



WHAT WORKS? – Transition to employment for young people with learning disabilities

FULL REPORT

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**KEY FINDINGS – ‘WHAT WORKS’
HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES INTO
JOBS AFTER SCHOOL OR COLLEGE**

- Promotion and support of employment as an option early in transition planning.
- Involvement of skilled employment organisations in transition planning.
- Access to individually tailored and flexible work experience, with on-the-job personal support when needed.
- Provision of transition workers as a single point of information and support for young people and their families.
- Consistent and high quality vocational training in schools and colleges.
- Challenge the idea that young people with learning disabilities are ‘incapable’ of employment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study

There have been a number of studies and reports that suggest the system of transition from school does not provide adequate support for young people with learning disabilities, particularly in relation to employment. Young people with learning disabilities are at high risk of never having a job. It is important to understand 'what works' in terms of employment support for young people with learning disabilities and their families.

The Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities and Shaw Trust, with Big Lottery funding, set out to look at six areas providing different approaches to supporting these young people to explore, and make decisions about, employment through external employment organisations (EOs).

WCLD interviewed 145 young people and their carers about their experiences of transition and employment. We collected information on the vocational input the young people had in their last year from their special school, college or employment organisation. We followed-up the young people 6 months after they had left to see how many had gone into employment. We asked them what had influenced their decisions.

Results

Young people received vocational input from many types from school, college and their EO. The main differences were that employment organisations mostly provided work experience, schools provided more qualifications based courses (e.g. ASDAN Workright) and colleges more practical skills courses. There was wide variation across schools and colleges in what was provided. EOs mainly provided longer, community based work experience, where schools and colleges did more in-house placement. EOs offered a significantly different style of vocational experience to schools and colleges.

Over 60% of carers reported that employment was not mentioned as an option at their last year transition review. However, a minority did receive employment advice from school or the careers service. There was a lot of input by schools and colleges, and careers services, about transition next steps. However, college remained the more common option discussed and promoted by schools and careers services. If there was contact with an EO, employment was more likely to be raised as an option, and any advice given appeared to be more detailed, and more likely to lead to a work experience placement.

In their final year, 59% of young people said they wanted a place at college as their next step after school or college, and 32% a paid job. Carers had different ideas, 50% wanting a paid job, and 21% a college place for their relative. Six months after leaving 60% of young people had gone onto college and only 17% to a job. A young person with a learning disability wishing to go to college is 2.7 times more likely to

get their wish than a young person wishing to get a paid job. For those young people we followed up at 18 months, employment had risen to 25% and 60% of those previously working were still employed, suggesting their jobs were relatively stable.

Those who gained a job tended to have had more hours of vocational input overall in their last year at school or college and more work experience from an EO. Their carers also more often had a positive view of the person working, had fewer concerns about their getting a job, and a more positive view of the impact of the young person working on their own lives. Statistically, young people have a higher probability of getting a job if they have:

- more hours delivered in qualification-based courses by their school/college
- more hours delivered in obtaining work experience placements by EOs
- a carer with fewer concerns about the young person getting a job.

Conclusions and recommendations

For those young people with learning disabilities that want to pursue paid employment on leaving school or college, there continue to be barriers to them achieving this. Employment is not universally considered to be a viable option for these young people by all professionals involved in transition planning. This is in part due to a lack of options for support into employment locally. There are significant implications for local transition policy and practice:

- It is necessary that information on all transition options, including employment, to be offered early in the transition planning timetable.
- Employment organisations need to be involved in the transition planning process if young people with learning disabilities and their carers are to be fully informed of about paid employment as a transition option.
- Work experience appears from our study to be a key input, and this has been an added contribution to the work of schools and careers service efforts in our study areas.
- For work experience to be constructive for the carer and the young person it needs to be individually tailored, flexible in the times and length it is delivered, and have a number of support options up to, and including, on the job support.
- Carers need feedback on the experience if it is to influence their subsequent decisions. For all of this to happen we need better, well-funded, supported work experience through experienced EOs who can deliver it.
- Carers want one knowledgeable source of information on future options, a named person who could help them digest information, give advice, and help them to make decisions with their son or daughter. A dedicated transition worker role can provide this type of service in a local area.
- To reassure people that employment is possible we have to tackle issues such as: the friendship potential of employment; the monetary arguments for working; how potential bullying and exploitation might be guarded against through good job finding, adequate supervision and support in work; and how positive impacts on carers can be assured.

- Agencies need to be able to deliver solutions to these issues through work experiences while people are still in school. They need to demonstrate the positive outcomes that can be achieved and build credibility with carers and young people to better help them find employment when they leave school.
- Greater consensus is needed within schools and colleges on what are the best vocational materials and curricula to be used. We need this to be linked more effectively with the efforts of EOs offering supported work experience with good feedback.
- Schools, colleges, careers services, social services and EOs need to develop a consensus on what is possible and desirable for young people with learning disabilities to do at transition, including the appropriateness of employment. Without this families will receive conflicting advice on whether employment is an option for a young person.
- We need to do away with the notion that some people are 'capable' and others 'incapable' of employment. The issue is more one of what support people need to work and whether we can deliver it here, now and with the resources we have.
- The sharing of information on the needs of people with learning disabilities between agencies needs to be more effective post-school. There needs to be 'one transition plan' that carries through into post-school placements. This will involve a greater commitment than is currently possible through the extended responsibilities of careers services.
- We need some rebalancing of resources to support the employment pathway rather than just the college pathway after school. Without this, college students will also fail to enter employment because of the systems.

INTRODUCTION

Why employment is important

Government policy in the UK has sought greater social inclusion and enhanced life opportunities for people with learning disabilities¹ and has promoted paid employment as one way of achieving this both in welfare reform and learning disability policy (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005, Chief Secretary to the Treasury 2003, DoH 2001). The broad thrust of policy has been to promote community-based employment as a replacement for a life on welfare benefit, or even sheltered employment (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005).

The government's general strategy for getting young people into employment has been to provide incentives for young people to stay at school longer, to provide a wider range of options for training and qualification. Assistance for seeking employment has also been provided through policies such as the New Deal for Young People, and the Youth Gateway. This strategy has not been universally successful, and there has been much publicity around the growing problem of young people who are not in education, employment or training (the so-called N.E.E.T. group), where numbers rose to nearly 1.24 million in 2006. However, the strategy has led to greater numbers of 16-25 year olds attending further and higher education.

When we look at people with learning disabilities, estimates of the percentage of who are employed vary between 10% (DoH 2001) and 17% (Emerson *et al.* 2005). This is low compared to a figure of 52% of the general disabled population (Smith & Twomey 2002). Young people with learning disabilities are therefore a group at high risk of separation from the labour market, and a group that overlaps with the wider NEETs group. Clearly, the general policy of pursuing further education and training post-16 has not redressed the problem of unemployment for people with learning disabilities.

The situation was recognised in the Learning and Skills Council's document *Learning for Living and Work* (LSC 2006) which highlights the need for greater action at further education level to strengthen pathways into employment for young people with disabilities, including the need to provide more supportive forms of work experience for young people while at college, and to explore supported employment as an exit strategy.

However, the situation is not just relevant to further education. There remains some demand at age 16, and at 18 in special schools, for employment as a school leaving option. The unemployment figures for people with learning disabilities, and previous research on post-16 transition, suggest that this is largely an unfulfilled aspiration,

¹ Learning disability was defined as: "having a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development" (Department of Health, 2001).

particularly if young people have a Statement of Special Educational Need as many with a learning disability have (Aston *et al.* 2006; p 21). In the UK, legislation requires Education Authorities to arrange and attend reviews meetings of the needs of Statemented students with a learning disability, who must have a Statement of Special Educational Needs/Record of Need² from the age of 14 years onwards which provides the framework for transition planning (DfES 2001). Employment is identified in guidance as a legitimate aim of that transition planning, as much as a college or a day centre place.

Indeed, Every Child Matters (DfES 2004) that sets out the Government's aspirations for children, has one of its 5 key aims as 'achieving economic well-being,' including engaging in further education, employment or training on leaving school and being ready for employment. Schools, colleges, and practitioners will be assessed against the five aims and employment performance will become an increasingly important outcome.

In making the next steps after school, the choices the young person makes are important, but so too are the availability of options, support and the more soft resources that come from family. People with learning disabilities are at a disadvantage in decision-making because of their cognitive impairments, and are a prime group for additional support if they are to compete in the labour market. Transition decisions are not without risk (Lehmann 2004); families of people with learning disabilities see the decision as particularly risky. A poor decision can have an impact on income, welfare benefit status, social well being, and make significant demands on the family. The risks are therefore shared by the individual and family and helping both to understand and reduce risk through this period is an important task of the transition process.

Previous research key messages

Shortcomings in the English and Welsh transition process have been identified by previous research (King's Fund 1998; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2002). The preferred route emerging from transition planning is often a five-day college placement, which contrasts with post-school transition outcomes in the US where sheltered and supported employment are predominant avenues for people with learning disabilities (Katsiyannis and Zhang 2005). Employment is not frequently pursued as an area in its own right for transition planning, with very few young people with learning disabilities entering supported employment programs between the ages of 16 and 19 years (Beyer, Goodere and Kilsby 1996). When young people with learning disabilities do pursue employment, many still find that a lack of available personal support, limited transportation options, and welfare benefit regulations hinder the transition into the workforce (Heslop *et al.* 2002; Morris 1999a,b; SSI 1997; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2002).

² Term used in Scotland during the survey period, but recently changed to Co-ordinated Support Plan.

Much of the UK research has concentrated on the problems related to the transition of young people with learning disabilities into employment. The pursuit of employment does not feature prominently in transition planning, although it contributes to the chances of the young people with learning disabilities to become more confident and increase their level of independence (Kilsby and Beyer 2002). There is some evidence that employment increases social inclusion in comparison to conventional day centre provision (Kilsby and Beyer 1996), although predictors of employment retention are still under-researched (Beyer 2001; Rose *et al.* 2005). Work from the US has identified factors that increase the likelihood of employment upon completion of school in this population (Peraino 1992). For people with mild learning disabilities successful completion of high school can lead to higher employment rates than not graduating (Warner *et al.* 2006; Scuccimarra & Speece 1990). Factors related to increased likelihood of employment after school among persons with mild learning disabilities include: being male (Peraino 1992); having had a summer job or part-time supported job experience while at school (Hasazi *et al.* 1985; Scuccimarra & Speece 1990; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell 1997); receiving vocational-technical training (Humes and Brammer 1985); duration of community based training and age appropriate integration with non-disabled peers (White and Weiner 2004); and use of a job coach (Howarth *et al.* 2006). On the other hand, Gray, McDermott and Butkus (2000) found that job coaching was only effective in urban areas and regions with low or intermediate unemployment rates.

Carers obviously play a crucial role in transition decision-making. They are the main providers of support, often have a particular view of the aspirations and preferences of the young person, and may often influence their choices (Smart 2004). Carers can sometimes be over-protective, and act as an obstacle to increasing the independence of the young person by limiting exposure to new experiences (Bowey *et al.* 2005). Studies have shown that carers tend to express general dissatisfaction with professionals (King 1997), but that more positive relationships are possible when professionals provide clear and appropriate information and interventions, and acknowledge the parents' needs, expertise and involvement (Case 2001). The success of transition will, therefore, be influenced by how informed carers are about the opportunities available, and the extent of their involvement in the process.

Too often transition processes are implemented without effectively eliciting the views of young people themselves as these tend to be dismissed as unworkable or uninformed (Carnaby *et al.* 2003; DfES 2004). Further, cultural differences and dissimilarity in preferred transition outcomes between carers and professionals can further complicate transition planning (Dowdy 1996). Ineffective or late planning for post-school transition can significantly increase stress for carers as well as for the young people with learning disabilities who go through a multitude of changes at that time, while effective collaboration can reduce stress for carers (Schneider *et al.* 2002).

Policy makers have envisaged the transition as one of collaboration between services, involving carers and young people to identify valuable post-school goals and to ascertain ideal life paths after school. This co-operative spirit is reflected in

relevant government policies and Acts such as the Connexions strategy (Learning and Skills Act 2000), and Valuing People (Department of Health 2001) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 which provide the general framework for support agencies in wider society. However, the National Service Framework states clearly that *‘there is still a lack of co-ordination between the relevant agencies and little involvement from the young person’* in transition (DfES 2004, p37), and a more recent report highlighted the lack of multi-agency work in providing meaningful post-transition opportunities for young people with complex needs (CSCI 2007). The government’s own analysis of the problems of transition looks for changes to services that are not based on age, but follow the young person for as long as required; for services based on strong relationships between young people and their advisors; and helpful policies that match realities:

“Despite these initiatives, in general, national policy makers have not placed sufficient weight on young people’s thinking and behaviour when they have designed policies aimed at them. This oversight means that policy interventions aimed at young people risk failing.”

(Social Exclusion Unit 2005, p5).

Why the research was needed

There have been a number of studies and reports that suggest that the transition system does not provide adequate support for people with special needs (Cooney 2002; Eisenmann 2003; Johnson and Stodden 2002). In particular, there has been concern over the support that is offered to young people with learning disabilities to enter employment. As we have seen, they are highly at a disadvantage in the labour market, and it was important to understand “what works” in terms of employment support for 16-24 year olds with learning disabilities and their families in particular. We set out to look at areas in which different approaches were being used to provide help that allows young people with learning disabilities explore, and make decisions about, employment.

The partnership - WCLD, Shaw Trust and the Big Lottery

Shaw Trust is a national charity and the largest voluntary sector provider of employment services to disabled and disadvantaged people. Shaw Trust operates a number of services that provide support to young people with and without disabilities to help them explore and improve their chances of getting employment. Together with the Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities, Shaw Trust approached the Big Lottery in 2004 with a proposal for this research. This was accepted, and the research work began in July 2004 and ended in October 2007.

What we set out to achieve

The research set out to explore six questions:

1. What are the key components of a variety of models of transition planning currently operating in relation to employment?

2. What processes of transition planning lead to young people with learning disabilities gaining and keeping paid employment?
3. What processes secure the effective involvement of young people, their families, agencies and communities during the transition planning process?
4. What benefits, in terms of social inclusion and economic self-sufficiency, accrue to young people with learning disabilities from the different approaches to transition identified?
5. What agency partnerships are key to successful transition of young people with learning disabilities?
6. What changes are needed in the supportive framework of central and local government policy to help young people with learning disabilities transition to paid work?

The models we looked at

The study was carried out in a purposive sample of six different local authority areas in the UK; each area offered employment-related transition planning services to young persons with learning disabilities in their last year of school. In all, sixteen special schools, one mainstream school and five colleges were included in the study:

- **Area A** focused on 3 special schools out of a total of 11 and one FE college out of 3 operating in the county. In this area a small team of transition workers offered Person Centred Planning to young people and families to design their next steps, over all life areas, including employment. Referral to a Supported Employment Agency for supported work experience was possible. The Supported Employment team worked with young people in transition from a FE college.
- **Area B** involved one mainstream secondary school with a specialist arts college and sixth form centre in the study out of 8 specialist schools in the area (13%). In this area a young person's employment service based in the school offered work awareness training, interest building experiences, and supported work experience in community jobs.
- **Area C** comprised 7 Special Schools out of a total of 24 in the area (30%). Here an employment focussed Transition Support Team provided supported work experience in community jobs.
- **Area D** involved 2 special schools in one county from a total of 8, one special school in a second county with no other special schools, and one special school for autism, again the only one of its kind. In this location a social firm offering training and work experience in a Social Enterprise offered placements over a few weeks, or sessions over a semester or a year, in a range of its own social enterprises or employment training projects (café, pottery, woodwork computer training etc.).
- **Area E** recruited two Further Education (FE) colleges in one county and, in two other counties, one FE college each. All of those colleges represented the total of FE colleges located in the county. Youth Supported Employment Team found, and supported young people in, part-time evening and weekend jobs with provision of "buddy" support from non-disabled peers.

- **Area F** included one special school each in two counties, in both cases representing a third of all local special schools. Here a team of Personal Advisors from a Careers Service with a particular interest in employment provided support for further education and employment decisions through the Connexions' careers guidance model. Team specialised in students with special needs.

Throughout the report we refer to schools (and either special schools or our one mainstream school), colleges (of Further Education), and employment organisations (EOs) (the intervention services mentioned in Areas A-F above). Table 1 summarises the areas and approaches.

WHAT WE DID

Our sample

The main impetus of the project was to look at 'what works'; hence the team identified five local authorities that provided a dedicated employment or transition service for young people in schools or colleges, and a sixth offering a Connexions service with a track record in pursuing employment with young people. The rationale was to examine the effects of this additional input for gaining and keeping employment as well as outcomes in terms of social inclusion for the young people. Three local authorities were located in England, one in Scotland and two in Wales. Local authorities were approached and managerial consent was obtained to contact a select number of schools in the authority. With the help of the local authorities, schools were selected in the areas if they were receiving an additional transition/employment service through one of the six EOs described earlier. Colleges of Further Education involved in the study were approached independently through the selected EOs that worked with them.

Recruitment

Staff at the selected schools and colleges were then approached and consent was sought to interview and brief them on the project's aim and purpose. Staff agreement was secured for their collaboration in the project. SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs) in the schools and colleges acted as focal point for data collation, securing parental and young person's consent for interviews as well as identifying the sample for the first and second cohort.

