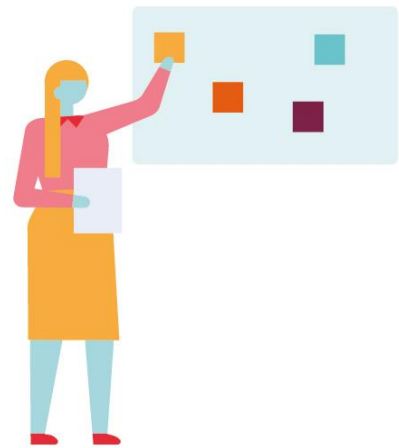


youth futures FOUNDATION

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

Understanding what works

Cordis Bright
October 2023



Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Understanding what works

- 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 apprenticeships 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

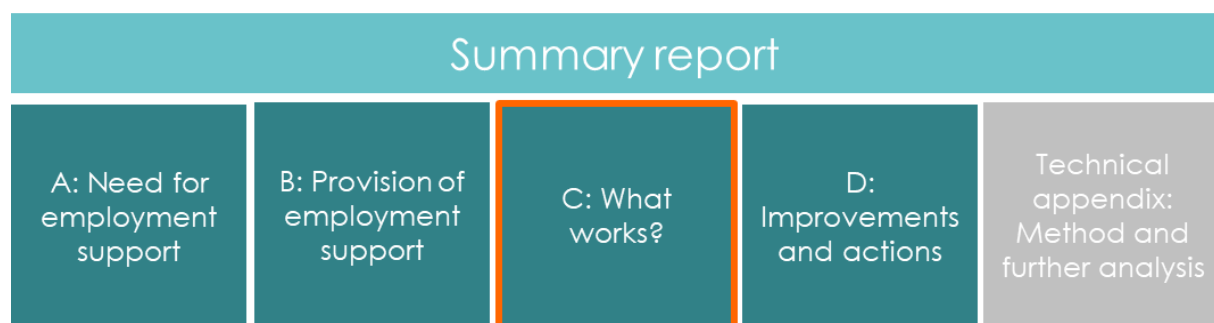
This report forms part of a wider research project into the provision of support to help young people (aged 16-24) with a learning disability and/or autism (LDA) into employment. The research was conducted by Cordis Bright and funded by the Youth Futures Foundation (YFF).

This report is focused on understanding what works to support young people with LDA into employment.

A robust assessment of existing research into “what works” in supporting young people with LDA into employment was outside the remit of this research.

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

Figure 1: Summary of research series



1.2 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?

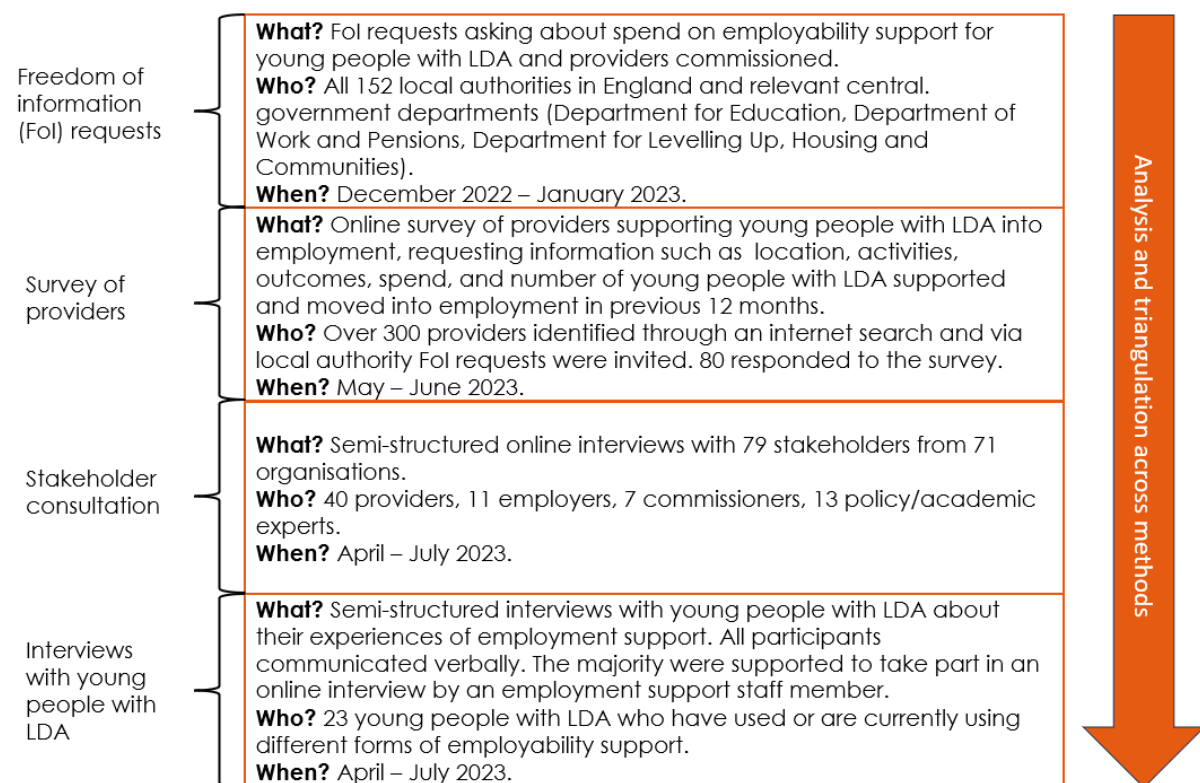
The research is based on a mixed methods approach, summarised in Figure 2. In line with our collaborative approach, all approaches, methods and tools were design by Cordis Bright and agreed with YFF before use in the field.

