

# Supported Employment for neurodivergent young people: pathways to employment, job coaching input and implications for practice.

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**Note: Data in this report looks at the first 5 years of the prospect up to 2021.**



# Abstract

Neurodivergent young people are generally excluded from the labour market as they experience difficulties in getting, learning, and maintaining a job without the right support. We know Supported Employment frameworks are effective ways of supporting young people into real employment in the open labour market. However, the Supported Employment model is not widely available for everyone who may need it. This paper analyses findings from the Engage to Change project, which, during Over the first five years, which included the Covid pandemic, this project provided support to 916 neurodivergent young people, out of which 113 were successfully employed and (719 out of 916) reported job coaching hours (78%). , The paper seeks to understand which are the most effective ways to get these young people into employment. Unpaid placements, paid placements, paid jobs, or a mixture of these pathways are analysed in relation to job coaching hours. Paid placements have been shown to be a successful way to get neurodivergent young people into paid jobs. This study suggests that paid incentives should be considered in employment programmes within a framework of Supported Employment, to maximise employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism. Different pathways to employment were found to lead to differences in quality of job outcomes. Unpaid placements still required intense input from a job coach, but with poor employment outcomes. There is a proportion of young people going directly into employment, with the unique support of a job coach, so this pathway should be encouraged. In conclusion, this study recommend flexibility in the way Supported Employment is organised and funded; this will help to support the needs of individuals, and employers and contribute to the creation of a more neurodiverse workforce.





# Introduction:

## 1. Job coaching and Supported Employment

Supported Employment “is an evidence-based and personalised approach to support people with significant disabilities into real jobs, where they can fulfil their employment aspirations and achieve social and economic inclusion” (Department of Health, 2009).

This approach was developed in the United States in the 1980s, to meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities who wanted to work in ordinary settings. Supported Employment is a successful system supporting people with disabilities in finding and maintaining a job. The success of the Supported Employment model has been measured in terms of increased employment rate, wages, social interaction (Robertson et al., 2019; Beyer 2012; Mank, Cioffi & Yovanoff, 2003). There are indications that health outcomes can improve also for those in paid employment (Robertson et al., 2019). The most important element of Supported Employment is that it is needs-led, tailored to the individual, who is regarded as unique, with specific interests, preferences, skills and experiences (EUSE, 2010).

Having a job represents a significant challenge for an adult reaching employment age (Hendry and Kloep 2002). Neurodivergent young people need reasonable adjustments in the workplace and support to facilitate their entry into the active part of the society. They experience difficulties in getting a job as only 5.1% of people having an intellectual disability and 22% with autism, aged 16-64 in the UK are in employment. These rates are much lower compared with the general employment rate for disabled people which was 52.7% after the Covid-19 pandemic (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021), and 75.6% of those in the general population (Office for National Statistics, 2022). The reason for the low employment rate is multi-factorial, involving individual and environmental factors and how these two elements interact. Individual factors include cognitive ability, individual experience, qualifications, and social ability that can influence young people’s employability. The environmental factors that limit individual opportunities include a lack of understanding of people’s needs and talents, poor aspirations for the person becoming employed, professionals and some families, together with a poor understanding of what support enables people to get into employment.

Research shows the benefits of Supported Employment; also called the “place, train and maintain” approach, it involves several key stages, which are paramount for this system to succeed (Beyer & Robinson, 2009):

- Vocational profiling: The process of understanding individual needs, abilities, experiences, and preferences. This is fundamental for the next stages.
- Job finding and matching: Finding the right job for that specific individual, based on their vocational profile.
- Job analysis and placement: Job tasks are analysed, and the employer’s expectations are studied, to train the person to meet these expectations.
- Job training: Tasks are demonstrated and taught in the workplace, to support a contextualised learning activity. It is delivered by following the individual’s learning style. Contextualised learning also allows people with intellectual disabilities to familiarise themselves with the specific social demands of that particular workplace. This helps overcome the common difficulty people with intellectual disabilities face in generalising learning from training to real environments. As the job is learnt, the support of the job coach is faded, the person becoming more independent and confident in their roles.
- Follow-up: The job coach checks on the person periodically and can be involved if re-training is needed, or the young person is moving on to new tasks.

