

Research outcomes for the Engage to Change study



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Stephen Beyer, Elisa Vigna, Andrea Meek, Jacob Meighan

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Introduction

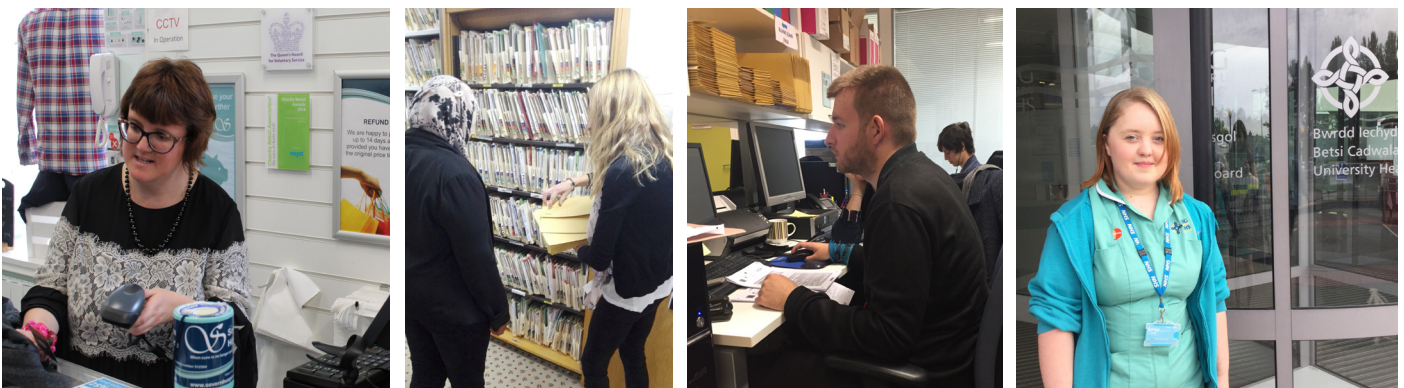
There is strong evidence to show that employment for people with learning disability and/or autism is a challenge.

The level of employment for people with a learning disability and/or autism in the United Kingdom is low; in England 6% of people with learning disabilities are employed and 16% of people with autism are in full-time jobs.

In Wales the employment rate of people with a learning disability is not reported, but it is likely to be similar to England.

The Engage to Change project is a five year project running in Wales, aiming to challenge unemployment for young people with a learning disability, a learning difficulty and/or Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

The project was designed for young people aged 16-25 who are NEET (not in education, employment and training) or are at risk of becoming NEET.



The consortium delivering the Engage to Change intervention is made up of the following partner organisations:

- **Learning Disability Wales**, project lead, is the umbrella organization for learning disability organisations in Wales, coordinating partners and advertising the project.
- **ELITE Supported Employment Agency**, delivering specialist support to young people and employers in South and Mid Wales.
- **Agoriad Cyf**, delivering specialist support to young people and employers in North and Mid Wales.
- **All Wales People First**, representing the unique voice of people with a learning disability and autism in Wales, is advising and providing Employment Ambassadors to promote employment awareness among young people.
- **National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH)** at Cardiff University, is the independent evaluator of the project, ensuring the project is influencing policy makers and create a legacy for the project.

The project is being funded by The Big Lottery Fund's Getting Ahead 2 grant in partnership with the Welsh Government to the amount of £10 million.

The funding includes the delivery of specialist job coaching support to 1,000 young people in ordinary work places and it provides support to 800 employers over the five years.

The Engage to Change project provides bespoke support through the following activities:

1 Vocational profiling

An Employment Advisor gets to know the young person, to establish their abilities, skills and preferences. In this phase, the young person might be given the opportunity to do a job tester to try a job they might like.

2 Job finding

Searching for job matching individual preferences and abilities.

3 Job analysis and placement

The job/tasks and the workplace is analysed, to see if this is appropriate for the young person. Some elements of job carving may be required in order to personalise some of the tasks for the perspective employee, maintaining employer's standard of work.

4 Job training

The job is broken down and the person learns the job in the workplace, with adequate support from a skilled employment trainer.

5 Ongoing support

Including follow-up review and ongoing support for change of tasks.

The Engage to Change study has reached the end of its third year, delivering important outcomes for young people with a learning disability/ learning difficulty and/or autism.

In this report we analyse the outcomes reported by young people and their families, to highlight strengths and address weaknesses and to ensure the project legacy meets expectations.

Meaningful quotes have been reported to support each topic and are identifiable with an abbreviation and a number:

- **YP:** quotes from young people
- **P:** quotes from parent/carer
- **Panel:** quotes from a young person from the panel sample, recruited at referral.

The 10% sample

Data are based on interviews with young people and their family which were randomly selected among the ones reaching job placement or paid employment stage in the project.

They represent the 10% of young people and to date 34 young people and 33 carers/parents have been interviewed. 25 are male and 9 are female.

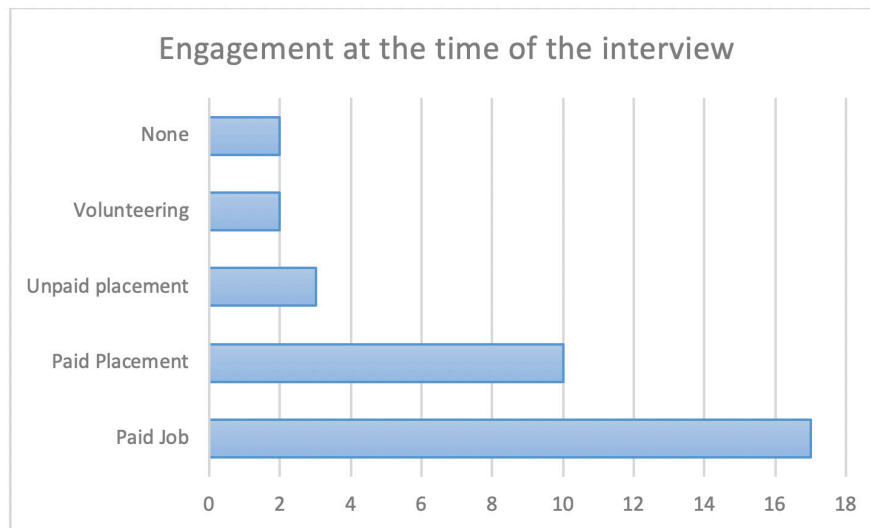


Figure 1: Employment type

Of these 34 young people, 17 are in paid employment, 10 in paid placement, 3 in unpaid placement, 2 in volunteering position and 2 no longer engaged with any form of employment (Figure 1).

Young people taking part into the research took on a number of roles, including placement in retail, administration, catering, cleaning, farming and factory work. The following table describes the type of placements or jobs that people from the 10% sample were engaged with at the time of the interview (Table 1).

