

Need2Know

Employers guide to employing people with a learning disability

A celebration of what works



Mental Health
Foundation



foundation for
people with
learning disabilities

Foreword

Employment is good for us. Having a job can improve our health and wellbeing, give us a valued role in society, enable us to earn an income and offers a chance to play an active social and economic role. However, only 5.7% of people with a learning disability have a paid job.¹

Yet we know what works to get people into paid employment and that there is much to gain from increasing the number of people with a learning disability in work, for the individuals, their employers and society in general.

With a gap between the employment rate of non-disabled people and that of people with a learning disability of some 72%, reducing inequality in employment levels is a big undertaking.²

We hope that this guide can play a small part in that important job. By highlighting the issues that need to be tackled, and showcasing a number of concrete examples of good practice, the guide aims to show that creating employment opportunities is not complex, but simply requires a willingness to recognise individual potential and to provide job seekers and employers with the right support.

Dr. Stephen Beyer

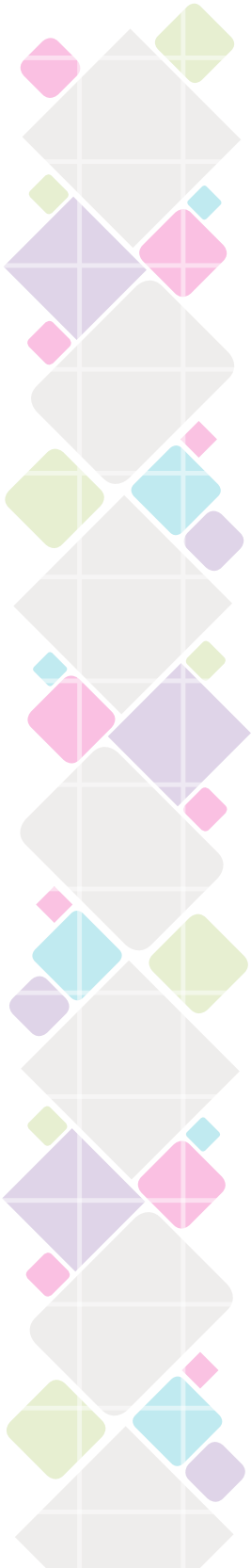
Lead in Learning Disability Employment
National Centre for Mental Health
Cardiff University

1. Chris Hatton, (2018) "Paid employment amongst adults with learning disabilities receiving social care in England: trends over time and geographical variation", Tizard Learning Disability Review, Vol. 23 Issue: 2, pp.117-122.

2. The difference in 2017 between a 78% employed rate for non-disabled people and a 6% employed rate for people with a learning disability.

Introduction

We know that people with a learning disability can and do make hard working and enthusiastic employees. They bring new skills, talents and perspectives to their employers and, with the right support, they will remain loyal and longstanding employees.



According to the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE), employing people with disabilities can enhance a company's reputation, lead to innovation in products and services and can be a great way to demonstrate corporate social responsibility in employment.³

This growing body of evidence showing that there is a strong business case for employing people with a learning disability, coincides with an increased awareness among employers of disability and an interest in employing a more diverse workforce.

In a recent systematic review of research for Mencap, Beyer and Beyer⁴ found strong links between employing people with a learning disability and benefits for employers, including:

- Better staff reliability
- Reduced sickness
- Lower staff turnover
- Increased customer loyalty
- Improved morale at work

Furthermore, BASE estimates that working with supported employment providers (see below) can reduce the estimated £5-£7k that, advertising, preparing, interviewing, inducting and training new employees, can cost an employer each time they take on a new staff member.

Following the When I Grow Up employment programme for schools, the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, part of the Mental Health Foundation, is focussing on the evidence that makes the employment of people with learning disabilities possible. Central to our work is the empowerment of people with learning disabilities. This is particularly important at this time of change with significant shifts taking place in the way we support people to think about and plan for employment as part of their future.

We know that with the right support people with learning disabilities make hardworking and enthusiastic employees. We also know that 62% of people would rather work in a company which employs people with learning disabilities.

This guide seeks to build on this knowledge by exploring the practical implications of adopting a more inclusive approach to recruiting people with a learning disability. Inside, we present information about Supported Employment and Job Coaching including tips on how and where to get this type of support, how to get funding for it, and how to work with Job Coaches. Importantly, we capture the experiences of a number of employers for whom employing people with a learning disability has been a successful and rewarding experience.

3. <https://www.base-uk.org>

4. Beyer, S and Beyer, A (2017) A systematic review of the literature on the benefits for employers of employing people with learning disabilities. London Mencap.