The support provided by a job coach is directed to the person and to the employer. The key element is the matching process, when the young person is matched with a job that suits them. The Supported Employment agency also offers a service in support of CV writing, completing application forms, and preparing for or even attending a job interview with the applicant. For some people completing an application form or going for an interview is a stressful situation, and one that neurodivergent people would rather avoid if unsupported. Supported Employment Agencies help employers to introduce “reasonable adjustments” under the Equality Act (2010), in the recruitment process and in the workplace, allowing young people with an intellectual disability to fully access the employment opportunity.

Some studies have highlighted the importance of job coaches teaching social skills during their training in the workplace to promote social integration. Social integration is not just an important outcome, but it also underpins the person’s success in carrying out their job. Social skills have been defined in two parts:

- dependent on the context.;
- rule-governed, and difficult to generalize (Chadsey-Rusch et al. 1992).

Chadsey and Beyer (2001) identified two different approaches to developing social skills. The first involves changing the social behaviour of the person with intellectual disability using social skills instruction, role play, problem solving strategies, self-management, or self-monitoring. The second approach involves engaging co-workers who, in addition to training people in the workplace, also assist people with intellectual disabilities to bond with their colleagues, with the aim of equipping people with the social skills needed to do their specific job and delivering social integration as an outcome.

Employees supported with a Supported Employment model experience improved emotional well-being, quality of life (Eggleton et al 1999; Kober and Eggleton 2005; Verdugo et al 2006), improved work environment and community involvement than employment enterprise workers and day service attendees (Beyer et al 2010). Young people with intellectual disabilities employed in competitive jobs experience showed higher self-esteem than unemployed with similar diagnosis, showing greater job satisfaction and less social isolation than unemployed people (Jiranek and Kirby, 1990). When young people with an intellectual disability experience typical employment, they also experience a higher quality of life, similar to their co-workers (Verdugo et al 2006).

Several studies have looked at different aspects of social integration and social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities in work. A small qualitative study highlighted how the presence of a positive workplace culture can help to increase the level of social inclusion in the workplace (Fillary and Pernice 2006). Social interactions have been compared between people in day centre and employment, finding that young people in the day centre were interacting more. However, those in employment, spend more time interacting with people without a disability and customers (Kilsby and Beyer 1996), resulting in a wide range of different interactions with a variety of people. A further study has found evidence that job satisfaction was negatively correlated with loneliness (Petrovski and Gleeson 2009), suggesting that both work and social interaction are important for a satisfactory workplace.

## 2. Key elements related to work success

The support element is key to a young person in employment. The support is needed throughout the Supported Employment pathway and after, when the person is settled in the workplace. The support is usually delivered through a job coach. Job coaches need to be flexible in their thinking about what having an intellectual disability and autism means in terms of possible implications for employee support, training, and workplace adaptation. In some cases, more training about support strategies for participants, needs to be offered to employers and co-workers in general, enabling colleagues to be a vital source of support for neurodiverse workers. This is crucial to job maintenance for the individual as the natural support offered by co-workers is a key element in job retention. A natural support workplace culture, which is translated into typical support patterns during all the phases, from job acquisition, through job training and job maintenance has been linked with elevated levels of social interactions at work (Mank et al 1997).

As the population of people with intellectual disabilities includes people with a wide range of abilities and challenges across the whole of the communications and adaptive behaviour spectrum, there remains a question of “what works for whom”. Research has demonstrated that Supported Employment approach can help people with severe intellectual disabilities get into paid work (Hill et al, 1987). This is particularly true where people also have other conditions, such as autism or significant specific learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia etc.). For some people with mild intellectual disabilities and strong communication skills, this level of job coach intervention is not required, and job matching, exposure to real work with some guidance can be just as effective. Further, the role of employer incentives is not clearly understood. There is evidence that Supported Employment, and direct support to employers by job coaches, is effective in moving employers from interest in employing, to the actual employment of, people with intellectual disabilities (Beyer and Beyer 2017). However, whether use of financial incentives to employers within an individualised “place, train, maintain” model of support improves effectiveness and employment outcomes is also unclear, and forms the focus of this paper.

