

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ar Anabledd a Chyflogaeth

This response was submitted to the Equality and Social Justice Committee consultation on Disability and Employment

DE25

Ymateb gan: Rhaglen Trawsnewid Anableddau Dysgu Gogledd Cymru Gyda'n Gilydd | Response from: North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme



North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme

Response to the Senedd Disability and Employment Consultation

Your name and contact details as the person, or organisation, submitting the evidence.

Kim Killow, Lead Planning and Development Officer (Employment workstream lead),
North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme, Flintshire
County Council (host employer).

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Whether your evidence is submitted as an individual, or on behalf of an organisation.

This submission is made on behalf of the statutory partners of the North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme who are also the members of the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group.

The partners are the six local authority Senior Managers for learning disability services and senior managers for learning disability services at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board.

If you are submitting evidence as an individual, confirmation that you are over 18 years old.

I confirm that I am over the age of 18.

Confirmation of whether you would prefer that your name is not published alongside your evidence (names of individuals under 18 years old will not be published).

We are happy for our name (North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme) to be published.

Confirmation of whether you would like the Committee to treat any or all of your written evidence as confidential, with reasons for the request.

Our submission is not confidential.

If you have referred to a third party in your evidence, such as a parent, spouse or relative, confirmation that they have agreed that you can share information that may be used to identify them and that they understand that it will be published.

Where we refer to third parties all information is anonymised.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senedd's Disability and Employment enquiry and thank the Equality and Social Justice Committee for undertaking this important piece of work.

I had the opportunity to attend the Senedd consultation workshop (as an observer) with members of Conwy Connect in North Wales on Friday 16th of August 2024 and was able to speak to Rhys briefly after the workshop.

I have thus sent Rhys the North Wales Supported Employment Strategy for people with learning disabilities and a document titled "Having a Job" which is the write up of the evidence we gathered from people with learning disabilities across North Wales for the strategy. What they told us forms the heart of the strategy.

I want to commend Rhys for his approach to the workshop and demonstrating a genuine willingness to listen carefully and non-judgementally to what the group had to say.

Context for our submission

As noted above I have prepared this submission on behalf of the statutory partners of the North Wales Learning Disability Transformation Programme. The programme has been running since 2019. We were originally funded through the Healthier Wales Transformation fund which became part of the Regional Integration Fund (RIF) in April 2022. We are currently funded till 31st March 2027.

The programme is based on the North Wales Learning Disability Strategy (2018 to 2023) which is broad based and structured around what people with learning disabilities told us matters to them. The strategy is currently being refreshed.

One of these areas is **paid employment** – in the strategy people with learning disabilities told us that they want paid employment, to be valued and to be seen as making a contribution.

North Wales Together Employment Workstream

The employment workstream was set up in April 2021 (covid recovery period) following a request from our statutory partners and people with learning disabilities that we prioritise efforts to improve access to paid employment for people with learning disabilities.

Due to the regional scale of the issue and the complexity of the reasons why more people with LD are not in paid employment, the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group asked the lead to help them co-produce the North Wales Supported Employment Strategy (2024 to 2029) for people with learning disabilities which we have shared with Rhys and the team. The strategy has now been published.

When we were writing the strategy we were committed to taking real action and thus the strategy includes a delivery mechanism – **the North Wales Supported Employment Model**.

From the 1st of April 2024 to the 31st of March 2027, the programme has been awarded an additional grant from RIF to roll this model out to each of the six local authority learning disability services.

The model or project went live across the region on the 1st of July 2024 and is being independently evaluated by the University of Strathclyde and a citizen panel.

The aim of the model is to enable more people with LD known to social services and/or who attend specialist secondary schools to make an informed choice if paid employment will help them achieve their wellbeing outcomes, to have access to the right model of support so they have the greatest chance of securing well matched employment, and in the longer term embed access to paid employment as a distinct care pathway within these services (system and culture change). **SEE APPENDIX 1 for an illustration of the model.**

The focus of our submission

Our submission to the enquiry focuses on ***people with a formal diagnosis of a learning disability*** who either attend specialist secondary schools and/or are known to social services, aged 14 plus.

Our experience is that in the employment and skills sectors learning disability is often confused with learning difficulties and ASD. We thus provide the definition of a diagnosed learning disability below (although we are sure the enquiry team and the members of the committee are aware of the distinction.)