SENCOs were asked to identify those young people who met our definition of learning disability, who were in their last year before leaving school or college

Table 1: Different approaches to employment in transition in the six study areas

Area	Approach to employment preparation	What was offered	Who it was offered to	Description of the Agency
A	Whole life Transition Team linked to a Supported Employment Agency (SEA)	A small team of transition workers offering Person Centred Planning to young people and families to design their next steps, over all life areas, including employment. Referral to SEA for supported work experience possible. SE team work with young people in College of FE	Transition Team: young people with learning disabilities in special schools. SEA: young people with learning disabilities in one College of FE and in special schools	Team provided by Local Authority Social Services Department- Adult Team
B	Young person's employment service	Work awareness training, interest building experiences, and supported work experience in community jobs	Young people with learning disabilities in one mainstream secondary school	A voluntary sector agency mainly providing support to adults with all disabilities into employment
C	Employment focussed Transition Support Team	Providing supported work experience in community jobs	Young people with learning disabilities in special schools	Team provided by Local Authority Social Services Department- Adult Team
D	Training and work experience in a Social Enterprise	Placements over a few weeks, or sessions over a semester or a year, in a range of its own social enterprises or employment training projects (café, pottery, woodwork computer training etc.)	Young people with learning disabilities in special schools	A voluntary sector agency offering training
E	Youth Supported Employment Team	Finding, and supporting young people in, part-time evening and weekend jobs with provision of "buddy" support from non-disabled peers	Young people with learning disabilities in four Colleges of FE	A voluntary sector supported employment agency
F	Personal Advisors from a Careers Service	Providing support for further education and employment decisions through the Connexions' careers guidance model. Team specialises in students with special needs	Young people with learning disabilities in special schools	English "Connexions" company, providing careers guidance to all young people at schools in area

respectively and received an input from our EOs. The research team asked for up to 20 young people in each of our six areas. Due to ethical and data protection reasons the team was not able to contact the young people and their carers directly. SENCOs wrote to the carers of the young people and informed the young people in class about the project and sought their consent. Factors such as terminal illness or difficult familial situations had to be taken into account. Still, only very few individuals were not approached because of this kind of problem. Briefing materials were supplied to SENCOs covering all aspects of the project, and appropriate versions of these, including easy read versions, were provided for young people and carers. Written consent forms were required from both parties.

Where a young person did not have the capacity to sign a consent form, the team relied on a statement that it would be in their best interest to take part from their form teacher, along with written carer consent, to include them. Where consent was not forthcoming from the carers but secured from the young person, only the young person was interviewed. Young people also had an option to ask that their carers not to be interviewed and four took that option. In these cases, parents were not interviewed. The purposive sample of young people in the first and second cohort represented a comprehensive sample of all school or college leavers in the relevant year who were offered additional transition or employment input through an outside agency.

Interviews

Once written consents were obtained, the school collected basic descriptive data on the young person: age; primary and secondary disability; SEN status; ethnicity. Next, the research team for interview contacted carers and young people. Interviews were conducted with the carer and the young person separately and usually took place in the carer's home or, on occasions, in school or college with the agreement of the SENCO. Interviews were taped, with agreement, for analysis purposes, and interviewers took detailed contemporaneous notes.

The interview schedules covered information on the transition process young people and carers experienced, their views on the help they had received, and their views on what they wanted to do after school or college. Also included were questions on the young person's involvement in other extra-curricula activity, and socio-economic and household composition data for the family. In addition, carers completed the Adaptive Behaviour Scale for the young person (Nihira *et al.* 1993) to give us a broad understanding of the problems they faced in everyday activities. Once the first round of interviews with carers and young people were completed, 59 case studies were undertaken. Carers and young people were asked more detailed questions and perspectives were gained from a teacher and a staff member of the EO working with the young person.

Two cohorts of leavers (2005 and 2006) were included in the study. Carers from each cohort were followed-up with a substantial telephone interview approximately 6 months after leaving school or college to see where the

young person had been placed, whether their choice had been met, and carers' retrospective views on the process they had been through. The 2005 leaver cohort was followed-up a second time, 18 months after they had left to establish longer-term trends.

Case studies

Once the first round of interviews with carers and young people were completed, a further selection of case studies was undertaken. Selection criteria were applied that would generate a set of interviewees with a representative distribution in gender, adaptive behaviour, and an identified transition outcome for the young person of either a college place or a paid job. Case studies also represented all six different models of transition and employment support that had previously been identified. Carers and young people were asked more detailed questions on their transition choices and how they had been influenced, and perspectives were gained from a teacher and a staff member of the EO working with the young person.

Policy interviews

The project was designed to obtain a detailed picture of employment support in several local authorities. An examination of current national and local policy was always seen as an important aspect to understanding what helped or hindered transition to employment on the ground. The team conducted semi-structured interviews within local authorities and education with a range of individuals who were in relevant strategic or operational positions and were in a position to comment on the implementation of national and local policy in practice. Overall, 32 individuals were identified across the six areas and 24 agreed to be interviewed. Amongst them were SEN co-ordinators, managers of adult and children's social services, directors of employment support agencies/social enterprises involved in the study, as well as managers of local education authorities and a small number of staff who worked in funding bodies of England and Wales (Learning and Skills Council and Education and Learning Wales³). Interviews were taped and the tapes transcribed.

In addition the team also interviewed 29 SENCOs involved in the project in schools, colleges and local authorities at the start of the project. Questions included identifying the aims and outcomes of transition, the nature and quality of transition arrangements between educational institutions and external support agencies, barriers to employment for young people with learning disabilities, the Career Services in England and Wales, the effectiveness of policy guidance issued by central government, as well as areas for improvement. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, while a small number were conducted by telephone where respondents requested it. Interviews were taped and the tapes transcribed.

³ Now part of the responsibilities of Welsh Assembly Government Department for Education, Life-long Learning and Skills.

Analysis

Much of the data took the form of open questions completed in note form and taped at face-to-face interview. Due to the large number of interviews carried out in the study (over 650) contemporaneous notes were transcribed and analysed using the five-step “Framework” method proposed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994), and issues were organised into themes and interpreted. Quotes illustrating the themes and issues identified were then transcribed directly from audiotapes.

Data on types of vocational activity offered through school and employment services during their last year at school or college were transcribed, themed and coded into categories. For each person the total number of hours spent in each type of activity with each provider was recorded, and coded by two people. Overall agreement on coding was 87%. The activity data, descriptive data on the young person, household employment and qualifications data, were fed into a logistic regression analysis. Logistic regression allows continuous and categorical variables to be combined and used to estimate what effects the probability that an outcome will occur – here, that a young person with learning disabilities will get a paid job (part-time or full-time) after transition. Policy interview transcripts were inputted into the qualitative analysis programme “N6” which offered a convenient way of looking for crosscutting and predominant themes.

WHAT WE FOUND

Young people

Overall, 149 young people met the project criteria and were approached, and 145 young people, and 145 carers, agreed to take part. We had data for young people and their carers in 137 cases, for 4 young people without their carer, and for 4 carers without the young person. Of the 145 young people interviewed, 71 were in special schools, 39 in the mainstream school, and 37 in colleges. Table 2 presents information on the characteristics of young people concerned.

As we would expect from people in their final transition year in different settings, ages differed with a mean of 18.0 (SD=1.2) in special schools, 16.1 (SD=0.4) in mainstream school, and 19.6 (SD=1.7) in colleges. A mean percentile rank across all ABS domains of 77 equates to a group of people who would have “average” functioning (across self-care, sensor and motor abilities, managing money, communication, use of number and time, independence in the home, vocational skills, active lifestyle, acting responsibly and interaction with others), compared to a normative sample of people with learning disabilities living primarily at home or in social care facilities. The ABS mean percentile rank varied between settings, from 68.1 (SD=16.2) in special schools, 79.9 (SD=13.5) in colleges, to 91.4 in our mainstream schools. As one would expect, the young people in mainstream school had higher levels of adaptive behaviour than others. The great majority of our sample was “White British.”

Table 2. Characteristics of young people with learning disabilities

	Study sample n=145 people
% Male	63.4%
Mean age (SD=Standard Deviation)	17.9 years (SD=1.8)
Mean percentile rank of the ABS (SD)	77.1 (SD=16.5)
Additional diagnoses/problems	
Autistic spectrum disorder	8.2%
Asperger's syndrome	1.4%
Emotional or behavioural difficulties	16.4%
Ethnicity	
White British	142
White and Black Caribbean	1
White-Other	1
Black British- Caribbean	1
Person had a Statement of Special Educational Need/Record of Need	57.7%
Person receiving School Action or School Action Plus	4.0%

In addition to meeting our definition of learning disability, 8.2% were reported as also having Autism, 1.4% Asperger's Syndrome, and 16.4% as having emotional/behavioural difficulties (EBD). When we look at these additional problems across different settings, 16.7% of young people in special schools had Autism and 11.1% EBD; 5.3% of young people in college had Asperger's Syndrome and 5.3% EBD; 35.9% in our mainstream school had an EBD label. Overall, 61.7% had a Statement of Special Educational Need, School Action or School Action Plus status.

Carers

Carers were primarily parents (96.6%)(Table 3). In addition we had three Grandmothers (2.1%), one Sister (0.7%), and one Care Manager of the young person. Just under half of the young people in the study lived in households where no carers had a formal qualification (47.9%). The most common qualifications were one or more GCSEs or equivalent (21.2%). Thirteen percent of households had at least one carer with a degree or higher degree.

Home circumstances

Overall the majority of our carers lived in their own home (53.6%) or in rented accommodation (40.1%). The majority of our young people lived in a household where one of their carers was employed or self-employed (41.8%), but significant levels of unemployment or no-economic activity were present (37.3%). The highest levels of carer employment were for young people in areas C (84.2%) and F (79.2%) and the lowest were in areas A (50.0%) and D (40.0%).

Table 3. Carer characteristics

	Carers (n=145)
Relationship to young person with LD	
Parent	96%
Foster parent	1%
Sibling	1%
Professional	1%
Marital status	
Married	91%
Unmarried/Single parent	9%
Household Tenure	
Owner occupied	53.6%
Rented	40.1%
Other	6.3%
Employment of Head Household	
Employed/Self-employed	41.8%
Unemployed	37.3%
Economically inactive	20.9%
Education level- Households with one or more carers with*:	
Higher Degree	3.4%
Degree	9.6%
A-Levels or equivalent	6.2%
GCSEs or equivalent	21.2%
NVQ	3.4%
Other	20.5%
No formal qualification	47.9%

* Percentages do not sum to 100%

The home situations of the young people we interviewed were, therefore, diverse and represented different potential relationships between household composition, the experience of employment, the education and qualification backgrounds of families and other factors that may influence the transition decisions of the family. In addition, the backgrounds of families meant that they brought very different resources, perspectives, stresses and abilities to the transition process.

Involvement in transition planning

As we saw in Table 2, a little over half of our sample of young people had a Statement of Special Educational Need or, in Scotland at the time, a Record of Need. The formal element of transition planning is targeted at these young people. We asked carers of young people at school if they and the young person had attended a review of the Statement during their last year: a key moment in developing the transition plan.

Figure 1. Attendance of young people with statements and their carers at review meetings

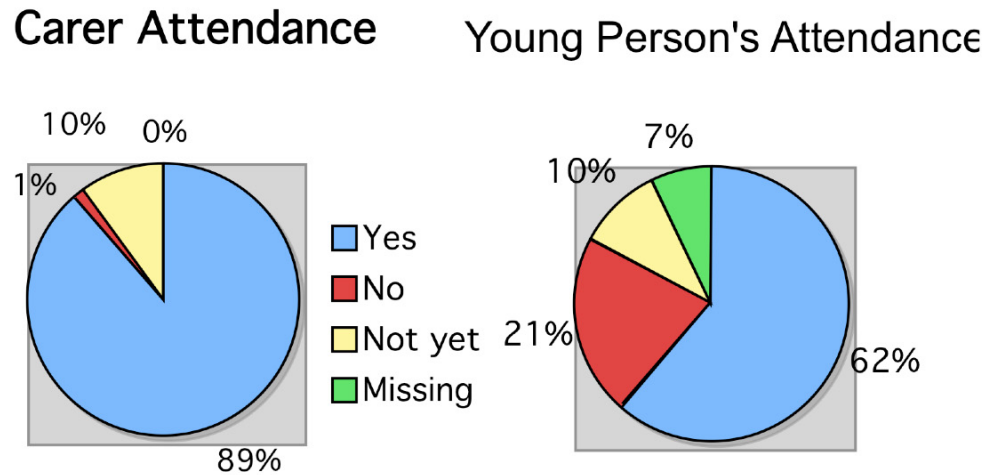


Figure 1 shows that attendance at transition review meetings was high among carers, but that 21.4% of young people had not attended their transition meeting. Ten percent of young people and carers had not yet had the opportunity of a meeting at the point we interviewed them. Although emphasis is placed in government guidance on transition on including young people and taking into account the views of carers, there was a significant shortfall in the numbers who might attend, actually attending. There may of course be reasons for this, including the inability or unwillingness of young people to take part, and communication difficulties leading to people feeling it is not appropriate for a young person to be present. However, this still represents a missed opportunity for some young people and carers to input into the decision making process.

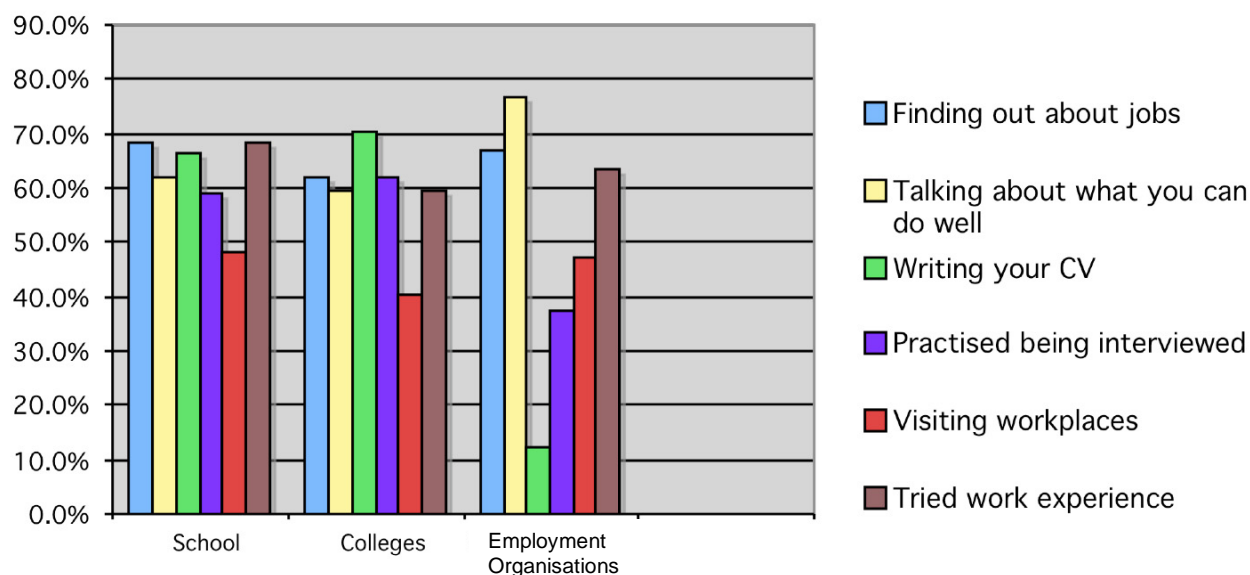
For young people attending college, 84.0% of carers reported attending a meeting of some sort to discuss their son or daughters options for transition from college. Again, they reported that 24.0% of young people had not attended these meetings, with the associated potential loss of opportunity.

Help received by young people on employment

We asked young people what help they had received in a number of aspects of thinking about a job from their school, college (Figure 2). All young people at school or college reported receiving some form of vocational input, over and above mainstream curriculum subjects. This employment related input fell into two types. First, classroom or resource based activities (finding out about jobs; talking about what young people are good at and how that might link to a

job; CV development; interview practice); second, workplace-based activities (visiting workplace, job shadowing and work experience).

Figure 2. Help and advice received by young people in relation to employment from school, college and EOs



The majority of young people reported that their school (68.2%) or college (62.2%) had helped them in identifying jobs that they might wish to do. The most common method was use of the Internet to look at advertised jobs and to analyse the requirements of those jobs. The use of videos of different jobs and workplaces was also common. This at times extended into interviewing people about their jobs and going down to the job centre to look at available jobs.

Watched films, different jobs in factories and supermarkets. Yes, used the Internet. Enjoyed it. (ID: 21, 215, Young Person)

We asked teachers and other people what types of jobs they do. We also had books and the computer to look at B & B's, café's, hotels, and pubs. (31, 74, YP)

The Job Centre, with college, looking for jobs. I want to work with animals, or with the elderly or in a shop. I'd rather work with the elderly. I worked in [named Elderly Person's Home] before. Looked on the computer. (21,46, YP)

We found that the majority of those who had some input on what they were good at did this as part of organised class-based activities, along with individual interviews with class teachers and careers staff. Young people also recognized that they were at times using formal systems, with ASDAN awards being the most common framework reported.

Insight into vocational strengths and weaknesses also came from other exercises, such as creating CVs, often using computer templates or sometimes careers service online systems, and preparation for interviews, including mock interviews, and class based presentations.

Yes. Actually sat there and discussed it with (teacher), then when I thought it was right input it on the computer. (10, 227, YP)

Yes, on the computer. Did CV on Career Wales' site on the computer and in class. (23, 218, YP)

Fewer people in schools (48.2%) and colleges (40.5%) had visited jobs or been involved in job shadowing. However, more reported that they had been involved in some form of work experience organised through school (68.2%) or college (59.5%). There were some interesting trends in these experiences:

- More short, one-off visits to workplaces to see jobs, organised by schools took place in the community (87.5%) than organised by colleges (69.3%) This meant that colleges provided more visits “in-house,” involving young people visiting places of work on-site, and shadowing jobs within the institution.

In college, yes, had a look around by ourselves. Went upstairs, didn't actually, but we did look downstairs, not upstairs. Cooking, yes, where they serve food. (20, 34, YP)

- 76.1% of school, and 87.0% of college-organised longer-term work experience was organised outside of the school or college.
- 40.0% of outside school-organised, and 11.1% of outside college-organised work experience took place in voluntary organisations, rather than commercial companies, notably some spending time working in charity shops.

Yes, every Thursday we go to the (voluntary sector trust) Farm. (62, 85, YP)

They arranged work experience, sorting out clothes in a charity shop. (22, 45 YP)

Someone took me to visit the Oxfam shop where I work now - can't remember who it was. (21, 46, YP)

Vocational input from our six external organisations (EOs) was reported by fewer young people (82.3%) than was input from schools and colleges. Even though receiving a service from these agencies was a criterion for entry to this study, over the course of their last year some of the young people reported

having no direct work done with them (although parents may well have been aware of work going on, on their behalf).

