



**Mapping the Employability  
Landscape for People with  
Learning Disabilities in  
Scotland**  
Key Findings

## What is the issue?

Facilitating employment opportunities for people with a learning disability is a priority under the 'The keys to life' strategy Active Citizenship outcome. SCLD commissioned this research on behalf of the Scottish Government to better understand the scale and effectiveness of employability support for people with learning disabilities in Scotland and make recommendations on how support can be enhanced.



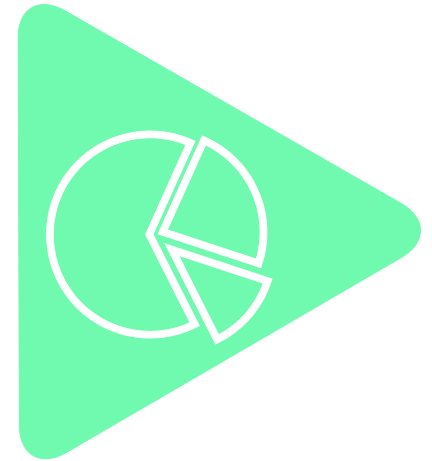
The employment rate of people with a learning disability is estimated to be in the range of 7% to 25%, well below the disability rate of 42% and the overall rate of 73%. For people with a learning disability who are in work, 65% to 70% work less than 16 hours per week; and only half are employed in the open market. It is important, therefore, to recognise the distinction between real, sustainable employment and part-time or sheltered employment that can effectively act as a substitute for day care.

The data also suggests that the number of adults with a learning disability in Scotland is significantly under-reported due to inconsistency in how learning disabilities are defined by organisations, reliance on self-disclosure and limited recording of learning disability in organisations' monitoring systems. In terms of potential demand for employability services there could be 120,000-150,000 adults with a learning disability who are not in employment. The aim of employability services should be, wherever possible, to support people with a learning disability into real, sustainable employment.

## What does the research tell us?

### Societal Factors impacting on learning disability employment

There is a substantial challenge in overcoming low expectations that parents, teachers, college lecturers, employers and society at large have of people with a learning disability. People with a learning disability are not always encouraged to see themselves as having a valuable role to play in society and the labour market, unduly limiting individuals' aspirations of what jobs and careers they are able to do.



### Parental Concerns

Parents of people with a learning disability are the most helpful source of information and guidance when young people are deciding what to do post-16. However:

- Some parents have low expectations of their children's work abilities.
- Some parents fear disappointment if aspirations rise above likely outcomes.
- Some parents are over(ly) protective and do not want their children to face the potential risks of the open labour market and prefer safer education options.
- Some parents are concerned about the impact on household income levels due to reduced benefits payments if their children move into employment.

### The Education System - Schools and Colleges

The employment options of young people with a learning disability are compromised by lower attainment at school and limited encouragement to pursue higher skilled and demanding study and employment pathways. Only 17% of pupils with a learning disability achieve an SCQF Level 6 or above qualification, compared to an average of 58%. Some of the weaknesses in the school and college system include:

- Low academic expectations of pupils and students with a learning disability.
- Poor quality of teaching, institutional admission policies, physical access, segregation, and delays in appropriate learning support being provided.
- Bullying, social isolation or being undermined by their peer group.

The main post-school destination is college (at 52% of school leavers with a learning disability the proportion is double the national average), while unemployment is also double the national average (16% of school leavers with a learning disability). There is a danger of 'cycling' between different courses rather than being supported along a pathway into employment as well as insufficient support to make the jump to FE, HE or employment. In recent years, however, there has been greater focus on full-time places, qualification attainment and progression in Scotland's colleges.

## Employers

Employers are the gatekeepers to the labour market and efforts are needed to challenge both employers' and employees' preconceptions of what people with a learning disability are able to do in the workplace. This requires cultural change to:

- Challenge the misconceptions held by employers that people with a learning disability are only able to carry out routine jobs.
- Challenge fears of existing employees through exposure to disability awareness training.
- Encourage and support employers to recognise the positive business benefits of recruiting people with a learning disability.
- Raise awareness among employers on how to provide a more accessible and inclusive workplace.
- Encourage employers to invest in the career development and progression of employees with a learning disability over the longer term.
- Encourage employers to make the adaptations in their recruitment and employment practices so that people can access and sustain the jobs on offer.

## Individual/Personal Issues

Many people with a learning disability will have support needs and conditions that directly impact on their ability to enter, sustain and progress into employment. For individuals with more severe learning disabilities employment there is a need for alternative sheltered employment and voluntary activities as well as specialist and ongoing employability support. While employment may be not possible for everyone it should, however, be a very real aspiration for all.

## **Employability Provision for people with learning disabilities**

### Mainstream Employability Provision

The available data surrounding the mainstream programmes suggest that only very small numbers of people with a learning disability are accessing this provision:

- Work Choice: 2,280 (pan-disability) starts in Scotland in 2014/15
- Access to Work: 250-300 grants to people with a learning disability in Scotland
- Community Job Scotland: 104 jobs for young people with a disability or long-term health conditions (a grouping much wider than learning disability)

Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Funding Council do not record learning disability in their monitoring systems. The lack of detailed monitoring information relating to the employability and skills journeys of people with a learning disability needs to change to enable more informed funding and service delivery decisions.

## Supported Employment

The main targeted type of employability provision for people with additional support needs – which includes people with a learning disability – is supported employment. The Supported Employment Framework has a five stepped approach:

- Engagement by SE Service – helping disabled people most distanced from the labour market to make informed choices.
- Vocational Profiling – identifying skills and preferences for work, giving work experiences that will help the individual make their own vocational choices.
- Job Finding – identifying the preferred job through employer engagement, also providing support to the employer.
- Employer Engagement – finding out about the workplace environment, co-workers and the ‘supports’ a person might need.
- On/Off the job Support and Aftercare – backup to the employee and their employer, developing workplace independence and career progression.

