

NDTi Insights give you the most important bits of learning from a piece of work by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi). We aim to make them quick to read; they point to more detailed materials for those who want more information.

# Commissioning Employment Supports

## Who should read this?

This has been written mainly for local authority and NHS commissioners and planners who work with people with learning disabilities and mental health problems. It offers an introduction to common commissioning issues and practice based actions.

## Background

Supporting people with mental health problems and/or with learning disabilities into paid work has been a national priority for successive governments. In most parts of the country, some public funds are invested in services designed to help this happen. The evidence is that these services do not always achieve the desired outcomes.

This Insights summarises the learning from NDTi's work on this topic, including an eighteen month programme in Yorkshire and Humberside that aimed to support the development high quality local commissioning strategies for the employment of people with learning disabilities and mental health problems.

## Purpose of Report

This Insights summarises the evidence as to why there needs to be a more structured and evidence based approach to commissioning employment support services if we are to achieve better outcomes (people in paid work) and value for money from public services.

## Plain English summary

The NDTi has been working with people locally who plan and provide help for people to get and keep jobs. In many places local support to get a job is not helping many people get paid work. More people want jobs than are getting help to find one. A major problem is how employment services are commissioned (planned and paid for). Some of the support offered is unlikely to help people get jobs. The NDTi has been helping local people plan how to do all this better.

## Main findings

The NDTi has been working with local authorities within Yorkshire and Humberside and beyond to understand and support what makes good commissioning and delivery strategies for specialist employment supports (services) for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems. Our work has highlighted that while the commissioning of high quality, effective local employment supports is possible, some very significant barriers remain in place, these include:

- An overall weakness in the planning and commissioning process, including not having all the right people around the table to plan services, not having an understanding of the business case for employment, increasingly a lack of commissioners with time and knowledge of best practice and a lack of effective oversight by partnership boards or other planning structures.
- Many commissioners having limited understanding of what style of employment supports are proven to deliver real employment outcomes (jobs). As a result, scarce resources are being invested in employment preparation programmes and work experiences whose success is measured in terms of the number of people participating rather than the number of people gaining and maintaining real jobs.
- Current commissioning strategies are not doing enough to expand the market of support. In many areas there remains an over reliance on one or two, not always successful, employment projects. Proven providers from elsewhere have not been encouraged to come into the area and local providers of other types of service not been encouraged to think about their possible role in supporting employment. As a result, resources remain committed to non-employment focused services such as day centres.



## Further NDTi Insights:

Also available in our Insights series is:

[Commissioning services for people with learning disabilities who challenge services](#)

Other Insights being published soon will cover:

Age Equality

Mental Health wellbeing

<http://www.ndti.org.uk/publications/ndti-insights/>

For more information, please contact Bill Love at the NDTi for an informal discussion at [Bill.love@ndti.org.uk](mailto:Bill.love@ndti.org.uk)

Further information about the NDTi is available at [www.ndti.org.uk](http://www.ndti.org.uk)

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## Main findings – continued

- Limitations in employment support are also restricting the type of employment people are gaining. For example, there is limited building of capacity for delivering self-employment
- While the numbers are slowly increasing, little is being done to encourage the use personal budgets (in whatever form) to self commission employment support.

## Conclusions and key messages

Where progress is being made there are a number of common planning and commissioning activities:

- Starting by developing a business case for employment that clearly shows a link between investment in employment supports and the potential for long term saving, alongside knowledge of best practice (variations of the supported employment, IPS or 'place and train' models) to inform and encourage local planners
- Engaging the right people in the planning process including the leads from education, health, children and young people, transitions, personalisation, the providers of national employment support programmes, economic/business development and the local business community. Using this engagement to, for example, identify local pathways, braid funding and minimise duplication
- Setting the type of challenging targets that really drive change, for example the authority who want to see 70% of young people coming out of transition into employment
- Commissioners actively working with the range of current and potential local providers to consider possible roles for them in the provision of employment supports , for example challenging local residential and domiciliary agencies to offer long-term employment maintenance as part of their wider day to day support role
- Understanding and using the potential of personal budgets as both a way of individuals commissioning and controlling their own employment supports and to widen the range of employment support providers.
- Ensuring that oversight groups like Partnership Boards, have enough knowledge of best practice to enable them to effectively review block and individual commissioning outcomes. This can be helped by such boards including people with learning disabilities or mental health problems who have successfully gained and maintained employment.