

youth futures FOUNDATION

Supporting young people with a learning disability and/or autism into employment

Understanding need

Cordis Bright
October 2023



CordisBright

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Understanding needs

- Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with a £90m endowment from the Reclaim Fund to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation and igniting a movement for change.
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Glossary

Term	Definition
Accessible / inclusive apprenticeships	An apprenticeship designed for young people who have an EHCP. They operate in a similar way to a traditional apprenticeship but offer opportunities for young people with a lower threshold of Maths and English qualifications required.
Autism	<p>The National Autistic Society (NAS) define autism as: <i>"a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world."</i>¹</p> <p>Autism is a spectrum condition, which means that people are affected in different ways and some may need more support than others in different aspects of life. Some difficulties that autistic people may experience include: challenges with social communication and interaction; sensory sensitivity; repetitive and restrictive behaviours; anxiety.</p>
Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	An EHCP is a plan created for children and young people who need extra support in school than is usually provided through Special Educational Needs (SEN) support. It is a legal document drawn up by the relevant local authority, health and social care team and the family. These children and young people may have a learning disability and/or other physical disability, health care needs or social care needs. ²
Employability support	Support that helps people to prepare for, gain and sustain employment. In this report, we distinguish between support targeted towards young people with a learning disability and/or autism (LDA), employers and actions taken at a system-level which are intended to help people access work.

¹ National Autistic Society, *What is autism*, available at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism> [accessed October 2023].

² UK Government, *Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help> [accessed October 2023].

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Term	Definition
Further Education (FE) Colleges	Further Education Colleges provide education to those aged 16 years and older.
Learning disability	<p>The Department of Health and Social Care (2001) define a learning disability as:³</p> <p><i>“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.”</i></p> <p>Learning disabilities can vary greatly depending on the individual and therefore the level of support needed will also vary.</p>
Special Education Needs (SEN) and Disabilities (SEND)	SEND is a term used to refer to children and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities that make it hard for them to learn at the same speed as other children/young people their age. Sometimes the term SEND is used interchangeably with SEN.
Stakeholder	<p>In this report, stakeholders refers to the commissioners, providers, employers and policy experts/academics who were consulted as part of this research.</p> <p>The views of stakeholders are reported collectively, unless there were views that were specific to an individual group.</p>
Supported employment	Supported employment is a model of provision designed to help a young person identify a suitable job and provide them with tailored on-the-job support, commonly via a job coach. Supported employment follows a five-stage process: (1) client engagement; (2)

³ Department of Health and Social Care, *Valuing people – A new strategy for learning disability for the 21st Century* (2001), pp. 14, available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7b854740f0b62826a041b9/5086.pdf> [accessed October 2023].

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Term	Definition
	vocational profiling; (3) job finding; (4) employer engagement; and (5) on and off the job support. ⁴
Supported internships	<p>Supported internships are for young people with learning difficulties or learning disabilities, who need extra support to get a job.</p> <p>Typically, a young person spends the majority of their time on placements with an employer, learning skills for work.</p> <p>They also receive support from a tutor and a job coach in college or with a specialist provider. They are aimed at young people aged 16-24 with an EHCP and last a minimum of six months.⁵</p>
Work trials	<p>A work trial is a short period of work that can be offered to see whether someone is suitable for a job. The jobseeker must volunteer to do the work trial, which is unpaid and will remain in receipt of their benefits during this period. The work trial must be for a job that is at least 16 hours a week for 13 weeks. The work trial can last up to 30 days depending on the length of employment on offer, although it is usually five days or fewer.⁶</p>
Young people with LDA	<p>In this report when we use the term 'young people' we are referring to those who are between 16 to 24 years of age, unless otherwise specified.</p> <p>We use 'young people with LDA' as an umbrella term to refer to young people with a learning disability as well as autistic young people and autistic young people with a learning disability.</p>

⁴ British Association of Supported Employment, *What is supported employment?*, available at: <https://www.base-uk.org/what-supported-employment> [accessed October 2023].

⁵ Department for Education, *Guidance: Supported internships, 2022*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties/supported-internships> [accessed October 2023].

⁶ UK Government, *Jobcentre Plus help for recruiters: Work trials*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/jobcentre-plus-help-for-recruiters/work-trials> [accessed October 2023].

