



Public Services Committee

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

Wednesday 28 February 2024

3 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Morris of Yardley (The Chair); Lord Bach; Lord Blencathra; 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. 12

Heard in Public

Questions 154 - 170

Witnesses

I: Scott Richardson-Read, ARC Scotland and Scottish Transitions Forum; Heather Hall, CEO, The Usual Place; Alex Harrison, Disability Equality Officer, Disability Wales.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Scott Richardson-Read, Heather Hall and Alex Harrison.

Q154 **The Chair:** Welcome to this session of our inquiry. We are getting towards the end of taking our evidence and we are delighted to have three witnesses, two from Scotland and one from Wales, today. I will start by asking them to themselves very briefly introduce and tell us a sentence or two about the organisations with which they are involved.

Heather Hall: Thank you very much for welcoming us to this committee meeting today. I am the chief executive of an organisation called Inspired Community Enterprise Trust, which trades as The Usual Place in Dumfries, along with doing other things. We provide training, learning and work opportunities for young disabled people, people with additional support needs, people with learning disabilities, autistic young people, and people with other sensory impairments.

Scott Richardson-Read: Thank you so much for having me. It has been nice to visit London. I am the policy development worker for a charity called ARC Scotland. It is a UK-wide charity. We work primarily on projects. We have three projects that we run. One is supporting offenders with learning disabilities. One is the National Involvement Network and is about being involved in care for people with learning disabilities primarily, and autism. We also run the Scottish Transitions Forum, which I am part of and which I am here to talk to you about today. We are also a social enterprise that provides training and puts the voice of lived experience at the heart of service delivery. That is what we do in a nutshell.

Alex Harrison: I am the disability equality officer at Disability Wales, which is the national umbrella organisation in Wales of disabled people's organisations. We work with the Welsh Government, disabled people and charities to improve their rights and to ensure that disabled people's thoughts and views are always heard.

Q155 **The Chair:** Thanks very much. I know from what you have just said that you do a very wide range of activities in this area. However, as you know, our report will try to focus in particular on the transition from education to employment. In that area, could you expand a little on what the organisation does, with some feeling for what has been successful? What are the positives or, indeed, the problems that you have had?

Scott Richardson-Read: Gosh, how long do you have?

The Chair: I was going to say without writing a book.

Scott Richardson-Read: I started the Scottish Transitions Forum back in 2012. I was employed primarily through the Scottish Government's Support in the Right Direction self-directed support funding to solve the transitions puzzle in Scotland. It is quite simple, and that is why we are in the committee today, right?

Primarily, the Scottish Transitions Forum is a member-led organisation. We have over 1,200 members now. It is made up of multiple professionals—teachers, social workers, healthcare workers, taxi drivers, support assistants, basically anyone who has a role to play in transitions, because we look at it as a holistic ecosystem rather than focusing on employment and education, although that is part of it.

We work primarily at the strategic policy level in the Scottish Government and Parliament. Three of us work in the team. I work primarily with local authorities on the framework that we have developed recently, which I can touch on in a bit, and a group of young people called the Divergent Influencers, who are the lived experience at the heart of the decision-making on strategy and policy that we do in the Scottish Government. My two colleagues work with parents and carers, and the other one works primarily with local authority leads. We spread that weight between us.

The Chair: Is it all young people transitioning, or do you work with older people as well?

Scott Richardson-Read: Our age remit is 14 to 25, but the caveat with the 25-year-olds is that we also work up to the age of 30. I use the phrase “additional support needs”, and, just to put a pin in that, that means all young people with a disability. It just saves listing the alphabet of impairment.

So, as I said, our remit is 14 to 25, with a lead-in to 30-plus, because young people who have, say, a profound learning disability tend to transition later on in life. Housing, employment, confidence, education issue, benefits are all issues. So we tend to work up to the age 30 bracket for that reason.

The Chair: That makes sense.

Alex Harrison: As we are an umbrella organisation, we do not provide the front-line services ourselves but we do help to mould them and advise other organisations on doing that. We have seen some good case studies. Scope runs a good programme for young disabled people as they are coming out of school. Often they find themselves getting lots of support in school if they are disabled, but once they finish their compulsory education a lot of young disabled people report that they feel they have been dropped suddenly and do not know where to start looking for work, especially if they need particular work that best matches what they can do as a disabled person.

We love the Scope schemes that they have. They work one on one with disabled people to discover what their impairment is and the work that they can do. Even though they are disabled, they are good at finding what their strengths are. We find that a lot of young disabled people face an awful lot of disabling barriers, not only physically but in attitudes. That is not just from others but from the young people themselves, who do not believe in their skills or their worth.

It is good that Scope and some other schemes we have seen have had a focus not only on the end result of getting employment but on making the young disabled person feel worthy of employment and believing in their skills more. We think it works best when disabled people are alongside charities that work with them, especially for the different impairments. They will be the experts on how best we can engage with these young people.

We have seen some amazing programmes and projects out there that charities do for young people. They are, sadly, often quite small charities because of different funding and being quite criteria-specific. This quite often means that the young person needs to have something negative already, such as already being out of work for an extended time, rather than getting help immediately when they finish their education.

We can see that there are gaps that need to be bridged between disabled people getting a lot of support in school and not getting a lot of support to find the right kind of work. Standard job-seeking activities do not match with a lot of disabled people and what they can and cannot do.

The Chair: That is helpful. Heather, your experience is slightly different.

Heather Hall: Yes. We are a hands-on delivery organisation. I am the co-founder of The Usual Place, which grew directly out of young people's voice in 2011. I was working as a development manager for a representative people's organisation, and I realised that young people were not directly involved in having their say and that Dumfries and Galloway had one of the lowest levels of employment for young disabled people and one of the highest levels of institutional support.

