

# **LABOR Project :**

## **Reflections on Good Practice in Vocational Training and Employment for People with Learning Disabilities**

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## LABOr PROJECT BACKGROUND

### The project aims

LABOr is a project financed by the Leonardo Da Vinci programme of the European Union and run by the European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (EASPD) in co-operation with sixteen partners in Europe. EASPD promotes the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high quality service systems and represents more than 6000 service provider organisations in 22 European countries. The project grew out of the need to bring together material on training and employment measures for people with learning disabilities and to improve the flow of this information across borders. There are training and employment schemes that cater for the needs of disabled people in general, but little specific information has been available on the employment situation of people with learning disabilities.

The LABOr partners set out to collect information on legislation, on labour market policies, and on methods and approaches to fill this gap, and to provide it in the form of a Knowledge Centre website operated by EASPD. The information gathered with the different stakeholders and available on the Knowledge Centre is to be used to support providers in fine-tuning their training and employment services, and to advise the local, regional, national and European authorities in order to increase opportunities for people with learning disabilities to become employed.

### National Survey

To achieve these aims, partners have collected questionnaires from the main stakeholders in employment: people with learning disabilities; service and training providers; employers; and authorities. Through this work partners have collected case studies, good practice examples, and information on measures, schemes and processes that have worked. Once gathered, the material was edited by a scientific team and then made available on the Knowledge Centre, which is becoming the main source of information for stakeholders who are directly involved in integrating people with learning disabilities into the labour market.

### Review of literature

A Scientific Project Team (SPT) was formed to carry out a review of the literature relating to Employment and Vocational training to inform the Partner's Survey and the development of the LABOr Knowledge Centre<sup>1</sup>. The SPT provided a clear definition of learning disability, and an understanding of the problems that people with learning disabilities face in relation to learning, finding and keeping paid employment. The literature review also set out to:

- understand the different labour market types within which Service and Training operated
- review the scientific literature derived from peer-reviewed journals to establish an evidence base of best policy

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<sup>1</sup> Beyer, S., Hedeboew, G., Morgan, C., Van Regenmortel, T. and Samoy, E. (2002) *Inter-National Reflections : An Interim Report on Effective Approaches to Vocational Training and Employment for People with Learning Disabilities from the LABOr Project*. Brussels: EASPD.

- look at studies of interventions, natural experiments, modelling exercises and other comparative studies
- take account of the experiences of service providers who were partners in the LABOr project, to find out what they found helpful at the levels of policy and technique
- take into account any “grey literature” that describes process or offers statements of opinion.

## **Knowledge Centre development and sustainability**

### **The aim of the Knowledge Centre**

The web-based Knowledge Centre (KC) is the vehicle for any knowledge collected, and it aims to provide information tailored for the needs of service and training providing organisations, service users, employers, and authorities charged with developing supportive policies. The website information aims to:

- be easily accessible and user-friendly for all visitors
- be constantly reviewed and updated to reflect the changing situations in the labour market
- contain scientifically sound and clear elements to raise the awareness of policy makers
- consist of brief, precise descriptions, as well as useful links to external websites
- help all concerned to pursue a real improvement of the employment opportunities of people with learning disabilities.

### **Structure of the Knowledge Centre**

Each of the different groups targeted within the KC are seen as having a different set of information needs. The KC provides service and training providers with more detailed descriptions of methods of training, placing and supporting people in jobs. Employers are signposted to sections that help them to understand their responsibilities within their country’s legislation, tell them what other employers are doing to further employment integration, and where they can find further help. People with learning disabilities are shown more accessible summaries of what help they might need to enter employment, what they can do themselves to become employed, and case studies of the experience others have had of moving into employment. Authorities can access information on models of training and employment they might fund, and be signposted to the policies, funding or contracting mechanisms needed to pursue these successfully. The website will be in English, French, German and Dutch.

### **Help desk arrangements**

The partners in LABOr will continue to provide a network of local country helpdesks. This will provide routing for local requests for advice and solutions to specific problems raised by local stakeholders, and provide support for local people and organisations consulting the KC, after the project ends.

## **The role of this good practice guide**

This Good Practice Guide brings together the results of our review of academic studies, and the results of the LABOr partner surveys. It provides guidance on what appear to be the most effective and practical ways of meeting the needs of people with learning disabilities in preparing for, getting and keeping a paid job. Its purpose is to:

- consolidate learning among the partners
- assist partners in selecting practical packages to apply within their own service, validate with other providers, or to promote through negotiations with their country or regional authorities
- drive forward the testing phase of the LABOr project, to obtain feedback on notions of good practice and to ultimately provide more accurate and useful information for the Knowledge Centre
- identify a positive way forward for EASPD's promotion of good practice with members, authorities and EU institutions
- contribute to the identification of new developmental projects for EASPD partnerships.

## THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

There are a wide number of causes of learning disability. Down's Syndrome (or other chromosomal anomalies) account for 26.5%, while in the largest group of cases of learning disability (48.0%), the causes are unknown. The outcome of learning disability will range from mild to profound. In relation to employment, people with mild learning disabilities will, if they have difficulties at all, be likely to experience social disadvantage and may require additional educational support. Those people for whom the impacts are more moderate to profound will require much higher levels of specialist support, for the whole of their lives. Again, the level and type of support needed could be very different for different individuals. There are associations between the degree of learning disability people experience and the likelihood of a person having other forms of impairment. People in the severe and profound range are much more likely to experience an additional sensory or physical impairment along with their learning disability than are those in the mild to borderline range. In general, about half the people with learning disabilities have an additional sensory impairment, 18% may have two such impairments. Between 30% and 40% suffer from poor vision, this rising to 75% among those with severe learning disabilities. Some 60% and 70% of people with learning disability have measurable hearing loss, particularly people with Down's Syndrome. As many as 60% of people with learning disability may suffer problems with speech and language. Physical disabilities are obviously common where learning disability is related to underlying conditions such as Cerebral Palsy, but is often present in people with severe levels of learning disability. Epilepsy affects 1 in 3 children with severe learning disabilities and generally increases in severity with severity of learning disability.

