North Wales **Together**
Gogledd Cymru **Gyda'n Gilydd**

Seamless services for people with Learning Disabilities
Gwasanaethau ddi-dor i bobl ag Anableddau Dysgu

North Wales Supported Employment Strategy for people with Learning Disabilities 2024 to 2029

North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group

April 2024

Cyngor Sir Ynys Môn Isle of Anglesey County Council | Conwy | sir ddinbych denbighshire County Council | Cyngor Sir y Fflint Flintshire County Council | Gwynedd | wrexham wrecsam | GIG Cymru NHS Wales | Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board | Cydweithredfa Gwella Gwasanaethau Gofal a Llesiant Gogledd Cymru North Wales Social Care and Well-being Services Improvement Collaborative

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Foreword

The North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group has been established for over 20 years and in that time the six Local Authorities and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Learning Disability and Mental Health Division have worked together to deliver improvement in the quality of life for people with learning disabilities across the region.

In 2017 the Partnership worked with the North Wales Social Care & Wellbeing Collaborative to co-produce the North Wales Learning Disability Strategy 2018-2023. The Strategy is based on what people with a learning disability told us mattered to them: having a good place to live, family, friends, and relationships, being safe, being healthy and having the right support. *And to have the same opportunities as the rest of the population to have a job, sense of self-worth and make a worthwhile contribution to society*

Building on the original strategy, the North Wales Supported Employment Strategy provides us with a clear way to support more people with learning disabilities to realise their aspiration to have a paid job. On the journey to complete this Strategy, we have had the opportunity to test the *North Wales Supported Employment Model* to make sure it works, and it does. More people with learning disabilities are already in paid work because of this Strategy.

I hope what this Strategy will do is to help us change the culture of low aspirations and risk averse behaviour. We need to change our assumptions about what someone with a learning disability can do and moreover has a right to do. If our starting point is an assumption that with good support, someone can get a job, then I think in the five years of this Strategy we will see many more people with a learning disability doing just that. This is my hope of what will be the legacy of this Strategy.

Ramona Murray, Service Manager, Disability Services, Conwy County Borough Council, Chair of the Supported Employment Strategy Steering Group

As Flintshire are the host Local Authority for the North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Team and I act as co-chair of the programme board, I am delighted by the publication of this strategy. It demonstrates a real commitment from the programme's partners, to make a step change across the region to improve the employment prospects of people with learning disabilities.

Through initiatives like DFN Project Search, we have witnessed the transformational effects that good quality employment can have on the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families. The additional investment in the transformation programme by the North Wales Regional Integration Fund means we can now roll out a new approach to enable many more people with learning disabilities, of all ages, to have equal access to paid employment. This strategy gives us the evidence

that with the right job, the right support and the right employer, people with learning disabilities can thrive in paid employment and be valued and valuable employees.

As the Chief Officer for Social Services at Flintshire County Council, we have started on our own journey to support more people with learning disabilities to access paid employment by acting as a joint host employer for a DFN Project Search supported internship project with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, building on the success of our first Project Search programme some years ago. We hope our example will encourage other local authorities in North Wales to make similar commitments so we can all reap the many benefits of seeing more of our citizens in paid work.

Neil Ayling, Chief Officer, Social Services, Flintshire County Council

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank for following for supporting the development of this strategy.

Steering Group

For their time, support, and guidance through the different phases of producing the strategy. Special thanks to Ramona Murray, Service Manager for Disability Services at Conwy County Borough Council for chairing the steering group and Jo Taylor, Service Manager, Disability Services at Flintshire County Council for co-chairing.

All Wales People First and North Wales Self Advocacy Services

For supporting the steering group to engage with people with learning disabilities across North Wales to ensure that they had a strong voice in shaping the draft of the strategy.

Special thanks to All Wales People First for their excellent work in obtaining feedback from people with learning disabilities on the draft strategy. As a result of we can be confident that their views are reflected in the final document.

Dr. Stephen Beyer, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Mental Health Cardiff University

For his support and guidance to the steering group and the North Wales Together workstream lead and direct contribution to sections of the strategy. Dr. Beyer's expertise in the field of supported employment, both in terms of practice and research has been invaluable in providing a strong evidence base for the strategy.

Angela Kenvyn, Programme Manager, Engage to Change, Learning Disability Wales

We want to thank Angela Kenvyn for her commitment to the steering group and helping to champion supported employment developments in North Wales at a national level.

Lyn Griffiths, National Development Team for Inclusion

For her stellar work in editing the first draft of the strategy and her colleague Rebecca Krzyzosiak for the creation of the illustrations.