Supported employment services are established in 26 of the 32 local authority areas. Some identified challenges around supported employment in Scotland include a lack of a strategic, co-ordinated approach in delivering Supported Employment Services leading to variation across the country; lack of quality standards, underpinned by accredited staff training; and lack of long-term sustainable funding. Increasingly supported employment services are being transferred from social work to employability/economic development departments. While this is viewed as a positive move allowing people with a learning disability to access the mainstream employability pipeline it may make supported employment more vulnerable to cuts as it is no longer included within statutory budgets. There is also the danger that people with a learning disability get ‘lost’ within mainstream client monitoring systems.

It is estimated that up to 2,000 people with a learning disability were engaged with supported employment services. Where data was available, the 16 hours/week jobs job outcome rate was 28% and this increases to 38% if all employment outcomes are included. A cost per job outcome calculation has been cautiously made to indicate a cost per 16 hour/week job outcome of £14,000.

## Other targeted provision

Colleges are a common post-school destination for people with a learning disability offering a two tier approach with basic SCQF Level 1 and 2 courses on the one hand; and work-related SCQF Levels 3 to 5 courses on the other. The 16 hours/week job outcome rate is 12%, increasing to 20% if all employment outcomes are included. A number of third sector organisations provide targeted and specialist employability services for people with a learning disability. They have a 16 hours/week job outcomes rate of 14% (and a cost per 16 hours/week job outcomes of £17,200), and this increases to 23% if all employment outcomes are included.

The Project SEARCH model is specifically targeted at people with a learning disability and involves a partnership between a host business, a supported employment agency and a training provider. The programme achieves higher employment outcomes rates – 16 hours/week job outcome rate of 61% in Scotland (73% if all employment outcomes are included) but cohort sizes are necessarily kept small.

A cost per job calculation is not possible due to the limited supply of Project SEARCH cost data. Data from North Lanarkshire's and South Lanarkshire's Scotland's project SEARCH programmes between 2010/2011 and 2012/13, however, indicated a cost per participant of £8,000 to £10,000.

Data for social enterprises/sheltered employment organisations is very limited in scope but the reported employment outcomes for people with a learning disability in 2014/15 were a 16 hour/week jobs job outcomes rate of 5%.

### **What works for people with learning disabilities?**

The consensus view of providers and stakeholders is that the approach set out in the Supported Employment Framework remains good practice. Key points raised were the importance of:

- Stage 1: being employment focused from the start, carrying out a robust household-based assessment of benefit implications of moving into work, working with parents and carers to raise expectations and developing a family commitment to moving into real, sustainable employment.
- Stage 2: in-depth and thorough vocational profiling so that each client's skills, qualities, ambitions and support needs can be fully understood leading on to good quality work experience placements in real work environments.
- Stage 3: high quality job matching that remains person-centred led and builds on the vocational profiling. Proactive engagement with employers which takes into account their own needs and concerns.
- Stage 4: maintaining a strong relationship with employers as well as delivering ongoing support and advice to them. Ensuring reasonable adjustments are made for the employee and that they are working in a supportive environment.
- Stage 5: skilled and experienced job coaches to provide on/off the job support and aftercare and gradually phase out the support as appropriate.

A number of challenges were raised that impact on delivery:

- There is no single point of information or directory to find out about employability services available for people with a learning disability.
- Lack of expertise in working with people with a learning disability in mainstream services.
- Difficulties in securing work experience placements and bridging the gap between work experience and real jobs.
- Challenging employer attitudes and concerns about how they can support people with a learning disability.
- Increasing difficulties meeting employer skills demands and the need for individuals to be increasingly adaptive to change.
- Short-term and annualised funding which does not align with the long-term support needs of people with a learning disability.
- The stringent application of welfare benefits entitlement - the implications of which can be difficult for people with learning disability to fully understand.

## What are the recommendations for action?

Increasing the employment rate of people with a learning disability requires long-term commitment from parents, carers, schools, colleges and other downstream actors who all have critical roles to play as well as employability services and employers.



### Recommendations for All learning Disability Partners

- Substantially improve recording and reporting of learning disabilities data.
- Establish more effective joined-up employment pathways for people with a learning disability.
- Double employment outcome rates for people with a learning disability to 50% over a 5 year time period.
- Secure extra resources/funding for learning disability employability services.

### Recommendations for Scottish Government

- Give greater priority to employability/employment of people with a learning disability.
- Renewed promotion of the Supported Employment Framework, working closely with SUSE, SDS, SFC and local authorities.
- Set Scotland's employers the target of 4% of employees to be people with a learning disability.

### Recommendations for Local Authorities

- Develop directories of employability services for people with a learning disability.
- Establish supported employment services in all local authority areas.

### Recommendations for Skills Development Scotland

- Collect and report learning disability data so that people accessing MAs, national programmes and employment can be monitored and reported.
- Embed learning disability good practice in its contracted provision with providers of SDS programmes promoting the Supported Employment Framework as best practice.
- Set higher targets for providers working with people with a learning disability.

### Recommendations for Scottish Funding Council and Scotland's Colleges

- Greater focus on progression into real, sustainable employment. This may require more developed joint working with employers so that learners are developing skills in real workplaces not just college settings.

### Recommendations for SCLD

- Continue to raise the profile and promote learning disability employment and employability, its challenges, and the positive social and economic value of supporting people into real sustainable employment.
- Develop agreed definition of 'learning disabilities' so that funders, organisations and employers are clearer who is included and who is not.

### Recommendations for Employers

- Increased employer commitment to recruiting people with a learning disability.