Supported Employment

Supported employment represents a collection of values, practices and processes designed to offer people with a learning disability, and their employer, structured and systematic work based support. It is frequently cited as the most effective way to systematically train people with a learning disability into paid work.⁵



Supported employment is about more than just finding someone a job. Although there are some variations, most supported employment agencies provide the following core modules of support:

- Discovery and vocational profiling to get to know the person with a learning disability
- Employment planning to find a job that meets the person's aspirations and needs
- Working with employers to understand their needs
- Job matching to ensure the right person for the right job
- In work support for both employee and employer
- Ongoing monitoring and contact

Each part of the journey is designed to link the skills, interests and aspirations of the individual with the needs of the employer and requires a detailed understanding of both. Importantly, support is given to both employer and employee throughout the process.

The benefits of working with a supported employment agency are:

- Access to a wider talent pool of job seekers keen to work
- Professional matching service so that employers get the right person for the right job
- Advice and support regarding any 'reasonable adjustments' that may help the job match⁶
- Disability awareness training for employers and their staff
- Ongoing training, support and advice
- The service is often free

5. OECD (2010) *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers: A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries*. Paris, OECD Publishing.

6. Employers have a duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to change their procedures and remove any barriers that a disabled person may face so that they can work and apply for jobs in the same way as someone who is not disabled.

Case studies

The examples below have been drawn from employers who actively employ people with a learning disability. Each example has been chosen to highlight a particular approach and can serve as an illustration as to what can be achieved.

We hope to show how simple, quick and often inexpensive adjustments can lead to great outcomes for both the employer, in terms of the business benefits outlined above, and the new employee. All of these employers share one common attribute – a willingness to employ people with a learning disability.

So how did they go about it? In most cases it was a simple matter of thinking through the options.





1

Starting from scratch – East Bristol Auctions

Despite no formal training or HR department to lead the way and little experience, East Bristol Auctions were keen to create opportunities for people with a learning disability. This was about being creative, flexible and willing.

Employment opportunities were formed by combining existing tasks that were required within the workplace, to create a new position. A combination of work tasters and work trials allowed potential applicants to see if the type of work suited them.



EAST BRISTOL
AUCTIONS

East Bristol Auction Rooms

East Bristol Auctions is a small family-run business set up to combine traditional auction sales with the increased interest in sales to online bidders.

East Bristol Auctions have a history of recruiting people through a variety of approaches such as work experience and work trials rather than regular interviews. The company are happy to employ people who may not have a lot of experience, but are interested in the work they do and are willing to learn more about it. Although they do not have a large HR department, the company are keen to give people the opportunity to learn new roles and to progress within their organisation.

A discussion with a neighbour about employing someone with learning disabilities, led Evan, the owner and manager of East Bristol Auctions, to the decision that he would like to give someone with a learning disability a

chance. He was put in touch with a supported employment provider and arranged to discuss options with one of their Job Coaches. Having never employed someone with a learning disability, Evan wanted to make sure that he was going to do things in the best possible way. In order to give the person a fair chance of getting a job with his company, Evan thought through the types of tasks that the company needed doing and, with guidance from the Job Coach, created a position of Auction House Assistant covering packing, post room duties and database work.

The company and Job Coach discussed and planned the recruitment process, which included the applicant attending a work taster. This involved visiting the auction rooms, working with a mentor and trying some of the tasks to ensure they wanted this type of work.

A work trial was set up once the applicant decided they were interested in the role. This involved more in-depth work over 5 days supported by a Job Coach and a mentor within the company. This also included social time with the team after work to get to know them.

After a short informal interview with Evan, at the end of the work trial, a job was offered. Both applicant and their family felt this was a very fair and helpful way to recruit, offering both the employer and the applicant the chance to see if they could work together.

TOP TIPS

- Invite the applicant to briefly look around the work area and to have an informal interview.
- Consider offering work taster sessions.
- If the applicant wants to proceed, consider offering a work trial, or a 'working interview', for a week. This gives both the employer and applicant the chance to see if there is a suitable match between them.
- Ensure that the staff working with the applicant give them clear instructions.
- Provide disability awareness training for all the staff.
- Help the person feel part of the team.



2

Selection and Recruitment – Bristol University

Bristol University wanted to make a change to their recruitment process to enable more people with a learning disability to apply. By working with their HR colleagues, adjustments were made to the way information on job opportunities was arranged and distributed, and to the way interviews were conducted.

This included the use of easy read information and ‘working interviews’ to see if the applicant was able to do the job.

