



Leading learning and skills

# Employment issues for young people with learning disabilities in Tynedale

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### **Note about pictures**

Note that all pictures of people in this report are included purely for illustration and are not of any actual individuals who contributed or were involved in any way in the study.

# Summary

## Basis

This research study set out to investigate

- The employment potential of young people with learning disabilities in Tynedale
- The barriers to employment that this group faces
- What further employability training might help them



by consulting the people themselves – those who have a learning disability and others who have a good understanding of them – their parents or carers.

The background intention is to gauge the need for, and guide the shape of, a social enterprise in the region which might provide both employment and employability training for people with learning disabilities.

46 people with a learning disability were interviewed and 41 parents and carers.

## What's needed

The consultations found a strongly articulated desire for work that avoids indolence, achieves real value and helps people develop more independent living.

There is also a desire to see a supportive working environment and the need to relieve lifelong carers.

## Employment potential and aspirations

93% of the young people interviewed have had experience of work of some kind.

However, this experience was often quite narrow. Of those who had some work experience, 28% had only worked in one type of job; and 70% had only experienced a maximum of two types of job.

Very few of the young people consulted were currently or had previously been in any form of paid employment. Most people's experience was of voluntary jobs.

The job aspirations of those interviewed were quite extensive – when these 46 young people were asked if they had a job that they'd always wanted to do, 24 different types of job were identified.

## Employment barriers

Five barriers to employment were identified from the consultations:

- 1/ **A suspicion of prejudice** – people believe that most employers are inherently prejudiced against disabled people.
- 2/ **Personal experiences are limited** and people with learning disabilities would benefit from advice based more on personal assessments; and from more opportunities to experience work.
- 3/ **Few suitable job opportunities** – there are limited job opportunities and plenty of able competition.
- 4/ **Employers have to be seriously committed** – people with learning disabilities need jobs to be adapted to cope with their personal vulnerability and limitations.
- 5/ **The financial risks are frightening** – there is seen to be a big financial risk for people with learning disabilities taking paid employment.

### Further employment training

Three possible types of further employability training were identified from the consultations:

- 1/ **Jobclub** – reintroducing a forum for mutual support for people with learning disabilities to work together in finding employment
- 2/ **More hands-on work experience** – providing a programme of work placements with a variety of local businesses, building individual experiences of types of job
- 3/ **Workplace visits** – a programme of visits to different workplaces, to extend individual experience by giving a broader awareness of different types of job.

### Other conclusions and recommendations for dismantling the employment barriers

It was very apparent during the study how everyone is an individual; that there is no universal solution; and that individuals need choices.

A number of conclusions and recommendations are offered about how the barriers to employment for this population group might be removed.

- Introducing new channels to **communicate** and highlight positive and useful information about employment opportunities and successes among this population group would help undermine the suspicions about employer prejudice.
- Providing the **training** identified above and a roll-out of the new forums for providing person-centred planning **advice** will contribute to resolving the lack of personal experience. Offering people a personal assessment of their skills and abilities, to guide this planning, would help them reach their full potential.
- The need for **sheltered employment** opportunities – besides those offered by mainstream businesses – is necessary where individuals are not able to

compete effectively in the job market. People need to be given the option of such sheltered work as either a means to develop skills and confidence before moving on; or as a longer term workplace where they may feel safer and happier.

- We should recognise that enabling people to risk stopping their **benefits** in favour of wages will only be successful when they feel secure; and that feeling secure may take time and will need them to feel in control of the change.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Objectives

The objective of this study was to carry out research that would provide a detailed assessment of the employment potential of people aged 20 to 30 with learning disabilities in Tynedale, the barriers to employment facing this group and the role that further employability training might play.

## 1.2 Background

The background to this research is the intention to directly use the findings guide the start up of a social enterprise, based in the region, which might provide both employment and employability training for people with learning disabilities.

## 1.3 Scope

The study was directed at individuals who have a learning disability themselves; at the parents or carers of people with a learning disability; and at other professionals who have experience of working with people with a learning disability.

The study focused on residents of Tynedale, including people from outside the region who are temporarily resident in Tynedale while doing a course of study.



## 1.4 Steering and guidance

Key to the success of the study was the contribution of established organisations working with people with learning disabilities, contributing as partners on the project Steering Group.

Several other professionals and individuals were also consulted and contributed to the planning and preparation, helping to shape and guide the way the study was conducted.

### **Steering group**

Direction for the study, guidance on the methods used and contact with individuals to be consulted was provided by a Steering Group which included,

Chair: Stan Cooke – Chief Executive, Disability North

Alice Belderbos - Vocational Project Development Coordinator, Mencap Dilston College

Tony Mulholland - Special Needs Manager, Connexions

Fiona Macdonald - Project Coordinator, Gateway into the Community

Annie Sanders - Participation Coordinator, Northumberland Families and Children's Trust

## 1.5 Research questions and methods

The study aimed to find out from these young people,

- What work experience and training they've had
- What sort of job they might like to do if it was possible, and
- What barriers they perceive preventing them from carrying out such a job.

Consultations were held with individuals and/or with their parents or carers; or with small groups of people from a college or school class.