The Engage to Change project offered an opportunity to test whether a wider list of interventions within a Supported Employment and job coaching framework, from unpaid work experience to full Supported Employment without placements, were effective in getting young people into paid jobs. Young people in the project are all neurodivergent and present a wide range of neurotypes and co-occurring neurotypes such as autism, intellectual disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Tourette Syndrome, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia etc.

### 3. Engage to Change

The Engage to Change project covered the whole of Wales, and set out to support neurodivergent young people, aged 16-25, not in employment, education, or training (NEET) or in danger of becoming NEET. The project was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and Welsh Government and lasted 7 years, including a two year period effected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The project brought together partners with different expertise and background to deliver a service and to work on the legacy of Supported Employment. The project was led by Learning Disability Wales, and Supported Employment was offered by two Supported Employment Agencies (SEAs), Elite Supported Employment and Agoriad Cyf, covering all of Wales. The project was independently evaluated by (XXX) and advised by All Wales People First, representing the unique voice of neurodivergent people.

The Engage to Change project offered different pathway to employment, of different durations:

- Short-term unpaid placement, about a week in duration.
  - Longer paid placement, lasting up to 6 months, with wages subsidised by the Engage to Change project, with the intention that the person would continue to be employed at the end of placement. The wage incentive provided to the employer wanting to employ that worker could be 100% over the whole period but was usually tapered over the 6-month placement period from 100% at the beginning to zero at the end.
  - Paid employment directly into the open labour market.
  - A mix of the previous pathways to employment:
    - o Unpaid placement and paid placement.;
    - o Unpaid placement, paid placement, and paid employment.;
    - o Unpaid placement and paid employment.;
- Paid placement and paid employment



# Methods:

This study recorded what support was offered to young people entering the Engage to Change project, in terms of the pathways set out earlier. As the allocation to placement was needs-led and dependant to placement availability and business needs, young people entered different pathways to employment. Job coach support was tailored on individual needs at all stages of the project, with some milestones to get young people into employment. The following diagram shows the project milestones and job coach involvement (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Engage to Change Supported Employment route.

The activity of job coaches was monitored by the project Supported Employment Agencies for the duration of the project. Data on the hours spent with every young person was recorded according to the activity that was carried out by job coaches. To ensure consistency in measurement, job coaches were asked to indicate what category the hours they worked with clients were recordable. Headings were agreed across delivery partners to maximise their agreement on what to include in each category (Table 2). Training on how to record their working hours was offered to job coaches and to new job coaches starting on the project.

The aim of this study is to analyse the influence of the following pathways to employment for young people on the jobs achieved and the quality of these jobs. Job quality includes indicators of how many hours young people work every week. We considered the 16+ hours cut off to be a measure of good quality employment outcomes because these jobs are more likely to create an opportunity of social integration, sense of belonging, learning possibility and they provide a life changing opportunity from a financial perspective.

The study reports on the mean number of job coaching hours delivered under different pathways for a young person to get into employment. Job outcomes such as mean hours worked, wages earned, and employees' age are analysed.

Hours of job coach input were tested for normality of distribution against the number of hours of support received by young people to understand if there are input differences in relation to quality of employment outcomes. The distribution was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test and it was statistically significantly different from a normal distribution. As the distribution was not normal, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis or Mann-Whitney tests were used to make comparisons between different pathways to employment and paid jobs, hours worked and age. Pearson correlation was used to correlate wage received and hours of job coaching support.