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This report has been informed through triangulation of findings from each of these methods. While we spoke to a variety of stakeholders, they are often referred to collectively in this research because there was substantial overlap and agreement in what they said. Where groups of stakeholders held distinctive opinions, these have been identified. Typically, the key difference between groups and individuals was 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 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.

1.3 Report structure

The following report covers stakeholders' views of what works in relation to:

- **Chapter 2:** Practice principles to support young people.
- **Chapter 3:** Models of support for young people.
- **Chapter 4:** Supporting employers.
- **Chapter 5:** Promising system-wide responses.
- **Chapter 6:** Improvements and actions.

2 Eight practice principles to support young people

2.1 Overview

Stakeholders reported the following eight good practice principles in supporting young people with LDA into employment based on their own experience:

- The right practitioners
- Person-centred approaches
- Provision of wraparound support
- Co-production of support
- Early exposure to employment
- Peer support
- A developmental approach
- Follow-on support

Features of good practice were identified by a range of stakeholders, but particularly providers with greater detailed knowledge of delivering support first hand. These principles are based on what has been found to work when supporting young people with LDA generally and does not differentiate between what works specifically for young people with a learning disability, autistic young people or those with both.

The following sections provide more information about each practice area. For more general information on the current provision of employment support for young people with LDA, see *Report B: Understanding of provision*.

2.2 The right practitioners

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of having the right practitioners to support young people with LDA. They reported that having the right practitioners in place can help to ensure young people with LDA are supported appropriately and in a safe way to meet their aims and objectives. Characteristics of “the right” practitioner included:

- Skilled and experienced in supporting young people with LDA.
- Well-trained and knowledgeable in providing support.
- Enthusiastic and committed.

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- The ability to develop and sustain trusting relationships with young people with LDA.

Stakeholders reported the following enablers to ensuring provision had the right practitioners to support young people with LDA into employment:

- Robust recruitment and retention approaches.
- Competitive remuneration packages.
- Good training opportunities.
- Appropriate caseloads. Stakeholders reported that ensuring practitioners caseloads were not too great helped to support staff retention as well as improving outcomes for young people with LDA.

Stakeholders stated the following barriers to recruiting and retaining skilled employment support staff for young people with LDA:

- Limited ability of organisations to remunerate practitioners competitively. Stakeholders reported that practitioners frequently move on to different higher paid positions, as wages in these roles can be limited.
- Short-term nature of funding that can result in short-term contracts that come to an end, meaning practitioners look to move on in advance of contracts ending.

Stakeholders noted the importance of providing skilled practitioners with greater recognition and incentives to support staff retention and to support young people with LDA to achieve positive employment outcomes.

2.3 Person-centred approaches

“Some people think all of this group are the same, but it’s about what an individual needs. There needs to be a lot more bespoke work for individual young people.”

Funder/commissioner

Stakeholders emphasised that person-centred approaches can be useful in supporting all young people, but particularly those with LDA to improve their employment outcomes. Similarly, young people indicated that one-to-one support and encouragement helped them to improve particular skills that they struggled with, such as time management and using computers.

Stakeholders reported the following key aspects of person-centred approaches:

- **Investing time in getting to know the young person.** Providers noted the importance of ensuring that they fully get to know and understand each young person they work with in order to adjust their support and direct the young person to an appropriate service or employer depending on their

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individual needs and aspirations. Suggestions for achieving this level of connection included:

- Committing substantial time to getting to know the individual (one suggesting at least three months).
- Ensuring young people see the same support worker throughout to build trust. This dimension may be particularly important for young people with LDA as it may take time to ensure that they are comfortable communicating with support workers.
- **Accounting for the “full picture” of the young person.** Person-centred approaches should consider the full picture of a young person’s life before supporting them towards employment, focussing first on the young person rather than the potential employment outcome.

“Trying to encourage employers and employment support organisations to think about the individual – rather than labels.”

