

# Closing the disability and employment gap



A CASE STUDY REPORT

V O D G

# Introduction

## Employment and inequality

The UK's disability employment gap is around 32% with less than half of disabled people in work - 48% - compared to 80% of their non-disabled peers<sup>1</sup>.

The gap between the employment rate for people with disabilities and those without has changed little over recent years, highlighting the lack of progress by governments of different political hues. This means that of the 5.7m disabled people of working age, 4 million are working but a further 1.3 million who have the potential to work are unemployed<sup>2</sup>.

The 2015 Conservative Party manifesto included a commitment to "aim to halve the disability employment gap" by transforming "policy, practice and public attitudes, so that hundreds of thousands more disabled people who can and want to be in work find employment."<sup>3</sup> Now, the recent publication of the long-awaited green paper on work, health and disability<sup>4</sup> will, it is hoped, spark an opportunity for a fresh and genuine conversation between policy makers, disabled people, businesses and charities.

## The aim of this report

Through describing the work of voluntary sector organisations that support disabled people into employment, this report seeks to address some of the issues related to the green paper. For example, how can employment be a positive and practical choice for disabled people, with lasting and sustainable opportunities?



<sup>1</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health (2016). *Improving Lives: the work, health and disability Green Paper*. Accessed: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Hansard (2016). <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-06-08/debates/16060839000001/DisabilityEmploymentGap> (under comments by Debbie Abrahams)

<sup>3</sup> Hansard (2016). <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7540>

<sup>4</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health (2016). *Improving Lives: the work, health and disability Green Paper*. Accessed: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf)

## Action on the disability employment gap – why now?

There are clear and longstanding ethical and practical reasons to support someone into meaningful employment that they want and are suited to – as opposed to pushing them into unsuitable work to reduce the welfare bill<sup>5</sup>. Work meets an important social need, boosts wellbeing, provides an income and improves people's participation in society.

There are also other more timely factors that demand more focused thinking and action on the disability employment gap.

As outlined in the green paper, government is introducing a new single Work and Health Programme to replace the employment schemes Work Programme and Work Choice<sup>6</sup>, both of which have been criticised for failing those with more complex needs<sup>7</sup>. While the new programme aims to combine support for long-term unemployed claimants and those with health conditions or disabilities, there are concerns that the number of

unemployed disabled people given specialist help to find work will be halved<sup>8</sup>.

There is also uncertainty about employment and economic issues, as VODG stressed in a recent report, *Post-Brexit: the impact for social care provider organisations*<sup>9</sup>. At a recent VODG event, members debated how the untapped employment resource we have in disabled people might help with the potential workforce loss after the vote to leave the EU. As research from the ILC (International Longevity Centre) underlined, any changes to migration policy post-Brexit could have serious implications for the adult social care workforce<sup>10</sup>.

In fact, there is research that argues the economic case for employing more disabled people, showing that encouraging a million more disabled people into work over the next 15 years would boost the economy by £45billion<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>Chakraborty, A. (2016). 'In excruciating pain. Unable to work. Yet John is still 'fit for work'', Guardian. Accessed: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/26/fit-for-work-disability-cuts-bureaucracy-daniel-blake>

<sup>6</sup>Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury (2015). *Work Choice and related schemes*. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-employment/2010-to-2015-government-policy-employment#appendix-4-supporting-disabled-people-who-need-more-help-to-find-and-keep-a-job>

<sup>7</sup>National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2011). *The Work Programme*. Accessed: [http://base-uk.org/sites/base-uk.org/files/news/11-10/ncvo\\_work\\_programme\\_concerns.pdf](http://base-uk.org/sites/base-uk.org/files/news/11-10/ncvo_work_programme_concerns.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Boffey, D. (2016). 'Disabled jobsseekers facing dramatic fall-off in support', *Guardian*. Accessed: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/oct/22/disabled-jobseekers-facing-dramatic-fall-off-support>

<sup>9</sup>VODG (2016). *Post-Brexit: the impact for social care provider organisations*. Accessed: <http://www.vodg.org.uk/news/480/111/VODG-analyses-post-Brexit-priorities-in-new-social-care-report.html>

<sup>10</sup>ILC (2016). *Brexit and the future of the migrant social care workforce*. Accessed: [http://www.ilcuk.org.uk/index.php/publications/publication\\_details/brexit\\_and\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_the\\_migrant\\_social\\_care\\_workforce](http://www.ilcuk.org.uk/index.php/publications/publication_details/brexit_and_the_future_of_the_migrant_social_care_workforce)

<sup>11</sup>Scope (2015). *Enabling work: disabled people, employment and the UK economy*. Accessed: <http://www.scope.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/employment/enabling-work/key-findings>

## The challenges

Yet while the benefits of supporting more disabled people into work are clear, austerity measures and changes to specialist employment policy undermine this aim.

