

How to spend money well on job support so social care users gain sustainable employment

Our project is examining the quality and quantity of paid work that result from social services investment in employment supports for people with disabilities. Why are some authorities more successful than others?

Recession need not be bad news for disabled people looking for work. In North Lanarkshire, where general unemployment is well above the UK average, disabled people are more successful at getting work than almost anywhere else in the country.

That's no surprise to Rob Greig, who is leading an NIHR SSCR research project into the most cost-effective ways to support people with disabilities (including people with mental health problems) into work. 'For example, people with learning difficulties have lower absenteeism rates and stay in the job longer. Why wouldn't employers prefer them, particularly in tough economic times?' he says. 'Some employers want diversity in their workforce and they know that, if they employ a proper cross-section of the community, they'll maximise the numbers of friends and family using that business.' adds Mr Greig, Chief Executive of the National Development Team for Inclusion and an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Disability Research at the University of Lancaster.

Some councils boosting spending

Nor is spending on employment support for disabled people necessarily nose-diving amid austerity. One local authority, he says, is increasing its spending on it

'These discussions about employment support re-motivate me to ensure that we are commissioning the right things. Taking this type of evidence to places like the Health and Wellbeing Board will add weight to our arguments when we push for more support in this area.'

Local Authority Commissioning Manager

employment support service by 250 per cent next year – it is shifting from day centre support which is seen as less cost-effective.

Nevertheless, despite this good news, there is limited evidence that local authorities are using the available evidence base to inform their commissioning decisions when investing in employment supports for disabled people. The evidence is stronger and more encouraging for the 'place and train' model – you work out what a person wants to do, get them a job and support them learning as they go along. Meanwhile, it's less convincing for the often used 'train and place' model, which focusses on getting a person 'job ready' with work preparation, literacy and social



skills and supporting their volunteering. It's not clear that this approach secures many jobs in the long run for a significant number of people.

Furthermore, there is little evidence about the cost-effectiveness even of the approaches that are known to work. 'If you are a local authority commissioner and you are spending £300,000 a year on employment support, you should know what outcomes to expect. And what amounts to good value for a money – is it 10 people getting jobs or 70? In reality, these questions often go unanswered and a lot of commissioning is being done on blind faith,' says Mr Greig. 'Our project aims to plug the evidence gaps. Then we will have greater knowledge not only

what works but also which is the smartest way to invest social care support to produce the best employment outcome for the money.'

His goal is not just to collect good practice and establish standards and models for effective interventions. 'We're not interested in just producing good research,' says Mr Greig. 'We want to secure change.' So once best practice has been identified, there will be a 9 month action learning period across the country, disseminating the findings and evaluating how much people use the learning materials. If they don't change behaviour, then they will be adapted.

To get to the bottom of the story, Mr Greig's team is not only examining local authority data. 'We're looking at a cross-section of local authorities – all significant spenders – some of which are successful and some of which are not. We want to see beyond the issue of how much they spend and to understand what else explains differential outcomes between these local authorities.'

Saving the tax payer money

The team is also tracking routes into employment for people, based on the different types of employment support, be it a supported employment service, volunteering, work in a day centre or training in college.

'There is already evidence that, if you do all this well, it saves the tax payer money,' says Mr Greig. 'So I don't see the conclusion of our research being that money should not be spent on this activity. Our interest is in helping more people get jobs from the investment than is currently being achieved.'

Project: [Employment support for disabled people and the relationship between investment and outcomes](#)

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