

Education and employment for people with learning difficulties



An easyread briefing



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

**Foundation for People
with Learning Disabilities**

What is this briefing about?



This booklet talks about people with learning difficulties and how they are helped at school and college in the UK. This means England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It also talks about the help people can get to find a job.

Some people with learning difficulties do not get the same help in school or college and with jobs as other people who do not have learning difficulties.

The briefing gives ideas about how to make it easier for people to do well at school, and to get a job.



What did we find out about?

Governments in the UK and Europe agree that all people should have the right to:

- go to school
- go to college
- have a job.

This means people with learning difficulties should have the same rights. We looked at what our government has done to help people get these rights.

We looked at the laws they have made. We looked at services they pay for. We looked at what still needs to change.



How good is the UK on schools for people with learning difficulties?



The UK has passed a lot of laws to give people services to support them. People with learning difficulties have had a right to go to school since 1970 when parliament passed an Act.

They should be taught the same subjects as other young people (a National Curriculum).

Children and young people may have a statement of their special needs. A statement is a paper that says that schools must give extra help to them. In Scotland children and young people may have a record of needs. People with disabilities must be treated equally in school or college.

There are people with learning difficulties in mainstream schools, but many go to special schools, some until they are 19.

The government wants special schools to work more with mainstream schools to help more people go to mainstream schools.

The government want to see more young people with learning difficulties in mainstream schools. In England they want fewer pupils with statements. They say that schools should meet pupils' needs anyway. Many parents are afraid that without a statement their son or daughter will not have a right to help.

How good is the UK on jobs for people with learning difficulties?



The UK has laws that say people with disabilities must be treated fairly in a job. This includes:

- getting a job
- not being sacked unfairly
- getting the National Minimum Wage
- being paid the same as others who do the same work
- not being treated badly in work.

If someone with a learning difficulty is treated unfairly, they can complain to the Disability Rights Commission or the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland. The staff can give them help.

Not many people with learning difficulties have paid jobs (about eleven per cent).

Benefits are getting better at helping people move into a job (like the Working Tax Credit).

Some keep their welfare benefit while working for a few hours as well as getting some pay (this is called Permitted Work).

Some people find welfare benefit rules difficult to understand and worry that getting a job will mean they lose money.

The government has lots of services that can help people get a job.



A lot of people with learning difficulties use:

- a Disability Employment Advisor (DEA)
- WORKSTEP or Employment Support in Northern Ireland - a supported workshop or placement option for people with more complex disabilities
- supported employment - with a job coach, usually offered by the council or voluntary organisations.

Fewer people with learning difficulties use:

- Access to Work - money to help get and keep a job in the community
- New Deal - a person called a Job Broker to help them find a job training schemes- to help people get qualifications and job skills.
- Training schemes- to help people get qualifications and job skills. The schemes have different names depending where people live:
 - modern apprenticeships
 - Job Skills.

A new report (called Working Lives) about people with learning difficulties in day centres showed most people like paid work best of all. A job helps you have money so you can go out. It also helps you to pay bills, make friends and help other people, and it gives you something to do.

What people said about their job:

It gives me independence. It gives me something to do. I'd hate to sit around all day doing nothing. It would drive me potty. It makes me use my brain and that is important for me as a person with learning difficulties.

It makes you feel happy inside, because you've got people to talk to.

How good is the UK on moving from school to college or jobs?



Young people with statements must have a plan for when they leave school from 13 years old. In Scotland young people have a Future Needs Assessment when they are 14. In Northern Ireland young people have a transition plan when they are 14.

Social services, and in England, Connexions must take part. Connexions work for government and help people go to college or get a job after school. In Scotland and Wales, young people get advice through Careers Scotland and Careers Wales. In Northern Ireland they get advice from the Careers Service.

Young people have two weeks work experience when they're 16. Few people with learning difficulties have work experience.

Most people with learning difficulties go to college or a day centre when they leave school. This is different from people who don't have a learning difficulty – most go straight into work or to college.

