youth futures
FOUNDATION

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

Improvements and actions

Cordis Bright
October 2023

CordisBright

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

- 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.

- Youth Futures contact details for more info about the report:
    - Dr Amanda Mackey
    - Fivefields, 8-10 Grosvenor Gardens, London, SW10 0DH
    - Amanda.Mackey@youthfuturesfoundation.org

Contents

About the research team

Cordis Bright provides research, evaluation and consultancy aimed at improving public services. You can find out more here: https://www.cordisbright.co.uk

For more information about Cordis Bright or if you have questions about the research please contact:

- Joshua Butt: joshuabutt@cordisbright.co.uk

- Dr Katie Hann: katiehann@cordisbright.co.uk

- Abby Noble: abbynoble@cordisbright.co.uk

- Dr Stephen Boxford: stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk

- Tom Noon: tomnoon@cordisbright.co.uk

October 2023

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	The National Autistic Society (NAS) define autism as: *"a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world."*[1] 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.
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].

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

Term	Definition
Further Education (FE) Colleges	Further Education Colleges provide education to those aged 16 years and older.
Learning disability	The Department of Health and Social Care (2001) define a learning disability as:[3] *"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."* Learning disabilities can vary greatly depending on the individual and therefore the level of support needed will also vary.
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	In this report, stakeholders refers to the commissioners, providers, employers and policy experts/academics who were consulted as part of this research. The views of stakeholders are reported collectively, unless there were views that were specific to an individual group.
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].

October 2023

Term	Definition
	vocational profiling; (3) job finding; (4) employer engagement; and (5) on and off the job support.[4]
Supported internships	Supported internships are for young people with learning difficulties or learning disabilities, who need extra support to get a job.
	Typically, a young person spends the majority of their time on placements with an employer, learning skills for work.
	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]
Work trials	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]
Young people with LDA	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.
	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.

---

[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 the potential areas for improvement are to support young people with LDA into employment and what actions may be required.

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
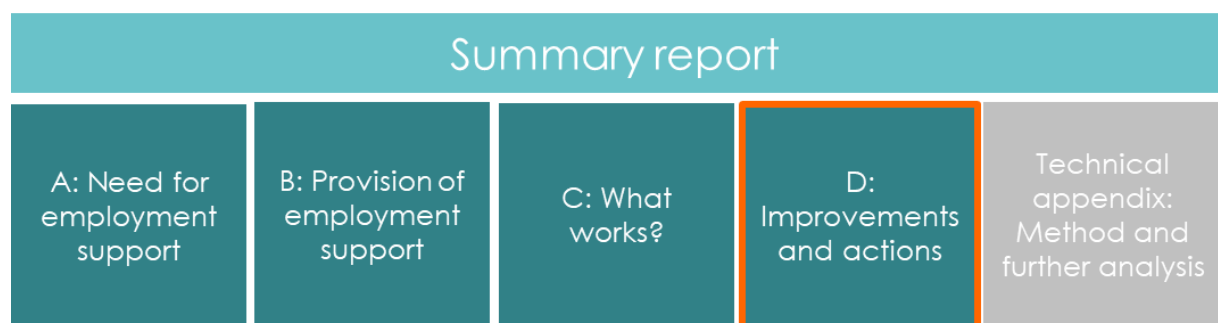
1.2 Summary of research

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?
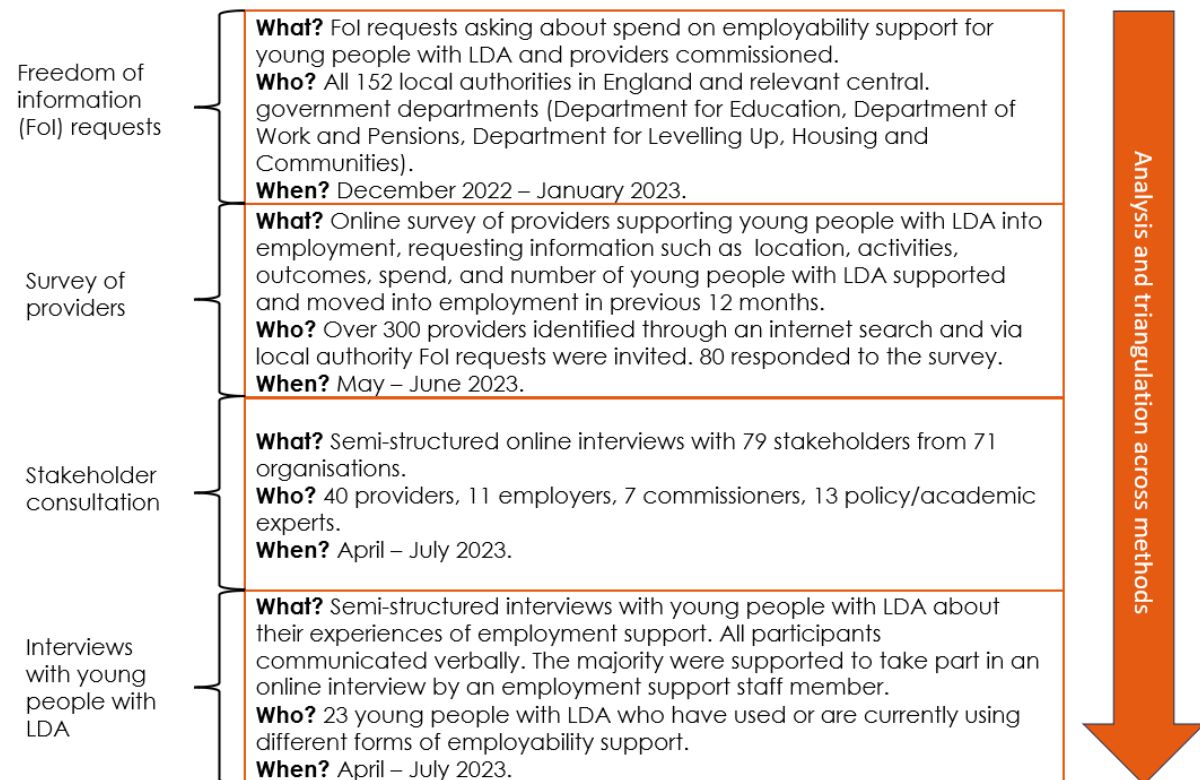
The research is based on a mixed methods approach, summarised in Figure 2. In line with our collaborative approach, all approaches, methods and tools were design by Cordis Bright and agreed with YFF before use in the field. This report has been informed through triangulation of findings from each of 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