Young people told us, "We want that to be different. We want to work. We want people to have an expectation that we can work". They have led all our work. They come into us with one story about themselves—that they cannot do anything, they are hopeless and they are not able to achieve. They watch their non-disabled peers go on to higher education and education apprenticeships, and that is not there for them. It is about learning that they can work and they can go on to do something different. That is exactly what they have done: proved everybody wrong, got into good jobs with a decent income, set up their own businesses, and moved into mainstream courses.

The important thing about our work is that it is led directly by young people, by what they are saying and what they want to do. Everything that we do is built on their strengths and their gifts and looking at where we can work with them to enable them to move on. The surprise for me, and for us all, was that although we are based in a community café setting, most of the young people who leave us to go to work do not go to work in hospitality. They have gone to work in retail, in care—delivering it, not just receiving it—in administration, and all sorts of different occupations.

Young people come in with so little ambition and sense of their own self-worth. They might have had a goal or a plan, but they have not really understood that. The minute they get in and start to develop that confidence and that self-worth and start to think, "I'm really worth something here and that ambition I had is achievable", our job is to enable young people in that way. That is everything we do, although we do deliver a café service and event space as part of that.

The Chair: To get a cup of tea. When they are moving to other employment, do you run a service for making links with other employers or helping in the transition, or is that led by them as well?

Heather Hall: Yes, we absolutely do that. That is another thing that young people have led the way on.

The Chair: Could you say a bit about that?

Heather Hall: That is about nurturing employers. We just fell into that, really. There is that gap from the work that we do in enabling people to get mainstream qualifications, but that is okay. People learn to work in the café and learn all the skills they need. Transferring that into another workplace is another challenge. So we have started to work directly with employers. We engage with employers, contact employers, and start building relationships with employers. Then we introduce them to young people. We have done work experience, and our job is to go into that employer and work with just enough support so that we do not overwhelm them. It is about engaging with the team that will be around that young person, enabling them to see that it is part of their job to make sure that young person succeeds.

Q156 **The Chair:** We will come back to that later, so I will not go down that avenue. Scott, I have seen the framework that you have, and, Alex, I know that you are working as an umbrella organisation. Am I right in thinking that for those you work with it is very successful, but it is only a drop in the ocean compared to all the people out there? Or was it a drop in the ocean and now it is getting to be lots of drops in the ocean? Give us a sense of the capacity, the number of people you have touched and the overall situation in Scotland and Wales.

Scott Richardson-Read: The work we have done has been a 10-year journey. Fixing transitions is hard, especially when you look at it in an ecosystem fashion. Employment and education for young people do not happen in a vacuum, especially for young people with additional support needs. They will need health support, social care support and extra employment support. Transport is a huge issue. Benefit changeovers are a huge issue. So we have worked with our partners across Scotland. Bear in mind that we only have 32 local authorities compared to the 300-odd in England. We have worked with a third of those to roll out the framework through the pandemic, which was a job to do. It has made huge differences at that strategic combined working level. This is why I am glad that Heather is here, because Heather is at the coalface level.

We have been working primarily with the NHS, Education Scotland, teachers, you name it, all those strategic bodies, to make sure that the guidance, the legislation and the policy all fit together. It was me taking a helicopter view of all that across all the different environments, if you like. It was the first time anyone has looked at what I call a legislation salad—if that is a phrase that we can get behind—to make sense of it for people and to provide that touchstone. Even though we have a membership of only 1,000 people, those 1,000 people touch others. We have done intensive work in three local authorities to prove that the framework and the digital tools support all that. The framework is very similar to *How Good is Our School?* I do not know if you are familiar with that publication, but it is something that education does. They rate their school. We did not want to massively reinvent the wheel. It is about where you sit. Are you thinking about the work that you should be doing? Are you delivering it or are you working it out in the middle?

I can say for certain that we have done the work with the 10 local authorities and it is successful. With the data-gathering tool that sits alongside that, we know that if we can reach 30% of parents, carers and young people in Scotland and gather their data through a tool called Compass. It does other things than gather data, but if they start to use that, we can collect over 300 different data points of information about how transition is going for each of those individuals across Scotland and aggregate that to give not only a national picture of what needs to improve short term and long term, but local authority spotlight examples, for instance. So I can tell you that that is the reach and impact that we have gone for. How many young people that has reached I cannot quite quantify for you, I am afraid.

The Chair: That gives us a good idea.

Alex Harrison: What we see as the umbrella organisation and when we talk to disabled people themselves is that what exists is brilliant, but it would always be better to have more capacity. We do have young people coming to us and saying that they have been told that there was not enough capacity in a project for them to join as well, or that there is not enough funding for their access needs, such as if they need a BSL interpreter or something. Whatever the capacity, there are always young people who want that service and appreciate it being there. We have yet to have a service or know people who run a service that is not used to capacity when it is about young people and employment and engaging with them.

Q157 Lord Willis of Knaresborough: First, thank you. I have looked forward to this session today, because it is good to see people working in the real situations.

Scott, I read through your stuff and the programme of expectation, if you like, but I could not find any evidence about how this is actually working. How are the local authorities and the Government working with you to create frameworks that allow it to be spread without having a charity, which is a relatively small charity, having to do that? Perhaps you could

say what those barriers are that have prevented the Scottish Government or the Scottish local authorities picking up your ideas, if they are successful—I will come back to that in a second—and putting them into view. Could you briefly say what the plans are to scale it?