For example, the impact of reductions to Access to Work<sup>12</sup> grants (funding that helps someone do their job if they have a disability or health issue) and a cap on the value of these grants will affect disabled people. There are risks in reducing such funding especially for people with particular support needs, such as hearing loss<sup>13</sup>.

Also of concern is the cut to Employment and Support Allowance In the Work Related Activity Group, with disabled people fearing this will hinder progress on the disability employment gap and push people further towards or into poverty<sup>14</sup>.

Then there are cuts to specialist disability employment advisers<sup>15</sup>; their existence is crucial, as job centre advisers do not fully understand disabled people's abilities. VODG has already spoken out about how the short job interview process does little to enable people to fully demonstrate their capability for a job<sup>16</sup>.



<sup>12</sup>HM Government (2016). *Access to Work*. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>

<sup>13</sup>Action on Hearing (2016) *Access to work policy statement*. Accessed: <https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/policy/policy-statements/employment.aspx>

<sup>14</sup>United Response (2015) *United Response's News Correspondent questions Minister for Disabled People*. Accessed: <https://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/news/united-responses-news-correspondent-questions-minister-for-disabled-people>

<sup>15</sup>Stone, J. (2015) 'DWP cuts specialist disability employment advisers in jobcentres by over 60 percent', *Independent*. Accessed: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/dwp-cuts-specialist-disability-employment-advisors-in-jobcentres-by-over-60-per-cent-a6728881.html>

<sup>16</sup>Hughes, R. (2016). 'Why we need to mind the disability gap', *Huffington Post*. Accessed: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/rhidian-hughes/why-we-need-to-mind-the-d\\_b\\_10486640.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/rhidian-hughes/why-we-need-to-mind-the-d_b_10486640.html)



## The challenges (*continued*)

Meanwhile local authorities, themselves faced with reduced central government funding, are cutting supported employment schemes around the country. A 2011 poll by the British Association for Supported Employment (Base) of 50 of its members found that half faced funding cuts of at least 15% and a quarter feared 50% to 100% cuts. A number of services are closing across the UK<sup>17</sup>.



And there are attitudinal barriers when it comes to employing disabled people – this is despite the fact that employers must make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 to support disabled applicants and employees. For example, a 2015 poll of 100 MPs<sup>18</sup> asked if politicians agreed that almost everyone with learning disabilities is capable of being supported into paid and productive employment – only 40% did. Another recent study found that 1 in 10 business people do not feel confident that their businesses would be able to support an employee with a disability or living with a long term health condition<sup>19</sup>.

And while the government's Disability Confident<sup>20</sup> scheme, launched in 2013, is a welcome initiative encouraging employers to “see the ability, not the disability”, it requires further traction. Only 600 employers have signed up<sup>21</sup> and campaigners and commentators have questioned its effectiveness and targeting<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>British Association for Supported Employment (2016) Progress Recruitment set to close after losing contract. Accessed: <http://base-uk.org/members/news/progress-recruitment-set-close-after-losing-contract> and <http://base-uk.org/members/news/wise-swanse-a-set-close>

<sup>18</sup>Dimensions (2015). So, who exactly can be supported into employment? Accessed: <https://www.dimensions-uk.org/best-practice-post/exactly-can-supported-employment/>

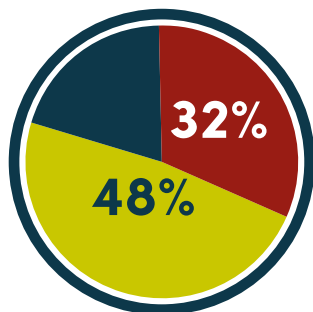
<sup>19</sup>Disability Rights UK (2016). *Disability and employment*. Accessed: <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2016/august/1-10-businesses-unable-support-employee-disability-or-health-condition>

<sup>20</sup>Department for Work and Pensions (2016) *Disability Confident employer scheme and guidance*. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>