Freedom of information (FoI) requests	**What?** FoI requests asking about spend on employability support for young people with LDA and providers commissioned. **Who?** All 152 local authorities in England and relevant central. government departments (Department for Education, Department of Work and Pensions, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). **When?** December 2022 – January 2023.
Survey of providers	**What?** Online survey of providers supporting young people with LDA into employment, requesting information such as location, activities, outcomes, spend, and number of young people with LDA supported and moved into employment in previous 12 months. **Who?** Over 300 providers identified through an internet search and via local authority FoI requests were invited. 80 responded to the survey. **When?** May – June 2023.
Stakeholder consultation	**What?** Semi-structured online interviews with 79 stakeholders from 71 organisations. **Who?** 40 providers, 11 employers, 7 commissioners, 13 policy/academic experts. **When?** April – July 2023.
Interviews with young people with LDA	**What?** Semi-structured interviews with young people with LDA about their experiences of employment support. All participants communicated verbally. The majority were supported to take part in an online interview by an employment support staff member. **Who?** 23 young people with LDA who have used or are currently using different forms of employability support. **When?** April – July 2023.

Analysis and triangulation across 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.

2 Overview and discussion

*"It's not just important that **the work is undertaken but the right work is undertaken**. Speak to people, organisations, businesses to pinpoint what is needed [....] Trial different, innovative ways of working with organisations."*

Funder/Commissioner

2.1 Overview

The following section outlines the different areas for improvement and actions that were identified by stakeholders, young people and through analysis of data in relation to:

- Understanding of needs.

- Understanding of provision.

- Understanding what works.

For detailed analysis, please refer to the reports outlined in Figure 1 *which focus on each of these topics respectively. These should be read in conjunction with this report.*

2.2 Discussion

This research has identified a **broad consensus that young people with LDA often miss out on the opportunity of employment and that progress to change is happening too slowly.**

The research has also identified that many stakeholders have an in-depth understanding of what young people with LDA's needs are and a range of promising practice that can be built upon to support them more effectively into employment.

Stakeholders we spoke to identified a number of areas for improvement and actions that could help improve employment outcomes for young people with LDA. Specific improvements and actions relating to needs, provision and 'what works' can be seen below.

Considering the improvements and actions that are required across all areas in this research, we suggest that the following are areas which need the greatest attention to help improve employment outcomes for young people with LDA:

- **Expand provision to build on what works and address known gaps.**

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

- **Strengthen local partnership working to maximise the impact of support.**

To support the achievement of the above, the research identified some key areas for further development:

- **Strengthening leadership locally and nationally.**

- **Expanding the use of promising practice and models.**

- **Building the evidence-base about what works including improved understanding of need, provision, data collection and evaluation.**

The improvements and actions set out in this report are based on stakeholders' views and suggestions and our analysis and interpretation of them. Not everyone will agree with everything in the following sections but the improvement suggestions and proposed actions are designed to support the improvement of employment outcomes for young people with LDA.

To implement these actions will require resource, political will and leadership and the co-ordination and input of a wide range of stakeholders – including national and local government, service providers, employers, other funders/commissioners, research organisations and experts, schools and colleges and young people with LDA and their families.

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.

3 Understanding of need

> **Understanding of need:** For a more detailed analysis of the understanding of need, see *Report A: Understanding of needs* or the *Summary Report*.

Figure 3 provides a summary of 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.