	Paid Employment	Paid Placement	Unpaid Placement	Volunteering	Not engaged
Administrative	2	2		1	
Care Assistant	1				
Catering			1		
Cleaning	1	1			
Driver	1				
Factory worker	1				
Farming	1				
Gardening/handy man	1	2			
IT					1
Retail	6	5	2	1	1
Teaching/coaching	2				
Warehouse operative	1				
Total	17	10	3	2	2

Table 1: Placement/Job description

Panel sample

This report takes into consideration the contribution from the Panel sample, composed of 10 people engaged soon after referral and followed along their experience within Engage to Change.

Panel participants are randomly selected from the referrals received during the previous quarter and replaced if they leave the project. At any one time there will be 10 participants in the Panel study.

This report includes quotes from the Panel study, for a total of 11 young people (one left the project and has been replaced) and includes 17 interviews over their period in the project. Eleven interviews were collected after referral, 6 after 6-8 months from the first interview. One participant in the panel study was replaced because he left the project after the first interview.

On the first interview, 6 of the 11 young people interviewed received a referral visit before our first interview, 3 were already engaged in a paid placement, 1 in an unpaid placement and 1 was about to start employment.

The second cycle of interview is still ongoing, but two of the young people who had been in a paid placement and one young person in an unpaid placement are approaching the end of the employment opportunity.

One person is now engaged in a paid placement and one is no longer engaged in any activity. The second round of interviews is due to be completed in the next 2 months and a third interview will take place shortly for some young people at a late stage in their journey through the project.

Table 2 shows the progression of young people into the Engage to Change Project and it gives an idea of what job the young person wanted to do during the first interview and an idea of how many hours they wanted to work.

ID	What job they would like to do?	How many hours?	Interview T1	Interview T2	Interview T3
Panel1	Gardening or Retail	16-20	Referral	left E2C	left E2C
Panel2	Office work or kitchen assistant	16-20	Referral	n/a	n/a
Panel3	Working outside, work with animals.	31-35	Paid Placement agreed - Retail Assistant	Paid Placement - Retail Assistant	n/a
Panel4	Retail, stacking shelves.	16-20	Unpaid placement - Admin Assistant	Unpaid placement - Admin Assistant	n/a
Panel5	Security, police force.	2 hours a week to start	Referral	Unpaid placement charity, now disengaged	n/a
Panel6	Café, tills or something with cars or dog grooming	16-24 hours per week, 3 days	Referral	Nothing from Engage to change - waiting list - Volunteering	n/a
Panel7	Office work	16-20	Paid Placement - IT assistant	Paid Placement - IT assistant	n/a
Panel8	Construction, working on train tracks	31-35	Referral	Paid Placement - Office Assistant	n/a
Panel9	Factory work, security work, stacking shelves	DK	Referral	n/a	n/a
Panel 10	Warehouse or working with animals	40 hours plus overtime on weekends.	Starting FT employment in a warehouse	n/a	n/a
Panel 11	In a warehouse or photography	Any	Paid placement - recycling business	n/a	n/a

Table 2: Panel summary of jobs and conditions required as people progress through the project

Diagnosis

Table 3 illustrates young people's diagnosis as reported to the Job Coach at the referral stage and crossed checked with what was reported by the carer. There are similar proportions of young people with autism, learning disability and learning difficulty in the 10% and the Panel samples.

	10% Sample	Panel
ASD	13	2
ASD and Learning Disability	1	3
ASD and Learning Difficulty	6	1
Learning Disability	11	4
Learning Difficulty	3	1

Table 3: Diagnosis people in the sample

Welsh areas

Individuals received the help of Elite or Agoriad Supported Employment providers, depending on the area they are living in, with a total of 26 supported by Elite and 8 supported by Agoriad. The areas people lived are described in Table 4.

Elite	10% study	Panel	Agoriad	10% study	Panel
Blaenau Gwent	2	1	Anglesey	2	0
Bridgend	0	1	Ceredigion North	0	0
Caerphilly	4	0	Conwy	1	0
Cardiff	3	0	Denbighshire	1	0
Carmarthenshire	4	1	Flintshire	0	1
Merthyr Tydfil	1	0	Gwynedd	4	0
Monmouthshire	1	0	Powys (North)	0	0
Neath Port Talbot	2	1	Wrexham	0	0
Newport	0	0			
Pembrokeshire	0	0			
Powys (South)	0	0			
Rhondda Cynon Taf	5	2			
Swansea	2	1			
Torfaen	1	1			
Vale of Glamorgan	1	0			
TOTAL	26	8		8	1

Table 4: Areas of origin of those people interviewed

Individual schooling background

The majority of young people taking part in our research went to a College of Further Education or Residential College, two attended University and one did not have further education after school (Table 5).

	10% Sample	Panel
FE college	28	9
Residential FE college	3	0
Higher Education	2	0
Nothing	0	1

Table 5: Education after leaving school

Results

Confidence, independence and purpose in life: the outcomes of Engage to Change after a placement or employment

Almost every young person and every carer reported increase of confidence as the main outcome from the Engage to Change, explained here by the young person.

Young person 10% sample (YP) 34:

"I am more confident in starting a new placement. My confidence wasn't good when I first started, but now I am a new man."

A young man explained how he settled into his paid placement over the six months. At first nervousness about the unknown was his main feeling, but gradually he felt more confident, he learnt new skills, discipline and benefited hugely from having a working routine.

Young person 10% sample (YP) 18:

"I have started a placement at X shop, it was suppose to be for three months but it was extended to six months. I was nervous going in, but gradually you get more used to it, you gradually understand how it works and you gradually get into a routine."

"Both placements were really enjoyable, because I met people, made new friends, and also I have learnt a lot of things like routine, discipline ... there are so many other different feelings at work."

Young people felt that the employment experience has helped them with their social skills. Some reported that they were more confident in talking to people, they were not afraid to ask for help or to offer help to customers of the business they are working for.

"I have become more confident in the respect that if I've got something to say I will say it. I didn't want to be interacting with people before."

Young person 10% sample (YP) 9

Being in a placement or employment has given them a purpose in life to get up in the morning, willing to go to work. It has given them a routine, where days are not all the same as they were before, when they were spending their days at home without an occupation.

Young person 10% sample (YP) 26:

"It structured my day, it means I am not stuck here all day or at my dad's. Obviously I am earning money, I don't have to ask to my parents for money for drinks and all that."

Earning money was considered to be an important outcome as it was giving people independence and the ability to contribute to family expenses and people can afford to buy goods and services, the same as everybody else in the community.

**Parent 10%
sample (P) 3:**

"She is happy, we are happy that she is not stuck in a house, otherwise X would be stuck in her bedroom listening to music and bouncing on her bed. She is part of the community as well and she is safe."