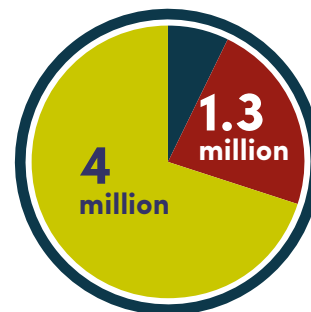
<sup>21</sup>Hansard (2016). <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-06-08/debates/16060839000001/DisabilityEmploymentGap#contribution-16060851000017> (under comments by Justin Thomlinson)

<sup>22</sup>Friend, P. (2016). Who needs to be disability confident? BBC Ouch. Accessed: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-ouch-25006133>

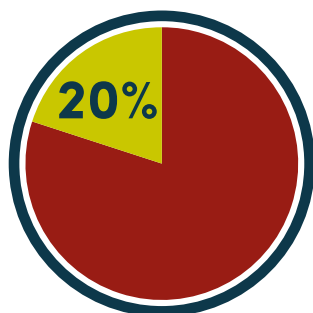
# The disability employment gap – in numbers



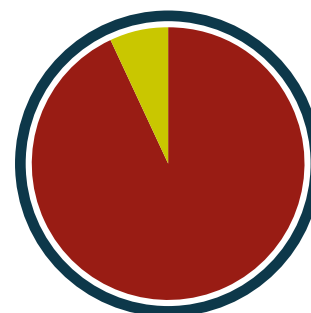
48% of disabled people of working age are in work – a gap of 32% compared to people without a disability<sup>29</sup>



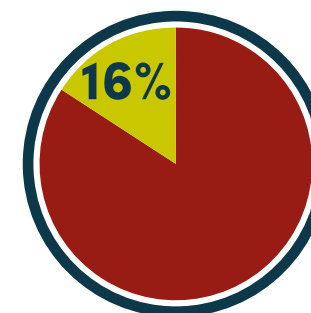
Of 5.7m disabled people of working age 4 million are working but a further 1.3 million who have the potential to work are unemployed<sup>30</sup>



Many of the 100,000 working age deafblind are keen and able to work but only 20% currently doing so<sup>31</sup>



Only 6.8% of learning disabled people using social care are in work<sup>32</sup>



Only 16% of autistic adults are in full time work<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health (2016). *Improving lives: the work, health and disability Green Paper*. Accessed: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf)

<sup>30</sup>Hansard (2016). <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-06-08/debates/16060839000001/DisabilityEmploymentGap> (under comments by Debbie Abrahams)

<sup>31</sup>Sense (2016). *Realising aspirations for all*. Accessed: <https://www.sense.org.uk/content/employment>

<sup>32</sup>British Association for Supported Employment (2016). i. Accessed: <http://base-uk.org/information-commissioners/key-facts-and-data>

<sup>33</sup>National Autistic Society (2016). *Autism employment gap*. Accessed: <http://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/media-centre/news/2016-10-27-employment-gap.aspx>

## Progress amid the problems

Despite the challenges, it is important to note the progress being made. This includes the NHS Learning Disability Employment Programme: a pledge to employ more people with learning disabilities<sup>23</sup>. The NHS Equality and Diversity Council has also recommended that a Workforce Disability Equality Standard should be mandated in England from April 2018<sup>24</sup>.

In addition, the introduction of Education, Health and Care plans<sup>25</sup> in 2014 for disabled children and young people could also help tackle the employment gap with a focus on preparing people for work.

Around the UK, we know of VODG members and their partners delivering a variety of successful schemes to support more people into work. These include:

- internships
- supported employment
- apprenticeships
- directly employing more disabled people
- awareness-raising campaigns

There are many examples of good practice, such as annual Learning Disability Work Experience Week<sup>26</sup> that highlights the benefits of employing someone with a disability. Successful, well-established models of disability employment – to name just two – include the co-working model, such as the one championed by human rights charity Change<sup>27</sup>, and the existence of Experts by Experience<sup>28</sup> (people who have direct experience of using health and social care services, employed to take part in CQC inspections).



<sup>23</sup>NHS England (2016). *Learning disability employment programme*. Accessed: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/gov/equality-hub/ld-emp-prog/>

<sup>24</sup>NHS England (2016). *Workforce Disability Equality Standard* <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2016/09/wdes/>

<sup>25</sup>HM Government (2016). *Education Health and Care plans*. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help>

<sup>26</sup>Learning Disability Work Experience Week (2016). Accessed: <http://ldwew.co.uk/what-we-do/>

<sup>27</sup>Change (2016). Accessed: <http://www.changepeople.org/>

<sup>28</sup>Choice Support (2016). *Experts by experience*. Accessed: <http://choicesupport.org.uk/our-work/who-are-the-real-experts>

# Snapshots of success

This report presents three brief examples of good practice:

**1** Supported employment schemes and social enterprise

**2** Disability organisations leading by example and employing disabled people

**3** Supported internships and specialist further education

The disability employment gap is unacceptable. It is our belief that if the progress featured on the following pages is replicated more widely across the UK, there will be a better chance that disabled people will experience more equity in employment.



