



Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The transition from education to employment for young disabled people

Wednesday 23 January 2024

4.10 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Morris of Yardley (The Chair); Lord Bach; Lord Carter of Coles; Lord Laming; Lord Mott; Lord Porter of Spalding; Lord Prentis of Leeds; Lord Shipley; Baroness Stedman-Scott; Lord Willis of Knaresborough.

Evidence Session No. 9

Heard in Public

Questions 108– 120

Witnesses

I: Laura Davis, Chief Executive, British Association for Specialist Employment Support (BASE) and Inclusive Trading CIC; Henry Foulkes, Policy and Public Affairs Lead, Employment Related Services Association.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Laura Davis and Henry Foulkes.

Q108 **The Chair:** Welcome to this session of the Public Services Committee's inquiry into the transition from education to employment for young disabled people. We have two more witnesses with us today. I ask them briefly to say who they are and where they come from.

Laura Davis: I am the chief executive of the British Association for Supported Employment. We are a members' charity that represents over 300 members across the UK.

Henry Foulkes: I am policy and public affairs lead at ERSA—the Employment Related Services Association—which is the trade body for the employment support sector.

Q109 **The Chair:** Can you go through what supported employment is, where it sits in this field and where you get your money from? Can you give a brief overview of your role in this area?

Laura Davis: Supported employment is an evidence-based model that first came about in the 1970s. It was originally designed to support people with a learning disability into good-quality paid work. However, the model works for anyone for whom those mainstream routes to recruitment do not work. It is based on five stages, which I will take you through to bring the supported employment model to life.

The model is based on something called the 'place, train and maintain' model. Historically, disabled and neurodivergent people were made to jump through endless hoops before they were ever let near an employer. I do not know about anyone else in this room, but I have never been ready for any job I have done in my life. I had a certain amount of strengths and then, once I got a job, I layered them up as I went along. The supported employment model is based on that principle. We need to get people into the workplace and train them up as we go along.

The first stage of the five-stage model is about engaging with people—going out and raising ambition for young disabled and neurodivergent people to think about employment as a realistic option for them. We do not adhere to the notion that some people are employable and some are not; we should have an expectation that every young person is thinking about a career. I can personally give hundreds of examples of where I have done that but people have said to me, 'Oh, you'll never get that person a job'. I say, 'I will. It just has to be the right kind of job'.

The next stage is about completing something called a vocational profile, which is a live document that brings together a whole picture of who an individual is—their strengths, talents and aspirations, and what kind of work culture will be right for them. You build up a rich evidence base for that individual.

The next stage is about going out and engaging with employers. Within the supported employment model, employers are an equal partner to the individual. In my experience, they need just as much support as the individuals. It is not about looking through papers and chasing vacancies but about going out and engaging with businesses to understand their business and recruitment needs. You complete something called a job analysis, which builds a rich picture of that business.

The next stage is job matching. You take the vocational profile, which is about the individual, and you take the job analysis, which is about the business, and you match the two together. This is about making sure that everyone can flourish. When you think about that match, you ask not just whether someone can do the job but whether that individual will flourish in that workspace, and whether that business will flourish with that individual in the workspace.

The final stage is about good-quality in-work support and career development. This is about having highly qualified trained staff—trained job coaches—who work alongside individuals to help them layer up their skills within the workplace. Just as often, it is about helping the employer to understand how they remove the barriers throughout the life cycle of an employee to make sure that that individual can not only access the labour market but stay in work.

The next bit is career development, which is so important. Too often, we high-five each other because we get someone a job. I do not know about anyone else, but I am not doing the same job that I was doing when I was 17. It is a good job too—I was a waitress, but I was awful at it; I threw plates at people. We should have conversations with young people about where they want to be in 5, 10 or 15 years' time. That creates a throughput so that employers who develop people leave space for other young people coming through into entry roles and moving through.

This is a rich value-based model. It is very different to employment support. I hear the two terms being used interchangeably as if they are the same thing, but they are not. Both have their place, but supported employment is a clear and defined model that has a rich evidence base, from across the globe, of it working for young people who are disabled or autistic.