Employment is giving the young people the status of active member of the society and the community. Some parents reported that they were happy to know their young people were safe in the workplace. A young man explained his satisfaction when telling everyone that he was now employed; he feels more independent in the workplace and in the way he was managing his relationship.

Young person 10% sample (YP) 15:

"One thing is that I am employed, so if people ask I can say "yes"! I am more confident in myself, starting a new life, and I am more independent in some things.

"I still need transport from my parents which is a little embarrassing to say but, I have become more independent in the job, doing stuff and I don't mean just in work but socially, and I do help around the house."

The Engage to Change project helped to develop working skills that the young person may not have had the opportunity to practice before the project, a positive outcome.

Parent 10% sample (P) 1:

"Where this Engage to Change has helped is that she has got more confidence talking over the phone. She still needs a bit of support, but she has confidence to try. She blossomed at the local shop, you know, dealing with customers, dealing with credit card payments that she would never have looked at."

When the Job Coach asked the young people what job they wanted, some were not sure, or had unrealistic aspirations. This was mainly due to their lack of experience of employment. The Engage to Change project supported young people by giving them employment options for what they wanted to do, increasing their confidence while trying a new experience.

Panel sample YP (Panel) 4:

"They gave me more confidence to start where I am right now, because I remember I wasn't really sure this is what I wanted to do. I was really shy, but I feel that this is where I belong. I am used to meeting people, especially people who I don't know, they come to say hello, and it is very nice. Other support me like knowing what to say and how to say it, and knowing what to do, it helped a lot, because when I don't know what to do, I am often nervous to ask, but now I just ask!"

Travel training

Travel can be a real obstacle to employment, if a person cannot travel independently, this could hinder their ability to accept an employment opportunity. Six out of 33 received travel training by Engage to Change, the others were able to get to the placement independently with some route familiarisation activity, some relied on relatives to take them to work and some did not need any assistance with travel.

Many families reported travel training was offered to the young person and travel to the workplace was discussed with the young person and the family. Travelling independently is a step forward towards independence, but sometimes it is not the most appropriate one to help with the individual needs.

Parent 10% sample (P) 2:

"Engage to Change helped him to find bus timetable, he was able to travel independently before. Sometimes he asks me to pick him up. He does not like to be late or early, he likes to be spot on. It is easier to take him by car, because of his need of timekeeping".

Independent travel means parents do not need to commit to accompanying their young person to work. This represents a great relief from that commitment and the acquired independence is an asset for families as explained by this parent.

Parent 10% sample (P) 29:

"Engage to Change helped with going on a bus, that is something new, something different and I don't need to take them on a bus, they can go there on their own".

Rural areas of Wales may hinder the ability of young people to travel to the workplace and limit furtherly the employment options for an individual. Parents are often obliged to take their young people to the workplace, activity that can limit their life and impose unwanted choices.

Parent 10% sample (P) 1:

"On paper they were able to access travel training, but there was not direct public transport to the place, a taxi is very expensive and they did not have the funding for a travel companion, so I had to take her."

Exploring non-conventional routes to employment

We asked families about the difficulties of finding and getting a job for young people. Parents reported several obstacles, such as communication barriers, barriers related to the disability, but also lack of qualifications and lack of previous work experience.

P20:

"Because of his autism he has communication difficulties [...] He needs to break things down, he does not pick things up quickly. He is very outgoing, so the autism is about his abilities, not his personality, he is very extrovert, but he refers to people and things that can be quite inappropriate. Part of the challenge is that, if he thinks something, he will say it!"

The interview process has been described as an obstacle, because of the communication issues and difficulties linked with social interactions. In some cases the interview represented a challenge for young people getting into employment.

Parent young people (P) 24:

"The first challenge is the recruitment process that is not at all "Autism friendly". She has got a job in (supermarket), after 20 odd applications in the last 4 years, she never had an interview. [...]"

"Her friends were getting jobs and she wasn't. They have a group interview, where they have to build a tower, which is not great if you have dyspraxia anyway. Even if she ticked she had a disability that was the process she had to go through. [...]"

"I raised the concern that group interviews are disadvantaging someone with Asperger's, who has declared their disability [...] Then, they offered her a permanent job. It should not go like that, but when I was there I tell them that she has such a strong work ethos, she has never been late in her placement, never missed it once. When you are measuring her against a tower of straws that is not fair."

Parent 24 explained how her daughter has a strong work ethos, characterised by punctuality and attendance. Standardised recruitment procedures represent a real disadvantage for young people with autism and learning disability, which should be taken into account when the employer receives the application form from a person with a disability, as described by this parent.

Parent 20 confirmed that their son would engage well with a work trial, where he could show what he can do, instead of going for the conventional recruitment route.

Parent 10% sample (P) 20:

"He won't present well in interviews, he won't engage in the convention an interview will require. If he does a trial, and work for a bit, he would be good at it, but he would not pass the initial interview."

Another parent feels their children will be disadvantaged not only from the recruitment process, but also from the common and popular misconceptions about autism. This parent feels getting to an interview stage would be impossible if the diagnosis of Autism was known by the employer, and that the employer would prefer employing somebody else.

Parent 10% sample (P) 14:

"The main challenge is the interview. If you ask him to go into a room with somebody he doesn't know, make polite chat, he could not do it. He can come across rude with somebody he does not know, he has a disability. People have misconceptions about autism, he doesn't even get to the interview stage if they would know about his autism beforehand, and he has his social awkwardness. When he has other 15 kids lined up, he does not have a chance."

The possibility to try a job with the Engage to Change in a 6 months placement can open new opportunities to non-conventional recruitment routes, because young people has already proven what they can do during their placement, as explained by this parent.

Parent 10% sample (P) 6:

"He has got in the position where he is now (one year into paid employment) without getting on a proper interview, which is good, because he has shown how good he is, and they got to know him."

Employers offering placements to the Engage to Change Project had the opportunity to get to know the young people, understanding the meaning of autism and learning disability and ultimately, benefiting from this experience. The support received by Engage to Change is central for a successful employment experience as described.

The support provided from Engage to Change

The support received from Engage to Change was generally rated positively by carers, as the majority stated they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the support they received. Satisfaction was rated on a 5-point scale questionnaire (1-very unsatisfied, 2-very satisfied, 3 don’t know, 4 satisfied, 5 very unsatisfied).

Vocational profiling and job coaching

Carers reported that **job coaching** was the right approach to get young people into work, but the time restriction of six months for paid placements has been considered by some parents to be a limit on the success of the project.

Parent 10% sample (P) 17:

“Everything Engage to Change says it does on the tin, it does. It is unbelievable, I am just gutted that only lasted six months.