The format for each consultation was as follows:

- An **introduction** to the purpose of the session
- An initial question to explore if there was any **ideal job** that they had always really wanted or were already doing
- A discussion about their **work experience and placements** so far
- A video to open up ideas about **job choices** and aspirations
- Exploration of **job preferences**, using a set of illustrated job cards to stimulate ideas
- A discussion of what factors would be **important** about any job that they might do
- A discussion about what might be **difficult** in attaining the job (or jobs) that they wanted and what might **help**
- An invitation to **parents/carers to add** anything else to what had already been said
- **Conclusion** and thanks

### **Job choices video**

The video was shown to open ideas about different types of job. It featured a couple of people with learning disabilities discussing the types of job they might like to do themselves; interspersed with short clips of them working in such roles.

The jobs featured were work in a garden centre, in a kitchen, in an office, in a children's nursery, painting and decorating, in a hardware store, in a florist, in a print shop and as a waitress.

## Job cards

The job cards were taken from the *Off to Work* set – a resource for exploring the world of work with pupils with special educational needs – produced by Lifetime Careers.

Jobs which were included and presented as cards during these consultations are listed in the table at right.

### Jobs cards presented during consultations

Removal worker  
 Factory worker  
 Bricklayer  
 Carpenter  
 Child-minder  
 Garage mechanic  
 Librarian  
 Bank officer  
 Office worker  
 Gardener  
 Postal worker  
 Cook  
 Shop worker  
 Water or waitress  
 Farmer  
 Cleaner  
 TV camera operator  
 Receptionist  
 Road-mender

## 1.6 Analysis

Keypoints raised during the consultations were recorded on flipcharts and each consultation was taped, with the permission of the interviewees, to assist the subsequent analysis.

The information gathered from these consultations was analysed to pull out,

- The work experience of the young people
- Their preferences for type of job
- Their views on what would be important about their working environment
- The barriers to employment that they perceive

Conclusions drawn from this were initially reviewed with members of the project Steering Group; and then with the Disability Employment Adviser at Hexham Jobcentre Plus and a Key Worker from the Northumberland Supported Employment and Education Service.

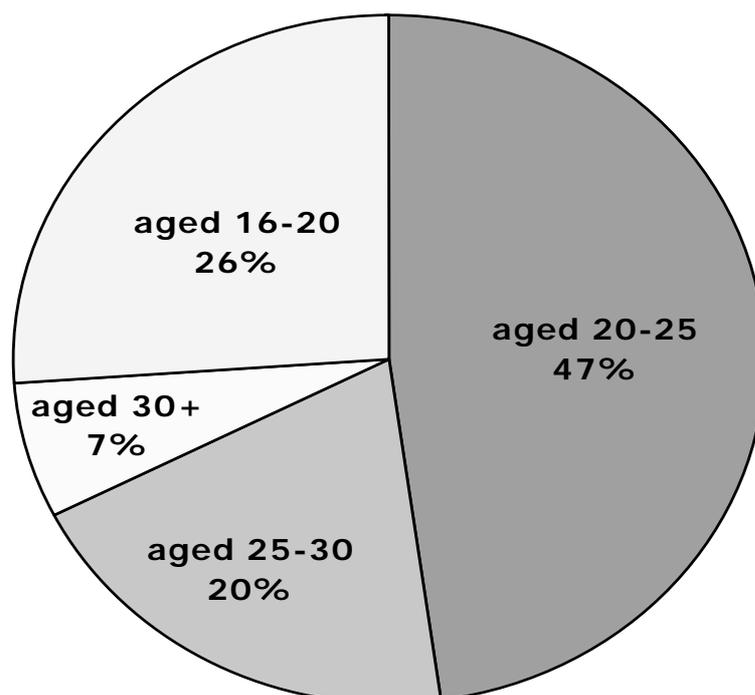
## 1.7 People consulted

In all, consultations were held with a total of 87 people: 46 people with learning disabilities and 41 parents or professional carers.

Of the people with learning disabilities,

- All had been to a school for special educational needs – mostly Priory School or Hackwood Park School in Hexham.
- Almost all were between the ages of 17 and 30 – two were only 16 and three were older but were included while doing group sessions with others and their views were not excluded.
- All except two were currently resident in Tynedale; all had had a parental home in Tynedale. This included people living in Hexham, Bellingham, Haydon Bridge, Haltwhistle, Prudhoe, Stocksfield, Corbridge and Allenheads.

### Age range of young people consulted



## 2 What's needed

In its October 2005 report<sup>1</sup>, the Open Society Institute found that the majority of people with "intellectual difficulties" in the UK are unable to access employment. The 2001 government strategy white paper Valuing People<sup>2</sup> estimates the number of people with intellectual disabilities in paid employment at only 11%.

During the course of this study, parents, carers and young people with learning disabilities themselves made a number of important points about what they need from employment.



### The need to avoid an indolent lifestyle

*It's absolutely vital for her to have these things to do - something to do every day, a reason to get up and get going, to give structure to your life. That's hugely important to her.*

*She wants something to occupy her through the day, because she just gets bored stiff with being in the house. She wanders off and then we don't know where she's at.*

*We don't want him to sit around the house and lie around - he's got to be active.*

*Certainly she needs to be doing something in the day - to give her some sort of meaning, some sort of point in life.*

*When we look at all the people [with learning disabilities] we know, and ask how many of them are working - the answer is not many.*

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<sup>1</sup> Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities – Access to Education and Employment – United Kingdom (Open Society Institute 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Valuing People: Moving Forward Together – the Government's Annual Report on Learning Disability 2004 (HM Government HC507)