Generally, many fewer young people received assistance with CVs (12.4%) and practice interviews (37.3%) from EOs than from schools and colleges. EOs instead engaged significantly more young people in talking about what they can do well (76.9%). Workplace visits (47.1%) and work experience (63.6%) were mentioned by roughly the same percentage of young people receiving input from the EOs as in schools or colleges. There were again trends in how workplace visits and work experiences were organised:

- Workplace visits were almost exclusively organised in ordinary community-based workplaces (95.8%), a little more often than was the case for schools and colleges.
- Work experiences were also more often provided in ordinary workplaces (rather than agency's own facilities) than for schools and colleges (93.6%) .
- Fewer of these external workplace visits (2.2%) and external work experience placements (18.0%) took place in voluntary organisations and charity shops than was the case for comparable placements organised by colleges.

It did appear, therefore, that EOs were offering a significantly different style of vocational experience compared to schools and colleges.

Most young people we interviewed were positive about the input they had had on jobs from whatever source, with between 8% and 25% of young people wanting change, depending on the type of input.

It's made me realise that I can't sit on my bum. (53,71, YP)

Overall, young people felt that differences in the way that employment related experiences were delivered did matter to them. Where there were criticisms young people tended to want information delivered in a more hands on, practical style. On finding out about different jobs, the Internet was not universally popular. There weren't always things on the Internet that young people were interested in and sometimes thought it was hard to use. Some people would have liked more outside experiences, either going to Jobcentres or seeing jobs directly. Others would have liked to have more people come in to talk, or more detailed information on what jobs involved. In terms of CV development, the main criticisms were that it was done once, sometimes too long before it might be needed, and wasn't reviewed and updated enough.

People wanted to talk about what they were good at, and the largest criticism was that schools and colleges did not spend enough face-to-face time doing this.

The teacher could have spent more time with us. It's more helpful to have individual meeting and not class group meetings. (10, 17, YP)

Would have liked to talk about what I could do better – look at my reading and writing. (51, 54, YP)

In terms of job visits and work experience organised by schools, 25% of young people would have liked change, dissatisfaction being mainly with the number and variety of companies covered in visits and work experience:

I would have liked them to give us more time to do more placements. (24, 217, YP)

I would have liked to have till experience so I could put it on my CV. Then I might have had a better chance at getting a job later. (51,53, YP)

Offer me more choice. I would have liked building, the construction option, but I'm too young. (Re: Health and Safety issues with under 16's) (10, 226, YP)

For EOs, 13% of young people wanted change, this being roughly equally split between young people wanting more choice in placements, and others wanting to spend more time in favoured placements when found.

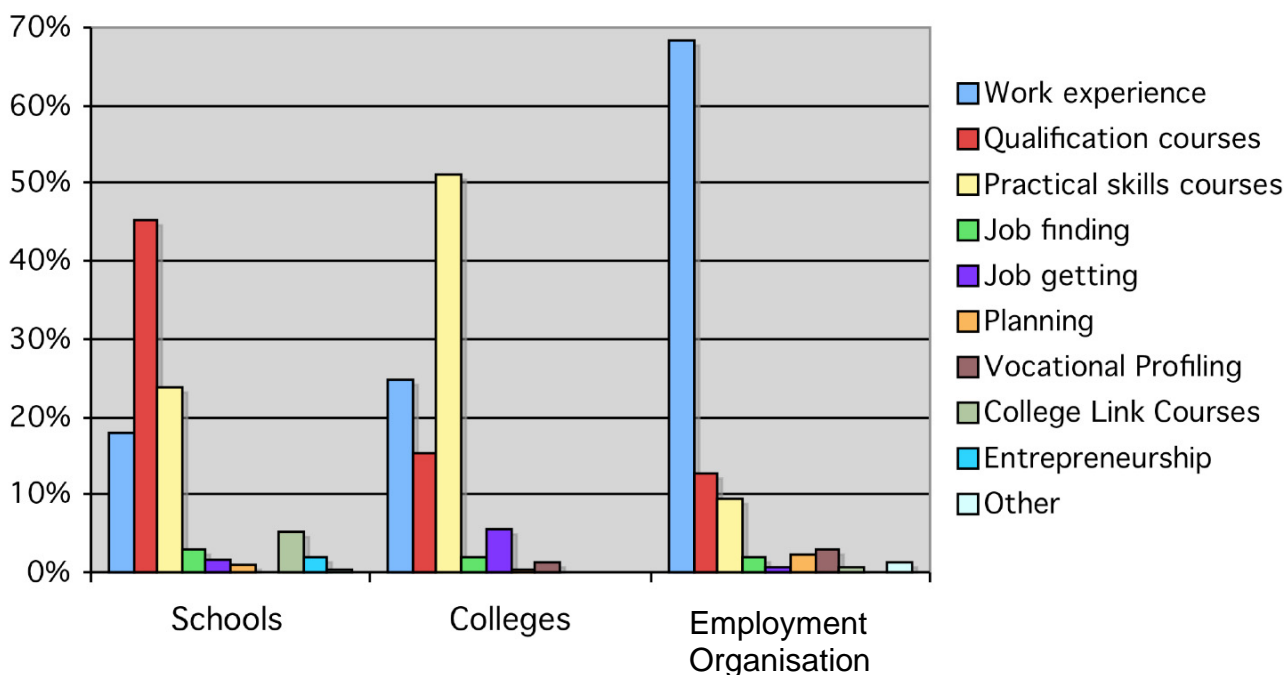
Balance of activities provided by schools, colleges and employment organisations

Schools, colleges and employment organisations provided detailed information on what vocational input they provided, over what periods, and for how long in their leaving year, for each young person in the study. These were subsequently categorised into major categories by the researchers for comparison (Figure 3).

When we take the number of hours of different activity offered into account, the difference between provision by schools, colleges and EOs becomes more pronounced. We found great variation in what was provided to young people both between the school, college and EO sectors, and also within each sector.

We also found that young women experienced higher levels of work experience (35.3 hour per person) and practical skills courses (64.1 hours), and lower levels of qualification courses (17.9 hours) than young men delivered by schools and colleges (21.8, 31.0 and 63.9 respectively). Young women had lower levels of work experience (16.5 hours) than men from EOs (47.4 hours), but were similar in most other activities.

Figure 3. Employment related activity provided by schools, colleges and EOs



Variation between sectors was significant. Figure 3 shows that EOs had work experience as the largest element of their provision (68.3%). Their mean input in work experience was 48.7 hours per young person although this varied considerably from person to person (standard deviation=77.6). The work placements varied widely:

Job	Job tasks
Garage	Assisting staff with MOTs, general tidying duties
Construction Company	Construction, health & safety, painting, decorating
Post Office	Assisting in a sorting office
Café	Assisting chefs with food preparation, food hygiene, tidying duties
National Tyres	Assist with supervised tyre changes, exhausts and general tidying
Sainsbury's	Shelf packing, general tidying, internet shopping
Hotel	Housekeeping duties in bedroom
Garden Centre	Preparation of rabbit cages, cleaning, feeding. Feeding and cleaning birds
Benefits Agency	Receiving and recording mail, binding programmes, using photocopier, using shredder
Charity Shop	Putting clothes in correct place in shop, removing older items, bagging unwanted items

The EO in Area B helped the young people to access qualification training (12.1% of hours) and practical skill courses without qualifications (9.4% of hours). The main qualifications used were an Open College Network courses

in Telematics, Foundation Craft Awards in plumbing, carpentry and brickwork, and National Vocational Qualifications.

Input from colleges had practical skills courses as a major part of their provision (51.2% of hours). These involved courses with a number of modules providing students with knowledge and understanding of work ethics, work rules and health and safety within the workplace largely through classroom studies. Included within this were discussions of the benefits of paid/unpaid work; identifying where to look for jobs; job centre visit, utilising job points in the Job Centre; choosing the right sort of work, applying for jobs; and interview technique.

The schools in the study had qualification courses (45.4%) and practical skills courses (23.8%) as their main vocational inputs to young people. Qualification included:

- OCR Level 1 (CLAIT) courses.
- BTEC Introductory Certificate in Health and Social Care Level 1.
- ASDAN Workright, Life Skills Qualification, and World of Work modules.

Work awareness training again covered a wide range of course content, including: catering; office skills; motor vehicle maintenance; painting & decorating; practical work tasks on a farm; hairdressing; coppicing and burning wood; baking; horticulture training and more. A small, but significant, group of young people took part in Young Enterprise, whose aim was learning through creation of a virtual business.

Work experience represented 18.0% of the hours that schools, and 15.2% of the hours that colleges, provided for young people. As with EOs, a wide range of jobs and workplaces were represented, the main difference being the use of in-house opportunities to deliver work experiences:

Kitchen assistants working in school cafés	Make tea/coffee to order, cleaning up, wash up, pour cold drinks to order, serving cakes and washing and drying up
Running a Webb Ivory Catalogue	Delivering catalogues, collecting returns, processing orders online, collecting deliveries, making and delivering orders, collecting the payments/receipting
Janitorial duties	Security checking, moping up
Classroom general assistant	Escorting pupils to the gym or supermarket and helping to get changed or helping other students to shop
Running school tuck shop	Use of tills, serving customers, packaging goods, shelf stacking.

Also, the mean input of work experience was 14.8 and 38.3 hours per person for schools and colleges respectively, compared to 48.7 hours per young person by EOs.

There was also significant variation within sectors. Schools differed significantly in what they offered in terms of vocational activity. The mainstream school provided virtually all of its vocational input in terms of CV development, citizenship (seen as strongly related to the development of relevant social skills), and preparing for interviews. In special schools there were relatively large variations in hours of activity offered in work experience, vocational qualification courses, practical skills and work awareness courses. A few schools had much higher input, representing a greater emphasis in vocational activity than the majority. Similar variation can be seen among colleges.

EOs differed in what vocational service they provided and to an extent we chose them for these differences:

- **Area A's** supported employment agency provided a well defined package: getting to know young people spending time with them in different formal and informal settings; vocational profiling to identify what young people want to do for work and what talents they have to offer; finding individual placement; transport and on the job training and support. The transition team spent most of its time in planning with families, attending review meetings, liaising with social workers over providing support for activity outside school; connecting people to neighbourhood networks for support; facilitating meetings on developing a plan for the future; referring people to jobcentres, supported employment and a range of other health and social care services.
- **Area B** offered a very wide range of individual work experience placements as its primary input (we counted 48 different employers who offered work experiences). It arranged courses with training providers offering qualifications, and practical skill development (e.g. plumbing, carpentry, brickwork). It also arranged a number of experiences designed to build confidence and maturity (e.g. visit to a fire station for re-enactment of collision following car crime and joyriding; linking into army who run team building days); and taster sessions in local colleges.
- **Area C's** supported employment agency also provided a well defined package: Getting to know the person; observation in a variety of settings; home visits to carers; vocational profiling; introducing people to work experience placements; supporting work experience placement and travel, including travel training. The agency also offered some modules of ASDAN "World of Work." Placements were again wide and included cafes, garages, charity shops, catering, hotel work, shops, garden centres, country park work and leisure centres.
- **Area D** provided a range project based work experience offering experiences in all aspects of catering; pottery including hand building with clay, use of cutter using template, constructing pots, vases, painting with oxides, straws and slips, packing and pricing, texturing and decorating; making and restoring woodwork products in a well equipped workshop environment; working on a farm. They also provided training in word processing and Internet use.

- **Area E** provided support for part-time paid work and work experience, linking people with learning disabilities from college and non-disabled peers. They spent time carrying out vocational profiling to identify potential jobs; introducing young people to “buddies” who would support them in jobs; finding placements; helping with interview preparation; introducing people to work experience placements and jobs; monitoring placements. The agency also provided work awareness training for some young people to provide students with knowledge and understanding of work ethics, work rules and health and safety within the workplace. Placements were less varied than elsewhere, but included electrical shops, MacDonald’s, hairdressing, and restaurant.
- **Area F** offered a Connexions model of input. Personal Advisors carried out a wide range of activities in support of their transition role. They provided career planning talks to groups; provided information on people individual next step interests; attended annual reviews; individual interviews with young people on their future; helped people to apply and escorted people to interviews with colleges and other training and employment providers; keeping people informed on progress of applications; organising college tasters and completing Section 140 documentation for college funding; organised work experience placements and visited to monitor.

The help and advice carers received on employment

We asked carers what help they had received in relation to employment through the school or college, from their Connexions or careers service, and from the EO. The meeting to review their son or daughter’s Statement (transition planning) was one source of information and advice. Over 60% of carers reported that the annual review had not mentioned employment as an option. For those at school who had discussed employment (as we have seen earlier, a minority), options had been discussed in only general terms.

Not in any great detail. I think this is going to be a difficult one, because at the moment we all feel that he probably couldn’t do a shift that was longer than two hours. (40,49, Fam)

A number of those at school had discussed employment in the context of going to college first:

What we were talking about was X’s move from school to college and what I felt about that and what options we thought would be available to X after college. I think we all agreed that X was a little bit immature to go into the work place at the moment, but after two years at college I don’t see any reason she can’t go out to the work place. (50,63, Fam)

Yes, in the future. Hopefully she is going to [name] College for three years. It’s going to be her first 3 days this week for assessment. (50,62, Fam)

Others did find that the school had provided specific help on employment:

It was, yes. Started with it may be possible working with children with special needs, because she's quite good at looking after children with worse disabilities than herself. She works a lot at school feeding children who can't feed themselves, so they thought that might be a good line to go down. Also she likes cookery so they thought maybe possibly a restaurant or something like that. (46,11, Fam)

Around half of carers mentioned that they had received employment related advice from their careers service. The advice mentioned was of four main types. Carers reported careers service representatives attending transitions review meetings (23.4% of carers) where employment was discussed. Around 25% of carers had received booklets, leaflets and a prospectus for colleges and other options. Carers had also attended interviews with a careers service Personal Advisor at school or college (22.1%), again where employment was discussed as an option.

Connexions mentioned the part-time job. They did at the last review mention his going one or two days a week to [name] veterinary college down the road, but because he's doing exams at the moment, Mr X, his teacher didn't think it would be appropriate because he needed the time at school to do his exams. (31, 77, Fam)

Connexions did mention a part time job but he wasn't accepted for this. He was given the opportunity to apply for work by Connexions. (31, 77, Fam)

They gave my son an idea of what he may want to do as paid employment as an option: Factory work, repair work. (61,32, Fam)

Around 21% of carers reported that a personal advisor had helped to organise a work experience placement for their son or daughter.

They gave them some job experience. They took them out. She was in an office photocopying and worked in a factory. (53, 56, Fam)

At the last meeting, yes. There was a scheme run through the Job Centre, from what I understand, they were going to investigate, through a gentleman who runs a company that repairs wheelchairs and things like that. He's going to try and see if they can get him in on that scheme. (61,32, Fam)

For the other half of carers who met with the careers service, the great majority told us that college was the only option discussed as a next placement.

Mostly just college. We expressed, didn't we, we would rather be practising work side of things more. Knowing him, how he is, not a very academic kid, if he's given a task he gets on with it. (31,73, Fam)

They've given him leaflets and catalogues to look about for courses. It's all college-based stuff. I think they try to get them into college. A lot of the kids do achieve GCSEs and things like that who do have a statement so it's a good pathway there. But not everyone gets what they want so they direct them to the colleges so that they've got a couple more years to get what they want. (31, 73, Fam)

We also asked carers about their interaction with EOs. Seventy-six percent had reported having contact with the EO. We found that people generally received more detailed and concrete advice on employment through these organisations than from other sources:

They helped her by getting her this job in McDonalds. She's putting the toys in the Happy Meal boxes. They have arranged all that, they arranged the interview and the induction course. She is coming up to her 5th week. She likes it up there, she's happy at the moment. (22,38, Fam)

With [EO job coach]...he did a brief work experience placement at leisure centre.... He did brief work placement at (named) leisure centre...Introduced him to a job which may interest him. (46,12, Fam)

There was a lot of input by schools and colleges, and careers services, about transition next steps. College remained the more common option discussed and promoted by schools and careers services. If there was contact with an EO, employment was more likely to be raised as an option, and any advice given appeared to be more detailed, and more likely to lead to a work experience placement.

Professional views of transition

The professional's view of transition arrangements is informed by the unique position of the school teacher, college tutor or the SENCO in the transition process. These educationalists are often the first port of call for parents to find out about post-school options, and they often also act as gatekeepers for access to outside employment organisations. If sufficient funding is available, outside employment support can be identified and incorporated into the transition process from the school's side. Educationalists, however, more commonly liaise closely with colleges and often facilitate the smooth transition of young people to a college place. Often the ground has been prepared by visits to the school by the college, or college link courses that the young people may attend when still at school. As such, the school teacher, tutor or SENCO occupy a key position in adequately informing and guiding parents and young people in future transition decisions, while at the same time taking a significant responsibility on behalf of education for transition review

meetings, the main vehicle for bringing different services together and evaluating the skills and abilities of the young person.

The position of the outside employment organisation is different to that of the school teacher. In some schools they were voluntary agencies, in others the support agencies were core funded by statutory services. In either case, the extent to which these employment agencies were represented in the transition review process differed widely. Consequently, employment support professionals had knowledge of the pupils to a different degree and this was reflected in the interviews that we conducted with our case studies among both cohorts.

We asked teachers, college tutors, and employment professionals their views of the suitability of the post-school and post-college placement decisions being made by our sample of graduating students. Second, we asked them whether the various activities that were organised during the transition period had had a positive or negative impact on the pupil's readiness for post-transition placement.

When asked whether or not the placement for the young person is suitable, there was a remarkable consensus between school teachers and employment organisation staff on the suitability of planned post-school placement. In the first cohort 83% of case study placements (n=59) were said to be suitable by the teachers. The assessment by employment staff was even more positive, 92% of post-transition placements being said to be suitable for the young person.

Teachers, tutors and employment staff involved with the person were generally agreed on the reasons for post-school placements not being suitable for any particular person. In one case the teacher thought that the young person did not show sufficient interest in further education and in a second, that the college environment was thought to be unsuitable for the young person.

If he's just doing catering he'd be fine. He does not cope with sitting down and doing basic skills. It would have been better for him to develop himself in a work placement. He will not be able to cook on his own but is very good at assisting. He would be better in work and not in a college environment. (Case Study School teacher, 266, 61)

This view was corroborated by the comments of the employment organisation's worker.