In the context of vocational training and employment we are interested in the impact learning disability has on performance in learning and employability. It is difficult to predicting the result of a learning disability on independence, learning and employment from cause of disability. This can be illustrated by people with Down's Syndrome, where diagnosis usually leads to a label of severe learning disability, but where people can achieve good academic results in mainstream education qualifications. However, there are implications of the nature of learning disability for vocational training, learning and keeping a job :

- Most people with mild learning disabilities would have difficulty with reading and writing, difficulty increasing rapidly within the moderate range to a point where reading would prove impossible.
- Substantial numbers of people will have some difficulty understanding receptive language, questioning and responding in a fully appropriate way. Ability to understand verbal instruction and to answer will decrease rapidly for many people as level of learning disability increases with severity of disability. Using a reduced vocabulary for training, taking time, and using different ways to say the same thing can all help.
- Many people with mild learning disabilities who cannot respond fully to verbal instructions will respond positively to demonstrations of tasks. People with greater needs will respond to more detailed demonstration and direct physical help to carry out the steps.

- There will be a relationship between the complexity of task demonstrated, and the ability of the person to remember and replicate it without tasks being broken down into steps and actively taught.
- The level to which tasks need to be broken down into steps will again be related to the degree of learning disability, and creativity may be needed in determining what sequence, or “chunks”, tasks are taught in.
- People with learning disabilities can quickly become dependent on cues from trainers, to move through the steps of a job. Trainers will need to avoid, or reduce, this dependency over time if people are to be left independent in the job.
- The fact that people with learning disabilities can become dependent on cues, can make it more difficult for them to transfer an ability to do tasks learned in one environment, to another environment. Only small changes in task sequence, materials, a co-workers role, or the workplace environment can lead to the person being unable to do a well known task.
- Care is needed to ensure there are no unrecognised hearing or sight problems that may impair training and learning. These must be anticipated for a substantial number of people with more severe learning disabilities.

**All practitioners in vocational training, sheltered work and community employment need to understand how each client learns best, and tailor their teaching and support to the person’s individual needs.**

## **PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE & SELF-DETERMINATION - A THEME THROUGH EVERYTHING**

### **Helping people to become decision makers**

Self-determination has emerged as a key area of outcome for people with learning disabilities. Traditional care systems, sheltered workshops, and supported employment all give a major aspect of control to the support worker.<sup>2</sup> Even natural support approaches to supported employment leave a lot of responsibility to co-workers. Flexibility, ability to learn new skills, and to adapt are now increasingly valued skills. If people with learning disabilities are to maximize their skills in this area, employment and vocational training services need to help people become self-determined. Experiments have shown that people with learning disabilities can learn to teach themselves tasks (rather than just learning tasks), learn to respond more flexibly socially, and to be helped to become better decision makers. The ability people have to do this is linked to cognitive ability. There are a number of areas of activity that are crucial to getting and keeping a job that they can apply these skills:

- They can examine their employment interests and skills and, through job tryout and use of decision making protocols, refine their job choices
- They can carry out some of the activities involved in job finding
- They can set themselves goals for improving their personal, social and work performance, act to improve, monitor their performance and assess their success, and implement further changes.
- Through “self-instruction” techniques people with learning disabilities can be helped to teach themselves job tasks
- Through applying these techniques consistently, over time, they can increase their independence and flexibility in jobs.<sup>3</sup>

The key steps in these approaches are detailed and we are not able to describe these here. However, providers can read about these and should take steps to review their core processes to see whether more control can be passed back to people with learning disabilities through teaching and support to help them become more independent.

**Service providers should strive to help people to take as much responsibility and control over the process of getting, learning and keeping a job as possible.**

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<sup>2</sup> Wehmeyer, M. L. (1994) Employment status and perceptions of control of adults with cognitive and developmental disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, March, 15 (2), 119-131.

<sup>3</sup> Agran, M. and Moore, S. (1994) *How to teach self-instruction of job skills*, Innovations Series. Washington: American Association on Mental Retardation.

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## COMMUNITY-BASED EMPLOYMENT

### The case for community based jobs as a priority objective of efforts

#### Link to EU Social Inclusion aims and National Action Plans

The European Social Charter (ESC)<sup>4</sup> 1961 and its revision in 1996<sup>5</sup> provides a comprehensive platform of rights relating to employment conditions, vocational guidance and training, and equal opportunity among other issues. The Charter provides for the right to work, looks for the provision of appropriate vocational guidance, training and rehabilitation to assist all people “including the handicapped”<sup>6,7</sup>, and wishes to promote their access to employment first in the ordinary working environment. The Charter sees a secondary role for sheltered arrangements, including specialised placement and support services, where work in ordinary environments is deemed not possible by reason of the disability.<sup>8</sup> It does not specify the situation under which disability cannot be catered for in the mainstream.

The Directive 2000/78/EC established a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation,<sup>9</sup> and echoes the need for reasonable accommodation on the part of employers in the first labour market.<sup>10</sup>

The Convention on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment<sup>11</sup> deals with the vocational rehabilitation of disabled people to secure, retain and advance in suitable employment and to further their integration, or reintegration, into society. The convention seeks the promotion of employment opportunities for disabled persons in the open labour market, promotes the principle of equal opportunity in the workplace, and making available trained rehabilitation counsellors and other qualified staff to provide vocational guidance and training, placement and employment of disabled persons.<sup>12</sup>

A review of National Action Plans (NAPs) on Social Exclusion would also suggest that a move to integrated first labour market employment is preferred in terms of national policy directions for the employment of people with disabilities.<sup>13</sup> The EU Member States have set as a priority “promoting investment in and tailoring of active labour market measures to meet the needs of those who have the greatest difficulties in accessing employment.” An analysis of the State NAPs confirms that the most important aim is to facilitate integration into the “primary” labour market. However, States do find moving people into the primary labour market to be difficult for certain groups with very serious difficulties. Various forms of sheltered work are traditionally offered to these groups. The analysts recognize that sheltered work settings risk teaching too specific work

<sup>4</sup> The European Social Charter, Turin, 18.X.1961.