“It has been fantastic, right from the very first day, they came to the house, spoke with me and my son. They were very respectful and they treated him like an adult. They asked what we wanted, they involved me with X’s permission, and that was important. They were very understanding. They came over again, I was not here, but they asked questions on the job my son wanted to do. They narrowed it down, because my son does not know what he wants to do. They helped with building a CV, they were looking for a job and when they have found it, they were amazing. They took it to the workplace and they backed off, when my son was ready. They were meeting him at the job and step back leaving him more independent. I just wished we had more of it.”

Engage to Change staff were described by the majority of carer respondents as supportive, in the way that they got to know the young person and treated the young person as an adult. The vocational profiling experience has been described by Parent 17 as crucial to get to know the young person and proceed with a good job match.

Engage to Change supported a young person who was experiencing difficulties in some of his volunteering positions. These difficulties were not experienced in the Engage to Change placement. According to Parent 20, the vocational profiling activity, and the initial work with the family and the young person, contributed to support the Job Coach to gather information about the young person. This was reported to be an important step by Parent 20 to select the right placement for the young person and to support him overcoming previous difficulties.

Parent 10% sample (P) 20:

“Engage to Change helped to tackle challenges in one of the placements (volunteering) my son already had, because they were having challenges that Engage to Change staff did not have.

The Engage to Change placement did not have the same issues, therefore [name of Supported Employment agency] helped him overcoming these challenges. [...] The placement has been selected very carefully, because they know him.”

Young people described the job coaching they received in positive terms as they were helped to develop a wider range of skills, leading them to greater independence. Young person 13 reported how he was supported in developing social skills, health and safety knowledge, and travel skills.

Parent 10% sample (P) 13:

"They (Job Coach and Supported Employment agency staff) showed me what to do, they introduced me to the team. They explained what to do in case of fire. I was helped with travel, the first two times they were travelling with me, so that I could do independently".

Engage to Change supported young people to enhance their confidence, by arranging mock interviews and by supporting young people during real interviews.

Young person (YP) 14:

"They helped me with the interview, they arranged a mock interview, it was useful. They've not been checking on me, but I didn't need help."

The Engage to Change Project helped by finding people a job and by helping them with the paperwork needed.

Young person (YP) 15:

"The biggest thing is helping me getting the job, I wouldn't have the job if it wasn't for them (Supported Employment agency). The second thing has been helping with the paperwork in the job."

Engage to Change supported young people to achieve several goals in life, as reported by Young Person 34. The Supported Employment agency helped with learning the job in the workplace, assisted with getting new qualifications and offered their help to overcome a situation of ill-health, while facilitating the return to work.

"They supported me with some of the work tasks, I had enough support in the workplace. They supported me with the work for the NVQ achievement. They helped me interacting with everybody else, working on my confidence. After 14 weeks I asked for more hours. I had an operation and I had to be off for 12 weeks and they supported me, making sure I was OK."

Young person (YP) 34

Carer liaison and satisfaction

We asked carers to rate their satisfaction with some elements of the Engage to Change provision (Figure 2).

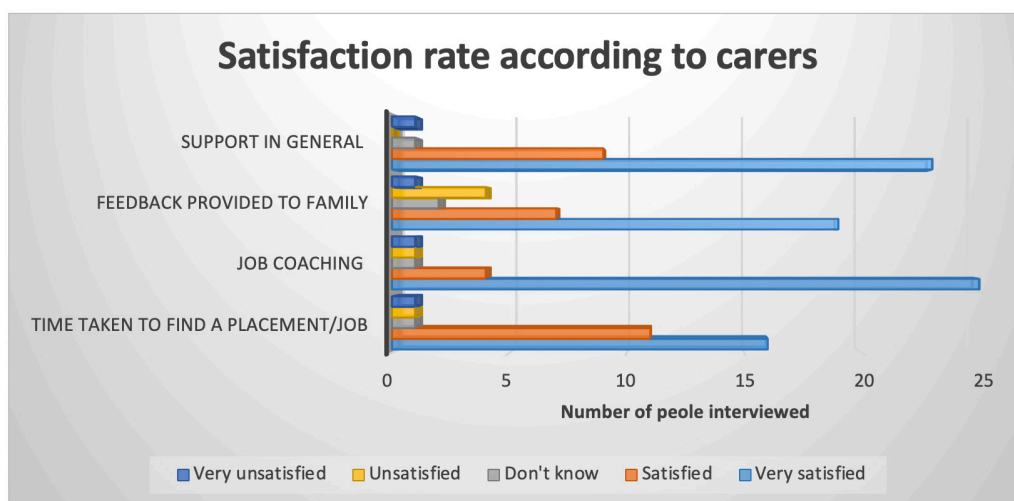


Figure 2: Carers' satisfaction rating for key elements of the service provided by Engage to Change

The majority of the carers contributing to the study were satisfied with the support their young person received and they were generally satisfied by the job coaching they received. High levels of satisfaction were reported for the time taken to find a placement or a job. Most of the parents felt that they had been listened to, they had been supported, and felt that finally someone was supporting them and their relative to move into a job.

Parent 10% sample (P) 17:

"I could text and ask them anything, or ring them, they would always come back to me. As a mum if I had any queries or if they had any queries, if something wasn't quite right they were talk to me, so that I could talk to X and they could talk to X... and so we were all on the same page. They have got to the point X did not need support, that was it, it was fabulous. Staff there absolutely wonderful, liaison, communication, can't rate it!"

The communication with the family was generally rated very well, with some exception where the family was unsatisfied with the feedback provided on their relative's progresses in work. One parent received misleading communication from the Supported Employment agency; there was a lack of formal feedback during the placement, but some emails reporting that the young person was doing a good job in his placement. Therefore, the parent assumed his son was doing well but then, when a similar job came up in the same organisation, the Supported Employment agency suggested not to apply for the position.

Parent 10% sample (P) 20:

"She [Job Coach] said he was fine, there has never been any formal feedback apart from that time when he was late to work and we addressed that. The emails were really good, I never had any doubts that he wasn't doing a good job, until I received an email saying the job was coming out, but they said that it wasn't worth for him to apply for it. He burst into tears, he was hysterical for about half an hour, because he loved going down there and he thought he would have had a job. That was a really difficult time as you can imagine [...] I was grateful for the opportunity but dissatisfied for what my son received".

The job match

The match between the job and the young person's interests and skills has been rated to be good or very good most of the time on a 5-point scale (Very Good, Good, Don't know, Bad, Very Bad).

Parent 10% sample (P) 21:

"The match is really good, it is up to X now to maintain it. He doesn't have good relationship, but it is up to X to make the effort, he is quite a shy person. The company is trying to understand X's interests to engage him in conversations."

33 young people out of 34 were enjoying their placements or jobs and they felt that they were performing well in their job. 29 people said the job was something they wanted to do, while some young people said that they never thought they would have been able to do that job. Other young people were not even aware of the existence of this type of job. A young man explained how trying a job has changed his opinion about that job, and how he is using his skills to do the work well.