If he's acquiring life skills then yes (the college placement) is suitable, but if he was gaining life skills here at [café] it would be better for him. I feel we were moving forward with him so would have liked to see him do more work here. He got a lot out of coming in here. (CS Employment Worker, 266, 61)

The onus is on teaching staff or tutors to assess the skills and abilities of the young person in order to subsequently identify adequate placements when leaving school or college. Underachievement of the young person in relation to staff expectation seemed to be a barrier for some in identifying suitable post-transition placements, with people being regarded as not mature enough to go into employment, not possessing the correct qualifications, or not having mastered basic work skills.

On the other hand, in some cases teachers were not convinced that the chosen post-school placement was sufficiently demanding and matched to the aspirations of the young person.

He has a lot of skills to offer and is very good in terms of organisation. I fear he is too able to do residential course. What he needs is a skills course; he needs to be stretched because otherwise he acts inappropriately. (CS School Teacher, 203, 50)

This was echoed by employment staff who also doubted whether the transition process had led to the correct placement in the case of this young person.

By default, yes, the placement will be suitable, but no transitional planning has been done. It will act as a base line. I'm sure he'll gain from it in some way. (CS Employment Worker, 203,50)

Interviews with employment staff, teachers and tutors also highlighted frustration with a lack of options for employment locally. Some post-transition placements were accepted at times simply because there was nothing else available, despite the placement being clearly unsuitable for the young person.

He had a successful work placement, linked to [voluntary employment agency]. He's capable of working but there are no employment opportunities. He's now with clients of a Day Centre for older people, not with peers. (CS School Teacher, 218, 23)

Respondents revealed that some young people had limited influence on the decision making process. Available places are often scarce and choice can be limited. This places a restriction on the young person having a meaningful choice from the transition planning process. School teachers were well aware of this.

I don't think he had a choice. At the leavers meeting he was only offered the 2 days at college and had no say in the choice. He's acquired a broad range of skills at school, but I'm afraid if he won't use them. He'll lose these. (CS School Teacher, 202, 50)

However, there were examples where the young person had been central to influencing the decision, to the extent of overruling the recommendations of the employment worker.

That is what she wanted. It's appropriate in so far as that's what she chose; it is suitable for different reasons. I would have liked her to go to a different college out of the area but she flatly refused. Or I'd like to see her go straight into employment, this would probably suit her more but she is also not ready yet in terms of attitude and maturity. (CS Employment Worker 228, 10)

The interviews also revealed some insights into the shortcomings of networking and service collaboration. On occasions there was lack of agreement on who should organise important service inputs. In one case, work to find a person a work experience had been started by the outside employment organisation, but having failed, the suggestion was that it was not their role:

First one of my colleagues mostly observed [him] and then looked for different jobs and went on to the Internet to look for work, but was not able to find anything.....

My current colleague feels he should have work experience, but I feel the schools should be looking for work experience for their students, and then support them. (CS Transition Team Manager, 249, 40)

The question remains why a transition service with an employment focus does not see work experience as its area of expertise rather than the school? This clearly flies in the face of other data that show work experience as a core activity for these organisations.

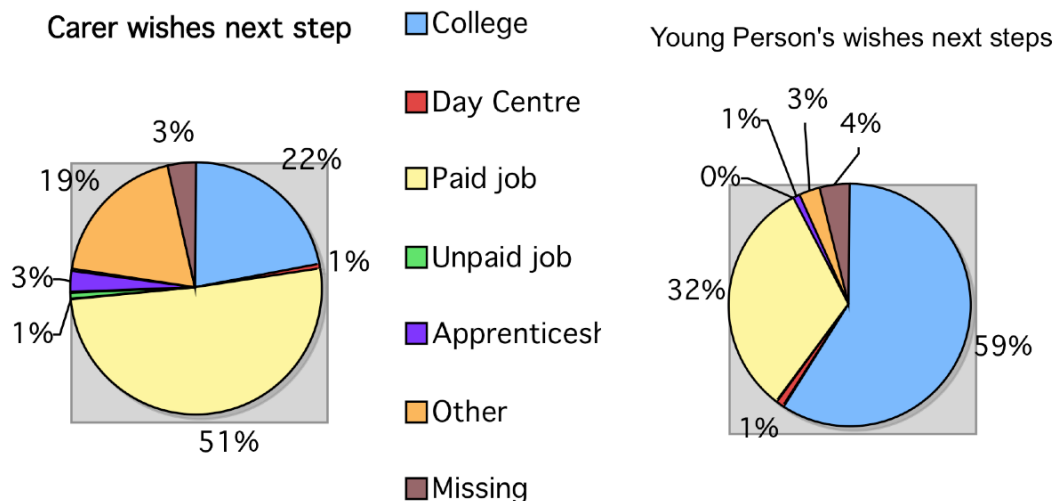
The last aspect that emerged clearly from the case studies interviews conducted with teachers and service professionals concerned the impact that the various activities had on the young person's development. Teachers and employment organisation staff were agreed that, in most cases, where the young person had participated in work placements, they had increased confidence and self-esteem noticeably. Improvement of social inclusion and increased independence were also frequently cited as positive outcomes of work experience placements.

What young people and their carers wanted as the next step

We asked young people and carers what they wanted to do when they left school or college. Figure 4 shows that 59.1% of young people wanted a place at college as their next step after school or college, followed by 32.3% who wanted a paid job. Very few wanted to go to a day centre, and none wanted to stay at home. Figure 4 also shows that, when asked "what are your hopes for your son/daughter when they leave school," 49.7% said a paid job, 21.2% a college place, and 18.8% wanted something else. This mainly meant people wanted the young person to do what they wanted, to be happy, or to grow in confidence and independence. Only 7% wanted a day centre place, and none wanted the young person to stay at home.

However, when we asked families what they felt their son or daughter **would do** upon leaving school, their opinions changed. Here, 51.7% said the young person would go to college, and only 26.8% felt they would go into a paid job. Further, 8% now felt that the young person would end up at home, and 2% felt that they would go to a day centre.

Figure 4. Preferred placement after leaving school or college, reported by young people and carers



When we looked only at what young people and carers wanted to do next, there was an agreement among 52.3% of pairs. The largest agreement was among those who wanted a college place as the next step (34.1%), while only 23.9% of those who wanted a paid job agreed. This highlights the need to inform both families and young people with learning disabilities to reach consensus over the next step after school or college.

Employment rates

When we followed-up young people six months after they had left school or college we asked their carers what their young person had done after leaving (Figure 5). We can see that the majority had gone into a college of further education (60.0%), and only a minority had gone into a paid job of any type (17.2%) and 5.5% unpaid or voluntary positions. We found that, despite the original expressed preferences of the young people and carers, 11.1% were at home with no place, and 2.1% were attending day centre. This is a situation at odds with the expressed wishes of the parents of the young people.

We found a significant difference in employment outcomes across our two cohorts, where the 2004/05 cohort experienced an employment rate of 21.2%, compared with 11.7% for our 2005/06 cohort (Table 4). The overall figure of

17.2% is at the higher end of estimates of current employment rates of young people with learning disabilities (Emerson *et al.* 1993). The figure for the first cohort is clearly higher than national rates. The difference between the two cohort employment rates show how dramatically these rates can vary over time, and we return to some of the reasons why this may be in a later section.

Figure 5. Placement 6 months after leaving school or college

Young person's placement at 6 months

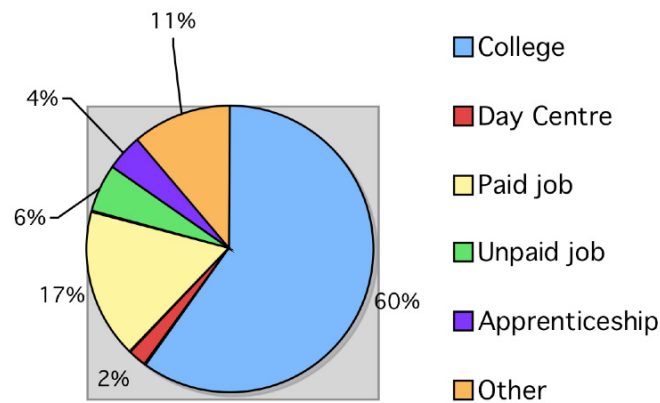


Table 4. Number of young people entering jobs after transition

	At 6 months		At 18 months		% Retention
	Number of Jobs	% employment	Number of Jobs	% employment	
First Cohort	18	21.2%	11 +10	25.3%	61.1%
Second Cohort	7	11.7%			
Total Jobs	25	17.2%			

We also looked at where people were placed in comparison with what people had said that they wanted as a next step. We found that, of those young people who said they wanted college, 79.2% had successfully obtained that placement. Only 29.2% of those who wanted a paid job successfully obtained one. This was the same for carers, with 80.7% of those wanting a college place receiving it compared to only 17.4% of those who wanted a job. A young person with a learning disability wishing to go to college is 2.7 times more likely to get a college place than a young person who wishes to get a

paid job. This suggests that significant barriers still exist for young people wanting to follow the employment route.

Employment rates in our sample also varied across areas at six months: Area A (11.8%); B (30.8%); C (0.0%); D (0.0%); E (24.0%); F (15.8%). The highest rates were for Area B, the most able group of school leavers in terms of adaptive behaviour. Area E's young people were college leavers, and Area F's were from schools supported by Connexions only. Neither Area C, the transition employment support team nor Area D, the project-based work experience and training provider saw any young people go through into paid jobs.

We were able to follow up the 2004/05 cohort after a further year. We concentrated on employment, and found that 11 out of the 18 people who had a job after six months still had a job at 18 months, representing a job retention rate of 61.1%. An additional 10 young people from the cohort had found jobs between the first and second follow-up surveys, representing an employment rate of 25.3% during the year.

In summary, the overall employment rates for our sample were at the upper end of estimates for the UK as a whole, but varied significantly, providing an interesting platform for the discussion of what inputs help to provide effective routes into employment. Employment rates for the most able group and college leavers were the highest. Retention over the 18 month period was moderate, suggesting that the jobs found were reasonably stable, and additional jobs found suggest that some people were able to find jobs after college placements or periods of not working, and that employment levels greater than 17% are achievable

The nature of jobs found and support provided to get them

Looking at the jobs that were found up until 6 months after the young people left school, 25 were found from cohorts 1 and 2. Table 5 shows the types of jobs and employers represented.

The mean hours worked per week by young people was 16.8 hours. Of the 25 people employed, 10 worked full-time (30 hours or more), 3 worked between 16 and 30 hours, and 12 less than 16 hours per week.

The mean hourly rate was £3.90 per hour (between the National Minimum Wage for those who are 18-21, and those who are 16-17 years of age). Seventy-two percent earned the minimum wage, and 28% earned more. The mean weekly wage was £94.30, with the largest wage being £280 per week. Six people (24%) retained their welfare benefit while working.

Table 5. Jobs and employers for young people employed six months after transition

Job type (number of people)	Employer
Exhibition Centre, Scene shifter	Employment Agency
Kitchen worker (2)	Restaurant Catering company
Shop worker (3) Cashier (1)	Department store Retail store at football ground Retail store
Delicatessen assistant (1) Delivery assistant (2) Shop assistant- tills (1)	Furniture store Supermarket
General Assistant	Builders Warehouse
Trainee Mechanic	Auto Centre
Cleaner (2)	Private cleaning company
General assistant (3) Customer service assistant (1)	Fast food outlets
Bricklayer	Tradesman
Trainee soldier (2)	Army
Hairdresser	Hairdressers
Customers assistant (2)	Garden Centres

We asked carers what the inclusion status of the young person was at work. Sixty percent of carers described their relative's relationship with their work colleagues as "good" or "very good." We also asked how well people mixed with work colleagues. The majority (52%) reported that their relatives "engaged in frequent and ongoing interactions with others at work." Only 4% reported that relatives engaged in "greetings and has/had very brief social interactions with others at the job but little interaction beyond this." Thirty-two percent were unable to provide an assessment. This represents a positive account of the social inclusion of young people in their workplaces.

Again, we asked carers what support they had had to find this job, what help they had provided, and which agency they worked for. Six young people had found their job through family, or through their family with an agency's help:

Cousin works at Tesco... Someone from [EO Area E] did go down to Tesco to see her on her first day and see how things were going for her and help her settle in. (20, 37, Fam)

I got her the job, I mentioned it, I phoned for her to my hairdresser. (21, 215, Fam)

A further five young people found their job as an extension of a work experience they started at school or college, all with the help of the EO that originally placed them.

He was working for the [EO], working for [company name] as a work placement before he left school. He started off on one day a week, then they put him on two, and then he started there part-time and just after he left school they offered him a full time position. He's been in full time work ever since. (10, 28, Fam)

Workplace was through (EO). It was all to do with [two EO workers]. He did the placement for 6-7 months before he left school. He was doing it one day a week then they gave him 2 days. (10, 29, Fam)

An additional five young people found their job through the additional actions of the agency they worked, but not the same job as they had while at school or college.

They helped with interviews and attended the interview with her. There was also follow-up contact; they phone her regularly to see how she's doing. [EO worker Area A] goes to see her employer if there are difficulties. (53, 58, Fam)

This data suggest that the involvement of EOs presented continuity for young people interested in employment, many having further involvement after work experience, helping people to turn work experiences into a job or to find subsequent jobs.

Influences on the transition decisions

Professional views

In our case studies we asked young people, carers, teachers and employment staff involved to comment on what influenced the family in their decision on the young person's post-transition destination, such as college, day centre or employment. Here we report the findings from the service staff and teacher case study interviews. Only those young people whom respondents said that they either knew the family 'well' or to 'some' extent were included in the analysis stage.

Thirty-one percent of teachers and 52% of employment staff noted that they did not know the family at all or 'not well.' This is a worrying picture given that service staff is tasked with engaging carers with any decision in the transition planning process. Contacts with the young person seemed to be made mainly through the school or college and carers appear to be kept informed by telephone rather than facilitating their inclusion in the decision making process by visiting them at home.

In the group of those young people where EO staff and teachers knew the family well or quite well, no clear picture emerged of any single predominant factor that influenced the family's decision making on transition destination. Instead factors that impacted on the family's decision seemed to reflect the individual circumstances of the young people and themselves. The complexities of the support needs and skills of each young person were ostensibly having a bearing on the comments of respondents.

His health both mental and physical rules everything, affects all the family members. (Case Studies EO staff, 246, 41)

School teachers as well as EO staff frequently cited themselves as a main factor in influencing the family's decision on transition goals. Professionals do have a privileged position in the decision making process since carers often rely on them for information on the options for transition destinations as well as on their opinions about what is best for the young person. Staff and teachers were often left in a position where options that were well resourced, tried and tested are often suggested at the expense of possibly more difficult routes.

Consequently service staff did note that availability of placements of various types were having an impact on the decision of the family and that this, since they were in an advising capacity, this left them with no choice but to guide the young person towards those options that seemed most available.

We are involved in transition but there isn't a lot of choice. (CS Teacher, 10, 44)

Could be advice from college about what is available for X. The college put family in touch with the Transition Services. (CS EO staff 57, 53)

Teachers also pointed repeatedly to visits or familiarity with particular post-school options as a significant factor in the family decision. This seems to be confirmed by carers' comments in the case studies that where the young person had either attended an open day or a link course at a particular college, this helped the decision making process greatly.

Because he's been going there one day a week and they can see that he is more able than other students in this school, so they think college placements are quite appropriate. (CS Teacher, 235, 46)

This familiarity prior to making a decision also assisted carers in de-selecting those placements that they thought unsuitable for their young son or daughter. Security and certainty about the safety of their young person at the post-school or post-college destination also figured prominently in the comments of case study respondents.

Distance to the placement and requisite transport arrangements and travel equally had a significant impact on the family's decision.

Choice is between (area A) or (area B) and (area A) is nearer to home and nearer to where the family have moved house. (CS Teacher, 10, 44)

On the other hand, benefits and general considerations of financial nature were only mentioned in few cases as having a decisive impact on the family in selecting post-transition destinations.

Benefits issues have contributed to them thinking that college is the best choice. (CS Teacher, 227, 10)

This may be surprising but the results need to be viewed with caution because aspects of economic status of the family may not be necessarily something carers would openly discuss with teachers or EO staff.

A prominent factor that influenced the family's decision was employment history and work experiences of either the immediate or wider family. Sibling's employment often acted as a catalyst and norm setter for the aspirations of the family for the younger brother or sister.

He has family members doing carpentry. (CS EO staff, 231, 10)

Mother doesn't want her to be un-employed as Brother is unemployed as well and Mum is adamant that she gets employment. (CS EO staff, 259, 53)

Good background. Dad's worked constantly and Brother works. (CS staff, 260, 53)

The experiences of the peers of the young person were also cited as important reasons for pursuing a particular transition goal, though not as often as young people themselves mentioned it.

Other students have gone to that college as well. (CS EO staff, 211, 44)

Mum does want the best for her so she may have seen the benefits of college because another older daughter goes to college as well. (CS EO staff, 228, 10)

Full time provision at the post-transition destination also played a role in the family's decision albeit only a secondary one according to our respondents in the case study interviews.

Mum liked it that it (college) was full-time and three years. (CS Teacher, 214, 43)

We also asked teachers and EO staff to comment on the attitude of family towards work and education to see whether this may have impacted out of the ordinary on their decision for post-transition goals for their son or daughter. Again we only analysed those responses where interviewees were sufficiently familiar with the family. Teachers agreed overwhelmingly that those carers with whom they were in close contact were very supportive of employment even though it often did not materialise as the next step for their young people.

They have explained to her that this is a natural progression, the positive attitude has influenced her with the job coach, she has picked up on it. (CS Teacher, 69, 53)

She was quite happy to be looking at supported employment. Most parents don't consider employment because they would lose benefits but her parents were happy to look at supported employment. (CS Teacher, 260, 53)

Overall, this strong positive attitude towards employment was surprising and echoes the general vocational aspirations of the young people themselves. Interestingly there was also no significant correlation between economic status or educational achievement and support for employment as reflected in the teachers and EO staff interviews. Positive attitudes towards work were prevalent amongst both the unemployed and those employed.