Bristol University



David works for Bristol University's Learning Disability Mortality Review (LeDeR) Programme as an Information Officer and has been in post since May 2017. When considering recruiting for the post, the LeDeR Programme team were particularly keen to open up their application and recruitment processes to a diverse audience and took some steps to ensure their application and selection process was accessible to as many people as possible.

This included working closely with the HR Department to consider how the usual recruitment practices may be a barrier to people applying for the post. The team did some research into accessible recruitment policies to inform the development of their own recruitment process, pack, easy read versions of the Job Description and Person Specification.

Applicants could apply via an easy read application form, online or at an open day. This would ensure anyone interested in applying for the job would be able to visit the office, meet the team and find out more about the job. The team was also responsive to any adjustments required at an individual level, such as talking with people individually rather than as a group.

In addition to the University Website, information was sent out widely to various networks in the local Learning Disability and community support sectors. This included supported employment agencies who had several candidates ready and interested in this type of employment. A shortlist of people from a wide variety of backgrounds was developed.

Having met all requirements of the Job Description and Person Specification, David applied for the job and was invited to interview along with the other shortlisted candidates. The interview itself consisted of some practical tasks as well as a number of questions which were shared with participants prior to the interview to aid their preparation for the interview. Many people attended with a job coach or other support staff.

The interview tasks included: following instructions; using the IT system; asking for help appropriately; creating easy read information – a key part of the LeDeR programme – and answering questions about interests and motivations for applying. Having successfully completed these tasks, David was offered the job.

As an employer, the University met its responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments by modifying some of the induction processes, by allowing David more time to undertake training and providing a one-page easy read version of his employment contract. They continue to be in contact with an employment support agency should David require any additional training and support.

Beyond his job description David has had a positive impact on team morale as well as offering colleagues a practical understanding of learning disability – especially important for the LeDeR team who would be speaking to members of the public, some of whom might also have learning disabilities.

David continues to enjoy his job, is an active member of the team and is growing in confidence and independence as he takes on new work tasks.

TOP TIPS

- Remember the wider benefits of employing people with learning disabilities.
- Consider alternative recruitment and selection processes such as 'working interviews'.
- Offer information in easy read formats avoiding jargon and complicated words.
- Make simple, reasonable adjustments for training and induction by offering extra time and support.



3

Disability awareness training – Sodexo

Specialist catering company Sodexo was keen to employ someone with learning disabilities, but managers were a little nervous.

By undertaking a small amount of disability awareness training, they were able to build confidence in their team about how to work with their new colleague.

Sodexo



Zoe enjoyed catering and wanted to find work in that sector. After she had finished a supported internship⁷ she saw a job advertised with Sodexo at Clifton College in Bristol. Zoe finds reading and writing difficult, but with the support of her Job Coach she completed the application form.

Clifton College is a very busy place where Sodexo serve about 2500 meals a day as well as offering event and hospitality catering.

Zoe was invited along to an interview which was long, as there were lots of questions related to legal information necessary for working in a school. However, the interviewer used short, easy to understand words and gave lots of examples to ensure Zoe understood the questions.

TOP TIPS

- Just because someone has a learning disability it doesn't mean they cannot do the job as well as anyone else. They just need a chance to show that they can do it.
- Ask for support and training for staff before the person starts. This will help to ensure all the staff are on-board and ready to support if needed.
- Let the Job Coach provide guidance, especially at the start of the job.
- Encourage the person to feel part of the team. Let them work with a buddy until they are comfortable with the tasks.
- Recognise that having a person with a learning disability in the team can positively affect staff team members.

She was also taken on a tour of the area to really put her at ease. Zoe shone and was offered the job of Catering Assistant.

Her new manager really wanted Zoe to do well in the job, but was concerned that his team did not have the experience of working with people with a learning disability. Zoe's Job Coach, from a supported employment agency, was able to support both the employer and the job seeker.

Firstly the Job Coach organised some disability awareness training that focused on how the existing staff could support Zoe to become part of the team. Although staff were nervous at first, the trainer explained how simple adjustments could help, such as providing Zoe with clear directions, allowing her a little extra time to learn new tasks, and avoiding giving written instructions.

When Zoe started her new job, the Job Coach supported her to learn her tasks and settle in. As the manager was keen that all staff were comfortable and not isolated, they also organised an employee to act as a buddy working alongside Zoe.

The Job Coach keeps in touch. Sodexo are pleased to have this support available should any further training be needed. Zoe continues to do well and has been described as 'a dream to work with'. In fact they would have more staff like Zoe if they could!

7. A supported internship is a 6 month work placement offered through a College, often with a large employer, where a young person with a learning disability can develop skills in a particular employment sector.