<b>Category and hours</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Action Planning</b>	Team meetings, staff training, office admin, writing letters or emails, making telephone calls for clients incl. welfare benefits letter (not job finding or monitoring). Access to Work <sup>1</sup> applications.
<b>Course Preparation</b>	Accredited training preparation and course work.
<b>Group Teaching</b>	Any group session. Job clubs (introduced later in the project).
<b>Independent Job Development</b>	CV building, better off in work calculation <sup>2</sup> , Cover letters, interview preparation, basic skills enhancement or any other activities with clients preparing for placement start including mock applications.
<b>Job Maintenance</b>	Whilst in paid employment or placement any tasks completed after phasing out has been done, where additional support is required to maintain the job. With exception of going back in for job coaching for new or amended tasks needed. Returning to workplace to address client's performance and issues. Support at probationary reviews, supervision, disciplinary reviews.
<b>Job Training</b>	All duties and tasks relating to job coaching/training in both paid and unpaid positions/experience. Could include re-training for new task or venue/change of contract.
<b>Job Finding</b>	General or specific work relating to finding a job or placement e.g., Internet, job searches, writing live applications, CV amendments and attending interviews. Meet and greet employers
<b>Monitoring</b>	Telephone or face to face or email check on regular basis, then up to sustainment date (3 months after job starts), then annually.
<b>Route familiarisation</b>	When someone needs additional support to get them used to the route or changes to transport links etc. NOT travel training
<b>Travel Training</b>	Initial travel training for independence to the workplace.
<b>Staff Travel</b>	Job coaches travel.
<b>Vocational profile</b>	First home visit and Vocational Profile assessment.
<b>Work Site Visit</b>	Any visit to a workplace by individual or group, usually for general familiarisation of participants with workplaces to aid choice-making or as part of any pre-placement training.

Table 2: Description of categories job coaching input

# Results

Job coaches reported hours for 719 young people referred to the project, from a total of 858 (84%) during the data collection period of September 2016 – June 2021. Data for some young people on the Engage to Change project were not included as some job coaches’ hours were not collected consistently for some young people. Information on the employment services from the project used by each young person was collected in order to define different pathways to employment or non-employment.

The Engage to Change worked with young people representing a wide range of neurotypes[1], which were reported on the first meeting with the Supported Employment Agency staff. Some young people reported more than one neurotype, as showed in Table 3.

[1] Neurotype refers to the type of neurodivergence reported by the young person. We refer to neurotype instead of diagnosis to underline the differences in how people think, process information and experience the world.

Neurotype	Number of young people	Percentage based on 719 young people *
Autism	409	57%
Intellectual disability	308	43%
Specific Learning Difficulties	341	47%
ADD	29	4%
ADHD	93	13%
Dyslexia	102	14%
Dyspraxia	82	11%
Dyscalculia	29	4%
Dysgraphia	8	1%

Access to work is a government scheme that provides a grant to help pay for practical support if you have a disability or any other type of health or mental condition (Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition: What Access to Work is - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)))

Better off in work calculation is an assessment to check if the young person would be better off in work than in welfare benefits, considering the type of benefits received, the hours worked, the pay rate etc.

Neurotype refers to the type of neurodivergence reported by the young person. We refer to neurotype instead of diagnosis to underline the differences in how people think, process information and experience the world.



\* Participants can be counted more than once due to co-occurring differences

Table 3: Neurotype description of participants in Engage to Change

The support provided by the job coach was tailored on individual needs and not neurotype details. The support received varied considerably depending on the individual and based on job requirements.

Table 4 summarises the number of hours spent supporting young people taking part in the Engage to Change project. Young people who were referred to the project but did not progress to the employment stage represent more than half of the people in our sample. The job coaches' hours dedicated to them was 25 hours on average. These young people received a referral visit, a vocational profiling appointment, employment skills development and similar activities, but did not progress to any form of employment before the end of the fifth year.

		Mean total job coaching hours per person	Number of young people included in this category
No employment outcome	Unpaid placement	100 hours	50
	Paid placement	76 hours	69
	Unpaid and paid placement	95 hours	92
	Referral Only	25 hours	371
Employment outcome	Unpaid Placement	76 hours	11
	Paid placement	125 hours	21
	Unpaid and paid placement	113 hours	44
	Employment only	46 hours	37

Table 4: Job coaching support

Some young people were engaged in paid placement only, for up to 6 months, with an average job coach input of 76 hours. Others achieved an unpaid placement and followed by a paid placement, without a progression and with an average job coach input of 95 hours. Young people supported during an unpaid placement and who did not progress to a job, received 100 hours job coach input on average.