# 1 Supported employment schemes and social enterprise – United Response

John\* is a valued and hard-working member of the team at the coffee shop in York where he works. Although he started his role greeting customers and waiting on tables, he progressed quickly and now also works on the till and coffee machine too.

John, who is in his 30s and has a learning disability, gets huge job satisfaction from his part-time role. He is one of 42 people currently supported in training and employment in York by United Response, a national charity which provides services for people with learning disabilities, mental health needs or physical disabilities.

John's bespoke training and employment coaching over several months included developing skills such as prioritisation, personal organisation, time keeping and communicating with colleagues. John soon adapted to the workplace culture and understood why and how tasks were carried out.

The support John received is part of United Response's Training, Employment and Consultancy<sup>34</sup> (TEC), an extensive training programme. The York-based project covers everything from IT courses to tips on self-presentation, communication and CV writing. Crucially, job hunters are encouraged to explore work and training options that suits them.



\* Name has been changed

<sup>34</sup>United Response (2016). *York supported employment service*. Accessed: <https://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/tec>

The supported employment service helps people to find voluntary and paid placements in local businesses, including offices, theatres and shops. Former trainees have gone onto paid and voluntary work in York Minster, Costa, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Fenwick, HMV and McDonalds, as well as a wide range of local businesses.

People get help with job coaching, writing CVs, job applications and learning interview techniques. There is also a travel training programme to increase independence before starting a new role. Simultaneously, United Response staff also work with prospective employers to create a comfortable working relationship and put both parties at ease, identifying shared goals and understanding the expected standard of work.

As part of TEC, individuals might take up a place at the organisation's specialist outside catering business, Krumbs Kitchen, which provides on-the-job training. There are also customer-facing roles at Cafe West, based in the City of York council offices.

There are currently 40 training placements a week in Café West – some people have more than one place per week – with people moving on once United Response identifies they are ready. For example, three Café West trainees recently moved into voluntary work placements in the council's post room, the elections team and in the hospitality department. Another young man has part-time paid employment with the council's vending machine team.



Other United Response projects enabling people into work include the disability awareness raising social enterprise UR Consultants. The enterprise, launched 10 years ago and which now employs 56 people with learning disabilities or autism across the country, provides training to employers, produces easy read translations for a variety of public sector bodies and runs the accessible magazine Easy News.

In Richmond, south west London, the charity has also supported the development of a micro-enterprise, Garden Gnomes. The micro-enterprise maintains gardens in the local community and offers paid employment opportunities to five young adults with a learning disability. Last year, the project, which was developed with just £250 from United Response's community grant, was highly commended in the Richmond Business Awards.

United Response believes that offering a range of options – supported training, supported employment, social enterprise, micro-enterprise – gives potential trainees and employees more flexibility in how they learn and work. Diane Lightfoot, United Response director of supported employment, explains: “The programme has to be tailored to the individual; you need the right approach for each person.”

She stresses that people supported into training or work are after more than simply a regular pay packet: “Moving towards employment has a huge benefit to self-esteem. In terms of impact, money is obviously an issue – but the status of being employed is equally important.”

### **Key message on using social enterprise or micro-enterprise to reduce the disability employment gap:**

“With a social enterprise or micro-enterprise, you need to get some business expertise on board and make sure there's a market for what you're offering. Engaging with a local business partnership or securing pro bono advice can help ensure the scheme is sustainable otherwise.”

## 2 Disability organisations employing disabled people - Thomas Pocklington Trust

Four years ago Thomas Pocklington Trust had just one per cent of people with a visual impairment in its work force. Three years ago, the medium sized national charity for people with sight loss, took on its first blind office intern. Today, 30 of its 100 staff are blind or have sight loss. The London-based charity's medium term target – which it expects to achieve in the next two years – is that 50% of its employees, and a similar proportion of its trustees and senior managers, will be blind or partially sighted.

“We reviewed and completely changed our employment strategy,” says chief executive Peter Corbett of how the organisation's approach to staffing has progressed. That strategy involves proactively welcoming applications “from all sections of society” by ensuring that blind people are made aware of vacancies, recruiting solely on the basis of ability with a genuinely accessible level playing field and encouraging and promoting involvement of visually impaired colleagues in the recruitment process.