<sup>5</sup> The European Social Charter, Strasbourg, 3.V.1996

<sup>6</sup> ESC, Article 1.

<sup>7</sup> ESC, Article 10.

<sup>8</sup> ESC, Article 15.

<sup>9</sup> Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

<sup>10</sup> 2000/78/EC, Article 5.

<sup>11</sup> C159, Article 1.

<sup>12</sup> C159, Articles 3, 4 and 9.

<sup>13</sup> COM(2003)773 final, Communication from the commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions joint report on social inclusion: Summarising the results of the examination of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2003-2005)

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experience for them to be easily transferable, making the "primary" labour market less accessible for these people. They conclude that *"...consequently, sheltered jobs must be carefully targeted at persons whose work capacity is very limited on a permanent basis, and for whom it would be very difficult to attain the productivity norm required in the competitive sector."*<sup>14</sup> Even here it is clear that an offer of sheltered work should be based on the needs of the individual and not due to national economic factors or unemployment levels in the general population.

It is true that people with learning disabilities are commonly seen as difficult to place and natural candidates for sheltered work situations. Still, few Member States have developed the more intensive forms of work support that have proved effective in the case of people with learning disabilities, such as supported employment. The question remains what constitutes a *"serious difficulty"* in relation to employment, and when a person's capacity can be considered *"very limited"* given that, from the perspective of the *"social model of disability"*, this may be more related to lack of availability of appropriate forms of support and a lack of knowledge on the part of support staff.

Several Member States make use of the job creation potential of the social economy, and make use of co-operative and social enterprises. However, analysts note that *"the social economy must be seen not only as a vehicle of job creation, but also as fulfilling needs for social services and assistance that are unmet by the market economy."* This implies that co-operative and social enterprises should not be seen as an alternative to the primary labour market.

### **Comparative outcomes from programmes**

The LABOr review of research suggests that there are arguments in favour of community-based employment being the priority because it delivers better pay and other employment outcomes when compared to sheltered options. The review of the literature from 1990 onwards shows that outcomes for people with learning disabilities are generally more positive for community-based placement, particularly for supported employment.<sup>1</sup> Generally, people with disabilities in supported employment achieve better wage outcomes, experience greater social integration and are more satisfied with their jobs than their colleagues in sheltered employment. Results are less clear for people with more severe disabilities, where some studies show better wage outcomes for people in sheltered settings. Employers also seem satisfied that people with learning disabilities can become good workers in ordinary firms. The cost of providing jobs in the community appears to be higher in the early years of programme development, but where the welfare benefit and vocational funding systems are carefully tailored to promote community jobs, savings outstrip programme costs in the medium term.

From a client and taxpayer point of view there are strong arguments in favour of having community-based employment as a priority. It is clear from the research that the supported employment model is the key to effective community-based employment for people with learning disabilities. We now describe good practice in supported employment.

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<sup>14</sup> COM(2003)773 final, p 49.

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## Key processes in community-based employment - supported employment

Supported Employment is also called the "*place, train and maintain*" model of vocational rehabilitation. It recognises that the demands of real workplaces can differ between jobs, and are difficult to replicate in training situations. This makes transition to open employment from training difficult for people with learning disabilities in particular. For this reason, placement in an ordinary job is not an end-point, but a necessary first step in successful training for people with significant learning disabilities, with the supported employee being taught a specific job, in a specific work place, usually by a skilled job trainer. The emphasis in supported employment is placed on having high expectations on behalf of the person to be placed, and working creatively to find jobs that match people's preferences and abilities.

Good supported employment can usefully be summarised under five main headings: Knowledge of the person and their potential (Vocational Profiling), Job Finding, Job Analysis and placement, Job Training and Follow-along services.

### Knowledge of the person and their potential (Vocational Profiling)

The main aim of vocational profiling is to collect enough information for each person with a learning disability to establish their work preferences and their skills, so that staff who find jobs can look for jobs that match the person.<sup>15</sup> Vocational Profile formats vary but should cover the following broad areas:

- Why the person wants a job - People need to be motivated to get a job.
- What type of job they want - Some people have ideas, others need help to construct a view.
- Things the person does in their non-working life - Things people are able to use in the home, the use they make of places and services in the community, and their ability to communicate, might help in finding the person the right job.
- The work skills people have
- The work environment and situation preferences people have- e.g. Work inside or outside, jobs with slow or fast pace, in hot or cold, noisy or quiet places, with many or few people etc..
- Anything else about what person can do that will help to find them the right job
- What aspects of their work lives will people need support in, and how much- e.g. Learning style, with taking instructions, with time and scheduling their tasks, with their lunch arrangements etc..
- How people's welfare benefits may be affected- Obtaining an accurate picture of an individual's income, and how a job will effect it.
- Educational information/Academic Skills- Reading, writing, maths ability, any qualifications, skills learned in past situations, but recognising that jobs can be found without these skills being a pre-requisite.
- Information on potential barriers to work- What working practices may need to be avoided, may be changed or treated flexibly, to avoid problems of performance or negative behaviour later in a placement. What support might be needed to be put in place to achieve an effective

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<sup>15</sup> In the past, assessments of disabled people have tried to test who can meet pre-set standards and therefore work, and those who cannot work. They have not tested what people can do with effective training and support throughout the job finding and placement process.

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job match. This may need to take into account the person's habits, physical abilities or health, or behavioural challenges. Good practice suggests that this information is needed to design solutions, not as a reason to exclude a person from employment.

- Information on the person's disability- Again to determine likely support needs on, or around, the job.

At the end of the Vocational Profiling process, a functional summary is needed of the findings, particularly covering :

- a description of the type of job required, including tasks and environment
- any identified support needs
- any identified additional learning or personal development needs
- what action will be taken to seek the required job
- who will do what to progress finding the job

Signed or authorised permissions are required to ensure that the person understands and agrees to the next steps, including agreeing to necessary information being collected and released to all who need it.