Henry Foulkes: There is not much I can add to that, but I can give a real-life example of it happening. An individual called Zahwa was nominated for an ERSA award at the back end of last year. She was a 25 year-old woman with a hearing impairment. In 2019, she met her supported employment adviser, who knew of an opportunity at a local theatre, based on the previous stages that Laura discussed. Zahwa and her adviser arranged an informal chat with the HR manager at the theatre. She was shortlisted and then selected for the role, and she continued to be supported in work by her adviser and with an Access to Work grant to provide a British Sign Language interpreter. She is still in the job and is currently working towards an ACCA accountancy qualification. That is an example of it working very well.

The Chair: That is good. How many organisations are there like yours, and is it spread right across the country?

Henry Foulkes: ERSA represents about 300 organisations that provide employability support more widely, which can deliver the Restart programme. We also have primes and subcontractors that deliver the Restart programme and much smaller local charities that work specifically with disabled young people.

The Chair: Do they use this evidence-based model?

Henry Foulkes: Some of them will, but it is predominantly BASE members that utilise this model.

The Chair: Is this model a little bit of the system or is it growing to be a big part of it?

Laura Davis: It is growing. Supported internships use the supported employment model, with a specific aim at young people with an education healthcare plan. All the inclusive apprenticeship work that is happening is using that five-stage model. Universal Support, which was announced in the Spring Budget, and then increased in the Autumn Statement, is using that five-stage model with model fidelity at the heart of that delivery. So it is really growing. We have about 315 members; they tend to be smaller grass-roots organisations that are delivering the supported employment model.

Funding is patchy. Historically, it was funded through local government, through education and European social funding, which left quite a big hole when that was disbanded. It is a real mix: some areas have well-developed supported employment offers and others have nothing for young people.

Q110 **Lord Bach:** Welcome and thank you for that explanation of supported employment and how it works. My question is what the barriers—if they exist—are to delivering supported employment services and how they can be addressed, perhaps with reference to the current model for commissioning supported employment. As an additional question, how can schools, colleges and universities more effectively engage with supported employment programmes? There is quite a lot in that.

Henry Foulkes: Laura has obviously mentioned the lack of provision in some areas; that is undoubtedly a huge barrier. The lack of awareness of these programmes among employers is definitely a barrier. ERSA members tell me a lot that employers do not know what support is available to them. Young people are also often not aware that supported employment programmes exist. There is definitely a barrier around raising awareness of programmes and what is on offer for employers and young people.

Laura Davis: One of the main barriers to delivering the supported employment model across the UK is that there is no statutory obligation for anyone to deliver supported employment. Local authorities do not

have to do this and do not get measured on it. The ASCOF ratings—the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework—were what underpinned and drove a lot of local authorities to engage in the supported employment arena. Recently, there has been an amendment to those ASCOF ratings, which has taken out two outcomes that relate to employment of people with a learning disability and autism. Originally, it was down to whether the local authorities saw that as a priority, when set against all their many other non-statutory competing priorities, but we are now also concerned that, because those areas that have commissioned supported employment do not have to report across the ASCOF rating for those two employment outcomes, it drives people further away from the model that we know works.

It is such a shame because it brings about real-life savings. A huge cost-benefit analysis was completed for the supported employment model and how much it saves adult social care: every £1 you spend brings about £1.25 back into local authorities. If you took that across the wider social determinants of health inequalities, it would bring other savings into the system. That is a huge barrier.

As I said, there is a real lack of understanding about the difference between generic employment support and supported employment. Look at the outcomes that are achieved by supported internships: 70% of young people that go on one achieve real paid work at the end of it, compared to those generic employability courses that young people might do within college. The lack of understanding, when people think they are delivering supported employment but are actually delivering something else, is a barrier.

On the question about how colleges, schools and universities could better engage with supported employment, there is a whole piece around ensuring that everyone within the SENCO training space understands that the supported employment model has an evidence base and how they could embed it in their curriculum planning. We need to raise ambition hugely within the education system.