Policy-maker/academic

- **Reaching out to the young person’s wider support network.** Stakeholders, particularly providers, reported the importance of taking the time to reach out to the young person’s wider support network and ensure that they also have all the information required and are on-board with supporting the young person into employment. For example, during a supported internship, parents/carers are often invited to progress meetings. Engaging with a young person’s support network was identified by several employers as key to their success within their supported internship programmes.

“Parents have a big impact and them being fully on board that this is going to happen for their child.”

Employer

“If your home, social life and other things aren’t right, work doesn’t happen.”

Provider

- **Matching young people with the right support.** Stakeholders particularly referenced the importance of ensuring young people are matched with the right role and employer for them. This helps both the young person and the service’s relationship with the employer.

“Important to make sure that we get the right placement the first time for these young people. There is also a negative impact on employers when we get it wrong, and we could damage that relationship with an employer for the future.”

Funder/ commissioner

'Vocational profiling' is one method used by providers to support young people to identify the opportunities that young people with LDA would be well suited to and is a standard part of supported employment programmes which follow the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) model (see *Report B: Understanding Provision* for details and Section 3.3, below).

Stakeholders reported that providing person-centred support should include seeking to provide support or employment opportunities which reflect a young person's needs and interests. However, in reality, providers of support may be constrained in the type of support they can provide or sign-post to because there are only limited services available. Likewise, where there are only a limited number of employers willing to recruit young people with LDA, this can limit the choices that young people have in terms of roles or work environments (see *Report B: Understanding provision* for more details).

2.4 Provision of wraparound support

Linked to the importance of person-centred approaches, stakeholders also reported that models that provide or are delivering alongside wraparound support have the greatest chances of succeeding. Stakeholders reported that this type of wrap-around support could include engaging young people with wider community and statutory services beyond the employment programme including, for example, health, mental health, services that encourage socialisation to improve wellbeing, services that support young people's needs in relation to housing, benefits and accessing supported living. Employment support services which can link into support in these areas are likely to encourage young people to engage more with the idea of pursuing employment.

To provide effective wrap around support, stakeholders reported that service providers need to have good working relationships with other services to enable coordinated and optimised support for individuals.

2.5 Co-production of support

Similarly connected to the importance of a person-centred approach, stakeholders spoke to the importance of using co-production in their approach to support. Stakeholders who discussed co-production spoke positively about its impact.

For example, one local authority commissioner reported that they had consulted closely with young people with LDA and others with lived experience supporting them to help design their approach to support. They reported that this had helped them to commission more effectively and was improving support in their area.

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Another example was given of training designed for employers that a local authority co-produced with families and adults with LDA, which stakeholders reported had been received very positively.

Adopting co-production in the commissioning, service design, delivery and evaluation process reinforces the efforts to personalise support, by promoting the voices of young people with LDA and their support networks at each stage.

2.6 Early exposure to employment

“We need to change the narrative and have the assumption that everyone who wants to work can work.”

Policy/academic

“If you get people younger, it’s more likely they’ll get into employment.”

Provider

Stakeholders reflected on the importance of encouraging young people with LDA at a much earlier age that employment may be possible for them. They suggested that the timing of conversations around employment currently varies and often happens too late, such as when a young person is approaching the end of education. Raising young people’s aspirations in relation to employment from an earlier age (possibly starting as early as primary school) would potentially aid the transition to employment services and ensure a ‘warm handover’ from education provision.

Stakeholders reported that, as well as raising aspirations for young people with LDA in relation to employment, it was also important to do this for their wider support networks, for example, their parents/carers.

Stakeholders mentioned the following practice which aimed to support young people’s earlier exposure to employment:

- Several commissioners emphasised their close work with schools and further education colleges to enable this early exposure.
- Some stakeholders specifically encouraged viewing EHCPs through an employment lens as young people grow older. This can ensure earlier support is put in place to prepare the young person and their support network for particular career goals.
- Stakeholders provided examples of careers advice being provided for young people with LDA in schools (including when they are in mainstream education provision) and maintained throughout their education. This could be through the school’s own provision, or in partnership with an external provider. One example included a jobs club being run by a provider with several local SEN schools for those as young as 12 and 13.

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Stakeholders reported that conversations with young people at an earlier age were important to outline the practical skills and experiences they might need to develop to enable them to access employment later on.

2.7 Peer support

Providers emphasised the advantages of peers engaging with one another, including through regular support groups (both before and after beginning employment). This provides the possibility for young people to discuss their concerns and experiences with others who may relate and have similar experiences.

A stakeholder we consulted works for an organisation that actively encourages employees with LDA to line manage other young people with LDA in order to provide role models (which this group have often seldom seen growing up) and build aspirations.

Speaking specifically about their experiences in supported internships, young people spoke positively about the value of having other young people with LDA interning with the same employer. They valued the friendships they built with other interns, which they indicated translates to positive impacts outside of work.

