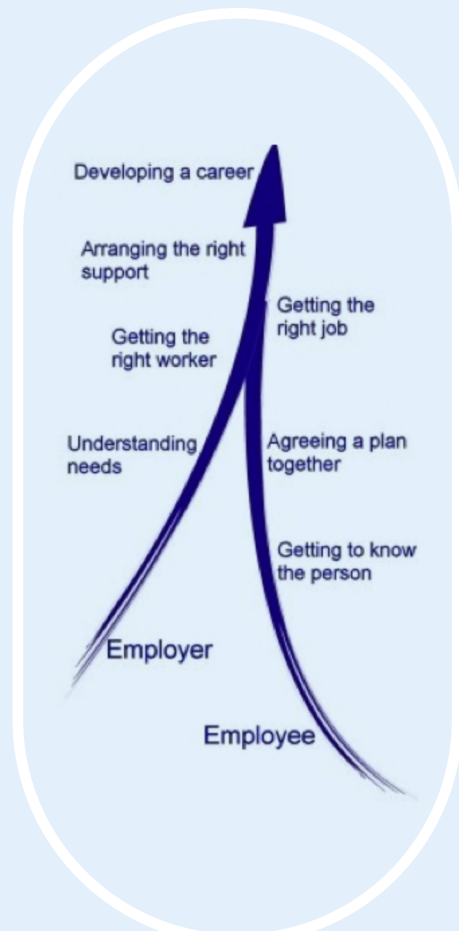
Compared to early 2020 there remains around 565,000 more inactive people in the UK economy today and employers are recording record numbers of unfilled vacancies. Covid highlighted the huge numbers of people being left behind by consecutive UK active labour market policies. In the previous IEP journal Dr Katy Jones FIEP focussed on the challenges of the 'Work First' approach to getting people into employment and the lack of evidence that this approach has worked in addressing the ever-increasing UK labour market shortages. At BASE I hear first-hand from both disabled people and from employers the damage this approach has done. Disabled people often describe that they feel set up to fail and employers describe the lack of job matching and in-work support to help prepare the workforce, leading to poor experiences.

In contrast, the Supported Employment model starts from a position of high aspiration, of having the time to get to know people and employers well, of matching the right person to the right role, and providing expert job coaching support to move from 'any job' to the right career.

However, I am certainly not suggesting that the Supported Employment model is all things to all people, nor should it be. We need a mixed economy, but evidence shows that for those furthest from the labour market, with multiple intersecting barriers, it works. As a wider employability sector, we need to be able to come together and understand the overlaps in our work, the commonalities and specific differences in the support different groups need. The differences between Supported Employment and 'employment support' are more than semantic and are often driven by how employment provision was commissioned.

Where is Supported Employment in 2024? We have seen the greatest level of investment and commitment from the government over the past three years, with £18 million investment by the Department of education to double the number of Supported Internships, through Internships Work. The announcement of Universal Support from the Department of Work and Pensions to support 100,000 people into work, using both the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelities to ensure the right provision is commissioned. This demonstrates a commitment from across government departments that the supported employment model is part of the solution in supporting people and employers across our communities, matching individual's strengths to business need.

We have policy makers in DWP, using the evidence base and making sure that quality is at the heart of commissioning, creating the right cultures and payment structures so that providers can embed the right values in their support, in a way the previous DWP employment programs simply didn't allow.



We also see a national picture of over 18,000 employers signed up to the Disability Confident scheme, yet there is no evidence that employers feel any more confident in employing disabled people. This certainly isn't intended to be an argument to scrap the Disability Confident scheme, which I know some of our global partners envy from afar, but it is a call for strengthening it, giving it some teeth, and ensuring employers understand how you move from disability confident to disability confident in action.

I started my career as a job coach, a role that is fundamental to the success of delivering the Supported Employment model. Job coaches are the connectors, the disruptors, the resolvers and will always find another way. Through the Internships Work program 760 job coaches are being trained and this commitment to the workforce development of the profession must continue, as we move away from high fiving each other when we get someone a job, to focusing on securing people careers (whatever that might mean for everyone).

This requires building long-term partnerships; one of my favourite parts of the Supported Employment model is the huge emphasis on employers being an equal partner, worth time and investment, just the way jobseekers are. In over 20 years in the profession, I have seen a genuine shift from employers, as they begin to recognise the huge potential within this largely untapped market and also in how they are looking for organisations to help with the 'how'.

We are increasingly supporting employers to develop the internal capability to develop inclusive recruitment pathways, to focus on a removal-of-barriers perspective, and to build their capacity for both early careers planning and workforce retention. Building these relationships doesn't happen overnight, so we need to ensure, as a sector, we are in it for the long game. More employers are seeing that qualified job coaches are part of the infrastructure needed to meet the ever-changing needs of their existing and future workforce: DPD

are an example of an organisation that talk about the huge benefits this has brought to their organisation, supporting both early careers and workforce retention.

It makes me walk a little taller, knowing that disabled, neurodivergent, and disadvantaged people across England and Wales will have access to a voluntary, locally provided and evidenced-based model of support. Are regional areas ready? How do we ensure that unlike previous DWP provision, the heart of Universal Support doesn't get lost between conception and implementation?

These investments provide opportunities, but this also comes with huge responsibility for the sector. Responsibility to understand and follow the evidence base around what works for each group, to ensure we become more effective at gathering and utilising data, and that regional areas and employers have access to the support needed to realise this huge potential.

This will take brave leaders, vulnerability in accepting how some of the ways we have worked needs adjusting and to shift the power balance from doing things to people and moving towards working with jobseekers and employers.

We need to embrace the ever-advancing accessibility technology that will support the jobseekers we work with to become independent in the workplace, to build more inclusive cultures and to build capacity in an often-over-stretched sector. BASE was incredibly proud to have been granted the Microsoft Accessibility Nonprofit Tech Accelerator program, with the aim of training 10,000 front line workers (employability professionals, job coaches, careers guidance, employers etc.) in Microsoft accessible tech fundamentals, with an introduction to Supported Employment and 10 short videos of the most helpful accessibility tools. This training is free and we encourage all our employability colleagues to take advantage of it, for our own development and another tool when

working with employers. IEP journal readers will be amongst the first to receive the link once launched.

My journey started as a job coach within a long stay institution, where disabled people were removed from their families and placed in hospitals, segregated from communities and othered in every way possible. What role does the employability sector see for the profession within an ever-increasing model-fidelity-driven policy. Does this feel like a threat or a huge opportunity?

I hope it feels like an opportunity, as we need the whole sector to come together to embrace the potential for continued investment to train job coaches, inspire leaders, engage commissioners, empower employers, and collectively raise the ambition of every single professional that Employment must be for all.

It feels like we are entering a new world where evidence is driving policy and quality is at the heart of employment programs. The IEP's Quality Improvement Framework provides a great starting place for any organisation delivering wider employability programs, and the SEQF and IPS models provide a robust fidelity framework for organisations wanting to embed the five-stage model, to support the groups most excluded from the workforce.

Here is your opportunity to take a deep dive and understand all three models and how they will help drive the greatest quality for the jobseekers and employers you support.

<https://www.myiep.uk/page/QIF>

[https://www.base-uk.org/SEQF\\_Model\\_Fidelity](https://www.base-uk.org/SEQF_Model_Fidelity)

<https://ipsgrow.org.uk/>



# SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT: WHY DOES MODEL FIDELITY MATTER?

02



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**It is impossible to have a conversation about Supported Employment without talking about fidelity, and with good reason.**

**The short answer to this question is to say that fidelity matters because it improves employment outcomes for individuals and services. The results are unequivocal.**

Close to 50 randomised controlled trials – the gold standard of impact evaluation – have by now compared the vocational impacts of IPS services operating to fidelity with those in ‘business-as-usual’ services not operating to that fidelity across a wide range of diverse workless population groups. Across that evidence base services adhering to fidelity deliver better vocational outcomes – job entry, job sustainment, hours worked, time to job entry for example – than those that do not (Drake et al., 2023; Whitworth et al., 2024). The impacts are consistent across evaluations and typically large. Within that, the evidence also finds that amongst services that do operate to fidelity employment outcomes are also relatively better/worse when fidelity scores are better/worse (Yamaguchi et al., 2021).

So, to some extent, the answer to the question is simple: employment programmes built around, and maximising adherence to, Supported Employment fidelity is simply good evidence-based, outcomes-focused employment policy. That’s really important and is the main reason why different parts of UK government – and other international countries

– are looking seriously at expanding Supported Employment provision to wider and larger groups where previous models of support have failed to make enough of a difference (Whitworth et al., 2024). Indeed, the UK is now at the cutting edge of Supported Employment innovation and expansion in many ways with Supported Employment reaching national coverage in relation to severe mental illness (NHSE’s IPS SMI), alcohol and drugs (OHID’s IPS-AD) and low to moderate health conditions, disabilities and disadvantage (DWP’s Universal Support).

But that’s not the main – or even most important – reason why fidelity matters of course. For at least 25 years the UK employment support system has (rightly) been criticised for paying too little attention to what I term process quality – the nature and quality of what is actually being delivered and experienced inside interventions under the bonnet – and the difference that makes to experiences, effectiveness, efficiency and equity outcomes. And it is with regards to the space of process rather than outcomes that fidelity really makes the difference in at least two different ways.

Firstly, and obviously, fidelity shines a bright, evidence-based light on the identification, measurement and continual strengthening of key service elements known as a collective



Professor Whitworth is an expert in the design and evaluation of employment support policies for people with disabilities, health conditions or complex disadvantages. He has particular expertise in Supported Employment (both IPS and SEQF fidelity), quasi-marketised approaches (e.g. Work and Health Programme) and locally integrated employment approaches.

Alongside his academic research and publications he is an applied scholar who conducts mixed methods process, impact and economic service evaluations and who works widely with commissioners and providers. Current/recent evaluations include the Via IPS alcohol drugs evaluation for West London Alliance and evaluation of the North Wales Regional Supported Employment service.

He is currently supporting DWP with Universal Support design, Scottish Government with their Supported Employment approach, and various providers and commissioners via advisory boards and ad hoc support.





to correlate with improved client outcomes: caseload size, integration, what effective employer engagement or really person-centred vocational profiling look like, the centrality of job matching, and so on. Pinning down how much work each fidelity item is doing for outcomes is less well understood, but as a set the evidence is clear. There are differences of course in the details of how an IPS and SEQF fidelity scale go about doing this, but they both do it in their own ways. Revealing and focusing on process quality via fidelity in this way helps Supported Employment providers and commissioners to think continually about where their service is at and what they need to do to strengthen further in order to maximise outcomes – always helpful to understand but especially so in the first year or so of any contract before outcomes really start to build.

Secondly, however, fidelity I would argue reaches further than this in its illumination of process quality by bringing into view a deeper focus on the underlying values that sit beneath and infuse those formal IPS or SEQF fidelity scales (indeed, values are an explicit part of the SEQF model). For the past two years I have led an NIHR funded research project into Supported Employment beyond severe mental illness. Part of that project has involved around 85 qualitative interviews with a whole range of Supported Employment stakeholders – frontline provider staff, service managers, clients, commissioners, employers – across a whole range of IPS and SEQF services supporting a diverse range of population groups. When speaking with high performing services one clear message is that fidelity for them is not just (or, actually, even mainly) about the formal fidelity scale/score. Instead, it is at least as much about the set of values that underpin what they understand the spirit of the Supported Employment model to be – really listening to and valuing client's wishes and needs, empowerment, co-production, genuine care for and commitment to clients and employers, proactivity, non-judgemental, ambitious, appropriately challenging. The values are about how

the Supported Employment service thinks, feels and behaves in its every action and interaction. And they are exemplified in provider staff who it is clear see their work as a vocation not a job.

To be clear, when these high performing services think and talk about fidelity they do talk about the fidelity scale and score. But they move seamlessly and rapidly into thinking and talking about the extent to which these values flow through the DNA of their service – its culture, management, staff recruitment and development, interactions with clients and employers, and so on – and what they are actively doing to seek to strengthen those values and collective culture. Hence, the fidelity scale is described by these services as resting on and being infused with these values – fidelity and values not as two separate things but as intimately connected, strong fidelity providing the key building blocks of the service and values filling those building blocks in with their form, feel and function.

That is also how clients describe the distinctiveness and positivity of their Supported Employment experiences. The clients that we interviewed spoke in glowing terms about their support, what a difference it had made, how different it was to many previous employment programmes, and how important the values were to those positive experiences. Clients could not tell us anything about the formal fidelity scales themselves – why would they be able to? – but the underpinning values they absolutely did and these are for them at the heart of their positive experiences and outcomes. As such, whilst many people might boil their summary of the Supported Employment model, its distinctiveness and its effects down to the fidelity scale (whether IPS or SEQF) I find it much more helpful – indeed, impossible not to – understand it in terms of that fidelity scale and the underlying values that do (or at least should) flow through its operation.

Stepping out for a moment, this raises implications not just for delivery but also for the design, commissioning

and management of Supported Employment services. Academic literature talks about five different ways that commissioners can seek to achieve their desired objectives inside employment programmes: procedural, corporate, market, democratic and network (Carter, 2019). Each of these five routes is underpinned by a different set of levers through which its effects occur (standardised rules and processes, targets and monitoring, payments and competition, choice and voice, and trust and values respectively) and each is oriented towards a different primary virtue (reliability, goal-driven, cost-driven, citizen accountability, and flexibility respectively). Supported Employment is rooted predominantly in the network approach with a primary lever of trust and values and a primary virtue of flexibility as services seek to grow and harness strong, positive, trusted relationships with their key stakeholders – clients, referral and co-location partners, and employers. In the UK context that makes Supported Employment a strikingly different model of employment support from either Jobcentre Plus (rooted in standardised rules and processes of the procedural approach) or mainstream contracted provision (rooted in performance management of targets in the corporate approach and, in particular, financial incentives and payment-by-results as per the market approach).

Naturally programmes are typically hybrids, operating not as single approaches but rather as differently configured and weighted constellations of these five approaches. Hence, although rooted in this network approach one would expect a Supported Employment service to also have targets (corporate), internal processes (procedural) and to grow choice and voice for clients (democratic). But as we do so it's important that Supported Employment services stay rooted in their primary network approach, in its emphasis on trust and values as the key performance lever, and in its emphasis on flexibility to give staff the time and space that they need to work in genuinely personalised ways as each

client needs. It is also important to note that these five approaches can be antithetical to one another such that they can potentially dilute or contradict each other if poorly configured. As such, we need to be careful about how we design, commission and implement these configurations in Supported Employment programmes so as to maximise and not contradict the trust, values and flexibilities that they rely upon for their success. The Supported Employment evidence base provides a clear guide for us here: with the right values, adherence to fidelity, a focus on outcomes, resource that is sufficient and sustained, and a commitment to continual improvement it really is possible to deliver a step-change in the experiences and work and health outcomes for individuals with a whole range of health conditions, disabilities or other complex challenges who have all too frequently been let down by previous employment provision.