I am the mother of three neurodivergent young people; I always say that we are a very 'neurospicy' family. My eldest daughter has an education, health and care plan, and I hear the conversations that happen around who is employable and who is not, and who is worthy of going on an employment-focused programme and who is not. We really need to make sure that we are embedding ambition into education at a much earlier age.

It would be hugely beneficial for schools and colleges to build better partnerships to help break down some of the barriers. Some of the funding means schools and colleges are driven to believing that they must do everything themselves, but they are not necessarily the people who have the expertise. We need to build partnerships with specialist supported employment providers to deliver that element of it, so that young people have better opportunities.

My final piece on how schools and colleges could engage in supported employment better is to think about all the different pathways that young people should be accessing. Supported internships are one of the pathways, but you need an education health and care plan to access them. What about good-quality work experience? What about championing ensuring that young people have access to inclusive apprenticeships? What about actually talking to young people about getting a job, even a Saturday job? There is a focus on putting young people through three-year programmes before they are let anywhere near a job; that might be the right model for some young people but for others it could just be getting a Saturday job. Then you can think about building from there to a first job and a career. There is a large education piece in there.

Q111 Lord Willis of Knaresborough: I found that quite exciting. On engaging young people, I am concerned about two things. First, the actual profile that young people have at the end of their school life, either at 16 or 19, is often woefully deficient in saying what they can do. It might say what they are not able to do. Can you think of a solution to that so that, when an employer wants to engage with someone, they can see what the young person has to offer?

Secondly, on employers, it encouraged me when you said that most of the employers you are using are relatively small. When 90% of employers have fewer than 10 employees, how do you engage them on all these things? Pound by pound, they are trying to manage their business on a daily or weekly basis. There are two things—how you get a better profile that employers can offer and a better profile that young people can be offered.

Henry Foulkes: Laura is more qualified to answer this, but whatever comes of that would need to be designed. There needs to be co-design from employers, careers advisers, schools and young people themselves to drive best outcomes and work out what is possible.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: But what do we do? How is it done?

Laura Davis: For young people, it is about starting the conversations earlier. I am a real storyteller, so if, at any point, I go off at a tangent, tell me to stop. I think about a nursery I was in. They were having conversations with these little people, aged three or four, about what they want to be when they grow up. There was a boy in the room who said he wanted to be a bus, and nobody questioned that, which is fine, but they skipped over the little girl with Down's syndrome. They did not ask her.

When I asked them afterwards, they had a genuine fear: 'I don't want to raise their ambition'. I said, 'Let's have some conversations around how we can address this'. We need to have conversations with young people, at a very early age, where we presume that they are going to get a job. All three of my children know that there is no way that they are sitting at

home and not working: 'You're getting jobs'. That is part of being a citizen in the world.

So some of this is about raising ambition, and some of it is about unpicking motivation. We hear about young people being unmotivated. I did some work with a young lady who told me that she did not want to work, but, actually, the only job anyone had ever offered her was a cleaning job. She was saying, 'I don't want to be a cleaner', not 'I don't want to work'. Supported employment builds on people's strengths and ambitions. It is a high-aspiration model, but it is not unrealistic, because we still have to match it to needs and to the business needs of an employer.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: That is all great, but what is the committee going to ask the Government to do to make this work more effectively for all young people?

Laura Davis: If you could embed vocational profiling as a tool for every young person with SEND, from year six, it would start to build this rich profile of who young people are, what they want to do and what their career ambitions are. We need to make sure that there is job coaching support for young people, getting young people into the workplace and not waiting until they are 35 before they get near an employer. Those are two recommendations that I would make.

On the employer piece, we know that 18,000 employers have signed up to Disability Confident. I talk to lots of them on a weekly basis, and they are telling me that they understand the principle of why they should engage in this space. They do not need anyone else to tell them the business case for diversification and why it is important, but they do not know the how: 'How do I make sure that my recruitment process is accessible? What do I do to offer alternative pathways?' Through the Disability Confident scheme, you should build almost a live toolkit for employers, so that they can understand how to do these things, not just why.