The term learning disability is used to describe an individual who has:

- *A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, or to learn new skills (impaired intelligence); and / or*
- *A reduced ability to cope independently (impaired adaptive functioning); which started before adult-hood and has a lasting effect on development (Department of Health, 2001).*

Please note, the term learning disability should not be confused with the term learning difficulty which is used in education as a broader term which includes people with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia (Emerson and Heslop, 2010). (North Wales Learning Disability Strategy, p.6)

1. What progress has been made to deliver the recommendations set out in the 'Locked Out' report and to reduce and remove barriers faced by disabled people who want to access Wales's labour market. Why progress to reduce the employment and pay disability gap has been so difficult to achieve.

Our response focuses more on the second part of the question as we cannot fully comment on what progress has been made to deliver the recommendations set out in the Locked-Out Report. In a way that is itself a response reflecting the need to improve joint working across health/ social care and employment and skills for disabled people.

We note progress that we are aware of which includes:

- The Disabled People's Employment Group – the employment workstream lead is a member.
- The Welsh Access to Work forum which we feel has been effective in increasing awareness of issues with A2W in Wales and advocating for change. Communication with DWP has seemed to improve as a result.
- Network of Disabled People's Employment Champion (we respond to the question below re. impact)

Our views on why progress to reduce the employment and pay disability gap has been so difficult to achieve are as follows:

- Lack of disaggregated data about the disabled population and their employment rate gap has led to broad brush policies that overlook inequalities within the wider population of disabled people in Wales.
 - For example, and using English data, during Covid the employment rate for people with learning disabilities dropped from 6.1% to 4.8% with fewer women in work than men – hence a gender gap.
 - Better data would help with designing more targeted policies and interventions based on evidence of what works for different groups. And prioritising action for those groups facing the most disadvantage and those who need targeted support to overcome the barriers they face to achieving paid employment.
 - In terms of what works, one size does not fit all and with people with learning disabilities (and indeed other disabled groups) there is a solid evidence base that the most effective model of support to enable more people with LD to secure a good job match and employers to employ people with learning disabilities is the 5 stage supported employment model aligned to the BASE UK Supported Employment Quality Framework model fidelity standards. https://www.base-uk.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/SE%20Phase-by-Phase%20guide_final_April2024.pdf
 - We note that not everyone with a disability and/or learning disability needs support to find employment – some will have the resources and support networks they need to navigate the labour market independently or with informal support.
 - However, the very low employment rate of people with learning disabilities suggest that the majority will need support and will require a supported employment approach (particularly those with a formal diagnosis of a learning disability known to social care services).

Challenges for people with learning disabilities in securing employment are related to verbal communication, task transferability, speech, language, memory, cognitive processing, reading, and writing difficulties, impaired motor function and difficulty in changing learned routines.

Supported employment is effective because it addresses the specific challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities.

As the severity of learning disabilities increases, supported employment strategies are more effective, focusing on "place, train, and sustain." (North Wales Supported Employment Strategy for people with learning disabilities, p.26)

- Since the end of the national Engage to Change (E2C) programme, there has been little to no investment nationally in quality assured supported employment models. Also, the adult population aged 25 plus were not eligible for E2C which creates the sense that they have been “written off”. In North Wales people with learning disabilities were very clear that they wanted an inclusive approach, young people are a priority in our strategy but the adult population are equally eligible for support.
- We are aware that the E2C legacy programme is lobbying the Welsh Government to create a national job coaching strategy – we would welcome this but note the importance of job coaching being framed with the **Supported Employment Quality Framework model fidelity standards** as all the evidence indicates that following this model and its core values produces the best outcomes.
- Our experience is that the Welsh Government’s efforts to address this gap through the “Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales” employment and skills plan have not been effective for people with learning disabilities. The Welsh Government has many effective programmes for disadvantaged groups in Wales but as we outline in the strategy these do not work well for people with learning disabilities because of the specific challenges they face accessing paid employment.
- The supported employment model works because it has been designed to address the specific learning and support needs of people with learning (intellectual disabilities) and other groups such as those with ASD.
- We include two slides that were provided to us by Dr. Stephen Beyer, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Mental Health, Cardiff University as evidence for the strategy which illustrate the difference between employment support approaches and supported employment.

What works in finding jobs?

Severe LD	Moderate LD	Mild LD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater use of support to find & plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families • Job coaches • Extended Vocational Profiling/ Discovery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20+ hours in various environs? • Interests and what good at • Relevant experiences • Work types and environments • Days and schedules • Welfare benefit planning • Use of practical job tryouts to aid decision-making • Aided CV and support planning • Proactive and specific job finding and matching jobs to people • Employer presentation and negotiation • Adaptation of interview and induction 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater independent action • More use of generic help to identifying strengths, interests and experience • Use of more generic sources for vacancies • Greater use of courses, "job clubs" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CV development • Job search • Writing applications • More use of mainstream job application & interviewing and induction processes

Dr. Stephen Beyer

What works for people with a learning disability learning jobs?

