

Engage to Change: the first four years

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Background

The Engage to Change project is a five-year national project funded through Welsh Government and the National Lottery Getting Ahead 2 Grant, to help young people with a learning disability, learning difficulty and/or Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) to get a paid job.

Led by Learning Disability Wales, it brings together Elite and Agoriad Cyf supported employment agencies to deliver job coaching, paid placements and paid jobs in ordinary workplaces.

Elite and Agoriad Cyf also deliver 3 DFN Project SEARCH internships, and 3 Supported Internship schemes, through the Engage to Change project.

They are supported by self-advocates from All Wales People First, through regular evaluation forums, and researched by the National Centre for Mental Health at Cardiff University.



Following the current Covid-19 pandemic, the project has been extended for a further 18 months. This report presents pre-pandemic findings.

Why Engage to Change is crucial for Wales

Only 5.1% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work[1] and the numbers for Wales are likely similar. Just 22% of adults with autism are in any kind of employment[2]. There is evidence that employment figures for people with ASC in Wales are lower still.[3] This is while 52.7% of people aged 16 to 64 with any type of disability in Great Britain, 81.3% of the general population, are in paid work.[4] It is in this context that Engage to Change is trying to demonstrate what can be done for young people when we get the model of support right.

People with a learning disability or autism face many challenges in finding, getting, learning and keeping a paid job. The outcome of having a learning disability will range greatly and so it is difficult to predict the result of a learning disability on learning and employment. People will, to a greater or lesser extent, have difficulty with reading and writing, understanding language, asking and responding to questions. They may have difficulty remembering and replicate complex tasks and may then find it hard to transfer tasks learned in a training environment to another real employment setting. People with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) also face common difficulties that impact on their employment opportunities. They may have specific communication styles which can impact situations and expectations from others, resulting in difficult social interactions. They may have difficulty coping with change and time management and need routine. People can find it difficult to concentrate and to focus on the most relevant information.

[1] NHS Digital 2021: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-social-care-outcomes-framework-ascof/england-2020-21>

[2] Office for National statistics 2020

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2020>

[3] Townsley R, Robinson C, Williams V, Beyer S and Christian-Jones, C. (2014) Research into Employment Outcomes for Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Cardiff Welsh Government.

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2021#main-points>

They can experience difficulty with stress and anxiety, often resulting from a lack of clear communication and accommodations.

However, none of this means that people cannot work. It means they need the correct form of support. We can see that, without widespread access to this support, the employment rates for our two key groups remain very low. Engage to Change aims to increase the employment rate of young people and support the transition to a more settled supporting system, supported by the existing literature on what works in getting people with a learning disability and/or ASC into work.

What do we know works?

One way to address these challenges on an individual level is Supported Employment through Job Coach support.

People with a significant learning disability and/or ASC need help to find a job to overcome the challenges they face by:

- Spending time understanding people's job interests, what they are good at, and the work types and the environments they need.
- Using job placements and try-outs to aid decision-making.
- Finding and negotiating a job that meets the person's specific talents and needs, not just giving them any available job.
- Informing and supporting employers to make interviews accessible, to induct and supervise their employees.
- Planning well with people and families and helping people with welfare benefits to ensure they will be better off in work.

People will also need help to learn and keep a job by:

- Having a Job Coach with them on the worksite to help them learn the job and to fit in.
- Breaking down tasks into small steps and providing a systematic approach to teaching the tasks of a job.
- Using prompts skilfully and fading these over time to leave the person independent on the job. Helping people to get work-based accreditation where they can.
- Helping people to fit in socially in work and co-workers and supervisors to get on well with them.

This paper describes the first 4 years of the Engage to Change Project, up to two months after the first Covid-19 lockdown commenced in Wales.

Sample description

Young people aged 16-25 can self refer themselves to the Engage to Change project or can be referred by someone else. A total of 771 referrals were registered at the end of year 4, which is well on target of the 666 expected referrals according to the most recent re-profiling exercise (January 2021)[5].

The areas receiving the majority of referrals were Rhondda Cynon Taf (11.5%) and Cardiff (11.2%), followed by Neath Port Talbot (7.6%), Gwynedd (7.4%) and Carmarthenshire (7.1%). Other areas such as Bridgend (7%) and Caerphilly (5.4%) received between 5% to 7% of the total referrals, followed by Swansea (4.7%), Pembrokeshire (4.7%), Newport (3.8%), Anglesey (3.4%), Conwy (3.3%) and Torfaen (3.1%). The areas receiving the least referral so far were Merthyr Tydfil (2.7%), Monmouthshire (2.5%), Ceredigion (2.5%), Wrexham (2.3%), Vale of Glamorgan (2.2%), Blaenau Gwent (2.2%), Flintshire (2.1%), Powys (1.7%) and Denbighshire (Figure 1). The Engage to Change project had a target to work with young people in proportion to the total population of a local authority area. The pattern in the number of referrals is broadly in line with general population variation across Wales as a result.

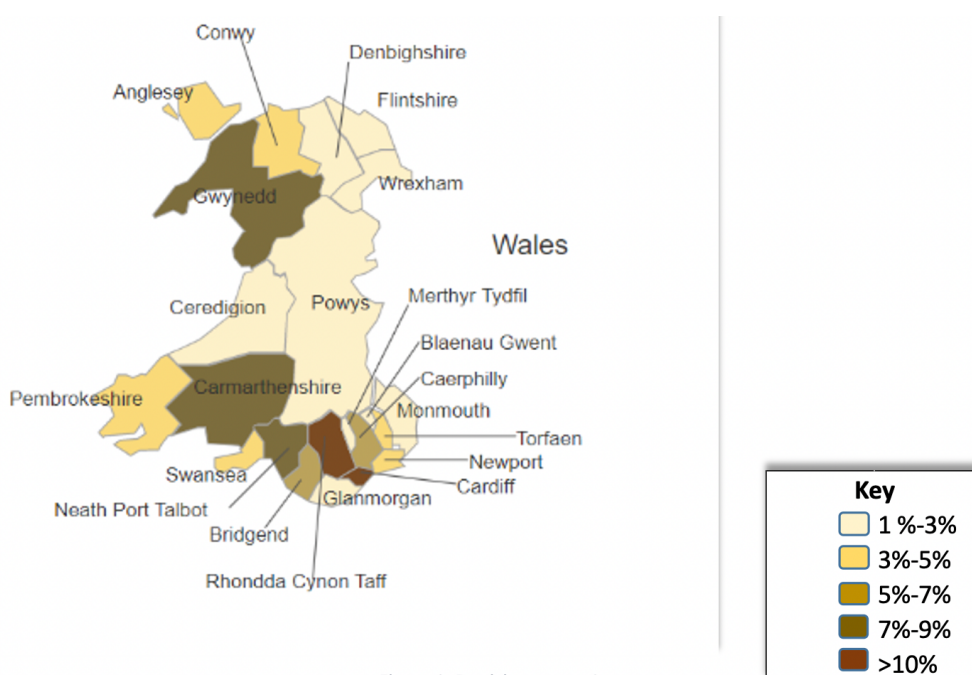


Figure 1: Participants per Area

[5] The target figures presented here are the revised 2021 targets for the whole 6 Years of the project, pro rata across the four years covered by the report.