“During my placement, I liked being around these guys [other interns] – I have been in mainstream school, in classrooms with no disabilities, but now there are people around me who have disabilities so we can support and learn from each other.”

Young person

2.8 A developmental approach

Providers highlighted the importance of taking a developmental approach to supporting young people with LDA. This included supporting young people's development gradually through stepping-stone roles. The aim should be that young people can progress from one type of support to another, until they achieve their goals or desired level of employment, whatever that might be (for example, this might be part-time or full-time paid work).

For example, a couple of providers indicated that they initially seek to place young people within a social enterprise or on placements within their own organisation where they are able provide a greater level of support whilst also enabling the young person to get used to a working environment. This is a 'stepping-stone' that can be used to help a young person develop their skills, so that they are able to move on to a work environment with fewer supports.

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Stakeholders made similar comments about supported internships, highlighting that it is a step in a young person's development and part of the approach should be to use the internship as a springboard to employment either with their current internship host or another employer.

Even once young people are employed, stakeholders reported that it is important to continue to be ambitious and work out how a young person can progress in their roles.

“Within employment support schemes, there should be a clear learning plan and pathways to the next step.”

Employer

What is most important though is that when a programme of support ends, the next step has been considered so that there is not a point when a young person is neither in work nor receiving support if that's what they want to do.

“Prevent a cliff-edge of an end of support at the end of programme. They need to be helped to do it for themselves.”

Employer

2.9 Follow-on support

Stakeholders reported that providers staying engaged with young people even after they have entered paid employment is important for ensuring maintenance of employment. This can aid management of any issues or crises that could happen in the role – both in terms of supporting the young person and their employer.

Although there is no specific consensus about what this follow-up support should look like, one provider suggested that follow-on support should stay in place for around 12 to 18 months after a young person with LDA begins a role and warns that potential job breakdowns often happen at around six months into roles. Support could be through continued access to a peer support group, regular check-ins from a support worker, or having an avenue through which young people are encouraged to reach out for support if or when it is needed.

3 Four models of support for young people

3.1 Overview

Consultation with stakeholders identified the following four models of support as promising:

- Work trials.
- Supported employment.
- Supported internships.
- Job coaching.

The type of support that a young person needs to help them enter and thrive in employment likely varies depending on their individual support needs and may differ depending on whether they are autistic, have a learning disability or if they have both. Our findings provide an overview of some of the types of support that stakeholders indicated generally work well when supporting young people with LDA into employment. We do not have evidence on whether certain types of support work best for certain groups of young people with LDA.

3.2 Work trials

Work trials were suggested by a small number of stakeholders as an effective alternative to traditional and often exclusionary recruitment processes, such as CV applications and interviews.

The idea behind a work trial is that a young person has a short placement (typically 5 days or less), where they can come into a work environment and have an opportunity to demonstrate in practice that they could be right for a role. A work trial could serve in place of an interview for instance, which many young people with LDA find particularly challenging.

What stakeholders reported is good about work trials is that they give employers a chance to meet young people, which demystifies the situation and gives young people with LDA a better chance of demonstrating their qualities in a forum that gives them the best chance of success. In turn, the young person also has the opportunity to better understand the environment that they would be entering and if it is what they want to do.

While work trials are unpaid, a young person can continue to claim their benefits, meaning it is a low risk option to try-out work.

When done well, stakeholders reported that work trials typically require a young person to have some support – for example, someone to discuss the

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possibility of a trial with an employer on the young person's behalf and also potentially to support them during the placement.

However, stakeholders reported that work trials are not widely available.

3.3 Supported employment

Stakeholders identified supported employment as a promising model of support.

Supported employment is not a model used exclusively to help young people with LDA into employment, but has been used for a range of different groups including adults with mental health difficulties, physical disability or substance misuse challenges. For example, 'individual placement and support' is a tried and tested model of supported employment for those with severe and enduring mental health problems, which is currently being implemented in England as part of the NHS Long term Plan.

Stakeholders typically referenced the 'BASE model' of supported employment, which is based on an internationally recognised five-stage process:⁷

1. **Client Engagement:** An opportunity for jobseekers to find out about the supported employment model and make an informed choice on whether it is right for them.
2. **Vocational Profiling:** A detailed and unique discovery and planning process that enables people to identify what they want to achieve and work out a plan for getting there.
3. **Job Finding:** The employment worker (sometimes referred to as a job coach) and client work together to find vacancies that meet the client's employment goals.
4. **Employer Engagement:** The employment worker learns about the job and works out a plan with the employer on how they will support the client through the recruitment process and in the workplace.
5. **On and Off the Job Support:** The client is supported to learn the job and sustain employment, this could include job coaching at work, training, support from a workplace mentor and regular workplace reviews.