1 Introduction

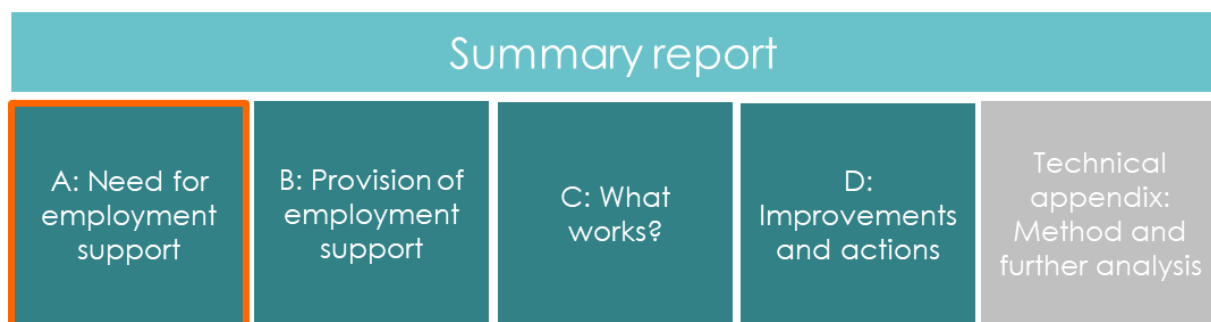
1.1 Overview

This report forms part of a wider research project into the provision of support to help young people (aged 16-24) with a learning disability and/or autism (LDA) into employment. The research was conducted by Cordis Bright and funded by the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF).

This report is focused on understanding the need for employment support.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the research reports. For a summary of the research findings, read the summary report. For detailed analysis of findings, read the accompanying reports and Technical Appendix.

Figure 1: Summary of research series



1.1.1 Summary of research

This research project has explored the following key areas:

- **Need:** what is the need for support for young people with LDA into employment?
- **Provision:** what is the availability of provision that aims to support young people with LDA into employment?
- **What works:** what works and what is promising in supporting young people with LDA into employment?
- **Improvements and actions:** what are the gaps in support for young people with LDA into employment? How could these gaps be addressed? What action is required?

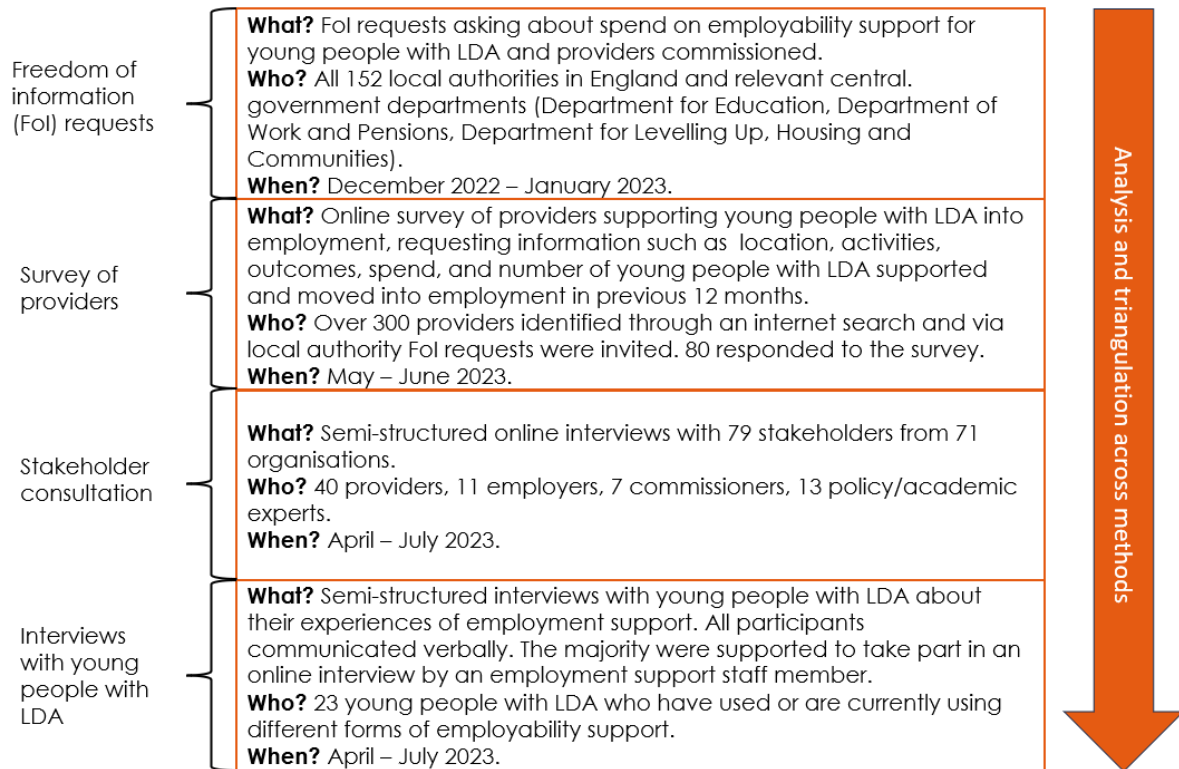
The research is based on a mixed methods approach, summarised in Figure 2. In line with our collaborative approach, all approaches, methods and tools were design by Cordis Bright and agreed with YFF before use in the field. This report has mostly been informed by interviews with key stakeholders and young people, as well as some publicly available data and research. While we spoke to a variety of stakeholders, they are often referred to collectively because there was substantial overlap and agreement in what they said. The

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main difference between stakeholders tended to be in the level of detail they were able to provide.

