

Education, Lifelong learning and Skills Committee

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Remploy Paper on Transition From Education to Employment For The Education & Lifelong Learning & Skills Committee Welsh Assembly August 2006

".....a Wales where everyone has the skills, motivation and opportunity to obtain good quality jobs that meet their aspirations and abilities..."

- Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales, 2005

Introduction

Remploy is the leading specialist employment services group that focuses on enabling people with disabilities or health related barriers to work to maximise their potential through gaining and retaining sustainable employment. We enable people to develop and demonstrate their transferable skills, helping them be more employable and to find jobs in mainstream employment. We currently support over 13,500 disabled people in work or into work each year. We believe passionately that employment is the key route to independent living through enhanced skills and better health.

Currently in Wales Remploy uses the Workstep programme to help people with more complex and significant health issues to find and retain jobs. Nationally across the UK, Remploy is also one of the largest providers of the New Deal for Disabled People employment programme. Finally, Remploy manages a range of significant European Social Fund projects, such as "Healthy Minds at Work" and "Adaptive Learning for Disabled Workers", both of which operate in Wales.

In 2005/06 Remploy helped a total of 4,307 disabled people obtain sustainable employment across England, Scotland and Wales. In Wales alone, Remploy helped 657 disabled people into jobs, of whom 507 (77%) sustained their employment to a point where they no longer required direct support from Remploy.

Of the 657 people Remploy supported into employment, only 13 (2%) were disabled people entering employment direct from education. All others were Incapacity Benefit claimants returning to work. This paper will explore some of the barriers and difficulties that exist in preventing more disabled people making the transition from education into employment, and propose some solutions.

General Recommendation;

- The figures above apply to Remploy only. We recommend that the committee request data from JobCentre Plus showing figures for all employment programmes in Wales for disabled people to research whether this pattern is the norm or an exception. Additionally, data should be available for the progression outcomes of disabled schoolchildren and students leaving compulsory, further and higher education in Wales.

An Improved Approach To Transition To Employment

Over the next four years Remploy plans to more than quadruple the number of people we support into work. To achieve this level of increase, innovative new approaches, services and collaborative partnerships are being developed. We believe there is considerable opportunity to increase the proportion of job entrants direct from education, many of whom will otherwise go into 2nd or 3rd generation families on inactive benefits. In order for this to happen, however, a number of areas need to be considered;

1. Earlier practical intervention of an employment focus in compulsory education
2. A more employment-focussed, relevant and flexible curriculum
3. Much improved inter-agency (and inter-departmental) working
4. A more flexible and holistic use of funding
5. Further professionalisation of staff and services, including improved Information, Advice and Guidance

Remploy believes the above can be achieved through a modest investment in the provision of a specialist brokering service, which is led by local employer skills needs and focussed specifically on facilitating transition into employment of learners with learning difficulties, health conditions and/or disabilities. This over-arching brokering service would be able to support and/or deliver the recommendations made below to address each of the 5 areas identified above.

- Earlier practical intervention of an employment focus in compulsory education

"...to ensure that everyone has the skills and qualifications to find work in the modern job market, so that no-one now outside the workforce is unequipped for work...."

- Wales: A Better Country, 2003

It is our view that young disabled people, be they in mainstream or special schools, are not encouraged enough to believe that paid employment is a realistic aspiration. Too many young disabled people leave compulsory education with an expectation of a life of dependency on benefits and support services. We accept that a significant number of young disabled people progress on to some kind of further education, but for many this is more about learning provision focussed on keeping the individual occupied, rather than realistically developing their life and vocational skills to ensure they are on the route to employment.

But this is not a simple issue to resolve. Disabled children, and equally significantly, their parents,

need to believe that paid employment is a realistic possibility. There needs to be a more holistic approach adopted to improving the education of parents and their children about what likely employment options exist in their local communities, what skills they need to develop, and which learning providers or establishments offer the appropriate training and development.

Supported Employment agencies, like Remploy, are the experts in enabling disabled people progress into work, and yet traditionally the relationships between the supported employment sector and the schools sector are very weak. Remploy works with employers to understand the local labour market, the key trends and to identify the vacancies, and so understands what employers are looking for. We are the experts in understanding the skills needs of employers and the local jobs realistically available to candidates with disabilities and/or health conditions. Key Supported Employment agencies, therefore, should be primary partners in advising young disabled people on suitable career opportunities. We believe that supported employment providers should be resourced to start working with disabled schoolchildren from as young as 14. We do not see this as replacing the current service provided by Careers Wales specialist advisors, more a complementary and more specialist input from a strong and realistic employment perspective. We would like to see every young disabled person from 14 having a transition to employment plan developed, and subsequent education choices being influenced by working towards the achievement of such a plan.