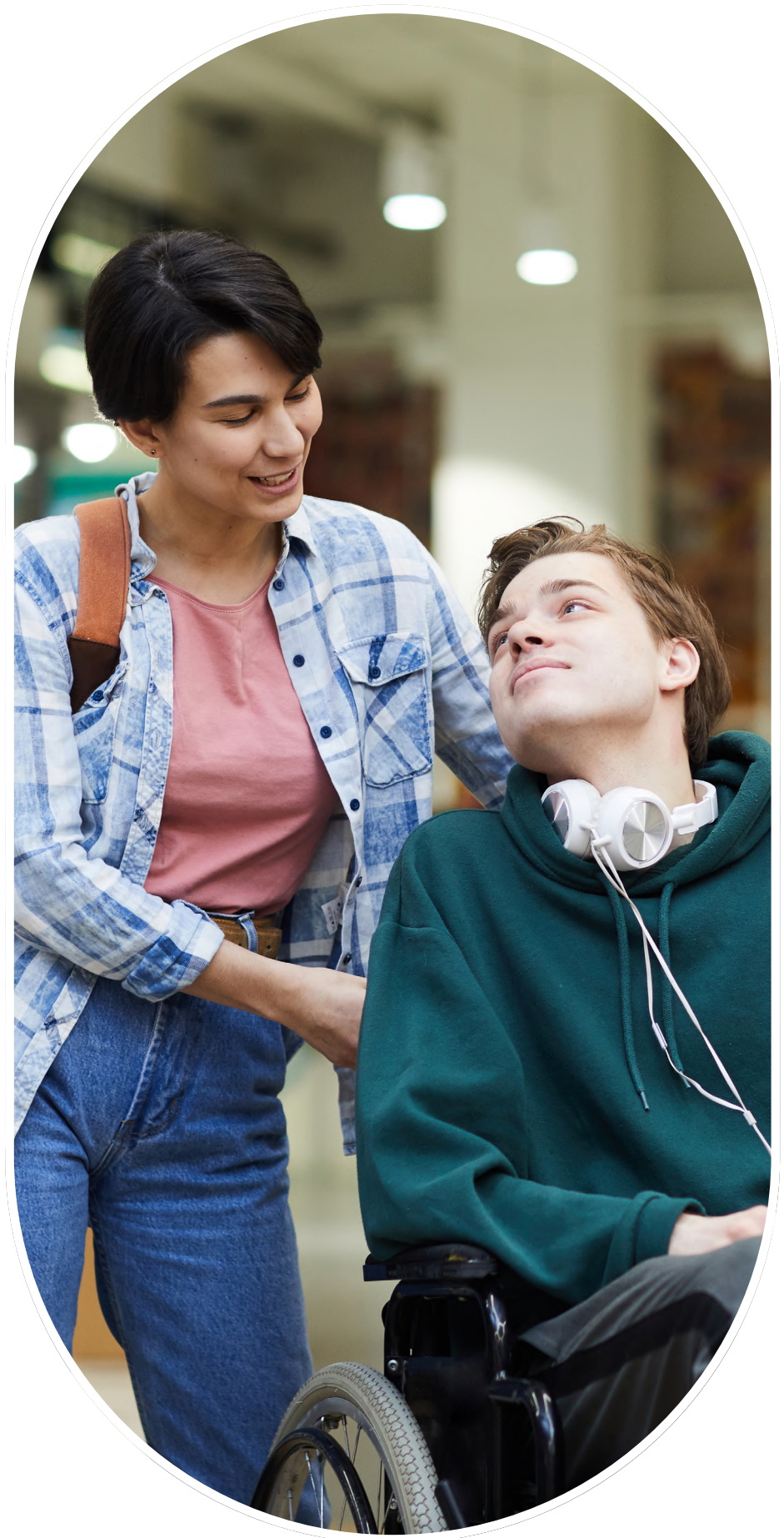
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# ENABLING, EMPOWERING AND THE EXITING, THE LIFE OF A JOB COACH

03



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**A Job Coach is to an employee with a disability what the Swiss Army knife is to a man who has been dropped into the middle of a forest and must navigate his way out.**

**My own experience of Job Coaching has come from working with adults with learning disabilities, although a Job Coach's support can be used for anyone facing barriers entering the workforce.**

An employee can be disadvantaged by the way they learn and absorb information. For example, someone with a learning disability (upon landing a position of employment) may struggle to thrive in their job and stay in work simply because the employer's 'one size fits all' approach to training their staff doesn't apply to them. Many employers simply are not well-versed on how to best support someone with a learning disability, learning difficulty or neuro-divergent condition.

Most employers (I like to believe, anyway) wish to be more inclusive in the way they hire new staff. However, when deciding about recruiting those with disabilities, they are faced with several questions. In my experience, they are always the same set of questions: Will hiring someone with a disability be cost-effective? Will it be productive? Will we realistically be able to train someone with a disability up to the required standard?

Enter the Job Coach, a trained and experienced professional, who will often be on-site within the employee's workplace and will learn some of the employees' tasks, if not all of them. Typically, a coach will be funded via

the government's Access to Work scheme. They will assist a new employee at the toughest phase of their employment journey, the first 26 weeks. After all, it takes most of us a good six months to settle into any new work environment. This can be an even greater challenge when you already have trouble processing information in the same way as others. As well as remembering who everyone in your new team is and what they do, your own email login and doing your very best to remember where the staff kitchen is so that you don't walk headfirst into the broom cupboard again!

The Job Coach will train the employee in a way that is tailor-made for that individual to learn, for the coach has a large menu of tools to pick from! What this looks like depends on the individual they are supporting. It may be that they clearly label equipment, tools, and materials, and use colour-coding. It may be that they break down tasks into individual components so that they can be learned more easily, through practice and repetition, a practice often referred to as systematic instruction.

Several years ago, I worked with a young man with a learning disability as his Job Coach. He learned how to master tasks such as photocopying using the systematic instruction method. At first, we would carry out photocopying tasks together and I



Craig Maloney is a Supported Employment Team Leader at the London Borough of Hackney and has six years of experience as an Advisor and Coach to those with disabilities.

In 2022, Craig received the British Association of Supported Employment's Practitioner of the Year Award.





would take photos of each step of the process (from loading paper into the copier to turning it on, to navigating his way around the different steps to produce a copied document). These photos were then made into a step-by-step guide that he could refer to. This visual aid supported him to - within the space of six weeks or so - become so familiar with this process that he was confidently able to do this on his own without my assistance.

Job Coaching is a key component in the employment journey, enabling those with disabilities to pick up skills and tasks that they are then able to complete with confidence. And it's at the very point whereby the employee has confidently grasped the day-to-day aspects of their job role that the Job Coach begins to fade, the level of support reducing over the course of six months or so. In that first month, a Job Coach might be at work with the employee every day assisting them to settle in. By the sixth month, the Job Coach might be checking in with the employee once a week in person or even by phone. The entire function of the Job Coach is to make themselves redundant; once an employee can carry out the functions of their role independently, they will disappear.

## SO, WHAT MAKES A GOOD JOB COACH?

### 1. The ability to foster good relationships with employers.

A Job Coach is there to support the employee on the job and will be involved in assessing the work environment long before they start. This means meeting with the employee's Line Manager and team, gaining an understanding of their business processes and learning the tasks of the employee's role. In this sense, the Job Coach becomes a 'Jack (or Jill) of all trades.' Whether this is as a Barista making fantastic coffee or sitting behind a desk dealing with complex administrative tasks, the Job Coach becomes so familiar with the employee's day-to-day tasks that they are able to transmit that information fluidly. For a job match to be a success, the Job Coach needs to build good working relationships with each and

every member of the team at the workplace.

It's all about balancing the needs of the business and the individual, facilitating colleagues to feel confident and empowered to integrate fully into the workplace culture. Job Coaches will subsequently be supporting their colleagues and managers on how to best relate and communicate with a member of the team with a specific disability. Job Coaches support the employer to make reasonable adjustments where needed. What is ultimately very interesting about this process is that it makes the other members of staff feel included, and empowered and teaches them how to become better communicators!

### 2. The ability to foster relationships with the employee and their support network.

Whoever it is you are coaching; both the employee and Job Coach need to have a good relationship. What exactly does this mean though? Well, having high aspirations, commitment and patience are all qualities required of a Job Coach and a genuine desire to empower others to succeed. Successful coaches need to engage employees with enthusiasm, humour, sincerity and honesty. Those very first handful of coaching sessions are about gathering an arsenal of information from both the employee and those closest to them to understand what their strengths are and how they best learn. This is often termed a 'Vocational Profile' or 'Vocational Assessment'. This is not a static document but is rather a record of conversations and observations which often involve quite a bit of collaborative work. At the end of it all, it's a relationship built upon trust and in the early days, the Job Coach is the go-to person for both the employee and their manager if there is a problem within the workplace.

### 3. Being able to recognise when to let go.

Once you have supported the employee to integrate and work independently, it's time to let them go. This is the hardest part in my

professional opinion, but successful Job Coaches understand their function is to equip someone with all the tools they need so that they themselves are no longer needed. The boundaries and expectations that are set early on are a key part of this process. As a Job Coach you are playing a role with many different hats; part employability professional, part helping hand, part recruitment specialist, but always a coach first and foremost. I genuinely feel that Job Coaches themselves are employable in just about any sector simply because the role itself is so incredibly multi-faceted.

And there you have it. Hopefully, dear reader, you have a better idea of what job coaching is and why it is such a key ingredient to employability and specifically job retention. In closing, it is important to remember that whether one has a disability or not, the world of employment is one in which we are all constantly learning and growing. Employment is the lens from which we understand the world better and whilst the cliché is that travel broadens the mind, I believe staunchly that employment does also. Not everyone will learn in the exact same way because each and every one of us is unique. The sooner society embraces this fact, the sooner terms like 'equality', 'equity' and 'diversity' will no longer be abstract concepts and ideas. Instead, they will be perceived as being what they actually are: Human rights. For all. Without exception.

I started my career as a Job Coach without much experience of the role. You can learn new skills, which I very quickly did as a Job Coach, but I soon came to understand that my strong values and commitment to building a world based on equity and inclusion are what's central to the role.

I would encourage anyone who shares my passion for inclusive recruitment to consider a career as a Job Coach. In 2022 I won the Practitioner of the Year at the BASE awards, which further cemented my commitment to encourage others to take on this privileged role. I am now managing a small team of Supported Employment professionals, but I will always be a Job Coach at heart.

# EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT IS NOT THE SAME AS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

04



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**In a world where we continue to strive for accessible and inclusive recruitment pathways, diverse, talented, and representative workforces, and a focus on can and not can't, employment support or supported employment absolutely makes sense.**

**Right? And with only subtle differences between employment support and supported employment as headlines, what they deliver and how they must be is really similar. Right? It can be tricky to fully understand and navigate, and so some further exploration into what supported employment really is, to see and understand the differences, will then help decide if they indeed are the same. Given the article headline you may have already guessed my intention to demonstrate that employment support is not the same as supported employment. And here's why.**

Supported employment has a well-documented history, and today within the sector, those founding principles remain, with continued development and growth in the tried and tested 5 stage model of supported employment and in its quality fidelity - namely the Supported Employment Quality Framework, or SEQF for short. Understanding what quality should and does look like is one of the key differences. Without quality measures and assurances people, providers, employers, and commissioners have no idea what 'good' is. Credibility is weakened and the risk of 'any job' over 'the job' increases, and just any job is not supported employment.

Provision for employment support has an equally tracked history and over the last 20 years Work Preparation,

Work Step, Work Choice, and Supported Employment Services represent just part of that history. It is always interesting to see how, where and when we circle back to things that worked well but then changed. I recently found myself describing place and train as being 'do you remember the Work Preparation programme back in 2005, where we engaged quickly with employers and introduced work at a much earlier stage to place the person and then train them on the job'? Place, train and the 5 stages of supported employment model create our foundation for delivery. Without one or either, supported employment does not exist and generic action plans, in work support calls, texts and check-ins just don't make the supported employment grade.

Supported employment is more than just the job. It is about really engaging with the person (stage 1), identifying through quality vocational profiles (stage 2) and job analysis (stage 3), everything that is important to the person, including circles of support, routines, learning styles, skills, and development goals. It is about challenging the status quo of systems and processes, changing hearts and minds, educating, championing (employer engagement - stage 4), and creating opportunity for everything the person can do, with little or no focus on what they can't. Job carving, job coaching, quality in work support (stage 5), and organic employer

→ My supported employment journey started in 2005 when I joined the Employment and Disability Service (EADS) as an Employment Development Officer. Progressing to Team Leader and then Manager has given me so much insight into the sector, its challenges, ambitions, and potential.

As Chair of BASE, I am privileged to see the impact quality supported employment has beyond my own county borders and able to contribute to national conversations. Employment is a game changer and championing employment for all and the right support, for the right person and at the right time so much more than just my day job.



solutions are all absolute musts when it comes to quality supported employment.

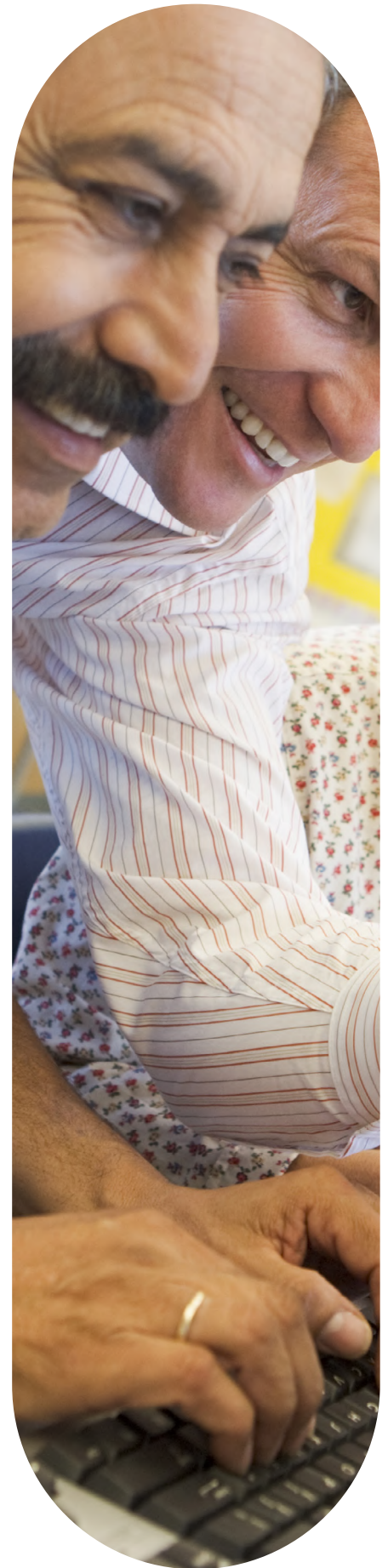
Danger alert! Do not overlook or underestimate the importance of the employer, like ever. They are not just gatekeepers to jobs with endless resources, patience, knowledge and understanding and supported employment will not work without them. Employer engagement is about really, like really, considering business needs, pressures, aims, and ambitions and working with employers as partners to tailor, adapt, overcome barriers and identify solutions together. I recently accompanied one of my team to an initial employer meeting and was beyond proud to listen as they explained to the employer everything that we, as a provider, could offer them in terms of help, support, education, learning, practical resources... a solution focussed listening ear.