Severe LD	Moderate LD	Mild LD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job coach task support on-site • Training on the job- Systematic Instruction • Breaking tasks into steps • "Chaining" tasks together • Hierarchy of cues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical guidance • Gestures • Verbal prompts • Job adaptation if needed • Managing praise and reinforcement more closely • Specific social training strategies • Work-based accreditation of skills demonstrated is possible 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-employment training is possible using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • verbal instruction & demonstration • Simple language • Greater time to learn • Use of naturally occurring praise and reinforcement through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors, co-workers • Ordinary pay incentives • May have to manage work pressure/ productivity demands • Shaping social contact through co-workers • Vocational qualifications for job and career development are possible

Dr. Stephen Beyer

- The other related issues is that within these programmes people with learning disabilities are often not viewed as a priority group and there is a

lack of targeting and effective partnership links with the services and the agencies providing care and support to people with learning disabilities.

- Proactive engagement efforts are critical for people with learning disabilities – for many their access to choices and options are influenced by their circle of support – schools, teachers, social workers, advocates, providers of support, families etc.
- And the range of those options and choices can be curtailed by the long-standing culture of low aspirations and expectations in Wales about what people with learning disabilities (and other disabled groups) can do and achieve – hence any interventions to increase the employment rate must also include strategies to change this culture.
- In our strategy we analyse this issue and thus raising aspirations and culture change is a fundamental goal of the supported employment model.
- The other thing that we believe would help is making stronger policy links across employment, skills and health and social care; strengthen partnership working and enable those responsible to view reducing the employment gap as a shared agenda. This approach fits well with the intentions of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.
- For example, in the Supported Employment Strategy we make a clear link between the aspirations of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and how well-matched paid employment can enhance people's quality of life, physical and emotional health and wellbeing and social inclusion whilst also contributing to the goals of a Stronger, Fairer, Greener plan.
- The approach we have taken in North Wales via the model is to test whether partnership working between health social care services and supported employment quality framework services will enable more people to find, get, learn, and keep a job and more employers to employ people with learning disabilities.
- We tested this model in 2023 to 2024 and the evidence suggests that this does work, we have already seen people with learning disabilities who have never worked and never had the option to consider paid work progressing into well matched paid employment.
- For example, in the pilot year, 61 referrals were made to the Employment Pathway Coordinator covering Denbighshire and Conwy County Councils – the majority came from the social work teams. Our supported employment service had a caseload of 26 people by the end of the year and 9 people had found well matched paid employment.¹
- Whilst these are not “big” numbers in context of the low employment rate of people with LD it suggests that this approach is tapping into unmet need and “reaching” individuals that existing employment programmes in Wales are not doing.
- As noted above this model has now been rolled out across the region.

¹ Whilst not everyone referred chose to pursue paid employment; they were given the chance to make an informed choice, to discuss concerns about the impact of work on benefits and hear about the support they could access if they did want to find a paid job.

- We would also highlight the excellent evaluation of the national Engage to Change programme which thoroughly evidenced the effective of the supported employment model in progressing many more young people with learning disabilities and autism into work. Both in terms of data and also people's experience of this model of support and the softer wellbeing outcomes achieved.
- The other gap is the lack of co-production within mainstream employment programmes in Wales – co-production (nothing for us without us) is a crucial tenant within the learning disability self-advocacy movement and we have not witnessed any efforts by key Welsh Government programmes to engage the LD community in co-producing/ designing their services.

Progress elsewhere.

Where we have seen progress elsewhere is in Scotland where the Scottish Government have now ring fenced funding for supported employment within the funding they allocate to the local authorities to commission local employment services for their residents. We acknowledge that Scotland is in a different situation as they have devolved responsibility for employment whereas Wales does not. This too is hindering progress in Wales.

There is a lesson to be learned here from Scotland – an independent evaluation of the Fairer Scotland national employment programme found that only 1% of participants were known to have a learning disability and that where supported employment existed (as part of FSS or other local authority provision) there was limited use of quality standards and thus variation in the quality of provision. The evaluation found that none of the Fair Start Scotland providers were not following the recognised 5 stage model.

By contrast, the service that was noted by the evaluators as delivering a particularly high standard of support was a local authority model following the 5-stage model and using a partnership approach. ²

In conclusion we would argue that Wales needs a local solution to tackling the disability employment gap that is embedded in the communities where people live and which uses a partnership approach across health, social care and supported employment services following the recognised standards for the supported employment sector.