*We'd like something to occupy her, but there's nothing.*

*I think it's important that she's out and doing something because, as soon as she's allowed to sit back, she would watch TV all the time and there would be no incentive to do anything else. Other teenage children ultimately get bored and go looking for other things - but that rationale isn't there for her because the concept of money doesn't mean anything to her.*

### **The need to achieve real value**

*Eventually, when I retire, I want to look back and say "I'm proud of myself. I've learned a lot in my time" - because it's learning, relevant support and successful completion that are important.*

*Something meaningful, that's what we want. Not just a job for a job's sake.*

*It's a mark of civilisation that the community spent so much time and money fixing his heart problem and we vowed that we'd help him achieve his potential, no matter what. That's what it's all about really.*

*You don't want to be treated just as someone with a disability.*

### **The need to develop more independent living**

*At the moment, being paid is not that important but he's at a stage where he's got to realise that he'll have to live on his own at some point. I suppose that he's living comfortably at home and none of us is making much effort to move on. If he was employed, I think that would be one step to being really independent.*

*A job would help towards her independence. That's so important, because none of us are getting any younger.*

*The whole point of employment is to give another aspect of life, to give independence, to help them grow out of themselves - so the job can't be mundane or it won't be achieving anything.*

*We would like somewhere that he could both live and work because where he is now, at College, he has a lot of autonomy - he can walk around the site freely, he doesn't need someone watching him the whole time because it's safe. Outside College, he has to be shepherded about.*

*There's so much in our own shop that he could do but he's got so much more independence now and it's great that he'd be happy to work here or somewhere else. So, although we could employ him, we'd much prefer it if he'd go out in the wide world and be independent.*

### **The need for a supportive working environment**

*He needs a nice working environment, where people are friendly and considerate.*

*There's certainly a need for some sort of supported employment and I don't think there's been very much in this area.*

### **The need to give carers proper relief**

*What worries me and everybody else as well is being stuck at home with her 24x7. But I don't want her stuck at the other end of the country.*



## 3 Employment potential and aspirations

### 3.1 Work experience

Most encouragingly, 93% of the young people interviewed during this study had had experience of work of some kind.

Clearly, considerable effort has gone into finding opportunities for them to gain some real experience of the workplace – during their school career, while at college or in post-educational placements to develop their employability.



The most common jobs were work in:

Shops	30% had experienced
Cafés	26%
Horticulture	17%
Kitchens	15%
Childcare	15%
Cleaning	15%
Animal care	15%
Offices	13%
Warehouses	11%

Less common experiences were work in hotels, with the elderly, on building sites, as a lifeguard, in the forces, in data input, in forestry, in a hairdressers and in a laundry.

Although 93% of the young people consulted had had some work experience, the breadth of their experience was often quite limited.

- 70% of those who had gained some experience had only been able to work in one or two types of job.
- 28% of those people had had just one type of job.

### 3.2 Voluntary and paid employment

Of the 46 young people consulted during this study, only 2 were currently in any form of paid employment and only a few others had previously had any paid job.

The work experience of all the others was solely of voluntary jobs or work placements.

### 3.3 Aspirations

Each young person was asked about their own preferences for a job.

34 of them had their own ideas before being prompted with the video about job choices or the set of job cards.

The range of job aspirations was quite extensive, as can be seen from the list shown at right here.

Among these,

- Animal care was the choice of 10 people
- Catering was the choice of 5
- Working in a café, in a shop, in horticulture or in hairdressing were each the choices of 3 people

