



Work and Learning Disability Research

Background



Mencap gave the National Development Team for Inclusion some money to do some research to understand more about work and learning disability.



They wanted to find out what is important to people with a learning disability when it comes to work.



They wanted to find out what makes it hard for people with a learning disability to find or keep a job.



They wanted to speak to employers to find out what would help them to employ more people with a learning disability.



The research will help with Mencap's work supporting people with employment and campaigning.



Other research found that only 5% of people with a learning disability in the UK have a paid job (NHS Digital, 2021) even though more people with a learning disability would like one.



People with a learning disability have the right to get a job if they want one, and to receive equal opportunities while at work.

What did we do?



The research team from NDTi worked with a **Research Working Group**. This is a group of nine people with learning disabilities who are interested in the topic of work.

The group met 6 times and they gave ideas at each stage of the research.

The different parts of the research were:



Focus groups and interviews with people with a learning disability.

We asked them what their perfect job would be and why.



We also did a **'snakes and ladders' exercise**. We asked about the 'ladders' (the things that help people to get or do the job they want) and 'snakes' (the things that get in the way of having or keeping the job they want).



In total 51 people took part in the focus groups and interviews from across Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

Interviews with employers

We wanted to better understand employer views towards employing people with a learning disability.

We spoke to people from 18 companies. 11 currently employ someone with a learning disability and 7 do not.

14 of the interviews included a **co-researcher** with a learning disability.



What did we find out from speaking to people with a learning disability?



People's perfect jobs were unique, based on their interests and passions.

42% of people who responded to the survey and 40% of people in the focus groups had a paid job.



Getting paid was important to people for many reasons. It helps them to pay their bills and live independently. It also allows them to save up or spend money on things they enjoy, such as holidays. Getting paid also makes people feel valued and respected.



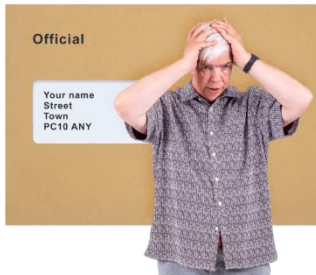
It was important to some people that they did something they were passionate about or that made a difference. Some people said they would do this work even if it was unpaid.



Other things that were important to people included helping other people, meeting people, getting a sense of achievement and learning new skills.

Barriers

We asked people what the 'snakes' were that made it difficult to get or stay in a job.



Lots of people said they were worried about the benefits system. People weren't sure what the rules were about working while on benefits and were worried about losing their benefits.



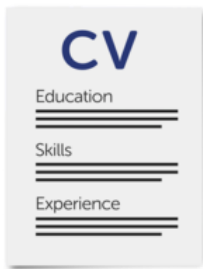
Sadly, lots of people had experienced poor treatment when looking for a job and whilst at work. Some people had been bullied or were treated differently from colleagues.

Most people who had experienced poor treatment at work decided to leave their job, as they didn't feel able to do anything to stop the poor treatment.



Some people did not have enough support to look for a job or did not receive the right support.

Sometimes there was a lack of jobs in the areas people live in, or poor transport meant that it was difficult to travel to work.



Sometimes people were not able to apply for jobs because they didn't have the right qualifications. Sometimes the application process was inaccessible.



Some people didn't have much confidence in themselves due to bad past experiences.

What we found out from speaking to employers

Barriers

Employers told us some of the things that could make it difficult to employ people with a learning disability.



Sometimes they were not able to employ someone because they did not have the right qualifications.

Some employers did not think they had suitable roles for people with a learning disability.



Sometimes there were things at work that were not accessible, like computer systems or the building.



There was a low level of training and awareness about learning disability. This meant that employers could be scared about doing or saying the wrong thing. Sometimes their colleagues showed prejudice towards people with a learning disability.



Sometimes employers were worried that it would cost too much to employ someone with a learning disability, because they might need extra support. However, the employers who had already hired someone with a learning disability said that the extra costs were small.



Some employers found it difficult to understand the Equality Act and had trouble with the Access to Work scheme.

What works?



Employers who already employ someone with a learning disability told us what worked well in their organisation.

Some make applying for jobs more accessible, for example being flexible about qualifications.

They allowed people to do a work trial rather than a basic interview.



Once people with a learning disability started working, it was important to have good communication. This means asking the person what they need. Other ways of supporting people included flexible working hours, prompt cards and travel training.



They thought it was important that the supervisors get training and support about working with someone with a learning disability.

Working with good employment support services could help employers to find the right people.



Some employers offered supported internships or inclusive apprenticeships as a way for people to join the organisation. These can lead on to paid employment for people.

It is important to find the right role that fits with someone's strengths.

What makes employers want to employ more people with a learning disability



Employers thought that more knowledge and awareness about learning disabilities was needed.



They wanted to hear more ‘success stories’ about people with a learning disability at work.

They wanted to know how it could help their business, for example helping with a shortage of workers.



Hiring people with a learning disability could make their team more inclusive. There were other benefits to their teams, for example new ideas and positivity.

Some employers felt that employing people with a learning disability was the right thing to do.



Some employers thought that more funding would help them to employ more people with a learning disability. Others thought that funding would not make a difference because it's not about money.



Some organisations thought that government policy or expectations from their customers would help them to be more inclusive.

Recommendations



Hearing from people with a learning disability and employers about what needs to change when it comes to employment, we have made some recommendations.



1. Organisations should have training in learning disability awareness, and this should be delivered with people with a learning disability.



2. Share positive stories about people with a learning disability at work. Tell organisations about how employing people with a learning disability can help their business.



3. Use the findings from this research to campaign about the benefit system.



4. Make sure that employment support is available across all areas of the UK.



5. Offer more supported internships across the UK.



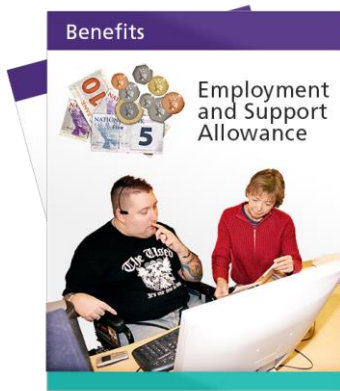
6. Remember to provide support to the employer as well as the individual.



7. Work with organisations to make workplaces more accessible.



8. Encourage people with a learning disability to be ambitious when it comes to work and their goals.



9. Make sure that people with a learning disability have the correct information about work and benefits.



10. People with a learning disability should get information about what discrimination at work is and what to do if this happens to them.

Glossary



Co-researcher – someone in the research team who has experience of the topic through their own life. For this project, this means someone who has a learning disability.



Focus groups – this is where a group of people meet to talk about a topic, and a researcher asks them some questions.



Inclusive apprenticeships – an apprenticeship is a job that gives people training at the same time. An inclusive apprenticeship is designed to be accessible for disabled people.



Research Working Group – a group of people who give advice on the research.



Supported internships – a work placement for young people with additional needs, where they get support from a job coach.