The relationship between key Supported Employment agencies and specialist advisors in Careers Wales should also be developed for the further education sector.

Recommendations;

- Improved education of parents and young disabled children of realistic employment options in their local communities
- Earlier involvement of key Supported Employment providers with disabled schoolchildren and students
- More co-working between Careers Wales and key Supported Employment Agencies
- Introduction of transition to employment plans for disabled children from the age of 14 and disabled students in further education

A more employment-focussed, relevant and flexible curriculum

"Our proposed priorities are to...ensure everyone has skills essential to take up employment and maintain their employability within the labour market"

Skills and Employment

Action Plan for Wales, 2005

We believe there is too much of a disconnect between curriculum content and employer demands to support more disabled learners into work. Traditionally, curriculum content has been driven by the need to achieve qualifications. When we talk to employers, they are less concerned about qualifications and more about actual capabilities. We believe, therefore, that the curriculum needs to be freed up to enable teachers and tutors to deliver more flexible learning programmes targeted at meeting employer needs. That is not to say that qualifications are not important. Quite the contrary –

qualifications provide validity to learning and achievement can significantly improve self-esteem and confidence; critical ingredients to creating the belief with a person that they can achieve their aspirations. The issue is more around the content of qualifications rather than qualifications themselves.

Currently, most qualifications tend to be focussed more on developing harder technical skills. There is a need for this, but these harder skills need to be underpinned by a wider range of softer skills. When we talk to employers about filling their vacancies, our experience is that they are less concerned about disability and more concerned about the basic skills to do the job. These skills tend to be described as; getting to work on time, coming to work regularly, ability to communicate with colleagues, working in a team, basic problem solving, having a positive attitude, a willingness to learn etc. This view reflects a point made in the "Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales, 2005", which notes;

"Employers increasingly require people to be "employment-ready" –they rightly expect to employ people who are literate, numerate, turn up on time, work well in a team and communicate well. FSW 2003 tells us that across all occupations employers say they most want people who can:

- understand customer needs
- work in teams
- communicate well
- learn
- follow instructions
- be adaptable and flexible
- show initiative"

Employers, and particularly larger employers, have a view that their own induction and training programmes can teach staff the more vocationally specific job skills, but they need staff with those generic underpinning skills to work upon. We believe, therefore, that broad curriculum content should be reviewed to reflect this need and many more vocational qualifications should be underpinned by the inclusion areas of need. This approach would go a considerable way towards the stated objective of in the Skills & Employment Plan of "making learning provision in schools, colleges and universities and the workplace still more attractive to learners and relevant to the world of work"

There is also an issue around expected outcomes and targets that drive the education system. For some disabled people, upward progression within the academic ladder is simply not realistic or achievable. Employment for many of these learners, particularly those at the lower end of the academic ladder, however, is a more realistic outcome than further higher qualifications. We believe therefore that the achievement of a job should increasingly be recognised as a measurable outcome as much as the achievement of a qualification within the education system. This is of course particularly true in Further Education, where there tends to be a cycle of disabled learners completing one course and enrolling for another, without any identified medium term objective. The introduction of employment-focussed transition plans would drive both decision making for learners and curriculum content offering from providers.

Heightened recognition of job entries as a measurable and rewardable progression outcome would also allow learning providers to be much more creative and innovative in both content and style of delivery. We would like to see a much more flexible approach to work-based learning, and the funding provided to support it. For learners who may be academically restricted, placing them into employment situations earlier and allowing them to continue working towards their qualifications, but through more of a work-based route will achieve more job outcomes for the learners, and critically, will subsequently dovetail into on-going workforce development programmes.

Developing a curriculum and a provider capability with the flexibility to enable this is a challenge, but one which we believe will reap great rewards.

Recommendations

- All skills-based qualifications to be underpinned by a more generic range of employment focussed skills to meet the need of employers
- Job entry to be recognised as a progression outcome in equal status terms as qualifications within the education system
- Flexibility within the curriculum to allow many more qualifications to be achieved through a work-based route

1. Much improved inter-agency (and inter-departmental) working

The journey towards and into sustained employment has a number of potential stages; from school, to sixth form, to further education, to higher education, into employment and beyond into work based learning. A journey for a young person with a disability, therefore, can see them working with agencies accountable to the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills on the one hand, and agencies accountable to the Department of Work & Pensions through JobCentre Plus on the other. At the same time, many disabled learners are also receiving support services from Health & Social Services. Whilst on paper this offers a comprehensive package of support for the disabled learner, the priorities and targets of different departments means that the reality on the ground is that services that should be complementary are often disconnected.