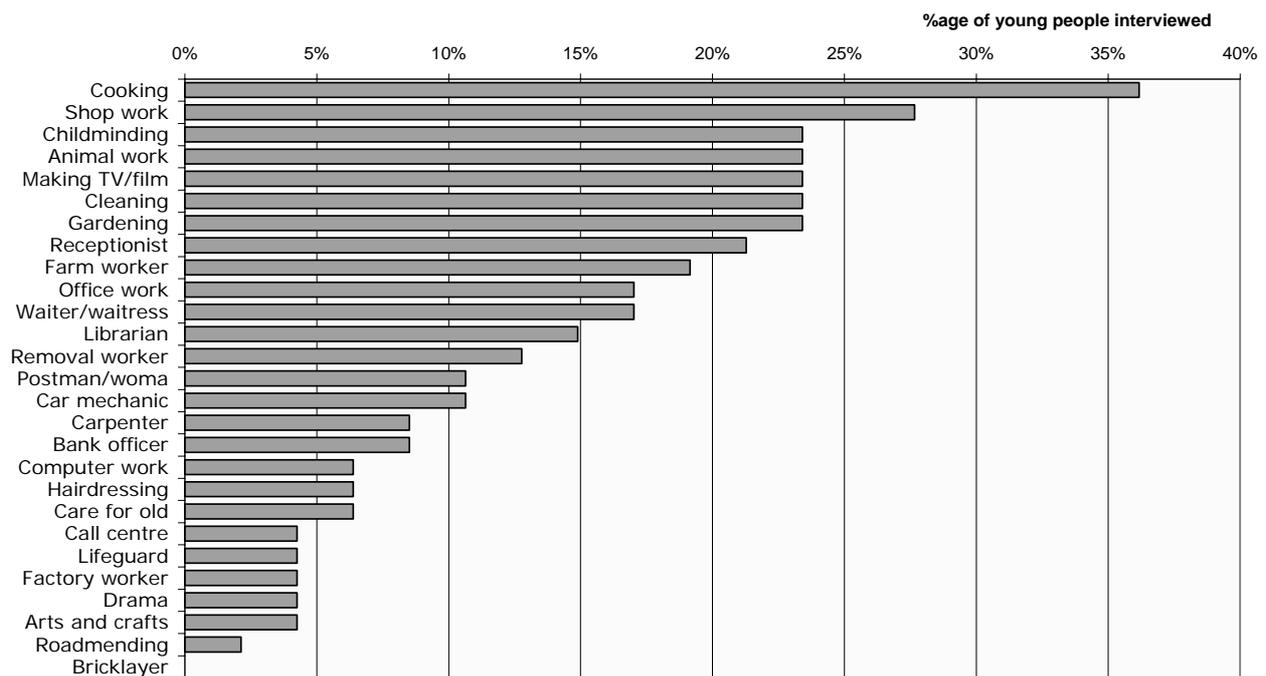
#### Initial job choices

Animal work  
Farming  
Garage mechanic  
Catering  
DJ  
Martial arts teacher  
Horticulture  
Modelling  
Care for old people  
Singing or acting  
Child care  
IT  
Driving  
Café work  
Crafts  
Warehouse work  
Shop work  
Hospital portering  
Lifeguard  
Receptionist  
Soldier  
Forestry  
Airport worker  
Hairdresser

All other occupations listed here were chosen by just 1 or 2 people.

After being prompted by the job cards and video, the young people then choose jobs as illustrated in the following chart:

Declared job preferences



## 4 Barriers to employment

Five barriers to employment were identified from the consultations:

### **A suspicion of prejudice**

People believe that most employers are inherently prejudiced against disabled people.

### **Personal experiences are limited**

People with learning disabilities would benefit from advice based more on personal assessments and from more opportunities to experience work

### **Few job opportunities**

There are limited job opportunities and plenty of competition for jobs.

### **Employers have to be seriously committed**

People with learning disabilities need jobs to be adapted to cope with their personal vulnerability and limitations.

### **The financial risks are frightening**

There is seen to be a big financial risk for people with learning disabilities taking paid employment.

Comments made during the consultations which support the identification of each of these are presented in turn through the rest of this section.

## 4.1 A suspicion of prejudice

Among some of the people consulted, there was clearly a view that employers were only going through the motions when considering their applications: that they were bound by law to include them, but had no genuine intention of offering them a position.



### **Some had experienced bullying or prejudice directly in their lives**

*She's dead keen to learn, but nobody will help. She had a job and she wanted to learn while she was there, but they just weren't prepared to help her.*

*One of her Care Managers did try to get her into a hairdresser, even for just one afternoon a week - but they weren't too keen and made excuses.*

*If she was childminding, they would have to be biggish children. She used to go over to the swimming pool and, once, she opened a door for a little one, because they were too heavy; and they asked her not to go back because people were frightened of her.*

*I used to work at a supermarket and, come the College holidays, I had no cover so I said to them, could my daughter come in with me? - she could do little jobs. At first they said yes and then they said no, "because of the insurance". I think that the insurance is a pathetic excuse - anyone can have an accident and I'm a lot more clumsy than my daughter.*

*He's had quite a few incidents of being picked on and being bullied [at school and college] - because he's not seen as quite the same as other people.*

**Some have been frequently frustrated and have developed a sense of rejection**

*Employers don't have an open enough attitude - a lot of the applications he's made never got him as far as the interview stage.*

*She's got so many good qualities and she's so keen, but nobody will give her a chance.*

*I've sent loads of letters off to businesses that might be an option for me - some say they don't have any vacancies, others that don't have work that suits my skills and capabilities.*

**Some have drawn firm conclusions that many employers are prejudiced against disabled people**

*Even if they say they're an equal opportunities employer, yes they'll let you apply, but it's down to whether they say you're able to do the job to the standard they require.*

*People think to themselves, "if there's a fire, how's he going to get out?"*

*I've been to lots of interviews that haven't worked out. People turn you down because of your disability.*

*I feel people don't want me because of my disability.*

*I find a lot of people are very prejudiced against handicapped people.*

*I think there are a lot of jobs but a lot of businesses don't take people with disabilities.*

*Some companies don't even think about people with disabilities. You can say you'd like a job, but you'd have to find out more about whether you'd be considered. Because if you applied and went for interview and they then said we can't have you because you've got a disability, that would mean that your confidence would take a hit.*

**Some have lowered their expectations as a result**

*A lot of people seem to offer people with disabilities voluntary positions, rather than paid ones.*

*He's now 25 and, by the time they get to this age, they really don't believe they're going to get a job and they get used to being at home.*

## 4.2 Personal experiences are limited

The life experience for the majority of people with learning disabilities has been more sheltered and, consequently, narrower than for other people. Many would like more opportunities to experience work.

Each person is unique and all are presented with a range of choices. Some need more help to decide what will be best for them – advice based on assessments of their potential.