The majority of young people enrolled on the project are male (76%) with 24% female. Almost all the project's participants are single (99%), with only 2 young people being married, 2 living with a partner, and 2 in a relationship. This is aligned with the general population in Wales, where about 98% of young people aged 16-24, are single[6].

One third of the sample were aged 20 to 21 years old at referral stage, roughly one quarter are aged 18-19 years old and one quarter aged 22-23 years old. Fourteen percent of the sample was aged 24 to 25 years old and 10% aged 16-17 years old. The average age for this sample is 21 years old (Figure 2).

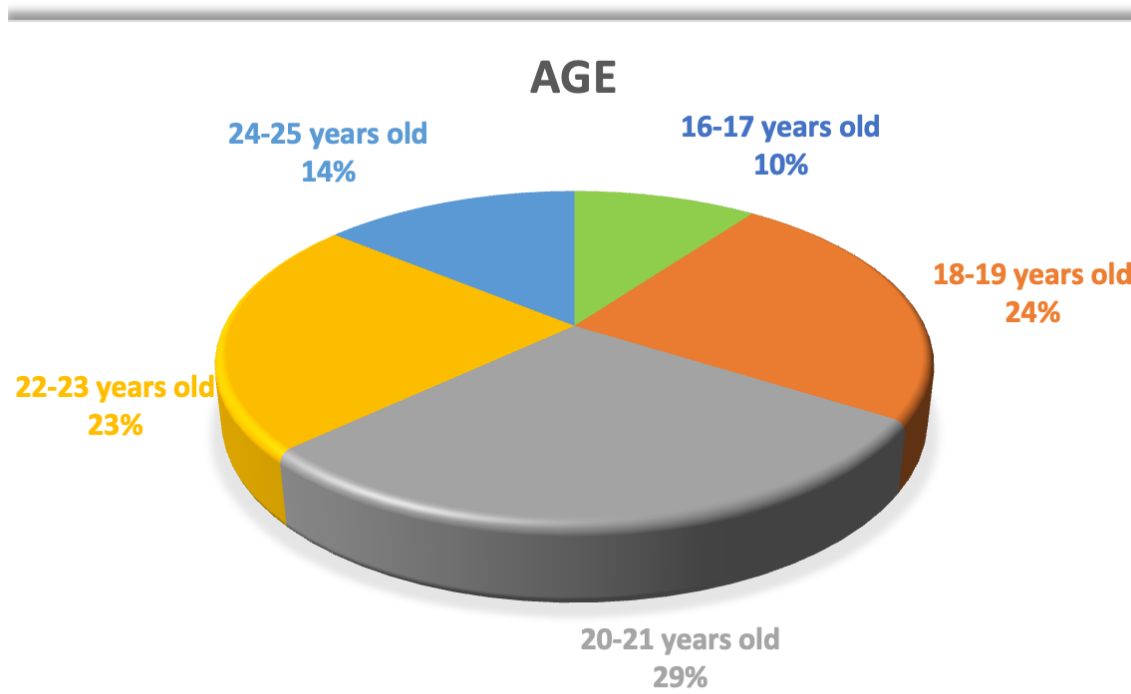


Figure 2: Age at referral

[6] Statistics based on official data for Wales, from the Stats Wales service over 3 years (2017-2019) (<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue>).

Previous experience

81% of young people reported they had some previous work experiences, most commonly when in school and of a short duration; 19% reported that they had no previous work experience. Only 28% had had a chance to do a work awareness course prior to Engage to Change involvement. More than half of the sample (58%) reported some experience with volunteering, which also support their commitment to work and new learning (Figure 3).