The employer had constant and high numbers of vacancies, an absolute want to be inclusive, creative, and accessible, but were finding the balance between business, recruitment and staff needs a real struggle. They explained how their work spaces required high levels of hygiene and process (lots of PPE – personal protective equipment - think blue hair nets, aprons, gloves and face covering and no make-up, no perfume rules), which led to in-depth discussions around solutions, including seam free PPE alternatives, to avoid irritation to people who may be sensitive to the feel of fabric and videos to show what PPE would look like so that people could prepare in advance. Assisted interviews, providing questions in advance, the disadvantages of large and busy assessment days, simplifying language, rules, initial applications, inductions and processes. The ultimate automatic door, accessible to everybody regardless of why they might need to go through.

During our meeting a call came through to the employer. A recently appointed staff member called to hand in their notice as they were unable to pay (upfront) the £2.50 per day bus

fare (subsidised and dedicated work bus). Payday was 4 weeks away. The employer team simply looked at each other and then us and said, 'We just need to remove this barrier don't we?'. At a cost of £60 they were able to retain a staff member, continue in their ambition to be a local employer of choice, prove their flexibility and commitment to their team, tailored to the needs of the person. Sometimes the solution is that simple (and sometimes much more complicated or complex but don't worry because that is exactly where supported employment teams come in!).

Supported employment starts with the person and then the provider supports the person based on the 5-stage supported employment model, and the employer makes up the final third of the jigsaw, reassured by model fidelity that they know what good looks like and that they can trust in 'good'. Right support for the right person at the right time and with the right employer. Employment support is not supported employment. Right!





# EMPLOYERS NEED A DIFFERENT KIND OF SUPPORT

05



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Employers today face challenges in both retaining and hiring staff to meet their business needs and this feels additionally complex when considering how to support a more diverse workforce, especially disabled and neurodivergent people.

I have focused on the issues faced by the neurodivergent community, but I know there are many areas of commonality with other disadvantaged groups. In this article, I will share my personal and professional observations on the recent history of inclusive employment and the current landscape of inclusion.

My current role is Head of Global Expansion, People & Culture at Rangam, a minority-, woman-, and disability-owned company whose mission is to promote Employment for Everyone. Previously, I was part of the leadership team at one of the largest global investment corporations building arguably the world's leading Autism at Work programme. I believe I hold a unique view of the challenges faced by employers and employees, as an autistic self-advocate, working within the financial, technology, and recruitment industries. I actively support the advancement of adapting the workplace to embrace neurodiversity and encourage neurodivergent individuals to seek employment.

The [Buckland Report](#) landed in the news in February 2024, a landmark publication for autistic people containing a wide-spectrum independent review of Autism Employment in the UK. It contains some thought-provoking figures, such as an estimated 1 million

people have autism, most working age autistic people want to work and yet only around 3 in 10 working age autistic people are in employment, compared with around 5 in 10 for all disabled people and 8 in 10 for non-disabled people. The report has received a positive response across communities. Several of the recommendations, if successfully implemented, will, I believe, produce results quickly and include initiatives which are the subject of other articles within this journal including Universal Support, the Disability Confident Scheme and Access to Work. The report underscores the necessity for collaboration among non-profit organisations, government bodies, and businesses to enhance employment prospects for those needing assistance to enter the workforce.

I have found that the type of culture change required to make a real difference in recruitment and retention processes does not happen quickly. Convincing companies and leaders to believe that investing in this area benefits their business requires substantial persuasion. Although I've witnessed an increasing number of companies incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) strategies, or setting retention goals, they often fail to assign the necessary funding or full-time equivalent positions to create a tangible impact. In essence, numerous firms excel in rhetoric but fall short in practice. Typically, this



Lee is an Executive Vice President of Global Expansion with many years of experience working within the financial, technology, and recruitment industries. Having been part of the leadership team building arguably the world's leading Autism at Work program within one of the largest global investment corporations, Lee is now recognised as one of the world leaders in the neurodiversity inclusion space and is an accomplished, in demand, global speaker. As an autistic self-advocate, Lee supports the advancement of adapting the workplace to embrace neurodiversity and encourage neurodivergent individuals to seek employment.



shortfall is not due to an initial lack of intent but relates to difficulty in accessing or affording support, leading them back to familiar, comfortable practices.

Disability:IN in the US has been running the Disability Equality Index (DEI) since 2015 and it is considered a comprehensive benchmarking tool for business disability inclusion policies and programmes. It has grown to include 483 US companies in the 2023 report and will expand to include UK in 2024. My experience has been that those companies achieving the greatest success are the ones actively embracing support. They acknowledge their unknowns and actively seek help from the community. Companies that focus on enhancing the support environment for their current employees typically see an uptick in disclosure and retention. Such improvements also create a more productive and inclusive workplace atmosphere, these as evidenced by higher employee engagement scores.

I was involved with the earliest **Autism & Work Roundtable**, now known as the [Neurodiversity at Work Employer Roundtable](#) and was the first truly effective collaboration between major global organisations on this subject. Initiated by Microsoft and five others in the United States, the group began by exchanging best practice and collaboratively developed an Autism@ Work playbook (2019). Sub-titled 'Finding talent and creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with autism' it offers comprehensive guidance from the strategic planning phases, how to make the business case for hiring autistic talent, reaching the autistic community with job opportunities and how to interview autistic job seekers.

There's no shortage of guidance and reports for employers on how to be more inclusive, supplemented by a large number of agencies and organisations, all purporting to offer the solution to easily transform companies into Disability Confident Employers. But the confidence of employers to employ disabled people especially autistic people isn't growing fast enough for me, despite the

abundance of resources and solutions. My son has now entered the workforce and I want the future to be different for him. Employers need a different kind of support to make the necessary changes. How can we encourage and support them to create working environments which are empathic, accepting and inclusive and make lasting changes that will enable autistic people to stay in work?

I first 'discovered' the supported employment model and its passionate practitioners and advocates, in 2021, when I agreed to be a keynote speaker at BASE's annual conference that year. The conference was a spirited congregation of minds united by a collective desire for positive change, and it reshaped my perspective on disability hiring, neurodiversity, and the power of authentic inclusion. Fast forward to 2024 and BASE and Rangam are strategic partners and I'm a Trustee of the charity leading on National Employers 2023. I've observed how BASE diligently unites local government agencies, local and national charities, businesses both small and large, and national government agencies to foster change and collaboration. This model of unity and support is echoed by other Supported Employment organisations across other countries globally including Canada, Australia and Europe. By offering easy access to candidates who already possess support networks, coupled with advice, guidance and minimal bureaucratic barriers, the supported employment model empowers businesses to open their doors and welcome disabled and or neurodivergent talent.

I know that the neurodivergent community contains a vast pool of talent, a pool that has been neglected for too long. This talent is eager to work and is calling for the removal of barriers that have been hindering their employment. This goal is attainable through innovative support approaches that streamline the connection between candidates and open-minded businesses. It also calls for providing guidance and assistance to businesses that are unaware of their lack of knowledge in this area. The key to unlocking job opportunities

for everyone lies in cooperation, partnership and support.

So, while BASE became the space that I was able to connect the dots in building the right partnerships to move this conversation forward, this isn't a sales pitch but a reminder that partnerships are the key. For every organisation or individual reading this, what networks do you belong to that can help you feel confident in having the nuanced conversations with employers? What partnerships are you building to understand the evidence around how you build inclusive workplace cultures and ensure this evidence is embedded into all the employer engagement work you do?

If we are truly to close the disability employment gap, employers must be valued as equal partners and strong partnerships need long term investment of time, energy and sharing of expertise.

## RESOURCES

[Paying it Forward: JPMorgan Chase's Autism at Work program seeks to help people on the spectrum secure jobs that will allow them to grow.](#)

[Two different continents, one message of inclusivity \(jpmorgan.com\)](#)

[2023 Disability Equality Index Report - Disability:IN \(disabilityin.org\)](#)

[Neurodiversity at Work Playbook: Employee Engagement & Growth Series - Disability:IN \(disabilityin.org\)](#)

[Employer Information - Disability:IN \(disabilityin.org\)](#)

[World Association for Supported Employment](#)

# THE UK GOVERNMENT'S DISABILITY CONFIDENT SCHEME: WHAT MIGHT THE FUTURE HOLD?



DR KIM HOQUE

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The UK Government's Disability Confident scheme superseded Two Ticks 'Positive About Disabled People' in 2016. It is one of the country's flagship schemes aimed at improving disabled people's employment outcomes, and there are now over 19,000 certified employers covering more than 11 million employees.

The scheme works by inviting employers to seek certification at one of three levels: Level 1 Disability Confident 'Committed' (the entry level); Level 2 Disability Confident 'Employers'; and Level 3 Disability Confident 'Leaders' (the highest level).

To gain certification, employers need to agree to various commitments and implement a range of disability equality practices. At Level 2 they must conduct a self-assessment, which at Level 3 needs to be validated by another 'Leader'. The Government claims that certification "gives employers the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to attract, recruit, retain and progress disabled people in the workplace", and "raise their ambition ... to increase disabled people's employment opportunities"<sup>1</sup>.

However, both the Work and Pensions Select Committee<sup>2</sup> and the Centre for Social Justice Disability Commission<sup>3</sup> have recently questioned the scheme's effectiveness.

Much of the debate centres around the certification criteria. While this requires organisations to commit to various disability equality standards and activities, there is little independent assessment of whether organisations really meet

these commitments, or maintain them over time (except for peer review monitoring at Level 3). This raises the possibility that employers will seek certification to secure the associated reputational benefits, while not necessarily adopting the anticipated practices or improving disability equality outcomes.

However, our knowledge on this matter is limited given there has been remarkably little research on the scheme. This is in part due to a lack of readily available data allowing for a comparison of disability employment outcomes in certified and non-certified organisations.

To address this gap, my Disability@Work colleague, Professor Nick Bacon and I drew on data on 127,890 UK employees (of whom 5,676 are disabled) in the WorkL employee experience database, which pools the results of employee engagement surveys across 26 industry sectors to form the world's largest database on employee happiness and engagement. We matched into this the Department for Work and Pensions' list of Disability Confident organisations, thus enabling us to identify which of the respondents in the WorkL database were in Disability Confident organisations, and those which were not<sup>4</sup>.



Kim Hoque is Professor of Human Resource Management and Vice Dean (People and Culture) at King's Business School. He has researched and published widely on disability employment and on equality, diversity and inclusion more generally.

In 2013 he co-founded the Disability@Work research group ([www.disabilityatwork.co.uk](http://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk)) and in 2021, along with leading charities and trade unions, he co-founded the Disability Employment Charter ([www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org](http://www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org)), which outlines to government the policies that need to be implemented to address disability employment disadvantage.



<sup>1</sup> HM Government (2021) Welcome to Disability Confident. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/830085/disability-confident-welcome-guide-new-members.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/830085/disability-confident-welcome-guide-new-members.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Work and Pensions Committee (2023) Plan for Jobs and Employment: Support. Eighth report of session 2022-23. House of Commons

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Social Justice (2021) Now is the Time. A Report by the CSJ Disability Commission. London: Centre for Social Justice

<sup>4</sup> See: Hoque, K. and Bacon, N. (2023) Does the government's Disability Confident scheme improve disability employment outcomes? Disability@Work research brief. <https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Disability@Work-Disability-Confident-research-brief-December-2023.pdf>



This matching process found that 39.6% of employees in the WorkL data were in Disability Confident organisations, which accords roughly with government calculations that the scheme covers approximately a third of all employees in the UK. In total, 12.3% of employees were in Level 1 'committed' organisations, 20.3% in Level 2 'employers', and 7% in Level 3 'leaders'.

What did the findings show?

The first matter we explored was whether Disability Confident organisations employ disabled people in proportionately greater numbers than do non-Disability Confident organisations. We found, somewhat worryingly, very little evidence in support of this. In Level 1 organisations, the percentage figure was 4.5%, which is statistically no different from the figure in non-Disability Confident organisations (4.3%). This held in a multivariate analysis (which controlled for the industry sector of the respondent's organisation, their occupation, job tenure and demographic characteristics, and whether they were in a management role), and in both the public and private sectors.

The percentage of the workforce that is disabled was, however, higher in Disability Confident Level 2 organisations than in non-Disability Confident organisations. Nevertheless, the difference was small (4.7% vs. 4.3%), and only held in the private (and not the public) sector.

It was also higher in Disability Confident Level 3 organisations than in non-Disability Confident in the public sector. However, in the private sector, there was no difference between Level 3 organisations and non-Disability Confident organisations (the percentage figure was 4.2% in both).

The second matter we explored was whether disabled employees' experience of work (regarding job discretion, fairness perceptions, job-related mental health, and job satisfaction) was better, and disability

gaps in the experience of work (i.e. the difference between disabled and non-disabled employees) were smaller, in Disability Confident than in non-Disability Confident organisations.

Regarding this, we found no evidence that disabled employees in Disability Confident organisations reported a better experience of work than disabled employees in non-Disability Confident organisations. Indeed, job discretion was lower among disabled employees in Level 2 organisations than among disabled employees in non-Disability Confident organisations.

We also found that the gaps between disabled and non-disabled employees in the experience of work were no smaller in Disability Confident organisations (at any Level) than in non-Disability Confident organisations.

Our findings have several important implications. First, they suggest disabled job seekers should not assume that Disability Confident organisations are any more likely than non-Disability Confident organisations to hire and retain them or provide them with a better experience of work. Employment advisers should also be wary of advising disabled people to focus their job search activity on Disability Confident organisations. In many instances, certification may represent little more than window-dressing that allows certified employers to claim unwarranted reputational benefits while masking ongoing disadvantage.