### **For some, the options can be baffling**

*It's not job searching that's a problem; it's not how long it takes; it's that there are so many jobs and understanding how they fit with the disability.*

*The major difficulty is finding something suitable - it takes a long time to find the right thing for the right person.*

*A cracking good website to pull all this information together would be very useful.*

### **There is some confusion about who advises**

*We would want to know who to go to for help.*

*When he left College, he went to the ATC and to Ridley Hall - he's always been in an environment in which work is provided. Presumably, it's up to him to go to the Jobcentre. I never know how much the Care Manager has got to do with it.*

*After College, there was confusion between whether he should continue with further education or go into supported employment provided by Social Services - the two groups didn't seem to talk to each other. There was no-one saying he has been assessed and this is how we should move forward on that.*



*We need an adviser with a high degree of knowledge and skill in this area and with a very good manner*

*You have to be realistic about what you're going to do and you have to start preparing for it early. Nothing happened at school - there was no asking about what he wanted to do and no realism. I think people are very unfair to kids with learning disabilities and raise their expectations - they should tell them that life has disappointments.*

*Here we are with him aged 17, but we really don't know what's available to him.*

### **There is a dilemma for some parents about their own role**

*She's got to grow away from me, to learn independence, so any employment should be totally independent of me - it shouldn't be me getting a job for her and setting up a support worker.*

*If you're reasonably intelligent and you've got money, you can expect to get a fair deal. But a lot of people with such children don't have those things and they don't appreciate how to utilise the system.*

*You need to go out and look - these jobs don't come begging.*

### **Some site the need for comparative experiences in order to make good choices**

*You need to do different things to be able to compare them - so that then you can say which is the sort of job that you'd like to do.*

*He needs to be able to look at a job that was like one he was interested in, in order to see what it was really like.*

### 4.3 Few suitable job opportunities

There was a general perception among those interviewed that there are limited numbers of job opportunities which are suitable for people who have a learning disability; and that there is plenty of competition for those jobs from people without any disability.

In a survey of employers in Tynedale<sup>3</sup> in July 2003, around 100 job vacancies were identified at the time - about one sixth of the number of people unemployed (data from [www.northumberlandinfonet.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandinfonet.org.uk)<sup>4</sup>)

This lack of opportunity and suitable jobs were raised during the consultations:

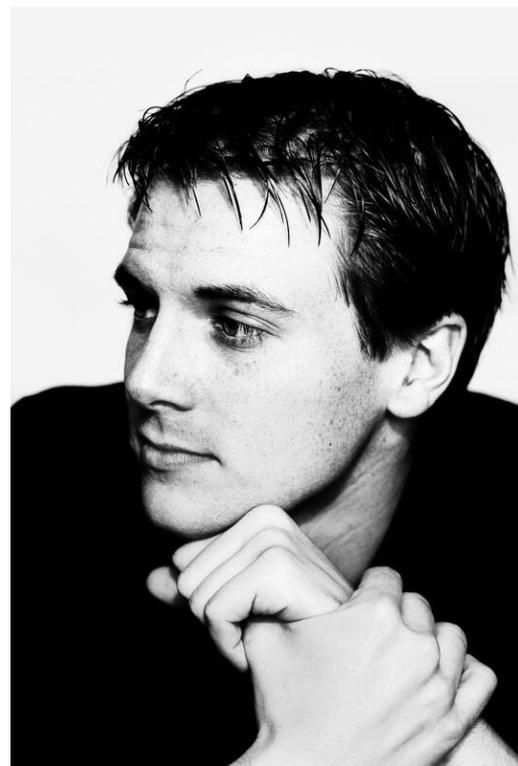
**There are few suitable job opportunities available**

*There are not many places really. I just think there should be a lot more opportunities for them.*

*Everybody recognises the fact that young people like him deserve a go, that they have a right to work. I think the main barrier is opportunity. There are lots of people who would like jobs. I think it's very tough in Hexham. SEEdS have tried a lot of avenues for him.*

*With the new legislation, we know there are fewer and fewer jobs available [to people with learning disabilities].*

*I think a lot more openings could be made if people could be bothered. For example, at our*




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<sup>3</sup> Survey of Employers in Tynedale – Final Report – July 2003 (prepared for the Northumberland Learning and Skills Council)

<sup>4</sup> Data from [www.northumberlandinfonet.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandinfonet.org.uk) North East unemployment statistics

*local supermarket: my daughter is quite knowledgeable about the shop and they could use people like her for customer relations, for helping people find things around the shop.*

**There is plenty of competition for jobs**

*I think it's difficult because there's high unemployment and plenty of people with degrees looking for work - so there's lots of competition for jobs.*

#### 4.4 Employers have to be seriously committed

The difficulty for any employer who is considering taking someone with a learning disability is that they must adapt the job to fit the person.

Instead of having a vacant job and finding the best person you can to fill it, as you would normally; you must consider the capabilities and limitations of the potential employee and adapt the job to fit the person.



Adapting one job like this will necessarily impact several others – a consequence which is most difficult where businesses are relatively small.

#### **The complications start with getting to and from work**

*She's just not capable of going out on her own anywhere.*

*She can't travel on her own - she'd get lost.*

*She's very friendly - which is quite frightening to us as her parents.*

*She's no good at independent travel. So travelling would be difficult - I have to take her to College and pick her up every day.*

*You couldn't put her on a bus and expect her to get off at the right place.*

*He'd need support travelling - even just crossing the road, because you can't guarantee that he's seen everything that he's supposed to*

*She would need support all the time because she's vulnerable - she has a certain degree of common sense, but she's not tuned into the big safety issues.*

*The train stations at both Hexham and Haydon Bridge are quite isolated and quite dark at night.*

*The buses are reliable and the drivers helpful but it's the timing that's the problem. For one job, offered afternoon work, she could get the 12-30 bus to Hexham and get there by 1-30, but then she'd have to finish by 2-30 to get the bus home. The shop closed at 4-30, but she couldn't be left standing in the bus station for an hour waiting for the 5-30 bus home. There are a lot of young ones hanging around there and she's vulnerable. Getting her there is okay; it's getting her home again in safety time that's the problem, while it's still daylight in Winter.*