For a small minority, the family's experiences of continuous unemployment were cited as a reason to pursue job placements to prevent similar status for their young son or daughter.

For their children, they want them to be employed, but not for themselves. (CS EO staff, 242, 10)

Wouldn't say her family are great role models for employment. The nucleus of the family are on benefits. They're more supportive of sticking to what they know, rather than seeking her potential in the workplace and helping her reach her potential. Their education is a little sketchy. They may feel it better for the kids to get as much education as possible. They may feel this is the cause of problems in family. They don't seem to have the ability to realise when the education path comes to an end and skills could be used elsewhere. (CS Teacher, 220, 23)

Equally, for those carers pursuing placements in further education for their young people, positive parental experiences or experiences of their young person was an often quoted factor.

The family's attitude has always been positive. They have certainly encouraged X and don't appear to disregard education. (CS EO staff, 29, 10)

The wish to appear 'normal' or pursue a 'normal' educational path was also mentioned several times to teachers and EO staff by their parents. This may be an effect of the wider push towards additional further education for young people by the government in the general population, something that may have precipitated the carers' desire to follow the further education course for their young son or daughter and may be coinciding neatly with their aspirations to carve out a 'normal' future for them.

I would imagine they want her to be in full-time, education. To be socially and morally aware. To be involved in the same things as her peers as regards the curriculum. (CS Teacher, 72, 31)

At the moment they would just like him to be 'normal'. If that means full-time education leading to employment they'd support that. (CS Teacher, 246, 31)

The family are keen for X to go to work and to do the same as everyone else in college. Wouldn't be so isolated, they want a normal progression for her. (CS EO staff, 69, 53)

Respondents were also asked if they could comment on the level of involvement of families in the transition planning. Teachers noted that, for those families they knew quite well, almost all carers were closely involved in the planning process. Only four carers in the case study sample had not engaged in the transition process for various reasons:

It took us 2 weeks to get her to sign an application form. A combination of factors, its hard to say. (CS EO staff, 228, 10)

No involvement as far as I'm aware. X has not attended school for approximately 12 months. (CS EO staff, 17, 10)

We went on to look more closely at the majority of carers that were closely involved in transition planning, according to the teachers. Our analysis leads us to question the teacher's interpretation of 'close involvement.' A comparison of the responses to this question revealed that teachers across the board thought parental involvement was 'good' or even 'very good' when they were informed by the teacher about any events or decision that were taken in school by phone or by letter.

They would come to any meetings, so they are very closely involved. (CS Teacher, 213, 42)

Family can ring me at any time, they are aware of this and do call me if there are concerns. If the bus doesn't turn up they ring me, if they've needed a letter etc. they have also contacted me. I believe if there is a problem they will contact me. (CS Teacher, 216, 24)

Simply attending parent's meetings on a regular basis often encouraged teachers to speak of 'excellent' involvement of the carers regardless of their actual integration into the transition decision-making process.

A subtler picture emerged when we analysed the responses of the EO staff to the question of family involvement. Since EO staff are more likely to visit the family at home, their impression of family involvement may be more accurate than the teachers'. In fact, EO staff found that about two-thirds of carers were positive about their involvement in planning the future of their son or daughter,

while the rest were either not really involved despite numerous attempts of the transition workers.

We got involved with her family. Mother rarely came into school to support X., only when legal steps were taken. (CS EO staff, 227, 10)

None - it's been his decision and they discussed the options, but it has been his decision. There is little involvement with parents except where there are higher needs. (CS EO staff, 231, 10)

This also seems to be reflected in the responses of carers when asked how engaged they felt themselves by either the school or the transition service in planning. Many carers insisted on a sharp distinction between the quality of attempts to involve them in planning by either the school/college or EO, with the EO being more positively commented on. It appears that conventional practices at school or college to keep parents informed are not sufficient to ensure practical involvement of carers in transition planning.

We also wanted to know whether perceptions of teachers and EO staff of the young person's abilities matched up with those of families. Most teachers used the word 'realistic' in one way or another to describe the family perception of the young person.

Mum is realistic. A little concerned what the future holds knowing there are limitations. (CS Teacher, 254, 20)

Teachers were interpreting the question mostly with respect to the lack of skills. The use of the word 'realistic' demonstrated clearly this emphasis on the negative dimension of learning disabilities by the teachers. They mainly used in relation to young people not able to pursue one or the other post-transition path due to their disabilities.

Realistic. They know his capabilities. They don't have high unrealistic ideas of what they think he can do. (CS Teacher, 266, 61)

In a minority of cases teachers thought that families would underestimate the abilities of their son or daughter.

They may under value her skills. They are supportive and well intentioned but may lack an understanding of the skills she's acquired and what they have enabled her to do. They may not realise that there is a cut off on acquiring certificates and gaining employment. (CS Teacher, 220, 23)

Didn't mention at the meeting any skills or abilities she had. Don't think they are aware of what she can do. They had thought of getting her to do Avon with the support of the family. It would help with the money. She can stick to a routine. (CS Teacher, 66, 50)

EO staff more commonly used the term 'awareness' when talking about carers' perception of their young person's abilities. They also thought that a minority of carers underestimated the capabilities of their young son or daughter. Overall, however, both teachers and transition workers seem to agree that carers are well aware of the abilities of their young person.

Finally, we asked respondents to comment on any worries or concerns that carers have articulated vis-à-vis teachers or EO staff in the planning process. There was consensus amongst teachers and transition workers that the majority of carers had few concerns about the possible risks of post-school or post-college placements.

They are aware of his vulnerability but do let him have independence. They try to give him opportunities, if there are mistakes they can be learned by. (CS Teacher, 79, 31)

Realistically concerned. They allowed him to be independent. He can be reasoned with considering his disability, he's actually quite able considering. The family gave him responsibilities. (CS Teacher, 222, 24)

Where carers were concerned, usually for reasons of vulnerability or behavioural problems, they would mainly cite the need for additional support or constant supervision.

Mum shares with us the concern over X becoming aggressive when he doesn't understand a situation. (CS Teacher, 57, 53)

I would be worried he may lose his temper in an unfamiliar environment. He does like a lot of structure. (CS EO staff, 79, 31)

Epilepsy, medication and autism make him vulnerable as he can't read other people. He is very repetitive and if something bothers him it takes over his whole life, anxiety is raised. (CS EO staff, 9, 42)

Travel was reported to be a concern of many carers with transport arrangements being frequently brought up in transition meetings as a problematic aspect of further education or employment placements.

They are just normally concerned. She doesn't get out and about by herself and they feel they don't want her to go about on her own. (CS EO staff, 258, 53)

Young people

The initial interview with young people contained questions about what they regarded as the good or bad aspects of their next destination. The research team hoped to gain some insights into how much the process of determining the next step reflected meaningful involvement of the young person in the transition planning process, their choice and how family and carers influenced the decision making process.

Many of those young people who identified college as their first choice expressed a keenness to learn and the hope that courses at FE would offer similar experiences to school activities. This was in part due to prior experience of college through link courses while the young people are still at school. Other school leavers hoped that college would offer them new experiences that may be a radical departure from, what they regarded, as the over-protective environment at school. Many young people commented positively on the fact that college would be a more adult environment that would offer more opportunities for independence and choice to them.

Equally, it was striking how many young people were aware of the role college might play in enhancing their chances for future employment. Many expressed an expectation that college courses would either lead to a job, would give them additional ideas for possible employment, or give them the opportunity to obtain qualifications which were seen as a first step towards employment.

Most young people were also acutely aware of the social dimension of moving from school to college. They commented expansively on potential positive and negative outcomes of their move to college. Often, friends made at school had already moved on to a particular college and the young people looked forward to being re-united with them. Others pointed out the increased opportunities to make new friends and gain some additional independence from carers. Where many more people already go to college than employment, there may be pressure for even more people to take that pathway. These all represent potentially powerful drivers for the college route that did emerge as the most common pathway for leavers.

Young people also mentioned potentially negative aspects of going to college. Some were anxious not to lose friends in moving on. Perceived difficulties in making new friends and the chance of not fitting into the new place produced misgivings amongst some. The potential of bullying was a common fear, and anxieties about finding their way around in unknown buildings and the college campus.

Young people with learning disabilities clearly had a wide range of reasons to choose college over employment, not all clearly related to the values and alleged advantages of college attendance. For some young people, the decision was not theirs in the first place:

I'm going to college. My mum and school decided that. (Young Person, 89, 30)

Another young person reflected on the pressure that was brought to bear on her to be independent and to learn additional travel skills:

I can go see all my friends and my cousin and they can help me when I go to college. I have to learn to catch a bus on my own. I can't do it at the moment but (Teacher) says I must try. (YP 78, 31)

Travel was another concern, with travel arrangements either not being in place yet causing uncertainty, or young people being worried that they would not cope with commuting to the college by bus.

Others mentioned the physical strain of college attendance as an important concern. They worried that they would be very tired after a long day in college and that work itself would prove too hard for them in the long run.

Those who opted for employment as a first choice were asked to say what they regarded as bad or good about having a job. More than half of all young people who wanted to have a job as a next step mentioned that money played a significant role in their decision. Increased income, independence from parental finances, and also the possibility of moving out of the parental home were important positives of getting a job.

Young people did identify some potentially negative aspects of having a job, such as the need to get up early and that there might be less time for socialising with their friends. Another significant concern for young people was again, that they might encounter some sort of rejection at work or bullying.

I might not like it 'cos of people if you can't speak right or can't work 'cos of your disability. (YP 71, 53)

In addition, respondents were wary of extensive travel to workplaces and how this might affect their ability to maintain employment. The ubiquitous mention of money as a main motivation for employment contrasted sharply with the absence of any mention of soft outcomes, such as increased confidence or capacity to make informed choices. In this respect, jobs seemed to be viewed very narrowly by young people. Potential long-term advantages of employment, such as improved social coping, were undervalued or neglected altogether.

Carers

We asked carers what had influenced their, or their relative's decision on the next step after school or college. Carers fell into two groups on advice from school or college. First, a simple majority of parents said that they had not received any substantial assistance from the school or college during transition for planning the next step of their young person (45%), and had not been influenced by them as a result. This group were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the overall role that the school or college played in the transition planning process, citing poor communication about the planning process and provision of information on future options. Carers wanted improvements to resolve this situation.

One person or one body functioning solely to help with that transition period, to give information to the parents. A total package that's available. That would have been good. (Case Studies Carer, 84, 62)

It would have been nice to have somebody. If you haven't got the input it's difficult; there's lots of information. I've always felt I know what I want but I did feel a bit restricted because of how things were. (CS Carer, 44, 41)

The second group of carers identified work experience organised by the school as having had an impact on their decisions (15%).

Parents were also asked about the contribution that EOs made during transition planning and how it influenced their decision on where their young person would go after leaving school or college. Again, there were two views, a significant number of carers noted that they either had no contact with transition agencies or that the activities organised by them had not helped them in deciding where to send their young person after school or college (24%). A second group of carers appreciated the help that external agencies offered, such as practical assistance with application forms, transport etc., but cited work experience and work tasters as the most important influences on their decisions. Carers reported that these experiences gave them an impression about their son or daughter's abilities and their preferences.

Attending transition review meetings was seen as a positive contribution towards making an informed transition decision by some parents. However, some reported that external agencies seemed to be suffering from shortage of funding and resources which meant that, at times, initial contacts promised to parents during the first meeting were not followed up and work experiences or tasters could not be organised.

Parents were also asked what other options they would have liked to see as part of the transition process. There was an overall majority expressing their overall satisfaction with the existing arrangements. This may reflect low parental expectations, just as it may demonstrate excellent levels of support from schools, colleges and external agencies during transition planning. Many parents consistently articulated two main themes. First, 40% of carers wanted to be kept informed about transition activities and arrangements far better than was the case at present.

I don't know the options yet. As far as I can remember he said to me (her teacher) she will have 2 days at the college and they would need to find something for the other three days. There must be places that are available that she can go into if college is not available where she can get experience. (CS Carer, 66, 50)

Second, a significant minority thought that their son or daughter would benefit from more work experiences or tasters during the transition period and would also like to see these begin earlier than in the last year.

Perhaps they could, bearing in mind with the difficulties some of these kids have got, they could look at employment, not so much in college, but employment and looking at what areas these kids could work in. Their capabilities, they must have had some ideas from when they did

their work experience, maybe they could catch up on that and say to them maybe you could go down this route and then perhaps follow it up from there. He enjoyed the plumbing he did perhaps they could have followed this a bit more. It just seems to be extension studies, extension studies or this B-Tech; it's all a bit something and nothing, nothing relevant to him getting a job. (CS Carer 73, 31)

It seems that work experiences and placements in real life jobs is one of the most appreciated activities that significantly inform parental choices during transition. A considerable number of parents still have no contact with external agencies or report promised activities do not materialise due to lack of resources. A consistent theme in the carer interviews was that communication between parents, school and external agencies was still in need of improvement and that parents sometimes felt left out of the transition planning altogether.

Statistical model of “what works”

Relationships

Can we identify any relationships between the concerns mentioned above that young people and carers have over particular types of next step, and their preferences and subsequent outcome? Table 6 shows differences in a number of key inputs and indicators across the aspirations that young people and their carers had about work or college, and where young people were eventually placed.

Those who wanted a job had received over twice the hours of all vocational input from school sources during the year than young people who told us they wanted to go to college. Similarly, those who wanted a job received double the amount of vocational input from the EOs in our study. The same difference in hours of input is found for those who had a job six months later and those who did not. When we consider only work experience, input from EOs was double for those who wanted a job and those who found a job, compared to those who wanted college or did not get a job. The trend was reversed for work experienced from schools. This may be due to high levels of work experience from external organisations negating the need for high levels in-house.

Table 6. Differences between key inputs and indicators for transition choices and outcomes

	Wants a job	Wants college	Found job	No job found
Mean total vocational input (hrs) from:				
- school	257.1	109.8	228.7	105.3
- EO ¹	116.0	49.6	100.1	45.5
Mean work experience (hrs) from :				
- school	9.7	25.8	17.7	28.8
- EO	81.4	33.8	71.8	31.2
Items of help YP will need in a job ²	3.7	4.3	3.8	4.4
Care view of job prospects for YP:				
- positive	81.4%	50.6%	75.0%	49.0%
- negative	18.6%	49.4%	25.0%	51.0%
Carer has concern about YP getting a job (%):				
- Yes	36.8%	50.6%	44.0%	78.0%
- No	63.2%	49.4%	56.0%	22.0%
Carer view of impact of YP job on them (%):				
- Positive	72.7%	40.0%	50.5%	49.4%
- Negative/no change	27.3%	60.0%	49.5%	50.6%

1 Employment Organisations; 2 Scored out of 8 areas of help that may be needed

We also asked young people what help they would need if they were to get a job, using an 8 item list of possible assistance needed: Thinking about the kind of job you want; finding some jobs to try; applying for a job; learning the job; making my workplace suit me; being a good worker; getting on with other people; sorting out benefits. Those young people who told us that they wanted a job, and that group of young persons who got a job, mentioned fewer items of help they felt they needed than those who wanted to go to college and did not get a job. They either felt more confident, or more skilled, about work.

More carers who said they wanted a job for their young person, and also those whose young person found a job later, reported:

- a positive view of whether the young person had good employment prospects
- less often having concerns about the young person going into a job
- more often having positive views on what impact the young person getting a job would have on them.

While causation may be in a reverse direction, with people who want jobs seeking out more vocational input and having more positive attitudes, we feel our interviews suggest that the experiences and feedback young people and carers receive can have an impact on their view of all aspects of employment.

To be effective, vocational activities, particularly work experiences, have to tackle issues such as the friendship potential of employment, the monetary arguments for working, and for carers, how potential bullying and exploitation might be guarded against through good job finding, adequate supervision and the positive advocacy of employment support organisations.

Logistic analysis of relationship between activity and outcome

We carried out a logistic regression analysis to establish what influence personal characteristics, aspirations, and vocational activities from school or college, or the activity of our EOs, had on the probability of a young person getting a paid job. Logistic regression allows continuous and categorical variables to be combined and used to estimate whether a categorical outcome will occur – namely whether people will or will not get jobs. We entered model (area), gender, age, mean percentile rank of ABS, hours of vocational activity by category delivered by schools/colleges and EOs, data on expressed preference for employment and on carer views of prospects for employment, their concerns about the young person getting a job, and its possible impact on them.

The overall model operated in the area was not a significant factor. Instead, elements of what was offered in each area seemed to influence outcome. Three variables were significantly related to the paid employment outcome at six months (Table 7):

- Hours delivered in qualification courses by schools
- Hours delivered in obtaining work experience placements by EOs
- Indicator of whether carer has concerns about young person getting a job.

This tends to confirm the earlier analysis that some of the things that carers worried about, along with vocational experience, did have some effect on employment outcome. Young people whose families had fewer concerns about them entering work were 3.2 times more likely to be employed. Those that had received work qualification based courses (provided by the schools/colleges) were 1.01 times more likely to be employed. Those having EOs work with them on job getting were 1.8 times more likely to be employed.

A Nagelkerker R-Squared value for the model was 0.38 (meaning that nearly 40% of the variation in our sample was described by this model). Prediction within this of who would get a job was about 50% accurate, suggesting that the factors identified here are useful in identifying the building blocks that have to be in place to achieve an employment outcome, but not yet adequate to accurately predict individual success in employment.

Table 7. Logistic regression- final model

Variable	Beta	Sign. p	Odds/ Ratio
School/College led Qualification Courses	0.007	0.002*	1.002
EO led Job Getting Activity	0.589	0.007*	1.775
Carer has concerns over YP getting a job	1.157	0.030*	1.121
Constant	-2.693	0.000*	-

* Significant at 0.05 level or below

Family satisfaction with transition

Parental aspirations for their young person are a significant motivation for choosing the further education route as a next step during transition. Interviewers asked respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with the options that were available to their young people. Under half of all carers said they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the options that were offered to their young people (46.5%). Around a third of all respondents were either 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with the options available to young people when leaving school or college (35.4%), representing a significant pool of discontent (Table 8).