"The public sector should: establish and resource a coherent strategy; agree overall frameworks of qualifications and training; and provide high-quality education and training provision and other targeted support for citizens to obtain and sustain employment."

Skills and Employment Action Plan for Wales, 2005

Greater public demonstration of co-working between Departments will set an example to agencies and providers, which in turn will result in those agencies and providers working more closely at an operational level.

A strategic plan should be developed and signed up to by the departments concerned with a single objective of supporting more disabled learners in the transition into employment. We believe the current work being undertaken by the Education & Lifelong Learning & Skills Committee can create

the opportunity for this to happen. Once a strategic plan is in place, agencies and providers should have performance criteria built into their delivery contracts focussing on this agenda, with requirements to demonstrate partnership working. We believe this will drive behaviour change and a new focus for achievement of successful transitions.

Recommendations

- A strategic plan for employment transitions in Wales be developed and signed up to by all key departments
- Contracting arrangements to build in performance management criteria for delivery against this agenda, including evidence of partnership working.

1. A more flexible and holistic use of funding

This point is driven by the general point made in point 3. Currently, funding is closely managed by departments, but the effect of this is the creation of silos, where people operate to deliver against their own individual targets. If targets were more commonly shared, then this would encourage a more flexible use of the funds available. This approach would see incremental improvements in the quality of delivery and achievement of outcomes.

If a step change in results is being sought, then we would advocate a more radical approach, where funding is allocated to the learner for them to decide how best to use the finances available to meet their needs. This would drive a much stronger customer-focussed mentality across the provider networks and demand creativity and innovation to achieve positive outcomes. The precedent in the UK is already being set for this approach with the trialling of Individual Budgets, but it could go further to see the funding and decision-making process continue though into training and employment. This may need to be supported by some kind of independent advocacy service who would provide advice and guidance on where to go for choices of services provision and could ensure value for money. We would recommend that a pilot be considered for this approach in Wales.

We would also like to see funding constraints relaxed to allow providers, and in particular colleges, to use their funding on a more discretionary basis, particularly recognising job entry as a positive and rewardable outcome. Employer vacancies do not wait until the end of term time and academic years, and realistic job opportunities for disabled learners are more limited. We would like to see funding constraints removed which meant that if a disabled learner progressed into employment part-way through qualification, this would be recognised as a success and there be enough flexibility in the system to allow that person to continue with their qualification via a more vocational route. This would be a far more positive approach than the present system, which would be reflected in current statistics not as a success, but as a drop-out from the course.

Recommendations

- Agreement of a joint targets framework across departments and agencies to ensure common goal working
- Further research be undertaken into the expansion of the concept of individual budgets into

training and employment, with a possible trial organised.

- More flexibility and recognition to support learners moving into employment part-way through qualifications.

1. Further professionalisation of staff and services, including improved Information, Advice and Guidance

We believe in and support inclusion and integration. To achieve this though, staff operating in mainstream provision need better education and training for supporting learners of all ages with disabilities. We would like to see the introduction of training covering basic standards of competency for supporting disabled learners for all teachers and tutors. Beyond this, we believe that a professional development programme should be created to give teachers and tutors the opportunity to develop more advanced expertise and understanding of particular types and ranges of disabilities.

Similarly, if the curriculum can be made more flexible to enable a much stronger focus on local employment market needs, then staff will need regular updating on labour market demands and needs and perhaps additional support in flexing the curriculum to meet those needs. This may be more pertinent in the Further Education sector than in mainstream compulsory education, but the general principle is that teachers and tutors need further support and training in balancing the needs of the individual learner with the needs of the employers to optimise the learner experience and the vocational relevance.