Second, employers should be wary of seeking Disability Confident certification, given that if it is not associated with better disability employment outcomes (as our research suggests), this may expose them to charges of diversity-washing.

Third, the Government cites the growth in the number of certified employees to over 19,000 as a significant step forward. However, our research suggests that this represents a false impression of progress. Yet the Government

may use this to argue that more interventionist or legislative approaches are unnecessary.

So, what might the future hold for Disability Confident? One argument might be that given its apparent ineffectiveness, it should be abandoned. However, this may be overly hasty. Instead, the scheme may be worth saving, though only if it is given 'teeth'.

Regarding this, the Disability Employment Charter<sup>5</sup>, which has now been signed by over 160 organisations including all the country's leading national charities, disabled people's organisations, and a growing number of large corporate organisations and trade unions, argues that if Disability Confident is to become more meaningful, its certification criteria should be reformed to focus on whether organisations have achieved certain disability employment outcomes, rather than their adoption of disability employment processes and practices. In particular, this would mean requiring Level 2 and 3 organisations to meet minimum thresholds regarding the percentage of disabled people in their workforce.

The Disability Employment Charter also recommends that organisations should not be allowed to remain at Level 1 indefinitely, with certification being removed from employers that do not move from Level 1 to Levels 2 or 3 within 3 years.

However, this raises the question of where the thresholds for Levels 2 and 3 should be set. For Level 2, an appropriate threshold might be 7% (the same figure used in the United States' 503 Federal Contractor Regulations as an aspirational "utilisation goal" towards which federal contractors are expected to work). For Level 3, it might be 10 per cent. Both figures are below the percentage of the UK's workforce that is disabled, so they would not be overly burdensome by employers.

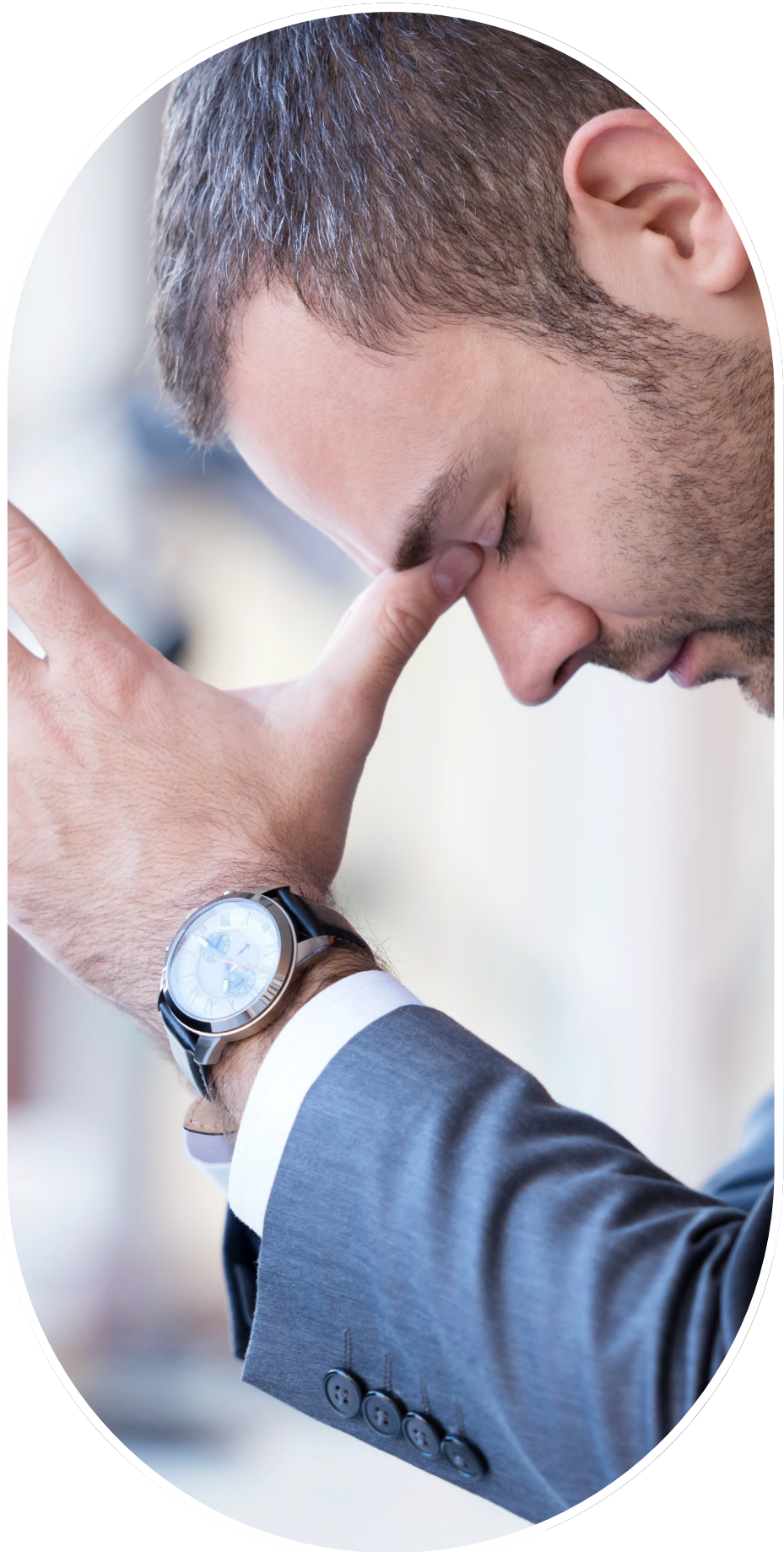
<sup>5</sup> [www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org](http://www.disabilityemploymentcharter.org)

The introduction of such thresholds would, of course, require comparable disability employment data across organisations. However, this data would be readily available, at least for large firms, should the Government introduce mandatory disability employment reporting (the Government's response to their consultation on this matter is due imminently).

For those unlikely to be covered by mandatory reporting (i.e. SMEs), while they would also need to report their disability employment data, they would not be disadvantaged by a threshold-based certification criteria given SMEs employ proportionately just as many disabled people as do large firms<sup>6</sup>.

These reforms would likely mean significantly fewer Disability Confident organisations than is the case currently, but they would nevertheless result in Disability Confident becoming a much more meaningful labour market signal to disabled people regarding the organisations that are more likely to hire and retain them.

Without these reforms, Disability Confident runs the risk of perpetuating a status quo in government disability employment policy and in disabled people's employment disadvantage.



<sup>6</sup> Bacon, N. and Hoque, K. (2021) Are small and medium-sized firms poorer employers of disabled people than large firms? Disability@Work research brief. <https://www.disabilityatwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Disability@work-SME-and-disability-briefing-paper.pdf>





### FINANCE REPORT

- ACCOUNT REPORT
- DASHBOARD
- INCOME
- OUT GOING

### DASHBOARD > INCOME

DAILY WEEKLY MONTHLY



### TOTAL INCOME

37.91%	31.86%	30.23%
LINE ITEMS 16.15 MS SHIPPING 0.15 MS TAXES 0% TOTAL 16.3 MS	LINE ITEMS 13.5 MS SHIPPING 0.2 MS TAXES 0% TOTAL 13.7 MS	LINE ITEMS 13.00 MS SHIPPING 0.2 MS TAXES 0% TOTAL 13.2 MS



# AUTHENTIC AND RESILIENT LEADERSHIP – BEE THE CHANGE

07



DR SHIRLEY WOODS-GALLAGHER PHD  
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I am one of the very few senior public servants in Greater Manchester (GM) out, loud and proud about my decades into life autism diagnosis.

Older age ranges at work can be too afraid to be out, loud and proud through fear they will lose their jobs, dead end their careers and be left with no alternative than to set up their own businesses if they are able to.

I feel a strong sense of responsibility that needs to be owned by others, to move the debate forward. Otherwise, nothing will ever change in the way it needs to for the tsunami of autistic, ADHD and dyspraxic young adults entering the world of work who know nothing but their diagnosis. What will the impact be of another generation of untapped talent not reaching their full potential? Whilst young people are being empowered through earlier diagnosis, are they being encouraged to expect more and then be let down by the world of work when they enter? That's why I am advocating for a Bee Neuroinclusive campaign with Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, for all organisations signed up to the [Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter](#). That's the right vehicle to deliver this by. The purpose of this campaign is to –

- Empower employers to show their vulnerability that they will not have this 'right' on day one but by being vulnerable, they will enable creativity that acts as a genuine catalyst for genuine growth.
  - Help Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and its stakeholders agree a set of working principles for the development and delivery of Bee Neuroinclusive, following the Mayor's agreement to take forward the campaign.
- Bee Neuroinclusive represents huge opportunities to –
- Pioneer a new approach to neuroinclusivity in employment, focusing on those already in the workforce and, as a result, breaking open new ground for neurodivergent young people entering their career.
  - Build out a bold new dimension to the GM Employment Charter.
  - Have a powerful impact on inclusion across GM and realise equally powerful gains in productivity and skills utilisation for neurodivergent people and for the city region.
  - Put GM in the forefront on this cutting-edge area of policy, which continues to grow rapidly in importance, and show – again – that GM does things differently.

- Create psychologically safe workplaces for neurodivergent staff of all ages and grades so they feel safe to ask for workplace adjustments.
- Collectively understand that **how** we work together as Greater Manchester employers matters just as much as what we do together.



Shirley lives in the UK. She was the first woman in her family to go to University and the only person in her family with a PhD. She has been selected to attend the inaugural International Forum for Inclusion Practitioners at UNESCO HQ in 2024.

She was twice nominated for the ITV National Diversity Awards in 2023 in the categories of Positive Role Model Award For Age and Positive Role Model Award for Disability.

She is a Member of the Advisory Panel for Children's Viewing for the British Board of Film Classification which lobbies for Online Safety. She is also a Trustee for the charity Respect For All who provide counselling to people who are either Autistic and/or have a learning disability in Greater Manchester. She is also an Advisor for Invest in Play who mission is to support children and their caregivers with practical and compassionate strategies for neurodiverse communities around the globe. She helped to write the first devolution deal for Greater Manchester on early years and presented evidence of what works for children to both the Education and Science and Technology Select Committees of the UK Parliament and is recorded in Hansard 2018. During the pandemic she was in the clinical extremely vulnerable to covid category and also lost her father to covid. He was finally admitted to a covid ward the morning after Shirley received her autism diagnosis letter. He would never know of her late diagnosis. In the absence of being able to tell him, she ended up telling the World instead. Her story is about redemption, recovery, pride and reintegration post pandemic into a completely new normal at work.

To succeed, GMCA and its partners will need to '**do working principles differently**'.

**True co-production** – ensuring that neurodivergent people are active participants in all decision-making, with an equal voice.

**Care and respect** – ensuring psychological safety for everyone involved and working together to identify and eliminate unconscious bias.

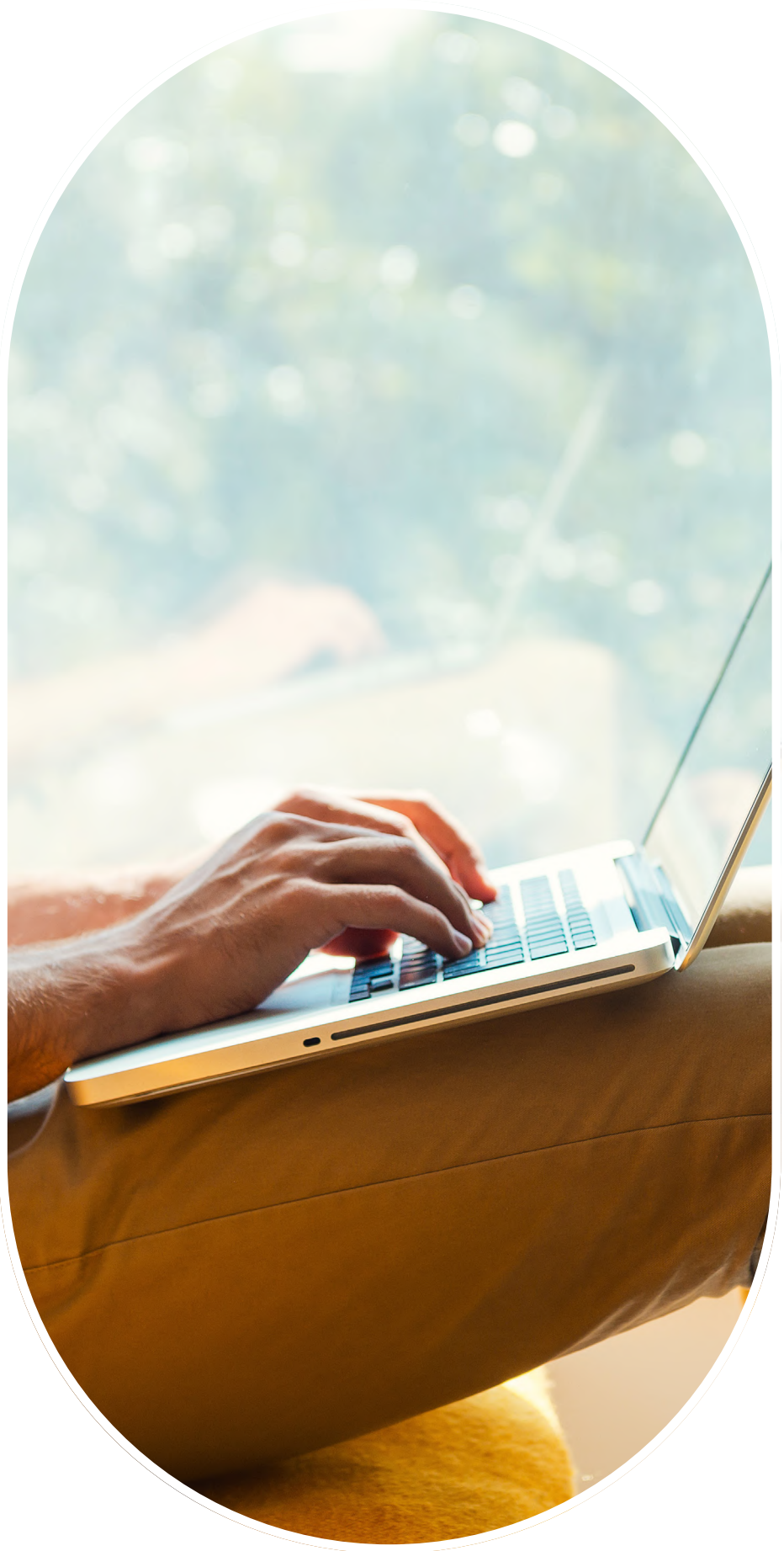
**Full transparency** – ensuring everyone is kept informed and nobody is shut out, even inadvertently.