North Wales Supported Employment Strategy for People with Learning Disabilities

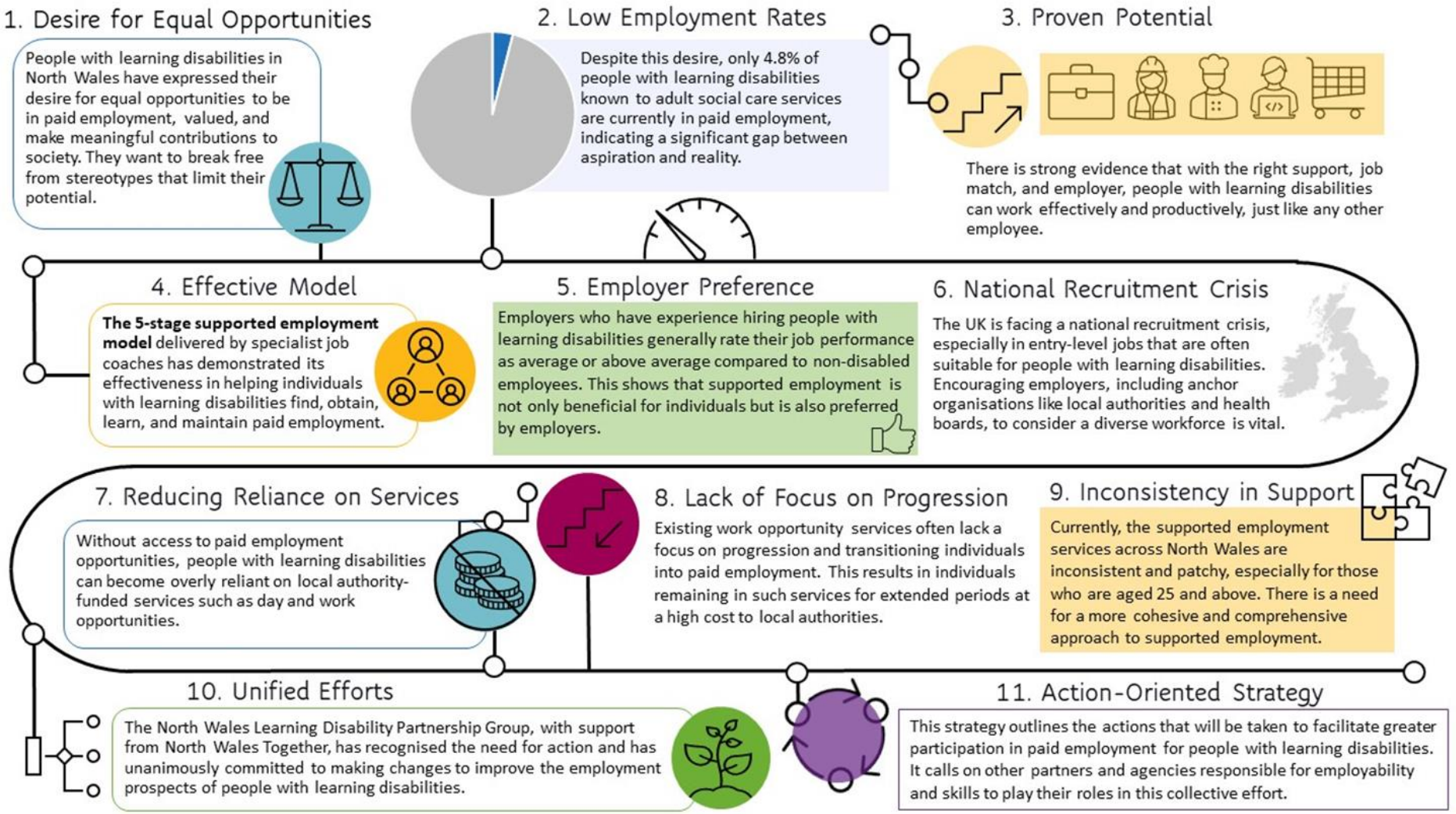
Executive Summary

> ***"I can do more than people think. I want to work but sometimes people around me think that I am not able to work or can only work in charity shops." (Citizen, 'Having a Job' feedback)***

- The North Wales Together Supported Employment Strategy for people with learning disabilities emphasizes the importance of providing employment opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities, with the goal of improving their quality of life and well-being.
- The strategy has been co-produced for the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group. It identifies the contribution that learning disability social services can make to support more people to have equal access to paid employment.
- This strategy targets individuals with a formal diagnosis of a learning disability and related conditions, with a particular focus on young people and those eligible for specific support services. It does not cover other groups with different needs, and its definitions clarify the scope of the strategy's applicability.
- The strategy advocates for a five-stage supported employment model aligned to the *Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards*, delivered by specialist job coaches, to help these individuals find, secure, learn, and maintain paid employment. And employers to employ more people with learning disabilities.
- The strategy underscores the cost savings and potential for personal growth when individuals with learning disabilities are gainfully employed, rather than relying on local authority-funded services.
- It highlights the collaboration of various partners and stakeholders in developing this strategy, including consultation and engagement efforts with people with learning disabilities.
- The strategy's vision is aligned with the North Wales Learning Disability Strategy 2018–2023, focusing on creating inclusive, safe, and community-integrated living environments for people with learning disabilities. It stresses the importance of respecting individual choices regarding employment, recognizing that work is just one avenue for achieving, wellbeing, inclusion, and equality.

In summary, the North Wales Supported Employment Strategy aims to empower individuals with learning disabilities by promoting their access to paid employment while respecting their choices and fostering inclusive communities. It seeks to implement a new supported employment model within learning disability services for people with learning disabilities aligned to Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards.

Illustration 1: Why is this strategy needed?