There are around 2m people living with sight loss in the UK and only a quarter of blind and partially sighted people of working age are in paid employment, according to the latest statistics<sup>35</sup>.



<sup>35</sup>UK Vision Strategy (2016). *Sight loss statistics*. Accessed: <http://www.ukvisionstrategy.org.uk/get-involved-ways-get-involved-across-uk/sight-loss-statistics>



Peter believes that this figure should be much higher and ultimately equal the three quarters level across the general population, and that organisations could do much more to increase awareness and inclusion by employing disabled people: “We’re interested in the attitudinal impact of employing blind or visually impaired staff so it becomes usual to have colleagues with sight loss, and to understand that only modest adjustments are necessary to facilitate this.”

By recruiting more staff with sight loss and supporting their professional development, the trust says it is creating an employment pipeline; one visually impaired colleague recently got a job at a local authority (in a job unrelated to his visual impairment). Another has gone on to a training contract with a law firm, remaining involved with the charity as a trustee. Three of the trust’s senior managers have sight loss, including deputy chief executive Keith Valentine; all have been promoted from within the organisation.

Making reasonable adjustments for sight loss is simple, says Peter. At the trust, this involves modest changes such as bringing in more accessible computer equipment or ditching bespoke IT systems (which often do not allow the use of magnification or text to speech software) in favour of open and accessible systems.



In addition, the charity's meetings are run in a more accessible way – everybody introduces themselves at the start of the meeting and questions are managed through the chair rather than on the basis of who shouts the loudest. Recruitment processes have changed, so jobs are advertised using networks in which people with sight loss participate and application forms are accessible. In addition, visually impaired people sit on interview panels.

Such work is among the reasons the charity has been recognised by various national employer accreditations, such as Investors in People, which recognises best business practice, and Positive about Disabled People, awarded by Jobcentre Plus and Disability Confident.

The trust's wider work includes a year-long pilot programme, Works For Me, which took place in 2016. The project recently won an award from Vision 2020 UK, the organisation that leads collaboration between organisations in the eye health and sight loss sector.

Works for Me supported people with sight loss to gain and retain employment and by May, enabled 14 of 32 people who had received one to one support to gain paid employment. All 14 are still in work. This success rate of almost 40% compares to under 6% for the government-sponsored Work Programme, according to a briefing published by RNIB<sup>36</sup> (the briefing shows 60 job outcomes of 1010 referrals to Work Programme of blind and partially sighted clients between 2011 and 2014).

“Our aim is to eliminate the inequality in employment rates between visually impaired people and the general population,” says Peter. “However, it's important to stress that we've not compromised on hiring the best people for the job.”

### **Key message on disability organisations employing disabled people:**

**“The biggest challenge for disability organisations considering employing from the community they support is just deciding that they want to do it. You need a firm strategy on this, leadership from the top, and then you need to make it a priority.”**

<sup>36</sup>RNIB (2014). *Work programme statistics briefing*. Accessed: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/work-programme-statistics-briefing-1>

### 3 Supported internships and specialist further education - **National Star**

For a recent learner at specialist college National Star, a year-long internship at energy firm EDF Energy was so successful that the company offered him a paid position to continue the work they felt was invaluable.

This is just one outcome of the Steps into Work supported internship programme run by the Cheltenham-based National Star. The college offers both residential and day further education to young people with physical disabilities and learning disabilities.

EDF Energy, under the Steps into Work scheme, created a very specific unpaid internship role for one young person, involving dismantling computer equipment and recording where it was sourced and how it was used. The job became so important that EDF Energy decided it could not do without someone in that role.

Various jobs in the organisation are open to learners as part of Steps into Work, such as administration, IT support, maintenance and catering. Students work in project teams, human resources, marketing and communications at the company. The type of position held is led by what the person wants to do.

Staff at EDF Energy volunteer to be job buddies to supported interns and receive guidance from their employer and National Star. A college tutor is permanently based on site to provide additional support to interns so they receive classroom-based tuition and work towards relevant qualifications in addition to working.





Interns attend four days a week as part of their one-year internship (based on an academic year) and see themselves as employees of EDF Energy. Now in its fourth year of working with EDF Energy, eight of National Star's learners have gone on to take up paid position within EDF with the majority of learners taking up paid positions with other employers.