A detailed methodology, including research limitations, may be viewed in the Technical Appendix.

Figure 2: Research methods



Definitions and terminology

Throughout this report, we often refer to young people with a learning disability and/or autism (LDA). This includes young people with varying degrees of support needs and intellectual abilities. Data sources, previous research and stakeholders often tend to address these groups together rather than differentiate between them. Similarly, eligibility criteria for some support programmes also do not necessarily differentiate, for example those that are open to young people with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). Where findings relate specifically to autistic young people, or young people with a learning disability only, or young people who experience a specific challenge in relation to their autism or learning disability, we specify.

1.2 Report structure

The remainder of this report provides an analysis of our understanding of the need for employment support for young people with LDA. It covers the following:

- **Chapter 2:** Understanding the scale of need.
- **Chapter 3:** Obstacles to achieving employment.
- **Chapter 4:** Improvements and actions.

2 Understanding the scale of need

The following sections provide a summary of national data sets and stakeholders' perspectives to understand the scale of need in relation to young people with LDA and employment.

The analysis shows that there is a significant under-representation of young people with LDA in the workforce.

Demographic and socio-economic needs assessment

A full demographic and socio-economic needs assessment was outside the scope of this research. Existing data sets provide a limited understanding of the scale of need or details about the characteristics of young people with LDA. Further research is required to provide a more nuanced picture of need for support.

2.1 Understanding need using national data

Nationally available data sets provide insight into the scale of need among young people with LDA, in relation to employment. Data shows that there has been extensive exclusion of all people with LDA from employment and it is likely true of young people as well. Data also shows that depending on how learning disability is defined, there is a significant variance in the range of employment rates.

In England, there are approximately 5.4 million people aged 18-24, of whom an estimated 76,361 are autistic and/or have a moderate to severe learning disability.⁷ There is not data available specifically showing how many of these young people are in employment and/or education. However, NHS Digital data – known as the *Short and Long Term (SALT) data* – showed that in 2021/22 **just 4.8% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work, compared with 75% of working age adults.**⁸ See Figure 3 for detail of the trend in time in general employment rates for working age adults compared to adults with a learning disability.

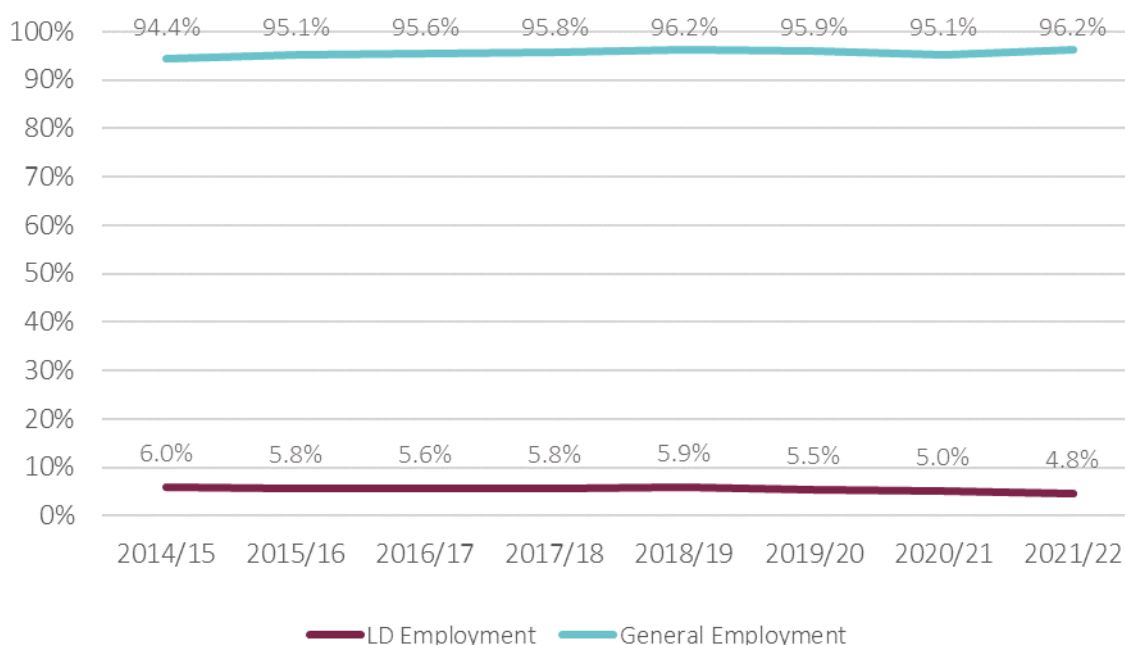
While the employment rate for people aged 18-24 may vary, not least because many young people will continue in education until 25, if we apply this rate to the population of young people aged 18-24, it can be estimated