Scott Richardson-Read: Transition is not a sexy subject. It is important, but it is not a mandatory thing that people have been mandated to fix.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Should it be?

Scott Richardson-Read: It probably should be, yes. That would be an ask: if we make it mandatory, what does that look like?

In Scotland, we have worked in very much a relational way. We have to bring people with us on the journey, because we are not there with a stick; we are there with a carrot. I have to say that the good will of local authorities and the Scottish Government is there and is huge, but they are also then drawn into crisis, child protection, adult protection, further education, funding, teachers leaving in droves across the whole of the UK. They are driven in different directions. So one of the hardest things for us to do was to maintain that focus on transitions when there was a non-mandatory framework—the framework we have created is a non-mandatory framework.

We are now at a stage where the Scottish Government are creating a transition strategy for the whole of Scotland based on the work that we have done. We did a lot of work to create the groundswell around the fact that we invest so much money in young people with additional support needs that dropping them off a cliff when they get to 18 seems ludicrous. For us, it is about that spend to prevent later the impact that these young people will have on—

Q158 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** Okay. Let me pick that up. There are a couple of issues from your Principles into Practice, which I liked. The committee very much appreciated those. On the 14 to 25 bit, is there any evidence that shows that that is being observed literally beyond the age of 18, or does it just simply drop off the cliff as you have suggested?

Scott Richardson-Read: The transitions work?

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: No. It is about what we as a committee should be suggesting to ensure that transition goes right through to the age of 25.

Scott Richardson-Read: In terms of the Scottish legislative landscape, things stop at 18. Getting it right for every child stops. Young people go on to be young adults, and all the wraparound services stop. We are working on getting it right for everybody in Scotland. They are doing a transitions element trial for the SHANARRI indicators—I do not know whether you are aware of those; they are Safe, Healthy, and all of that—and how they apply to adults across the piece so the language will be joined together.

We have done a lot of work with local authorities about that handshake on from paediatrics into adult healthcare. Sadly, there will still always be a reassessment element when it comes to adult health and social care. You leave children's services and you get reassessed for everything. However, we are working with the Scottish Borders Council and others to create a youth-focused strategy now. It is a focus on 14 to 25 year-old strategy at local authority level that can deliver what is in the framework and keep hold of that transitions element. Does that answer the question?

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Do you feel, though, that without some primary legislation by the Scottish Government this will not work? Yes or no?

Scott Richardson-Read: A Bill went through that potentially would have worked, but it was not written very well so it would have added to the issue. What will work is legislation that is created in co-production with local authorities to give them the powers and the strengths they need and the voice of young people to present that to Parliament.

Q159 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** Before I leave you to have a sleep, the other point in the principles was one that is at the heart of this transition, which is about having the access to information. Is there anything happening in Scotland—I will ask you in Wales as well, so do not go to sleep there either—that gives us an idea as to what we should be presenting to the Government here on this whole business of access to information? That seems to us to be a major problem; there are no real criteria around that.

Scott Richardson-Read: Yes. We have solved that issue in Scotland by creating a tool called Compass. Briefly—I can send you more information about this, because we will be here for ever—if you are a parent or a young person, you can go on to it and it works out where you are in your transitions journey. It works out what duties—the musts, shoulds and coulds—should be happening, and gives you the information by asking you questions. It will say, "Do you know what guardianship is? Do you know what a package of care is?" We know that people tend to get all the information—and Heather can talk to this—in a big bundle, and it is overwhelming, or they do not get any. This tool delivers it in a bespoke, proportionate, journey-filled way. For the young people it does the same thing; it points them in the direction of information that is aimed at young people with additional support needs.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: When I looked at this on the internet, I could find very little evidence that shows that anybody has picked it up to work with it. Is it just a dream or is it actually happening in reality?

Scott Richardson-Read: Yes. It was launched only in June last year and we have over 1,100 users already. We have just launched an interim impact report. If you would like, I can send that.

The Chair: That would be very helpful.

Q160 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** That would be very useful for us. I am sorry, I will leave it there because I will get shouted at in a minute.

Alex, could I ask you the same questions as regards Wales? Is anything like this happening in Wales? This is about the two fundamental questions of the interaction with the local authority and the national authority on transition.

Alex Harrison: As far as we are aware, it is not the same as in Scotland. It sounds good in Scotland. In Wales, the Welsh Government engages more directly and runs schemes for young disabled people instead, like the young person's guarantee to help disabled and non-disabled young people get into work or an apprenticeship. It is tailored support. That is what we have seen more of in Wales—bigger schemes rather than local authorities running schemes. We do not really see any local authorities around here running any schemes, apart from for those who are long-term unemployed, rather than young people who have not got that far.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: You mentioned in your introduction, though, that there were some good examples of where this was working very effectively with some local authorities. Did I mishear that? If I did not mishear it, could we have some evidence of that? We would like good examples of what is happening somewhere so that we can perhaps include those.

Alex Harrison: We know that the charity Scope works well with some local authorities and young people in Wales to support young disabled people to get into work if they are under 25. We know that has worked well in helping to set up placements in local government. We mainly see supporting other organisations to contact local authorities themselves or, with the association of voluntary organisations, for them to contact us and for us to engage with the charities through that. We have not seen local governments and local councils offering much more. It tends to be the Welsh Government offering it through the jobcentres and through work across Wales rather than the local authorities.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: You sound a bit depressed with all that.

Alex Harrison: A bit.