4

Working with a Job Coach – Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI)

Vital to the success of supported employment is the role of the Job Coach. Having approached the BRI at a recruitment fair, the Job Coach ensured a good match between employer and job seeker, initiated conversations, negotiated interviews and supported the employer with all aspects of induction and training.

By learning the job before the new employee started, the Job Coach was well placed to help the new worker become independent as quickly as possible.



Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI)

Will had been working with a Job Coach in his search to find paid employment. As part of this work, the Job Coach attended a job fair run by the local authority. One of the participating employers was the Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI), part of the University Hospital Bristol NHS Foundation Trust.

Having identified a position that would match Will's skills and interests, the Job Coach secured an interview for him at the BRI. After a successful interview, Will was offered a position of Stores Porter working 40 hours per week. Because the position was new to the hospital, they asked Stuart Cundy, who had experience of having someone with a learning disability in his family, to be Will's new manager and he was delighted to be involved.

Before Will started, the Job Coach spent some time at the hospital learning the role, understanding the routines and getting to know the team. When Will started work, his Job Coach taught him the job by systematically training him to do each new task and checking to ensure Will was doing everything to the hospital's standards.

The Job Coach also helped Will to understand how things worked at the hospital, such as how different employees in the hospital have priority use of the lifts.

Will was also supported to talk to his manager about how tasks could be adjusted to help him work effectively. Stuart was very happy to look at making small adjustments to the work so that it was easier for Will to perform at his best. Will was given specific areas to deliver to and was able to load his own trolley so he would know the items he had to work with.

Although it has taken time to learn all the tasks and to develop the skills needed to be a successful porter, having both a supportive manager and training from a Job Coach has made all the difference. Will said, 'I'm just glad they gave me a chance to work!'

TOP TIPS

- Learn about the person's support needs.
- Understand that everyone is different with different support needs.
- Be prepared to make adjustments to tasks and work processes, as long as it's practical to do so.
- Some managers and mentors may already have experience of people with a learning disability in their lives and can be of help when first taking people with a learning disability into a company.
- Understand that it will take some people a little longer to learn the job but that the results will be worth it.



5

Building a supportive culture – Holiday Inn

Having sought guidance from the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (FPLD) the Holiday Inn have developed a long-term relationship with a supported employment agency, enabling them to build a positive and sustainable culture of inclusion within their workplace.

They are able to celebrate the many talents that disabled people bring to the workplace and to understand the contribution they make.



Holiday Inn Bristol City Centre

Having decided to give someone with learning disabilities the chance to work in their hotel, the General Manager at the Holiday Inn Bristol City Centre contacted FPLD who were able to connect them to a local supported employment agency.

Building a long-term relationship with the agency enabled staff at the Holiday Inn to increase their confidence in developing employment opportunities, to adjust their recruitment processes and increase the number of disabled people they employ.

The hotel team worked with Job Coaches who provided on-the-job training and support to help the first disabled employees in their new positions.

The hotel management quickly saw the value of the new members of staff, their commitment and hard work, and were encouraged to offer additional work experience placements to young people with learning disabilities.

They were so impressed with the young people involved that they created more paid positions including a place for Dwain, who secured a job as Commis Chef. Dwain mostly works the evening shift, where he prepares the food that the chefs need for the evening service. During the service he prepares meals, then plates up and adds garnish. It can be hot and busy in the kitchen, but very rewarding. Dwain really enjoys his job.

The hotel's managers have learned the benefits to their business of employing these new workers. They all display impressive timekeeping, are rarely sick and are completely reliable. If they are asked to do a job they always complete it. Their colleagues see the benefits of employing people with a learning disability, are understanding and always happy to provide extra support, especially to new workers.

The hotel's culture has been positive from the outset and, by working with a supported employment agency, the team have seen their colleagues progress, understanding that getting to know each member of staff is the key to getting the best from them.

TOP TIPS

- Use a supported employment agency to help identify suitable candidates who are well matched to the needs of the job you have available.
- Help people feel part of the team, involve them in conversations, invite them to join team evenings out and other events.
- Give thought to how instructions are given at the start of someone's recruitment, perhaps giving people one job at a time to complete as they learn their role.
- Be ready to teach people new skills as they master initial tasks so that they can progress in their jobs.

Working with a Supported Employment Service

For some employers, recruiting and employing people with a learning disability will be a new experience. A good supported employment agency is there to help employers navigate the process, providing support and practical guidance along the way.