Table 8. Carer satisfaction with post-transition options available

<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Very dissatisfied</i>
10.4%	36.1%	16.7%	24.3%	11.1%

When pressed about what they would like to change about post-transition options, responses varied considerably. The most frequent response was that they would have liked to be kept more informed about the options in the first place underlining that serious shortcomings still exist in terms of parental involvement in the transition planning process. While young people may be approached effectively by external support agencies in school or college, information about arrangements for work placements or other activities does not always feed through to the families. This can create friction and dissatisfaction between those agencies and carers when there should be mutual support.

Parents were hesitant to identify additional options that should have been arranged for their son or daughter in the transition period, many pointing out that this was simply because they either didn't know what was out there in the first place, or thought that there is little chance of influencing any placement decision.

Well again more information being readily available, not having to chase it. Really other options being available. I may not have decided for X to go to college if someone could have given me an option of a suitable work placement in which I felt she could cope. Although she's matured during the last few years and she has enjoyed the catering side, if there was an option now for her to transfer straight into a catering sheltered work placement I'd consider it. That may exist but I haven't been made aware of it if it does. (Carer Follow-up; 84, 62)

When parents in the case study cohort were asked to identify activities that should have been available as part of the transition process, about a sixth of all respondents said that their young people lacked opportunities to socialise outside college or school. They placed special emphasis on youth clubs or societies where their son or daughter could form friendships outside the educational or vocational environments.

Nine percent of respondents would have preferred an earlier start to transition planning. Respondents were again split on whether the young people should receive more academic or more vocational input but consistently pointed out that more of both were needed. This highlights once again how much still needs to be done to forge truly person centred planning processes that reflect individual needs and that do not treat young people with learning disabilities as a coherent group with identical preferences and needs.

Carers wanted a better source of information to improve this situation:

One person or one body functioning solely to help with that transition period; to give information to the parents, a total package that's available. That would have been good. (Case Studies Carer, 84, 62)

It would have been nice to have somebody. If you haven't got the input it's difficult; there's lots of information. I've always felt I know what I want but I did feel a bit restricted because of how things were. (CS Carer, 44, 41)

Satisfaction with placement six months after leaving

Parental satisfaction seems to be shaped by various factors. Their levels of satisfaction with the outcome of the transition process is strongly related to whether or not their expectations were met in the first months of attending the new placement at college, employment or day centre. The obstacles or problems in arranging the new placement may equally colour their level of satisfaction with the new environment.

Additionally, changes in location and routine may impact negatively or positively on the family life. Not only do new placements often pose serious challenges to existing family work and social routines, they can also alter the financial context to which the family has become accustomed while the young person has previously been in school or college. Family income can drop or increase and benefits may cease to be an option. Also, carers are very

sensitive to changes in the young person's behaviour that may be influenced by the challenges of a new environment and the uncertainties of the transition period. Frustration with having few or no options when considering the next step, and lack of help in the decision-making process may also play a part in any dissatisfaction. We report the responses of carers from follow-up interviews organised by those who have gone on to a job, those who have secured a college, or residential college, placement or those who have joined a day centre.

In terms of jobs, satisfaction with the chosen destination of their young people was generally high among carers. There was a feeling amongst carers that the job would offer their young people the chance to mix with others in the workforce and especially they expressed the hope that employment would enhance the opportunity for their son or daughter to mix with non-disabled people. More than 70% of those whose young son or daughter had gone on to employment were citing the increase in social inclusion as a reason why they were happy with the choice.

He's very happy with himself, he's met more new friends since he left school. He gets on with everyone well. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke, which is good for the youngsters today, with the kind of money he earns. (Carer Follow-up, 28, 10)

The socialising side is very positive. They encourage them in McDonalds to have social evenings; he's first out there. He's got quite a few of his friends from school with learning difficulties he still sees them, but he can see a big difference from people who don't have learning difficulties to people who do have learning difficulties and how he treats them. (Carer Follow-up, 57, 53)

Employment also had a positive impact on family life or fitted in well with existing circumstances, such as receipt of benefits, transport arrangements or work patterns. A quarter of all respondents whose son or daughter had been employed pointed to the young person enjoying their job as one of the main reasons for their satisfaction with the choice. Several carers expressed their relief that, given the high unemployment rate in the area and the lack of work patterns in the family, their young son or daughter had actually found a job and continued to be employed for the time being. To be 'off benefit' was frequently quoted as a reason to be satisfied with the outcome of transition by carers given that expectations of further educational advances were low for them or that further education could be taken up at a later time in life.

Carers also noted positively the impact of employment on social behaviour within and without the family. The fact that young people were now occupied and had something to do often contrasted with the long period of low occupation during school times that had induced boredom and problematic behaviour. In one case, the young person had initially taken up a college placement from which she subsequently withdrew and then had been given a job coach. The carer's was enthusiastic about the change.

She has improved fantastically since she left college and got a job coach. She is doing well for herself and I am very proud of her. X wants to find a job and get out of the house. She helps me a great amount as well. I have asthma and diabetes. (Carer Follow-up, 259, 53)

Carers were more pessimistic about the prospect of their young person being in a job some time in the future. Although hopes were certainly high that this would be the case, only 25% of carers of those in employment were confident that they would still be employed in the future.

For the majority of young people with learning disabilities college is still the preferred route after school. To go straight into employment remains rare for young people who leave school and so, for most of our young people in the project, college was still identified as the most desirable option for them during transition. About a third of those respondents whose son or daughter was attending college said that college had turned out to be the most appropriate choice for them. Considering that transitioning to college is a well-trodden path and that most transition services are well geared towards them, this is a low satisfaction rate that reflects negatively on college as a transition outcome.

Among the most cited reasons for satisfaction with college was that the young person was either enjoying the course or that it would give them the chance to develop further and prepare them for the adult world.

It gives him routine, he enjoys it, he is learning. He has great teachers and he gets on with everybody there. He enjoys it, that's the main thing, he's happy. (Carer Follow-up, 67, 46)

I think he's maturing, I think it has benefited him in that way. (Carer Follow-up, 254, 20)

Some carers were, therefore, sceptical about school leavers being ready to negotiate their position in the world of work and leisure as adults. They placed great hopes on college to increase the levels of maturity. Satisfaction with college as a transition outcome was hence motivated by the experience that the college did contribute to their son or daughter's development, and the expectation that it would do so in the future. Carers also commented positively on the increased opportunity for social contact with non-disabled peers for the young people.

It's ... helping her mix with [others]; it's a mainstream college and it is a course for children with learning problems but within a mainstream college. It helps in that way because she mixes with all kids and adults alike, because adults go to the college as well, mixing with all ages and every sort of people. It's bringing her on in her confidence, without putting too much pressure on her at the moment. (Carer Follow-up, 63, 50)

This then seems to be an effect of moving on from the mainly sheltered and protective environment of the school rather than something to be attributed solely to college.

Where carers felt the college route had turned out to be inappropriate, the main reasons were that colleges had failed to provide the necessary support for their young person to maintain interest or motivation to attend.

Don't know. He's not got a lot of capabilities but he's got a good memory, but when it comes to reading and writing he's at a standstill. I can't see him ever being able to read and write. He's got a laptop here and he messes about with that, he just sits and copies things. They talked about helping him but it never came to anything. (Carer Follow-up, 52, 51)

In the very few cases where young people went into day centres post-transition, the predominant motivation for that choice was a negative, in the sense that neither college nor employment was deemed suitable for the young person.

I want her to go where she's happy. At the moment she's happy in the Day Centre, but I wouldn't like to see her there forever and a day. This is what I told her social worker, I don't want to see her there forever and a day. I would sooner see her better herself if she can. But, I don't want her to go with someone who is going to put her down all the time either, and that is what I felt (EO Area E) was doing, putting her down. (Carer Follow-up, 46, 21)

Reviewing the responses where the young person failed to secure a college place or work and was instead using a day centre or remained at home, it became clear that expectations of cognitive and social development were low. These carers identified no positive changes, while two drew attention to negative changes, such as regression of social skills, since the young person had left education.

Improvements needed in the process of advice and preparation

Parents were asked to comment on what they thought should be available for young people in general who are in transition from school to college or from college into adult life. We also asked teachers and EO personnel from supported employment services and transition agencies about the same issue. This section first reports the responses of parents and professionals and then looks at similarities or differences in their responses.

Family views

Parents were first asked to point out what additional help should be available to assist young people like their son or daughter during the time of transition. This question was generally understood by respondents to be an opportunity

to point to inadequacies or insufficiencies in the provision of services around learning disabilities and transition help.

Overwhelmingly parents identified two aspects of transition that required more efforts from schools, colleges and the various EOs. First, they emphasised that currently there was a lack of work placements in their area. Some parents added that the lack of appropriate local provision of work experience placements was a particular problem. Others stressed that work placements too often take place inside the school and therefore do not succeed in providing a realistic working environment and which does little to prepare young people for the complexities of real employment.

Secondly, many parents were unhappy with the way in which information about transition arrangements in general, or decisions taken at school or by EOs, were relayed to them. Often, parents felt that they were simply 'kept in the dark' about the developments during transition for their son or daughter. This contributed to a considerable degree of uncertainty about the aims of transition on the part of families.

College is very poor at giving information; unless I call them I don't know anything. Everything is last minute. (Case Study Carer, 39, 23)

More involved and informed by the college. I'm pretty clued up but I imagine for other families they must feel very alone. (CS Carer, 218, 23)

I feel I have been left by a lot of services including the school. It's all hear say from other parents. I feel it's been difficult to make proper judgments. (CS Carer, 266, 61)

Parents were split about the needs for further academic or vocational skills. This may simply reflect the wish to have recognised the individual needs of their young people to succeed according to their different abilities. On the other hand the parents' responses did also indicate that schools, colleges as well as outside support agencies are still some way from fashioning adequately individualised transition support for young people.

Need to look at the kids as individuals rather than groups and looking at their skills. Look for strengths rather than just weaknesses. (CS Carer, 30, 10)

As young people are being transferred from one work experience to another, care managers and support staff needs to take stock of the benefits and merits of each individual placement and remodel relevant transition plans so that strengths and weaknesses of the individual in work experiences can be reflected in planning.

When asked what they felt should be done to improve transition experiences for families, parents took this question to refer to their own position and status within the process. They consequently stressed that they felt left out of the

process and required much more information than was currently forthcoming. A majority of parents identified the lack of information on transition originating from school, college or outside agencies as the prime problem for their involvement.

A lot more information from the school. They should be telling you what you should be doing in an action plan letter. They need to warn you about when to do what in advance. (CS Carer, 250, 40)

Huge uncertainty hasn't had a good impact on him. (CS Carer, 249, 40)

More information, more support and help to know what his next step will be. To know there is a job he can go to. At the moment we are left in limbo. Don't know what he'll do after college. (CS Carer, 222, 24)

Interestingly this need to receive more information was not mirrored in a wish to be more involved in the transition processes. Very few parents expressed a wish to be more involved in transition planning meetings. Parents may simply not envisage themselves as proactive contributors to the planning process, just reactive recipients of suggestions from professionals. This represents a dilemma for professionals involved. How can we better inform parents and find an effective way to fulfil the Code of Practice aspirations to involve them in discussions about, and decisions on, transition next steps?

In a way this discrepancy may simply reflect the fact that more information is critical. Parents were also asked to comment on what other options should be available to young people with learning disabilities. Generally parents felt that there is a need for places where their young son or daughter could socialise outside the family and educational facilities.

More Day Centres where people of his own age go, maybe play pool, go off as a group. I feel he's very socially isolated. I think it's more important than the reading and writing. (CS Carer, 218, 23)

Would like to see a number of things like athletics clubs, sports clubs. There isn't a disabled athletics club locally. A lot of disabled kids do put on weight more than other kids. Everything stops at 18 - they get used to going places and then it is hard to explain why they can't continue going. They also lose social contacts when they leave school. (CS Carer, 32, 61)

Need more social things to do, maybe with some "normal" young people. He has two clubs, both brilliant, but both run on the same night and holiday on the same weeks and they are both at (area M). He needs to be taken now he is 19 and can't go to Challenges Club (holiday weeks, every Saturday locally which gives a bit of respite, do days out etc). (CS Carer, 44, 41)

To have seen her get out more. More social clubs available locally. (CS Carer, 260, 53)

More work placements were also frequently mentioned, as were more employment opportunities in the community and training facilities where young people could be instructed in independent living and travel skills. It was felt that much of the provision that was available in support, training and employment was too far away, and hence not accessible to them and their son or daughter.

Would have been nice to have something local. There is a college at (area X) but you have to come home on the weekends. Would have liked residential in (the county). A county the size of (this county) should provide something like that. We can make the two and a half hours drive but others can't drive to these places. We think (EO B) start so late, and we would like it to start earlier, maybe at 16. (CS Carer, 36, 43)

I don't know. This is the thing because we live here in (area Y), so if he finds something else and it's 10 miles away the Council won't approve the transport. We did that before with another school and they didn't approve the transport. (CS Carer, 235, 46)

Parents were acutely aware if there was a sharp divide in the quality of educational or vocational training provision from one county to another. As most parents either lack the transport facilities or financial means to compensate for these discrepancies in council service provision, they criticised them and were deeply frustrated with difference in provision.

It's the great divide here - North and South (area Z). She isn't allowed to join a club in South (area Z). North (area Z) need to do a bit. South (area Z) have an old Coal Yard where young persons get work experience working in a cafe etc. (CS Carer, 260, 53)

Employment staff views

We interviewed EO staff who had knowledge about the young people and asked the same questions about what transition arrangements should have been in place and what additional options they would like to see in place for young people with learning disabilities. Staff from EOs were adamant that family involvement was not adequate. Some thought that this was due to family indifference while others mentioned that the transition processes are not geared towards meaningful participation from the family. Some indicated that service organisation and planning did not allow sufficient time for them as EOs to engage the family in transition processes as much as they would want.

More interaction on my part but it was a time thing. Work experience placement time is more important and feedback to parents would have been nice. (Case Studies EO staff, 10, 44)

We try and involve the parents as much as we can but we mainly focus on the clients. If we had more funding and staff we could build up more of a relationship with the family. (CS EO staff, 215, 21)

We could have met the family but because of time restraints we couldn't, but in future we may. A lot of families want them to move on into employment, so maybe in the future we may have to make more contact with families. (CS EO staff, 249, 40)

Generally there was a sense that the transition process as it is set up locally does not give staff enough opportunities to discuss arrangements with families and elicit their views on transition goals and outcomes. This mirrors the perception by families, reported above, that they felt left out of planning for their young son or daughter's future.

The overwhelming response by EO staff, when asked about what should have been available for young people in the time of transition, was that more options needed to be found across the board.

Generally in local community, not a lot for him too access. Cornerstones will have to investigate this. Community service do not focus enough on disability, especially learning disabilities. (CS EO staff, 202, 50)

High on the list were employment and work experience opportunities that, EO staff felt, were far from sufficient. Supported employment was also mentioned frequently together with college courses that were suitable for young people with learning disabilities.

Another area that was repeatedly pointed out as insufficiently developed was support for young people outside school and college. To EO staff it seemed that, once the young person reached the planned destination of transition, support was withdrawn and responsibilities were transferred to another agency, such as the college. EO staff deeply regretted that funding arrangements and budgetary restrictions meant that young people could not be followed up at a later stage.

Some ongoing support for her in college. We cannot track and support all of our previous students. (CS EO staff, 228, 10)

More money available to service like ourselves. There is a waiting list for supported employment. In North (area Z) there is supported employment but nothing on offer in South (area Z). (CS EO staff, 56, 53)

On-going support once in college or some form of monitoring. (CS EO staff, 241, 10)

A lack of apprenticeships was also identified by EO staff as hindering young people to take full advantage of the opportunities in working life. The provision

of places for vocational training that was suitable for people with learning disabilities was patchy at best in some areas and EO staff commented that this made their work often impossible if employment had been identified as a desirable goal for the young person in transition.

More opportunities for supported work placements, for the funding to be there and not the targets to convert into paid employment. Less pressure of expectation of timescales. It would help when supporting people with learning difficulties. (CS EO staff, 216, 24)

Teacher views

Case study interviews were also carried out with teachers and college lecturers who had pastoral or teaching contact with those young people selected for detailed case studies in our project. We first asked them what sort of help should have been available in times of transition for the individual pupil and their family. Teachers were almost unanimous in their response insofar that nearly all of them identified a lack of training placements as the most significant option that should have been there.

There is only day service or work available - nothing in between. Something on daily living skills in a realistic setting in people's own communities. Also more voluntary work placements needed - supported for those who need it. (CS Teacher, 46, 21)

She would have benefited from going on a pre-vocational course. Her abilities as a potential worker were quite profound. She was capable of going to work and holding down a job. A retail vocational programme linked to work experiences. (CS Teacher, 88, 30)

Some also pointed out that there were too few opportunities for practical skills training for the young people as well as a lack of vocational training options. There seems a clear focus for teachers on the provision of work experience placements arranged by school staff or outside agencies. The lack of such places was acutely felt and cited by teachers and college lecturers as a significant barrier to successful transition into meaningful employment for young people.

Teachers also criticised the lack of involvement of other agencies, families, careers services and supported employment services in transition arrangements. Throughout the interviews a picture emerged that most of the transition work was arranged and delivered through the efforts of teachers and college lecturers while outside agencies and families were insufficiently involved. In a similar vein, teachers complained about the lack of support and assistance in arranging transition for the young people. Although many mentioned this, the comments were of general nature and would often not single out any particular agency or service.

The picture that transpires is that teachers and lecturers seem to feel that much of the burden of transition planning is placed on their shoulders while

parents' expectations have significantly grown over the last years and outside agencies deal only with particular segments of delivery of transition.

The problem is for someone like her the options here are very limited. There wasn't much of a fall back option for her. In years gone by she would have been offered a place in a resource centre but that doesn't really happen anymore. I wouldn't be surprised if some time in the future she is going to be referred back to college. (CS Teacher, 260, 53)

When asked about what other options should be made available for young people in transition, teachers and lecturers focused on employment and work experience placements. They were united in identifying a lack of work placements outside school as the most serious problem of developing meaningful transition goals. Some pointed out that there was a lack of supported employment provision in particular and some also commented on a low number of opportunities in further education for people with learning disabilities. At times, teachers indicated that they would like to see smaller FE colleges in order to facilitate smoother transition to post-compulsory education for their students.