Young people achieving employment did it through different pathways. Some young people went into employment directly, without any other forms of placement; they had an average job coaching input of 46 hours. Others who went from an unpaid placement to paid employment received, on average, 76 hours of job coaching input. Some young people experienced a short unpaid placement, followed by a paid placement, and paid employment, and they received an average input of 113 hours. Another possible pathway was going from a paid placement to a paid employment, and on average, they received support from a job coach for 125 hours.

In order to establish the employment percentage for each pathway we considered that 61 young people experienced an unpaid placement and only 11 (18%) of these went into employment. If instead, we consider the 90 young people experiencing a paid placement, 21 (23%) went into employment. If we consider the 136 young people experiencing an unpaid placement, followed by a paid placement, 44 (32%) young people are getting into employment. This suggests that the unpaid to paid pathway delivered the most experience the most job coach hours of support and the higher employment rates than other pathways.

Young people going directly into employment received less input from a job coach. When comparing the 211 young people who did not achieve paid employment but had an employment experience with the project, and the 113 young people who entered employment, there is no significant difference in the number of hours dedicated to support them (Mann Whitney U test  $Z=-0.1355$  Sign. = 0.175). The average input of job coaching hours for those not in employment is 74 hours, while it is 98 hours for those in employment, but the difference is not statistically significant (Mann Whitney U test  $Z=-1.751$  Sign=0.8).

### Job coaches' hours and job outcome quality

#### Hours worked

We compared young people working 16 hours or more, with young people working less than 16 hours. A total of 74 young people for whom we had hours of work data were included (65%). Forty young people worked for less than 16 hours per week, and they were supported for an average 80 hours by a job coach. Thirty-four young people worked 16 hours or more and were supported for an average of 132 hours. There is a difference between the group of young people working less than 16 hours and those working 16 hours or more, where young people working more hours also received more support. However, this difference is not statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U test = 577.50, Sign=0.266).

## Age

Young people were compared considering 3 age groups:

- 16-19 years old (29 young people) who received an average input of 58 hours from job coaches.
- 20-22 years old (40 young people) receiving an average input of 75 hours.
- 23-25 years old (34 young people) receiving an input of 129 hours.

There is no statistical difference in the number of hours of job coaching input (Kruskall-Wallis's test = 5.608; Sign=0.061).

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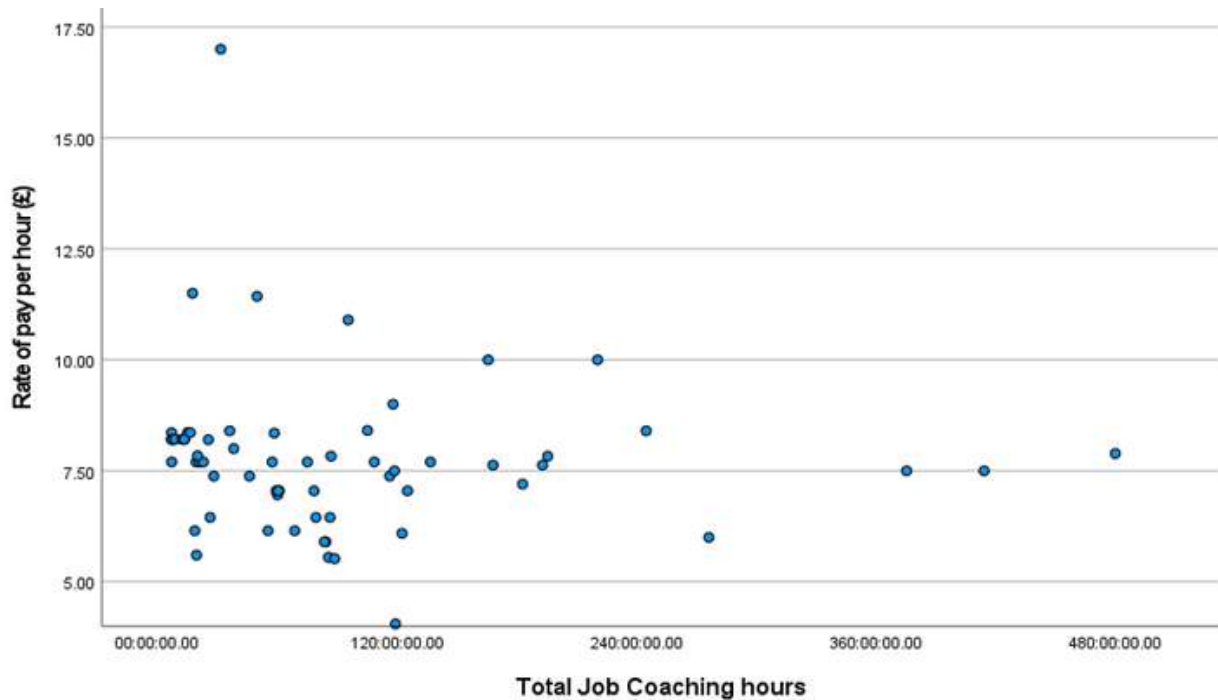