⁷ Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information 2021 (PANSI), available at: <https://www.pansi.org.uk/> [accessed October 2023].

⁸ NHS Digital, *Social care collection materials 2022*, available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-collections-and-data-sets/data-collections/social-care-collection-materials-2022#short-and-long-term-support-salt-> [accessed October 2023].

that **just 3,665** young people with LDA may be in paid employment in England.⁹

Figure 3: Learning Disabilities and General Employment Rate using SALT data¹⁰



The national data sets do not provide additional details about young people, including their age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or any other protected characteristics that they may have. This makes it challenging to understand how young people with LDA from different backgrounds or groups experience the labour market and whether there is variation within the group of young people with LDA.

Other existing research sets the employment rate for people with a learning disability higher than SALT. For example, research conducted by Mencap in 2019 found:¹¹

- 32% of those with the lowest support needs have a paid job.
- 9% of those with medium support needs have a paid job.
- Fewer than 5% of those with the highest support needs have a paid job.

⁹ This figure is calculated using the SALT rate of 4.8% applied to the PANSI data, i.e., 4.8% of 76,361=3,665. It is likely an underestimate, as figures will include young people in education rather than employment and it will likely miss a proportion of young people with a mild LD who don't access support from the local authority.

¹⁰ NHS Digital, *Social care collection materials 2022*, available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-collections-and-data-sets/data-collections/social-care-collection-materials-2022#short-and-long-term-support-salt> [accessed October 2023].

¹¹ N/B data included working age adults, not only those aged 18-24. See Mencap, *Big learning disability survey 2019*, available at: <https://www.mencap.org.uk/about-us/what-we-think/employment-what-we-think> [accessed October 2023].

This highlights the importance of defining the cohort of young people with LDA. It also suggests that not all people with LDA are experiencing challenges to the same extent.

2.2 Understanding need using previous research

A range of existing research highlighting that people with LDA often experience poorer employment opportunities.

Research indicates that employment rates of people with LDA are lower than the employment rates of people with other disabilities and those with no disabilities.¹²

While there were a limited number of studies that focused exclusively on young people, evidence shows that certain groups face additional wider employment bias, extending beyond disability status, linked to other protected and not-protected characteristics such as race, age, gender, education level and socio-economic background.^{13,14,15} This research was predominantly conducted with autistic people in the US.

It is likely that for young people with LDA, many of these trends also impact on their likelihood of finding work. The following examples (from research conducted in various geographical locations) consider how other characteristics also differentiate the experience of employment for people with LDA:

- UK data indicates that the greatest gap in employment is between men with disabilities and men with no disabilities.¹² Between July and September 2021, the difference in employment rate between disabled and non-disabled men was 31%, while it was only a 25% difference for disabled and non-disabled women.
- Black people with autism had worse employment outcomes than white peers in a US sample.¹³

¹² Office for National Statistics, *Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2021*, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2021#employment> [accessed October 2023].

¹³ Schaller, J., & Yang, N. K. (2005). Competitive Employment for People With Autism: Correlates of Successful Closure in Competitive and Supported Employment. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 49(1), 4-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00343552050490010201>

¹⁴ Lawer, L., Brusilovskiy, E., Salzer, M., & Mandell, D. (2009). Use of vocational rehabilitative services among adults with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 39, 487–494.

¹⁵ Chiang, H. M., Cheung, Y., Li, H., & Tsai, L. (2013). Factors associated with participation in employment for high school leavers with autism. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 43, 1832–1842.

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- Increased age is associated with a greater likelihood of success in competitive employment.^{16,17} However, data from the UK suggests that among those aged 45 years and older, the disability employment gap increases.¹⁶
- Comorbidity (co-occurrence of two or more diagnoses) significantly reduces the likelihood of being competitively employed in a US sample.¹⁷
- Low socio-economic status is associated with fewer resources and opportunities and less access to services, thus leading to poorer outcomes for young people with LDA.¹⁸

2.3 Stakeholders' understanding of need

Stakeholders consulted as part of our research including policy makers, support providers, employers and academics had a clear and consistent understanding of need.

