

Strategic approaches to employing people with intellectual disability: Lessons from the UK

Introduction

This paper describes strategic approach and programmes used and tested in the UK to improve the employment rate of people with intellectual disability. This draws on a paper presented by Anne Williams of the UK's **Valuing Employment Now** programme at a seminar held by the National Disability Authority in April 2011. Further reading and materials are listed in the reference section.

The strategic actions taken in the UK are in line with the approach set out in the National Disability Authority's 2006 report **A Strategy of Engagement: Towards a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities**.

A central message from the UK experience is that 'a one size fits all' is not the best approach when there is a diversity of support needs.

The key learning from the UK experience is:

- Work is a realistic outcome for people with intellectual disabilities
- Preparing for work must start at school
- Ensuring people and their families have accurate information helps better decisions about work
- A key element in an employment strategy for people with disabilities is ensuring people have accurate information about how much they will take home if they are in a job
- The transition from training to open employment is difficult for people with an intellectual disability. 'Place and train' can work better than 'train and place'
- Project Search is a 'place, train, and maintain' model of Supported Employment. A strength of the approach is learning the tasks in the context of the individual workplace. Placement in an ordinary job may not be an end-point, but is a necessary first step in successful training, where the supported

employee is taught a specific job, in a specific work place, usually by a skilled job trainer or job coach¹

- The social aspects of real workplaces can be as important as the jobs themselves. These are difficult to replicate in day or training centres
- Demonstration projects can address how people think about work and intellectual disability, and may help in resolving blockages in the current system
- It is important to make the business case to employers around employing people with intellectual disabilities
- Realising the potential of people with intellectual disabilities to work requires actions that span different Departments or agencies. At Government level, there needs to be a commitment to working together across agency boundaries.

A strategic approach needed to deliver outcomes

The British government spends €750m (£660m) approximately a year on day care including supported employment for people with intellectual disabilities, and the Department of Work and Pensions spends €80m (£70m) a year on employment support, yet the outcome was a UK employment rate for people with intellectual disabilities of 6.5%.²

The Valuing Employment Now Strategy

In 2009 the British Government stated 'any disabled person who wants a job, and needs support to get a job, should be able to do so'. That Government's **Valuing Employment Now** strategy focused on significantly increasing the opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, especially those with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, to get real work.

¹ A Review of the Research Literature on Supported Employment: A Report for the cross-Government learning disability employment strategy team by Dr. Stephen Beyer and Dr. Carol Robinson June 2009

² Anne Williams (2011) Wasted Talent, Wasted Resources How to effectively support people with intellectual impairment into employment. Presentation at NDA Employment Seminar, 13 April 2011.

In line with wider UK Government commitments, this strategy's objective was to increase radically the number of people with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities in employment by 2025. Specific aims of the strategy included:

- That as many as possible of these jobs were to be at least 16 hours a week
- That the gap between the employment rate of people with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, and that of the disabled population as a whole must be closed

Five specific targeted action projects were undertaken, to tackle existing obstacles in the UK system. Each of these five projects addressed the support people with intellectual disabilities to find and remain in work. These projects were:

- **Getting a Life** – A focus on successful transition into adult life
- **Project Search** – Internship model involving further education, supported employment and employers
- **Jobs First** – Using an individual budget to pay for employment support, and to focus life around work
- **Aspirations for Life** – Working with parents and professionals of young children with intellectual disabilities to aim for a future job
- **Sustainable Hub of Innovative Employment for People with Complex Needs** – Showcasing that people with complex needs can work

Whole of government approach

An initial step was to agree that generic approaches to solving the unemployment question were not working. The UK government decided that a cross-departmental approach was necessary to develop and implement practical solutions to this question (see appendix diagram).

The objective of this joint approach was to create employment paths for individuals using a person-centred approach. This built on such models already being used by some practitioners. Close partnerships between statutory, voluntary and private agencies, which combined their funding streams, resulted in employment for people with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities.

The process was overseen by a cross-Ministerial group. If cross-departmental work in any area was proving problematic, the relevant Ministers were available to address that and find a resolution.

Changing the culture of low expectations

The Valuing Employment Now strategy actively promoted the expectation, from birth through to adulthood, that people with intellectual disabilities can work and

have careers. How parents are told their child has a disability can play a crucial part in shaping expectations.