Colleges may be too big, so maybe smaller colleges on offer, although staying within small organisations may not prepare people for the outside world. (CS Teacher, 77, 31)

Comparison of view points

There are some significant differences in the responses between the groups of interviewees. Some of these differences can be explained by the fact that the perception of shortcomings and difficulties are necessarily tied to the perspectives of the transition processes that families, services professionals and educational staff have.

The feeling on the part of families that they are not kept properly informed about developments in transition planning for their young son or daughter corresponds neatly with the criticism on the part of teachers that parents do not make sufficient efforts to contribute to the planning process. It appears that a change of attitude on both sides will be critical to accomplishing active involvement of the family.

In effect these are reflections of conflicts between professional competences and the rights of families to participate in planning processes. However these problems should not prove insurmountable when approached with the appropriate sensitivity for parental attitudes and the professional's expertise.

The parental views on the need for clearer information in transition planning clearly echo the perception of professionals and teachers that provision of information is not optimized between the numerous agencies involved.

Parents, teachers and EOs were all aware of the lack of suitable work experiences and tasters for their young people. There is less agreement on who should make additional efforts to alleviate this situation. Teachers and lecturers point to EO staff to create more options in work experiences and supported employment opportunities. EO staff point to insufficient resources, a lack of commitment on the government to transitional employment services or blame insufficient interest on the side of parents for the low numbers of young people to experience suitable work experiences and job tasters.

What people would be doing in 5-years time?

In our case studies around 58 people, we interviewed carers, the young people, their teachers and EO staff on their future employment chances, future living arrangements and likely social inclusion. Respondents were asked to consider where the young person in question would be living in 5 years time, with whom they would be socialising and whether or not they would be in work at that time. We report work status across all groups of respondents first, answers to questions about where the young people would live will second, and third their likely social integration reflected in their living arrangements.

Young people were confident, overall that they would be in work in five years time. Sixty-six percent of the young people (n=38) saw themselves in work 42% cited specific jobs or work placements that they can envisage themselves working in.

Think I will have a part time job in McDonalds or a supermarket. On days off I could do some extra jobs or stay in the house. (CS YP, 42, 21)

Only three young people thought that they would still be in further education. One identified a day centre as a future destination of transition while one expressed a wish to own a business. This indicates that young people in transition have a clear idea about employment as the final destination of transition from school or college with further education seen as a preliminary and transitional step towards that ultimate goal.

Parents were equally hopeful of their young son or daughter's chances to be employed. Sixty-six percent of respondents (n=38) identified job or work placements as the desired and anticipated outcome of transition in five years time. They were less specific about the particular job that their young person would do, although two parents ventured an opinion about this. The carer of one person with mild intellectual disabilities/borderline disabilities was convinced that the young person would be serving in the army in 5 years time, while the carers of another young person hoped that their young son who suffered from Autism would be holding down a job in the IT sector.

Four carers were sceptical about the chances for employment for their young person and supposed that they would spend most of the time at home without

meaningful preoccupation, neither at day centre nor otherwise engaged. They were not necessarily satisfied with this as a likely result.

Sitting at home, playing on the play station. A lot of family stress. If there is no support I dread to think what the outcome may be. (CS Families, 222, 24)

Interestingly, only three carers thought that further education would still provide the main preoccupation for their son or daughter during the day. This contrasts sharply with current practice to repeat further education courses far longer than 5 years in lieu of other opportunities. One carer was confident about the chances that their young person was going to own his own business, echoing the conviction of the young person in this matter.

Teachers were equally very confident that the young people selected for case studies would be in employment. For 72% of the young people (n=42) teachers thought employment is the most likely destination in 5 years time. In the opinion of the teachers eight young people were thought to be most likely to be home without any employment or alternative leisure activities, while four would be in further education. They felt that two further young people would be placed in day centres and would remain there. Teachers also highlighted the dilemma of finding placements and developing employment opportunities for those who are often seen as too able to receive help by social services and other agencies, yet who still require significant support.

She will be at home because there won't be any day service provision because she is too able. She will have payments and whether any employment opportunities are there it would have to be initiated by professionals rather than the family. (CS Teacher, 211, 44)

Teachers were reluctant to identify any specific job roles as the future destination for their young students, which may reflect a lack of insight into the opportunities and/or the vocational abilities of the young people they taught.

These results were paralleled by the opinions of the EO staff involved with the young people selected for the case studies. EO staff believed that 64% (n=37) of individuals would be in part or full time employment. Their confidence, however, was sometimes predicated on certain conditions that had to be fulfilled.

Like to think she could hold down a job, I think she could but it's finding the right thing to simulate her. (CS EO staff, 84, 62)

They felt that four young people would remain in their family homes without any further occupation, a further six young people would attend educational or training facilities while a further two would be in prison or day centre respectively.

These figures indicate that there is an undiminished confidence about employment as the ultimate destination for young people with learning

disabilities following transition from school or college. Two thirds of all young people in our sample were seen to be in part or full time employment in five years time by their carers, their teachers as well as by the EO staff tasked with identifying meaningful transition goals for them. The overwhelming confidence on the side of young people themselves, carers, teachers and agency staff contrasts negatively with the actual destination of young people and the very low probability that more than a fifth of this sample will achieve meaningful employment, without a significant change in employment support options. We must also be concerned that a small number of young people should be seen as remaining at home, be in a day centre or in one case prison, in 5 years time. This suggests that we need further planning and intervention after people leave school to work on positive futures for some young people.

A second question related to the future living arrangements of the young people. Again we report the results here across all four types of respondents, starting with the young people themselves. Roughly half of those young people who ventured an opinion on their future living arrangements saw themselves still living at home with their parents (n=23; total=45 responding to this question). Nineteen of the young people could envisage living on their own or living with friends.

Hopefully moved from home into a nice house or flat, and not be around here - 'it's crap'. (CS YP, 6, 10)

One young person thought it likely that they would be in supported living, while two more believed that they would share with friends. This view contrasted sharply with the opinion of the carers amongst whom only 8 respondents thought it likely that their young person would live independently. Eighty-nine percent of families (n=42) identified the parental home as the most likely location of living for their son or daughter in five years time. Three carers thought that their young person might be in a supported living programme.

I hope he will hold his own because I won't be around forever. Maybe a supported living and he would enjoy that. (CS Carer, 250, 40)

This widespread scepticism as to the young people's probability to live independently was mirrored by the opinions of the EO staff. There was a degree of cautious optimism amongst the teachers. Teachers believed that seventy-three percent of the young people would still be living at home with their carers, while they saw 38% (n=17) would be living on their own.

He will move on but stay in constant contact with his parents. He is a social chap, but whether he can organise activities himself is doubtful. It depends on what support is available to him. (CS Teacher, 249, 40)

Four were seen as likely to be in supported living schemes, while a further two young people were thought likely to share with friends in the future.

EO staff equally identified the parental home as the most likely destination for the young people in our sample in five years time (56%, n=25), that 27% (n=12) young people would be living on their own, 11% (n=5) living in supported living and 4% (n=2) living with either their close friends or partners.

Don't know but if he has the right support and job and if he is given a lot of support prior to moving he may be doing well, but he would need the ongoing support. Moving from home straight into supported living doesn't work. (CS EO staff, 249, 40)

The last section of the questionnaire concerned the likely future social integration of young people in our case study sample. We asked the young people, carers, teachers and EO staff with whom they thought the young people would spend most of their time in five years.

Young people were adamant that family and friends would mainly play an equal role in their social life. They identified the family as the central component of the person's future life in a third of cases, while in another third they believed that friends and future partners would be the main pillar of their social environment.

I may come and visit my Mum and Dad, but mostly spend my time with my mates. (CS YP, 250, 40)

Two young people were pessimistic about their future integration in society and believed they may spend their lives alone.

Carers echoed the view of their young people with again a third thinking that the family or friends would play a central role in the lives of their son or daughter. One carer shared the belief of their young person that in five years time, they would be mostly alone without any social life. Four carers were confident that work mates would add to the social dimensions of their young person.

Work colleagues, perhaps after work as well. When he did work experience he did socialise with colleagues. (CS Carer, 247, 31)

Teachers and EO staff responses were very similar, with EO staff slightly more optimistic about the potentials of developing and sustaining viable friendships outside the immediate family. Teachers agreed in the one case previously mentioned that the young person would spend most of their life without any adequate social activities.

The research was aware that responses to questions in this section represented a mixture of aspirational sentiments as well as views on the probability on their son or daughter's future destination. Although interviewees prompted respondents to comment on what they saw as the actual final status of their son or daughter, responses often started with expressions of hope and desirability.

What seems striking in comparing responses between the four groups with regard to employment is that they are agreed on the positive prospects of employment for two thirds of the young people, reflecting the express desire on the side of the young people to pursue this course of post-transition development. Current figures suggest however that only around 17% of adults with learning disabilities actually end up in employment which in turns throws up the question why, if everybody involved in transition for the young people in our case study sample agrees on their likelihood for employment, this remains an elusive goal for most of them.

What agency partnerships are key to successful transition of young people with learning disabilities?

Representatives of key partners in transition

Staff in strategic positions and with a responsibility to implement national and local policy in the field of learning disabilities were interviewed to obtain their view of transition policy and practice in their local authority (n=24). The project had particular interest in gaining an overview of whether or not recent national policies had made a difference in transition practice, what the barriers were for successful transition outcomes for young people with learning disabilities, and whether or not agencies would engage in collaboration with other organisation in delivering effective transition support.

Four themes were identified and qualitative data was structured and analysed according to these themes in a flexible matrix (using the programme N6). Interviewees were asked to comment on:

- local transition arrangements and highlight good practice where it existed
- barriers to employment as an outcome of transition
- positive and negative arrangements in terms of funding for transition support
- the impact of national policies and central government programmes on either employment or transition for young people with learning disabilities.

Respondents also had the opportunity to raise any issues or comment on anything that they felt the interview had not touched upon.

One of the most striking results of data analysis was the divergence of views on what the aim and outcome of transition should be. The majority (71%) of respondents identified either 'a smooth transition' or 'creating choices and opportunities for young people' as the aim of transition. Employment was suggested as a primary aim by only one respondent while 'empowerment of young people' as well as institutional arrangements such as 'connecting different services' were also included as legitimate aims of transition. This ambiguity about the understanding of transition extended to the nature and extent of transition planning as well:

There is no common understanding of what transition planning is, some schools see transition planning as the young person sees a careers advisor to see what they are going to do education wise or something else rather than as a holistic process, so if they see a careers advisor that's it they think and the action plan or careers plan is the transition plan and they don't understand that it is bigger than that.
(Manager, Careers Service)

When asked about what the outcome of transition should be, managers and staff overwhelmingly suggested a move into 'further education'. Employment had a higher profile with 25% of respondents identifying paid employment in full-time or part-time capacity as a valuable outcome for young people with learning disabilities. Soft outcomes scored highly, with another 20% of respondents indicating that increasing the ability to make 'informed choices' was an important outcome of transition.

Respondents were asked to talk about the existing transition arrangements with local schools and colleges and to identify negative and positive aspects of these. Interviewees were almost unanimous in expressing dissatisfaction with schools are generally not geared up to deliver employment as a possible transition outcome. Although respondents mentioned that work experience has a higher profile these days in schools, the majority of referrals to outside employment support services still originates in colleges or from social services learning disability services in the area. It was felt that there was generally a lack of options for those leaving school and not intending to progress to college. Respondents also expressed surprise at how individual preferences and abilities are still disregarded while young people are being pushed towards well-established options that offer least institutional resistance. A manager of a careers service commented on a particular case:

There is a young man who has a very specific interest and wants to go to college. He has autism and he needs some social support to do that and I went into the review with the idea of let's see what we can do to make that possible and was shot down in flames by the school because they thought it was not doable for him and thought he needed to be independent. (Manager, Careers Service)

Such institutional push in favour of particular routes runs counter to the principle of self-determination and respondents were well aware of this problem. Another manager of a social enterprise felt that the role of careers services is not always constructive for the young person's progress in the long run.

They [careers service] will get them into college if they can, not necessarily with an end result in mind. They won't see it as a natural progression to employment, they just see it as the here and now.
(Manager, Social Enterprise)

In general, only 3 local authorities out of the 8 represented in our sample had put in place a transition protocol covering the operation of all services involved

in transition support for young people. Transition protocols are regarded as good practice in guidance to English local authorities. However, one respondent was sceptical about the effects of transition protocols because 'everybody sees something else in it' and that the effects on positive joint working had been overestimated. Most surprisingly, despite the SEN Code of Practice clearly allocating responsibilities within transition planning there was still ambiguity as to which agency should be doing what in some areas.

There is still room for interpretation and there are a lot of discrepancies [with regard to responsibility for transition arrangements]. There are issues over who is responsible for holding a review and sometimes it does not happen. (Manager, Careers Service)

The lack of exchange of data and information was seen as a related problem.

One of the weaknesses is at 19 we [transition team] step out of the process and the school system has got all the information about the pupil and all of a sudden they are out of it, and if they go on to college and could be leaving at 20 or 21 they lost all information. (Manager, LEA)

Early identification was still not being carried out and information on young people was not being passed on to EOs or colleges. This made planning for the coming years extremely difficult and even core-funded services often complained about the need to arrange contingency funding since placements couldn't have been planned ahead.

If the picture of data sharing amongst children and adult services is often a problem, EOs encounter even greater difficulties in getting into 'the loop.' A common complaint was that employment support agencies or even careers advisors were invited to transition meetings on an ad hoc basis, far too late to make arrangements for staff to attend.

The good schools invite all agencies, they hold as many reviews as possible on one day, they will give a lot of notice for transition planning meetings, they prepare the young person so they know what they can expect, and also make sure that the young person has support if needed. They ensure that everybody makes a contribution but also ensure that the young person is heard first. (Manager, Careers Service)

A manager of an EO commented that they had very little input, and only at a late stage in those cases that were deemed 'capable of work' while the decision on the young person's abilities rested solely with the school or college.

Respondents were also asked to point out good practice in transition and employment support. Many mentioned that close relationships with outside agencies were critical to an effective delivery of transition services. Success in securing employment for young people with learning disabilities seemed to

depend on close co-operation between an EO and a school or college. In particular, it appeared beneficial to outcomes when outside employment agencies were given the opportunity to contribute to the curriculum in one way or another. A manager of a supported employment EO commented:

We go to the school and do a vocational course. It allows us to evaluate the person's skills, and as part of that we approach employers as well. That enables them to make informed choices and to build a judgement for themselves. (Manager, SE agency)

This puts the outside agency in a more advantageous position than being invited on a one-off basis. It permits an EO to get to know the young people sufficiently early to be able to assess their abilities and carry out vocational profiling (a form of personal vocational assessment) to match them to existing jobs.

Emphasising the importance of an EO working within the school, one respondent pointed out:

The pattern that was successful is a stepping stone process for the young person. We work within the educational establishment so we can do some employment profiling as well as build a relationship with the young person to get to know them much better. (Manager, SE agency)

EO staff echoed this where a supported employment organisation was closely involved in curriculum development in the schools and colleges. Involvement like this resulted in:

A high profile of employment and [agency] in the local schools. (School SEN co-ordinator)

This type of success is rare, however, in schools and most supported employment EOs are more prominent in colleges. The establishing of dedicated employment partnership boards (sometimes called Welfare to Work Partnership Boards) in the local area as well as close partnerships between careers service Personal Advisors, college teachers and employers certainly facilitates the chances to find a job for young people with learning disabilities. Yet, effective co-ordination of interventions between agencies is still a serious problem. A manager of the local education authority was critical of transition arrangements:

The transition process is not robust enough. We don't have the attendance from other agencies we wish we had and there may be separate reviews going on in social services. They need to get much more co-ordinated. It is not effective to have two sets of reviews. (Manager, LEA)

Duplication of courses or interventions between schools and colleges also occurs which points to a lack of co-ordination between the two, with the result that young people miss out on meaningful progress as they access college.

Some of the colleges also do that same sort of work as we are, so they follow the same work scheme. That means there is no progression if they work on the same ASDAN scheme. Our key stage four would work on transition for example, to progress to independence and they would just repeat that. (School teacher)

In general, however, where transition and employment partnerships were well established respondents assessed their impact on young people leaving school or college in a positive light.

A manager in the local education authority commented on the complex relationship between employment and further education as main routes of progression for the majority of young people with learning disabilities:

The majority of young people struggle to find employment and training particularly post-21. There are quite a few opportunities in local colleges but that's what the young people are funnelled to and that's the only option and post-21 it seems to fall apart. (Manager, LEA)

Families do want to protect their young son or daughter from disappointment. Many commented that meaningful employment induces enormous positive changes in the young people and any subsequent loss of work is hugely disappointing and frustrating. Work placements and job tasters thus need to be carefully planned to see the young person permanently settle in a position, otherwise families feel that this is a 'useless exercise'.

I found that three years ago families would decline [the offer of referral to a SE agency] because they had not seen any results and families need that reassurance otherwise they can't see the benefit of it. (Manager, Learning Disabilities Service)

Respondents also reflected on the best time to give employment support in school and college. Several interviewees made it clear that they regarded supported employment as a service most suitably aimed at students at FE colleges rather than school. Higher levels of maturity were frequently cited as the main reason for this later involvement, and an increased capacity of young people at college age to cope with the demands of work and unfamiliar environments. They attributed this to the fact that FE colleges are mainstream establishments that create a challenging but, in the long run, rewarding context that enables young people with disabilities to engage with non-disabled peers. Hence many college teachers as well as managers of Learning Disability Services expressed reservation about supported employment EOs actively recruiting young people for placements while at school. This opinion however was not universally shared amongst professionals.

Schools need to sell the concept [of employment] as well. Developing the options depends on work experience. You build expectations but the options are quite limited when you are 16.... There should be a general system of the range of options, training and apprenticeships before they leave school. (College lecturer)

Almost all respondents commented positively on the changes in day services over the last decade and pointed to the fact that referrals to social enterprises and supported employment agencies from social services had increased dramatically, which offered the young people a better future compared to placements in sheltered environments.