Q161 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** I will move on to Heather then. Heather, I thought that yours was a splendid example of what you could do. We had one of these in Harrogate when I was an MP. It was nothing to do with me; other people did it and I took the credit. It collapsed eventually, because the charity ran out of money and it had to close down. What worried me about it and what worries me about your idea is what happens to people as they move on. We had evidence from Asda the other day that said that about 70% of the people who go through there voluntarily go on to get full-time work. I have sent a note to the person from Asda.

The problem that is arising in the UK is that if you want people to get on to apprenticeships or to go on to things that require level 2 or level 3

qualifications, you suddenly hit a brick wall and cannot do that. It is very limited. Could you give us any advice as to what we should be doing with the splendid people you are working with when they go out to seek other jobs, or do they simply go to the bottom of the pile there as well?

Heather Hall: You are right about the funding. It is very difficult.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: I am right about most things.

Heather Hall: We do not really fit, because we straddle education, training, transitions, and health and social care, so that is quite difficult. Although what we are doing is very simple—we are enabling people to get good qualifications and move into work, and we are adapting the qualifications and working with our partners—you are right about the poverty of expectation and ambition. People generally think that they will be at the bottom of the pile. As for running out of money, yes, it is a very unstable position to be in, even though you know that the outcomes for young people are good. So we are working in that gap by enabling employers. There needs to be much more of that.

On Disability Confident, there is lots of negativity and it is a mixed bag, but we are doing some work with local employers using the principles of that to start those conversations, to open those doors. We are Disability Confident leaders now, so we are working with the organisations. In fact, our young people are doing that directly and it is making a real difference to how employers think. For most of them, it is not that they do not want to do things; it is just that they are terrified of litigation. It is about getting underneath that. We have found that once young people have got a job with somebody, they realise that it is not scary at all, and they have done it. Then they are much happier to think about another person and another person and think, "We can do this".

Our young people are also filling that gap where employers cannot recruit. I am a member of what is called Prosper now but was the Scottish Council for Development and Industry. I am for ever in there saying, "You're looking in the wrong places for employees". They are saying that they cannot recruit, and I am saying, "Look differently, think differently". We are starting to see that coming through, and that is so important.

A lot of our young people now are delivering training directly. They are co-delivering training and delivering autism and enablement training in lots of businesses now. It is open training. Once people and employers start to talk directly to disabled people, they start to look at them completely differently. They become a person and that person then becomes employable. Lots of people have come back and said that. We need to start using the gifts, skills and talents of young disabled people to go out there and do some of that work for us. We already do that.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: What can the Government do? What goes into our report that says, "Do this and you'll get a real benefit"?

Heather Hall: We certainly need some money, not a lot of money, if we are going to do it. We have 14 different funders attached to us now, and we will probably get another three. We are navigating all that. We have half a salary paid for here, half a salary paid for there, a little bit here and a little bit there. It is like one massive jigsaw, which is quite frightening when you look at it. We are just doing one simple thing.

The Government need to fund success, be hands on, out there, doing the job and getting people into employment. For each young person who comes to us when they are 16, it takes about 17 months to enable them to go from being peeled off the floor because they are so terrified of coming in to walking out of our door with a national qualification that they have never had and into a job. As one young man said, "I was told when I left school that I'd be in social housing and get a bit of social support". He said, "Not only am I not in social housing, I'm employed full-time, buying my own house and contributing".

Baroness Stedman-Scott: We want that case study.

Heather Hall: I have that case study. That is what we need to be doing. One young man said to me, "Heather, I just want to be a taxpayer". Everybody laughed. He said that, because that is what he saw as being a contributing adult. That young man is a taxpayer now. He moved away. He has a job in Fife and he came down to see us. He said, "Heather, I have worked all the way through the pandemic as a key worker". He was so proud and his family were so proud. He was somebody who was told, "You won't be able to do anything".

We have had people set up their own businesses. One young man could not talk to anybody. He did not like people but loved animals. He wanted to walk dogs, but the one thing he could not do was to ask anybody for money. We put him on the till. He was quite techy and we knew that he would be able to do that, but he had to ask people for money. After six months he did not have any problem asking people for money. He has his dog-walking business now, which is a full-time business.

It is about looking at the individual. What does that individual need? How can we enable them? Can we see what that person can do and what they can give? Yes, you can, but you need that attitude of expectation.

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Fabulous.

Q162 **Lord Porter of Spalding:** You started to get to the place that I am more bothered about. Those are the fluffy people over there. He says he is never wrong, but that is debatable. We are a bit more hard nosed on this side.

The Chair: Heather, do not look so distressed.

Lord Porter of Spalding: The Chair is the one who keeps us apart, because we are not sure which of this gang of two or that gang of two are the worst, so we have a neutral referee in the middle.

Is there anywhere we can go that just puts hard cash terms on the table so that we can put something into the Treasury that says, "Look, spend a million quid at this end of people's journey and it delivers you 10 million quid's worth of benefit"? The people stuff is real and right, and I am with them. I share in that joy if we can make people's individual lives better, but the only way we can make people in the Chancellor's space have some sense is by showing them cold hard cash: early investment generates cash outturn. Is there any way? Your examples are brilliant, so we need those, because then we can show a person's journey and maybe try to scale that up on a national picture. Is there anywhere we should be looking to show us that; spend a little bit of money here, because it generates this much over there?

Heather Hall: We have some figures that we can give you, yes. I suppose everybody's journey is slightly different, so the cost will be slightly different, but we can give you those unit costs: if you give an organisation this much money, you can do this. We already know that you can transfer what we are doing, because we have transferred it. We have seeded another charity and done some positive research on what it takes to do that. It is definitely transferable and scalable.