**Unwavering focus** – ensuring the brief agreed by the Mayor is delivered in full, without scope or mission creep.

**Honesty and humility** – ensuring difficult issues are identified and engaged with, leaving egos at the door, and being brave in calling out bias and poor practice.

By its nature, the Bee Neuroinclusive campaign is a different type of project. Its fundamental focus is on a complex and sensitive area of public policy, which will challenge beliefs and offer real life reflections of uncomfortable truths.

It will involve putting the voice and lived experience of neurodivergent people at the heart of delivery, planning and implementing across organisational boundaries and different remits while maintaining focus on the objective, and a willingness on behalf of all parties to be open about the challenges they face.



# WIDENING YOUR TALENT POOL WITH REVERSE JOB FAIRS

08



**GILLIAN PARKER**

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**Employers' recruitment processes are increasingly relying on applicants having good digital skills to navigate the application process, combined with the use of AI tools to automate the screening process.**

**In 2018 there were still 5.3 million people with no or very little digital skills, according to the Centre for Economics and Business Research and, 23.3% are disabled compared with only 6.0% of those without a disability.**

The Government's Disability Confident Scheme aims to encourage employers to make the most of the talents that disabled people can bring to their workplace and recognises that adjustments to recruitment processes can be one way to remove barriers for this group. Whereas the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology's guidance on the use of responsible AI in recruitment highlights the potential for AI to further exclude those who are not digitally literate and "could bring about novel risks of disadvantage".

Bearing the above in mind, this article explores how we can support employers to do the right thing and embrace an inclusive recruitment approach, whilst also being able to recruit on a large scale. Employer engagement is often cited as one of the greatest challenges for employment support organisations but increasingly employers are engaging with Reverse Job Fairs run by specialist employment support teams.

## WHAT IS A REVERSE JOB FAIR?

They started being mentioned widely in the UK around 2015 when Justin Tomlinson, Minister for Disabled

People, hosted his own reverse jobs fair "to meet the demands of employers and create lasting employment opportunities for disabled people".

A Reverse Jobs Fair takes the traditional Jobs Fair concept and turns it on its head.

Typically, a jobs or careers fair, is where employers, job agencies, service and training providers come together to offer job seekers information and be on hand to ask questions. Some large employers may also have apprenticeships, entry level roles or graduate programmes that they are wishing to fill. Job Fairs are often held in hotels, colleges or community centres and each employer will have a stand trying to attract a candidate. They are naturally busy, buzzing, noisy events and can be intimidating and stressful places for disabled and neurodivergent people.

Whereas at a Reverse Job Fair, the job seekers are at the centre of the process, and they are empowered to explain about their skills, strengths, and interests.

## WHY RUN A REVERSE JOB FAIR?

Headline figures from the CIPD shows that the number of job vacancies will fall although 38% of UK employers continue to have hard-to fill vacancies. The CIPD recommends that employers and people practitioners: "Take a



I've always had an innate sense of social justice and been motivated to make the world a better place for others. Having personally experienced the difference that good social policy can make to lives, I'm constantly delighted by the fact that I get to do a job that I love, whilst contributing in a small way to helping others to reap the many benefits of a rewarding career.



**EMMA SHEPHERD MIEP, BSC(HON), MSC, CHARTERED MCIPD**

Owner & Founder of Let's Talk Disability & M's Cafe

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Emma is a dedicated and an experienced HR professional (Chartered MCIPD) with a deep commitment to fostering diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the workplace. Her extensive background in HR and supporting disabled individuals, or those facing additional barriers, into employment span nearly three decades. Emma has written a number of articles for disability magazines and was part of a co produced book about supported employment with Books Beyond Words. Emma is actively involved with her local CIPD branch and the Better Hiring Institute which addresses faster, fairer and safer hiring.



varied approach to addressing your hard-to-fill vacancies. Adopt inclusive recruitment and selection approaches to help broaden your talent pool”.

Despite 18,000 employers having signed up to Disability Confident, evidence shows that this is not translating into more disabled and neurodivergent people in employment within those companies. In our experience, it is the fear of getting it wrong combined with a lack of support around how to be inclusive in practice which prevents employers from doing anything at all. A Reverse Job Fair which includes disabled and neurodivergent candidates provides a well-supported and safe space for employers to interact with this talent pool and demonstrate how easy reasonable adjustments can be.

By taking an alternative approach to recruitment some of the burden for recruitment is removed from employers, for example, advertising vacancies and sifting through CVs to develop a shortlist. Instead at a Reverse Job Fair, employers are presented with a readymade talent pool of candidates who are highly motivated to work and ready to show and talk about their career aspirations. Plus, it's a fantastic opportunity for job seekers to practice their soft skills in a natural way.

### WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN STAGING A REVERSE JOBS FAIR

Think about the venue itself. One that is accessible, with parking or nearby transport links. Have a 'quiet area' that is clearly signed, so that anyone feeling overwhelmed can take a five-minute breather.

Maximise attendance at your event by considering the needs of the businesses who will attend. There may be particular pinch points such as month or quarter end that would prevent managers etc from fully engaging with your event.

Use both the aspirations of people and the local labour market intelligence to target specific employers or industries that match the career pathways people want to pursue.

Consider creating information packs with redacted information about each of the candidates. These can be shared with employers ahead of the day via email with hard copies available on the day. Use a simple anonymised system to link the information pack with the location of the candidate on the day to enable employers to speak to their ideal candidates.

Create sector-specific sections within the room and create a map/key for employers so they can navigate to those areas most relevant to their needs. Provide opportunities for people to demonstrate their talents, for example individuals who want to work in catering can give demos of their skills on the day.

Create a mixed economy of support for employers by inviting organisations who can provide free practical advice and support the event: Access to Work expertise and benefits advice are always useful. Specialist Employment Support teams will welcome the opportunity to support employers with free disability awareness training and advice around reasonable adjustments.

### WHO WILL A REVERSE JOB FAIR BENEFIT?

The short answer is everyone! How many groups of individuals are there within society for whom the mainstream routes to recruitment no longer work? By embracing a Universal Design approach to recruitment, inequity based on socio-economic backgrounds, gender, and cultural background, as well as simply extroverts vs introverts, is avoided.

Whilst the supported employment model was originally designed for disabled and neurodivergent people, it has been shown to work with people recovering from addiction, people experiencing homelessness and the long term unemployed.

How many other disadvantaged people that your organisation supports could benefit from a collaborative approach between all agencies?

[Does the government's disability confident scheme improve disability employment outcomes?](#) December 2023

[Exploring the UK's digital divide - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

[Labour Market Outlook -CIPD Winter 2023-24](#)

[Minister: MPs must help 'open doors' for disabled jobseekers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



# WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP? NEVER TOO YOUNG TO EMBED EMPLOYABILITY INTO THE EDUCATION CURRICULUM

All of us will no doubt remember being asked 'What do you want to be when you grow up?'. This question was asked by a range of adults to poor unsuspecting children throughout their childhood.

Most of us had a dream of what being 'grown up' would look like, from becoming a doctor or a teacher, fisherman, to working in a shop selling ice creams, maybe becoming a dancer or even an astronaut. We had wild imaginations and high expectations of moving into a career, when we left schools, that we would really enjoy. After all, we need to enjoy any role we move into. Most of us can now expect to work for 50 years before we can look to draw a state pension.

## THE REALITY

Adults have often made up their minds as to the capabilities of children they know both personally and professionally by the time the child is 7 years old, broadly based on academic achievements during their short time at school and by comparing peers. These assumptions, if not challenged, can become negative in terms of how we value young people and begin to predict the futures of their career pathways.

We are all influenced by what is around us, and for a child that has special education needs, or/and a physical or sensory requirement (SEND) it is even more pertinent. It's how careers structuralism theory is acted out - children of doctors become doctors, children of builders become builders, this happens across all labour markets and across all class boundaries. In one survey 70% of

students wanted to become teachers - it's the only job they encountered regularly!

Then there are well meaning adults who provide what they see as advice, such as 'You're good at cooking why don't you become a chef, you'd like that wouldn't you?' Or 'Gosh, you're good with your hands, you need to get a trade'. Or 'You can do better than being a hairdresser, you've got a good brain'. All of the above is nothing but random opinions on preconceived ideas; none is professional careers advice and guidance, and nothing empowers the young person to explore the job market and understand their unique talents, skills and personalities. At best it's stereotyping and at worse it's damaging to a young person's self esteem, confidence and future prospects.

All jobs are equally valuable in society, manual or academic or a combination of the two, I for one would only trust a professional hairdresser to touch my hair! Add into the mix a special educational need and the assumptions for these young people can be restricted further.

## EMBEDDING SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN SCHOOLS

Teachers have a heavy curriculum of national standards to deliver in schools in line with the government requirements - measuring outcomes in terms of results and targets at



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The Education People support the full age range from early years to young adults, with over 800 products and services available, specific to education needs always.



different key stages. It can be possible to lose sight of what we go to school for, which is to move into adulthood, prepared, and ready to enter employment - whatever that career choice may look like.

For students to be able to make well-informed realistic decisions about their career pathway they need to understand the following

- Self-awareness: What do I like? What am I good at? What is holding me back?
- Opportunity Awareness: What jobs could I do? Where can you work?
- Information: What is the labour market like? What qualifications/skills will I need?
- Transition: What next steps do I need to take? Where can I study?

Careers guidance delivered by qualified careers professionals is the only way to find impartial, measured guidance.

Students with Special Educational Needs (SEND) are often overlooked in terms of talking about employment at an early age. It is never too early to look at pathways after leaving school and understanding clearly what the work of work is like. The working life is a long period of time, it's essential we find work that we want to do, makes us happy and provides the lifestyle we need, be it 8 hours a week or 40. Employers tell us they are not looking for those with the highest qualification but rather those that want to work, are reliable and have the drive to succeed.

At The Education People we have worked with Kent schools and launched the Supported Employment in Schools Framework. This is aimed at raising the aspirations of students with SEND through training and mentoring teachers, governors and other school staff to bring career pathways to the forefront of their students and their parents' minds. The programme is in line with Ofsted and Gatsby Benchmarks and embeds elements of the 5 stages of Supported Employment and its 12 core values that create

impact and additionality to current careers strategies. The programme gives schools practical methods and tools to engage with both students and employers. Vocational profiling is taught to the schools in order to start a conversation at a young age regarding topics such as dream jobs, skills, preferred environments and barriers to employment. Employers are valued as much as the students, only by bridging the divide can we prepare students for the world of work, this is about preparing students for the workplace, that is fit for employer's needs.

The programme is split into three distinct areas, the first being a consultation to assess what is already in place in the school. The second involves formal training of the Supported Employment Model that would specifically benefit each school, depending on their individual needs and the third stage offering mentoring to staff to embed the model into the curriculum and build in the training.

An equally important part of the programme focuses on engaging with employers, it supports the school to understand the needs of local and national employers and how best to work with them. Practical training and support are given around how to do this in a busy school environment where time restraints are a key factor, as well as considering the time employers have available.

Feedback from schools is very positive and makes the direct link between what schools can embed into their curriculum to raise aspirations for students with SEND and help plan for the transition into employment. Employers have told us that the programme supports them to work with engaged students with SEND and understand what an asset this potentially untapped pool of wonderful young people can bring to the workplace.

Evidence shows that by opening the minds of students with SEND, and those of their support networks, students can progress into meaningful career opportunities. By preparing

for adulthood and transitioning successfully from education to employment young people with SEND can become fulfilled members of society where they have the opportunity to be valued as an employee, independent, and live a fulfilled life.

Oh, and it's okay not to know what you want to be when you grow up, you need just to know how to explore career pathways, understand what employers are looking for and seek appropriate support when you're ready to take the next step.

Good career guidance perspectives from the special educational needs and disabilities sector [<https://www.goodcareerguidance.org.uk/assets/file?filePath=send/good-career-guidance-perspectives-from-the-send-sector.pdf>]

[Supporting SEND - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

The SEND Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit [1051 SEND Gatsby Toolkit Refresh V8.pdf \(careersandenterprise.co.uk\)](https://careersandenterprise.co.uk/1051-SEND-Gatsby-Toolkit-Refresh-V8.pdf)





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## Using everyday technologies within the workplace should not have to be a topic for discussion. The use of productivity and accessibility apps in personal lives is prolific.

### The adoption of built-in accessibility features in phones and laptops within business is key to opening the door to employability.

Many of the ways in which employers and work coaches can support is by allowing people to utilise the tools and skills they bring with them into the business. The issue facing employability professionals is understanding and being able to support these tools effectively to enable each individual to excel to their potential, whilst maintaining a consistent approach to all. 23% of the UK working age population have a form of disability<sup>1</sup>, highlighting the importance to ensure that workplaces are accessible and continually strive to meet the needs of all.

Accessibility is a big word, with a huge implication. It can cover physical adaptations; specialist equipment and it can be easy or tricky to implement. Accessibility is often thought of as being the responsibility of specialists, Occupational Therapists or the business' HR department. Employability professionals can feel unqualified for such a daunting task.

One form of accessibility that can make a large difference for productivity and inclusion is the use of the built-in accessibility features in everyday technologies (laptops, Chromebooks and phones).

These are not specialist, and all share equal responsibility for their implementation.

Built-in accessibility tools could easily be renamed productivity tools. This would take away the stigma and fear associated with 'Accessibility', whilst also emphasising the usefulness of these features for all. Inclusive working practices can often break down some accessibility barriers.

A case study of effective adoption of everyday accessibility features is The Oaks Specialist College. The Oaks Specialist College works with young adults with learning disabilities focusing on independence and employment.

Their approach is to utilise the accessibility features built in to laptops and phones to boost independence, problem solving and productivity; ensuring their graduates are able to follow their aspirations, gain sustainable employment and have choices, career paths and progression as key features of their lives.

Within the college learners are given the option to learn, utilise and ultimately choose accessibility features that enhance their lives. Alongside this, staff are also given these opportunities and encouraged to investigate tools they may not have previously considered apply to them.



Libby specialises in designing and implementing digital curricula using everyday technologies to support those with learning difficulties and disabilities who are seeking employment.

She recognises the critical role technology plays in our day-to-day lives. Her passion is ensuring people are empowered, making use of accessibility features to overcome barriers within the workplace.



<sup>1</sup> Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023, GOV.UK website, statistical release, Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022.

A recent email from the CEO of The Oaks to staff read:

“...Or try something new: The manifesto (and any web address) can read itself out loud to you whilst you have a cuppa, sort the washing or do whatever, thus saving you both time and effort. Tech genius!