North Wales Supported Employment Model for Learning Disability Services

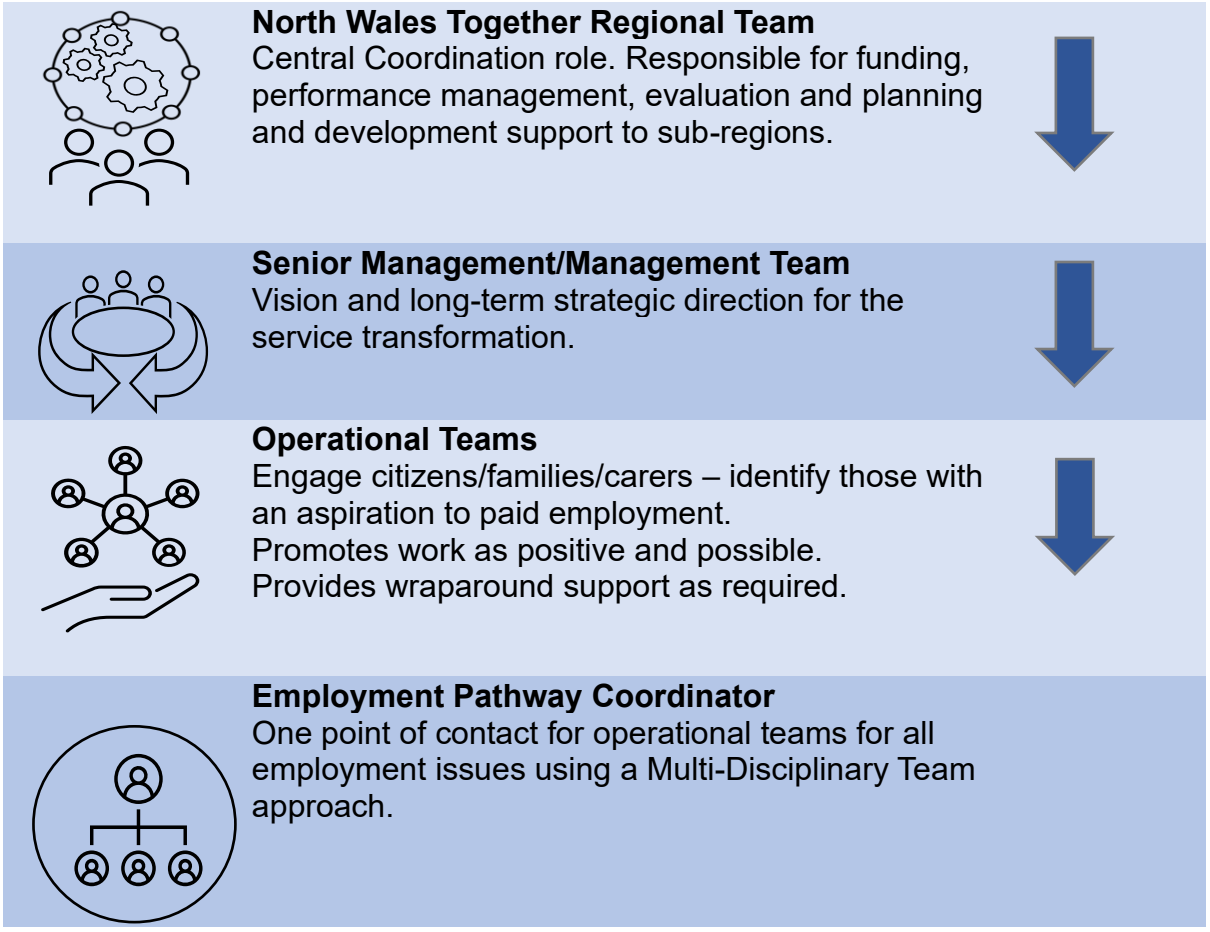
The core recommendation in this strategy is that the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership implement a new supported employment service model for learning disability social services in North Wales in partnership with specialist support employment services.

Overview: The model is designed to address the findings of the strategy and aims to provide individuals with learning disabilities the same opportunities for paid employment. It emphasises a whole-system approach to system and service transformation and seeks to bridge the gap between the current state of services and future aspirations. The model is *sub-regional* with two local authorities working together to share resources and learning.

Aim: to embed access to paid employment as a distinct care pathway within learning disability social services and as an alternative to traditional day/ work opportunity services and long-term unpaid work placements using a partnership approach with specialist supported employment services.

The Model Components: The model consists of a range of elements that work together to create a comprehensive approach. This is illustrated below.

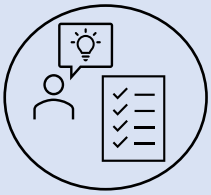
Illustration 3: North Wales Supported Employment Model



Receives all referrals into the service from the teams.

Supports individuals and circle of support to identify best local service/ options to meet their needs and employment goals including specialist support employment/job coaching service.

Feedbacks progress to operational teams.



Supported Employment/Specialist Job Coaching Service
Provides dedicated specialist job coaching service to the operational teams.

Adheres to the 5-stage supported employment model of best practice and its core values. Leads on employer engagement.

All referrals into the service come via the EPC.

Peer Champions
Employed by the Supported Employment service on behalf of the partners.

Use their lived experience to raise expectations and aspirations with stakeholders including employers.

Lead by example.

Conclusions:

This strategy thoroughly examines the obstacles to employment faced by individuals with learning disabilities known to social services and has drawn the following conclusions:

- People with learning disabilities can work successfully in various occupations when they have the right support, job match, and employer. Stereotypes should not limit their opportunities.
- Work is not the only way for individuals to achieve equality and inclusion, but it has a powerful role to play and individuals with learning disabilities should have the right to choose if paid employment is right for them.
- While some individuals may find and maintain employment through mainstream employability programmes or independently, the current low employment rates suggest that the majority will require specialised supported employment.
- Supported employment is an evidence-based model that yields positive outcomes, especially when it aligns with the BASE UK Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards. This strategy recommends using the SEQF model fidelity standards as the benchmark for any supported employment service provided.
- Concerns about the impact of employment on welfare benefits, as well as a pervasive culture of low expectations, hinder individuals from realising their social and economic potential.