Figure 2: Rate of pay per hour and Job Coaching hours.

There is no linear correlation between the number of hours dedicated to the support of young people and rate of pay per hour (Pearson Correlation - 0.79; Sign. 0.54) (Figure 2).

## Employment pathways and job outcomes

Within the 4 different pathways leading to employment, we looked at differences in term of employment outcomes (Table 5). The group that was earning the most on a monthly and hourly basies were the participants going directly into employment, without a placement. On average, they were working 17 hours a week. Those who achieved a paid placement followed by employment earned on average £477 a month, with an average hourly pay of approximately £7. The mean age of workers is 21.

Young people going from a short unpaid placement to employment earned an average of £444 per month, or £8 an hour. These participants worked on average 18 hours per week and the average age for the group was 22.

Pathways to employment , wages and hours worked	Mean Monthly Wage	Mean Hourly Wage	Mean hours worked per week	Mean age of workers
Employment	£576.35	£8.37	17	21
Paid placement to employment	£477.58	£7.02	19	21
Unpaid Placement to Employment	£444.05	£8.01	18	22
Unpaid Placement, Paid Placement and Paid employment	£351.96	£7.48	11	22

Table 5: Four pathway to employment and outcomes

The group earning less consisted of young people going from an unpaid placement to a paid placement and to employment, earning an average of £352 a month and £7.48 an hour. Young people following this pathway to employment were working on average 11 hours a week and their average age was 22 years old. There is a statistically significant difference between the 4 pathways leading to employment when considering the hours worked per week (Kruskal-Wallis's test = 8.517  $p=0.036$ ).

When looking at the job coaching input along the timeline of engagement quarters for each pathway to employment, we can highlight some differences in average amount of hours of job coach support delivered (Figure 3). Young people moving from an unpaid placement to employment received higher support input over the first 2 quarters; the support faded away naturally over the following three quarters, to increase again slightly for job maintenance.

The paid placement to paid employment pathway present two peaks, as the support from a job coach continues to grow until quarter 3 of their engagement. The support decreases naturally over the 4th quarter, to increase once again in quarter 5. The support naturally decreases to climb again on the quarter 9 of engagement. Those who moved directly into paid employment had support reduced down to a low level after 4 quarters. The general trend for support reduces over time for all pathways. Young people engaged in employment only received higher support at the beginning, but that naturally faded over time, with some rises over time. This is consistent with the Supported Employment model, although there may be issues in how quickly support is faded. Direct to employment and unpaid placement to employment faded the quickest to similar levels over 4 quarters and this may be a reflection of the people being placed in these pathways needing less support than those in other pathways.