*Living at Haydon Bridge, we find the buses are quite irregular - on Sunday, for example, and the night time buses are terrible. If she had to work on a Sunday, the travelling could become quite difficult - if she got a job in a cafe and finished at 8 o'clock, she couldn't get the bus home.*

*There's also the experience that the bus driver has been nasty to her once or twice.*

*She is very vulnerable. She would actually step off the road and get run over. She needs to be supervised all the time.*

*He's very vulnerable - he thinks there should be traffic lights everywhere we cross the road.*

*He'd have to be supported the whole time - he'd have to be taken there and he'd have to be secure when he was there, lest he wander off.*

*He's still very much an innocent little boy - he'd go off with anyone.*

### **Many would need ongoing support, not just support to get started**

*I think a job would be a good thing but it would have to be supported because she has no sense of danger.*

*Even if you get through the interview and start the job, there's a probationary period which you can get through because you've got support. But, after that, when the support's lifted off, the question is how are you going to cope then? Eventually you are expected to work independently in the workplace without support.*

*She would need some support. When she worked at one store café, she was left largely on her own - no-one kept an eye on her and there weren't many people that talked to her.*

*I can't envisage any job where there wasn't a group of people that supported him; or where he wasn't part of a set up and he knew his role in it.*

*He would always need someone else around - because of his eyesight, ability and motivation - someone to say "Come on, get on with it" - not just support at the start, but ongoing.*

*She would need ongoing support because she can't be relied on to make consistent decisions. If something happened that she couldn't cope with, she wouldn't know what to do - and that could cause problems for herself or for whatever she was doing at the time.*

*I get really upset if I don't achieve tasks - and, at the end of the day, we just need a bit of support to achieve tasks.*

*As always, it depends on who supports and how good that support is.*

*He's going to have to be supported quite a lot, which makes it difficult. He would need someone very understanding to help him.*

*She would need the correct amount of support in the job - it's not that she can't do it - she can - but gauging that can be quite hard.*

*He has no idea of safety - I'd be frightened to let him loose with a set of sharp tools though, if it was on a one to one basis, maybe it would be okay.*

*She would need to be constantly supervised.*

*Because of her lack of communication skills, she's not going to say "I've got a problem" or "I don't like this" - so, for her own safety, she'll need full time support.*

*If you take someone on who has special needs, you've got to have staff there who support them; and in this day and age who's going to pay for that?*

*There would need to be two people employed to do one job - it would be her and someone else to support her. I wouldn't have thought that we would be able to do it, that that sort of job was available.*

### **For many, basic work disciplines are undeveloped**

*She would need someone to be with her all the time - she could be stacking shelves in a shop and get bored and come away and not tell anybody.*

*She wouldn't stay on task - if she was doing something, she'd do it and probably enjoy it - but there's no saying how long she'd keep it up.*

*If there's an incentive, she'll do it; but, if she doesn't want to do it, it won't get done. If someone wants something done quickly and precisely, she'll have a real problem - she doesn't understand urgency because she has no sense of time.*

*If she was cleaning, you'd be holding the mop in her hand.*

*She panics - it takes a while for her to settle in to anything - you have to do a step at a time.*

*She lacks commitment - that would be a problem unless she really enjoyed what she was doing.*

*The difficulty with having a job - take farming, for example - is that it's there every day which is very different from College where you do a half-day farming session and take good breaks.*

*He'd expect us as parents to find him a job. He wouldn't use any initiative of his own - he'd find that difficult.*

*He forgets the time. He'll go there and be there on time - but he gets carried away while he's doing something.*

*He would need encouragement and understanding of his disability.*

### **Some couldn't cope with full-time work**

*She couldn't cope with too long a day. Longer than a 9 to 2 day means she gets too tired.*

### **Some need familiar routines and straightforward tasks**

*She doesn't like haphazard things - she needs to know what's happening - what's happening at breakfast, through the morning, what's for lunch and what time it's at, what's happening in the afternoon, where she's going to be, if she's going home...*

*He'd need guidance about where to go and what to do next but, once he's got into a routine, he can retain a lot.*

*He enjoys doing a little bit of a job - for example undoing the nuts when changing a wheel. He needs to have a task broken up so that it's easier.*

*He gets anxious around any unpredictable or challenging behaviour - which would be a problem in some spheres.*

*When I started, it was hard because I had to remember where all the stuff was going. I had to keep asking my*

*boss where things were to go. And when they changed the aisles around, I had to learn where everything had moved to.*

*She's got a short-term memory. It's no good showing her once. She can work the DVD and the telly, but only because she's been shown over and over again.*

*She finds it quite difficult to follow two sets of instructions - for example, "Go to the kitchen, fill the bowl and make a cup of tea" - but, once she's built up a routine of what you've got to do, you're very efficient at what you've got to do. It's just the time needed to build up those routines.*

*Knowing what time to get up, what time to get there, what time to come back, what time to get the bus, where to get dinner - she needs help organising her life.*

*When I worked at a store, I was given a list of 15 tasks to complete. Now trying to do 15 tasks one after the other is very hard for me. People lack understanding about what your disability makes it difficult for you to do.*

*To most people the work could be a doddle, but to someone with a learning disability, it may be very confusing - they just wouldn't know what to do or how to cope.*