It will not look the same, however, because it does not matter what community you are in, you have to build from the ground up. You have to take that community with you and enable them. We went into the business we went into because, at the time, we thought that that was where the jobs were, so there was no point training people for the jobs that are not out there. The fact is that people have chosen their own way and done their own thing, but the principles remain exactly the same.

We are doing work out in Stranraer to enable people in Stranraer. We are doing some work in Edinburgh with an organisation. Cornwall Council and Essex have spoken to us. We have had quite a lot of people come in. We invite people to come in to see what it is like and how you might translate that. The hard figures are there.

Q163 **Lord Mott:** My question is pretty quick and is on funding. I get your frustration about the number of funding agencies or bodies that you have to go to. My question is specifically about when you get the sign-off on funding. First, is it the usual situation you only get the sign-off at the very last minute? If so, what impact does that have on you? Secondly, do any of the organisations that fund you give you a three-year or five-year sign-off process so that you have absolute certainty for a long period of time and can get on with your work?

Heather Hall: The answer is yes for some funders and no for others. Collectively, it is very difficult, because you are working from one year to the next. That is very difficult if you want to attract good-quality staff and staff to stay. Seventy per cent of our staff are disabled themselves, and we have a very loyal staff group who are great role models. The funding is extremely challenging.

Scott Richardson-Read: On the first question, there is a microsegmentation report by Professor Tommy MacKay that breaks down cost for autism only. If you invest this here, you will save that. I am happy to share the report with you.

I am glad you asked about spending to invest in the future. On the funding question, we are funded on a three-year cycle. I know it is a huge frustration when we have projects that work. They are given project funding for generating ideas, they kick off, they do good stuff, and then the project funding finishes because it is based on a strategic aim that changes politically. One of my asks to you would be: can you gather all the stuff that you know is working and fund that? Ask the Government to be like, "We know the stuff that works, and it is stuff like The Usual Place", the co-ordination and working that brings it all to life. My ask would be to find the things that do the jobs and fund them as part of the future curriculum and employment opportunities for people.

Q164 **Baroness Stedman-Scott:** Are the 14 funds that you have all government or local government?

Heather Hall: No, most of them are private trusts. We have private trusts and private investors. We have very little government funding or local authority funding.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: You are lucky.

Heather Hall: In some ways it makes it easier, because you can just create and do that work. We turn in quite a good income, and all our income from the social enterprise is invested in that. We are a real live business, and all the money goes directly into our work.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Have you tried Inspiring Scotland?

Heather Hall: We work closely with Inspiring Scotland. It is a fantastic organisation and it is massively supportive of us.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Well done.

Q165 **Lord Laming:** We are very much engaged with your evidence that transition is not a decision; it is a process, and one that can take a number of years. It would be very helpful if the three of you could share with us, first, the stage at which you engage employers; secondly, what the deal is for employers; and, thirdly, what you are offering employers. Bearing in mind that employers can be the local corner shop, a public agency, a charity, a manufacturer or a supermarket, as examples, where do you target and engage employers? That is a lot of questions, but could you help us with the employment engagement? I would be glad if all three of you could share your experience and knowledge with us.

Alex Harrison: We always think that it is best to engage with employers before asking, "Have you thought about hiring disabled people?" so that we can start talking to them and making sure that they do not believe some of the myths that surround the employment of disabled people and

that they are aware that there are things like Access to Work that can help to pay for any adjustments needed.

If we can work with employers, we can show them the benefits of hiring disabled people. A whole load of people are underutilised in employment who can bring so many different skills. The biggest thing we always say is that, if you have a disabled worker, that opens up your company and your organisation to better engage with other disabled people, whether they are your service users or your customers. We always say to people that it is about having improved skills and knowledge of disabled people, not believing the myths and always making sure, like others have said, that each disabled person is treated individually. They can see the different skills that disabled people have.

We realise that not all jobs out there will be suitable for all disabled people, so we tend to work with employers to tell them the health conditions that people might have but who could still do the job. Disability covers a lot of health conditions, so there is a chance that someone is suitable for that work who will not need big adjustments, will not need a wheelchair. We need to tell employers that so that they do not write disabled people off straightaway. We talk to them about what they need and then we can come up with a solution together with any adjustments.

We know that cost is a big thing always, so once we tell organisations that there is quite a lot of support out there for the costs of hiring a disabled person, many of them are thankful that we have informed them that things like Access to Work exist. They then feel a lot more comfortable about focusing on disabled people and the recruitment of disabled people. We have done a lot of work with BBC Wales, which has improved its employment of disabled people. We have had good feedback from BBC and the disabled people themselves that it has worked out well.

Lord Laming: Are you asking employers in those circumstances to be charitable, or are you putting a commercial proposition to them?

Alex Harrison: Both. We often say to them that it can be good to have an unpaid placement first if they are unsure of the skills of a disabled person. We always say that it is better to offer paid employment to disabled people, but if they feel the need to offer a few weeks unpaid to make sure that they feel comfortable, that can be the difference between them employing someone and not. We say that a couple of weeks unpaid is worth it then.

Scott Richardson-Read: We do not work directly with employers, but we help our partners to work directly with employers, so I do not have much to add. Heather is the one to talk about that here. However, I employ young disabled people in delivering equity and transitions training, and they sometimes liken it to being dipped like a tea bag into different services, into different cups of tea.

Stigma is also a massive issue. If you say “autism” to someone, their head will go to a well-known film with an autistic character in it and what is represented. It is exactly as Alex said: getting people in front of people to do the breaking down of stuff. As an organisation, through our social enterprise of training, we deliver training on disability with disabled people. It blows my mind that able-bodied people deliver disability training, because you would not get white people delivering Black Lives Matter training, for instance. That is what we are dealing with, but Heather is the one here for all this.