The issue on Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is not so much one of further training of staff, but more around the role that key supported employment agencies can play. We believe that specialist IAG is needed for disabled learners. We strongly support the inclusive agenda adopted within "Wales; A Better Country" and "Wales; The Learning Country", but whilst we have the aspiration to see a wholly inclusive and integrated society, the reality of the employment market is that we are not there yet. We therefore need to provide a balance between an on-going strategy to eliminate discrimination and remove barriers in the long term, but keep a focus on what is realistically achievable today and in the short term. Key Supported Employment agencies have the knowledge, understanding and experience of placing disabled people with employers of all sizes and in all sectors. This is often achieved through the development of effective partnerships with employers and the intelligent use of support programmes, such as Workstep, New Deal, Access to Work, etc. The key to effective IAG is the capability to interpret and understand the intricacies of what support is available through education and training and integrating that with the support available from employment brokering, all against a background knowledge of an real understanding of the local labour market. Organisations such as Remploy can offer this expertise. We recognise the role of the specialist advisors within Careers Wales, but believe this service need to be complemented and a strong input representing employers and employment needs should be injected into the IAG service.

Recommendations

- Basic training for all teachers and staff on responding to personalised needs of disabled learners against a competency framework

- An on-going professional development framework introduced for teachers and tutors to allow them to develop their expertise in particular areas of disability
- Support for teachers in tutors in delivering a more flexible and work-based learning curriculum
- Improved specialist employment focus in IAG services

The Proposed Solution

Remploy believes that there is potentially a strong infrastructure in Wales to achieve much greater levels of transition into employment for disabled learners. The missing link, however, is a service that will work with and across all of the various agencies and providers involved. The establishment of a specialist disability brokering service which is led strongly by employer demand in Wales, but which advocates a person-centred approach to the learning journey of the individual, will facilitate the bringing together of services and agencies to provide a seamless service of support, provision and opportunity to disabled learners wishing to progress into employment.



The added benefit of such a brokering service is that once it is established for disabled learners, the same service and infrastructure can be accessed by other disabled people, namely Incapacity Benefit claimants, who require further training and development before they are able to return to employment. This would provide a key channel for IB claimants to access further (and possibly higher,) education.

The service should not replace existing services in Wales, but complement them, and Remploy has

the knowledge and capability to provide this service. Remploy could work alongside Careers Wales to further develop this concept and establish a pilot project in Wales with a view to addressing many of the recommendations above.

All of this is set within an employer-led context and the whole focus would be on supporting more disabled people from education into sustained employment.

We see most of the provision required being delivered through existing mainstream funded processes and programmes. The investment required will be in the establishment of the brokering service. In overall terms, however, this investment should be minimal and we believe will be self-financing in the medium term, as disabled learners will achieve more independence and require less relative support as they successfully transition into employment.

In the near future Remploy will be opening its first High Street branch in Wales, in central Cardiff. This new branch will provide a platform from where such a brokering pilot can be launched if Cardiff were chosen as a pilot area, and we would seek to ensure the pilot complements plans for Cardiff contained within any city strategy being developed.

Recommendation

- Remploy is invited to work alongside Careers Wales to further develop the proposal of a specialist disability brokering service and how it would work, with a view to establishing a pilot programme, preferably in Cardiff.

Conclusion

"...it is striking that economic inactivity is seen to be most closely associated with characteristics of individuals, notably a low level of educational qualifications."

- Wales; A Vibrant Economy, 2005

The fact that only a very small percentage of disabled job entrants come direct from education, with the significant majority coming from Incapacity Benefit is likely to be reflected across the Supported employment sector. Significant improvement can and must be achieved in numbers transitioning direct from education. This paper outlines our thoughts on the key issues that we see as currently blocking or slowing down the transition process, makes a series of recommendations, and offers what we believe is a realistic solution. If progress can be made in these areas then significant strides would be taken in getting best value out of the infrastructure of public services in Wales to support more disabled learners into sustainable employment, and in doing so prevent many going onto benefit and falling into worklessness in the first place.

We have attempted to offer a range of strategic and practical solutions, which we hope will generate further debate and interest. We have deliberately not gone into any detail concerning actions for employers. Our view is that whilst direct and indirect discrimination continues to prevail in areas of the labour market, increasingly employers are simply concerned as to whether or not someone can do

a job. In the future, therefore, we must promote the skills and abilities of people who just happened to have a disability, rather than promote the disabled person.

In a labour market that will increasingly see the demand for new labour pools to be utilised given the demographic forecasts for the UK, and where Incapacity Benefit reforms will see an influx of people with disabilities or health conditions re-entering the employment market, employers will be more open and receptive to recruiting and retaining disabled staff if they possess the basic skills and qualities to be employed. Recognising this employer need is the key to achieving more successful transitions into employment and we believe our recommendations and proposals outlined in this paper will help us all achieve that objective.

We hope that the Education & Lifelong Learning & Skills Committee finds this paper beneficial and we would be delighted to engage in further discussion with the Committee, Minister and/or officials to explore any of the specifics of this paper further.

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