However, understanding of the precise scale of need at a local level was often limited. Additionally, employers noted that they felt they and their peers were less aware of the situation than other stakeholders such as commissioners and support providers.

Commissioners and service providers

Local authority commissioners, policy experts/ academics and service providers demonstrated clear understanding that the scale of need is large and, as discussed in Section 3 were able to point to a number of the challenges that young people experience.

They noted that the limited availability of data meant that they found it challenging to describe the precise scale of the need for support or the characteristics of people who needed support. They also suggested that siloed working between different providers, commissioners, schools and colleges and employers meant that collective understanding and intelligence sharing needed to be improved and strengthened to support a greater understanding of need.

Nevertheless, based on their own experiences, stakeholders identified the following groups of young people with LDA which require focus. These included:

¹⁶ Office for National Statistics, *Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2021*, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2021#employment> [accessed October 2023].

¹⁷ Schaller, J., & Yang, N. K. (2005). *Competitive Employment for People With Autism: Correlates of Successful Closure in Competitive and Supported Employment*. *Rehabilitation Counselling Bulletin*, 49(1), pp.4-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00343552050490010201>

¹⁸ Chen, J., Leader, G., Sung, C., Leahy, M. (2015). *Trends in employment for Individuals with autism spectrum disorder: A review of the research literature*. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, (2), pp. 115-127.

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- **Young people with LDA who are in transition between education and employment:** Providers identified that the transition from school or college to adulthood and potentially to work is challenging. They highlighted the importance of an effective and organised handover between support to stop people “falling through gaps”.
- **Young people with LDA without Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs):** Commissioners identified that an EHCP is a pre-requisite to accessing certain forms of support (e.g. supported internships / accessible apprenticeships, etc.). However, they raised concerns that not everyone who should receive an EHCP does receive one and that this affects the availability of support later on.
- **Young people with LDA with higher levels of need:** Commissioners reported that young people with LDA with higher levels of need are often not considered regarding employment as a possibility for them (*although such prejudice was reported by stakeholders generally as a challenge for most young people with LDA*).

Employers

Employers consulted reported that they are often unaware of the scale or nature of need for support for people with LDA. Reflecting on their own experiences, employers highlighted that they were unaware of the extent of unemployment challenges for people with LDA before they became involved with a particular scheme.

“The figures are shocking. This is the group we should be helping the most and we’re not.”

Employer

2.4 Gaps in understanding about who needs support

The evidence presented above, based on nationally held data, stakeholder views and existing research, shows that young people with LDA have experienced poor employment outcomes over a sustained period.

Stakeholders consulted during this research suggested a number of questions that they would like improved evidence to answer. These included:

- How many young people with LDA are in employment? If they are not in employment, how are they occupied?
- What are the characteristics of people with LDA who are and who are not employed and do employment outcomes vary between different groups (e.g. based on gender, ethnicity, protected characteristics, level of need, and whether a young person is autistic or has a learning disability or has both, etc)?
- Does need vary by area?

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Further research and changes to approaches to routine data collection is required to better understand the needs of young people with LDA in relation to employment.

3 Obstacles to achieving employment

3.1 Overview

Stakeholders and young people identified a wide variety of obstacles to employment related to young people with LDA's needs, many of which are supported by existing research. These included:

- **Practical obstacles**, including challenges relating to work-readiness, applying for jobs and completing work tasks.
- **Employer obstacles**, including risk adverse or non-inclusive recruitment policies.
- **Systemic obstacles**, including societal misconceptions about people with LDA's willingness or ability to work; misaligned welfare incentives; and poorly coordinated support which prevents young people from accessing the help they need and are entitled to.

The obstacles that a young person experiences likely varies depending on their particular challenges and level of support needs. This may also differ depending on whether they are autistic, have a learning disability or if they have both. Our findings provide an overview of commonly discussed obstacles that those with LDA may experience but we do not have evidence about how each group experiences these differently.

For more information on how providers are helping young people to overcome some of these obstacles to employment, see Report B: Understanding provision.

3.2 Practical obstacles

Stakeholders and young people identified that at each stage of the process to prepare, apply for, achieve and sustain employment there are obstacles that they experience.

3.2.1 Preparing young people for work

Stakeholders identified that getting young people prepared for work is a challenge. The transition from education to employment often places insufficient focus on employment opportunities meaning young people with LDA lack the right skills or are incentivised to stay in education for longer. Stakeholders and existing research reported:

- **A need for additional skills focusing on employment.** Education for young people with LDA often lacks flexibility, such that young people may be poorly prepared for employment at the end of school. This can result in a

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lack of Maths and English qualifications which are often seen as necessary conditions for employment.¹⁹

- **Young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) may not feel encouraged to transition to employment.** Stakeholders indicated that EHCPs allow young people to stay in education until they are 25 years old, meaning that they can delay leaving education. One stakeholder reported:

“EHCPs are a bit of a comfort blanket. Young people are afraid of losing it if they go into work”

Funder/Commissioner

Despite staying in education for longer, stakeholders reported that young people with LDA continue to find the transition into work hard and lack the necessary support after school or college.