Heather Hall: Stigma is a big thing, and so is fear of litigation. We are very opportunistic in the way we work with employers in that they are our customers as well. We employ young disabled people, so when people come into our cafés and see people working in very social roles, they no longer say, “I didn’t think that people like that could do this”, because they see it every day. We ran a customer survey recently and were delighted to see that people want to come here, because we have a fabulous place, great food, a lovely atmosphere, and our social aims and objectives go right down the list. That is because people see that we are a team. We meet people and we take every opportunity we can to talk to employers whenever we see them, when we are doing the training, when they come in for meetings or anything else, when our young people are doing the training.

When our young people start to express an ambition that they want to do something, like one young man who wanted to work in care—I set up some care services in another life before I came to this and I knew some of the managers—I was able to go to the employer and say that this young person is worth a punt. We can enable that transition, because he can cook, he has learned to clean and do all these things. Personal care and medication will be different, but we can enable that to happen. That is exactly what we did, and we worked with the employer who has now employed that young person delivering care. As a result of some of that work, we have been contacted by four different care homes that want us to create a transition into care because they are looking for people to work in the kitchens, to deliver care and to do the ancillary services.

That is not rocket science. We could easily do that but, as you said, our funding is not stable enough for them to say, “We’ll set up this programme”. We did it with Alpha Solway. I do not know whether you have heard of Alpha Solway. It provided the PPE in Scotland. It built a big factory and we worked with it to create a pathway into work for young disabled people, which was very effective. Unfortunately, that closed down and the young people who worked there came back to us to say that they were made redundant. We did not take them back into the service, but we made connections with employers and enabled them to step into other employment. We were not disabling them by saying, “That’s such a shame”.

We do not have a strategic approach with employers. We just speak to them wherever they are and wherever young people are connected, and

we say, "Give us a chance. Give this young person a chance". There is not a lot in it for them, except that they may want to please us by the time we have finished with them. We have used unpaid work placements, people have gone into work, and the employers have paid the young person for every week of unpaid work that they have done previously. It is about having the opportunity to transition from us into an employer and being able to offer that employer six months or four months so that they can take a risk that they are unsure about.

We had six Kickstart young people. Three of them stayed with us and took jobs that came up and three others went into employers. These young people were probably the furthest from any employment you can imagine and nobody else was looking at them. We thought that we would give them a chance. We had six months, and their lives have been transformed. In fact, they have transformed their own lives by having a chance, an opportunity, in a real work environment where they have to get up, get dressed, get to work and do all the things that we all have to do when we go to work. There is also the respect that comes with that.

We are starting to work in schools now with young people from age 11 where the divergence starts to happen: "I'm going down the academic route". That is when it all starts. In fact, it starts earlier than that. Get young people in, give them work experience, start to change their thinking and, importantly, change the thinking of parents who have the idea that, "My child can't do anything". We have had children and young people withdrawn from us because they are doing too well and certainly the parents are petrified. They have been told for ever, "Your child won't be able to do anything", and we are saying, "Well, actually they can".

The other thing I would say to the Government is that that transition does not belong to the young people. It is the family and the parents who have been told, "Your child will never be able to do anything", and suddenly we are saying something completely different. Our work has been about getting in there and starting to say at an earlier age, "Think work first". People get swept into health and social care services when you should be thinking, "This young person can work. Let's put in what we need". Young people are saying that they want to work, so let us help them do it. Why should they have to exist on benefits? Why should they not be allowed to work?

Q166 Lord Laming: Are you offering these young people a very narrow range of employment possibilities—looking after animals, looking after their fellow human beings—or are they experiencing a whole range of employment that other young people leaving school would be considering?

Heather Hall: Yes, we are. We do not just consider that. We work with the individual. People have gone into administration, into college to do childcare, into all sorts of other mainstream college courses. We look at what the young person wants. I think you are talking about ambition as well.

Lord Laming: Give us an example of mainstream, please.

Heather Hall: For mainstream, we have somebody who has gone into administration. They might have come to us feeling completely unable to do that but thinking that they really want to do it and use their computer skills. They have gone on and done an apprenticeship and further qualifications in computing and administration. That is one example.

The Chair: On the whole, the young people coming to you do not have qualifications having left school.

Heather Hall: No, most young people coming to us do not have any qualifications.

Q167 **Lord Prentis of Leeds:** It has been very interesting listening to the discussion but also reading the background information that you have sent to us. It seems that there is one factor underlying everything for you, in that you are attempting to ensure that disabled voices are heard, which we know is a big issue. You talk about the ability of young disabled people that may not be recognised, you talk about gifts, skills, talents. You talked about the young man who left school and how he was able to contribute. At the same time, you mention barriers to making progress. You talk about attitudinal barriers, not just among parents but among employers and educators. You talked also about transport and social care as barriers, so there are real issues that have to be addressed.

My question is about policymakers. How do policymakers engage with young disabled people? Are there key issues or challenges that young disabled people may be facing that policymakers might not be considering? We know about certain examples from the Government's national disability strategy, but they were criticised for not talking to young disabled people before producing their report. It is an important area, because it is critical to the progress that is being made. Are policymakers missing something? Are there things that they are not considering that are important to young disabled people who may want to work? That question is to all three of you.

Alex Harrison: We know that young disabled people face a lot of barriers out there. One of the biggest ones beyond attitudes—we have spoken in depth about the attitudes—is being able to access the necessary equipment that they might need. If they are looking for certain work or want to do certain training, if they have a certain health condition they might need particular equipment or a support worker to attend with them, and they get worried about how that will be paid for and how to access that. When they were younger, they always had someone doing that for them—their parent or their school.