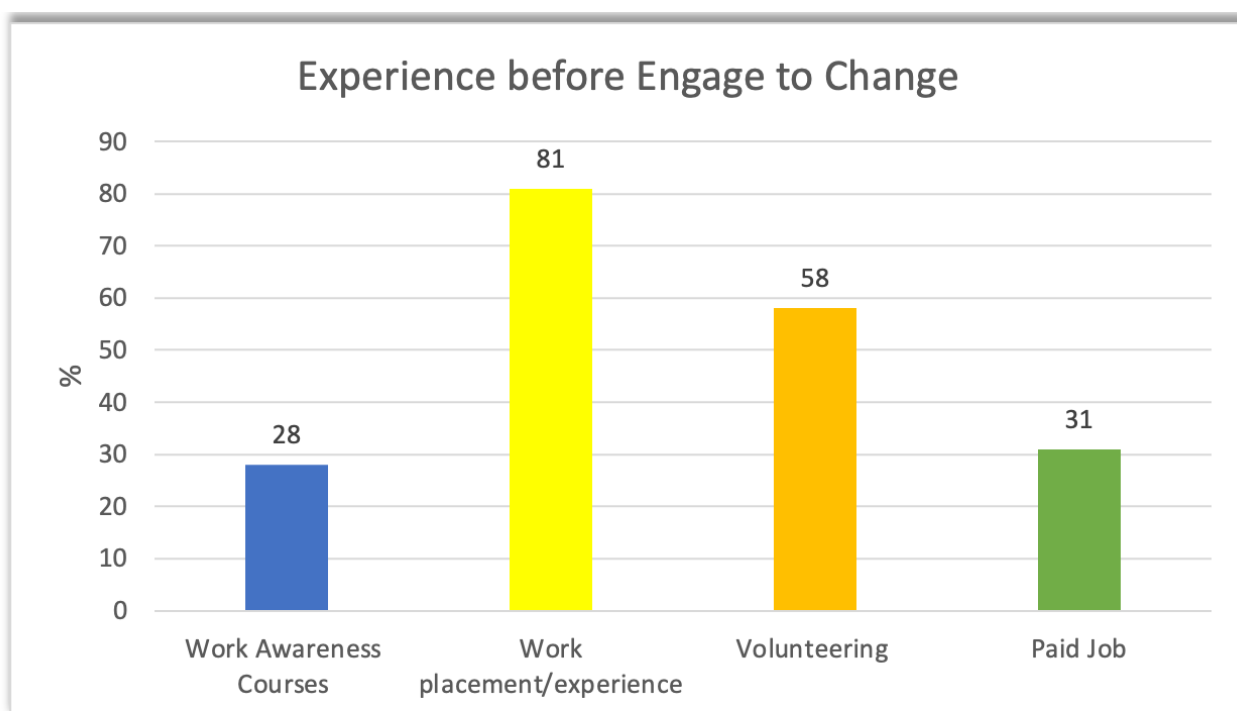


Figure 3: Previous experience

Diagnosis

Most diagnoses were collected at referral stage, with 763 individuals reporting information regarding their diagnosis and support needs. The following table indicates the number of young people with reporting a diagnosis of autism (160), a diagnosis of learning disability (207) or a diagnosis of specific learning difficulties. Young people reported a comorbidity with other conditions that are affecting individuals in different ways, shown in Table 1.

	Autism Spectrum Condition	Learning Disability	Specific Learning Difficulties	Other
Autism Spectrum Condition	160	127	133	0
Learning Disability	127	207		0
Specific Learning Difficulties	133		130	0
Other	0	0	0	6
Total	420	334	263	6

Table 1: Diagnosis

Additional diagnoses were reported by young people such as: dyslexia; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); developmental co-ordination disorder or dyspraxia; dyscalculia; attention deficit disorder (ADD); cerebral palsy; and dysgraphia. Some people reported personality disorder such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), but also mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Figure 4).

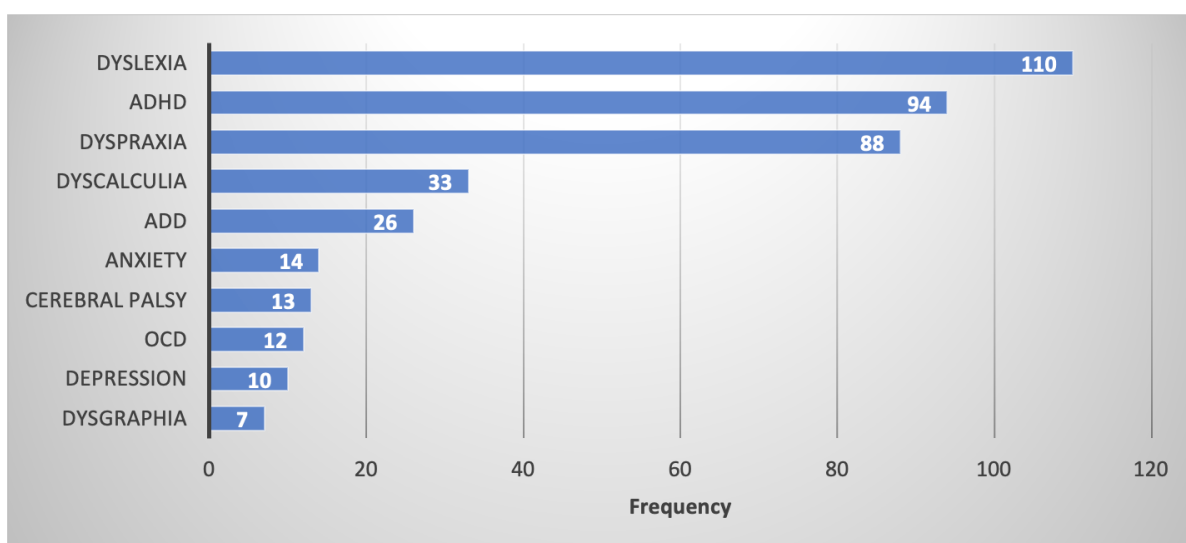


Figure 4: Additional diagnosis

Benefits

At referral stages, out of 748 referral we collected data for, 83% of the young people receive welfare benefits. Table 5 describes the number of young people receiving Universal Credit, the number of young people still on legacy benefits at referral, the number of young people receiving other benefits and at what level they are receiving these (Table 2).

Benefits received	TOTAL	LEVEL	N.
Universal Credit	148		
DLA care	99	High	26
		Medium	53
		Low	15
		Unknown	5
DLA mobility	85	High	15
		Medium	7
		Low	61
		Unknown	2
PIP care	352	Standard	106
		Enhanced	203
		Unknown	43
PIP mobility	266	Standard	121
		Enhanced	129
		Unknown	16
Other benefits	83		

Legacy Benefits	TOTAL
JSA	58
ESA	186

Table 2: Welfare Benefits received at entry to the project

Employment

Over the first four years, Engage to Change Project offered 362 paid placements and 396 unpaid placements. The project successfully placed people in 194 paid jobs and 164 of those were sustained over 13 weeks^[7] (Table 3).

	n	Revised target (2021)
Paid Placement	362	316
Unpaid Placement	396	456
Paid Job	194	-
Sustainment at 13 weeks	164	185

Table 3: Summary of the outcomes and revised target at the end of year 4

The expected target figures for the end of Year 4 based on revised targets (January 2021) exceeded the expected number of paid placements. Unpaid placement and sustainment of paid jobs were slightly under target at this point^[8].

Over the first 4 years, the Engage to Change Project also offered 116 young people an internship through either a DFN Project SEARCH, or a Supported Internship, model. These schemes delivered 301 unpaid work placements with their host employer (2-3 per year) over the period. The schemes successfully placed 41 young people in paid jobs and 29 of those were sustained over 13 weeks (Table 4).

	n
Numbers starting an internship	116
Work placements	301
Paid Job	41
Sustainment at 13 weeks	29

Table 4: Summary of the outcomes for Project SEARCH and Supported Internship at the end of year 4

[7] The sustainment figure is updated to the end of year 4. Jobs found in Year 4 and sustained in year 5 are not counted.

[8] The target figures presented here are the revised 2021 targets for the whole 6 Years of the project, pro rata across the four years covered by the report.