So, kick back, relax and use Immersive Reader to read out the manifesto whilst having a coffee or whatever. Our 60SecondCPD (so simple it's only 30 seconds this time) is attached for you.”

Taught through holistically embedding features, such as Immersive Reader, the college uses productivity tools that can be used for all within a business whilst, without stigma, raising awareness of tools that can break down barriers for many in the workplace.

With the majority of UK businesses using Microsoft or Google as their productivity platform, employability professionals should understand the basics of both of these. Customisation of devices is commonplace in our personal lives, and functions such as [windows key] + [U] open a menu of customisable options for individuals including screen filters, magnification of the screen and adding a braille display. Each section is guided with instructions of how best to implement and requires no prior knowledge. Similarly, [search button] + [d] will open the menu on a Chromebook.

Using Office 365 programs such as Word allow the user to check that their content is more accessible, without having specialist understanding. Word has an Accessibility Checker which will guide the user through ways to make their document more accessible.

A similar approach can be taken when looking at phone use. How do you use your phone? Chances are that the first thing that came to mind was not making phone calls. For better or worse phones have infiltrated most areas of daily life for adults in the UK. Our reliance on mobile technologies

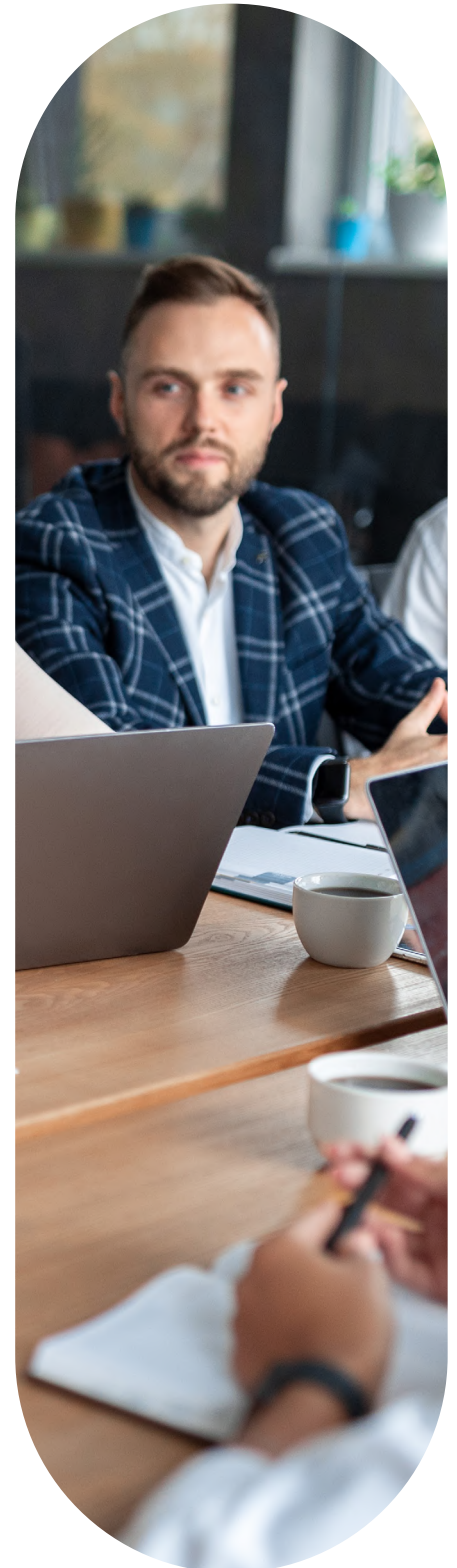
has expanded in the last decade with 92% of UK adults owning a smartphone<sup>2</sup>. In 2022, the number of active mobile connections in the UK totalled 71.8 million (4.4 million more than the UK total population)<sup>3</sup>. Broken down by age, 98% of 16-24 year olds had a smartphone in 2022<sup>4</sup>. The world young people will inhabit when they enter the workplace is a vastly different landscape from the one encountered by their parents. To reflect this within the workplace allows for this generation to benefit from the tech they understand.

I am not a “tech-person”. To label someone as such is to remove responsibility from others to be aware of the simple tech solutions that can be provided within a business for the benefit of all. Before arriving at work today I had listened to a Teams message through my car as I drove. It saved me time and meant I walked into work informed. I take notes on my phone so that I can remember the content of a conversation. I make choices in my professional life using everyday tech to help me. Having the autonomy to use everyday tech in a way that works for me allows me to be more productive.

Kieran has a learning disability and low literacy levels. He applied for a job on a well known job website and was granted an interview. At the interview he was asked if he could work an industrial washing machine (can you?). When he admitted that he could not he was told that the instructions were on the side of the machine. This adaptation in the workplace means that a wider range of people are able to operate the washing machine. However, Kieran cannot read. This was a barrier to his employment. Kieran self-advocated and asked the interviewer if he would be able to bring his phone to work. In his interview he showed the interviewer how he uses an app to capture text and read it aloud. He got the job.

For every Kieran, there are a thousand other employable people who would not have the confidence in an interview situation to self-advocate in this way. It

should not be the responsibility of the person with a disability to ask. It is the responsibility of all: educationalists, work coaches and employers to understand these functions and to provide solutions to accessibility barriers.



<sup>2</sup> Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023, GOV.UK website, statistical release, Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Ofcom data: [Mobile and smartphones - Ofcom](#)

<sup>4</sup> Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023, GOV.UK website, statistical release, Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022.

# SUPPORTED SELF-EMPLOYMENT – INSPIRING THE DISABLED COMMUNITY

11



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**“I want to be a tree” said the young disabled person meeting me for the first time. As a self-employment adviser, that is not always the best way to start a conversation but, as an entrepreneur myself, I knew that I needed to unpick the statement.**

As the discussion continued, the young person explained that many of the professionals involved in their life did not understand the daily challenges that they faced, a comment which has been supported by a 2019 Department of Work and Pensions report (Pearson. et al., 2019). And, as a mother of a young person with multiple disabilities, I knew that this person was not wrong.

When working with a disabled person, I always have a box of stationery and other goodies with me to help them share their narrative. These conversation catalysts are a good way of encouraging the disabled person to engage without having to hold eye contact or feel the pressure of an interview-style conversation. Not surprisingly, the young disabled person selected some yellow paper and a brown pen and proceeded to draw the trunk of the tree. I asked them to explain what that meant, and they said that was their life, the here and now and the stability that surrounded them. The bark was strong, it was protection against the world and the roots were their family, the life they had and the security of their home. They explained that the trunk was round so that their circle of support can surround them and keep them safe, but they wanted so much more.

Branches appeared on the tree, one branch for education with lots of twigs being added. Each twig identified a new topic, a new thought, a new experience

that had been explored. The young person explained that their ADHD meant that they could not concentrate on one thing, they needed variety, independence and to be able to fly, although they loved to analyse and do a deep dive into things that interested them. The second branch appeared and there were no twigs or leaves. I asked what that signified and they said, ‘the traditional route to employment’.

When the third branch appeared, I knew that it symbolised self-employment. The twigs, leaves, and colours meant that this was an avenue to be explored. This branch represented a new life, one where any challenges were overcome and aspiration, inspiration and growth were expressed as ultimate goals to be achieved.

The question here is why I am sharing this with you? It is because the main discussion about this tree was the potential opportunities it offered. The disabled young person wanted to explore the options available to them for the future and self-employment was one of them. They did not want to be an entrepreneur with a multi-million-pound business and hundreds of employees, but someone that freelanced into different organisations and offered support and advice about disability and things that mattered to them. As I was candidly told, it is all well and good to google a disability, such as ADHD, but what exactly does that tell you? Research will demonstrate that there is a generalised list of symptoms,



Sam Everard FIEP is the Founder of the award winning SAMEE charity, Chair of the Regional Stakeholder Network for the Disability Unit and a PhD student at Bournemouth University.

She is a dedicated practitioner with a flair for reaching out to vulnerable people in the community, engaging the voices of disabled people and informing the development of best practice.



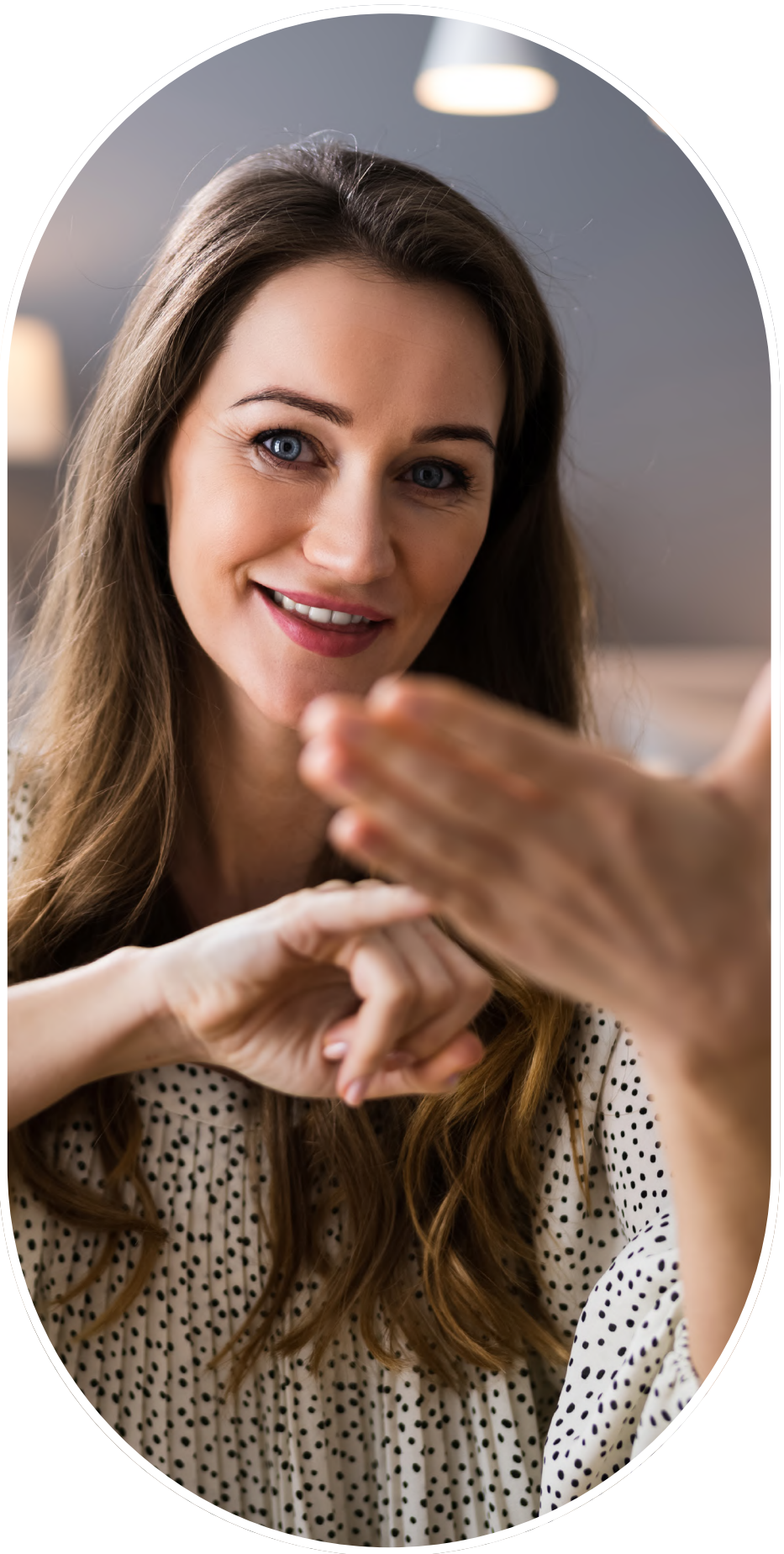


behaviours and causes along with many ways of how to 'reasonably adjust' but, what it does not tell you, is the real-life daily challenges faced by the person.

This young person asked me if they could be honest – something which I like! They explained their morning challenges to me. Getting up is not always easy, they said, as you do not know what will happen that day and that anything unknown causes a lot of anxiety. How do you know what to wear when the weather is not what was planned for last night? When you went to bed last night, the weather forecast indicated that it would be dry and now it could be raining. How do you know if there is any of your favourite cereal left when other people in the house share the same food? What if someone is having a shower when you want to get ready? These challenges are real and incredibly important to the young disabled person, as they can cause anxiety and stress even before they leave their home.

The next potential obstacle discussed was public transport and it became apparent why this particular young disabled person did not want to work in traditional employment. The sensory overload from the bus, the noise, smells and movement of passengers was all too much. Added to that pressure was the fact that a disabled person's concessionary bus pass cannot be used on public transport before 9.30 in the morning, meant that an employed role may not be accessible (Government, 2024). And, if they did manage to travel after 9:30am, comments from colleagues and the stigma of always being late meant that the anxiety would build leading to the potential breakdown in relationships at work and ultimate failure.

Just these few daily challenges, remembering that we have not got past 9.30 in the morning yet, can create anxiety and distress for our young disabled people. They want to work and yet the environment around them will not let that happen, so they turn to alternative options. Self-employment allows them to create a role for themselves, one which is achievable and manageable but, sadly,



UK Government support mechanisms are not yet in place to make that possible.

As a qualified self-employment adviser, I have met hundreds of young disabled people who want to explore their aspirations, and many have been successful because they have had the right support to make it happen. We should never say no to their self-employment ideas as they need to have the opportunity to find out for themselves. Mentoring is key in the early stages to ensure that they have the answers they need to make an informed and balanced decision about whether to proceed with their self-employment goals, and ensuring it is the right career pathway for them.

The UK Government needs to consider setting up a supported self-employment programme, and I am campaigning and working for this. Challenges such as Access to Work not being available until a person is registered with HMRC, due to the need for a unique taxpayer reference number (UK Government, 2021), are difficult to overcome. The young disabled person needs the support from day one whether that be transport support, a personal assistant or a piece of equipment. If the young disabled person does register immediately with HMRC to access that support, we then have the Minimum Income Floor barrier (UK Government, 2020) meaning that they only have 12 months in which to make the self-employed role sustainable, adding unnecessary pressure. Then there is the lack of available personalised formal self-employment support with tailored resources to meet the educational needs of the young disabled person. There is a lot to be done!