We feel that the option of embedding job coaches within Welsh Government's current programmes will not be effective in creating the step change Wales needs to make a real impact on closing the employment rate gap and there is a real risk that the most disadvantaged groups will still get left behind such as those with learning disabilities for the reasons we have noted.

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-supported-employment-scotland/pages/5/>

Moreover, we require an approach that is underpinned by a clear set of values and principles that prioritises the quality of life and health and wellbeing benefits that well matched paid employment can bring and an understanding of how this may have a ripple effect on creating genuinely inclusive and cohesive communities.

This approach fits far better with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and the aspirations of a Stronger, Fairer, Greener plan.

We acknowledge there are serious funding and resource constraints, but these will always exist – there may never be a right time to for Wales to invest in developing a good quality supported employment infrastructure – but the real support needs of people with disabilities and learning disabilities and those of employers cannot be ignored and now is the time to respond to the substantial evidence base of what actually works and take action.

We have limited information on the DWP Universal Support programme, its status and how it will work in practice – we have heard that the DWP have worked in partnership with BASE UK to align US to the SEQF model fidelity standards.

We wonder if there is an option for the Welsh Government to negotiate greater control over how this will be rolled out in Wales for example, key priority groups, partnership models between health, social care and *local* supported employment services using existing local planning structures. This could include greater interaction between Regional Partnership Boards and Regional Skills Partnerships.

2. How the social model of disability is being used to underpin employment and recruitment practices, and what barriers continue to exist throughout society that impact on access to work (i.e. transport, attitudes)/ How can we make sure disabled people are included in society so they can work and keep a job?

Our experience is that application of the social model of disability to employment and recruitment practices appears to be largely non-existent beyond disability organisations.

In the commercial sector our experience is that there is a profound lack of understanding and awareness of how to apply the model to employment and recruitment practices and traditional approaches are entrenched with a lack of incentive to do otherwise. It is a long-standing challenge to Government's across the UK to identify effective interventions to incentivise private sector employers to employ disabled groups.

Research carried out on employer attitudes to the employability of people with learning disabilities found that employers have more reservations about employing people with learning disabilities compared to other disabled groups.³

³ Beyer, S. and Beyer A. (2017). *A systematic review of the literature on the benefits for employers of employing people with learning disabilities*. London: Mencap.

What would help – employers were clear having professionals such as job coaches or disability employment specialists supporting the individual and the employer in the workplace was viewed as the most effective intervention to support employers to overcome entrenched attitudes and recruitment barriers.

“Sitlington and Easterday (1992) reported that employers would be more likely to employ people with a learning disability if they had on-going availability of a person to call for assistance and they have the availability of a person for on-site training. Kregel and Unger (1993) found that employers valued supported employment and job coach support, reporting that “from the employer’s perspective, supported employment is viewed as a program that capitalizes on the strengths of workers with disabilities and is easily integrated into the workplace. Furthermore, the presence of the job coach at the worksite is viewed by the employers as a positive experience.”⁴

The same research found that interventions such as general awareness raising, promotional campaigns were not effective – what made the difference was the practical offer of advocacy, job matching and tailored training that employees need, and to assist employers with the advice and on-going point of reference that they report as being so valuable to their efforts in creating a diverse workforce.

Hence again this research supports our call for Wales to invest in developing its supported employment infrastructure – giving it an equal place alongside mainstream programmes designed for those without disabilities.

Public sector and the recruitment policies We analyse this in the strategy but the feedback from people with learning disabilities about big employers like the local authorities was that they find every aspect of the recruitment process difficult and for some inaccessible. Online applications forms on less than user friendly platforms are a big barrier – people with learning disabilities experience higher levels of digital exclusion and poverty compared to the general population.

We have found a lack of understanding and clear protocols for making reasonable adjustments to the application and interviewing process for example, easy read applications forms and reliance on competency-based interviews which can be very challenging for someone with a learning disability - 50% have communications challenges associated with their learning disability and thus cannot compete on an even playing field.

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-06/2017.061%20Benefits%20of%20employing%20PWLD%255b1%255d%20%281%29.pdf>

⁴ Ibid, <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-06/2017.061%20Benefits%20of%20employing%20PWLD%255b1%255d%20%281%29.pdf>, p.32

Whilst in some ways that is the “hard knocks” of a competitive labour market, but the public sector should be leading the way and proactively introducing accessible recruitment practices and effective reasonable adjustments to level the playing field.

We suggest that as part of the public sector equality duty, energy and resources are directed to introducing a target for public sector organisation in Wales (including the Welsh Government) to embed the social model of disability into their recruitment policies and practices.

Public sector organisations should be given targets for employing disabled people that reflect their local demographic (for example in North Wales people with learning disabilities make up 2% of the population) and required to report to the public annually – these should be disaggregated targets.