Young person 10% sample (YP) 21:

"I did not want to do it, but then I like it now. Things make you change your mind, when I tried and I have found out that it's a great job. Money is good, using my mathematical skills, getting to know what I am good at."

Some young people felt that they were supported and praised by their co-worker(s), therefore, they were working hard to accomplish the task to the best of their ability.

"I like working there, friendly staff, they support me. I do a good job, I work hard looking after the place for them. I make sure everything is in its place, everything they need."

Young person 10% sample (YP) 10

The Supported Employment agency provided support to the company and to the young person to help the young person to develop social skills.

Young person 10% sample (P) 3:

"The biggest problem is socialising with people - I have no problem speaking to people, my problem is starting the conversation because I have a load of things going on in my head. Why should I approach them? They probably don't even want me to approach them, so why should I bother? Picking up on the cues is something I am dreadful at, so I relied on the Job Coach to be the stepping stone for that in work."

Employment provides a routine for young people and helps them to concentrate on the work they do.

**Young person
(YP) 11:**

"They helped me improve me! Before Engage to Change I was very distracted, now I have a routine to help me in work. I socialise better in work."

Most of the young people said that they were happy with the hours they were working, but 13 out of 34 said they would want to work more hours. A few young people complained that there was not enough to do in their placement.

For some young people the level of support was insufficient:

"The Job Coach showed me the job only once and that was it, she has not been supporting me."

**Young person
(YP) 20**

The job match has sometimes been tailored to the person's current needs, to help the young person settle into a job while developing their confidence. However, after the confidence issue has been addressed, sometimes the young person preferred to move on to do something else.

Parent 10% sample (P) 6:

"This placement in a factory environment is for his confidence. Now, ideally he would like to do landscaping gardening."

When the match has been rated as "good", the issues have generally been well addressed by the Supported Employment agency.

**Parent 10%
sample (P) 23:**

"I was quite pleased with the placement, [...] the issues with speed have been well addressed. X always wants to go to work, so I think it is positive."

When the match between the young person and the placement or job was not adequate, or the work was not challenging enough, the person's confidence was negatively affected.

Young person Panel 5:

"This placement put me off even more to be honest. Stacking up the books and having nothing to do for the rest of the shift. It wasn't challenging at all."

Improving the Engage to Change project

Waiting times and personnel turnover

Some young people felt that they had been left out by the project because they had been waiting to receive the Engage to Change input for a long time. Waiting meant that they had been unoccupied for a while and that they could not access any other course because they needed to remain “Not in Employment, Education or Training” (NEET) to access the Engage to Change Project. This was explained by one of our Panel sample members.

**Young person
Panel 8:**

“I was on their list in June and I started in December, I waited six months for this placement, but I had to wait and couldn’t access another company while I waited. I could have done another course to get me something, but I had to say no as I was waiting for Engage to Change.”

A Panel member, still on an extremely long waiting list at the second research interview, decided to take a placement with another project.

Young person Panel 6:

“I have not had anything from Engage to Change, still on waiting list. In July last year a lady came out and said we were 22nd on the list. Another lady came out on the 29th August and said they would be back in contact by the end of September, but no contact. I have been to do a work placement in (name of a business), but this was with [name of another project] [...] I wanted to try retail, did 12 weeks, I was stacking shelves. Wasn’t fussed on it. Couldn’t keep waiting for Engage to Change.”

Some concerns were raised on the quality of support provided by Engage to Change. The waiting time was judged by some to be too long, the Supported Employment agency’s expectations of people have been judged to be too high and the support provided has sometimes been thought to be inadequate.

Parent 10% sample (P) 32:

“The waiting time was very long and I had to initiate the contact and there was always an excuse why we had to wait. I was really patient and I’ve never lost my temper. I don’t think their vision and mission are realistic, I think they need to manage people’s expectations better. I am sorely disappointed with the mismatch between the claim and the reality. For six months they had full Access to Work grant, X had a Job Coach for two weeks and then a volunteer. I signed the (Access to Work) forms, I had to approve as I am his appointee. The Job Coach should be a skilled role, if you are putting a volunteer is like saying this is not a skilled role..... I think he would have benefited by a skilled Job Coach support, that’s my feeling.”

Some individuals were particularly dissatisfied because they experienced a turnover of staff. Some of the Job Coaches or Employment Advisors left the project, with some areas being particularly affected, while other staff were moved between areas to cover vacancies. This situation left parents and young people disappointed, not having continuity in the support they received.

Parent 10% sample (P) 23:

"I was really disappointed for the first six months because my son was with [name of the Job Coach]. It was like a stop-start situation, they (name of Job Coach and Employment Advisor) both left now, and for someone like my son... he needs continuity."

A young man explained that he had had a negative experience, where he had no placement but a volunteering job where he had experienced issues that were not addressed by Engage to Change. There was a lack of communication from Engage to Change staff, and several changes of staffing in the workplace, that affected him negatively.

Young person Panel 5:

"They put me in a volunteering job for two months, a second hand furniture shop, where they sell used goods for one day a week for four hours. I left because of issues with the staff, everyone changed, manager, everyone. I did not get along with them."

"We haven't heard from Engage to Change since then. First there was a lady, then (name) and now (name). They said there was nothing that they could do and we haven't heard from them since. I keep chasing them up, there is nothing, there is no follow on."

Nature of placement and suitability of placement

The majority of parents (27 out of 33), rated the match between the placement and the young person's interest to be "good" or "very good". However one of the families we interviewed reported that the placement was not suitable for their relative because of the frequency of the placement (once a month). The parent found another placement for the person but the support from the Engage to Change was inconsistent.

Parent 10% sample (P) 23:

"They found a placement that was two hours one week and then nothing for four weeks. I understand the labour market is what it is unfortunately, and that was depending on the employer, but this wasn't working."

"Through a friend I work with, we found a placement, X got paid quite well there, for 10 hours a week, but then it came to an end. It is me finding the placement, continuity is not there, therefore I complained. I said that this is not what it is on the tin, I complained to Engage to Change. They listened to the complaint another Job Coach has got involved and kicked in. They then got to know X, travel training, etc. I don't know about the outcomes, I haven't heard from them."

Several families argued that the project is investing in "young people, providing bespoke support, but that time is limited by the project and that the time allocated was not enough for all the effort and work provided to be translated into employment.

Parent 10% sample (P) 23:

"Every good project raises an expectation and a hope. It looks like you are only getting a chance (six months placement) and that's it. It is now down to us parents, sometimes I feel like giving up my job and running a business, so that I can give our children some employment. There's got to be more."

**Young person
10% (P) 3:**

"I would have liked to have had a few more opportunities to have another placement. Possibly longer so could have had the opportunity to explore avenues..."