In order to change attitudes, the pathway to work was started early in second-level schools for young people with intellectual disabilities. The **Getting a Life** project is a preparation for the transition to adult life. It focused these young people from the early teenage years to think about what jobs or careers they would like. This was coupled with good career and skills preparation during the school years.

In tandem with this early intervention in the schools, the UK Government encouraged a cultural shift through campaigns with parents, workforce training, demonstration job sites including Project Search, and through building on existing good practice.

Working with and consulting with people with disabilities, their families and their support networks were essential to the UK strategy.

Getting information to people that work pays

The UK Government has simplified the benefits system and reversed work disincentives in it. But these changes are not always well explained or understood on the ground. Supported employment providers were encouraged to build good advice on benefits into their services. People's decisions about work are fundamentally affected by having reliable information on what their actual income would be if in a job. Providing clear and concise information in this area was an important part of the strategy.

Effective supports through job coaching

Getting a job is only one part of the solution; real effort must also be put into maintaining work. Therefore in the UK a significant effort was put into increasing the quality of job coaching. Traditionally a job coach helps people to discover what work would suit their skills and interests, negotiates real jobs, and supports individuals at work. But there is a shortage of skilled job coaches, and quality varies. The UK Government are currently considering how to accredit quality standards in this area.

The job coach in the 'place, train and monitor' model plays an essential role in breaking down work into tasks, and training in tasks step by step. This typically involves breaking tasks down into component steps for a person with intellectual disabilities. The trainer uses a prompting hierarchy to give just enough information for the person to do the job, without creating dependency. In addition, the job coach supports the person's social integration into the workplace.

Ideally, over time, it is possible to reduce the input from the job coach in these two areas, with just occasional monitoring. The supported employment service continues to maintain a problem solving and career development brief for the individual.

Rules of the Access to Work fund were also changed to cover job coaching.

Encouraging employers to see the business case

Employers who understand the business benefits of employing people with intellectual disabilities are more likely to do so. In the UK, the public sector leads by example. The 2005 report **Valued in Public** discusses how to raise employment of people with intellectual disabilities in the public sector. The UK civil service and the wider public service (including the National Health Service) has clear goal on employment of people with intellectual disabilities. The UK Cabinet Office has been working with partners on tools to support this throughout the public sector, including local authorities.

Specifics about the UK Systems

Reporting on progress

The actions described so far are all elements of the UK Valuing **Employment Now** strategy to promote employment of people with intellectual disabilities. This entailed significant joint working across government. Effective leadership was key to successful cross government working. The diagram in the Appendix shows how this joint approach was structured.

Getting a Life – planning the transition to adulthood

Getting a Life was a three-year cross government project, completed in March 2011. It was set up to drive change so that young people with severe intellectual disabilities achieve paid employment and have full lives when they leave education. It has focused on what needs to happen during the vital transition period between ages 14 to 25 to create better job outcomes.

There were 12 demonstration sites each working with 30 young people, their families and the local services. Some regions have added “associate sites”, which are also adopting the same approach. Each site has carried out an in-depth analysis of how the current transition process works and why young people do not go into employment.

Young people, families, and multi-agency teams in the sites, developed and implemented pathways to employment, based on evidence of what helps young

people with an intellectual disability go into employment, and on the real experiences of young people and their families.

The results in the demonstration have shown improved outcomes, a better experience for young people and their families, and better value for money. An evaluation of **Getting a Life** has been published, along with a **How-to Guide**.³

More information is available at www.gettingalife.org.uk.

Project Search

Project Search is an employer-led internship model, which has been successful in helping young disabled adults secure and keep paid permanent jobs. Because of its built-in employment support, the model is particularly suited to people with an intellectual disability and autism, and others who can benefit from job coach support and partnership working. The model originated in Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, USA, where it has been running since the mid 1990s, achieving high employment outcomes for disabled people. The model has expanded successfully to a wide range of public and private sector employers, including banks, hospitals and the US Department of Labour. **Project Search** is running in 14 demonstration sites in England. An evaluation will be published in autumn 2011/ early 2012.

Project Search is a licensed model. More information is available at

www.odi.gov.uk/odi-projects/jobs-for-people-with-intellectual-disabilities/projectsearch.