What stakeholders thought was effective about the supported employment approach is that it provides support to young people with LDA to both help them enter employment and succeed once they are in some form of part-time or full-time paid employment. Rather than approaches to support which

⁷ British Association for Supported Employment, *About supported employment*, available at: <https://www.base-uk.org/about-supported-employment> [accessed October 2023].

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focus on 'getting young people ready for work', supported employment takes the approach of 'place, train, maintain' – i.e. helping people to learn on the job.

The role of the employment worker, similar to a job coach described in Section 3.5, was praised due to the ability to support both the employers and young people as well.

Additionally, providers and commissioners welcomed the amount of guidance on how to deliver a supported employment programme, as well as the strength of the evidence base. There is some existing research evidence that suggests that this model is most effective for people with mild or moderate LDA.⁸

The evidence suggests that supported employment is effective because it provides sufficient intensity of support and opportunities for repeated practice for young people with LDA to be able to master employment skills.⁹

However, for young people with the most complex needs or those furthest from the job market, additional support may be a necessary first step before something as intensive as supported employment.

A possible barrier to the wider use of supported employment is that, in order to be delivered to a high standard, those offering this type of support need to be well-trained and skilled (as described in Section 2.2). It can be difficult to recruit skilled practitioners and often training will be needed, which will require resources.

3.4 Supported internships

Supported internships were another model of support which stakeholders reported was achieving promising results. Supported internships differ from supported employment because of the combination of work and study and the time-limited nature of the placement in comparison to a permanent role.

The core of the supported internship is a substantial work placement, facilitated by a job coach, combining practical on-the-job learning with supplementary classroom based teaching. Typically, a young person is hosted by a college. The college delivers the teaching component and may also provide the job coach (although this may also be delivered by a third party, such a voluntary sector partner).

Stakeholders we spoke to, including young people with LDA, suggested that the DFN Project SEARCH, a programme which sets out a model of delivery for

⁸ Laungani, D. (2019). *Preparing for employment: An exploration of the transition experiences of young people with mild and moderate learning difficulties and their parents of a supported internship programme*. UCL Institute of Education, pp. 1-205.

⁹ Wehman, P., Schall, C., McDonough, J., Graham, C., Brooke, V., Riehle, J., Brooke, A., Ham, W., Lau, S., Allen, J., & Avellone, L. (2017). *Effects of an employer-based intervention on employment outcomes for youth with significant support needs due to autism*. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 21(3), pp. 276-290.

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supported internships, was an effective example of how this work could be delivered.¹⁰ A license is required to use the Project SEARCH model and receive the associated resources and support. Those delivering the programme, which usually involves a partnership between the local authority, an education provider, employment support provider and employer, are asked to maintain model fidelity. Project SEARCH internships include a series of placements in different roles within a host employer to help young people learn where they would like to work.

There is an evidence base to suggest that supported internships can be an effective path to employment. For example, DFN Project SEARCH report that programmes following their model typically see approximately 70% of graduate interns secure paid employment, including 60% of graduate who progress to full-time employment.¹¹

Features of supported employment, including models such as DFN Project SEARCH, that stakeholders reported worked included:

- **Immersion into workplace culture:** Stakeholders reported that young people benefit from access to the workplace and learning skills on the job. Young people reported developing practical skills through this programme, such as customer service, cleaning, working different devices in the workplace and coffee-making. Alongside this, young people also developed skills in communication, teamwork and problem-solving. Many young people highlighted these skills as crucial for their overall personal development as well as increasing their employability.

“[The internship] Improved my independence skills and relying on yourself.”

Young person

- **Onward planning during the internship:** Stakeholders highlighted the opportunity for a young person with LDA to gain experience and strengthen their chances of employment post-internship as well as the opportunity to convert their internship experience into a permanent role if the employer and young person wish to continue.
- **Tried and tested model:** Funders/commissioners we spoke to referenced the benefit of using the DFN Project SEARCH model as it was ‘tried and tested’. They used the evidence as a tool to persuade parents that it could work for their young person too. It was noted that having a range of guidance made it easier to implement a supported internship programme that had already been tested.
- **An effectively managed transition into work:** Stakeholders reported that it helped to bring colleges and employers together to discuss the young

¹⁰ DFN Project Search, *Changing lives together*, available at: <https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DFN-Project-SEARCH-Overview.pdf> [accessed October 2023].

¹¹ Ibid.

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person and their work goals. This can help facilitate an effective period of transition from full-time education to work.

“Everyone's involved and takes responsibility for different actions within the group.”

Funder/commissioner

While stakeholders reported that supported internships are promising, research carried out on behalf of DFN Project SEARCH does indicate that men who have graduated from the programme were slightly more likely to find paid employment and have worked more hours per week than women. Stakeholders also suggested that supported internships would be too intensive for some young people, especially those with more complex needs.