Parent 10% (P) 24:

"I think 6 months sounds like a long time, but particularly if the job changes in the middle, some people might need a bit longer. I am not sure what the support is going to be after, they said to give them a call, but actually after the 6 months they will be busy with other people."

"A lot more time to help me, come up to see me. Instead no contact, I am really sorry about that. There was no looking for other opportunities after that."

**Young person
(P) 20**

Some respondents questioned whether the employers being targeted were the right ones. Others were unsure why, if a job was not offered after a paid placement through no fault of the young person, a further opportunity was not offered. On the occasion where a second placement was offered, a family respondent felt there was no real plan in place and felt that things were being done to placate Welsh Government.

Parent 10% sample (P) 17:

"Engage to Change? Too good to be true, what is the catch? X is now back to the job centre, it is just a shame that E2C only lasts six months. The shop where he did his placement did not take him because they could not afford to, but they wrote a nice reference."

Parent 10% sample (P) 14:

"[We need] more funding, more people, more workplaces, more businesses and companies to help kids, it needs to be bigger, and we need more of everything. They need to scale it up, more support from the Government."

Several young people and their families felt that they had not been supported by Engage to Change after the six months of paid placement had ended. They wondered what was planned for the young people who received input from the project.

Parent 10% sample (P) 2:

"After the end of placement, what is next? I rang them asking and they offered another service. X went on a waiting list for few months! The lady in charge seems OK, but there is no plan. I am cynical, as far as the Welsh Government is concerned he wasn't a NEET for a while, it seems they have targets to meet, tick the box."

:The good thing is that he has been on a work experience for 6 months. I don't know how this will look [on his CV], being a small employer serving people with disabilities, it would probably be better to have an experience with a bigger employer."

Confusion about the project and concern over feedback

Some families and young people reported that they were confused about the project even after meeting with the Supported Employment agency. They said they were unsure whether an employment outcome was guaranteed at the end of the project and what support would be in place after any placement ended.

Some felt more could have been done to keep the family informed on how any placement was progressing towards a job. Clearly this represents a communication problem with young people and families, but it is unclear whether the information was provided and not understood, or not provided.

Parent 10% sample (P) 25:

"[Name of Supported Employment agency] has given him a good confidence about himself, he was a bit shy and unsure of himself, hard to socialise with. We met the manager of the shop and he was comfortable there. [Name of Supported Employment Agency] came to the house to speak to us. They didn't explain at the time that this was a training programme - we thought he was going to get a job"

A parent thought there was a lack of formal feedback from the Supported Employment agency.

Parent 10% sample (P) 18:

"Written feedback, an email, something on paper on the progress, and describe what the steps are. More feedback generally on how she is doing. I have an idea on how she is doing, maybe an initial report and where the boundaries are. Is it a job for life, is there a contract?"

A parent reported a lack of clarity about the placement length as there was no mention of a six month period deadline. The young person thought he was doing a good job, instead he was asked to support the training of the next young person.

Parent 10% sample (P) 22:

"I think the bit about managing expectations for X, [...] there wasn't any mention of a cut off period at the end of 6 months so X was very much of the attitude that: 'I am going to go there and do my very best and I'll get more hours.' It came as a bit of a shock to him when they said that he'd done a very good job but he would be leaving in two weeks and could he help to train the person who was taking over from him."

Families could also be key to positively addressing some of the issues facing people, making good communication very important.

Parent 10% sample (P) 22:

"Better feedback would be helpful, [...] when I would speak with (agency) and ask how is he getting along they would say 'Fine, fine, fine' but then they said 'Oh we've been having this problem for the last three months' and you think well, I didn't need to hear it was fine if there was a bit of a problem and we could have perhaps worked that through, and they said that they were very pleased with him but he doesn't seem to be able to follow this, so I said let's try this... and they said 'Oh that's much better.'"

More courses and training opportunities

The majority of the people involved in the research study at the time of their placement/employment had not received any training in addition to on-the-job training from Engage to Change.

23 of the 34 people interviewed had not attended any additional course, 6 reported attending health and safety courses, 3 reported that they had attended small group courses to enhance their employability skills and 2 received a manual handling course (Figure 3).

Courses	Frequency
Health and Safety	6
Employment Skills	3
Manual Handling	2
No courses	23

Figure 3: Courses offered by Engage to Change

Engage to Change is a Supported Employment model which primarily offers job match and on-the-job training. The Supported Employment provider partners also offered training and qualification where it was relevant for a job outcome, as Figure 3 shows. However, some young people and families did report that it would be helpful to receive extra training to achieve independence, and suggested potential courses that they felt would have been helpful for Engage to Change to offer. Some of these suggestions might be relevant for an employment agency to consider, where others may be useful but better delivered by other organisations.

Parent 10% sample (P) 25:

"They should put on a confidence course, relaxation course for anxiety and for them to know how to come in some scenarios. If you look at X you would say there is nothing wrong with her, but in some situations people will look at her and think what is wrong with her? She is not bringing herself over for her age, she doesn't behave like a typical 20 year old (not always).

"Simple thing such as keeping the P60, using a card, dealing with matters such as providing identity documents for the bank or simply coping on a situation where a debit card was lost can be a real challenge for her."

Young person 10% sample (P) 30:

"One of them [Job Coach] was coming every week to see me and if I needed any help. It would have been good if they were coming in with a Universal Credit calculator, how to apply for it, it would have been quite beneficial."

Families' attitude towards paid employment, benefits and employer involvement

One family respondent admitted that they did not really mind having paid employment, because they were living on benefits, and therefore they were happy for their relative to be occupied with a volunteering activity rather than have no activity and poor personal outcomes.

Parent 10% sample (P) 25:

"If he was earning money for himself that would increase his self-respect so much more. The unpaid placement has been on for over nine months, they are prepared to have him there, but they can get someone 'norm' for that. If they are going to pay someone they are getting someone who doesn't have the challenges X has.

"[Supported Employment Agency name] is working on that, but for us what is really important is that he is busy. If there is a choice between unpaid placement continuing and no placement at all it will be the unpaid placement. We can manage with benefits, but we can't manage his mental health issues coming from not being busy."

This highlights a dilemma for the project which was set up to assist young people in fulfilling their aspiration to get a paid job. In some cases is it better to maintain a long-term unpaid placement to support a person's quality of life and positive mental health or should a paid job always be the priority?

Engage to Change: supporting young people to achieve their independence

The community impact of the Engage to Change seems to be growing over time, given the positive outcomes reported by young people, their family, their employers and their co-workers. Young people seem not to be afraid to communicate and interact with people, when it is part of their job.

**Young person
10% (YP) 9:** *"I have become more confident in the respect that if I've got something to say I will say it. I am not one for sitting at home, I didn't want to not be interacting with people."*

"[Engage to Change] has given me a good confidence boost, I feel better about myself. Now I would like a more quiet shop."