Many people still find it hard to get a job after college.

Some schools support young people to get work experience while at school. Some schools and colleges work with supported employment agencies to try out jobs.

What might need to be done in schools and colleges?

The Government is trying to help more young people with learning difficulties go to mainstream schools. The Government says we need special schools for young people who have severe difficulties.

This could mean that young people with severe learning difficulties may go to special schools when it might have been possible for them to go into a mainstream school.

The government wants people with learning difficulties to be included in their communities, and going to a special school can make inclusion more difficult.

More needs to be done to help young people with learning difficulties to go to mainstream school.

Schools and colleges all need to support young people with learning difficulties well.

Colleges need to have qualifications that show everything young people have achieved and not just higher qualifications.



Lecturers and tutors need to teach students what employers want if people are going to get jobs. Colleges need to help young people move on to a job when they leave.

What might need to be done in transition from school to college or jobs?

There are still problems for young people with learning difficulties when they leave school.

Plans about leaving school should be about what the person with learning difficulties wants, and should be led by the person themselves. (There should be person-centred planning.)



Families and carers must be helped to take part in planning for leaving school.

Before young people leave school, they should learn skills that will be useful in day to day life in their communities; for example, shopping and going on buses.

Adult services need to get more involved before people leave school so that young people can find out more about the services they will be using in the future.

Many Agencies help young people when leaving school (schools, Connexions and other Careers Services, social services, doctors). One agency needs to be in charge of making them work together better.

In England, Children's Trusts are a new way of helping children and young people. They should help services to work together better.

What might need to be done to help people get jobs?

Disabled people should be able to get a place on ordinary training and employment schemes.



Personal Advisors and Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs) who work for Jobcentre Plus and Jobs and Benefits Centres need to think more about:

- what support people with learning difficulties need in jobs. They should believe that they can work with help.
- what work tasks people want to do
- what work places would be best for them
- paying specialist agencies to give help if they themselves cannot.

Ordinary training schemes do not give good teaching and do not support people with learning difficulties well in the job.

Ordinary training and job schemes like New Deal need to help all people with disabilities.

The Government needs to pay for all of supported employment. Some people with learning difficulties need help from supported employment. Government services for disabled people to get jobs, like WORKSTEP, Employment Support and Access to Work, do not pay for all of supported employment.

Personal Advisors, WORKSTEP, Employment Support and other staff need more training about working with people with learning difficulties and supported employment.

Day centres need to work more with supported employment agencies and other job services so that people in day centres can get more jobs.

Some WORKSTEP and Employment Support services do help people with learning difficulties well, arranging for them to have job coaches. Others should do the same.



Local authorities, the National Health Service and Government need to give more people with disabilities jobs. Politicians need to make this happen in government departments as a good example to other employers.

Welfare benefits and tax credits are difficult to understand and people worry:

- that they will be worse off if they get a job
- that if they lose their job they will not get their benefit back.

These worries stop people getting jobs, even if they are false.

People should have more help with information about benefits.

People should be able to get good advice and support in all parts of the UK. Some areas are better than others.

It will help more people worry less if the government:

- lets people go back to benefit easily if their job does not work out
- finds a way for people to earn money and lose their benefit more slowly so that they are better off
- only takes people's benefit away when they are earning enough
- lets people get paid support and Working Tax Credit when they work only a few hours.



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The report and this briefing was written by:

Dr. Stephen Beyer

Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities, Cardiff University

Dr. Pauline Banks

Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research, Glasgow University

Professor Roy McConkey

School of Nursing, Ulster University

Edyth Dunlop

Northern Ireland Union for Supported Employment

The report was edited by EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program.

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The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities
Sea Containers House
20 Upper Ground
London
SE1 9QB

Tel: 020 7803 1100

Fax: 020 7803 1111

Email: fpld@fpld.org.uk

www.learningdisabilities.org.uk

Registered charity number 801130