I can give examples of things like embedding working interviews as part of your recruitment process. It does not cost an employer any more money, but it gives someone an opportunity to demonstrate their competencies rather than articulate them, which is half the barrier for people.

Henry Foulkes: I know the next question is on employers but, to give a case study of that happening and how it could happen, one of ERSA's members is Enable Works, based in Scotland. It worked with Public Health Scotland, which went to Enable Works and said, 'We want to diversify our workforce and tap into this talent pool'. Enable Works offered training and consultancy on inclusive recruitment practices. It redefined job descriptions, created accessible job adverts and designed inclusive interviews. Since then, Public Health Scotland has embarked on a programme of training and designing workshops on the benefits of EDI,

developing employees, disability awareness and neurodiversity awareness. That is a real-life example of this happening.

To go back to what was said earlier, there are organisations out there—ERSA and BASE members—that have the skills and the willingness to work with employers. You just need to join those dots.

Q112 Lord Prentis of Leeds: I am referring to your written evidence, which is great, and what you have just been saying about things that need to be done.

In your written evidence, you say that 'BASE believes in a zero-rejection policy, where everyone who wants to work should have access to the right support to enable them to do so, which is not always shared across the system at a local or national level'. You go on to say: 'There is a lack of ambition within the Education sector', and that, 'There is a lack of specialist tailored careers and guidance support, especially within mainstream education'. You are making very powerful points and you have talked about some of the things that we should be looking at.

Given what you have said in your written evidence, it would be useful for me at least if you could write a note setting out some of the things that you believe could counter some of the criticisms you made in those paragraphs.

Laura Davis: We would welcome the opportunity to present. We have ideas, and we have evidence of where it is working. An example is Kent, where they have embedded vocational profiling into mainstream schools. We often talk about young people with SEND being in a specialist setting but, actually, lots of young people are in a mainstream setting where they do not have that specialist, tailored, differentiated support that young people within a SEND school have. Embedding that good-quality vocational profiling by qualified staff who have job-coaching support which wraps around it is achieving some positive outcomes for young people through a mixture of different employment routes, whether internships, apprenticeships or straight into work.

Lord Prentis of Leeds: You are obviously passionate about it.

Laura Davis: Absolutely. I have been working in the supported employment sector for over 20 years. I started as a job coach, so I have gone out and worked with employers, supported people in the workplace and helped with that career progression. As I say, I am now experiencing some of the barriers that exist in the system with my own children. I can see ways in which we could break them down, so that every young person has the opportunity to gain meaningful paid employment.

Q113 Lord Carter of Coles: Can I take us back to employers? They are obviously critical to the whole thing, and we have 18,000 signed up. How many are really active and how many are just box-ticking? What do they need to engage? Are the existing government programmes good enough to drive that engagement?

Henry Foulkes: As you said, there are 18,000. In the first two of the three levels of Disability Confident, there is no assessment from an outside organisation, and you do not have to employ a single disabled person. The DWP's own report on the Disability Confident scheme found that more than a third of employers that had signed up to the scheme failed to employ a single disabled person after they joined. There needs to be some transparency or form of auditing employers. I understand the idea behind it, but there needs to be a way of showing or seeing how employers are improving practices.

I like the idea that Laura suggested earlier about connecting employers. If employers are asking, 'How do we do it?', connect them to ERSA or BASE members, whether through the chamber of commerce or things like it. There are definitely ways to join the two together.

Laura Davis: There are two things for me. One is about reporting. At the moment, employers do not have to report on the numbers of disabled and neurodivergent people they employ. It would be really helpful. This is not about battering employers over the head. It is about saying 'How do you know where you need to go if you don't know where you are?' We have seen this with gender pay-gap reporting, where we started to see real movement. We need the same thing, with disability reporting set out in the disability employment charter. BASE signs up to all those principles.

So that is one thing, but I do not think that alone would make the difference. There is something about having some wraparound support so that employers can go to an organisation and say, 'Okay, we're now Disability Confident level 2. We want to be leaders. How do we go about it? What do we now have to do to ensure that we're breaking down those barriers across the total life cycle of an employee?'