- Current local authority day and work opportunities can contribute to a culture of dependency and lack focus on progression. These services, a form of managed care and support, are also costly compared to supported employment. The proposed supported employment model has the potential to realise cost efficiencies.
- Employer attitudes pose challenges to advancing people with learning disabilities into the workforce, but employers, including local authorities and the Health Board, are part of the solution. They can lead by example in recruiting and employing more individuals with learning disabilities.
- Health and social services stand to gain the most from supporting more individuals with learning disabilities to secure paid employment. This is a regional issue requiring a regional approach to ensure equal access to employment for everyone in North Wales.
- The strategy recommends the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group (NWLPG) implement a new supported employment service model to serve as a bridge from their current state to their aspirations outlined in this strategy.

Recommendations:

The strategy outlines actionable steps and initiatives to address the identified barriers and support the inclusion of individuals with learning disabilities in paid employment.

The recommendations are grouped according to those that are about the Regional Supported Employment Model and those that address wider system barriers.

Regional Supported Employment Model:

1. The North Wales Learning Disability Partnership adopt the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards as the benchmark for the provision of quality assured supported employment services to people with learning disabilities.
2. Integrate expert welfare rights advice into the supported employment process to ensure individuals and their families/carers have a clear understanding of how employment impacts income.
3. Explore and test peer approaches that highlight the rewards of paid work and how income can increase, combined with early interventions with young people and their families to change mindsets.
4. Develop an integrated approach to the provision of supported employment, making it an essential component of social services care and support for people with learning disabilities.
5. Promote a culture of "work first" within operational services in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 focus on work as a wellbeing outcome.
6. Develop a coordinating role to support operational teams in implementing the recommended changes, drawing from successful models such as Progression Coordinators and Person-Centered Planning Coordinators.
7. Implement the Supported Employment Service Model for learning disability services across each of the six local authorities.

8. The North Wales Learning Disability Partnership should work with North Wales Together to secure additional funding from the North Wales Regional Integration Fund to roll the model out across the region.

Supporting Recommendations:

1. Advises the Welsh Government to recognise young people with learning disabilities aged 19 to 24 as a distinct group at risk of not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) and allocate resources to prevent this.
2. Collaborate with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other welfare benefit advice agencies to create accessible information and guidance on working and benefits for individuals, families, and their support networks.
3. Investigate options to review charging policies for those in paid employment to prevent financial disadvantages and incentivise employment.
4. Commission research and consultancy support to help local authorities align day and work opportunity services with the strategy's aspirations.
5. Collaborate with North Wales Together and local authorities to explore reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process and improve access to job coaches.
6. Investigate practical models that can support both individuals and local authorities as employers, for example supported internships.
7. Identify opportunities to add value to public sector priorities by creating paid roles for people with learning disabilities as experts by lived experience.
8. Explore how social value in procurement can benefit people with learning disabilities seeking employment, such as incentivising providers to offer job try-outs or work placements.

North Wales Supported Employment Strategy for People with Learning Disabilities

1. Introduction:

The North Wales Together Supported Employment Strategy for people with learning disabilities aims to address the pressing need for increased participation of young people and adults with learning disabilities in the workforce. It recognises that changing the cycle of low expectations and attitudes is essential for improving their lives. This strategy is developed by the North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation programme, representing the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group (NWLDPG).

Background:

- The NWLDPG consists of senior managers responsible for specialist learning disability services across the six County Councils and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB). They are responsible for implementing the North Wales Learning Disability Strategy 2018 to 2023, which focuses on various aspects of life, including meaningful employment.
- The strategy identifies improving employment outcomes for people with learning disabilities as a priority.
- The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted progress in helping individuals with learning disabilities find paid employment, causing a drop in the employment rate from 6.1% in 2019 to 4.8% in October 2022. In response, stakeholders, including people with learning disabilities, supported renewing the focus on employment.
- A dedicated employment workstream was created to provide strategic responses to regional employment challenges, considering the relatively small number of individuals with learning disabilities known to social services and the complexity of underlying reasons behind their limited employment opportunities.

Strategic response:

The NWLDPG recognised the need for a strategic regional response due to the following reasons:

- Economies of scale: The numbers of people with learning disabilities known to social services are relatively small, making a regional approach more effective, including sub-regional efforts.
- Complexity of issues: The underlying reasons for the limited employment of people with learning disabilities are multifaceted, requiring a comprehensive, multi-faceted response to drive real change.

The employment workstream lead was tasked with collaborating with the NWLDPG to co-produce this regional supported employment strategy.