Jobs First

The **Jobs First** project is showing how people with a moderate or severe intellectual disability can use their social care personal budget alongside other funding streams such as education budgets, Access to Work, and in some instances, Work Choice to buy support to get and keep a job. The UK Government worked with seven demonstration sites for one year and each site is working with 20 individuals. A full evaluation is due for publication in late 2011 with a follow-up evaluation report in September 2012.

³ The Office of Public Management (OPM) is working with Getting a Life to develop a methodology to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the pathway into employment compared with other routes that do not have employment as a goal. It was published in March 2011.

Aspirations for Life

'Aspirations for Life' was a one year campaign funded by the UK Department of Education. The aim of this campaign was to raise aspirations and expectations about jobs and careers amongst children and young people with an intellectual disability aged 0-14. The campaign worked in six areas with children, families and the professionals involved in their lives, the campaign prepared a toolkit of free resources for other localities to use. It includes lesson plans, children's games, case studies, posters and an employment related children's book.

More information is available at www.aspirationsforlife.org

Sustainable Hub of Innovative Employment for People with Complex Needs

This demonstration project aims to ensure that people of all ages with complex needs are properly supported to have the same life opportunities as everyone else, including paid employment. The project is working with a range of partners including families, support providers, education providers and employers, to deliver paid employment outcomes for people with complex needs.

A guide was prepared on the project participants' experiences. The guide is aimed at practitioners and families, to help them understand what needs to be in place to ensure people with intellectual disabilities get meaningful employment. This project started small, with a few people, and helped them to get real jobs. The rationale was that this approach creates demand and a belief that paid employment is possible.

UK strategy aligns with NDA's Strategy for Engagement

The pillars for action set out in the NDA (2006) report A Strategy of Engagement: Towards a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities align closely with the strategic approach in Valuing Employment Now. Common features are:

- Make work pay
- Start the pathway to work at school
- Create the business for employing people with disabilities
- People should assume from a young age that they will get a job
- Involving families to lead the way