3.2.2 Applying for jobs

Recruitment and application processes often place obstacles in the path of young people with LDA. A range of stakeholders, including employers, support providers, commissioners/funders and young people identified that activities such as writing a CV or participating in a traditional job interview may not provide young people with the best opportunity to show their skills or appropriateness for a job role. One employer highlighted:

“Young people with LDA often can't get through applications and not all employers know that. They don't know who they are not employing.”

Employer

Some roles are advertised with specific qualification requirements, which often young people with LDA do not hold (see Section 3.2.1). Support providers and other stakeholders challenged the notion that these qualifications would be relevant to a person's ability to carry out a job, but nevertheless acknowledged that it can prevent some young people from accessing certain opportunities:

“As a society we have a habit of judging everyone by the same standards and making people jump through the same hoops to be deemed good enough for certain jobs.”

Employer

Young people reported struggling with applications and interviews, as they find it more difficult to speak to new people and they often required some additional support or reasonable adjustments to access and engage in these

¹⁹ Barnham, C., Martin, N. (2017). *Considering employment of young people with intellectual impairment and autism leaving school and college*. *Autism and Intellectual Disability in Adults*, 2 (1), pp. 53-59.

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processes. Highlighting the difficulty that they had with the application processes, a young person said:

“I applied for 30 or 40 jobs and had only five or six telephone interviews.”

Young person

Similarly, online applications can also be challenging for people with LDA who have limited experience or access to computers,²⁰ but this does not mean that they cannot function effectively in that role.

“Some technology is very hard to understand and I’m not sure how it works, which can be frustrating.”

Young person

Alternative approaches to applications and interviews, such as a work trial are less frequently offered by employers.

3.2.3 Challenges within the workplace

As the workplace will be a very new environment for most young people with LDA, support providers outlined they often find that there are a series of challenges that young people face while getting to grips with their new surroundings. These might include:

- **Independent travel to and from work:** For some young people with LDA, independent travel and use of public transport can be a particular challenge.²¹
- **Workplace and interpersonal skills:** For some young people with LDA, the literature identifies that certain workplace or interpersonal skills present a greater challenge than they do for people without LDA. For example, research indicates that people with LDA may need longer to learn certain skills, or could find tasks that require complex recall, communications or motor-skills more difficult.^{22, 23, 24, 25}

²⁰ O’Toole, G. (2018). *Review of different approaches to work skills development for disabled young people (14-25) and disabled working adults in the UK and internationally*. Institute for Policy Studies in Education and London Metropolitan University, pp. 1-49.

²¹ Nicholas, D., Mitchell, W., Zulla, R., Dudley, C. (2019). *Perspectives of employers about hiring individuals with autism spectrum disorder: Evaluating a cohort of employers engaged in a job-readiness initiative*. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 50(3), pp. 353-364.

²² Beyer, S., Meek, A., Davies, A. (2016). *Supported work experience and its impact on young people with intellectual disabilities, their families and employers*. *Advances in Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities*, 10(3), pp. 207-220.

²³ Lysaght, R., Ouellette-Kuntz, H. and Lin, C.J. (2012). *Untapped potential: Perspectives on the employment of people with intellectual disability*. *Work*, 41, 409-422.

²⁴ Beyer, S., and Beyer, A. (2017). *A systematic review of the literature on the benefits for employers of employing people with learning disabilities*. *Mencap*, pp. 1-42.

²⁵ Beyer, S. and Robinson, C. (2009). *A review of the research literature on supported employment: A report for the cross-government learning disability employment strategy*

- **Arranging reasonable adjustments:** Young people with LDA may be eligible and require reasonable adjustments to be made within their place of work. Providers of support often identify that this is something that they are required to help young people (and employers) to arrange correctly.

Impact of COVID

Whilst stakeholders acknowledged that it was difficult to precisely measure the scale of the challenge, there was agreement that the Covid-19 pandemic has made it more challenging for young people to transition away from education and consider employment.

Stakeholders were concerned about missed education and worse preparation for adult life as a result. During the pandemic, the lockdown was experienced particularly negatively by autistic children and young people, who were already at risk of poor education outcomes and experience.²⁶

Additionally, several stakeholders provided examples of employers being less open to providing space for people with LDA since the pandemic, as they face greater economic pressure.

