

# Engage to Change: Progress so far and what we have learned



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## The aim of this briefing

In this briefing we want to explore what the Engage to Change project can tell us about what works in helping people with a learning disability and/or autism to get paid employment, and what needs to be done by others to maximise their chances of getting a job.

The Engage to Change project is a five-year project funded through Welsh Government and the National Lottery to help young people with a learning disability and/or autism spectrum condition get a paid job. Led by Learning Disability Wales, it brings together ELITE Supported Employment Agency and Agoriad Cyf supported employment agencies to deliver job coaching, paid placements and paid jobs in ordinary workplaces. They are supported by self-advocates from All Wales People First and researched by the National Centre for Mental Health at Cardiff University.

## The problem

People with a learning disability and/or autism face many challenges in finding, getting and keeping a paid job. The outcome of having a learning disability and/or autism 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, questioning and responding. They may have difficulty remembering and replicating complex tasks and may then find it hard to transfer tasks learned in a training environment to a real employment setting.

People with autism also face common difficulties that impact on their employment opportunities. They may have difficulty communicating with others and with social interaction. They may

have difficulty coping with change and time management and need routine. People can also find it difficult to concentrate and to focus on the most relevant information and many struggle stress and anxiety.

However, none of this means people cannot work. It means they need the correct form of support. We can see that, without this support, the employment rates for our two key groups remain very low. Only 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work.<sup>1</sup> The figures for Wales are likely to be a similar. Just 15% of adults with autism are in full time employment, 9% in part time employment and 66% are not working at all. 26% of graduates with autism are unemployed and over 60% of all people with autism are financially reliant on their families.<sup>2</sup> There is evidence that employment figures for people with autism in Wales are lower still.<sup>3</sup> This is while 53.2% of people aged 16 to 64 with any type of disability in Great Britain, 81.8% of the general population, are in paid work.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> NHS Digital 2018: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-social-care-outcomes-framework-ascof/current/enhancing-quality-of-life-for-people-with-care-and-support-needs/1e-proportion-of-adults-with-a-learning-disability-in-paid-employment>

<sup>2</sup> Rosenblatt, M. (2008) *I Exist: The message from adults with autism in England*. London: National Autistic Society.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilityandemploymentuk/2019#employment-by-disability>

## **What do we know works?**

The solution to many of these individualised challenges is Supported Employment using a Job Coach. People with a significant learning disability or autism 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 detailed talents and needs, not just 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.

## Progress so far

Using this model the Engage to Change partners have helped people with a learning disability and/or autism in unpaid short-term work trails, and for 284, paid work placements of up to 6 months. So far, in 166 cases these have led to a paid job (58% of paid places). 143 of these jobs (77%) have been sustained for at least 3-months. 41% of paid jobs were for people with a learning disability and 51% for people with autism.<sup>5</sup>. Our E2C Project SEARCH projects have worked with 61 young people and delivered a 66% employment rate in the first two years and 35% in year 3 so far.<sup>6</sup> They worked 24 hours per week on average. These figures are encouraging, given the low national employment rates for these young people.

## What we have learned

Our experience shows that many people with a learning disability and/or autism can potentially work if they have the right job and the right support. To be successful we need to commit to:

- work being real- work that would be done by others
- work in ordinary work settings alongside non-disabled co-workers and supervisors
- real wages- at going rates of pay for the job.

We also need to be realistic and to understand that we cannot always find a person a paid job. This may be because it is not economically viable for some people, we cannot identify the right job for their particular talents and needs, or we cannot provide the right support for them. However, it is important to identify why we cannot get people a job. It is no longer sensible to say that a disabled person cannot work, when it is we who cannot deliver the right circumstances or support.

We have also 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. There needs to be a good match between the job and the employee. Employers also

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<sup>5</sup> There are people with both conditions.

<sup>6</sup> Employment rates for E2C Project SEARCH are audited in April 2020.

recognise that task performance is not the only way people can contribute successfully to their business - they contribute to workplace cohesion and productivity of other workers. Employers recognise the importance of on-site training by, and on-going availability of, Job Coaches to employment success. We believe that employers are willing to provide additional time to train and supervise disabled people as there are clear benefits from their employing reliable, dedicated employees, increased workforce diversity and a positive corporate social responsibility.

We have also learned that to deliver good experiences for young people Supported Employment must shorten the length of time taken to engage the young person in job search. Delays impact negatively on family and people's motivation. We need to deliver intensive input early on and to reinforce early messages that this means real work so that people and families commit to the process. We do need a national strategy that helps us to recruit and retain good Job Coaches. Adequate wage levels, good training, and providing a career structure are important here.

Engage to Change has shown that paid jobs can come through a number of routes: found directly or via combinations of unpaid and paid placements.

Our use of *Employer Development Grants* 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 placements into paid jobs are delivered.

## Relevance for stakeholders

National and Welsh governments can help make our outcomes more widely available by recognising the business, social and economic benefits of inclusive employment and promoting these with business, communities and relevant departments. Government must 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 autism 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 the use of Access to Work 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, overcoming barriers to work from poor transport, inaccessible workplaces, and to help with specialised equipment and personal care 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 and/or autism 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 the roll-out of a Local Supported Employment model across Britain. Will Welsh LAs embrace the proposed DWP Job Coach funding strategy and develop partnerships to bid for funds?

More inclusive Apprenticeships are being developed. Can we deliver adequate funding for Job Coaching to make these relevant for people with a learning disability and/or autism? Can we develop enough expertise in the system to deliver the Job Coach support people need?

We have found supported internships to be very effective for people with a Learning Disability or ASC. What role will that play in an emerging inclusive system?

The Welsh Government's Employability Plan represents an individualised approach for skill development and employment for everyone. Can we guarantee a place for Supported Employment in these emerging arrangements so that people with more complex needs can be a part of this? Will skilled Job Coaching for people with a learning disability or ASC be a part of the Job Support Wales Employability Programme?

Our experience in Engage to Change is that the aspirations of the Social Services and Well-being Act and the Future Generations Act will not reach these people without Supported Employment being a part of the support system in Wales.

### Final thoughts

We can see many more people with a learning disability and/or autism enter into paid employment if we can ensure a role for Supported Employment in our programmes. Job Coaching is key within this. It delivers real employment for people with complex needs. It delivers skill development through supported work-based learning. It underpins employer engagement, providing support for them to employ people and to create a more diverse workforce. Job Coaching ensures that paid jobs deliver social inclusion, well-being and quality of life outcomes for people. We must ways to fund and deliver Supported Employment across Wales in a sustainable way.

The Engage to Change project is delivered in partnership between Learning Disability Wales, Agoriad Cyf, All Wales People First, Cardiff University, ELITE and in collaboration with DFN Project SEARCH.



[www.engagetochange.org.uk](http://www.engagetochange.org.uk)



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