Again, it is not just about early careers planning. We need to make sure that people come into the labour market and stay there. Too often, what happens is young people might make it into a job, but, if the right support is not there, they dip back out again. The damage that does to young people is huge, but the damage it does to employers is equally important, because they then say, 'It didn't work. I'm never doing that again'. The challenge I always give is: 'Would you be happy to say that about any other group?' I ask if they would say, 'I've employed a middle-class white woman and it didn't work, so I'm never doing it again'. You would never say that.

When it comes to employing disabled people, employers are scared of getting it wrong—even with things like some of the language. In the phrase 'reasonable adjustment', what does 'reasonable' mean? I have never heard anyone ask for an adjustment that was not reasonable. We know that there are lots of myths around the amount of time that disabled people take off work, for example. Equally, it can be dangerous to talk about everybody having a superpower, because that builds people up as being somehow superhuman, and they are not; we are all human beings.

Employers need a lot more support, but they also need to be held to account. I would want there to be some nuance to the reporting. You could say, 'We recruit a number of disabled people', but does that include anyone with a learning disability or anyone who is autistic—or are we thinking just about people with musculoskeletal conditions? That is also important, but they are not the group most marginalised from our working community.

Lord Carter of Coles: Like many others, you are on the record as saying that it is a postcode lottery. Which are the successful postcodes? What are their common characteristics? Can you give an indication of what people need to do?

Laura Davis: Where it works well, there is a local authority that absolutely understands that this is not just about getting people a job but about a system-wide change that helps to save money across the whole economy. If you get someone into a job, they are less likely to go to their GP and less likely to need far more expensive adult social care. It is about that join-up within the system. It is about good connections between education and adult social care. For me, it is always about joining the dots.

In the areas that do it well, there is almost a seamless process where you do not have to fall off the cliff to then rejoin the system. I know we will come to Universal Support, but one of the important things is that we should not make people fall out the system to get back into it. We need to make sure that there are ways of joining the dots so that, from the person's perspective, they are just transitioning from one part of their life to another, potentially with different people supporting them.

Lord Shipley: What you said was very helpful. Do you have any examples of employers helping each other? You said that employers are scared of getting it wrong, and I can understand that, but do you have any examples of, say, chambers of commerce or other groupings of employers—such as the Federation of Small Businesses—that are helping to deliver solutions to the problems you identified? Do they not do that?

Laura Davis: There are some good examples of where employers are starting to champion the models that we know work, such as the Disability Confident leaders group, which is part of the Disability Confident scheme. I am hungry to say, 'How do we now go out and start to celebrate and advocate for the models that we know work?' For example, Coca-Cola and Amazon are starting to go out and mentor other organisations that are scared.

On the small and medium enterprises or organisations—as was rightly said, they make up the vast majority—great work is happening within local chambers of commerce. We are bringing together things like reverse job fairs, where schools will run an opportunity for employers across the county to come and meet young people. Rather than asking the employer to host a fair—saying, 'Can you celebrate and bring young people in?'—you bring the employers to the young people, who demonstrate their

competencies and the things they are great at. That feels like a safe way for employers to come and dip their toes in, see what it is like and meet young people.

Q114 **Lord Laming:** Thank you very much for your evidence, which is most helpful. Can we turn to how effective government programmes are? If we had a Minister here, we would ask them this question and he or she would reel off a whole series of programmes. It could sound very impressive. They would mention Disability Confident, Access to Work, Jobcentre Plus and all the rest of it. It is difficult for us to understand how well these programmes are working. You must come across them all the time in your work, so what is your impression? We want to make some recommendations to the Government, and it would be helpful if you could tell us what you think about these programmes.

Henry Foulkes: We spoke about Disability Confident, so I will speak about Access to Work. I mentioned the story of Zahwa, the hearing-impaired lady. She was in work for three months before the Access to Work grant came in and, by all accounts, three months is quite quick at the moment. The numbers say there is usually a wait for five to six months for the grant to come in. That sums up the problems that individuals and employers face with Access to Work at the moment.