Overall, the employment rate for the Engage to Change Project at the end of Year 4 was 25%; in addition to this, for the Engage to Change DFN Project SEARCH internship schemes the employment rate was 44%, with a rate of 35% when all internship schemes are included. At the end of Year 4 no paid jobs were registered for the alternative Supported Internship sites, which commenced later than Project SEARCH sites in September 2019, and continued with significant employment disruption within host employers due to the Covid pandemic.

Young people followed individualised pathways to employment, the journey to employment reflecting individual needs, personal aspiration and practicalities. For each pathway, the key element is the job coach support^[9], offered by trained staff to the young person and the support offered to the employer.

Young people went through different pathways and these are some examples:

1. A short unpaid placement (a week maximum), followed by a paid placement funded by Engage to Change, that was followed by a paid job.
2. An unpaid placement of variable duration, followed by a paid job.
3. Work rotations within a Project SEARCH or Supported Internship scheme, followed by a paid job.
4. Some people went straight into work

^[9] Job Coach is a widely recognised term for these employment workers, but they are called Employment Advisors within the project.

The following bar chart (Figure 5) represents the frequency of use of different pathways to employment, based on 266 young people.

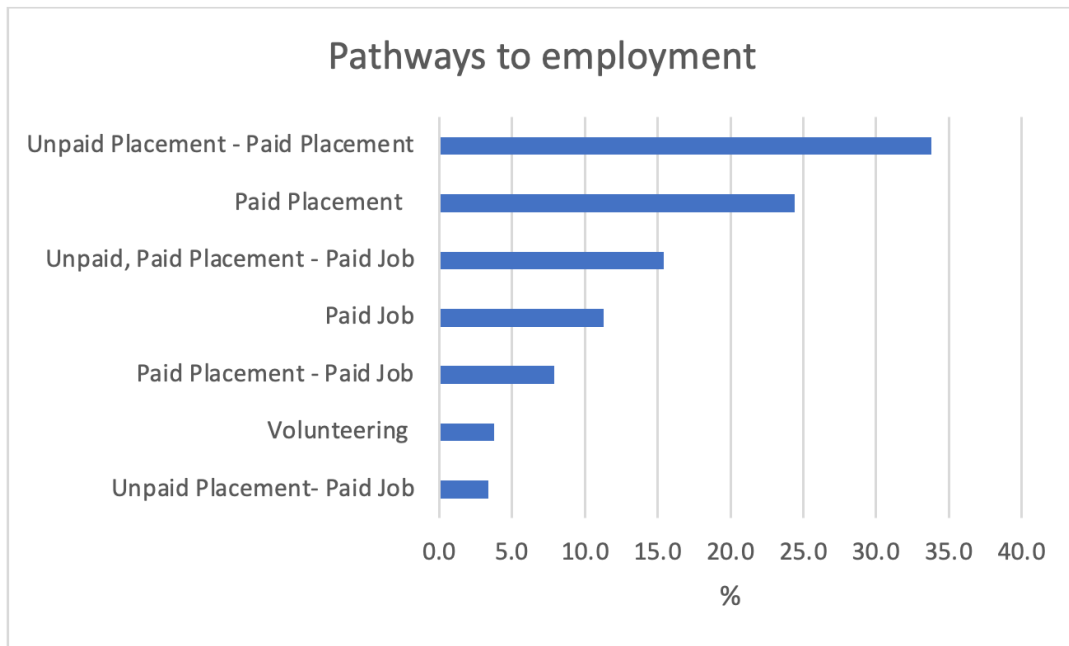


Figure 5: Pathways to employment (based over 266 young people)

More than a third of the young people getting a paid job had the opportunity to try a short unpaid placement followed by a paid one, usually with the same employer. One quarter experienced a paid placement only, while more than 16% progressed from an unpaid to a paid placement, followed by a paid job. 11% of young people went directly to a paid job and a small minority commenced their employment experience with an unpaid placement followed by a paid job.

Employment and diagnosis

A quarter of young people entering employment reported a diagnosis of autism only, while more than a quarter reported a diagnosis of autism and learning disability or learning difficulty (Table 5). 29% of individuals starting employment had a learning disability only and 19% had a learning difficulty only. The co-morbidity is a key element to take into consideration as it might results in more complex job coaching. The project presents a wide range of diagnosis and individual characteristics (gender, ethnicity etc.) that will have an effect on the job coaching provision. There is no significant statistical difference among these groups for people entering employment, tested with Pearson χ^2 .

	Paid Employment	%
Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)	46	25.3
ASC and Learning Disability (ASC LD)	24	13.2
ASC and Specific Learning Difficulties (ASC SpLD)	26	14.3
Learning Disability (LD)	52	28.6
Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)	34	18.7
Total	182	100

Table 5: Employment and Diagnosis

When analysing the different employment opportunities, young people with a learning disability have more unpaid, paid placement opportunities and paid employment, followed by people with autism (Figure 6). Most people sustaining their job after 3 months have a diagnosis of autism. If comparing the different groups considering their employment experience and the listed diagnostic groups, there are no statistically significant differences (for employment: Pearson $\chi^2=7.928$; Sign. 0.243 and for sustainment $\chi^2=6.951$; Sign. 0.325)