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

Figure 3: 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	• Review appropriate national and local datasets 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.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers
Further research to understand need for different groups, e.g., by gender, ethnicity, protected characteristics etc.	• 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. This is built on further in Figure 5.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers
Promote a positive mind-set to employment for young	• 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	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
people with LDA.	young people into employment, with a focus on employers to ensure their processes and policies work to be inclusive of young people with LDA. • 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.	• Providers
Ensuring young people with LDA are properly incentivised to work.	• 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.	• Employers • Policy makers • Providers
Horizon scan and take action to future proof employment opportunities for young people with LDA	• 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.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers

4 Understanding provision

> **Understanding of provision:** For a detailed analysis of the understanding of provision, see *Report B: Understanding of provision* or the *Summary Report.*

Figure 4 provides a summary of improvements and actions in relation to the understanding of provision. It highlights the importance of:

- Building a clear and nuanced understanding of existing provision through improved data collection and system mapping.

- Ensuring that provision is available and accessible to people with different needs across the country.

- Building on existing programmes to encourage more providers to offer in-work support.

- Considering how changes to funding and the way local systems operate could provide more effective support.

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

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

Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
Improve understanding of existing provision	• Develop system maps to help all parties understand existing provision which aims to support young people with LDA into employment, as part of a robust national and local needs assessment. Ensure the system response is rooted in evidence for young people with LDA in relation to employment outcomes. • Document, protocolise and, where possible, manualise their programmes of support so that successful initiatives can be replicated, scaled and spread if they are found to be effective. • Review and improve the effectiveness of how information about provision to support young people with LDA in relation to employment is shared across the system. This is built on further in Figure 5.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers
Improve accessibility of employment support for young people with LDA	• Review the eligibility criteria to programmes to ensure that they are open to young people with LDA who need the support. Consideration could be given especially to young people with LDA but without an EHCP and whether alternative assessment of need could be used. • Review how referrals are made to different support and examine whether the pathway to support can be simplified and better joined-up between different providers.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers
Ensure equitable provision of employment support for	• Review how available provision compares to local needs. Ensure that resources are targeted towards local areas and regions where there may be insufficient availability of support. • Map the current eligibility criteria of support and give consideration to whether the support that is available provides options which meet the	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
young people with LDA	requirements of young people with LDA with different levels of need. Give particular attention to those with complex needs or those who do not have an EHCP. • Ensure providers have the skills, capacity and funding to collect robust service level monitoring data which takes into account the action above, i.e., including data on young people's demographic backgrounds. This could aid commissioners to better understand whether needs are being met equitably.	
Ensure the availability of support for young people with LDA in work	• Build on existing programmes to promote in-work support (such as supported employment and supported internships). • Engage with providers who offer other employment support – and therefore may be well placed to deliver in-work support – to explore any barriers to entering this sector. • Promote and encourage more employers to consider participating in supported internship, supported employment or other programmes that offer in-work support. This should include explaining and promoting the support and benefits for employers.	• Commissioners • Employers • Providers
Ensure appropriate support for employers	• Review the availability of support for employers nationally and locally, to ensure that the support is sufficient and meets the different needs that they have. • Review and improve the effectiveness of how information about provision to support young people with LDA in relation to employment is shared with employers, including information about what the benefits are to employers and what support is available to them. • Review how commissioners/funders and providers are recruiting employers and explore whether more action can be taken collectively and at scale, rather than targeting employers one at a time.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
Create local systems that prioritise and support young people with LDA to access employment	• Clarify the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in relation to supporting young people with LDA into employment, with a focus on the role of schools/colleges and local authorities. • Encourage local authorities to develop local strategies which outline how they will improve the rate of employment of young people with LDA in their area, to promote the salience of this issue and provide greater accountability. • Ensure that local authorities have the skills and resources to play a full role in coordinating local provision in their areas.	• Commissioners • Policy makers
Make funding effective and sustainable	• 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, build local expertise and establish sustainable provision. • Review the availability of funding to ensure that it is sufficient to recruit and retain staff with the necessary skills and expertise to deliver high quality support. • Review the criteria associated with national and local funding streams that aim to support young people with LDA into employment. Make funding sufficiently flexible that providers and employers can access resources to meet the full range of needs of young people with LDA.	• Commissioners • Policy makers

5 Understanding what works

Understanding of what works: For detailed analysis of the understanding of what works, see *Report C: Understanding what works* or the *Summary Report.*

Figure 5 provides a summary of improvements 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.

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

Figure 5: Summary of improvements and required actions in relation to understanding what works

Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
Improve the evidence base concerning what works.	Building on improvements to evidence base (see Figure 3): • Ensure providers have the skills, capacity and funding to collect robust data to demonstrate the outcomes they are achieving with young people with LDA.	• Commissioners • Policy makers • Providers
Undertake high quality evaluations of provision to develop the evidence base about what works	• 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 develop 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.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers
Improve understanding of existing provision and whether it incorporates best practice	Building on improvements to data collection concerning provision (see Figure 4): • 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.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers
Improve understanding on what it takes	• 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	• Commissioners • Policy makers

Supporting young people with LDA into employment: Improvements and actions

Improvements	Actions informed by discussions with stakeholders	Relevant to:
to create local systems that prioritise and support young people with LDA to access employment	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.	
Improve understanding of existing funding structures and improving them.	• 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. • 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.	• Commissioners • Employers • Policy makers • Providers

6   Reference List

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

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].

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].

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

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].

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].