The ethos behind Steps into Work, which was launched in September 2013, is to bring together a host employer and National Star. The unpaid internship is focused on and supports transition from education to employment, providing opportunities to learn in the workplace and experience an extended time in a supported work placement.

Those on the internship gain critical personal and social skills as well as qualifications that are often harder to achieve via other training methods – for example, training based solely in the classroom. Currently on average 75% of Steps into Work interns progress into paid employment.





National Star job coaches analyse each placement prior to student starting. This is complemented by an element of “vocational profiling”, which involves assessing each student's skills and preferences to ensure that they are placed in the right role for them to achieve. In addition, as with the EDF Energy partnership, a tutor is embedded within the employer business and has responsibility for developing personalised learning programmes.

The college accommodates up to 180 students at one time. Most of the students require high levels of personal support, 75% are wheelchair users, over 60% require speech and language therapy, 50% use a communication aid, and 13% have a life-limiting condition. Every year National Star works with 1,600 people with disabilities across the UK.

“We have found that transition to employment works well when moving on from a supported internship,” says Davina Jones, head of business development at National Star. “The overwhelming majority of people with disabilities are capable of sustainable paid employment with the right preparation and support. If that is the starting assumption then the effort needs to be placed on identifying the skills that employer's value and in helping people with disabilities to develop these.”

**Key message on using supported internships and specialist further education to reduce the disability employment gap:**

“Through National Star's experience of transitioning young people with disabilities into employment, both locally and across the UK, the charity has found programmes where young people are embedded with the employer for a longer period of time lead to more successful and sustainable employment outcomes.”

# Conclusion

This report has briefly outlined some different solutions to closing the disability employment gap.

## What our case studies tell us

Key themes emerge from the experiences of disability support providers that chose to employ disabled people and from organisations that deliver supported employment programmes or internship schemes:

- disability organisations employing disabled people must develop a firm strategy - leadership from the top will ensure aims remain a priority
- supporting social or micro-enterprises means getting business expertise on board and being clear there is a market for what you're offering
- supported internships will be more successful if interns are embedded with employers for longer period lead to more successful employment outcomes

## What government can do

As yet, it is unclear how options like supported internships will be included in the new Work and Health Programme<sup>37</sup>. Clarity is needed.

Government also has a role in creating more specialist support, from specialist job advisors who can help someone secure work to in-work job coaches who can help them sustain it.

As has been well documented, the disability and employment issue is too narrowly focused on benefits, in a bid to reduce public spending<sup>38</sup>. Attention is generally on moving people off benefits, rather than on them sustaining employment. This approach needs to change.

It is also of huge concern that local authority funding for supported employment is on the wane. This should be a national priority and locally delivered.

<sup>39</sup>Equalities and Human Rights Commission (2016). Written submission to select committee. Accessed: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/disability-employment-gap/written/33950.html>

## What employers can do

Employers themselves – whether they are disability organisations or not – should focus on specialised and supportive recruitment and retention. This ranges from accessible adverts and interview processes to ongoing support, when needed, if someone’s condition fluctuates.

Bearing in mind the onus placed on employers by the Equality Act 2010, we agree with the recommendations that companies be obliged to set their own targets on recruitment and retention of disabled employees and report on their progress (based on the fact that companies usually provide a statement about their equality policies, not information about targets and progress)<sup>39</sup>.

## A range of options and tailor made, targeted support

Policy movements such as personalisation and person-centred care make it clear that disabled people are not a homogenous mass; the concept of tailor-made support seems largely to be missing from mainstream debate on the disability employment gap.

People with high support needs, including people with a learning disability, autism or people sensory impairments, require specialist support, as we argue at the outset of this report.

<sup>39</sup>Equalities and Human Rights Commission (2016). Written submission to select committee. Accessed: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/disability-employment-gap/written/33950.html>

## Attitudinal change

For too long, the presumption has been that disabled people cannot or do not want to work and that the process of supporting people into work is costly and complex. This needs to change.

Along with the obvious economic benefits, the focus must be on jobs that are sustained over time. A job that quickly breaks down because the right support was not in place benefit neither employees nor employers.

When employment is a positive choice for disabled people – rather than something driven by benefit cuts – it can help to improve health outcomes, wellbeing, social inclusion and life chances.





[info@vodg.org.uk](mailto:info@vodg.org.uk)



[@VODGmembership](https://twitter.com/VODGmembership)



[www.vodg.org.uk](http://www.vodg.org.uk)



New Bridge Street House  
30-34 New Bridge Street  
London EC4V 6BJ



Published 2016