Purpose:

The primary objective of this strategy is to increase the number of people with learning disabilities in paid employment. It emphasises that improving employment prospects can contribute to better health, wellbeing, and quality of life, aligning with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

How strategy was developed:

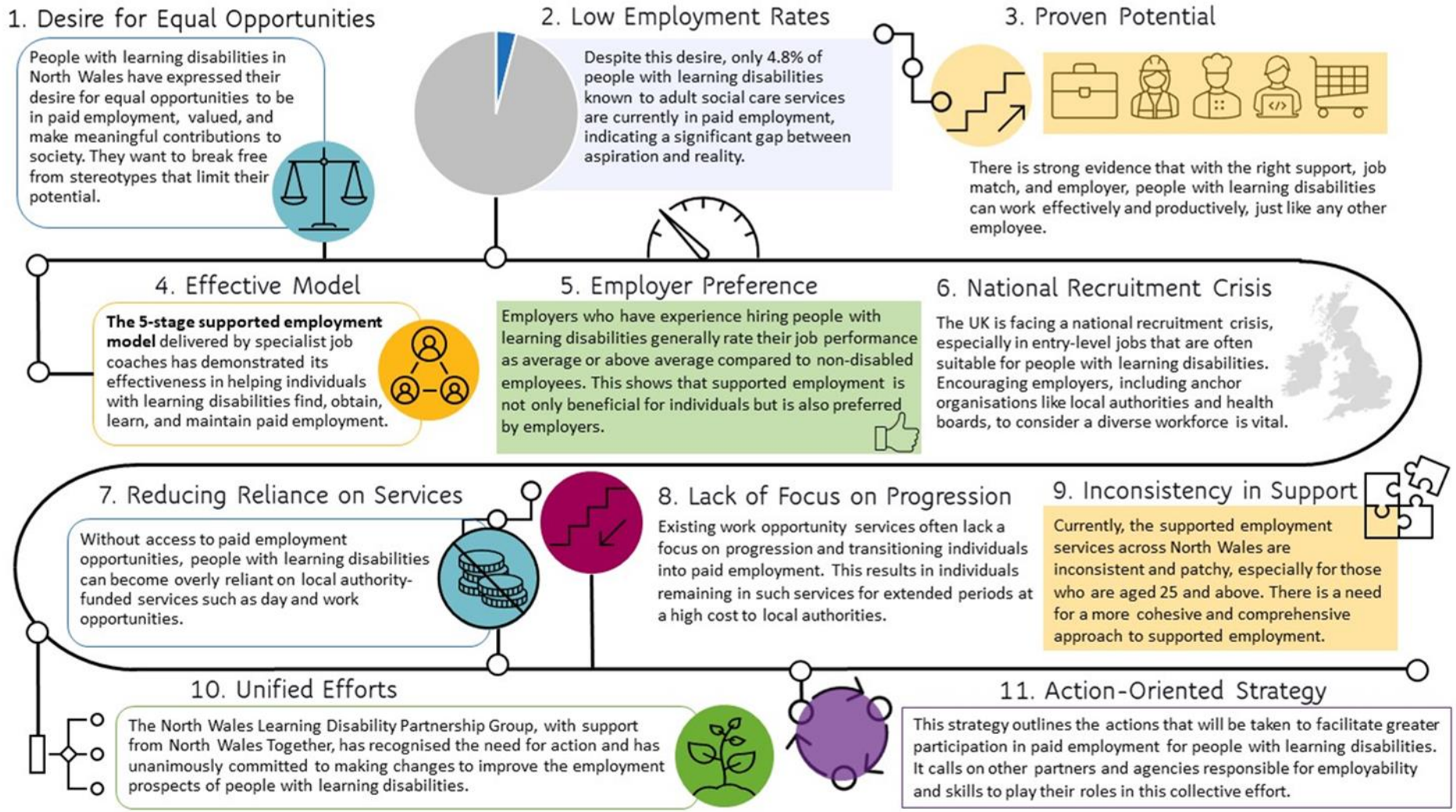
This strategy is a result of comprehensive research, collaboration, and input from individuals with learning disabilities, aiming to empower them and improve their access to meaningful employment.

- A multi-partnership steering group was formed to oversee the co-production of the supported employment strategy, led by the Service Manager for Disability Services at Conwy County Borough Council. The group included representatives from various fields, including parent carers, citizens, health, social services, self-advocacy, employment, education, training, skills, and Learning Disability Wales.
- Dr. Stephen Beyer, an expert in supported employment and Senior Research Fellow at Cardiff University, was commissioned to support the steering group. His role included gathering evidence on best practices, regional and national policy contexts, and mentoring support for the North Wales Together lead.
- Evidence was collected from multiple sources, including the North Wales Regional Population Needs Assessment, statistical data on employment rates, evaluations of supported internships and supported employment programmes, research on the relationship between work, health, and wellbeing, a systematic review of literature on employer benefits, mapping of current supported employment offerings in North Wales, the "Life After School" research report, cost-benefit analyses by UK Local Authorities, and an analysis of national funding and schemes for supported employment and job coaching.
- The voices of people with learning disabilities were integral to the strategy's development. A two-month engagement program called ***'Having a Job'*** involved online workshops with local self-advocacy organisations and a toolkit.

The key themes explored through the 'Having a Job' engagement were:

- ✓ Work and benefits.
- ✓ The right job for me.
- ✓ Finding, getting, learning, and keeping a job.
- ✓ Big employers: making it easier for people to work for them.

Illustration 1: Why is this strategy needed?



2. Focus of this Strategy?

This strategy targets working-age individuals aged 14 and above residing in North Wales who have a diagnosed learning disability and are known to learning disability social services. Other groups, such as individuals with different disabilities or those not known to these services, are outside the scope of this strategy.

It includes individuals who have received a formal diagnosis of a learning disability and any of the following:

- Attend a specialist secondary school.
- Are eligible for care and support under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.
- Or, have eligible needs under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and would not be able to meet their outcomes without support.