And as we are finding in North Wales, having the offer of supported employment specialists in the workplace can make a difference to overcoming negative attitudes about how someone with a learning disability will perform – we have found these attitudes in both the private and public sector.

3. How effective Welsh Government actions (e.g. the network of Disability Employment Champions and apprenticeships) have been in reducing barriers to employment and reducing the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people, including the extent to which Welsh Government policies complement/ duplicate/ undermine those set by the UK Government.

We are aware of the network of Disabled People’s Employment Champions and have done some work together in North Wales. To be fair, the posts have only just been made permanent this year and there have been changes to the team – it may thus be too early to assess the impact of this approach.

Our view is that effective employment strategies are typically characterized by supply side and demand side action and interventions.

The network of champions is a demand side intervention that is not balanced by an effective supply side intervention – an effective model of support to enable disabled people to effectively compete for jobs in the open labour market as we noted above.

Putting an effective supply side intervention in place would enable the Champions to work alongside local supported employment services who can then provide a pipeline of people “ready to work” and follow this through with the practical in-work support that both the individual and the employer may need to recruit more people with disabilities and learning disabilities (and often this is simply a matter of tackling myths and mis-perceptions that employers have of

disabled people e.g., they will be off sick more often, health and safety concerns etc.)

Although not formalised some of this work has started in North Wales where our supported employment services have been working in partnership with the local Disability Employment Champion (Gareth Foulkes) to engage employers signed up to the disability employer confident scheme. It is still too early to assess whether this is effective but in principles it adds value to both initiatives.

We thus conclude that Welsh Government actions to reduce barriers to employment and reducing the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people have not been effective to date – we have not seen real change on the ground in North Wales for people with learning disabilities.

At the same time, we also believe that reducing the employment gap is as much a health and social care agenda as it is an employment and skills agenda. This is not to suggest that this should sit with social care services but that a joined-up approach as noted above may be more effective than the current fragmented approach. (this is not to suggest however, that social care budgets should provide the funding given the huge pressures on the budgets of local authorities and statutory services).

For disabled people who are eligible for care and support under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, helping people achieve good quality work that meets their wider life aspirations, that they find meaningful, can have a positive impact on their quality of life and physical and emotional wellbeing. It also has the potential to lead to cost efficiencies for social services who otherwise may need to fund services to help people achieve their wellbeing outcomes. So there is a “win win” in such an approach.

The other reason has to do with principles and values, and people with learning disabilities were very clear that they wanted to be supported into paid work by those who had the right set of values, who believed in them and what they can do and achieve. Hence another reason why the supported employment model is effective because it is underpinned by a core set of values and beliefs (see page 19 of strategy for an illustration of the core values of supported employment) which aligns well with the principles of the SSWBA.

The University of Strathclyde will be evaluating both improvements to health and wellbeing and cost efficiencies for those who join the supported employment project so we will have more data to share over the next 3 years.

This is the rationale for the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group taking a leadership role in North Wales, the business case for the allocation of an additional grant to enable the Regional Supported Employment Model to be rolled

out to every local authority social work service, and investment in supported employment services following the SEQF model fidelity standards.

But that investment is short term and the RIF itself is under significant pressure so as a partnership we would welcome an approach to creating a stable supported employment infrastructure with the Welsh Government setting national design principles for that provision (using the SEQF, its core values, national occupational standards for job coaching) but with local implementation. At the heart of this approach should be a requirement to co-produce local delivery models with disabled people.

4. Whether disabled people are accessing apprenticeships and if any further support is needed to ensure schemes are inclusive.

The blunt fact of the matter is that apprenticeships programmes are not accessible to people with a formal diagnosis of a learning disability because of the academic requirements.

However, the shared supported apprenticeship scheme has enabled some young people with a mild learning disability to access apprenticeships. The Level 2 academic requirements do mean that for many this bar is set too high because of the effect of their cognitive impairment on their academic abilities.

5. What further policy measures are needed to support disabled people, young disabled people, and employers to increase participation rates and what can be learned from elsewhere.

Our responses above have mostly addressed this question – we note progress in Scotland around ring fenced funding for supported employment as being effective.

- In the NW Supported Employment Strategy, we advise the Welsh Government to recognise young people with learning disabilities aged 19 to 24 as a distinct group at risk of not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) and allocate resources to prevent this.



Disabled young people are more likely to be NEET compared to non-disabled young people.

Among 16 to 18-year-olds, **17.7% of young disabled individuals are NEET** while 9.2% of non-disabled peers are NEET



For 19 to 24-year-olds, **40.3% of young disabled people are NEET**, compared to 15.4% of non-disabled young people.