### **The use of Job Tryouts**

People with learning disabilities can lack an ability to make informed choices in employment. Commonly this is because they lack practical experience of jobs or workplaces. This problem gets worse as people's level of cognitive disability becomes more severe. Good practice would suggest that job tasters can help them make an informed decision and help employment staff understand their needs. High quality job tasters allow a person to gain knowledge of work places so that they can make job choices based on an understanding of what is required in work.

High quality job tasters have certain characteristics :

- They are time limited, lasting a week or a few weeks- certainly not for many months or years
- They can last a few hours or a few days per week
- Tasters can be of one job or, over time, a number of jobs
- The goals of the job taster(s) should be specific and include at a minimum identifying:
  - The person's job and workplace preferences
  - Their strengths and weaknesses in doing a job
  - How they learn best
  - What help they need around work- e.g. travel to work, break times, ability to cope socially
- People should be adequately supported by a job coach, or the company, so that the individual and the support agency can obtain the most information from the experience
- Job tasters should not be mandatory for all people with learning disabilities, if they have a clear sense of work and their aspirations, and can articulate them.

### **Professional job finding (with the employer in mind)**

The aim of job searching is to find jobs that match each person's work preferences and abilities. A job finder uses their understanding of their local labour market and approaches potential employers, finds potential job matches, offering people choices and initiating the first steps to

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obtain the job. There are a number of key steps and competencies that good practice would suggest are important in this activity :

- Identifying the type of jobs available in the local jobs market- There needs to be a clear and realistic understanding of what options exist for people to apply for.
- Finding potential employment opportunities- Jobs should be accessed through the full range of sources; many jobs are not advertised but identified through other links such as family, friends, and work contacts, or by speculative “cold calling” companies that have jobs of the type sought for an individual. In addition there are the usual published sources from government employment services, newspapers, internet advertisements etc..
- Refining the search and job matching- The aim of job search should be to identify the jobs that would meet the description we have of the person’s needs. Getting a job that meets these needs will help people to enjoy their job, reduce to a minimum the amount of help the person will need, ensure they keep it longer, and ensure an employer will get an effective worker.
- Effective selling of the worker and the person- A positive case needs to be made on behalf of the potential worker, promoting the skills and interests they have, and the general capacities of people with learning disabilities<sup>16</sup>. The effectiveness of the supported employment process and the services offered by the supported employment organization are also major selling factors. Face to face presentation and negotiation are preferred, rather than by telephone. Many job finders consider the reasons why employers may not employ and prepare counter-arguments prior to negotiation.
- Employer natural support- Research shows that it is good practice not to promise to take all responsibility for the worker. Better outcomes come from the employer taking as much responsibility as possible, with advice from skilled workers, from the beginning.
- Clear placement plan- It is important to complete negotiations with a clear plan for the way forward, agreed by all parties, including the nature of the job, start and finish dates, support to be provided by the main parties, pay and conditions, and contractual agreements.

### **Job analysis**

To achieve an effective job match, good practice is to generate as much information on the job and workplace to match that available for the individual from a Vocational Profile. To be able to establish a match, and to assess how much input may be needed to close any gap between the requirements of the employer and the abilities of the worker, a formal job analysis of a prospective job is needed. It should cover a number of areas as a minimum :

- The conditions of employment: hours, wages, and other financial benefits
- The main tasks and steps of the job, including breaks
- The physical, social and cultural make-up of the workplace- does the environment meet that preferred by the potential worker
- Are there any health and safety standards to be met, or concerns to be resolved?
- Is support available from the employer and his staff in induction, training, problem solving and supervision?

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<sup>16</sup> Beyer, S., Hedeboom, G., Morgan, C., Van Regenmortel, T. and Samoy, E. (2002), P 19 covers the generally positive features employers value workers with learning disabilities. These include: lower than average absence and job turnover rate and assessments of reliability and productivity comparable to other workers.

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### **Training people with learning disabilities on the job**

The aim is to provide support in the workplace tailored to individual need. All forms of on-the-job assistance will mark the person out as special and will run the risk of hampering the person's integration into the workforce. Help provided by a co-worker (natural support), if effective, will be the least intrusive way of the person learning a job, and good practice would suggest that helping the employer and their staff to do this is the best method.

However, if effective natural support is not available, or the person with learning disabilities needs more intensive training, then direct help from a job trainer is the best method. Making sure people with learning disabilities can do the job to the quality expected by the employer is the primary aim. Good practice in direct teaching is defined by using a series of tools :

- Task analysis- Breaking down the tasks to be trained into small steps, that can be taught intensively and then chained together to make the full task. The detail to which tasks need to be broken down depends on the degree of learning disability of the person.
- Systematic instruction- The use of cues, verbal gestures, or even hand-on-hand assistance to help the person work through the task analysis. The aim is to get to the point where the person can use the completion of one step as the cue to the next, thereby leaving the person to be independent.
- Fading- Reducing the frequency and intensity of prompts as the person learns to do the job independently.
- Coping socially- Many people with learning disabilities will need advice and possibly training to cope with the social side of work. Many claim that this is best done over a significant time and in a sheltered environment. This may be true for some people, and may be a significant role for education and vocational training. However, there is evidence that training in and around the workplace is possible and that training environments struggle to replicate the types of interaction common in specific workplaces.<sup>17</sup> There are two elements of communication in work: about the job and about life. In the job, people need to be helped to take instruction and criticism, to ask for help, and to give information. In life terms, people need help to be able to tell people about their lives, to take turns and to ask others about themselves, to joke, and to empathise. Trainers can help people tailor their actions to their specific workplace and colleagues by:
  - Practicing conversations
  - Rehearsing conversational openings, such as watching the news and soaps for conversation pieces
  - Simulating difficult social situations and what to do

### **Long-term support**

Having a job does not mean that the person's learning disability has disappeared. Some people with disabilities will need additional assistance in the future, either to adapt to change at work or to change their career. Hopefully, they will receive help from colleagues at work and employers, but good practice suggests that services need maintain the link with the person and employer to monitor at an agreed frequency the quality performance and the job match.