Example: Young person case study of a DFN Project SEARCH internship

The DFN Project SEARCH programme was recommended to Luke* by a teacher at college and he decided to apply. The programme he joined was adapted so that he would spend 2 days a week in class at the employer's head office and 3 days working off-site. He was supported by a tutor and a job coach, both based with the host employer.

Luke worked in three different placements over the year-long programme, which he particularly enjoyed. This gave him a variety of practical skills and experience, such as working in a team. He was also supported to work on his time management, problem solving, communication and computer skills.

When nearing the end of the programme, Luke was supported to apply for jobs and prepare for interviews. As he had done so well, he was fortunate to get a job with his host employer at the end of the DFN Project SEARCH programme.

*For confidentiality the young person's name has been changed.

3.5 Job coaches

Related to supported internships and supported employment, stakeholders also reported that job coaches were a valuable support in their own right.

A job coach can be part of a programme of support, or could be employed directly, for example using Access to Work funds to support an individual in their place of work (see *Report B* for more details). A job coach can provide support to both the employer and the employee, including a range of activities such as arranging for adaptations specifically to suit the young person, carving up tasks into more manageable parts; supporting managers and co-workers to be effective colleagues to a young person; and more.

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What stakeholders felt was valuable is the way that job coaches can provide very person-centred support by getting to know and building a relationship with the young person and adapting their support accordingly. The flexibility of support was reported to be key.

"People learn in different ways and this is adjusted by job coaches."

Employer

Stakeholders reported that having job coaches within programmes such as supported internships, is what employers felt set those schemes apart from other work experience. The presence of another professional makes it easier for employers to commit to the programme. The inclusion of job coaches can help to tackle employer's initial concerns around not knowing how to support young people with LDA.

"They can just tell [the young person] how to do [a task] one time and then the job coach can break it down and explain how it works [...] this is the major benefit of the programme."

Employer

One employer particularly emphasised the benefits that job coaches can offer to the young person's managers, helping them to improve their skills in supporting young people with LDA and making an inclusive workplace.

Example: Young person case study of receiving support from a job coach

Jared* took part in a supported internship which involved classroom learning and a substantial amount of work experience. He was supported by a tutor and a job coach, who were based with his host employer.

Jared gained various skills in communication and workplace etiquette and was also supported by his job coach to improve his time management. He really enjoyed the placements on his supported internship, but appreciated being able to go to his job coach to discuss any difficulties he came up against at work.

During the supported internship, an opportunity came up to apply for an apprenticeship, which was a paid opportunity with greater independence. Jared discussed the opportunity with his job coach and was supported to complete the online application and prepare for the interview. His job coach ensured that reasonable adjustments were made for the interview, including receiving questions in advance and also supported Jared on the day of his interview.

Jared successfully made it on to the apprenticeship and his job coach supported him with the relevant paperwork, such as his work contract. As

the apprenticeship was with the same employer and he continued to receive some follow-on support as and when he needed.

*For confidentiality the young person's name has been changed.

3.6 Discussion

When discussing the above models, stakeholders discussed the following:

- **Support for young people and employers:** Several of the models picked out by stakeholders were models that had the flexibility to support an employer and a young person simultaneously. This reflects the challenges in Report A: *Understanding Needs*, which identifies that there are obstacles to employment which relate both to the individual young person but also the employer and their confidence, skill and willingness to recruit young people with LDA.
- **The role of practical employment experience in relation to academic and classroom-based experience.** Several stakeholders suggested that taking a more practical experience approach to employment preparation over an academic and classroom-based preparation was beneficial (e.g. the 'place and train' approach of supported employment).¹² This may be true for many young people with LDA. However, some stakeholders reported that it does have a risk of excluding those who are unable to go straight into the workplace environment without additional support and training beforehand.
- **Engagement with pre-employment support and preparation.** Stakeholders were less clear about what they felt works best in pre-employment support. This may reflect that, compared to supported employment or supported internships, there are fewer identifiable and manualised models to point towards as examples of good practice. It may also reflect that there is uncertainty among employers about what the best practice looks like when trying to prepare young people for work.

The models outlined in this section may also best suit those young people with LDA who are prepared to enter the workplace but lack experience. There may be a lack of defined models of support for those young people with greater need who may require additional support to reach this point.

¹² British Association for Supported Employment, *What is supported employment*, available at: <https://www.base-uk.org/employers-supported-employment> [accessed October 2023].

4 Supporting employers

When it comes to supporting employers, stakeholders reported that the key is to ensure that there is buy-in from the top of the organisation – once this happens changes can happen that make it possible to recruit young people with LDA.

Buy-in from senior leadership is needed to confront negative perceptions around employment of young people with LDA at every level of an organisation and takes the emphasis away from young people needing to prove themselves. Stakeholders reported that where there was strong organisational buy-in, this helped young people to feel settled and valued.