Only 5% of young people with learning disabilities move into paid employment after leaving school.



Post-school, many young people with learning disabilities pursue Independent Living Skills courses at college, while managed care or support/day or work opportunities are common destinations after further education.

- The Transformation Team did an earlier piece of research that looked at outcomes post-specialist secondary school for young people with learning disabilities – Life After School: the onward journey of young people with learning disabilities. <https://northwalestogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Life-After-School-Executive-summary-English.pdf>
- The report found for those leaving specialist secondary school in year 13, the most common next step was Local FE or specialist college. No young people were recorded as “entering employment outside of work-based training” but a small proportion of young people in Year 13 in all regions were recorded as unemployed.

- Following college, the picture was murky, and we struggled to collect good quality data at this stage. What we did collect indicated that the majority left college without having a clear route to access paid employment.
- This was identified as one of the biggest gaps in the report for North Wales which is why the SE Model seeks to reach back to aged 14 plus and partnership working with the local specialist secondary schools.
- The situation may have improved with the introduction of the ALNET Wales Act and new FE ILS curriculum – however to date we have not seen data demonstrating this.
- And as we noted above one size does not fit all and not all young people with a learning disability want to undertake a segregated ILS programme and there is perhaps too much reliance on further education as the expected next step for young people with learning disabilities and ALN more widely in lieu of community based options such as paid employment.
- We have seen some positive outcomes for young people with learning disabilities in North Wales via supported internship programmes (DFN project search/ ILS pathway 4). However, this project does not work well for all young people with learning disabilities, has selection criteria, and our experience is that young people with more significant learning disabilities and additional challenges are not always considered “suitable” for this pathway.
- As noted above we are not seeing the commitment to reducing the employment rate between young people with learning disabilities and non-disabled young people translating into real action on the ground in North Wales. Disaggregated data with respect to performance against this commitment would be useful to measure impact and understand which young people are still getting left behind.

Basically, we need an honest conversation about whether the Wales Young Person's Guarantee and its programmes are effective for young people with learning disabilities, and we need good quality data to understand this.

6. What actions would support those who are currently unable to work to access voluntary opportunities (which could lead to future work opportunities).

“I can do more than people think. I want to work but sometimes people around me think that I am not able to work or can only work in charity shops.” (North Wales Supported Employment Strategy, citizen, p.6)

In some ways this quote encapsulates our response.

Voluntary work or unpaid work placement have been relied on for far too long as a panacea for people with learning disabilities in lieu of making real efforts to support

them to find paid jobs with the same terms and conditions as other employees doing the same role.

In the “Having a Job” sessions for the strategy, we met numerous adults through the self-advocacy groups who over the past 25 years have undertaken a wide variety of unpaid work roles of which none led to the option of progression to paid employment.

⁵This suggest that people with LD do not need more support to find voluntary work – they need more support to progress into paid employment if this is the reason why they are doing voluntary work.

The other trend we identified was confusion about the difference between “work”, voluntary work and work opportunity services funded by the local authority – many people who were attending work opportunity services told us this was their job and the stiped they received for attending their “wage” – this confusion is compounded by families and advocacy organisations who also believed this was their job.

We agree that as part of the 5-stage supported employment model, short term voluntary work, with a clear purpose and outcomes can be an effective part of the vocational profiling stage – and help people experience real jobs in a real working environment as part of identifying a good job match.

But we have too many examples of people who could find paid work (or indeed wanted a paid job) who have been “placed” in long term unpaid work placements/ voluntary work. We have examples of this happening in the commercial sector which raises real concerns around compliance with national minimum wage legislation (as we heard from one attendee at the Conwy Connect workshop with Rhys).

On the other hand, there will be people with learning disabilities who **choose** not to be in paid work and make an **informed choice** to undertake voluntary work because they want to give back to their community etc.

The key here is **informed choice** to avoid voluntary work being used as a “good enough option” because of low aspirations and expectations about what people with learning disabilities can do and achieve and a “get out clause” for services and providers who do not have the expertise and right set of values to champion people’s right to have access to paid jobs.

We thus have real concerns about the use of voluntary work as a “stepping stone” unless that is applied as part of a structured progression plan with paid work as the goal.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our response,

Kim Killow

05.09.2024

⁵ See also <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-supported-employment-scotland/pages/4/> - the role of volunteering.