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<sup>17</sup>Chadsey, J., Beyer, R. "Social Relationships In The Workplace", *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews*, 2001, 7, 128-133.

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## Employer incentives

There are a number of incentives that are commonly offered to employers to assist in their offering jobs to disabled people. There is a danger that the offer of an incentive, particularly a wage subsidy, may suggest that the people are not good employees, and lead to reliance on poor job matches. Good practice would suggest that incentives should be used in limited circumstances:

- Access to training- Additional grants to employers to help them to provide more staff resource in training for the person, or to re-skill their own staff in this area of work.
- Aids and adaptation- Additional grants to overcome the cost of adapting the workplace, or introducing personal aids to help a person do the tasks of the job better (e.g. computing equipment, tailored jigs on machines).
- Co-worker mentoring- Additional grants to replace time of co-workers who play a significant role in mentoring a person with a learning disability, or problem solving with them.
- Wage subsidies- These may still form a part of a support package for a person with learning disability, but good practice would suggest that this is reserved for people with high support needs and very low productivity- people who are currently not generally supported in employment at all.<sup>18</sup>

**The way forward according to the EU is to seek integration, to be employed through choice and without discrimination, and to have access to appropriate training and support. Supported employment represents an effective measure to assist people with intellectual disabilities into employment. If providers and authorities are to serve the broad range of people with intellectual disabilities effectively, they must make widely available supported employment of high quality, offering the approaches detailed here.**

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<sup>18</sup> Recent research on the UK WORKSTEP system where job coaching was offered instead of wage subsidy achieved successful placement with new employer and client pairs, but failed to move people from wage incentives where they had been in place for some time. Beyer, S. and Thomas, J. (2002) *Scope to Work: An evaluation of a Supported Employment Development Initiative (SEDI) Project*. Cardiff: Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities.

## THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING

### The historical role of vocational training

Vocational guidance and training is seen as a right in Social and Human Rights legislation referred to earlier and many governments have significant investment in rehabilitative training for people with disabilities. A number of EU measures and actions have been developed to further learning (Helios, Horizon) and significant EU funding has been routed into State mainstream programmes of vocational guidance and training, particularly in colleges. One of the main problems in this respect is that people with learning disabilities have often been excluded from these programmes because they are structured with low intensity of resources and find it difficult to cope with people who do not readily learn by verbal instruction and demonstration. There remains far more investment in pre-placement vocational training in the EU than in work based support or sheltered systems of work.

### Who can benefit from vocational training before employment?

It is clear from our arguments under “The Needs of People With Learning Disabilities” that traditional form of pre-placement vocational training can be effective if targeted on the people who have the cognitive ability to learn and generalize to other situations- namely those people who learn from verbal instruction and demonstration. It is also true that vocational training can be made more effective at catering for the needs of this group and probably be beneficial to a greater number who would not normally benefit. Pre-placement vocational training has largely failed to increase the chances of people getting paid jobs on any scale.

It is true that vocational training does not necessarily set out to find a person a job. It is clear from the responses of providers of vocational training in our Partner Survey, that linking vocational training to supported employment for finding and placing someone in a target job, maximises the outcomes of the investment in training. Good practice suggests that there are a number of ways in which vocational training, for the right people with learning disabilities can be made effective.

### Matching vocational training to local employment needs

A common criticism of many vocational training courses is that they do not teach people the skills to carry out jobs that are available in enough numbers in the local labour market. They are too often based on what staff are competent or interested in teaching, or what people think that people with learning disabilities can learn. Good practice suggests that, to be most effective at equipping people and to ensure they get paid jobs at the end, requires :

- Understanding the jobs market- Trainers need to understand the local jobs market, what jobs are available in the broad parameters of qualification and experience that people with disabilities are likely to be qualified to do (e.g. basic or no qualification, little experience) and what competencies employers need. These should be competencies, and not qualifications used as surrogates. We know that employers use educational qualifications as a substitute for an ability to do the tasks of a job, and that as more people get qualifications then employers

trade up, requiring qualifications at too high a level than are really needed. With negotiation it is possible to convince employers to take people who are taught to their task criteria instead.

- Surveys or employer panels- Information on what is required in the local labour market can come from regularly updated surveys, and from advisors from commerce and industry.
- Monitoring and feedback- What happens to course graduates is not commonly monitored by vocational trainers. If followed up, it is possible to create a feedback loop between what is taught and what we know gets people jobs, thereby validating the course content with numbers and types of jobs found.
- Tailoring the use of real and simulated environments- Where simulated work is used to train, there is a need to provide work experiences that are closely and thoughtfully modeled on real world environments if they are to be effective. Culture, work speeds and production pressures, taking instruction and feedback, problem solving and seeking help, the way tasks are completed in reality are all aspects that need to be taken into account if simulation is to be beneficial. This can often be as costly and time consuming as carrying out training in the real job. There is one benefit of using simulation rather than the real workplace. Here people can try parts of tasks over and over again, out of sequence, without it upsetting real work productivity.

### **Use of job tryout in vocational decision-making**

We have already described earlier the role of, and good practice in, job tasters. The provider we talked to in the study felt that it was good practice to incorporate a significant element of open workplace-based training in the vocational training curriculum. Support should be available on the job to help people learn tasks and consolidate their pre-vocational learning. In addition, providers saw an important role for “job sampling” in real workplace. This involves spending a few hours in a range of workplaces, seeing different sorts of jobs, usually with an exercise of answering specific questions about the job :

- What do people do here?
- What qualifications or skills would I need to get to do this job?
- What do I like about this job?
- What isn't good about this job?

This material is then usually linked to group work sessions to consolidate people's understanding of what jobs are like and to develop a range of realistic aspirations for a career.