"We have had employers who have always been supportive, but now said they can't do it for reasons like 'jobs have changed', 'less work available'."

Funder/Commissioner

In particular, the increased prevalence of working from home may limit some roles available to young people with LDA, particularly for supported schemes where they would benefit from time in an office supported by colleagues.

"In-person, people can always be supported and observed. Now we are figuring out the balance of a lot of organisations being hybrid, if not remote."

Funder/Commissioner

team, available at: <https://www.researchonline.org.uk/sds/search/download.do%3Bjsessionid=47237BC2921A7622448FC0DF4675C065?ref=B12586> [accessed October 2023].

²⁶ Oliver, C. Vincent, G. Pavlopoulou, G. (2021). *The experiences of autistic young people and their parents of lockdown and the reopening of schools: Key messages for policy makers, schools and families*. The British Educational Research Association (BERA).

3.3 Employer obstacles

Stakeholders highlighted that an employer's willingness and openness to employing people with LDA is a fundamental prerequisite of young people gaining and retaining employment. If employers do not want to provide opportunities, then there is limited leverage to make them do so.

“Ultimately, responsibility has to sit with employers who have a lack of knowledge and a lack of understanding.”

Support provider

Employers may share misconceptions with the wider population about the aspirations of young people with LDA and their ability to work (see Section 3.4.1) but stakeholders also reported that employers often feel trepidation about employing people with LDA due to a fear around reasonable adjustments or other changes they might need to make.

This includes concerns about potential costs of these changes,²⁷ but also a more general lack of knowledge or confidence that they have the correct expertise and processes in place to make opportunities viable.

“Employers are frightened and there is a huge lack of knowledge about what it means to work with people with LDA. Their assumption is that it will increase their workload and they will have to ‘babysit’.”

Funder/Commissioner

Stakeholders suggested concerns about additional costs may in fact be due more to a lack of understanding of what support may be required and what programmes are currently available, rather than employers having an understanding of realistic cost implications.

Employers who already had programmes in place, spoke very positively about the minimal cost to their organisation for employing young people with LDA, suggesting that a lack of understanding is the critical barrier rather than any particular reasonable adjustment.

For more information on how employers can be supported to employ young people with LDA, see *Report B: Understanding of provision*.

3.4 Systemic obstacles

Stakeholders and young people identified three obstacles that are more systemic or societal by their nature. These are:

²⁷ Skellern, J., & Astbury, G. (2014). *Gaining employment: the experience of students at a further education college for individuals with learning disabilities*. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(1), pp. 58-65.

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- Pervasive negative misconceptions about young people with LDA's ability to work.
- Misaligned incentives that discourage families or education providers from encouraging young people to work.
- Poorly coordinated support prevents young people with LDA from accessing the right support, compounding other challenges.

For information on system-level support, see Report B: Understanding provision of support.

3.4.1 Misconceptions about young people with LDA and work

Stakeholders suggested that the main barrier to employment for young people with LDA is that many within society do not see employment as a viable option for them. Often employment is seen as 'nice to have' rather than a central part of life like it is for other young people.

Stakeholders suggested that this view is too often pervasive among employers, educators and even family members, who may not believe that people with LDA are able to sustain employment. As a result, many young people with LDA are often not encouraged to think about employment at an early enough age.

This is reinforced by low rates of employment, meaning employers and young people with LDA are also unlikely to see people with LDA in working roles.

"Not seeing others like themselves going out working makes it hard for young people with learning disabilities to imagine going out to work."

Policy/Academic Stakeholder

Stakeholders identified that sometimes parents and carers may never have been prompted to consider the possibility of employment, making them less likely to encourage this for their young person.

"As much as I love my family, they struggle to let me do independent things. It doesn't really give me a chance to be an actual adult."

Young Person

Ultimately, this can discourage young people with LDA from aspiring to employment, which can in turn result in them not being sufficiently well prepared to make the transition from education to employment.

3.4.2 Misaligned incentives discourage people and organisations from promoting work

Support providers reported that it was common that young people and families fear losing financial support if the young person accesses work. As

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young people with LDA may be unable to work full-time or access higher paying jobs, stakeholders reported that families are concerned that their young person may risk losing their benefits without the opportunity to earn the equivalent, or more.

Support providers recognised that parents and caregivers often experienced challenges to ensure that their child had sufficient support throughout their early life and education. Given their own experiences, stakeholders stated that families feel protective of their young person and are often concerned about how they might be able to navigate similar challenges independently.

Additionally, a commonly reported concern was that a young person would lose their current support or benefits if they start work, but will struggle to get them back later, if a job did not work out further down the line.

“People fight for the benefits needed and the idea of supporting young people to get a job and losing those benefits is off-putting.”