This can include:

- On site job coaching support (see below for information about the role of the Job Coach)
- Disability awareness training
- Input to your diversity strategy
- Advice on reasonable adjustments
- Being there in the longer term if needed to provide advice and practical support
- Advice on your managerial and supervisory roles with these employees
- Provide systematic training of the agreed tasks and processes
- Collect performance data but with the Supervisor or Manager retaining management of the new employee
- Gradually fade support so that new employee can perform tasks unassisted
- Keep in touch with both employer and employee and be available to support at a later stage should tasks or workplace change

The key practitioner within supported employment is the Job Coach. Job Coaches provide the vital link between the job seeker and employment opportunity and will work hard to encourage a partnership between the employer, the employee and the supported employment agency. The Job Coach will usually provide support, advice and guidance and will typically know the jobseeker well, having supported them to apply for the position.

Once a job has been secured the Job Coach will:

- Spend time learning the tasks and understanding the workplace before introducing the new employee
- Agree a specific plan of action identifying tasks, performance levels and timescales, which are adhered to and reviewed at set intervals
- Introduce the Job Coach and explain their role to the whole team
- Set tasks that are consistent over a period of time
- Allow the employee a short time away from the tasks to discuss performance with the Job Coach and supervisors
- Allow the Job Coach to attend regular supervision sessions
- Inform the Job Coach of any team meetings or supervision in good time
- Identify an in-house staff mentor who can be available to employee and Job Coach

Final Comments

Once an employer has had experience of employing people with a learning disability, they are significantly more positive about the individual's work and value to the company.

The simple truth is that the vast majority of employers who have hired people with learning disabilities⁸ find that the presence of an employee with a disability has had a positive impact on the productivity and profitability of their business⁹.

The examples in this guide offer an illustration of how good practice and support can result in positive employment for both the individual and their employer. We do know that there are times when extra input is needed to ensure success. However, we also know that with good job coaching all is possible.

We have emphasised the importance of evidence informed practice, the need for good planning and support through a partnership between the individual, their employer and the Job Coach. We believe that everyone has talents, skills, gifts and with the right approach, everyone can work.



8. In the USA the term "Developmental Disabilities" includes people who in the UK would have a "learning disability."

9. Kregel J (1999) Why It Pays To Hire Workers With Developmental Disabilities. Focus on Autism and other Developmental Disabilities. Volume 14, number 3,

Frequently asked questions



How can I find out if there is a local supported employment service near me?

The BASE website has a list of all members searchable by area and postcode

<https://www.base-uk.org/find-member-organisation>



Do employers have to pay for job coaching?

No. Most supported employment agencies offer their services at no cost to the employer. Some will be funded through grants or other programmes or can access financial support through Government schemes. Talk to your supported employment agency.



Can employers get help with other costs?

Access to Work is a fund run by the Department for Work and Pensions that can not only pay for job coaching support, but may contribute to equipment and travel costs for employed people with a disability or long term health condition.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-guide-for-employers/access-to-work-factsheet-for-employers>



What skills and qualifications should I look for in a Job Coach?

Although Job Coaches are not currently regulated in the UK, there are a variety of training courses for Job Coaches. Some of the best known ones include:

- Training in Systematic Instruction
- Introduction to Supported Employment
- Teaching and Coaching for Success
- Marketing for Jobs
- Training in Customised Employment

Glossary of terms used in supported employment

Access to Work

Is a grant from the Department for Work and Pensions which can help pay for practical support so that disabled people can do their jobs. It can pay for support at job interviews, job coaching and help with additional support costs.

Job analysis

Is an in-depth way of analysing jobs to ensure an effective job match. A job analysis includes looking at the job summary, core and occasional routines of the job, work demands, worksite considerations and workplace culture.

Job carving

Involves creating, modifying or customising a job so it is suitable for a particular individual while simultaneously meeting the needs of an employer.

Natural support

Emphasises the participation of supervisors and co-workers in training and supervising disabled employees. The concept of natural support highlights the need to understand the workplace culture and actions or activities considered natural or typical.

Systematic instruction

Is a coaching method specifically designed to help people with complex learning difficulties learn new tasks. Contact the Learning and Work Institute¹⁰ or your National Valuing Families Forum (NVFF)¹¹ representative for information.

Vocational profile

Is the process of 'getting to know' the person, to identify their aspirations, learning needs, skills, former experiences and job preferences. The profile informs practical job finding and helps to achieve a good job match.

Working interviews

Are a reasonable adjustment in the recruitment and selection process where individuals can demonstrate their skills as opposed to talking about them in a formal interview.

10. <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk>

11. <http://www.nationalforums.co.uk/nvff>

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