### **Curriculum and curriculum support**

Where skills are being trained pre-job, there appears to be a consensus that the following curriculum items should be included :

- Work awareness- Discussions and input making people aware of what the world of work is like, and incorporating awareness of the expectations employers will have during the recruitment process.
- Interview skills - Role-plays that help people to be able to take part in, and pass a job interview. For the most independent people this may include training on finding and applying for jobs, and monitoring a plan to implement this.

- Opportunities to talk about and develop work preferences
- Health & Safety Awareness – Training sessions using scenarios and pictures, with hopefully site visits, to discuss workplace hazards, how they are avoided, and employer expectations
- Awareness of rights – Work in groups, with training input, to highlight people’s rights at work, how they should be treated and what work conditions they should expect, and how to complain.
- Work Ethics – Training and discussion of what makes for a good employee and what behaviour an employer can expect, scenarios to work through, and work experience, with input on strategies for overcoming common problems (e.g. getting up on time, taking breaks on time, personal hygiene, when to chat and when not to chat)
- Money Management – Training on coin and note recognition, the price of common items that may be purchased at or around work, counting back for change, making up sums from coins. Many people can get buy without handling money- it is not a requirement of many jobs. If people have to manage money, or tills at work, more specific training on equipment is required, preferably on machines people will be using in real work situations. Input is also needed on bank accounts, wage slips, and how to budget (if this is not being dealt with elsewhere in people’s lives).
- Manual Handling – Training sessions to lift in line with EU health and safety directives.

Good practice would suggest that vocational trainers would have to be able to deal effectively with people who have a range of learning styles. They would therefore ideally be able to task analyse and use systematic instruction on a one-to-one basis as part of their portfolio. Where classroom techniques are being used, simplified and straightforward language is of course required, with opportunities for people to discuss and feedback material to ensure they have understood it. Wherever possible an emphasis on “showing and doing” will help trainers to involve a wider range of students than just “telling.”

There is no consensus on how long courses should last. Some providers deliver short courses that last some months part-time, while others can last for one or two years. We would suggest that vocational trainers have to be convinced of the benefit of courses lasting more than one year. If qualifications demand it, or people are being prepared for specific industries, and people are supported effectively so that they achieve them the time is justified. There is a strong argument that, in other cases, more can be learned and certainly more wages earned, by training basic attitudes and work awareness and then providing supported employment in real workplaces.

## Qualification

Qualifications obviously differ from country to country. However, good vocational training will aim to equip those who are able with the skills to meet relevant vocational qualifications. Vocational trainers will then naturally have to be capable of assessing for these awards themselves, or have arrangements with institutions that do. For people who will not meet competency for industry standard awards or basic educational qualifications, trainers should consider using systems that collect a range of basic elements of competency that the person has achieved during vocational training. These can act as “passports” that people can keep and add to evidence their achievements, experience and capacities to future employers and trainers.

### **Linking with follow-on employment services**

It is clear that good practice would require pre-vocational trainers to make available through direct provision, referral, or partnership supported employment, including job trainer support. This will make sure all the learning is carried forward into getting a real job matched to capacity and interest.

**Vocational training should target the people who can learn in this way and be organized effectively for their learning needs. Providers of vocational training should lead to jobs and thus train skills that are needed, including life skills, for jobs which are available on the local labour market. Providers should provide work placements as part of training and link to supported employment to help ensure people get jobs after training.**

## SHELTERED WORK AND TRANSITION TO COMMUNITY JOBS

### The historical role of sheltered work

Sheltered work and the idea of sheltered workshops have a long track record in Europe. Many schemes go back to the First World War and have their roots in the rehabilitation of disabled war veterans. The idea goes back even further to philanthropic systems for relief of the poor through self-sufficient farms or work schemes. The range and number of sheltered workshops have been increasing over the 1980s-1990s<sup>20</sup>, and in some countries they represent a significant labour sector, ranging from 0.1 to 12 per 1000 of the active workforce.<sup>21</sup>

### The continuing contribution of sheltered work?

There are two major dimensions that describe the approach taken by sheltered workshops. In the first, the disabled worker is primarily a “sick” person in need of help and for whom the work activity offered is therapeutic. In the second, the sheltered workshop is regarded as a work environment no different from a company offering jobs in the open market, and the workers will have rights and responsibilities in the same way. Similar types of manufacturing activity can be seen operating within both the “therapeutic” model and the “wage employment” model, but with widely different labour relations and working conditions resulting. This is difficult to justify within an EU human rights perspective. The fact that sheltered workshops do play such a large role and cater for large populations makes a general statement on how important they should be in the system of support to disabled people difficult to make. Certainly our discussion of the thrust of UN, ILO and EU human rights and labour standards, and disability discrimination law, would suggest that open market jobs are the goal and that much more emphasis should be placed on open market support solutions. However, the extent to which this move should be at the expense of current sheltered work options must be a tactical decision at country and regional level. However, there would seem to be some general good practice guidance for existing sheltered workshops:

- The therapeutic form of sheltered workshop should be regarded as potentially leaving the worker in a “grey area” and likely not to further their rights as workers with rights within E.U. charters, and labour laws. The fact that a disabled worker will need more support, particularly a worker with a learning disability, should not limit the opportunities open to that individual to participate fully in employment life as far as working conditions are concerned.
- People should be treated as individuals, and support given should meet individual needs. Disability should not be seen as dictating that a person is suited to only one particular labour market options, such as wage subsidised jobs, or a sheltered workshop.
- Sheltered workshops are better at moving people into ordinary jobs when the working conditions it offers are close to or identical with those prevailing in that ordinary work environment. This means modelling the work status of people, their contracts, the assumptions of collective bargaining, and worker representation, pay and conditions of

<sup>20</sup> Visier, L. (1998) Sheltered employment for persons with disabilities, *International Labour Review*, Vol. 137.

<sup>21</sup> Samoy, Erik; Waterplas, Lina. 1992. *Sheltered employment in the European Community*. Final Report submitted to the Commission of the European Communities. Louvain, Hoger Instituut Voor de Arbeid Leuven.

service on equivalent industries and the open labour market.