On Jobcentre Plus, due to work coaches' time constraints and the sizes of their caseloads, it is difficult for them to provide comprehensive employability support. I have been told that lots of young people are not even aware of what a disability employment adviser is, so it is obviously a little lost in translation. Due to the nature of the time when work coaches in jobcentres see people, I believe that their role should be to understand local referral routes and local providers, and then to refer young people out appropriately.

The Chair: On that person who had to wait for three months for the funds, did they not work or did they work under the most challenging conditions? What happened?

Henry Foulkes: In that case, the employer covered the cost for the first three months.

Lord Laming: Not every employer would do that, though.

Laura Davis: These programmes have huge potential. We are incredibly lucky to have things like Access to Work. We do a lot of work across Europe and the globe. We are part of the World Association for Supported Employment, and we are envied. But is it executed in a way that makes the most sense for individuals and business? No. We can tell you stories of small to medium enterprises that could not take someone on because they could not get Access to Work funding in time. You cannot tell someone, 'I'm going to employ you, but, by the way, for the first six months you're not going to have the specialist tech that you need in order to do your job'. Small to medium enterprises cannot afford those six months where that person essentially cannot do their job.

We need to ensure that there are ways of speeding up the Access to Work process—I know that there is work on this at the moment—and of making it easier. Making an Access to Work claim is still convoluted. It recently brought in a framework so you do not have to do things like three quotes. But the framework quite often does not cover the total cost of a job coach. So we are hearing that, historically, local authorities would subsidise it—you would get £25 but it actually costs £45 to have a job coach. In the past, local authorities were funding that, but they simply cannot do that any more. We are hearing about providers saying, 'I'm not sure we can deliver this any longer because of the amount of money that we're owed through Access to Work'. We need to treasure it and make sure that it is working in a way that means people do not have to jump through endless hoops.

There is a way of connecting it with business better. I have recently had conversations with some employers that said that they use it purely to get the report—not to fund the equipment or the support that someone might need, but just to get the recommendations on what someone needs. Is that not a bizarre way of using Access to Work?

The Chair: Who does that? Who wants the report?

Laura Davis: Some employers know that it would take too long to get the actual funding, but they are going through the holistic assessment within an Access to Work process in order to get the set of recommendations for what the individual needs, and then they never actually apply for the grant. That is still a whole chunk of time that could be used for somebody else who is going to go through the whole process. There are some interesting things around why employers feel that that is the only route they can go down to get support and guidance they need about the equipment and other things that individuals might need.

On Jobcentre Plus, I agree that there are often time constraints on how long they can work with people. For example, in the Health and Work programme, which looked at working with disabled people, you only have a certain amount of time you can work with somebody. This is where you tend to find that the zero-rejection piece does not come in, because if you only have six months to work with somebody, you are going to pick the people who are the easiest, and those closest to the labour market. We know that, for universal support, it is going to be a 12-month wraparound programme, which is a good amount of time to get to know someone and make sure you are not cherry-picking.

For me, it is about how do we join the system, so that Jobcentre Plus is part of community employment for people, rather than a separate thing. We hear of lots of people who are petrified of going into a Jobcentre, because it equates to 'You're going to take my benefits away from me'. We have to separate those conversations. You cannot say, 'I want you to have high ambitions and think about a job, but, by the way, if we start talking about a job, you and your family might be worse off, because we're going to take your benefits away from you'. We really have to try to separate those two conversations.

Q115 **Lord Laming:** Could each of you give two recommendations to government to simulate the matters you have been setting out? What are the two things the Government could do now that would really make a big difference?

Henry Foulkes: I would sort out the Access to Work backlog by hiring more assessors.

The Chair: Is it a capacity thing, and more people would solve the problem?

Henry Foulkes: Yes, definitely. The second one would be a marketing campaign so that employers understand programmes like Access to Work and young people are aware of it.

Laura Davis: Am I allowed only two?