We know that there needs to be a bit more information out there for young disabled people on how to do all these things themselves, day to day, as older disabled people do without thinking, so that they can feel more confident about being able to go out and do things and apply for jobs themselves by having the support workers they need. Often you can get those only through things like Access to Work when you are already

in employment. You cannot access them while you are seeking employment. We feel that that is quite a big gap, because if you are seeking employment you probably need your BSL interpreter or your support worker to give you support throughout, including getting you ready for an interview. That is a missing part of support at the moment.

Scott Richardson-Read: There are loads of barriers. Do we have an extra hour?

Lord Prentis of Leeds: Are the policymakers taking these issues forward and addressing those barriers?

Scott Richardson-Read: We have done a lot of work with the Scottish Government on centralising the voices of young people, parents and carers in the policy-making decision process. I am passionate about that with the young people I work with. I am bit of a glamorous administrative assistant these days, and I gate-keep the doors for them and help them with standing in arenas like this or in Parliament or in Scottish Government and speak their truth to people. That, like a job, needs somebody to work alongside them. Some of them were in a BBC documentary about transitions, and we worked with them on what they need to say in the media, in newspaper and radio. That has led them to skills to be able to articulately engage with policymakers, the Scottish Parliament, and local authority leads.

Co-production is massively undervalued and misunderstood, as is how much effort it takes for young people to walk through doors like this, sit here and tell you directly what I, Heather and Alex are saying today. It is effective, because they and their parents and carers—we have to be mindful that transition is in that ecosystem—know what needs to change. They will tell you what barriers are there in the policy landscape. The Scottish Government have done a lot of work on engagement with young people. We have just finished looking at the CPS strategy refresh, for instance, which they pulled together with the help of the young people I work with—deaf, blind, hearing impaired and sensory-impaired young people—to express what they want the strategy to do.

I think we need to do more of that and to get people in a room. The people who are experiencing bias will tell you what the solutions are. From my experience, they will probably moan a lot first and will then get to those solutions eventually, if you give them the space. Co-production is a huge element across the piece.

Heather Hall: I am delighted that the committee is going to talk to our young people by videoconference. That is one of the most important things. Our young people are really looking forward to that. They might be a bit anxious about it, a bit nervous, but they are really looking forward to it. It is important that young people feel that they are being heard and think that they will be heard. We try to get our young people into every forum that we can to be heard, because people think quite differently once they are talking directly to young disabled people and start to view them quite differently.

The barriers for our young people are very real. The attitudinal barriers from the stigma and the expectation are huge. We have started to get our young people into schools and working with people from about S3. They come to us to learn about what a social enterprise does—it is business for social good—but our young people are going in and saying, “You’ll be the colleagues and the employers of the future, so this is what we need from you, thinking about your business”, to try to start that thinking differently. We also get young people who are not disabled to come and work with us, and they tell us at the end that their thinking about working with disabled people has totally changed because it is real. It is our young people who are doing that training, so that is important.

I think Access to Work is a nightmare. I probably should not have said that, but we find it very difficult. It is very difficult for employers to navigate when it should be the most brilliant thing out there for enabling employers to confidently bring disabled people into work. Employers have a fear of litigation. There is a real bit of work, which we are doing in a small way, to enable them to get over that.

Q168 The Chair: Does a lot of litigation take place? That is the second time we have heard that.

Heather Hall: I think they are afraid of doing anything that might get them in front of a tribunal for disability for having done something wrong. That is what employers tell us. They share that with us. That is not necessarily the reality, but it is their perception. It is about somehow dealing with that. I think Disability Confident does a bit of that, but—

Lord Mott: It would be interesting to get some statistics on that, because perception is one thing, but what is really going on?

Lord Prentis of Leeds: I think you will find that it is largely under tribunal cases or moving to tribunals, but they are not necessarily young disabled people. They do not go through tribunals, because they do not understand it. It is too big an issue for them to go forward on, but with disabled people in general, large numbers will attend various courts. I do not think it is the right way forward.

Lord Bach: Perhaps we can discuss that later, because it is an item on our agenda.

Q169 Lord Blencathra: In a minute, I will ask you all what your key recommendations to the Government would be if you were in our position and writing a report on how to support young disabled people into employment.

First, however, I want to ask Heather about The Usual Place and the catering trade’s contribution to training young people. I have been looking at your menu. It is very impressive. If there is any chance that you could take over the ghastly Avanti train food contract, I would back you all the way, although I think your ultimate Scottish breakfast with 13 items contributes to an obesity problem in Dumfries.

From what you have said, you share my attitude that the catering trade

industry can have a vital role to play in training people, the job you do, doing food from scratch and the whole range of a kitchen, not issuing ready-made nuggets through a window to motorists. Young people have to get up in time, be clean and tidy, learn health and safety in order not to poison the public, deal with allergies, not cut themselves with knives. Then they have the till work and, of crucial importance, they face the public and interact with people.

I can see that getting people through that catering industry can be a great help, but there are stigmas to deal with. There is the stigma of disabled people, but there is also the stigma of the catering industry itself. Thirty years ago as Food Minister I talked to a school in my constituency in a village called Aspatria, where the old industry was dying out and only Sealy beds were left. I said, "Have you thought about the catering industry?" "Being a cook's a woman's job". I said, "I have an article here for a catering and hotelkeeper. It's £15,000 a year". They said, "What's that in real money?" I said, "Almost 300 quid a week". "What, 300 quid a week for being a cook?" Some of them began to think about it. I do not think that any of them did it, but that is the stigma we have to get around. Do you have any ideas on how we or the Government could push more young people into the legitimate catering trade where they can learn other life skills as well as being a cook?