- Making the assumption that the boundary around the workshop is permeable and having an assumption that people will move into the open labour market, will tend to create more favourable conditions for workers inside the workshop.

The over-riding concern should be :

*“Although disabled persons, and those in sheltered employment in particular, have certain inherent characteristics, their situation should be viewed as part of a broader issue, namely, whether work is experienced as an imposition and a source of alienation, or can be a means of liberation and self-fulfilment.”* (Visier, 1998; p 19)

## **Job matching**

With this in mind, it will be important to ensure that any person coming into a sheltered workshop does so because the environment, the job, and the support available, suit their needs and aspirations. We see no reason why similar initial assessment techniques, such as Vocational Profiling, should not be used to determine that the sheltered work placement is appropriate. When looking at support, there has been a tendency to see the sheltered environment to be the “support.” However, particularly for people with learning disabilities, the support should be determined at the micro, rather than the macro placement level. Learning style, how tasks are structured, and how systematic training techniques may be used should all be part of the placement decision and any plan for support.

One of the potential advantages of a sheltered workshop environment is that it may be more pre-disposed to make significant adaptations to the process of production and to the social and physical environment of the workplace. These may be greater than open employers are willing to make under disability anti-discrimination “reasonable adjustment” criteria. Sheltered workshops should consider their responsibilities in this area, and whether they may currently offer opportunities to more significantly disabled people than is currently normally the case.

## **Partitioning workshops into businesses and training**

As we have seen, sheltered workshops do play different roles in people’s lives, and set out to achieve different aims. There are some that are mainly about rehabilitation and vocational training. Others are about production. Others again are about occupation and therapy. As we have suggested, sheltered workshops should not be the only choice for disabled people and, where people are placed in a workshop, they should continue to offer them development opportunities, qualifications, and support to enter open employment.

There remains an imperative to continue a viable business, while still offering people development routes. In these circumstances splitting posts within the workshop into core paid jobs, and trainee posts may be a useful option. Here, people on longer-term contracts can keep the means of production for the company going, while other disabled workers are given time-limited places that continue with the production process, but the purpose of which is to provide vocational training with the aim of moving on into open employment. This would have the

advantage of providing some security to disabled workers within the sheltered workshop, but provide a clear direction towards open employment for others.

There are some other processes which should be included within this model, particularly if they are to cater appropriately for people with learning disabilities:

- Introduce a system of action plans for each individual worker in training, that allow the workshop to :
  - agree short-term and long-term work goals with the worker
  - identify areas for further training
  - identify the support people will require
  - set targets for the person and the workshop
- Introduce arrangements for people to acquire relevant vocational qualifications
- Introduce in-house vocational qualification assessors and links to recognized colleges and training providers
- Consider the qualification potential of people with learning disabilities and introduce appropriate systems. This may need to include systems that assess and accredit very basic employment skills, and the use of passports that allow people to take these forward to future employers.

## **Effective training and supervision**

If sheltered workshops are to cater for the range of needs people with learning disabilities may present, the staffing of sheltered workshops and the training these staff have, should equip the workshop for the level of micro-organisation of support required for this level of working. This may involve :

- higher supervisor:worker ratios may be needed
- staff roles may need to be more clearly separated (e.g. production supervisor, job trainer)
- closer working with rehabilitation and health professionals if significantly disabled people are to be included
- training in systematic instruction, task analysis and “fading”
- skills in workplace adaptation in the organisation, or links to professionals with this skill

In addition, if sheltered workshops are to maintain their place in the market and provide a proper “wage employment” model, then managers will need to have generic business planning skills, and have within the organization appropriate production skills, financial management, and be well versed in mainstream labour law and personnel systems.

## **Transition arrangements**

Where workers with learning disabilities are being helped to move into open employment, then there needs to be transitional arrangements that deal with the move from the workshop and continue into the open employment job. We may underline the problems people with learning disabilities face in moving from one job and work environment to another. Even where people with learning disabilities are able to gain qualifications and be very independent in their work

within a workshop, they are still likely to need transitional help to get and keep a job in open employment.

The short-hand description of this is the provision of supported employment. This would mean that workshops would need to provide themselves, or through partnership with supported employment agencies, the key processes of :

- Vocational Profiling while training in the workshop
- Professional job finding
- Job analysis of the new job
- Training on the job, where needed
- Maximising natural support
- Help with coping socially in work
- Long-term monitoring and support

**Sheltered work is still an important contribution to employing people with intellectual disabilities, and more creative intermediate labour options are needed. Sheltered work, and creative alternatives, should adopt a “wage employment” model, providing good pay and conditions. They should introduce measures for training, supervision and qualification that support people to move on to the open labour market.**

## **SUPPORTIVE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

The role of government policy is clearly important in making the employment strategies for people with learning disabilities effective. It is difficult to make general recommendations for different member States as their employment systems, labour markets, economies, and their support services, are very different. However, there are some sensible general measures and approaches that are required to support the good practice guidance we have put forward in supported employment, sheltered employment and vocational training.

### **Disability Discrimination Legislation**

There are relevant EU directives that require disability discrimination laws in member States, including new accession States. These provide a crucial context for employment support services to work with employers to place people in jobs and to ensure that they are also treated equally when in employment.

### **Enhanced job assessment for disabled people seeking work**

Where government is providing employment support services, whether in open employment or the variety of sheltered work options, then there is a need to provide assessments that are enhanced above those traditionally used. The principle we promoted here is Vocational Profiling. The assessment approach should set out to identify the tasks, environments and supports they need, and have the expectation that people can work with support. Assessments should not be about determining whether people can work or not.

### **Outcome related funding giving incentives for community job outcomes**

Where government is funding employment services, it is increasingly necessary for funding to have a quality outcome element and provide incentives for open employment based work. At a minimum this should include incentives for obtaining enough information to establish a good job match, and for getting and keeping a job. They should also consider providing additional incentives to service for drawing people with higher levels of disability into employment. In general governments should recognize that vocational preparation for disabled people does not always mean pre-placement training. People with learning disabilities need work-based training and support and a system that puts all the government's resources in pre-training will not suit them.