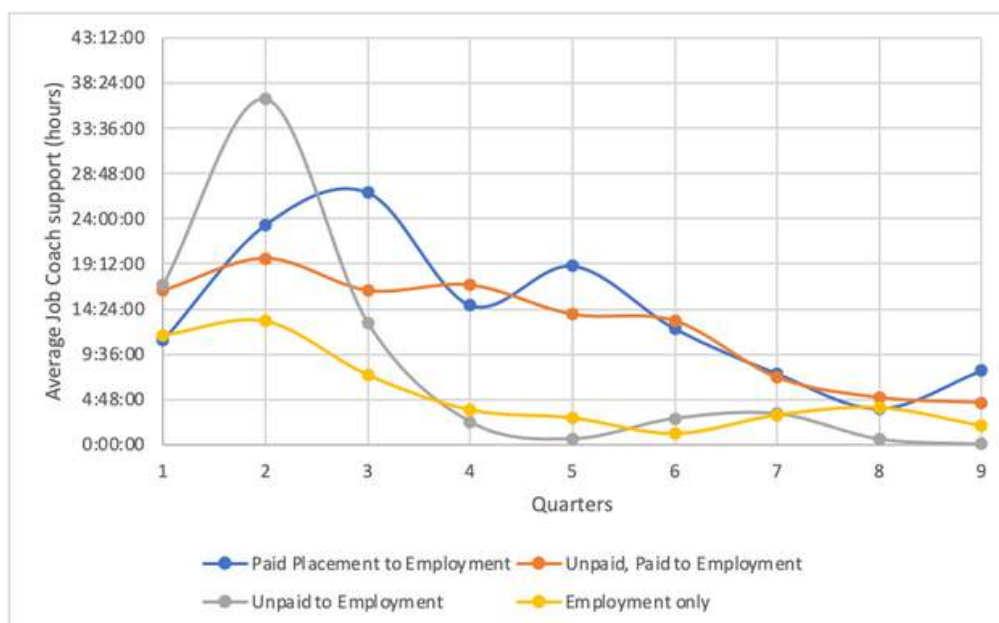


Figure 3: Different pathways to employment and average job coaching input per quarter

We can observe the same fluctuation for the unpaid, paid and employment pathways with fewer peaks, and with a naturally decrease in the number of job coaches' hours of input needed.

## Discussion

The level and nature of engagement of young people in this project differed greatly. Half of the people in our sample received a small amount of job coach input, as they received initial input with a referral visit and vocational profiling but did not progress to any form of employment. We do not have comprehensive data regarding the reason young people left the project without an employment outcome, but it includes going back to college, being referred to another service, or not finding a suitable employment opportunity through the project.

For the young people reaching the employment stage, the range of pathways taken supports an argument that a degree of personalisation, central to Supported Employment, was offered. In some cases, this led to a paid job, in others it did not.

The number of job coaching hours dedicated to a young person varied considerably, also suggesting a degree of personalisation to the individual.

Those who received support for less time were the participants going directly into paid employment. They were also the participants working more hours and receiving higher salaries than those going through other pathways. It is likely that young people going directly into employment were the participants that needed less support to be work ready or had clearer ideas of what they wanted to do, and that right employment opportunity was available at the right time. The support of a job coach during the recruitment and workplace training process played an important role. This support appears to make a real difference in whether the young person is able to demonstrate their abilities to enter a paid job. The pathway of going directly into employment delivered jobs for a significant number of young people in the project and delivered higher wage rates and greater hours compared with other pathways.

This pathway should be available as an option for neurodivergent young people in their employment journey.

Young people going through placements and then paid employment received more support, and this seemed to be linked with their personal needs and the work needed to help them meet the employers' specifications.



Overall, in the Engage to Change Project, paid placement to employment resulted an important route to employment, leading to a 41% employment rate (Vigna et al., 2023). This study suggests that paid incentives should be considered in employment programmes within a framework of Supported Employment, to maximise employment outcomes. This means that the employment incentive should be one of the elements offered within Supported Employment, together with job coach support and a good job matching process.

Unpaid employment placements were relatively unsuccessful in getting young people into employment, delivering lower rates of employment than other pathways. It is likely that this is related to the short duration of many of these placements. This study highlights how unpaid employment pathways do not imply less job coach support needed, but often more, as the job match element and on-the-job training is still part of this pathway, but with worse employment outcomes. Indeed, both pathways, unpaid and paid placement, if done correctly, take up just as much time as the other as the pay element is only an additional admin task between the Supported Employment Agency and the employer.