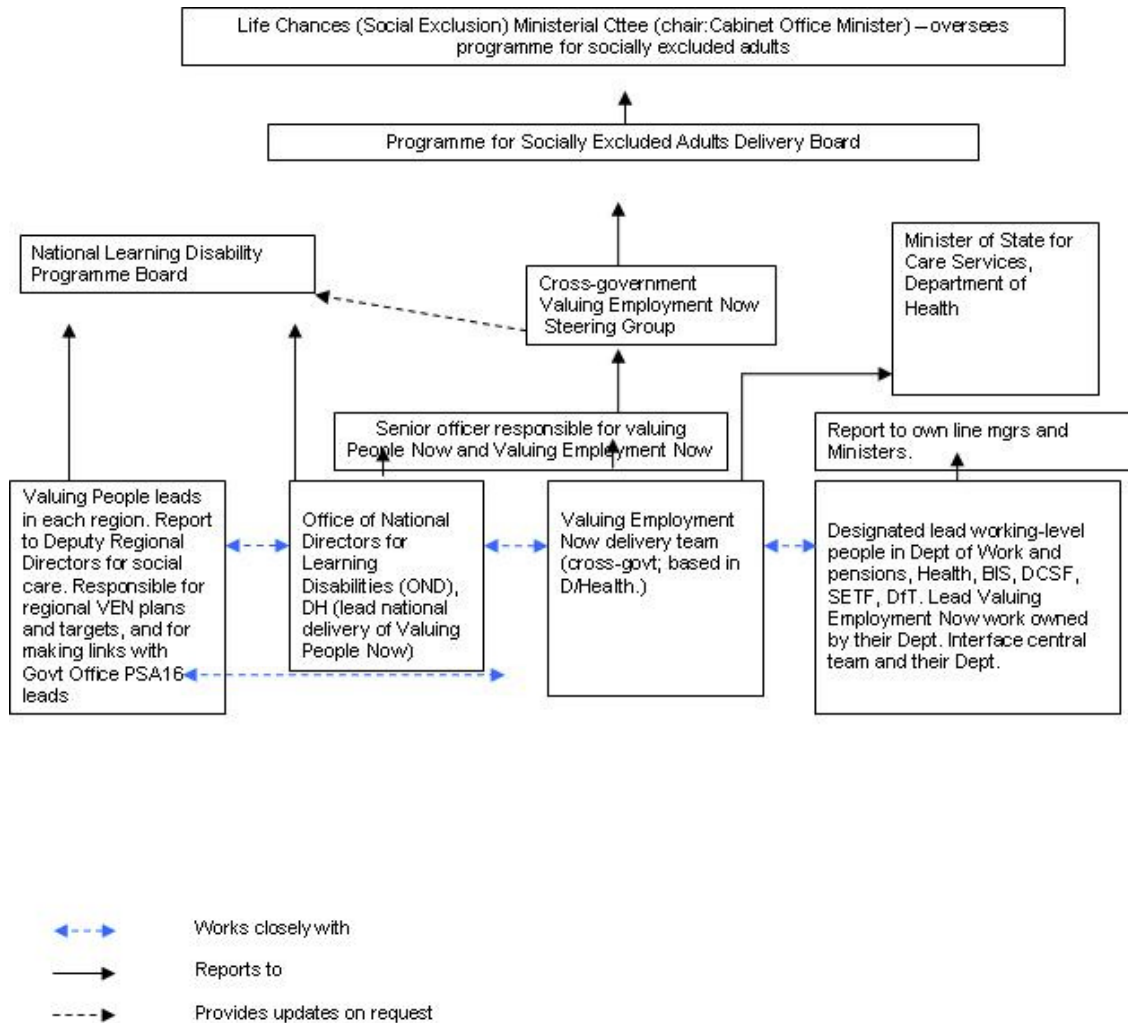
Conclusion

The learning from the UK strategy is that real effective leadership at local and national level is essential to provide real employment opportunities and appropriate supports for people with intellectual disabilities.

Appendix I National governance structure

National governance of Valuing Employment Now programme.

This diagram shows oversight by a Ministerial Committee chaired by the Cabinet Office, as well as cross-departmental working, and ownership of the programme within relevant departments and agencies:



Appendix 2 - Delivering the Pathway Locally – A Checklist

These questions, alongside the Valuing Employment Now Local Assessment Framework, can be used to identify what needs to happen locally to support young people with intellectual disabilities into employment. Young people, their families and representatives of all agencies working on transition and employment should be involved in the analysis.

Strategic change and commissioning

- Is there a multi-agency strategic group in place?
- Does it represent all the key agencies, for example children’s services (including education, health and social care), adult social care (including personalisation lead and commissioner), 14-19 commissioning Connexions, schools (special and mainstream), Jobcentre Plus, supported employment services, health, further education colleges, employers, user-led organisations and parents groups?
- Is there senior management commitment from all of the key agencies?
- Do they know the evidence about what helps young people with intellectual disabilities go into paid employment?
- Do they understand the business case for people with intellectual disabilities getting paid jobs?
- Are people with intellectual disabilities and their families represented?
- How are you involving people with intellectual disabilities and their families in commissioning decisions?
- Are there mechanisms in place for feeding issues back to strategic decision-making groups in all of the key agencies?

Raising expectations and aspirations

How are you raising aspirations and expectations of paid employment with:

- People with intellectual disabilities
- Their families
- People who support them, e.g. schools, Connexions, colleges, care managers, brokers, providers of home support?

Is there a young people and families leadership programme in place?

See Love, B and Whitehead, S., (2010) Valuing Employment Now Local Assessment Framework (2010). Available as part of the Valuing People Now

employment resource hub

(www.valuingpeoplenow.dh.gov.uk/content/employmentresources-hub)

Person-centred transition planning and support planning

- How does person-centred transition planning with person-centred transition reviews happen locally?
- Do young people have person-centred reviews from year 9?
- Are you providing accessible information about employment and what help you can get locally to get a job (including good welfare advice) from age 14?
- How are you ensuring there is an employment focus to person-centred planning?

Support employment and work experience

- Is the local support for work experience inclusive of people with severe intellectual disabilities?
- Can young people get support from a job coach for work experience?
- Are young people having meaningful work experience in community based settings whilst, at school and at college?

Is there an employment focused curriculum:

- In schools?
- In colleges?
- Does this reinforce work experience?
- What support do people have to get Saturday or holiday jobs?

(How to guide: learning from the Valuing People Now employment demonstration sites 47)

Post – 16 options

How are post age 16 choices made?

- Does support planning happen with an employment focus pulling together information from person-centred planning, career planning and work experience?
- What funding streams are you pulling together?