In 2015, I founded a charity called SAMEE (Support and Mentoring Enabling Entrepreneurship) to address the needs of disabled people wanting to consider self-employment as a viable career option alongside their disability or long-term health condition (SAMEE charity, 2023). To give you an example, we were asked to work with a young gentleman who wanted to be

a gardener. It was said that he would need day care services through the council due to his multiple disabilities, but his mum knew he had a talent. At the point of referral, he was not leaving his house, did not speak to anyone new and spent his time pottering about in the garden. His mum showed us the amazing things he had achieved in their garden and asked whether we could help.

Five years on and he has a thriving horticultural business with regular clients. In fact, he is often too busy to see us for mentoring meetings, so we must work around his diary! What went from a few houses in his road, has led to gardens being tended to across the town with increasing requests for his service from glowing word-of-mouth recommendations. He has developed that role from mowing the neighbours' lawn to planting up borders and beyond. There are restrictions due to his disabilities which prevent him from offering certain activities but that has not stopped him as he has teamed up with another young disabled person offering a similar service. This meant that he has not only started a small sustainable business but created his own peer support network removing the social isolation barriers he once faced.

Inspiring and encouraging a young person to explore self-employment is key. Your confirmation that they are good at what they do is paramount to their confidence and self-esteem; the patience shown to them by you, a professional practitioner, as challenges are overcome, is proof that they can be independent and that the skills they learn are transferable to daily life. Watching a young disabled person grow honestly makes you feel humble and something that I recommend you do. It takes time, it is not a quick fix or a 12-week programme, it takes nurturing, confidence building and a lot of patience but, when you see the results, you know that every minute invested has changed someone's life for the better.

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# 7 STEPS TO AN INCLUSIVE SUPPORTED APPRENTICESHIP

12



As the landscape of recruitment changes and the demand for homegrown talent grows, this is an ideal time for employers to open their doors to a more diverse workforce as only 4.8% of adults in England with a learning disability are in employment.

According to a report by the DfE (Department for Education) in 2019/20, only 12% (39,250) of apprenticeship starts were learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties (LDD) in England. From this percentage, the majority identified as having dyslexia or a medical condition. Less than 0.5% of apprenticeship participants identified as having a learning disability.

In this article, we share how Little Gate Farm has led in delivering Accessible {Inclusive Apprenticeships}

At Little Gate Supported Employment we deliver an apprenticeship programme to support young people with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), aged 18 - 24 into paid apprenticeships with local employers.

Accessible Supported Apprenticeships provide young people with:

- Support of a Job Coach at work
- One to one tuition from a training provider
- Added time to complete an apprenticeship
- 20% of working hours for off the job training
- Reasonable adjustments made at work
- Reasonable adjustments made for assessment

We have highlighted the seven steps we follow to support young people with SEND to access Apprenticeships.

## STEP 1 – DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE WHAT IS A SUPPORTED INCLUSIVE APPRENTICESHIP?

At Little Gate Inclusive Supported Apprenticeships are a four-way partnership between an employer, the apprentice, the education provider and Little Gate Supported Employment. It is these partnerships and the supported employment model at the centre, that makes them different from other Apprenticeships.

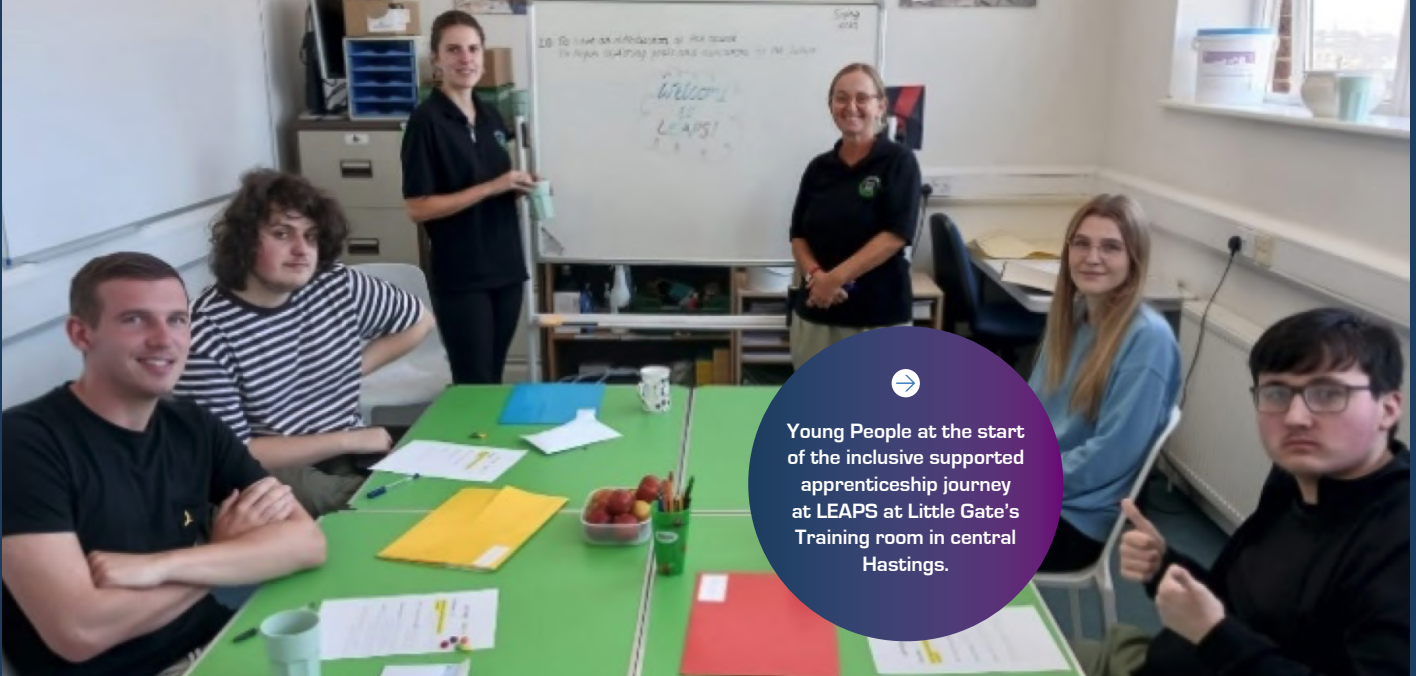
Working with the young person at the centre, Little Gate Farms Job Coach and Circle of Support, build an accessible development plan to understand the young persons' goals, aspirations and what support will be needed to help them achieve these. This is the start of finding the employer and education pathway. Once the right employer is identified the Job Coach works alongside them to make sure they feel confident in creating inclusive work cultures, where young people with a learning disability, difficulties and or autism can flourish. This may include providing some free disability awareness training, helping to empower the existing workforce to take on natural support and mentoring. The Job Coach will also support the employer to understand how to make the necessary reasonable adjustments.

→ Daxa Parmar, with 20+ years of experience working with children and young people with special education needs, leads the Young People's Programme at Little Gate Supported Employment. Passionate about neuroinclusion, Daxa's motivation drives her to support systemic change in organisations through sharing models of inclusive practices, including supported employment.



**HARRIET LEE**  
Digital Communications Officer  
Little Gate Farm

→ Harriet Lee brings over a decade of digital expertise to her role as Digital Communications Officer at Little Gate Supported Employment. With a keen eye for detail and a flair for design, she creates captivating content that highlights the triumphs of the individuals supported by Little Gate. Passionate about storytelling, Harriet weaves narratives that resonate with audiences, bridging the gap between digital platforms and human connection. Her dedication to amplifying voices and creating engaging experiences shines through in every project she undertakes.



Young People at the start of the inclusive supported apprenticeship journey at LEAPS at Little Gate's Training room in central Hastings.

## STEP 2 – IS AN INCLUSIVE SUPPORTED APPRENTICESHIP THE RIGHT PROGRAMME?

Not every young person needs this level of wrap around support to access an apprenticeship, so we provide a screening process to ensure this is the right employment pathway for them.

We use the following criteria to help guide young people and their parents and carers with their initial enquires:

- Does the young person live in East Sussex?
- Do they have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)?
- Have they completed Maths and English functional skills? If not, do they have the potential to pass functional skills during the apprenticeship?
- Are they motivated to work for 16 hours or more a week in a paid job?
- Is the young person willing to travel to their workplace, if so, do they need support to learn to travel to work independently or to apply for Access to Work?
- Does the young person need a Job Coach to help break down the workplace tasks, layer them back up and provide additional support outside of the usual workplace support?
- Would they like to complete a qualification whilst working?

If young people don't meet these criteria we will try, and sign post them to other local provision.

## STEP 3 – REQUESTING AN OFFICIAL CONSULTATION THROUGH THE COUNTY COUNCIL

If the young person meets the criteria set and is still interested, they can be referred by contacting the Assessment and Planning Officer (APO) at their local County Council to request an official consultation.

Our Supported Apprenticeship Team would then meet with the young person and their parent or carer. During this informal meeting we work through a few documents that gives an opportunity for the young person to share:

- Their goals and aspirations
- What conditions and support would help them to thrive and succeed

By the end of the meeting, we will help them to decide if the programme will help them reach their goals and assess if the programme is the best pathway for them. If the young person decides this is not the right pathway for them, we try and sign post them to other services.

## STEP 4 – PROVIDE A FOUNDATION TO AN INCLUSIVE SUPPORTED APPRENTICESHIP

If a Supported Apprenticeship programme is the right fit, the young person starts their journey on our LEAPS course: Living Education Application of Practical Skills in Hastings. LEAPS is the springboard and foundation of an Inclusive Supported Apprenticeship.

It includes 15 sessions taught weekly sharing practical life skills in preparation for the next step in their journey towards independence. Each session is 3 hours of guided learning delivered by two tutors.

The group sizes are small, with up to 6 young people and the sessions are informal, fun and productive. The course gives the young people opportunities to develop and practise basic life skills appropriate to accessing the wider community including work settings and support to develop an understanding of the transferable quality of these skills. LEAPS also prepares young people for further education in an apprenticeship.

When delivering Accessible Apprenticeships, you don't have to embed this step, we have just found this helps to build the resilience, mindset set and practical things the young people need when embarking on both training and employment.



### Three Benefits to Supported Work Experience

1. Build confidence and independence in setting up a routine, getting ready for work, travelling to work

2. Learn new skills to add to their CV that will help get a position as an Apprentice

3. Learn more about themselves by trying out different types of jobs and work environments



## STEP 5 – MEET THEIR JOB COACH

**At Little Gate, each young person would be assigned a Job Coach.**

The first meeting could take place in a public setting like a cafe or a private office where they can have an informal chat and get to know each other.

This first introduction needs to be made by someone who already knows the young person and whom they are familiar with. This is the start of the supportive role for a Job Coach as they will support the young person at an interview and/or a work trial. The Job Coach will also carry out travel training if needed.

Once they start their work experience placement, their Job Coach will help them learn their job to build up their confidence to work independently.

## STEP 6 – PROVIDE A WARMUP LIKE WORK EXPERIENCE

**A foundation course is an opportunity to get to know the young person and for the young person to get to know themselves in relation to employment in the safety of a training room.**

A work experience placement also provides this opportunity for the young person to dip their toes into what an Inclusive Supported Apprenticeship could be in an actual work setting.

It is the starter dish, and it also gives the provider a chance to observe, assess and plan for the young person's next steps. The provider can develop a skills gap analysis to identify young people's strengths and skills and what support is needed to get them to where they need to be to demonstrate competency. The work experience placement is normally up to 16 hours per week and will usually last up to four weeks and is unpaid. Once the young person has completed their work experience, we will begin to look for an apprenticeship that suits their skills, interests and aspirations.

This process is person-centred and will be reviewed with the young person and can take from a few weeks to 3-4 months, depending on how niche the apprenticeship is. The important thing is to move young people into the workplace as soon as possible.

## STEP 7 – STEP INTO AN INCLUSIVE SUPPORTED APPRENTICESHIP

**At this stage, the young person is now ready to begin their Inclusive Supported Apprenticeship which involves an employer, training provider, Job Coach as well as parents and carers supporting them.**

We project manage the whole apprenticeship, supporting everyone involved and ensuring that the apprenticeship stays on track as long as the young person is happy and progressing.

Most of the apprenticeships we support are part-time usually 16 - 24 hours a week including on-the-job training and off-the-job training as well as some study needed at home. Level 2 Apprenticeships part-time will be for up to 2 years in duration. Level 3 Apprenticeships part-time will be for up to 2.5 years in duration. Some young people complete their apprenticeships in record time.





A young person on a very niche, perfectly suited to his skills and goals, Inclusive Supported Apprenticeship.

### PRIOR TO THE START OF AN APPRENTICESHIP THERE IS A SERIES OF STEPS REQUIRED THAT INVOLVE:

**1.** Engagement of an employer – this can be complex and challenging as firstly an employer must have a business need to provide the Inclusive Supported Apprenticeship or be willing to provide one. Having an openness to learn and a vision to enrich their organisation and culture of inclusivity and diversity is necessary as well as the commitment to collaborate with several stakeholders. Providing reasonable adjustments is key to the success of an Inclusive Supported Apprenticeship. In addition, the mindset of an employer and an organisation that this is a true exchange of skill and knowledge and not a 'favour' or a 'box ticking' exercise. We now work with employers that offer multiple opportunities for young people.

**2.** Source a training provider that can offer one-to-one and ideally in-person education sessions to meet the needs of the young person. Check if they have ever supported young people with SEND and what level of support might be needed to be able to differentiate the learning. A training provider that is willing to provide part-time apprenticeships as well as have the resources to tutor young people with additional needs. This type of training provider also needs to be open to holding the relationship with the employer who may need additional support and guidance to offer specific opportunities in the workplace.

**3.** Support the parent and/carer as this is normally a huge leap for them too. It is an adjustment for parents and carers to go from their young person attending full-time education in one setting, to them getting out in the big wide world. Keeping parents informed, (as long the young person is happy and agrees to this) not only helps them, it will help you as the provider to build the relationship when things are good, new, and progressing. There will come a time when the apprenticeship hits an obstacle or two and having parents on side working and collaborating with you will be invaluable and help that apprenticeship to succeed and the young person to thrive.

Our aim at Little Gate is to support the young person to not only gain the work experience, and a qualification but to secure permanent paid employment with regular contracted hours once the apprenticeship is completed.

Over 50% of the young people are offered roles that they were in as an Apprentice, and we secure other roles for those who aren't offered a placement. The roles have included Teaching Assistants, Administrative Clerks, Warehouse Operatives and Adult Care Workers.

We believe that Inclusive Supported Apprenticeships have the potential to have a life-changing impact on any young person especially those with LDD, ASD and/or disabilities. Empowering learning and training whilst developing practical hands-on paid work experience. Resulting in gaining a recognised qualification that could lead to permanent paid employment and a career of possibilities.