“Our scheme is really well valued by the top level which is important. For individuals on the programme, that level of support and commitment helps to empower and encourage young people to join.”

Employer

To achieve this level of buy-in requires two important factors:

- **Employers must be aware of the possibility and the benefits of employing young people with LDA.** This includes explaining:
 - Companies benefit from the perspectives that young people with LDA bring to the workplace.
 - Employing young people with LDA requires limited ongoing effort, time and cost.
- **There is support available that can make it straightforward to recruit and employ a young person with LDA.** As discussed above in relation to supported internships, supported employment and job coaches, there are different options available to employers to recruit young people with LDA, that are relatively easy to set-up and can help an employer effectively maintain the employment of young people with LDA.

Case Study: DFN Project SEARCH

Employers we spoke to who were involved in DFN Project SEARCH programmes spoke very positively about the model. They were positive about:

- The outcomes they had seen their interns employed through the programme achieve.
- The experience of setting up the programme and benefits it offered their organisation through an increased workforce and access to new perspectives.

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- The fact that the programme requires little ongoing effort, time and cost by the employer once established, making it relatively easy to set up and maintain.
- The lack of significant risk or investment of finances or other resources the programme required, making it much easier for employers to decide to get involved.

"If you take away my time [businesses liaison] and the base room, there isn't a direct financial cost, which makes it an easy thing to sell. [...] No bottom-line financial risk here."

Employer

"It's easy for the host business to give people a chance and have their hand held through it. They have fulltime staff provided at no cost to support them. The only cost [for us] is the cost of the vetting process, getting them a room and getting them an ID."

Employer

5 Five promising system-wide responses

5.1 Overview

This section focuses on stakeholders' views of how the system can respond more effectively to support young people with LDA into employment. Stakeholders identified the following five key elements to support systems to improve employment outcomes for young people with LDA:

- Prioritising a strategic vision.
- Visible and committed leadership.
- Understanding the local system.
- Strong local networks.
- Improved funding.

5.2 Prioritising a strategic vision

Stakeholders reported that a strategic vision is required to improve outcomes for young people with LDA. However, it was unclear how this strategic vision can be developed and who should be responsible for leading and co-ordinating its development. Some stakeholders reported that local authorities should (and in some areas, do) play a central role in the development of a strategic vision as they can play a critical role co-ordinating locally. However, this role would need to be supported by central government, local employers, local providers, wider-system partners and young people with LDA and their families.

Stakeholders reported that creating a strategic vision was an important learning process, because it requires policy makers and commissioners to develop a deeper understanding of needs and provision (see Section 5.4). The strategy is also helpful for providers because it sends a clear signal from local or national policy makers about what support is needed and what types of support that they are willing to fund. Stakeholders reported that this market shaping can help providers to better meet local needs.

One commissioner we spoke to strongly supported having a strategic vision for improving the lives of young people with LDA, including employment. They reported that one approach to supporting a strategic vision was by accessing funding which aligned with the previously decided vision for their programmes of support for young people with LDA. They shared that they had declined or chosen not to bid for smaller and more short-term pots of funding to avoid deviation from their overall long-term goals.

“We recognise that short term funding isn't always helpful and that actually you can say no.”

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Funder/commissioner

Although this may feel counterintuitive as it can place greater pressure on gaining the specific funding that they choose to apply for, they believed it was key to the success of their work. It helped to ensure that they do not deviate from their plans and are able to maintain their provision consistently for the longer-term funding period.

5.3 Visible and committed leadership

Linked to the above, stakeholders reported that visible and committed local leadership in the system is important to support young people with LDA into employment. Two commissioners who are involved in local authorities taking innovative steps in this area both mentioned that they benefit from significant buy-in from top level management. This area is seen as a key corporate priority and leadership buy-in makes it easier to pursue innovative solutions.

5.4 Understanding the local system

Stakeholders recognised the importance of understanding local need, local provision and potential gaps alongside what works in supporting young people with LDA into employment. Some local authority commissioners discussed the importance of system mapping to gain a full picture of existing provision and how this relates to need. Mapping can help identify gaps in provision, duplication of provision and where provision can connect more effectively.

One commissioner discussed how utilising system mapping enable their local authority to develop a team to act as a service link, rather than an additional direct service provision. Alongside improvements to the effectiveness of the service provision, they also emphasised how important this process had been to identify and utilise currently available funds in the council, rather than applying for specific grants or additional funds. This meant that the system mapping process ultimately was able to decrease need for additional spending and ensure increased cost efficiency.

5.5 Strong local networks

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of building and maintaining relationships across all parties involved in supporting young people with LDA into employment. This is likely to include education providers, employers and wider local services including the existing support networks of young people and other support providers.