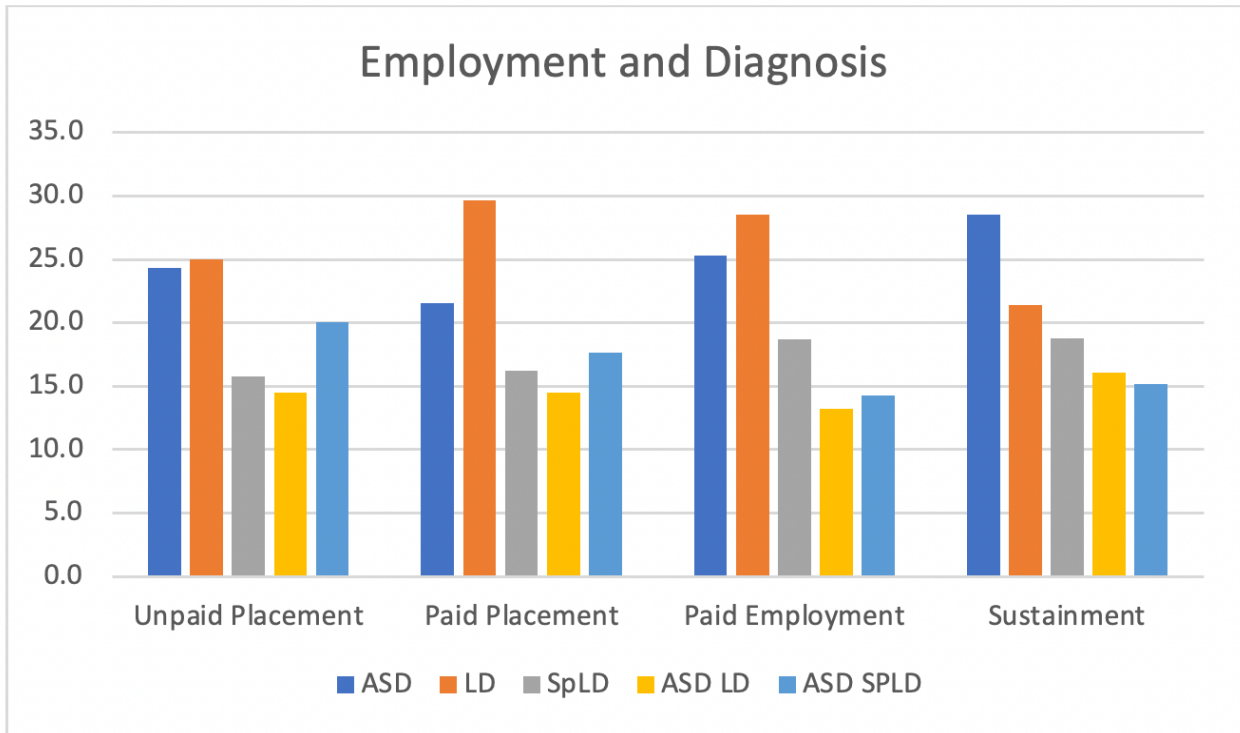


Figure 6: Employment and Diagnosis

Employment and Gender

When looking at the differences in gender distribution over different types of employment (Table 6), one quarter of paid placement has been offered to female participants and 23% of unpaid placement were offered to female participants. The distribution of paid jobs is 80% to male participants and 20% to female participant. Overall, considering the referral figures (24% female and 76% male), the employment opportunities follow a similar distribution. There are no statistically significant differences in employment considering the gender distribution.

	Paid Placement	%	Unpaid Placement	%	Paid Employment	%
Female	73	25	73	23	38	20
Male	219	75	238	77	149	80
Total	292		311		187	

Table 6: Employment and Gender

Engage to Change Project Support

In the previous paragraphs, we have considered differences in gender and diagnosis and their significance in relation to different employment pathways. Within the Engage to Change model, each participant should be looked at as a unique individual and a person-centred approach adopted throughout their journey to employment. Below is an example of a typical Engage to Change pathway to employment, highlighting the different phases and support provided to the individual with notional timings (Figure 7).

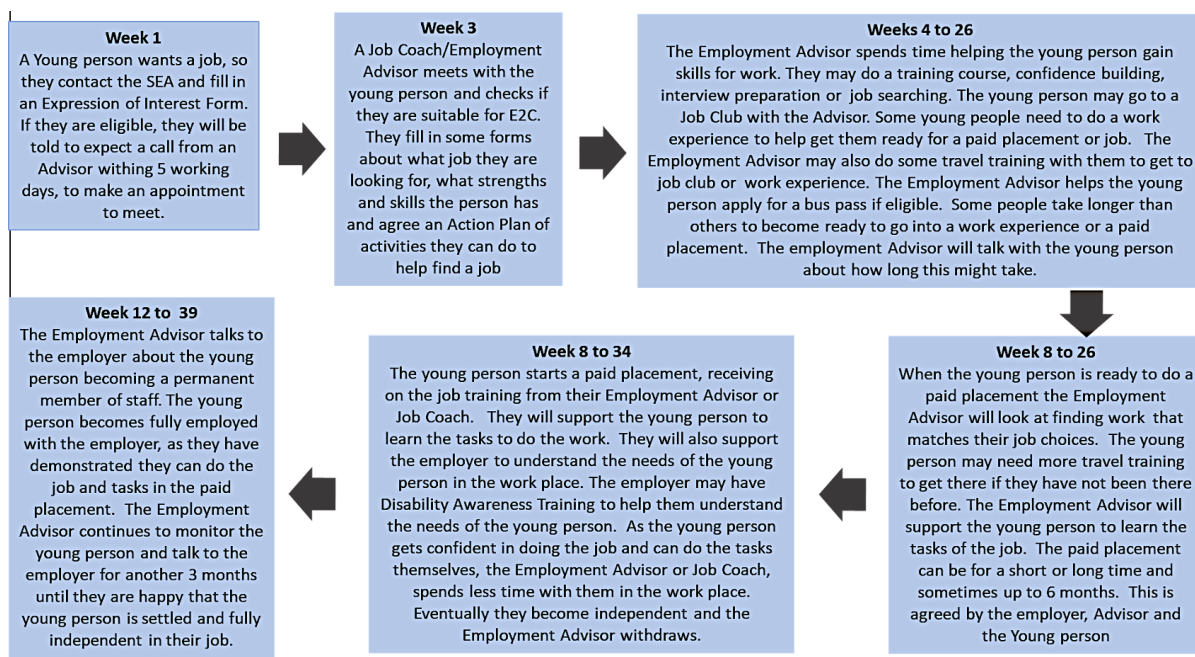


Figure 7: Example of a typical Engage to Change pathway to employment

This pathway is certainly variable, with some young people needing more support or different pathways to get into employment. We performed an analysis to monitor the input needed by Supported Employment Agencies (Elite and Agoriad Cyf) to support individuals into employment. The pathways identified in Figure 7 describe the number of Employment Advisor or Job Coach working hours to support the individual into employment. These hours include different elements such as planning, vocational profiling, course preparation, group teaching, job development and finding, job training and maintenance, travel training and route familiarisation and worksite visits. It may not include administrative hours dedicated to the project and the work done with the employers as these elements are difficult to quantify.