**Young person
10% (YP) 27**

Carers do seem to experience the change, reporting that their relatives are finally part of their community, thanks to the employment opportunity they have had. Young people attend a setting and meet people that are different from their family network.

Parent 10% sample (P) 2:

"He is a changed man. He went to school and he was in a bubble, he came back from school and he was in a bubble. He went to college and they brought them out of that bubble, now that he started working he is even more out of that bubble. Before, he would not interact with people but now he is getting on with people, laugh with them, years before he would go up to his bedroom, he would go upstairs, he wouldn't talk. He has just come out of his shell, he is a changed man."

Employment provides a routine, something for the person to look forward to. Young people have been developing important life skills, and earning a wage seems to be helping them to understand the value of money.

Parent 10% sample (P) 31:

"Feeling valued, having a structure. After school X has lost the structure in his time, you know getting up in the morning and having a purpose and seeing other people different from your family members."

Parent 10% sample (P) 5:

"It is giving him something to look forward to, it is giving him a purpose. It is giving him much more independence, he has his own bank card now, he can go out with friends when he needs to. He is on a cinema trip this afternoon."

Young person 10%
sample (P) 2:

"I know more about spending now, how to spend, I've learnt it".

One young person realised their difficulty in transferring their learning to other contexts, but Engage to Change helped them to gain confidence in their placement.

Young person (YP) 3:

"I was confident when I was doing the placements but a lot of the time with me it's like training a dog, you've got to keep doing it. The classic thing with autistic people is that the skills are non-transferable, you may be able to tell them that this is how you do it, and they may be able to do it in a mock situation, but get into the real thing and it's brain freeze!"

Young people felt contented and were looking at their future with confidence, loving what they did and knowing that they were successfully achieving something. Some increased their awareness of community networks around them.

Parent 10% sample (P) 31:

"It helped me become a better worker, better at socialising. I am happier with my life, more confident in my future, see people that I love to work with."

Young person
(YP) 16:

"I have more knowledge of the transport system around. Trying to keep a calm environment, and I can go and talk to someone about work."

Young people also reported positive feedback about their quality of life. They are generally satisfied with their health, achievement in life, personal relationship, feelings of safety and their standard of living. High rates of satisfaction were reported with future security and being part of the community, but with some young people still having some concerns about it (Figure 4).

Quality of Life area	Mean score	Most common score	Min score	Max score
Standard of Living	8.00	10	3	10
Health	8.00	10	5	10
Achievement	8.50	10	5	10
Personal relationships	8.59	10	5	10
Feeling safe	8.63	10	5	10
Being part of the community	7.97	10	3	10
Future	7.34	10	2	10
Life as a whole	8.20	10	4	10

A score of 10 represents "Complete Satisfaction" and 0 represents "No satisfaction at all".

Figure 4: Quality of life

Mental health impact

The support received from the Engage to Change project and the employment experience provided benefits for the young people's mental health. Parents described how frustration and boredom were factors in their son or daughter's mental health deterioration.

After the experience with Engage to Change, feeling of anxiety and depression seemed to be replaced by pride and self-respect at having a placement, of having something positive to do. One parent described their son being able to stop taking anxiety medication since they started an employment placement.

Parent 10% sample (P) 20:

"Very considerable (impact) on his mental health, he is getting quite frustrated and quite bored without a placement, his behaviour starts to deteriorate. When he went to the hospital for a routine appointment, he was telling everyone about his placement. If he would not have it, he would be more disabled than he is, the autism will take over, and he would be quite depressed and anxious. Since he has been in this placement he has come off his anxiety medication."

Quality of life and mental health has improved significantly for some, and young people are generally more positive than before.

"It has improved his mental health immensely. It has improved his quality of life, he now understands the value of money, he is working for it, he is earning it. [...] He is a lot more positive than he used to be."

P14

A parent reported how the right match hugely improved their son's mental health.

Parent 10% sample (P) 20:

"Had a great impact on his mental health. He was mentally very unwell, he was depressed very badly and he couldn't cope with anything, so he sat at home for a bit and I tried to get him out."

Once he started in [name of company] he seemed to be a whole lot better because it was exactly what he wanted to do. They got him out of his depression and they were very proud of him. They did a little programme about him there about how sport can help you with mental health issues. [...] He is doing exactly what he wants to do, he is very good."

Carer's view changes

Carers were sometimes aware of their son or daughter's potential, but seeing this potential realised through work really made them proud. Young people showed that they could keep a job and be mature enough to take their responsibilities.

Parent 10% sample (P) 14:

"He has proved to me that actually he can stick at something, even if it is going wrong, he has proved to me that he can stick at it, that he wants to work, he want to get somewhere. He kept going back, he has matured, he has grown, I am so proud of him."

Parent 10% sample (P) 20:

"I think X is X, he is my son, he is who he is, but he is taking his responsibilities, he does that, I am really proud of him for doing that. His skills, his independence."

The employment experience helped some parents to understand exactly what a young person can do and what their limits are.

"I think he is amazing, that he can do anything, but I think that having seen him in the workplace, it gives you a triangulation of how accurate it is, my view, and how actually he is in the workplace."

Parent 10% sample (P) 31

"Yes, he is amazing, but there are other aspects, there are things he can do, but there are others he can't do. I am less likely to push him into something he can't do."

Conclusion

Overall, Engage to Change is a successful project from the viewpoint of young people and their families, delivering important outcomes for young people with learning disabilities and/or autism.

The support received from the Engage to Change project and the employment experience provided benefits for the young people's mental health. Parents described how frustration and boredom were factors in their son or daughter's mental health deterioration.

After the experience with Engage to Change, feeling of anxiety and depression seemed to be replaced by pride and self-respect at having a placement, of having something positive to do. One parent described their son being able to stop taking anxiety medication since they started an employment placement.

The main personal outcomes of the Engage to Change project are the independence and confidence of the young people, derived from the status of being employed.

This new status gives them purpose in life now and confidence for the future. Being employed means that young people have a routine to follow and a working context to practice their social skills.



In employment new skills can be learned and well-known ones can be consolidated, with the additional benefit of being paid for the work young people do. Mental health and quality of life is improving for young people because of being employed. In general employment tackles a number of issues such as social isolation, mental health, poverty and dependency.

Several barriers were highlighted by young people and their families, mainly linked to the recruitment process:

- 1** communication and social relationships are often a problem for the young person, making the job interview process extremely hard to cope with.
- 2** the lack of qualifications and lack of work experience can be also detrimental to the young person's success in being selected for a job, and preventing them getting to the interview stage.
- 3** lack of timely, accessible public transport can be a barrier to people working, even when jobs and job support are available.
- 4** common misconceptions about autism and learning disability can prevent an employer from shortlisting a person.