This strategy is inclusive of both young people and adults recognising that the latter have historically received less support from supported employment initiatives.

This strategy does not cover:

- People with learning disabilities who are not known to local authority learning disabilities services.
- People with learning difficulties (e.g., Dyslexia, ADHD, Dyspraxia).
- People with autism who do not have a learning disability.
- ALN learners without a learning disability.

Definitions

Learning Disability:

- Refers to individuals with significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information or learn new skills (impaired intelligence) and/or reduced ability to cope independently (impaired adaptive functioning).
- This condition typically starts before adulthood and has a lasting impact on development.
- It should not be confused with the broader term "learning difficulty" used in education, which encompasses specific learning difficulties like dyslexia. The term "intellectual disability" is sometimes used interchangeably with learning disability to avoid confusion.

Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD):

- Describes individuals with multiple impairments, including profound intellectual impairment.
- These individuals often struggle with communication and may require those familiar with them to interpret their responses and intent. People with PMLD may also have physical or sensory impairments or complex health needs.

Autism:

- A lifelong developmental condition that affects how a person communicates with and relates to others, as well as their understanding of the world.
- Autism exists on a spectrum, meaning that while individuals share certain difficulties, their experiences and challenges can vary. Approximately 50% of autistic individuals also have a learning disability.

3. Vision, Principles and Values

The strategy acknowledges that while not everyone may choose to work, paid employment is a valuable avenue for achieving inclusion and equality. It underscores the importance of respecting individuals' choices, promoting their well-being, involving them in decision-making processes, and recognising the significance of paid employment in achieving the vision of an improved quality of life. The strategy's values align with established principles in supported employment and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

Vision: The North Wales Supported Employment Strategy for individuals with learning disabilities shares the vision of the North Wales Learning Disability Strategy 2018-2023. This vision aims to enhance the quality of life for people with learning disabilities in the region. It envisions individuals living in their local communities, feeling safe, valued, and included. The vision emphasizes providing personal support that fosters independence, choice, and control over their lives. The strategy recognises that paid employment plays a crucial role in realising this vision and underscores the importance of considering the preferences and voices of people with learning disabilities.

Principles: The strategy adheres to key principles, in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014:

1. **Voice and Control:** It upholds individuals' rights to choose paid employment and seeks to empower them to make informed decisions. It challenges low expectations regarding their capabilities and encourages self-determination.
2. **Prevention and Early Intervention:** The strategy highlights the evidence supporting the role of paid employment in reducing the need for costly services and addressing health inequalities. Early intervention, particularly with young people, is vital to achieve this.
3. **Well-being:** The strategy focuses on providing the necessary support to make paid employment a realistic and achievable goal, with positive implications for individuals' health and overall well-being. This is in line with the definition of wellbeing in the Act which includes *being able to work.*
4. **Co-production:** It commits to placing the voices of people with learning disabilities at the centre of its efforts. The strategy engages them in the design and delivery of services, ensuring their active participation.

Values: The strategy places significant emphasis on values in the provision of care and support to people with learning disabilities, including support to access paid employment. Trust and respect are identified as fundamental values. Individuals must trust those assisting them in securing paid employment. This strategy aligns itself with the *core values of the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF)*

model fidelity standards (see Illustration 2 below) because they uphold the importance of empowering individuals to be fully involved in all decisions affecting them. In turn these core values are consistent with the *North Wales Values and Behaviours Framework* co-produced by North Wales Together with people with learning disabilities and those of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

Illustration 2: The core values of supported employment (Supported Employment Quality Framework)

1. People with disabilities and/or disadvantages can make a positive contribution in the workplace.

2. People with disabilities / disadvantage should have access to a real job where:
   - wages are paid at the going rate for the job
   - the employee enjoys the same terms and conditions as all other employees.
   - the job helps the person to meet their life goals and aspirations;
   - the role is valued by managers and colleagues;
   - the job has similar hours and times at work as other employees, with safe working conditions.

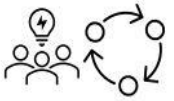
3. Practitioners uphold the "zero rejection" philosophy of supported employment so that, with the right job and the right support, everyone who wants to work, can work.

4. Supported employment does not adhere to a work readiness model and a 'place, train and maintain' approach is implemented.

5. Job search should happen at the earliest opportunity.

6. People are encouraged to exercise choice and control in achieving their career aspirations.

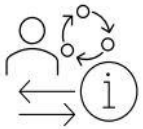
   Support is individualised and all options assume successful employability.



7. There is genuine partnership between the person, their family carers, employers, social care services/ providers, community supports and the provider of supported employment.

8. People are supported to be full and active members of their workforces and wider communities, both socially and economically.

9. Support services recognise the importance of the employer as a customer of supported employment with requirements that need to be satisfied.



10. Supported employment draws on Social Role Valorisation (SRV) in recognising that employment is a valued social role and becoming employed can help reverse societal devaluation, with wider positive consequences for the person.

11. Supported employment draws on the social model of disability recognising that disability is the product of the physical, organisational, and attitudinal barriers present within society. The removal of discrimination requires a change of approach and thinking in the way in which society is organised, in this case removing barriers to employment.

12. Supported employment should encourage the career development of individuals by promoting training opportunities and seeking options for increased responsibility.

4. Policy and Legislative Context

The North Wales Supported Employment Strategy is deeply rooted in a comprehensive policy and legislative landscape that underscores the importance of enhancing the well-being and employment prospects of individuals with learning disabilities. It aligns with these initiatives and seeks to address the unique challenges and requirements faced by this population.