### **A framework for funding job coach supported employment**

It is difficult to start a new service with outcome related funding, because a service must first exist to create the outcome and claim the funding. Governments should be concerned with geographical equity, and should be prepared to core fund supported employment services if agencies of this type are not available in an area. Governments should also provide a funding model that enables all elements of the support model required by people with learning disabilities to be provided.

## **Sheltered Workshops**

Governments should also consider the level at which sheltered employment should be part of the portfolio of employment initiatives. Where sheltered work will continue to play a role governments should promote “wage economy” arrangements rather than “therapeutic” models through the entry criteria, the support and outcomes they fund, and through the welfare benefit regulations they have for people in employment.

Where they wish to promote and fund community alternatives, existing sheltered workshops should be provided with bridging funding to help them put in place systems to help disabled people make the transition to open work.

## **Employer incentives for employing people with disabilities**

There remains a place for incentives paid to employers. Subsidies in the form of wage subsidies to employers should not be a main plank of policy as it undermines efforts to support people as productive, valuable workers. It can have two important roles. First, wage subsidies might be offered for a short introductory period to enable worker and employer to get to know each other and for employees to be trained to be productive. Second, it can also be paid to help employers to employ people with severe and complex disabilities who may have problems of long-term productivity. Here we mean people who have not been considered for open employment before, and have largely not been seen as possible to get jobs for at all. These people usually attend day centres or are at home.

Incentives can be used in more flexible ways. Employers can be offered incentives for providing extra support and supervision if needed through their own staff. Incentives can also be useful in offsetting the costs of additional training for the person, or for another employee to provide leadership (mentoring).

## **Incentives to overcome additional expenditure**

People with learning disabilities sometimes incur additional expenditure when entering work. They may need transport because they are unable to navigate and find their way to and from work. They may need additional work clothes and be unable to buy them. They may need personal aids to help them work, such as visual equipment, special chairs, or general computer aids. Governments can help people overcome these initial hurdles.

Employers can also incur additional costs related to adapting their workplace to make it accessible, or providing special equipment to help people do their job. Governments need to help employers with this also.

### **Additional support model for vocational training for people with disabilities**

Governments provide training to help many disadvantaged groups re-enter work. We have suggested that many people with learning disabilities need workplace support rather than pre-placement training or qualification. However, those people with learning disabilities who learn through verbal instruction and demonstration can benefit from pre-vocational training, if it is tailored to their needs. This may often need enhanced staffing, and for vocational trainers to be trained in systematic training techniques. Policies in this area should also allow for supported work experience to enable people to test their learning in real job situations.

### **School to work transition**

Governments should consider the arrangements they have in place to help children move from education to adult employment. They will need plans that cross the boundaries between school and adult life. They will need to establish opportunities for work experience and for people to progressively work towards a final job placement at the time of leaving school.

### **Progressive welfare benefit arrangements allowing people to be better off in employment**

Again welfare benefit and pension regimes vary considerably across the EU. However, the problems people with learning disabilities face are common and there are a number of approaches that may be useful.

- Extending transitional arrangements for maintaining people's entitlement after moving from welfare benefit to paid employment so that they can move back if the placement fails- an extended linking rule. This will help overcome the problem of people not having enough confidence to move into employment.
- Move to benefit systems that compensate people for the additional costs of disability and exempt these from consideration when people enter employment. At a minimum people should be allowed to keep most of any earned income, with any reduction in welfare benefit being on a realistic sliding scale, so that they can be substantially better off in employment than on benefits
- Introduce income top-ups for disabled people whose skills will only allow for them to earn low incomes.
- Avoid tapered reduction of welfare benefits at too low a number of hours. This would mean people could not earn enough to make a job worthwhile. It will also restrict people who want to work, but earn only low wages, to only a few hours work in an attempt to keep all their welfare benefit.
- Make the organising principle for receipt of welfare benefit "disadvantage in the labour market", rather than "incapacity."<sup>22</sup> The advantages of such an approach would be that it would provide a better fit with the social model of disability. It would recognize that for most disabled people, with more significant impairments, their disadvantage may be a more permanent condition. Yet under some welfare benefit frameworks, a history of

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<sup>22</sup> O'Bryan, A., Simons, K., Beyer, S. and Grove, B. (2000) *Economic Security and Supported Employment*. Policy Consortium on Supported Employment. Manchester: National Development Team

successfully holding down a job can be seen as evidence of “capacity”. It should be perfectly possible to retain a “disadvantaged” status, be in paid work, and to continue to receive some welfare benefit to help to overcome this “disadvantage”. We need systems that assume that people will continue to need the additional protection of enhanced benefit rates unless it can clearly be demonstrated that they are no longer at a disadvantage in the labour market.<sup>23</sup>

- Ensure that, as people go into work, they are not disadvantaged by the withdrawal of other forms of financial support, such as free or subsidized health care, subsidised housing, and other forms of social care support.

**Authorities should enable people with intellectual disabilities, through supported employment and training, to find a job in the open labour market. They must ensure that people with intellectual disabilities have a real choice between individual and collective employment models of employment by funding individuals using each equally. Young people leaving school should be supported to find employment.**

**Authorities should ensure that the active labour market programmes they fund for non-disabled people are effective for people with intellectual disabilities. They should also recognise that, by getting people a job, society will benefit by reducing costs of social care, welfare benefits, and by generating tax income. Their welfare benefit, sickness and pension systems should allow people to be better off when in a job, and not financially penalised if jobs fail.**

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<sup>23</sup> We are grateful to Ken Simons for and to his paper *Economic Security and Supported Employment* for some of this perspective, which is mentioned and referenced in O’Byrne, A., Simons, K., Beyer, S. and Grove, B. (2000) *Framework for Supported Employment*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.