Overall, we are looking at three primary pathways to employment:

1 Young people engaged in paid placement followed by a paid job (19 young people).

2 Young people engaged with an unpaid placement, followed with a paid placement and a paid job (39 young people).

3 Young people going directly into a paid job (27 young people).

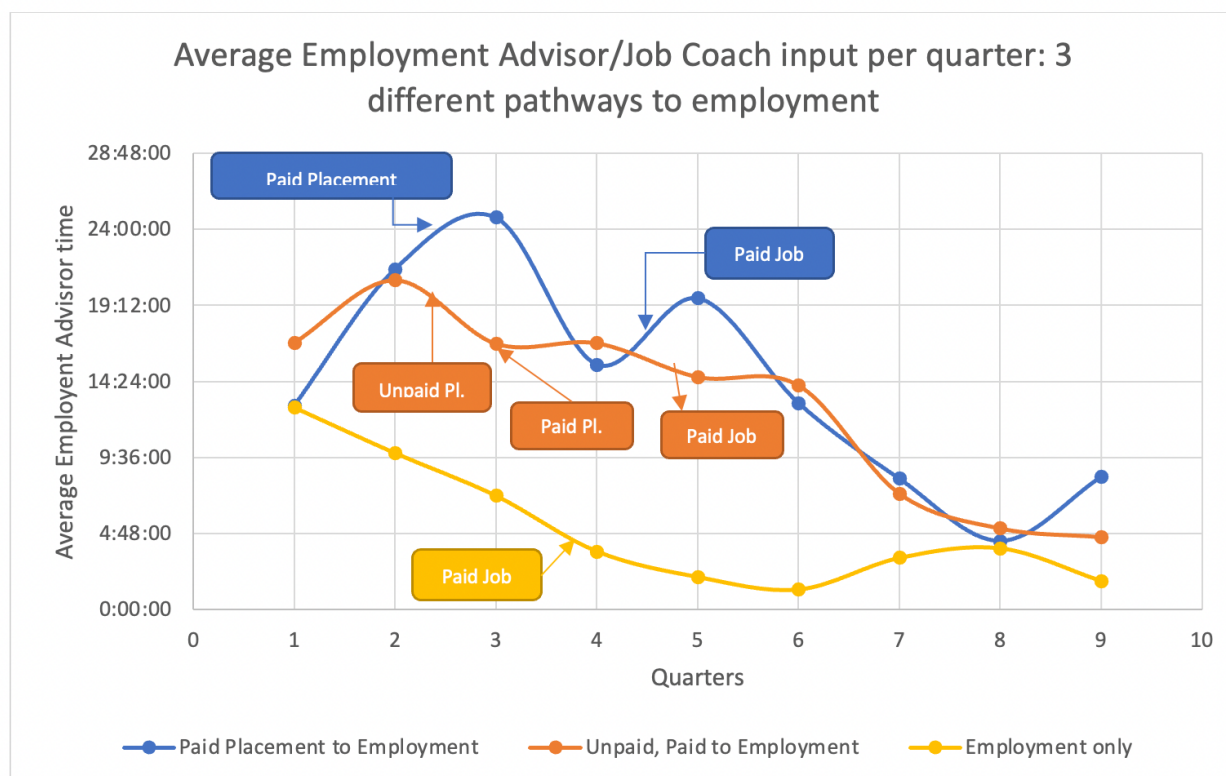


Figure 8: Pathways to employment

On the first pathway considered, we notice the increase in hours from an average of 13 hours during the first quarter that is climbing to an average of 24 hours when young people are starting with a paid placement. Employment Advisor/Job Coach input is kept up when the young person is in placement to increase once again when the 6 months placement period is coming to an end and the young person is starting a job. The support fades away over time as the young person is settled into work. It is interesting to consider how in the 9th quarter of engagement, the average hours increased again to 8 hours per quarter. This can be explained by the young person starting a new task within the workplace which will require some re-training inputs or the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and which requires further intervention by the Employment Advisor to cope with the event.

On the second pathway considered, young people had an experience with a short unpaid placement, followed by a 6-month paid placement and a paid job. The average hours for this group peaks in the 2nd quarter of engagement and just before the start of the unpaid placement, and stays almost constant for the following quarter, for an average input hour of 14. The support provided fades away overtime.

On the last pathway considered, young people experience a paid job directly. In this pathway, a higher support input is needed at the beginning, and it fades away overtime with little fluctuation and a little input of an average 2 hours. Nearly half of the people engaged with this pathway had previous employment experience.

Further investigation is needed to understand how individuals might need different levels and type of support.

Skills development

Young people were assessed for their skills during their experience with the Engage to Change project.

Their skills are assessed by a Job Coach/Employment Adviser at:

1. Vocational profile stage
2. End of unpaid placement
3. End of paid placement
4. When settled into a paid job

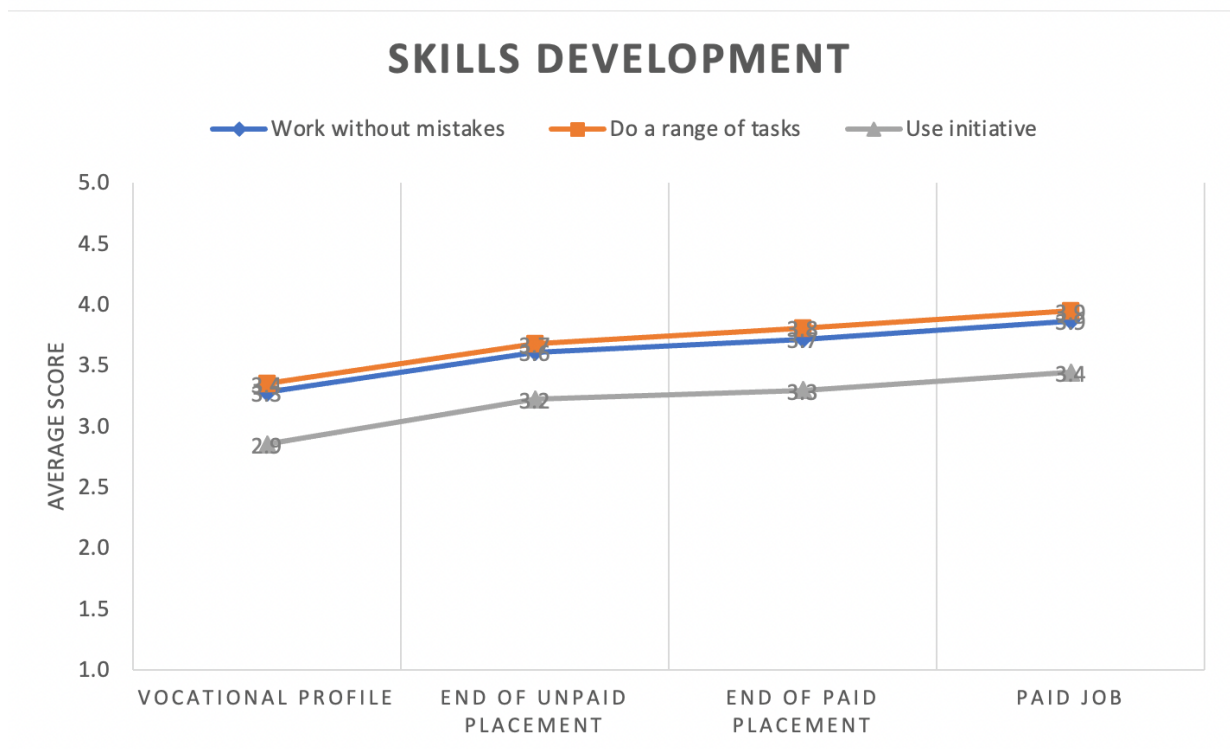


Figure 9: Skills development in Errorless working,

Competence level on each skill is scored by Job Coaches/Employment Advisors from 1 "no competence" to 5 "full competence" with a score of 3 representing adequate work competency. The average score across all participants for skills such as working accurately without mistakes, doing a range of tasks and using initiative are shown to be increasing overtime and reaching adequate levels, although within a small margin of change (Figure 9).

The ability of communicating with others (colleagues and/or customers and/or service users), the ability to concentrate and working without support also increases over time (Figure 10), with greater positive changes for the latter two skill areas. This data suggests that it is important to recognise that using a Supported Employment approach is also a mechanism for developing vocational skills in the workplace and not only an effective route into paid employment.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

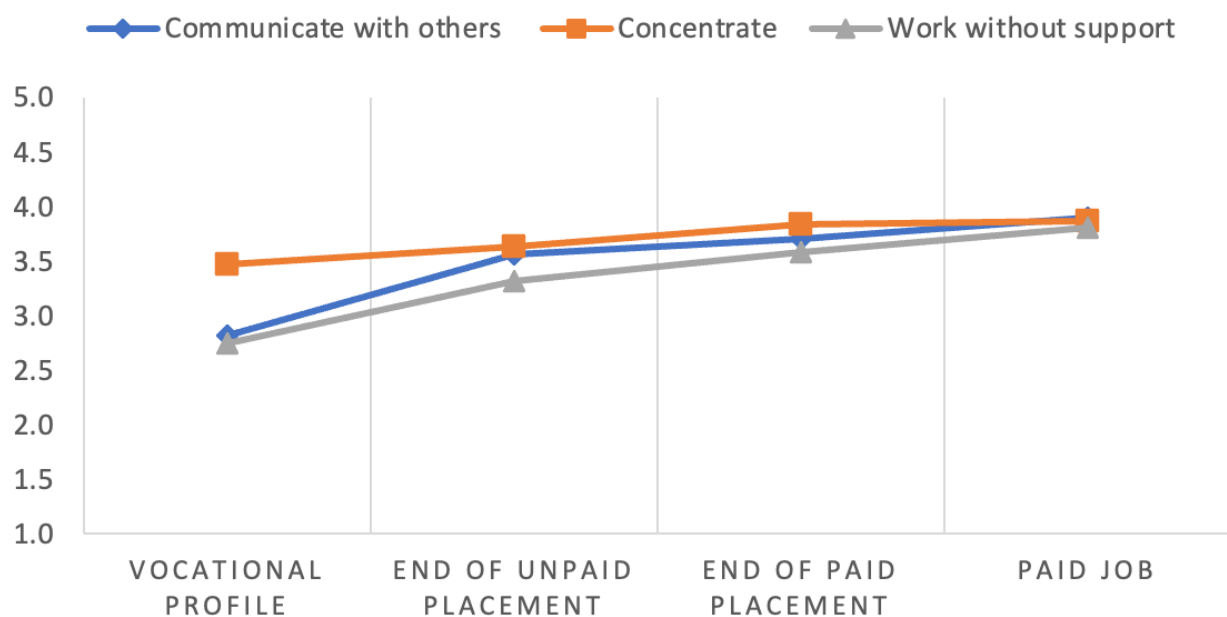


Figure 10: Skills development in communication, Concentration and working without support

Employer rated benefits

Employers strongly valued the support of Employment Advisors/Job Coaches with 97% reporting that they felt supported as a company. 94% of employers reported the young person has been supported well (based on 391 questionnaires completed by employers). 57% of 211 employers reported that they feel their company had changed its attitudes toward employing a person with a learning disability and/or autism (Figure 11).

Furthermore, 92% of employers would think about employing a person with similar disabilities if a supported employment agency was involved.