The key policy and legislative elements include:

1. **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA):** The Act defines eligible needs for care and support, which encompass participation in work, education, training, or leisure activities. The strategy is designed to address this need by offering an alternative approach to social services that facilitates greater access to paid employment.
2. **Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018:** This act underscores the significance of high aspirations and improved outcomes for young people, with a focus on enabling them to work towards long-term aspirations, including employment. The strategy aligns with this act by supporting young people known to social services in their transition to paid employment.
3. **Learning Disability Strategic Action Plan 2022-2026:** This plan commits to enhancing access to employment, training, and support for individuals with learning disabilities, integrating their needs into employment policies. The strategy reinforces these commitments for both young people and adults known to social services.
4. **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD):** The UNCRPD recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal footing with others. The strategy aligns with Article 27 of the UNCRPD and aims to expand employment opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities within the public sector in North Wales.
5. **National Disability Strategy:** This overarching strategy seeks to improve the lives of disabled people in various domains, including employment. It pledges to expand supported employment services for those with learning disabilities and autism. The strategy dovetails with this national approach by advocating for supported employment as an effective model.
6. **Stronger, Fairer, and Greener Wales for Everyone:** This plan encompasses actions relevant to the strategy, such as addressing the gap between disabled and non-disabled young people who are not in education, training, or employment (NEET). It recognises the efficacy of job coaching for individuals with significant learning disabilities. The strategy endorses these actions and aligns with the national direction.
7. **Welsh Government Youth Engagement and Progression Framework:** This framework is designed to re-engage young people at risk of becoming NEET. The strategy supports the framework by assisting more young people with learning disabilities known to social services in finding paid employment.

In summary, the North Wales Supported Employment Strategy is grounded in various policies and legislations aimed at improving the well-being and employment opportunities of people with learning disabilities. It aligns with these initiatives and seeks to address specific challenges and needs faced by this population.

5. Statistical Profile of People with Learning Disabilities in North Wales

This statistical profile highlights the challenges and disparities faced by individuals with learning disabilities in North Wales, particularly in terms of employment, health, and education outcomes.

A key area to highlight is the trend for young disabled people to be more at risk of becoming NEET at a later age which may be more acute for young people with a learning disability.

And the impact of economic inactivity on health and wellbeing.

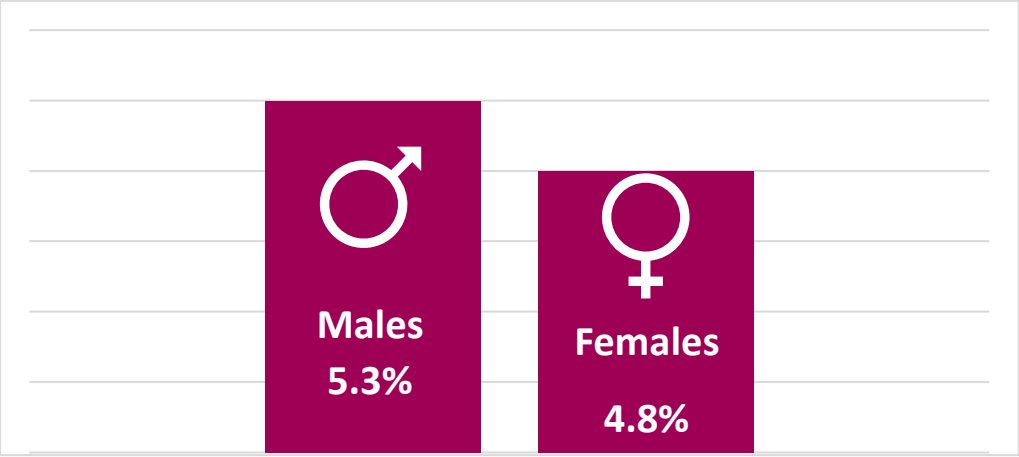
What we know about the population of people with learning disabilities in North Wales:

There are approximately 13,000 people with learning disabilities in North Wales, making up 2% of the population.

Between 2015 and 2020, the number of people with learning disabilities in North Wales increased by about 8%.

There are 3,092 people with learning disabilities aged 16-64 known to social services in North Wales accounting for 24% of the total population of people with learning disabilities.

What we know about their employment rate compared to other groups:



The employment rate for people with learning disabilities known to adult social care in North Wales is 4.8%.

Those not known to adult social care is 23%

The employment rate for disabled people is 50%

The employment rate for the general population in Wales is 74% and in North Wales it is 76.6%

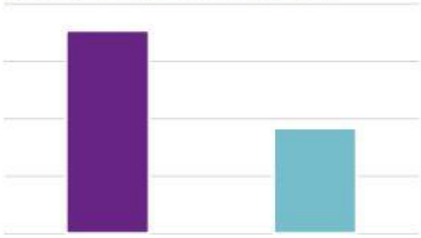
Percentage who want to work:

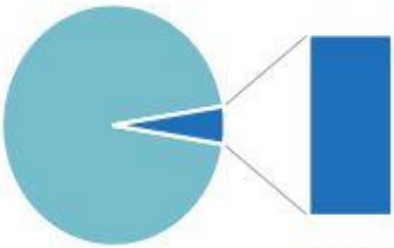
Disabled young people not in education, training, or employment (NEET) - Wales:

Disabled young people are more likely to be NEET compared to non-disabled young people.