APPENDIX 1

North Wales Supported Employment Model for Learning Disability Services

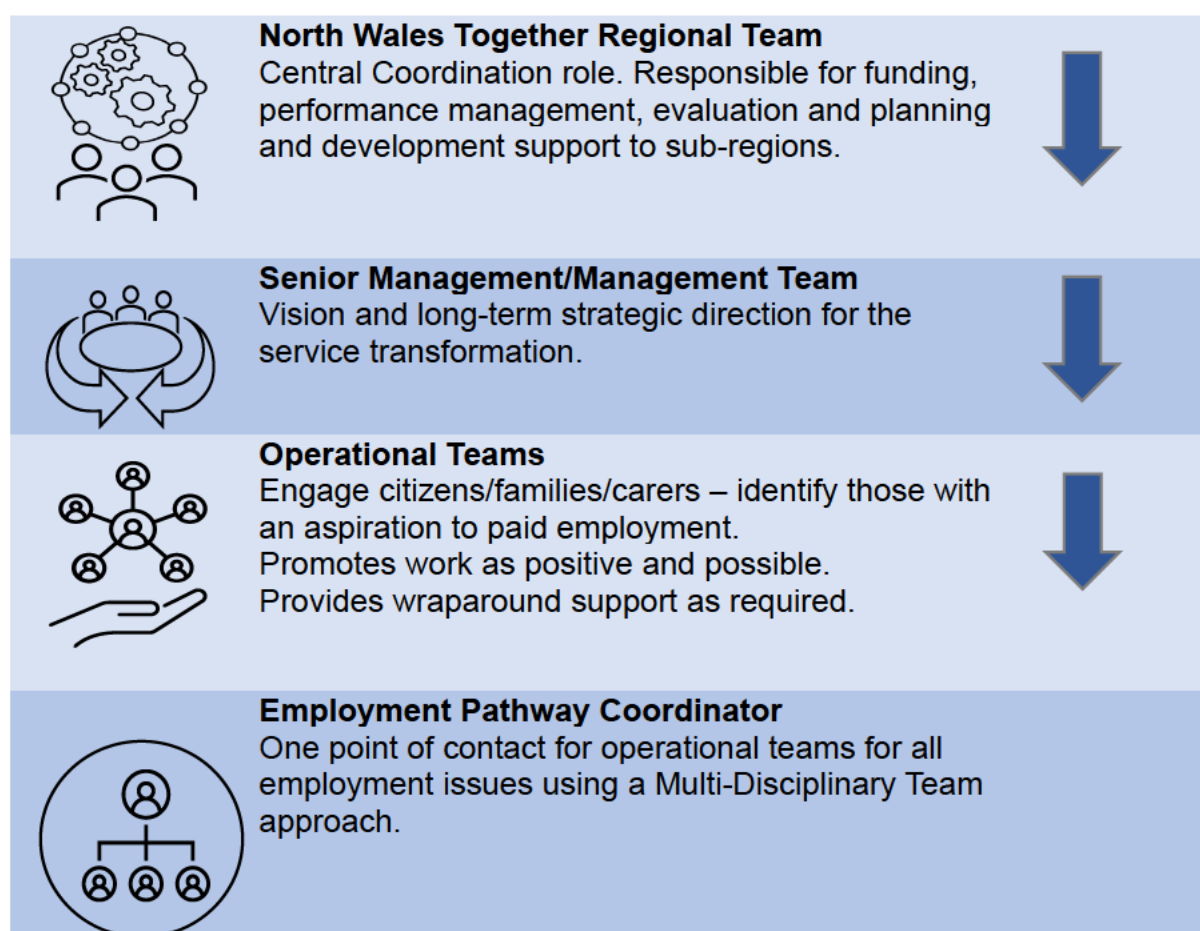
The core recommendation in this strategy is that the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership implement a new supported employment service model for learning disability social services in North Wales in partnership with specialist support employment services.

