

Employing people with learning disabilities and autism

A report about what employers thought



This document was written by **Andrea Meek and Dr. Elisa Vigna**, from the **National Centre for Mental Health, Cardiff University**. It is an easy read version of 'Employing people with learning disabilities and/or autism: a feedback report from Engage to Change employers'.

March 2025



How to use this document



This is an easy read document. You may still need support to read it. Ask someone you know to help you.



Where the document says we, this means **National Centre for Mental Health**. For more information contact:

Website: www.engagetochange.org.uk

Phone: 02920681160

Email: enquiries@ldw.org.uk



Hawdd ei Ddeall Cymru
Easy Read Wales

[Easy Read Wales](#) made this document into Easy Read using **Photosymbols**. [To tell us what you think about this easy read version, click here.](#)

[Photosymbols Licence number 403527247](#)

Contents

About this report	4
Learning disabilities and employment	6
How can we improve things?	7
More about the Engage to Change Project.....	10
Research.....	11
Results.....	12
The Disability Confident Scheme.....	14
What we think	15
What should happen next.....	21

About this report



The **Engage to Change** project supported young people with learning disabilities or autism into employment.



They worked with 1300 young people and 800 employers.



This report is about what employers thought about the people they employed.



A Job Coach worked with the young person and the employer and gave support to both.



We asked for the views of many of the employers.

We want this report to:



- Show how important it is to employ people with learning disabilities and autism.



- Give advice about what works and how to manage issues.

Learning disabilities and employment



Only about 5 in every 100 people with learning disabilities are in paid work.



Only about 22 in every 100 people with autism are in paid work.



Many people feel they do not have the support they need.



And employers do not understand the issues they face.



We need to make changes in society to support people. Because there are many talented people who could be working.

How can we improve things?



Supported Employment is well known as a good way of helping people into work.

Supported employment:

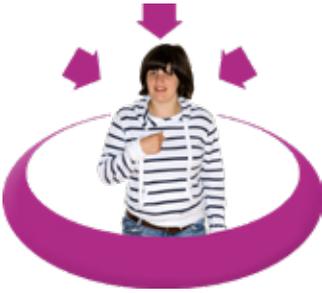


- Supports people into paid work.



- Supports employers to understand what they need to do.

There are 5 steps to Supported Employment:



1. Support people in a way that is right for them.



2. Focus on what they can do. Look at their interests, likes and dislikes.



3. Work closely with the employer. Make sure employers understand how supported employment works.



4. Match the person to the right job.



5. Give Job Coach support in the workplace.



There is also a guide to support employers. It is made by the **British Association of Supported Employment (BASE)**.



Research shows the benefits of employing people with learning disabilities and autism. For example, being reliable, on time and staying in the job.

More about the Engage to Change Project



The project supported young people who were **Not in Education, Employment or Training**. This is sometimes called **NEET** for short.



The aim was to develop skills through paid and unpaid work and experience. And for this to lead to paid work.



It involved organisations working together.



We checked the outcomes of **Engage to Change** to see how well it worked.



The project ran for 7 years. We believe employers gained a better understanding of employing this group of young people. And how important it is.

Research



Job coaches were trained in how to collect information for the project. For example, what employers thought about it.



Employers were asked to complete a form about how things went after each person ended their employment.



We had feedback from 277 employers.

Results



We asked employers if they thought the support worked well.



Almost all employers said yes.



We asked them if the young people had received enough support. Almost all of them said yes.



We asked employers how satisfied they were with the young people they employed.



This is what they said:

- 1. Skills and following instructions**
Most were satisfied or very satisfied.

- 2. Safety and timekeeping**
Most were satisfied or very satisfied.

- 3. Quality of work**
Most were satisfied or very satisfied.

- 4. Employees interest in jobs**
Most were satisfied or very satisfied.

- 5. Getting on with other staff**
Most were very satisfied.

The Disability Confident Scheme



This is a scheme by the UK government. It gives advice and guidance about employing disabled people.



We asked employers if they had signed up to this.



About 3 in 10 had.



Most who had not signed up, did not know about it.



But most employers said they would employ someone with similar disabilities, from their experience of working with **Engage to Change**.

What we think



The **Engage to Change** project shows supported employment can be a success.



The feedback from employers was very positive.



With the right support people with learning disabilities and autism can be valuable members of the workforce.



We have also learnt from other research we have done. For example, that different work experiences were helpful to prepare people into paid employment.



And that good quality job placements and support are important.



The length of support and experience is also important. At least 6 months of work experience and support seems to work best.



Employers were happy with many things about the people they employed. From time keeping, to how well they worked.



It is important to make sure the job role matches:

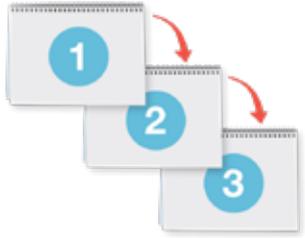
- the skills of the person
- and what the employer needs.



It is also important the young person gets the right support for their needs from the job coach.



All job coaches were trained to national occupational standards.



All job coaches were trained on how to break down difficult jobs into easy steps.



The young people were also happy with the jobs they were matched to.



There are so many positives. But also some issues.



People with learning disabilities and autism are still treated unfairly. This can stop them getting a job.



There is work to be done to change and improve this.



Research has shown that people with learning disabilities saved employers money. Because they are:

- good workers
- follow health and safety and
- stay in jobs a long time.



Many employers focus on what people cannot do. Rather on what they can do.



But most employers who worked with **Engage to Change** said they would employ someone again.



These employers are the ones with the real experience of doing it.



Engage to Change worked with over 800 employers. But this is tiny compared to the amount of businesses in Wales.



We think the work carried out by **Engage to Change** was really important.



Connect to Work is a programme from the UK Government. It supports people with different needs into work. It is starting in 2025.



The success of **Engage to Change** shows the importance of having more supported employment services.



It is really important that people get:

- the support that is right for their needs
- early in their careers.



We think there needs to be a **Job Coaching Strategy for Wales**. This would be a plan about developing more job coaching in Wales.



This work has shown that job coaching is really important.

What should happen next



1. Employers need to know more about supported employment and try it out.

Training should be run by people with learning disabilities or employers with experience.



2. There needs to be more job coach support.

Job coaches need to be trained to high standards.



The new **Connect to Work** programme must make sure people with learning disabilities and autism are included. The goal should be to get paid employment.



Connect to Work should make sure it supports people and employers.



3. Work with schools and other education services more.

This is important for reaching young people early on.



It is important schools understand more about supported employment and job coaching.



Some school staff could be trained as job coaches.



4. Paid placements.

Paid work experience was the best way to make sure people got a job.



5. More support is needed in rural areas.

There needs to be more support for people living in the countryside and quiet areas of Wales.



Support online could help with this.

6. Working together



Governments, employers and people with learning disabilities must work together to improve things.



More needs to be done to teach people about the success of supported employment.



7. More needs to be done to make sure people have a job long term.

For example, through support to develop someone's career. And support to move to a new job.