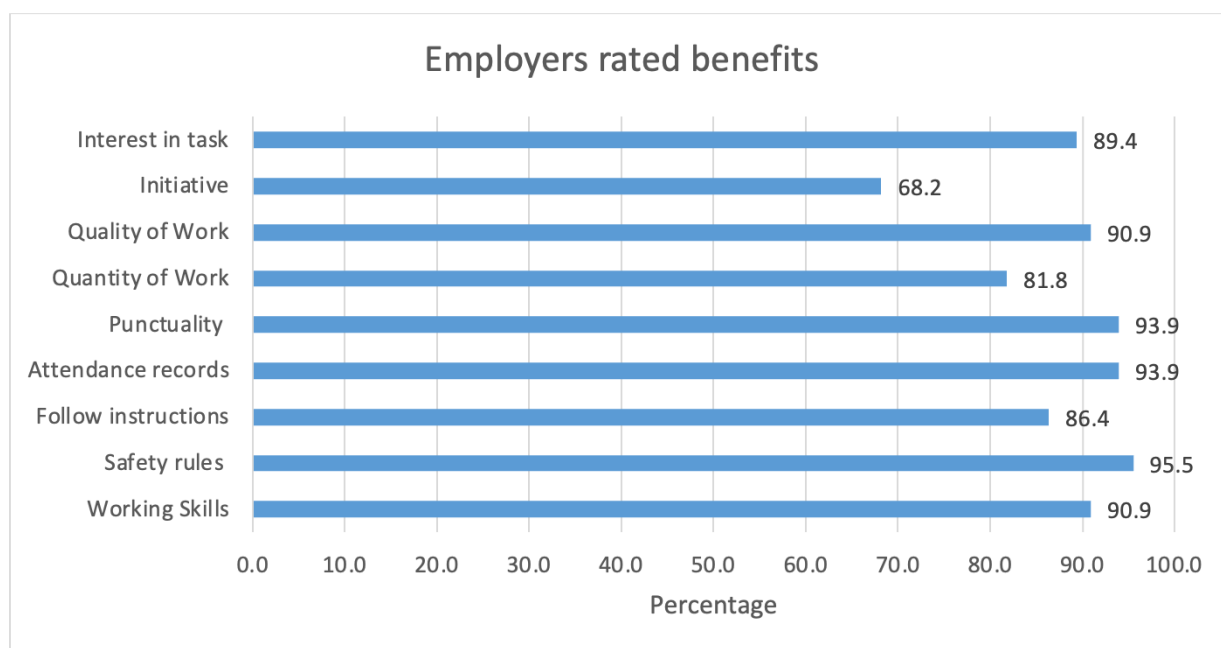


Figure 11: Employer rated benefits of workers from Engage to Change

Employers are positive in the way that the project provided support to them and the young person. They also recognised positively on the young person's ability to follow safety rules in the workplace, punctuality and attendance records, quality of work and interest in the task. Employers were satisfied with working skills and the ability to follow instruction. Quantity of work and initiatives are two elements that received fewer positive ratings, probably due to the newness of the work and work tasks (Figure 11).

Discussion

Our experience shows that many people with a learning disability and/or autism can work if they have the right job and the right support. The Engage to Change project is showing how ordinary work alongside non-disabled co-workers and supervisors is possible and beneficial for the individual and the employer.

Engage to Change pathways to employment choices are varied, consistent with reflecting individual needs and aspirations. The employment rate of 25% for the main Engage to Change Project and 35% for all internships, and 44% for the Engage to Change DFN Project SEARCH internship sites, is a significant achievement for Wales. Further consideration will be given to the argument that employment might not be economically viable for some people or that a particular match between a person and a job could not be made. A further issue would be transport where in some rural areas of Wales poor access to public transport is an ongoing issue for the whole community that might prevent young people taking up an employment opportunity.

We have learned that employment is more successful when we support employers to make their work standards clear and we help employees to work to these standards. Employers need to insist that a good job-employee match is demonstrated by support agencies for success. Employers also recognise that task performance is not the only way people can contribute successfully to their business as they contribute to workplace cohesion and the productivity of other workers. Employers recognise the importance to employment success of on-site training by, and on-going availability of, Job Coaches. Employers seem willing to provide additional time to train and supervise persons with a disability as there are clear reported benefits from their employing reliable, dedicated employees that increase workforce diversity and a positive corporate social responsibility. This can contribute to the creation of a neurodiverse workforce in Wales, with a consequential increase in prosperity for the community, which is the results of more neurodiverse young people becoming part of the working population in Wales.

One of the difficulties of the project has been the existence of a waiting list in some areas. Young people were engaged, but some time was lost before offering a placement, which might have impacted negatively on some participants. This issue has been addressed with the creation of job clubs to keep individual engaged while waiting for a placement. This time was used to increase their working skills and confidence among other outcomes. We need to invest and deliver intensive input early on to make sure young people and their family understand that they can work with appropriate, professional support.

Engage to Change has shown that paid jobs can come through a number of routes. The project's use of Employer Development Grants[10] to help employers with wages over an initial "get to know you" period is effective, but time periods need to be flexible and rates of subsidy should taper to enable employers to take up full payment as soon as possible. We also need Job Coaches to work actively with employers over time to ensure that agreements to move from paid placements into paid jobs are delivered.



[10] Employer Development Grants can provide a wage subsidy to employers for up to 6 months as part of a paid placement. This has often been applied on a tapering scale for many, paying 100% of the person's wage in the first month, reducing to the point where the employer is paying the whole wage in the sixth month.

Legacy for the Engage to Change Project

National and Welsh Governments can help make outcomes more widely available to people with a learning disability and/or ASC by recognising the business, social and economic benefits of inclusive employment and promoting these with business, communities and relevant departments. Government should recognise what individualised support looks like and what it costs. We need to legislate for, and fund, Supported Employment if people with a learning disability and/or ASC are to fulfil their potential to be employed. It is logical that government also disinvest from services that do not help people to get jobs and waste their lives in a perpetual cycle of “preparing” to work without getting there. We must maximise use of the Access to Work scheme alongside Supported Employment and Internship as a flexible support budget that can help create a level playing field for disabled people in relation to work. Effective use of Access to Work can also help overcome barriers to work from poor transport, inaccessible workplaces, and to help with specialized equipment where needed.

Engage to Change works with younger people. Our experience underlines the need to create opportunities for individually matched, Job Coach supported, work experience while people with a learning disability or ASC are in education, with a clear goal of transition to paid employment.

There are opportunities now and in the future that we must take. DWP are planning to roll-out a Local Supported Employment programme across Britain to explore the further use of Job Coaching. Further work will be needed if Welsh Local Authorities are to embrace the proposed DWP Job Coach funding strategy. Partnerships will need to be developed to bid for these and any future extension of these funds. More inclusive Apprenticeships are being developed. Adequate funding is needed for Job Coaching to make these schemes and initiatives relevant for people with a learning disability and/or ASC. We also need to develop enough expertise in the system to deliver the Job Coach support people will need to access Apprenticeships and other mainstream schemes. We have also found Supported Internships to be very effective routes for people with a learning disability and/or ASC to become employed. There is an emerging funding system for Supported Internships from 2021 under the college-based Independent Living Skills programme. Supported Employment and Job Coaching has a role to play in this emerging inclusive system.

Welsh Government's Employability Plan represents an individualised approach for skill development and employment for everyone. Welsh Government need to guarantee a place for Supported Employment in these emerging arrangements so that people with more complex needs can be a part of this. It is unclear at present whether skilled Job Coaching for people with a learning disability and/or ASC will be a part of the Job Support Wales employability programme. Our experience in Engage to Welsh Government's Employability Plan represents an individualised approach for skill development and employment for everyone. Welsh Government need to guarantee a place for Supported Employment in these emerging arrangements so that people with more complex needs can be a part of this. It is unclear at present whether skilled Job Coaching for people with a learning disability and/or ASC will be a part of the Job Support Wales employability programme. Our experience in Engage to Change is that the aspirations of the Well-being Act, the Future Generations Act and the Youth Guarantee will not reach these people without Supported Employment being a part of the support system in Wales.



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