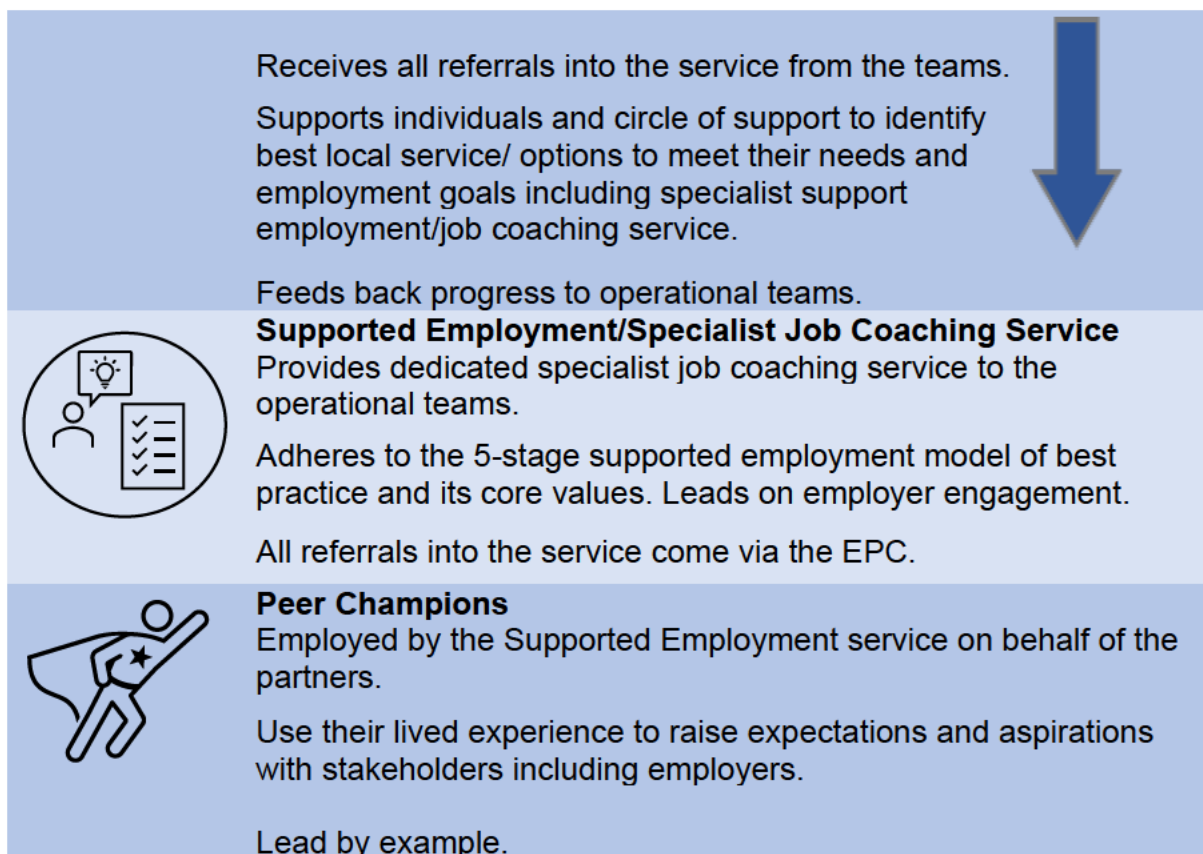
Overview: The model is designed to address the findings of the strategy and aims to provide individuals with learning disabilities the same opportunities for paid employment. It emphasises a whole-system approach to system and service transformation and seeks to bridge the gap between the current state of services and future aspirations. The model is *sub-regional* with two local authorities working together to share resources and learning.

Aim: to embed access to paid employment as a distinct care pathway within learning disability social services and as an alternative to traditional day/ work opportunity services and long-term unpaid work placements using a partnership approach with specialist supported employment services.

The Model Components: The model consists of a range of elements that work together to create a comprehensive approach. This is illustrated below.

Illustration 3: North Wales Supported Employment Model





Conclusions:

This strategy thoroughly examines the obstacles to employment faced by individuals with learning disabilities known to social services and has drawn the following conclusions:

- People with learning disabilities can work successfully in various occupations when they have the right support, job match, and employer. Stereotypes should not limit their opportunities.
- Work is not the only way for individuals to achieve equality and inclusion, but it has a powerful role to play and individuals with learning disabilities should have the right to choose if paid employment is right for them.
- While some individuals may find and maintain employment through mainstream employability programmes or independently, the current low employment rates suggest that the majority will require specialised supported employment.
- Supported employment is an evidence-based model that yields positive outcomes, especially when it aligns with the BASE UK Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards. This strategy recommends using the SEQF model fidelity standards as the benchmark for any supported employment service provided.
- Concerns about the impact of employment on welfare benefits, as well as a pervasive culture of low expectations, hinder individuals from realising their social and economic potential.

- Current local authority day and work opportunities can contribute to a culture of dependency and lack focus on progression. These services, a form of managed care and support, are also costly compared to supported employment. The proposed supported employment model has the potential to realise cost efficiencies.
- Employer attitudes pose challenges to advancing people with learning disabilities into the workforce, but employers, including local authorities and the Health Board, are part of the solution. They can lead by example in recruiting and employing more individuals with learning disabilities.
- Health and social services stand to gain the most from supporting more individuals with learning disabilities to secure paid employment. This is a regional issue requiring a regional approach to ensure equal access to employment for everyone in North Wales.

The strategy recommends the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group (NWLPG) implement a new supported employment service model to serve as a bridge from their current state to their aspirations outlined