The Engage to Change project has challenged all of these barriers, supporting young people during the interview process with mock interviews or by supporting during interviews with employers.

The project provides opportunities to try non-conventional recruitment routes, such as proving personal abilities and work ethic during any placements created by the project. Furthermore the Vocational Profiling process helped Engage to Change staff to focus on what young people can do, and what they want to do, in order to create a good match to a job, despite any lack of qualification and/or experience.

Engage to Change staff also initiated a change of culture in the way young people with disabilities are viewed by employers and their workers, by increasing their awareness around learning disability and autism. Engage to Change staff have had to deal sensitively with some significant dilemmas along the way.

The project was set up to assist young people in fulfilling their aspiration to get a paid job. In some cases, it has seemed better to support long-term unpaid placements of volunteering to support a person's quality of life and to promote positive mental health.

These decisions have had to be made with the person and their family and seem generally to be supported by the families concerned. It demonstrates the care needed in balancing overall project objectives and effective use of resources with the needs of individual people.

Despite the good work in finding placements and paid jobs, feedback suggests that Engage to Change should work more with employers, targeting those who are able to offer a placement and sustain it into a paid job after the placement ends.

One can only imagine the frustration experienced by those who are ending a paid placement, not being offered a job, and being asked to train a new person to take their placement.

Engage to Change needs to review its practice if employers offer sequential paid placements without offering paid jobs to ensure these employers offer the best option for development young people. Paid placements should have strong possibilities of leading to a paid job.

Another obstacle is travelling to the workplace, which was well addressed through travel training and always on offer through Engage to Change.

The ability of travelling independently increases individual independence and offers relief for parents of any commitment to take their son or daughter to work. However, in some areas of Wales, the benefits of travel training could not be enjoyed by some because of the lack of public transport to get to work.

Travel can still be a barrier for the young person and their family and might be an obstacle to some employment opportunities or the individual choice of staying in a job.

There is a high satisfaction rate for the project, linked with the vocational profiling procedure and the individualised approach to employment, which facilitate a good match between work placements and jobs and personal skills and interests.

The match was also based on individual needs when, for instance, Job Coaches opted to find them a repetitive job to increase a young person's confidence. In the long term, what was initially a good match could become a mismatch, because the young person has grown in confidence and is willing to try something different.

This is something that should be taken into account by the project, by ensuring the fit between person and job is reviewed during any placement, and jobs are adapted to meet emerging capacities and needs transforming a successful employment outcome into outstanding practice.

Job coaching was reported to be good, Job Coaches being well respected and families acknowledging the skill shown in helping their son or daughter to develop. Some families felt that their experience of job coaching didn't meet their expectation, hindering their young person's success in employment. This underlines the need for Engage to Change to keep under review the adequacy of job coaching hours delivered and skill of Job Coaches to meet any challenges faced by young people.



Many young people reported that their quality of life improved considerably with work and some reported that they would increase the hours they are working if they could. This underlines the fact that young people are becoming more confident workers and that they could contribute more to the employer's business.

The issue of career development for those in paid work has not had significant attention within the project as it has battled to deliver on its core contracted outcomes. It is clear that there is interest in career development and ensuring that this is an essential element of provision in the future should be part of what Engage to Change argues for as a part of any policy change legacy.

Many people benefited from the Engage to Change project. Some have concerns over the length of time that they had to wait before accessing the support. Some recognised that there have been delays due to Engage to Change staff turnover.

The Engage to Change project has identified this as a problem and have moved to provide positive transitional services to people, offering employability courses or job clubs, to help young people to prepare for work while on the waiting list.

Some respondents did feel that they had given up other opportunities waiting for Engage to Change services to begin, noting that they had to remain NEET to be eligible, and that they might have made other decisions if they had known how long the wait would be.

More information on local waiting times, and on what is available from these transitional services, will need to be made available to clients, in order to inform them of the choice they are making.

The Engage to Change project needs to examine the information they are providing to young people and their families and how key messages are delivered to them. Feedback here suggests that young people and families are not always clear on what it is being provided and for how long.

There is a proportion of young people who completed paid placements with the Engage to Change project, but do not get a paid job at the end of it. It is clear that this is not always because of a poor job match or lack of worker skill, with some employers having financial or organisational reasons for not offering the young person a paid job.

Some families and young people are surprised that there is no opportunity for further job match and job finding for the young person within Engage to Change. It is difficult for them to accept that a young person who may have performed well in a placement, developed good employment skills and built valuable experience, would not be helped further to gain paid employment while newly referred people are.

The danger is that we are missing an opportunity for a subsequent direct placement into another paid job of a young person we know well, who is experienced and who has demonstrated commitment over a significant period, by prioritising new referrals.

The Engage to Change project and their job support delivery partners have welcomed the positive trends in delivery, but recognised that there have been some weaknesses in the delivery of the project in the first three years.

At the three year point the project re-profiled its delivery in agreement with its funders to address identified weaknesses and to implement appropriate measures and actions to deal with them. A more comprehensive reporting system was put in place manage delivery and to feed back to funders.

In response to disappointment for some participants that paid placements do not always lead to a job and that more than six months input may be needed, a range of Job Club activities have been implement to offer continued opportunities and career development.

There have also been greater consideration of alternative routes for progression to work for these people, including sign-posting to other providers, e-direction to volunteering, or paid work with other employers.

In the last 12 – 18 months, following re-profiling, there has been a change to the referral and assessment process with earlier better-off calculation's being completed to more effectively engage families in discussions about what a paid job could deliver. While waiting for job coaching support, young people are entering Job Clubs for positive development activities.

This report highlights the view of some families that employers need to be targeted to ensure sustainable employment is more readily available. An expansion of the Employer Engagement Team, and the additional support and opportunities provided via Job Clubs, is allowing a greater focus on sustainable jobs in year four of the project.

Some families reported being unclear about the extent of provision and whether multipole job trials were available. Again, the implementation of Job Clubs in the project allows for continued and more regular interaction with participants and carers, which makes managing expectations more achievable and also making it more likely that follow-on activities when a paid placement ends.

The report makes reference to a 'waiting list', this should now be an historical weakness in the delivery of the project as the timescales for referral and assessment have been restructured and regular attendance at Job Club allows for continued activity. This aids the process of ensuring a young person is work ready and better prepared for sustainable employment.

The implementation of Job Club activities, it is hoped, will enable a better job match and therefore a greater possibility of sustainable employment. These changes have already led to an increase in paid employment without use of paid placements with Employment Development Grants over the last 12 months, with permanent contracts that are not timebound reducing the risk of disappointment when a paid placement ends.



Contact us

02922510774
@ E2C@cardiff.ac.uk



Engage to Change,
Cardiff University,
Hadyn Ellis Building,
Maindy Road,
CF24 4HQ