The Chair: We will come back to this question later, so you will get another chance.

Laura Davis: The first is to embed supported employment into education at the youngest point. Let us make it from year six.

Then we need to make sure that it is a statutory requirement that young people, with a learning disability and autism, should have an employment pathway. Then it is not left up to chance whether someone engages with it or not. It becomes their duty. Should that not be part of the young person's education? Why are people going through education if it is not about thinking about having a career at the end of it? So that would be my second recommendation.

If these are too big, I can lower my ambition a bit.

The Chair: No, do not do that.

Laura Davis: We like high ambition.

Q116 **Lord Prentis of Leeds:** I have been asked to talk to you about one of the Government's programmes. What is your view of the Government's Universal Support programme?

Henry Foulkes: The announcement was certainly welcomed by ERSA members. It is a programme based on voluntary engagement with provision and it leads to a closer join-up of health and work outcomes. I have been told that there has been some co-design between employers and health professionals, which is also welcome.

But it is too early to have a fully formed opinion. Most of the ERSA members I speak to are still not fully aware of what universal support is. There is no set timeline for the commissioning nor for the delivery dates. We still do not know the geographical areas where it will be commissioned. Once we know more, particularly with regard to the geographical commissioning point, there will be areas in the UK that will be expertly placed to commission a programme like this, particularly

some of the larger combined authorities. But there will be areas that do not have any experience of commissioning a programme like this, and they will need support from DWP and providers on what good commissioning looks like.

- Q117 **Lord Prentis of Leeds:** There has been a discussion about the level of ambition for the Universal Support programme, and how more and more is being placed in its capabilities. Do you think the planners have the right level of ambition?

Henry Foulkes: As I said, the initial announcement was welcomed. The numbers are quite large, but not massive, and will not make a massive dent in, for example, closing the disability employment gap. It is a start, but more needs to be done. Universal Support is not going to be the only way to close the disability employment gap; there will be other ways. I think it is too early to properly have an opinion.

- Q118 **Lord Prentis of Leeds:** It is coming in 2024 and there is a hype around whether this will actually help young disabled people to transition from education to work. How far do you think the programme goes to enable a young disabled person to use it to transition into work?

Laura Davis: From a BASE perspective, we really support the Universal Support programme, as long as it is commissioned in the right way. You cannot say to local areas, 'By the way, you are now delivering supported employment', without any wraparound support for commissioners to know what 'good' looks like. I have worked in local authorities and community-interest companies, and our members work in partnership with them all the time. We need to make sure that the right thing is commissioned, because there is a very clear evidence base for what works, and that it has that five-stage model fidelity. It has to be commissioned in the right way with the right support, so that local areas have an organisation they can come back to and say, 'This isn't quite working. How can you help us?'. The wraparound support has to be there.

On young people, one recommendation we would make is that young people should not have to fall out of education in order to access Universal Support. We know who young people are and where they are in their educational journey. Supported internships, for example, are a really good example. The outcome rates are amazing: 70% of people are moving into supported employment, but let us talk about the 30% who are not. If you have delivered supported internships, you know who the 30% are by that last rotation.

So our recommendation would be that Universal Support kicks in half way through the last rotation, so that a young person has a seamless journey out of education and into employment support, rather than saying 'I can't work with you until you've finished your education journey'. A summer holiday is a very long time for a 19 or 20-year old to get back into playing on their Xbox and not engaging with employment, so we think

that piece is really important. So it is about making sure that those transitions are supported.

Some areas are far more equipped to deliver this and to get up and running really soon. We know there are areas where you could say to them, 'Tomorrow, you've got to do universal support', and they would embed it beautifully. Other areas will need a lot more support. It would be interesting to connect areas that are prepared with those that are not. It goes back to the point about the ingredients of success and how we make sure that we are connecting them with the areas that are fresh and new to this.

My last point is about making sure that the workforce delivering this is trained. There is a lot of evidence that trained job coaches achieve better employment outcomes for young people. So we want to make sure that, as part of the plans in the regional areas that are delivering universal support, they are not doing the classic thing of saying, 'Yesterday, you were a learning support assistant and, by the way, today you're a job coach'.