Heather Hall: Again, it is about enabling people. You have just listed all the skills that you get out of that, and those are probably not well recognised. There is a shift now to more vocational opportunities and to valuing them in the same way. For a while there was a shift towards trying to get everybody into higher education and further education, but we still need good cooks and people doing these occupations. People definitely learn that raft of skills and being able to face the public—they are not always nice to you, although on the whole they are—with those communication skills. Young people have told us that it is important to be able to say hello to somebody, to start a conversation, to ask a question. To be able to communicate well keeps young people safe.

We have had to say to people, "Kissing in the toilets is not a good look", but we are working with such a lot of young people who are often navigating what a work relationship is, what a friendship is, what a closer relationship is, and how they go about those life skills. We are teaching them those skills as well as being able to cook something from scratch. If you can cook something from scratch, you can work in a care home and get a job there, and we have had people do that.

Q170 **Lord Blencathra:** Thank you. Alex, what recommendations would you write in our report to the Government, if you were doing that?

Alex Harrison: One would be funding, but we have spoken about that quite a lot. Beyond that, our recommendations would be for more training, especially the creation of e-learning for employers, being aware of the VoS e-learning suite and some e-learning about disabled people and social models so that employers can start to break down some of the attitudinal barriers they have. It is about working with charities like

Heather's and others that do the work rather than trying to create something different just for the sake of it, things that are already working, and the smaller charities that provide the front-line services.

It is about making sure that there is always a lot of collaboration with organisations that can bring the voices of the young disabled people in so that the voice is always heard. We need to make sure that we hear the voices of the young people we are trying to reach and help to get into employment.

Scott Richardson-Read: It is what Alex said, but there is also the cost-benefit of transition. This is the huge missing piece of the puzzle. If you want to drive forward change, you need to know that if you invest in this now you save X later. It is a no-brainer. We have been pushing for that in Scotland for a long time, because that just speaks the language.

Look also at the legislative scenario that England has. I am not so familiar with it, being very familiar with the Scottish legislation. Look for where the holes and gaps are. Is more legislation needed? Is there a mandatory thing that needs to happen? Is it a carrot or a stick? Do that with the local authorities and the young people and their parents and carers at the heart of drafting that legislation. Do not draft it here. Draft it from the bottom and then consult upwards, because that is where the solutions will be, rather than imposing from on top what might be a well-intended piece of legislation that does not solve the issues that people are experiencing on the bottom.

I want to reiterate what Alex said. Too often, government funds projects for three years under a strategy and it flies, and then the strategy funding ends and the learning disappears. No one has captured it, it is all in the bin, and then 10 years later we suddenly start to reinvent the wheel and a new strategy comes out and we start to do the same stuff that we did 10 years ago. Let us not do that anymore. Let us see what worked with the strategy funding and especially how we link that to local authority commissioning processes. If it is government-seeded, how do we persuade local authorities to continue to commission that service and is there any incentive stuff there?

Incentivising employment for disabled people in private business will sound strange. I do not mean, "Here's £1,000 if you employ Johnny". I mean get businesses to understand that if you employ a disabled person, you will have less churn in your employment because they will be very loyal to the people they have been employed by, and there is less of this dunking of a teabag situation. I know people who have worked in Asda for 13 years and they literally say to the person who gave them the job—and they have moved around in Asda—"Thank you so much for taking a chance on me". If you try to go for the top cream and suddenly realise that this is a horrible narrow place for promotion, you will leave to go to another organisation. Those conversations need to happen with private business. That is the cost-benefit of employing people with disabilities, those kinds of things. I do not know how you write that in a policy.

Lord Blencathra: That is a very good point. Can you point us to any evidence, any statistics on that or reports from the CBI or whatever?

Scott Richardson-Read: Skills Development Scotland might have some. I work with individuals within organisations and local authorities. Can you leave that with me to see whether I can source something for you? I will speak to Tom about whether I can surface that information for you.

Heather Hall: I will say that it is “Think work first”. That needs to happen at an early age. You need to think work first and not divert people into health and social care services. They could be delivering those services, and many people are; they are not just in receipt of them. That needs to start early. That is my recommendation, and again bringing young people into the conversation. If you listen to them, they will tell you. Young people designed and were part of the development and the delivery of The Usual Place and everything that we have done in seeding the new charity and working with Glasgow University to research what works. They did all the questions and the researching as co-researchers. They can do it, so it is about expecting more, about having that ambition for people.

When we talk to parents about what is going to happen, a lot of what we do is holding hope for people until they can take hold of that themselves and realise that they are not broken, that they do not need to be fixed, that they can do things. They are opportunity deprived, so the Government need to enable those young people to have opportunities and enable employers to have the opportunity to experience having a disabled person working with them. It is all about enablement and opportunity. If we think work first, that is a good start. Then there is the rest of it—talking to young people and enabling them to be part of that. Some of that will come.

The Chair: I checked your train times first so that you do not miss the train back to Scotland, but that has been excellent. We have learned a lot and there have been wonderful examples. It is also good that you have confirmed some themes that have emerged from previous witnesses. That adds weight to it and it has been great. When you send us the material you have offered, if any of you have anything about long-term evidence so that you are tracing the people—they might go to work as soon as they leave you—we would be grateful for that. You mentioned that there is not the employment churn, but if you have any longer-term research that would be very good for us if you are monitoring it in that way. To all three of you, thank you so much. It has been very informative. Thank you for the work you do, because you clearly change a lot of lives.