*Routine is important to him - knowing exactly what to expect.*

### **Others need variety and challenge**

*She wouldn't like to do the same thing every day - she likes the variety.*

*It's a matter of finding something that's going to stretch him but at which he's going to be happy.*

*The job he needs will be made up of a lot of different bits. He can concentrate for a long time but I think that doing one repetitive job all day would not keep his attention.*

### **Relationships with staff would need to be right**

*You'd need to be sure that, if you had a seizure, the staff would be able to cope - it can be quite traumatic.*

### **For some, health problems or physical disabilities can compound the problems**

*She has arthritis in her joints - so she has problems standing for to long.*

*Seeing is difficult for him - his eyesight isn't too good.*

*She has good dexterity for some things but not for others - that's why she'd need support.*

*I'd like to work in a bed and breakfast but I know it would be difficult for me because I've got a medical condition.*

*She has to be careful with hot teapots and heavy things - because she has small hands.*

*She can't stand for very long.*

*Space within an accessible building is a problem. For example, some of the work placements from the school have been in a shop or in some cafes in town but there's just not enough room there for him to operate in his wheelchair.*

### **Many have literacy, numeracy or communication difficulties**

*She is capable of a lot more than people realise. An issue in the first place is convincing people that she's going to do a really good job.*

*He couldn't follow written instructions.*

*If something went wrong - a process or a feeling - she wouldn't be able to express that.*

*Her short-term memory is not good unless it's something that really struck home with her.*

*He's capable of doing lots of things - he's got good computer skills, good general knowledge, good intelligence - it's his communication with people that's the problem because he's so reticent he'd find it difficult talking to strangers.*

*Numeracy would let him down - coping with money.*

*It might be difficult learning how to work a till or give change.*

*It took a long time to learn the safety rules for the engineering course and College and to learn the names of all the equipment.*

*His numeracy is non-existent.*

*She would need a job that didn't involve reading.*

*She would find it difficult weighing and pouring things accurately.*

*He's very literal - he's much better now but he would once have real problems with expressions like "keep your eyes peeled"*

*He has difficulty with empathy - which would make it difficult to work with another group of people.*

*You also only get the answer to the question you asked and nothing more - that can be very difficult for people to get used to.*

**Issues about workplace safety and insurance cause concern**

*You have to be very careful as an employer - particularly when it comes to ensuring that the workplace is safe.*

*There couldn't be any toxic materials around or anything.*

*Employment law and regulation are so oppressive that it's now very difficult for small employers to consider taking people that are at risk. The big companies can afford to fund this sort of employment support. But there just isn't a culture in this country to be employer-friendly.*

*Lack of qualifications is an obstacle - it might affect an employer's insurance.*

## 4.5 The financial risks are frightening

Taking paid employment above threshold time and earnings levels triggers a consequent reduction in benefits.

There are measures in place to restore these benefits if, for any reason, the job does not work out during the first year. Despite this, though, many see the risk to their own or their family's financial security as a major obstacle to taking and keeping a paid job.



### **Some want to be well paid, to others it means nothing**

*I wasn't alright with the money I was getting - I didn't get paid enough. I'd want more hours and more pay. Though it doesn't seem to make any difference because it affects your benefits - it's just swings and roundabouts, isn't it.*

*I want to earn lots of money – buy a sports car – that would be my dream come true.*

*Some people will want money but he wouldn't really care how much he earned.*

*She's got no sense of money.*

### **Some are concerned about insecurity if the job doesn't work out**

*She's on a severe disability allowance and we've been told that if she worked full time she'd obviously lose the allowance. But what if the job didn't turn out right or she wanted to leave it, she wouldn't get the allowance back. That's wrong because, though people with disabilities can be dead keen, they don't actually realise what it's like to hold down a full-time job. And if they try it, it can become far too much for them.*

*Money is a big consideration. If she got a job with too much money, it would affect the benefits - that would be difficult to deal with if she wanted to stop working for some reason or the job fell through.*

### **Many believe that benefits, once stopped, are difficult to get back**

*Once you lose your benefits, you've got to jump through all the hoops to get them back again. It's not something you can have and then not have. And then there has to be someone who can fill in all these forms - which consumes more and more of the time of the carers, people who are already overstretched and under-valued.*

### **Some believe the system discriminates against them**

*When I was working, I was only allowed to earn £15 a week. If I earned any more, it was taken off my benefits. It's a form of discrimination against you.*

*I don't think there should be prejudice against them that makes them lose this money. It's one of the main reasons we have difficulty helping her find a job.*

*It's very important that they're paid properly if they're doing a proper job - the minimum wage, at least - and I know that, a lot of the time, they're paid much less.*

*You can only earn so much money before it affects your benefits - there's a limit you reach and then they stop your benefits. It's very black and white. And then they make mistakes about it!  
- I know two people who were told that they could work and, when it came to it, they couldn't.*

**Some conclude that their options are limited and that voluntary work can be less satisfying**

*I'm restricted to how many hours I can do in a day and how much pay I can get. So the rest of the time it would have to be voluntary work.*

*Being paid for a job does wonders for your self-esteem - you feel more of the team rather than having the label 'volunteer'.*

*As a volunteer you can be used as a dogsbody and the temptation is to take the day off because you feel it makes no difference.*

## 5 Potential further employability training

Three possible types of further employability training were identified from the consultations:

### **Jobclub**

Reintroducing a “Jobclub” to directly help people with Learning Disabilities to work together in finding employment.