We see that happening a lot in education. Providing job-coaching support is a very specific skill set. You have to be a mediator between the young person and the employer, and you need to know enough about employment law to support an employer. You have to understand a bit about organisational development and HR. It is a very specific skill set. There should be a training piece that goes alongside universal support to make sure that the workforce delivering it does the right thing.

Henry Foulkes: I have sat here today and commented on the lack of awareness of other government schemes, so for Universal Support to be a success young people and employers need to know what it is. I think we are long way off from that at the moment.

The Chair: Of the 70% who get work, what are the figures for how long they remain in work, particularly with the employer they have their first job with?

Laura Davis: We are doing analysis looking at that, so I might have to send the exact figures to you afterwards—women of a certain age do not want to get it wrong. We know that areas that have a supported employment provider as one of the partners achieve significantly better retention rates than an education provider on its own.

Q119 **Baroness Stedman-Scott:** This is your moment if you would like to make policy recommendations to make life better for the people we are here to serve. Let us limit them to two, and you can write to us with the other 500.

Laura Davis: A policy I would recommend is a range of employment pathways for young people. At the moment, we have heavy investment in supported internships, which we hugely support because they work, but they are for a particular group of young people. You need to have an education, health and care plan to access them, and we know that not

everybody needs that full year of wraparound support. In education there needs to be as much investment into all the different pathways—supported internships, accessible apprenticeships and good-quality study programmes where young people access employment.

We know about making sure that employers are incentivised. Through T-levels there is an incentive for employers to take on young people, but we hear from employers that they are not working with local SEND schools. Why would they, when they can get payment if they take a T-level student? Something about making sure that we prioritise those young people who are the furthest from the labour market would be a really good recommendation.

The other bit is training educators so that we raise that ambition, with the presumption of employability and employment for young people at the end of education.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: That was three, but I will not hold it against you.

Henry Foulkes: It is a bit of a cop-out to say the same two I said earlier.

The Chair: You can expand on them if you want to. If those are your two recommendations, do not feel that you have to think of any more.

Henry Foulkes: We definitely need to sort out Access to Work backlogs and then run a marketing campaign to educate employers on the current support available to them.

The Chair: That matches one of the recommendations made in the first panel session. It is good to have two of you make the same recommendation.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: I have a real thing about getting somebody into work being one thing but keeping them there being another. Do you think it would be a good idea if people were judged on the numbers they get into work and the numbers still there six or 12 months later? Would you recommend that?

Laura Davis: Yes, absolutely. Model fidelity is about getting somebody not only a job but a sustained job outcome at six months. This is not about somebody still having a job in two weeks; six months is the point at which they have passed their probation period. We want to know that the employer is as positive about that person joining their organisation as the individual is about working there.

Q120 **Lord Shipley:** I am hoping that you might share more evidence about access to T-levels. To what extent are they successful for all cohorts of young people? I do not necessarily want to draw you out on that now, but any evidence that you can supply to us will be great.

I want to check, because in your reply you did not use the word

'statutory', but I remember you saying about 20 minutes ago that there should be statutory entitlements. I assume that in your reply to Baroness Stedman-Scott you meant that these would be statutory requirements.

Laura Davis: Absolutely. It should be a statutory responsibility on local authorities that every young person with a special educational need or disability has access to employment.

The other thing is making sure that those organisations lead by example. I think the Civil Service should lead by example. The Civil Service recruitment process is not accessible, and I cannot think about somebody with a learning disability or autism managing to navigate their way through it. As well as going out to employers and telling them what they should be doing, the Government should be leading on that. We would be very happy to help them think about what that looks like, of course.

The Chair: That is a very good point. We are very grateful. I am sure that, without exception, we all have a far better understanding of your area of work and can see its value and better visualise its place within the wider system. You will get the transcript, so please check it. If you have any evidence of the things you have said, or any more examples that you think would be good for the report, please send them in. They still count as evidence. Thank you.