The fact that young people entered employment through a number of pathways we have described, confirms the need of a flexible approach when planning for people's journey into paid work. Some young people would benefit from a 6-month placement, but others might need more time to become confident in the job and employable at the end of the 6 months.

Job Coaching also provides an important source of support for the employer in each of these pathways which should be taken into account in future studies.

Young people aged 23-26 have an higher employment rate (16-19 = 20%; 20-22 = 24%; 23-26 = 26%) when compared to other age groups served by the project (Vigna et al., 2023). We have speculated elsewhere that this may be due to older young people having a better idea of their goals, being more mature, and more able to adapt to employment than young people nearer to school or college.

Different pathways to employment led to differences in the quality of job outcomes. Those working the least number of hours are the participants moving from unpaid placement to a paid placement and to paid employment. It might be that some participants wish to retain the certainty of welfare benefits while working, but at the same time be financially better off, requiring the number of hours worked to be limited. All of the other pathways leading to employment led to a higher mean number of hours worked, exceeding 16 hour a week. However, when comparing rates of pay per hour and per month, there is no significant difference in the amount of support received, and the amount earned, by young people who followed different pathways.

In this study there is a large proportion of people who reported themselves to be autistic or having a co-occurring autistic neurotype. In terms of support, this means that some young people with autism needed more help in dealing with the social aspect of work, while people with other neurotypes needed more support in learning the job. It is good practice to acknowledge how job coach support could be different and case specific to individual needs.

Further research is needed to understand the reason why young people decide to work a particular number of hours. The Supported Employment approach should be tailored to the individuals' needs, and so it might be that the amount of time a young person could work per week was limited. However, it could also be that a person decides to work fewer hours to retain some welfare benefits to be just a little better off financially in work. Supported Employment staff checked with the young person if they were better off financially in work, considering the number of hours worked, the expected rate of pay and the young person's benefits status.

When analysing different pathways to employment, we can see how intense the support is at the beginning of the employment journey, but this naturally decreases over-time, increasing slightly again in the job maintenance phase. This is fundamental, as the job coach support needs to be available in the long term to the young person and the employer to promote job retention and job development. Some young people might decide to go for a promotion or increase their responsibility with a job change. In both cases the input from a job coach should be available to them. The nature of the input is very different from the first part, when young people are new to the employment experience. In each of the pathways, it is interesting to observe the level of job coach support increasing when the young person is trained in the workplace, then decreasing naturally, to increase again when further job coach input is needed. This suggests that securing job coach support over time is a successful way to guarantee long term employment.

There had been some dissatisfaction expressed by participants and their families with the waiting list time on the Engage to Change project, where young people spent too much time before receiving support to actively obtain a job, resulting in some people leaving the project. This issue was addressed by the project partners through the introduction of Job Clubs, which were accessed by young people waiting to receive support. Job Clubs aimed to increase employability skills and keep the young person engaged, while looking for suitable employment opportunities.

A weakness of this study is that the number of hours worked by the employees are those reported initially on their employment contract; since then, there might have been changes in the number of hours worked. An example could be that employees becoming more confident in their role, could have increased the number of hours worked to accommodate employers' needs. Another limitation of this study is the relative low number of young people accessing the different pathways; it would have been important to have a larger sample size for each pathways to provide further comparisons.

## Conclusion

Job coaching is central to Supported Employment; a job coach is a professional figure trained to support young people into employment. Pathways to employment may be different, but we know that more experience, of a significant length, within the Supported Employment framework supports young people into employment. The support provided by a job coach depends on individual needs, employer needs and the work environment.

This study suggests that a flexible approach to funding Job Coaching is needed to maximise effectiveness of Supported Employment. It is essential that a correct job match is pursued, and that the job is trained in the workplace.

Paid placement appears to be a successful solution for neurodivergent employees. Wage incentives should be delivered within a Supported Employment framework to be successful.

This paper provides further evidence that Governments should provide a National Supported Employment service, accessible to anyone with a neurodivergent profile, willing to work and that could not find, learn, keep, and maintain a job without job coach support.

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