Finally Inclusive Supported Apprenticeships are an incredible benefit to employers and an opportunity to change the belief of what is talent and skill and embrace the **ability** in disability.

If you would like to find out more, please follow us on our social media pages or visit us at our website.

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[Little Gate - Creating opportunities for people with learning disabilities and autism](#)

# UNIVERSAL SUPPORT: TAKING SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT TO SCALE

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**JULIA GAULT CBE**

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## SUMMARY

This article explains the background to the UK Government's new and ambitious approach to supporting more disabled people, those with health conditions and other complex barriers to work by expanding Supported Employment.

**As a social policy maker in central government for over thirty years, I've been involved with a range of high-profile programmes aiming to bring new national approaches to improve the prospects of disadvantaged citizens. Sometimes to get commitment to change, I've found that it was enough to know what the right thing was to do. On other occasions, especially when the right thing required significant investment, additional factors needed to align.**

When I took over as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) policy lead for employment support for disabled people and those with long term health conditions in summer 2022, little did I know that I would soon find myself in one of those moments of alignment.

DWP has a long history of providing additional employment support to groups at disadvantage in the labour market, including disabled people and those with long term health conditions. In recent years there has been increasing experimentation, especially exploring jointly with the health system what works in the intersection between work and health. This has seen more in-depth analysis of past programmes as well as various structured trials of promising approaches in the UK as well as in other countries. This means we now have a much stronger evidence base and are better able to demonstrate

that our best interventions can show a strong return on investment and make a real difference to the lives of citizens.

Whenever I move into a new policy area, I am always curious to understand what has been shown to work and in what circumstances. In late 2022, I was particularly struck by the number of internal and external stakeholders interested in the potential for the "place, train, maintain" supported employment approach to play a much more significant role in supporting disabled people who want to work to achieve their labour market aspirations. The experts highlighted that supported employment delivered with high fidelity to the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) models was particularly associated with good employment and other outcomes. And this was the case, not just for the disabled groups the programmes were originally created for, but they had also demonstrated benefits for people with other complex barriers to work.

So, when government became increasingly concerned about an upward trend in inactivity due to long-term sickness, teams in DWP and the Department for Health and Social Care were able to pull together a substantial package of measures to tackle it. As a result, significant new funding was announced in both the Spring Budget and Autumn Statement



Julia Gault CBE is Deputy Director Universal Support at DWP. In over 30 years in the Civil Service in three departments – Department for Work and Pensions, Cabinet Office and the Department for Education – she has held a wide range of posts from front-line service delivery to strategic policy development; many linked around the common themes of enabling families to improve their life chances and make the transition out of poverty.

She has considerable experience of working in partnership with charitable and private sector organisations. She is strongly committed to developing and delivering evidence-based policy and has designed, developed and delivered a wide range of trials and pilots – including randomised controlled trials of social interventions.



<sup>1</sup> Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023, GOV.UK website, statistical release, Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022.

2023, with Universal Support as one of the biggest measures to receive investment.

Universal Support is a major new programme built on the supported employment evidence base. It will grow to support 100,000 participants a year across every area in England and Wales. Universal Support will increase the availability of support based on the IPS in Primary Care and SEQF models. Those models share a common five stage approach - aiming at securing a good job match for participant and employer, with wrap around support (for both) after the participant has started work, to help sustain it for the long term.

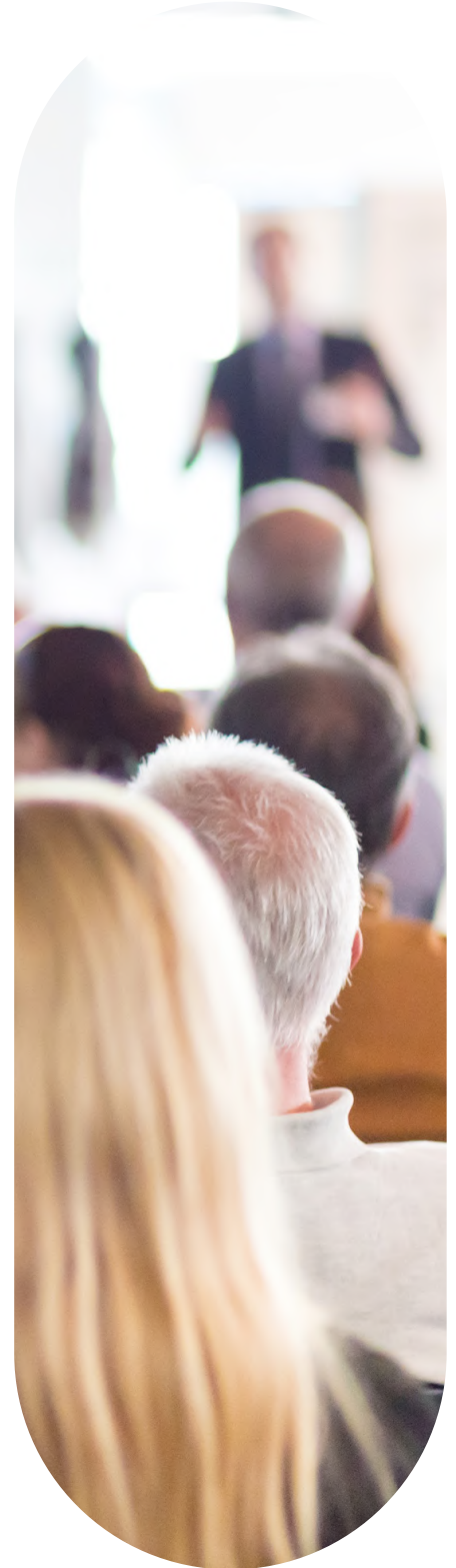
Like many voluntary programmes Universal Support will need effective participant engagement routes. Potential participants are more likely to step forward for support when made aware of it by services/ organisations they already trust. Such touch points can be well placed to help potential participants see how support might fit their needs and complement the other support they are receiving. Earlier UK delivery of supported employment has demonstrated that creating strong links (including in some cases, integration) with other services has been critical to securing take up, sustaining engagement and achieving good work and other outcomes.

This evidence and expert advice we have received means we will be delivering Universal Support through clusters of Local Authorities. Embedding this support into local systems will help with the identification and engagement of people who may benefit and with joined-up delivery. DWP has some experience of this, but our more usual delivery model for large-scale programmes has been through procurement over bigger geographies. There are increasing numbers of authorities with experience with the IPSPC and SEQF models. They have valuable insight into how to implement these services effectively, so we have much to build on.

Universal Support is an exciting opportunity, but not without risk. DWP will need help to get it right. We've already benefited from expert input and advice from supported employment experts, local authorities, employers, support providers and academics – including through the various reference groups we set up to feed into our design thinking. We expect working together to address challenges, share solutions and insights will continue to be a major feature of how we move towards implementation and live running.

I've noticed widespread appreciation of the potential of Universal Support amongst stakeholders and many are keen to work with DWP to realise it. I'd encourage anyone with an interest to get involved. I am looking forward to working with you all to help Universal Support change people's lives!

If you would like to connect around Universal Support, you can contact: [universalsupport.stakeholders@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:universalsupport.stakeholders@dwp.gov.uk)



2 Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023, GOV.UK website, statistical release, Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022.

3 Ofcom data: [Mobile and smartphones - Ofcom](#)

4 Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), released 23 March 2023, GOV.UK website, statistical release, Family Resources Survey: financial year 2021 to 2022.



# HOW SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IS CHANGING LIVES

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**RAMSAY TAYLOR**  
DurhamEnable Manager  
Durham County Council

## SUMMARY

In this article, we hear from a group of people who would not be working if it were not for the Supported Employment model. They tell us about the impact it has had on their lives.

In short, Supported Employment is a way of helping people with a disability or health condition who need additional support to move into work, believing that with motivation, tailored support and the right job, anyone can work.

The model follows a partnership approach with services, regarding employers as key customers. Like all good quality services, Supported Employment relies on those whom it supports to ensure products and services are co-produced and remain relevant to them. We took the time to join Durham County Council's [DurhamEnable](#) user forum to better understand the impact the local authority's use of the place and train model is having on disabled jobseekers in County Durham.

The national disability employment gap currently stands at 28.9%. However, in County Durham the gap stands 2.8 percentage points higher at 31.7%. The current employment rate of disabled people in County Durham lies at 44.5%, 12.4 percentage points below the national figure of 56.9%. It is clear among those we spoke to that one way to fix the gap is by ensuring Supported Employment services continue, subject to funding, with Mark stating: "they have made me able to believe in myself again. I got in a rut after no one else could help me. They gave me purpose again. They got me to where I wanted to be."

The DurhamEnable forum meets every month with community, and rapport and positive relationships are clearly formed amongst users. There was a mix of attendees, including Dan who has been attending the forum since the beginning: "I love coming to the forum and seeing Ben and Julia. It's part of my routine and I like telling people how I'm getting on in my job". Others like Megan, are new to the forum "this is my second one. My job coach told me to come, and everyone is really nice".

Ben and Julia were helped by a Supported Employment service over a decade ago, and now work together leading the forum for DurhamEnable. Ben leads on engagement: "My personal contributions to the work have been helping take the user forum on the road, arranging community spaces to accommodate the forum, engage new members and promote the forum at networking events. My vision for 2024 is to gain more representation in areas like Weardale and Teesdale". Specialising in wellbeing, Julia ensures forum members know where to get access to mental health support, and makes sure members feel safe, supported and seen when attending the forum.

The purpose of the forum is to share and celebrate the successes of those who have gained work via DurhamEnable and to help raise the aspirations of those who are starting their journey to employment.



Ramsay began his career within the Adult Social Care sector and took a vested interest in supporting disabled people into employment. Ramsay has managed the operations of a national charity's Supported Employment services, running social care, UK Government and education funded programmes.

Ramsay then took the role of managing Durham County Councils Supported Employment services and has experiences of managing European contracts alongside national Supported Employment programmes.

Ramsay recently led Durham County Councils Supported Employment service to achieve an "Excellent" Supported Employment Quality Framework accreditation and through his role with BASE supports other services across the north east of England.



Family members often attend, with one member stating: “We didn’t really know what to do after everyone started going back to work after the pandemic. He was struggling to get into a routine until he started going out for coffee with his Job Coach, they really made a difference to his life when he needed it and the forum has been a brilliant place to keep up our contact”.

To successfully deliver a place and train model, services must adhere to the five stages of Supported Employment. They are: engaging jobseekers, vocational profiling, engaging employers, job matching and in-work support and career development. The forum is evidently a valuable tool when engaging with local jobseekers, with accessibility to services being vital in building trust and visibility in local communities.

The development of wider skills to both enter and maintain employment is a key element of the Supported Employment model. Sometimes described as ‘soft skills’ these are skills that whilst not directly linked to employment outcomes, are the fundamental building blocks needed for people to progress to more specific employment-related outcomes. They are based on behaviours rather than competencies, and form the personal attributes required to participate efficiently and effectively in a workplace.

The skills include social interactions, confidence and understanding new and different situations, including within a workplace, as well as transferable skills such as communication. Often these soft skills are key to enabling people to realise their potential. Lucy and her DurhamEnable Job Coach explained: “it’s all about building blocks”, achieving this through a robust vocational profiling phase. Lucy stated: “My confidence is a lot better since meeting my job coach. I have now got a volunteering job and I’m going to start looking for a paid job now with my Job Coach”.



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Lucy's Job Coach explained: "We are working with what some people deem a difficult client group, with lots of experiences of negativity...being told they won't get anywhere in life. We work with the person to change their perspective, so they feel able to change their life".

Employer liaison is integral to the delivery of Supported Employment, but is often unnoticed by jobseekers and their families. One family member discussed the value of a Job Coach and the "work which goes on behind the scenes...a lot of getting the job was down to her Job Coach. They visited [the employer] a lot beforehand and then went with her to visit and practised using the bus too. She was always led in the right direction by her Job Coach and that's definitely what helped her get the job". The support for employers is beneficial in removing the "fear of the unknown" when employing a disabled person, a fear that is often linked with concern for doing something which might impact negatively upon the person. This is a key success factor in supporting employers to close the disability employment gap, as explained by Laura's employer: "Staff were nervous about working with them at first. But the transition was smooth and there was always support for her and now she is working independently".

Support for people transitioning into work was highly valued by DurhamEnable forum members and their families. Ongoing support was identified as vital, ensuring improvements in confidence were maintained during what could often be a daunting time. Support, ranging from emotional to practical measures helping people sustain work was evidently appreciated. Laura explained: "Before I started, they had lots of meetings with the manager and talked to them about introducing me to the job and people I work with which was really helpful...since everyone was very kind and supportive of my condition, while making sure I was comfortable in the space around me, it was like taking the first steps into a new society".

The employers we spoke to at the DurhamEnable forum reported an improvement in confidence both when employing disabled people and when supporting them in work. An initial lack of confidence around Supported Employment related to a lack of experience in employing disabled people. Increased confidence in employing disabled people arose from the positive employment experience in addition to the training, advice and guidance provided by the Job Coach. For one employer, this increase in confidence created opportunities for further employment opportunities: "In terms of the wider implications, it doesn't scare me any more about employing someone with a disability. It's not as scary as we once thought. With the training we received, it makes it easier to adapt our working practices to other people in a similar situation...we've employed another two people with autism".

DurhamEnable forum attendees told us that the support they are offered when in work is important, especially during the initial months of employment. Job Coaches spend time with people helping them learn the tasks and nuances of a workplace, or as previously stated by Laura "a new society". Everyone agreed that if on-the-job support was not offered at the beginning, they would struggle to stay in work.

"Ever since I started my job, we have been seeing each other a bit less but are still in contact. She started helping every day but it's like she isn't needed as much now but is still at the end of the phone if I need her and she pops in now and then to see how I am getting on".

There are several stages to consider in providing good quality in-work support: they include understanding the specific needs of the person in relation to the role and any adjustments they would need, support for the employer, helping them make sure they have the right support in place for their new employee, whether managing expectations, helping facilitate communication or practical support, and ongoing support for both

the person and employer throughout, addressing any arising or unforeseen challenges.

It is clear from the conversations with DurhamEnable forum attendees and their families that Supported Employment has changed people's lives for the better. Supported Employment services are uniquely placed in their local communities to lead on place-based solutions for local jobseekers and employers. The trusting relationship a Supported Employment service can build, allows them to implement long-term, creative, and inclusive solutions for those seeking work and talent for their workforce.

"My Job Coach helped me find my confidence but then getting the job really helped as well. I'm coming up 6 months at work now and I'm feeling a lot more secure and confident than ever before".

To find out more about DurhamEnable and Supported Employment, visit [www.durhamenable.info](http://www.durhamenable.info)





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