What post-16 options are there locally?

- Internship or Project Search
- Supported employment in further education
- Supported employment

- Support for self employment
- Apprenticeship

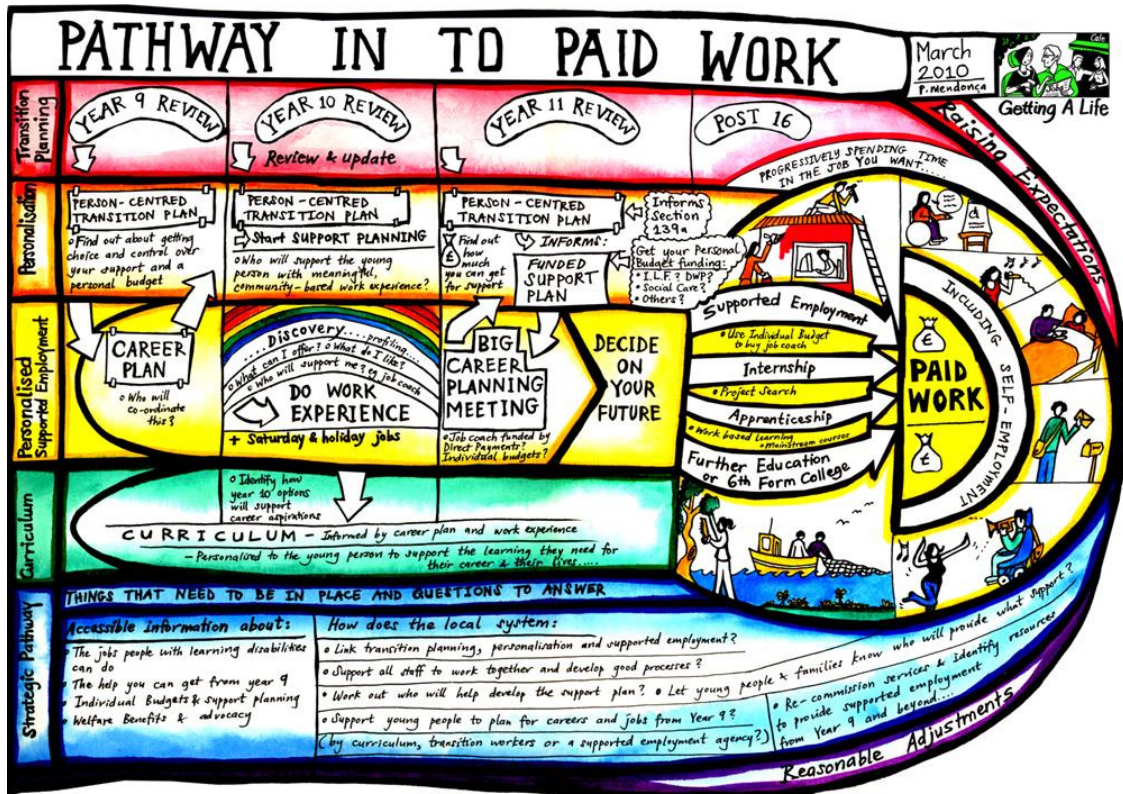
Personalisation and individualised funding

- Is self-directed support being rolled out locally?
- Are you connecting it to person-centred transition planning and making sure that support planning drives how resources are allocated and used?
- Can people use their personal budgets for employment support?
- Is there a strategy to introduce personal budgets for children?
- When do young people get an indicative budget?
- What funding sources are being used?
 - Personal budget
 - Supported people
 - Further education money
 - Access to work
 - Work choice
 - Other

(How to guide: learning from the Valuing People Now employment demonstration sites 48)

Appendix 3 – The ‘Getting a Life’ pathway to employment

This graphic is based on research evidence and was developed with the 12 ‘Getting a Life’ demonstration sites. A full description is set out in the Pathway to Employment guide, published as part of the Valuing People Now employment resources. (How to guide: learning from the Valuing People Now employment demonstration sites 48)



References

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Valuing People Now: A new three-year strategy for people with intellectual disabilities. UK Department of Health (2009)

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Good Learning Disability Partnership Boards: Making it happen for everyone
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107385

Valued in Public – helping people with learning disability work in public bodies
<http://www.bossemployment.co.uk/uploads/employmentvalued.pdf>