The young people with learning disabilities benefit from being in work-based environment such as learning on the job. Their potential for going into employment as greatly increased by this rather than hypothetical employment. It gives them a greater sense of worth. (Manager, Social Enterprise)

Some respondents mentioned family resistance to employment as a barrier to pursuing employment for a young person. Reasons for family resistance mentioned included the issue of welfare benefits, where agencies have to allay the carer's fear that an initially successful work placements may result in a reduction of family income and that any subsequent problems with the job may force the young person to re-apply for benefits and be refused. Additionally, respondents commented on the need for early presence of employment as a vocational developmental goal in schools. This may be difficult to reconcile with funding restrictions that often compel supported employment agencies to work with adults.

There was frank criticism of the role of Connexions advisors from English school and college teachers as well as agency staff. Respondents complained about a lack of knowledge amongst Connexions staff about alternatives to FE college as a next step placement for young people in transition.

The other fact is the lack of knowledge in employment options and it is easier to find for some young person a college place and you can move them through the system much faster. Sadly my view is that this does not improve their prospects at all. What it does is just delay the point at which they enter the job market and they often don't come out with vocational skills or qualifications that would help them in employment. (Transition Consortium representative)

From their perspective, parents like the security for their young son or daughter that a college place offers up to the age of 23 or 24. Sometimes respondents assumed that parents took a too casual attitude towards their son or daughter's employment prospects.

Parents are often blocking [employment]. It's about education of the parents. For example the parents would prefer him to go canoeing on Tuesday rather than work. Or they may settle for part time work for him

while he can actually work full time. (Manager, Learning Disability Services)

Funding

Funding structures and sources place different demands on the various stakeholders who are involved in transition and employment support for young people with learning disabilities. There was consensus that the recent changes to day services through the introduction of direct payments was beginning to have an impact, even if not at the rate and scope as some wished. Others pointed to the problems that day services faced when direct payments reduced their overall budget at the same time as most of their core funding was tied up in estates or personnel.

Another funding issue mentioned was ambiguity about who is responsible for various components of funding in residential educational facilities. English and Welsh funding bodies would often limit their funding to educational aspects only in residential colleges placement, which leaves local authorities having to plug the gap for social care support. The policies of local authorities vary widely in these cases with some firmly resisting funding social care while others are more willing to step in. This uncertainty created significant tensions between careers services and local authorities, and could leave families and young people uncertain until late in the day about whether they would get a funded place. One manager of a careers service noted:

There is no strategic view of assessment on all agencies and we had a rough time with one LA because they turned up for reviews and said to the young person you are not going to a residential college because we are not paying. So they turned to us and said 'who do you think you are to suggest something we got to pay for?'... I wasn't happy to say to my team that if you are working in that area you can't talk about residential colleges because they don't fund it and if you are working in another area you can. (Manager, Careers Service)

This problem often extends to supported employment provision. The pressure on agencies offering supported employment (offering one-to-one job coach input) to support young people in finding and sustaining employment is significant. Job cuts in a locality and bad socio-economic conditions in general have a direct impact on the availability opportunities for people with learning disabilities because of the low skill nature of the work that people with disabilities often engage in, and it can take significant time and resources to find, get and keep a job. As one careers service manager said:

[The funding body] does not fund supported employment in a way that is helpful. They see FE in terms of accreditation and being college-based where I think if there was an element that was geared towards work experience it would be better. But because they are so rigid in their thinking it does not give us any opportunity to do anything with [the funding]. (Manager, Careers Service)

Funding also creates problems if colleges themselves are not willing to take on a student with behavioural difficulties unless additional support is provided and paid for by social services.

Often the college will say they cannot manage that behaviour and you can't come on that course unless you can provide somebody to come with them, which is a nightmare really because you have to use something like direct payments which should really be used for social leisure or respite activity but you are using that because there is a gap in the college provision. (Manager Learning Disability Services)

Many outside EOs are not core funded to work with school and college leavers, which leaves them looking for funding on a short-term basis and from many different sources to do the work. This often creates synergy problems within the service since different funders impose different criteria on prospective clients. Many respondents commented negatively on the fact that since most grants are short-term only, identifying additional funding sources is an activity that ties up a substantial amount of staff time. Funding criteria additionally impact on what the services can do, which threatens continuity of service provision for some young people.

Funding preferred the 16+ transition and then one year it preferred the 50+ so it depends on the flavour of the month. Short term funding is really hindering transition and employment and the fact that it can change over night. (Manager, SE agency)

However, many respondents were positive, noting that they were able to draw on substantial amounts of funding from the European Social Fund where local authorities were located in Objective 1 or Objective 3 areas (areas with high socio-economic deprivation).

We have utilised much of this sort of money and that area has been at least if not more helpful than our core funding. (Manager, Learning Disability Services)

Policies

Respondents were asked to comment on the impact that government programmes and policies had on their service and in particular on transition and employment provision in their local area. There was a broad consensus that the Disability Discrimination Act had contributed to raising the expectations of parents of young people with learning disabilities and challenged the way carers and service personnel had thought about the quality of life for people with learning disabilities. Interviewees also positively remarked on recent changes in the curriculum that gave schools and colleges more freedom to determine the best possible curriculum content and tailor it to various groups with different needs.

However, the role of vocational learning in colleges was more precarious according to some respondents. Although policies have recognised vocational training as a valuable component of FE provision, a lot of vocational work is

not reflected in league tables which dis-incentivises colleges to re-commission vocational courses year after year.

The National Minimum Wage was another aspect that many respondents felt was worth highlighting. Generally, legislation about the minimum wage was welcomed but some respondents did note that it was a double-edged sword in respect of employment for people with learning disabilities, as social enterprises often could not afford to pay those wages. One respondent pointed out that minimum wage and tax credits meant that employed clients of the supported employment agency were better off by £100 per week compared to receiving benefits which would afford them a powerful tool in persuading parents to give up any resistance to their sons or daughters taking up work.

There were also critical voices that questioned whether any policy statements would actually make a difference on the ground where transition practice was determined by service structure, resources and staff availability rather than abstract policy. The lack of a combined document that would bring together all the different agencies and allocate clear responsibilities in the transition process was also pointed out. Respondents clearly saw a need for central government to formulate such a document rather than leave it to local authorities to organise transition in a piecemeal fashion.

There needs to be something that links it [education and social services] all together. We tried to do this from the Borough and there are so many different agencies on a local level it's just too difficult to get the people together on a strategic level so I think it would have to come from the government for everyone to take notice, in order to re-focus transition, there so many transitional themes and supported employment is one of them but maybe there needs to be more emphasis on what these themes are. (Manager, Social Services)

Respondents were also invited to make some general comments about any aspects of transition or supported employment work that they would like to see improved. There was general scepticism that policies and governmental announcements would make a practical difference on the ground.

There are all those wonderful documents, which say all these wonderful things, and we go back and question the various bodies and it doesn't have a huge influence on the particular client group we are working with. (Manager, SE agency)

We tried to develop protocols with agencies but it isn't easy. The will is there on the individual level but there is little progress with [a careers advice service] in our area. (Manager, Learning Disability Service)

There can be no doubt however that over the last decade transition and employment have acquired a higher profile in the lives of young people with learning disabilities, which has created pressures for greater outcomes from

parents on schools, social services and colleges. Many respondents still urged schools and colleges to accord the young person and carers more of a voice in the process and commented on the lack of, and need for, formal transition planning once the young person has left school.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

For those young people with learning disabilities that want to pursue paid employment on leaving school or college, there continue to be barriers to them achieving this. Employment is not universally considered to be a viable option for these young people by all professionals involved in transition planning. This is in part due to a lack of options for support into employment locally. There appears to be a lack of personal support to help people try out jobs while at school/college, and too few organisations that can help find people jobs when they leave. While the UK's Special Educational Needs Code of Practice identifies employment as a legitimate outcome of transition planning, there does appear to be a bias in outcome towards moving on to college for further education. Our data suggests that the involvement of external employment agencies (EOs) in transition plays a crucial role in promoting employment as a viable option to young persons with learning disabilities post school or college.

Carers

Most carers had clear aspirations for the future of the young people they care for. We were surprised at how many wished for the young person to go into employment at the point before they left school or college. In this they echoed the view of many young people that they do want to become employed. Many carers were clearly frustrated when employment was seemingly rejected as a legitimate next step. The nature of the up-hill battle was confirmed by how few of those who wanted employment as the next step actually achieved it, while so many who wanted a college place did get their wish. Carers were 2.7 times more likely to get a college place for their son or daughter if they wanted it than if they wanted a paid job. Clearly going for employment is still not the easiest option.

It is also clear that, to pursue and get employment, one needs to have employment as an aspiration for the young person in the first place. Carers give different weight to different factors when deciding on these next steps. Some are heavily influenced by the wishes of the young person with learning disabilities. Some are influenced by a wish to follow a developmental model and provide as much education as possible for the young person to develop their skills and their independence. Still others are influenced by concerns for safety and fears of exploitation and bullying. Many feel under informed and that there is a lack of post school or college placement options to meet what they regard as the very individual needs of the young person.

Recommendation 1) For this reason, it is necessary that information on all transition options be offered early on in the transition planning timetable. Some suggested that this information should be discussed as

early as in the first transition review meeting in year 12 to ensure that all possible options are considered and explored. We also need some rebalancing of resources between colleges and employment support, to provide a strong set of steps into employment. Without this, college students who will also fail to enter work because the systems do not exist after college to get them there.

We found that external Employment Organisations (EOs) acted as effective promoters of the employment route by offering more concrete advice regarding next steps and practical support options than school or careers service counterparts. It also appeared that EOs were offering a significantly different style of vocational experience compared to schools and colleges. Our data suggests that, where EOs are not involved, advice on paid employment is less frequently given, and where it is, it is less concrete and less likely to lead to work experience. As a result, fewer carers are likely to pursue paid employment as a next step for the person that they are caring for.

Some of our respondents pointed to breakdown in communication and information provision between agencies at the transition boundaries. Given that many young people with learning disabilities will still need support to enter employment after college, there is a need to provide continuity of transition planning and co-ordination of effort both within college and in the link to the world of work. Without increased planning and co-ordination through this second transition, including the provision of support for work experiences and paid work by experienced EOs, we will continue to waste the investment we make in young people's training at college, and they will continue to fail to obtain work on leaving.

Recommendation 2) Employment organisations need to be involved, and involved earlier, in the transition planning process if young people with learning disabilities and their carers are to be fully informed of their options and work toward fulfilling any aspirations for paid employment.

Our study included a Connexions service as an EO. Their delivery of options in relation to employment was reported to be more effective than the input on employment of careers services in our other areas. Young people in this area went on to find jobs. This suggests that careers services can highlight employment more successfully as an option than they commonly do. What they cannot do is provide more intense job placement finding around individual needs, support young people in work experience placements where they need it, and provide continuing support at this level to help young people into paid jobs later on.

Recommendation 3) Work experience appears from our study to be a key input, and this has been an added contribution to school and careers service efforts in most of our study areas. It is key in demonstrating positive outcomes and building confidence for young people and families about employment and should be offered to all young people with a learning disability. To be constructive for the carer

and the young person this work experience needs to be in community jobs, individually tailored, flexible in the times and length it is delivered, and have a number of support options up to and including on the job support. Carers need feedback on the experience if it is to influence their subsequent decisions. For all of this to happen we need better, well funded, support through experienced EOs who can deliver it.

Carers reported that young people going on work experience did influence their thinking. For some this strengthened their resolve that the young person could work, for some it reduced fears that a job would be an unsupportive environment for the young person, and for others it confirmed that a job was the right next step. However, a significant number of parents still have no contact with EOs or report that promised activities do not materialise due to lack of resources.

If we are to meet the aspirations of young people who want to be employed after school, then we need to engage more proactively with carers to support them. A consistent theme in the carer interviews was that communication between parents, school and external agencies was still in need of improvement and that parents sometimes felt left out of the transition planning altogether.

Recommendation 4) Carers pointed to the need for a guaranteed source of information on future options, and a named person who could help them digest information, give advice, and help them to make decisions about transition with their son or daughter. A dedicated transition worker role can provide a focus for this type of service in a local area.

However, in relation to employment, this is not just a matter of informing families about options. We have seen that carer concerns over job placement plays a significant role in whether people go on to get a job. People who know about employment are needed to discuss with carers any questions and real concerns they have, and to provide evidenced based reassurance where it is possible about the positive outcomes that can be delivered for the young person. Where concerns persist services need to plan credible solutions for the particular needs of that young person.

Recommendations 5) We need to listen to families concerns over employment and provide credible examples of how they can be tackled through good job match, planning, and intensive support. To be effective, vocational activities, particularly work experiences, have to tackle issues such as: the friendship potential of employment; the monetary arguments for working; how potential bullying and exploitation might be guarded against through good job finding, adequate supervision and the positive advocacy of employment support organisations; how positive impacts on carers can be assured. Agencies need to have the resources and the skills to deliver these solutions through work experiences while people are still in school. They need to demonstrate the positive outcomes that can be achieved and build credibility with carers and young people to better help them

find employment when they leave school. Greater consensus is also needed within schools and colleges on what are the best materials and curricula to be used in-house. We need this to be linked more effectively with the efforts of EOs so that there is less duplication of effort. This also needs to link more effectively to the work of experienced EOs offering supported work experience with good feedback.

Work Preparation Activity

Work experience is one important source of preparation for the young person and of information for all to make decisions. We also found that preparation young people have at school and college is also important. We found significant variability in what is offered in terms of vocational preparation for young people with learning disabilities while at school. While some schools used well-structured modules from ASDAN and OCR modules (some with adaptation for ability) to develop work awareness and key skills, others relied on their own work awareness curricula, and some provided no input. While small, the data from the colleges suggests that variability exists here as well. There also seems to be significant overlap in what is offered by schools, colleges and EOs with employment expertise. Some EOs offered work awareness courses and linked young people into external sources of qualification training including NVQ and OCN qualifications.

However, not all vocational activities offered, by schools/colleges or external organisations, appear to increase the probability of young people with learning disabilities being employed post graduation. We found that the use of qualification based courses provided through schools/colleges and efforts to get work experience placements provided through EOs in the last year of school does seem to have some impact on the likelihood of employment. Provision of this type of partnership was inconsistent across our areas and needs to become more consistent.

Policies and partnership

Underpinning these variations is a lack of agreement on what is possible and desirable for young people with learning disabilities at transition among SENCOs, teachers, careers services, social workers and staff from EOs. Without this carers and young people will still receive conflicting advice and they will still be steered away from certain options. We need, through these joint initiatives, to do away with the notion that some people are 'capable' and others 'incapable' of employment. The lack of options for support into employment can often be fed back to young people and their families as 'work is not an option for you', which is then understood as 'incapable.' The issue is one of what support people need to work and whether we can deliver it here, now and with the resources we have.

Recommendation 6) The development of a more consistent view is required among key school, college, careers, social services and EOs, on what is possible and desirable for young people with learning disabilities to do at transition, including the appropriateness of employment. In addition the sharing of information on the needs of people with learning disabilities between agencies needs to be more

effective post-school. There needs to be 'one transition plan' that carries through into post-school placements. This will involve a greater commitment than is currently possible through the extended responsibilities of careers services up to 25 for people with special needs.

Most of our policy survey respondents were positive about the potential of transition partnership and regarded cross-agency collaboration as critical to delivering good employment outcomes. Yet, there seems to us to be an undue emphasis on the quality of inter-agency collaboration at the expense of identifying and delivering concrete aims and goals for the young people themselves who are about to leave education. Too many LEA and social services respondents seemed to think that the main purpose of transition arrangements is to execute the processes and procedures rather than effecting real change for the person most concerned, the young individual with learning disabilities. In short, there appears to be a preoccupation with processes rather than what should be the essence of transition, to ensure final placement outcomes that reflect the young person's preferences and abilities.

There seems to be a significant case for EOs being more involved in local transition partnership and to be more involved in transition planning for individual young people. It seems important that this is done before choices are made rather than only when someone says they want employment as an option. Skilled employment input should be part of the initial decision making process. However, they are subject to demand for high quality placements and parental expectations of support are increasing. This often results in a no-win situation since many of the supported employment (job coach) providers are situated in the voluntary sector and must compete for funding from social services or government. These funders can apply eligibility and outcome criteria to their funding that do not allow providers to work with young people. A consequence of this tends to be that EOs are excluded from working in schools, or are compelled to select service users who are 'easy to accommodate' neglecting in the process young people with more significant needs.

We must challenge the assumption that college is the only training route for all people with learning disabilities. We need to develop instead the idea that learning a job while in that job is education and training by another means, a means that suits many people with learning disabilities better than longer periods of less experientially based learning. By strengthening our ability to help some young people to enter employment straight from school, we also strengthen our ability to support young people with learning disabilities leaving college to get into employment. This study has shown that many college leavers also need additional assistance to enter work, because they cannot learn all they need to know about a job in college. Currently the college route is heavily emphasised through systems of assessment, availability of funding, and early experiences, such as college "link" courses, that make the move into college more likely. The more people go, the more there is a social draw for young people to follow their friends into college. These are very useful for

those who want to go to college and can benefit fully from it. Without a similar density of resources, procedures, staffing and opportunities, the employment route will never be able to deliver in the same way for those who want a job. As we heard from some of our respondents, carers need to see work experience going somewhere, in the same way as college link courses are seen as an essential preparation for college as a next step. Without this status, families can see work experiences as irrelevant. Central government funding plays very little part in employment support in transition at present. Government must act through the rebalancing of additional support costs to colleges and other disability employment funding to also fund EOs directly to provide supported work experience in schools and colleges and act as an effective exit route to employment.

The findings from this study support recent efforts from government and organisations sponsored by it, attempting to forge stronger links between colleges and supported employment agencies (Learning and Skills Council 2006). In Wales a report has called for government funding specifically to assist adult focussed supported employment agencies to work with special schools to provide supported work experience and exit routes to jobs (National Assembly for Wales, 2007). **With greater consistency in schools and colleges in vocational course content, and with more resources dedicated to building links to EOs offering employment support, a higher rate of employment among recent graduates with learning disabilities may be within reach.**

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