Stakeholders suggested that this can provide benefits by enabling services to effectively support young people by having contacts and connections to a variety of other services.

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“if our team gets out there and gets known, if you are coming across a barrier, we can call someone and see if they've experienced similar issues.”

Commissioner

5.6 Improved funding

Stakeholders reported that more funding is required to support young people with LDA into employment, and they discussed how funding structures and arrangements can be improved. They agreed that in order to allow and encourage effective and reliable employment support services to improve outcomes for young people with LDA, funding should:

- Be long-term (or recurrent)
- Be consistent
- Be flexible
- Allow for innovation in approaches
- Provide absolute clarity about the various requirements and criteria for receiving the funding.

In particular, stakeholders suggested that increased flexibility could allow providers to offer their services to all young people with LDA, including those without EHCPs.

Some funders and commissioners outlined how they have been experimenting with different funding streams. One example was provided of a particular innovative and unique funding process of 'grant funds for employer organisations'. The local authority involved provided grants to individual businesses to encourage them to open or expand their business to employ young people with LDA. This is a relatively new scheme, with only five organisations receiving the grant funds last year. However, this resulted in 19 young people with LDA gaining employment.

6 Improvements and actions

The above sections of this report outline stakeholders' views on what works in relation to supporting young people with LDA into employment. However, stakeholders reported a range of areas for improvement to continue developing understanding of what works and to put it into practice.

Figure 3 provides a summary of improvement areas and actions in relation to understanding what works. It highlights the importance of:

- Strengthening the approach to evaluation across the sector, to support the development of a robust evidence base concerning what works.
- Building on improvements to data collection regarding need and provision, ensure that promising practice is being widely adopted.
- Identifying and building on existing good practice, including sharing and promoting examples of effective working to others.
- Building on promising actions to create local systems that prioritise and support young people with LDA to access employment.
- Considering changes to funding approaches that could be a catalyst for more effective support.

For more information on other areas for improvement and actions, see Report D: Improvements and actions.

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 3: Summary of improvements and required actions in relation to understanding what works

| Improvements | Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders | Relevant to: |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Improve the evidence base concerning what works.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review appropriate national and local data-sets to ensure they collect data on young people with LDA. Ensure it captures data on young people's demographic backgrounds including for example, age, gender, ethnicity, protected characteristics so that analysis can take an intersectional approach. ● 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. ● Ensure providers have the skills, capacity and funding to collect robust data to demonstrate the outcomes they are achieving with young people with LDA. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commissioners ● Policy makers ● Providers |
| <p>Undertake high quality evaluations of provision to develop the evidence base about what works</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fund high quality evaluation of initiatives aimed to support employment outcomes improvement for young people with LDA. ● Ensure capacity for providers and employers to take part and support robust evaluation of initiatives. ● Review and developing what outcomes young people with LDA should be working towards including employment related outcomes measures. ● Review existing outcome measures and/or develop validated outcome measures that can be used by evaluators to measure the impact of provision. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commissioners ● Employers ● Policy makers ● Providers |
| <p>Improve understanding of existing provision and whether it</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider developing system maps to help all parties in local areas understand existing provision which aims to support young people with LDA into employment. Ensure the map is used to improve the system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commissioners ● Employers ● Policy makers |

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| Improvements | Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders | Relevant to: |
|---|---|--|
| incorporates best practice | <p>response for young people with LDA in relation to employment outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Document, protocolise and where possible manualise programmes of support so that successful initiatives can be replicated, scaled and spread if they are found to be effective. ● Consider existing evidence of good practice and assess the quality of provision against these benchmarks. ● Review how information about best practice is being shared with providers, to ensure it is widely understood and adopted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providers |
| Improve understanding on what it takes to create local systems that prioritise and support young people with LDA to access employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build on the promising system responses discussed by stakeholders in the research including prioritising a strategic vision, visible committed leadership, understanding the local system rooted in a needs assessment that could include system mapping, creating strong local networks and improved funding. ● Identify local systems where support for young people with LDA is working well and evaluate what works in their system responses. Develop good practice case studies of those systems to share how they are working and what they are achieving more widely. ● Encourage central and local government to work with key sector stakeholders to support the development of system responses to support outcomes improvement for young people with LDA. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commissioners ● Policy makers |
| Improve understanding of existing funding structures and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map the current existing national and local funding streams that aim to support young people with LDA into employment. Make funding more transparent so that it can be used to encourage commissioners, funders, providers and employers to access and use it to support young people with LDA into employment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commissioners ● Employers ● Policy makers ● Providers |

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Understanding what works

| Improvements | Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders | Relevant to: |
|-----------------|--|--------------|
| improving them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="434 284 1496 392">● Consider longer-term funding for provision which aims to support young people with LDA into employment. This will also help support recruitment and retention of the workforce. | |

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