### **More hands-on work experience**

Providing a programme of work placements with a variety of local businesses to build up individuals’ experience of types of job.

### **Workplace visits**

Extend the experience of individuals further by organising a programme of visits to different workplaces, to give them a broader awareness of different types of job.

## 5.1 Jobclub

Some individuals consulted during this study were in a variety of jobs which they had secured with the help and support of a Jobclub that was once available to them in Hexham.

The Jobclub acted as a meeting place for those who were seeking jobs – offering mutual encouragement and support, skills training and job-seeking advice.

It had some success with helping some people to face and tackle some of the difficulties they may have had in getting into work.

A new Jobclub in Tynedale would regain that focus for people – offering them somewhere to get together with others as they discussed job prospects and supported each other in applying for and finding work.

It could also act as a venue for job-seeking and employability training – where individuals might go through a programme of courses designed to prepare them for work.



Such training is currently available through other agencies – such as Jobcentre Plus. However, the advantage of providing it through an environment such as a Jobclub for those with Learning Disabilities would be the element of mutual support and common ground that people would enjoy by being there.

## 5.2 More hands-on work experience

It was evident during the consultations that many individuals had had a fairly limited experience of work. As a result, they had a fairly low awareness of different types of job.

To help these people choose what sort of job they would most like to do, it would be valuable to provide them with a programme of experience working in a range of different roles and businesses.

This would overcome some of the barriers to employment that they might have themselves.



## 5.3 Workplace visits

Their experience of work and working environments could be further developed through a programme of visits to a range of different businesses.

Organised tours, in small parties and arranged with the help of businesses in the region, would give them insights into jobs and workplaces that they might otherwise remain quite unaware of.

Visits like this have been organised by schools in Tynedale – so some younger people have already benefited from them. However, those who are a little older may well have missed out on such opportunities: and those of any age would benefit from more.

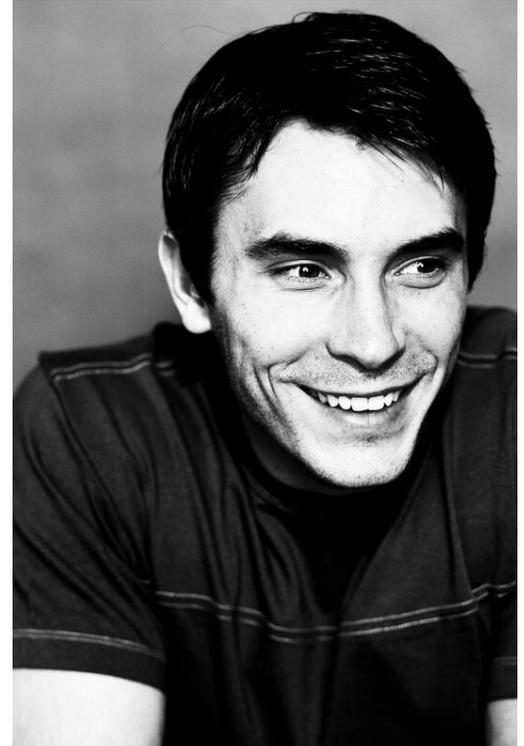
Each such visit should be quite brief and conducted with appropriate and informed support. The emphasis would need to be on demonstration rather than explanation.

## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

It was evident in doing this study that the old truism – everyone is an individual – applies just as much to this group as to any other. Everyone is an individual and there are no universal solutions. People need to be given choices – about what work they might do and where they might enjoy that work.

Dismantling the **suspicion of prejudice** will be particularly hard. In reality, it will only be removed when there is no prejudice to suspect and when there are more good outcomes being talked about than bad ones. There is certainly a view that the perception of prejudice is worse than the reality – so:

- Introducing new channels to communicate and highlight positive and useful information about employment opportunities and successes among this population group would help.



Developing individuals' **personal experiences** may be achieved through the proposals on further employability training outlined in section 5 of this report. The provision of more direct advice, based on assessments of potential – person-centred planning – is becoming available now, though not all of the people consulted during this study will have experienced it.

- Offering people a personal assessment of their skills and abilities, to guide this planning, would help them reach their full potential.

The fact that there are **few job opportunities** and that **employers have to be seriously committed** to find suitable jobs really comes down to the need to find what's

in it for the employer. In the end, for those for whom competing for jobs in the open market is unreasonable,

- Having good opportunities available that provide sheltered employment will give them options as well for gaining satisfaction from working.

Helping people to overcome the frightening **financial risks** will not be at all easy. The evident underlying lack of trust about this that was apparent during the consultations shows that people will not quickly offer to trade their benefits for a pay-packet. The solution will only come slowly – perhaps through working in a job long enough for self-confidence to develop and allow an individual to choose change based on positive experience.

- Perhaps schemes for ‘payment in kind’ should be encouraged and developed instead – creating options for various non-financial means for businesses to repay their workforce.

Finally, some sound basic steps were apparent during the study that would help anyone find a job and it is worth concluding this report by emphasising them:

- Get some good advice about what’s best for you
- Share ideas with friends, family and those who care about you
- Try to get a variety of work experience
- Have a CV – a summary of the important events in your life: where you’ve been educated, where you’ve worked
- Put together a portfolio that shows things you’ve done – something to show people, that will tell more about you than you could ever say
- Get references from places that you’ve worked at before
- Keep going!

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