Policy/Academic Stakeholder

Multiple examples were provided, from different types of stakeholders, of young people declining employment opportunities due to pressures from their families. Concerns included whether a role is the right fit or how the young person’s schedule will change to allow for this employment.

Without support from their families, it can be very difficult for young people to access or maintain employment.

“If you haven’t got support and that push from home, it’s really difficult.”

Funder/Commissioner

Additionally, a minority of stakeholders identified that certain services, such as special schools or day support, do not have strong short-term incentives to support people towards employment or independent living. For example, schools and day support are funded based on the number of places or hours support that they provide, which does not incentivise helping young people with LDA move to a different occupation.

4 Improvement and actions

The above sections of this report outlined the needs of young people with LDA in relation to accessing employment, based on stakeholders' and young people's views and existing research. However, stakeholders reported a range of areas for improvement and actions in relation to understanding need.

Figure 4 **provides a summary of areas for improvement and actions in relation to understanding of need.** It highlights the importance of:

- Strengthening existing data sets to enable a more nuanced understanding of need, including a more in-depth understanding of the different needs of groups of young people with LDA, for example, by gender, ethnicity, protected characteristics etc.
- Encouraging information sharing across key stakeholders – including employers – about the challenges faced by young people with LDA.
- Ensuring work is properly incentivised for young people with LDA. This includes reviewing and improving the welfare system to ensure that young people with LDA are encouraged to work, i.e. ensuring that the welfare system does not discourage young people with LDA from work.
- Investigating how changes to the workplace post-Covid-19 are affecting the work opportunities of young people with LDA.

For information of other areas for improvement and actions, see Report D: Improvements and actions. For information on how young people with LDA are being supported into employment, see Report B: Provision of employment support.

Suggested audience: To improve support to help young people with LDA into employment, there are a range of partners that will need to play a role. Different actions will require the input of different combinations of stakeholders. We have identified which stakeholders we think actions might be most relevant to, with a focus on policy makers, commissioners and funders, providers, and employers. This is not a comprehensive list but reflects our interpretation of which stakeholders are best placed to progress the actions recommended by the participants of this research.

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Figure 4: Summary of improvements and required actions in relation to understanding of need

Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
Better data to understand young people with LDA's needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review appropriate national and local data-sets to ensure they collect data on young people with LDA. Consideration should be given to young people who are not accessing support from local authorities but who may require employment support and how their needs may be reflected in data sets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioners Employers Policy makers Providers
Further research to understand need for different groups, e.g., by gender, ethnicity, protected characteristics etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review appropriate national and local data sets to ensure they capture data on young people's demographic background including for example, age, gender, ethnicity and other protected characteristics so that analysis can explore the needs of specific groups. Ensure providers have the skills, capacity and funding to collect robust service level monitoring data which takes account of the action above, i.e. including data on young people's demographic backgrounds. Fund research which aims to understand in greater detail the differences in needs or challenges experienced by young people with LDA (e.g. in what ways autistic young people without a learning disability have different support needs to those with a learning disability) and for different groups of young people with LDA, for instance by demographic and socio-economic background. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioners Employers Policy makers Providers
Promote a positive mind-set to employment for young people with LDA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share evidence and stories which challenge misconceptions about young people with LDA and their motivation and/or ability to work. Ensure that what is known about needs of young people with LDA generally is widely shared and promoted to stakeholders with a role in supporting young people into employment, with a focus on employers to ensure their processes and policies work to be inclusive of young people with LDA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioners Employers Policy makers Providers

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Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that employment is discussed as an option with families from an early stage, to ensure that it is being promoted as a viable pathway for young people with LDA. 	
<p>Ensuring young people with LDA are properly incentivised to work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that young people are properly incentivised to work, e.g., ensuring pay and conditions are appropriate. ● Ensure that there is clear information for young people with LDA and their families about what will happen to their welfare entitlements when a young person starts working and how they could reclaim those entitlements in the event that the young person stops working. ● Review the process of claiming welfare entitlements to ensure it is flexible and quick, minimising the friction between starting and stopping work. ● Review the balance of work and welfare payments to ensure that young people with LDA are not financially penalised for working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employers ● Policy makers ● Providers
<p>Horizon scan and take action to future proof employment opportunities for young people with LDA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Undertake research to explore how changes in work and the workplace are affecting opportunities for young people with LDA – including the increased use of Artificial Intelligence, automation and remote working post-Covid-19. ● Undertake research to assess what different or additional support young people with LDA might require to be successful in work environments of the future. ● Consider what incentives might be necessary to encourage employers to ensure that opportunities are available for young people with LDA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commissioners ● Employers ● Policy makers ● Providers

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