For 19 to 24-year-olds, **40.3% of young disabled people are NEET,** compared to 15.4% of non-disabled young people.

Among 16 to 18-year-olds, **17.7% of young disabled individuals are NEET** while 9.2% of non-disabled peers are NEET





Only 5% of young people with learning disabilities move into paid employment after leaving school.

Post-school, many young people with learning disabilities pursue Independent Living Skills courses at college, while managed care or support/day or work opportunities are common destinations after further education.

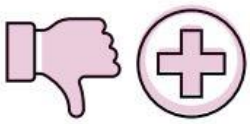
SEN school leaver destinations:

The trend for young disabled people to be more at risk of being NEET at a later age requires consideration at a national level. Given only 5% of young people with learning disabilities move into employment after leaving further education despite their aspirations indicates that current efforts to reduce the NEET gap between disabled and non-disabled young people are not working effectively for this group.

Health inequalities and social determinants of health:

It is widely recognised that *"good work is good for health and wellbeing".* Employment is a key social determinant of health and economic inactivity is associated with higher mortality, poorer health, and psychological distress. Studies specific to people with learning disability are consistent with the findings for the general population. Improving access to paid employment could play a

preventative role whilst recognising the important role of wider health improvement interventions for this population group.



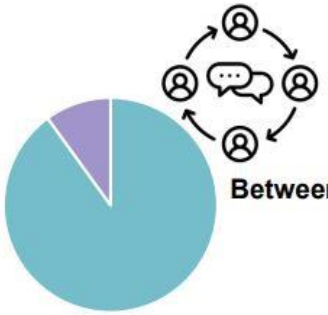
People with learning disabilities experience health inequalities and are more likely to have poorer health compared to their non-disabled peers.

People with learning disabilities are four times more likely to die from preventable causes and **50 to 58 times more likely to die before the age of 50.**

Mortality rates are three times higher among people with moderate to severe learning disabilities.

One in seven adults with learning disabilities rates their health as not good, and **40-60% experience poor mental health without a diagnosis.**

Communication:



Between 50% to 90% of people with learning disabilities have communication difficulties.

Recommendations:

- Advises the Welsh Government to recognise young people with learning disabilities aged 19 to 24 as a distinct group at risk of not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) and allocate resources to prevent this.

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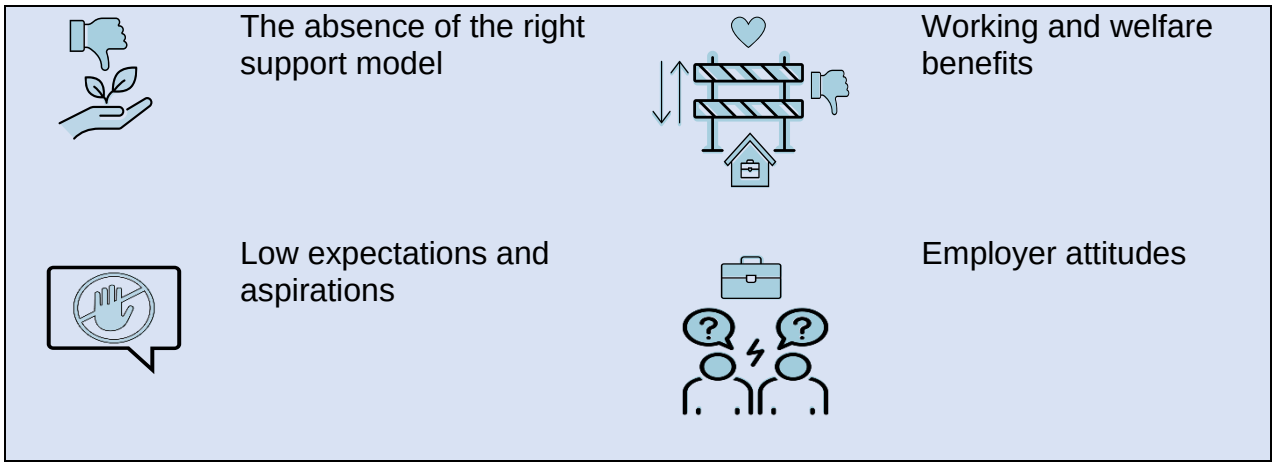
6. Why more People with Learning Disabilities are not in Paid Employment?

Reasons for limited employment of people with Learning Disabilities:

Four main areas contribute to the limited employment of people with learning disabilities:



We look at each of these areas in turn in the next sections. In each section we highlight what people told us they need drawn from the “Having a Job” engagement programme with people with learning disabilities.

“The absence of the right model of support”

Specific challenges in finding employment:

- Learning disabilities have various causes and effects, resulting in differing impacts on individuals.
- Challenges for people with learning disabilities in securing employment are related to verbal communication, task transferability, speech, language, memory, cognitive processing, reading, and writing difficulties, impaired motor function and difficulty in changing learned routines.

Supported Employment/ specialist job coaching:

- Supported employment is effective because it addresses the specific challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities.
- For those with mild learning disabilities, mainstream employability approaches may work.
- As the severity of learning disabilities increases, supported employment strategies are more effective, focusing on *"place, train, and sustain."*

For most social services registered individuals it is likely that a supported employment approach will be needed.

The 5-Stage Supported Employment Model:

- **Engagement:** Building trust and providing accessible information to help individuals decide if supported employment is right for them.
- **Vocational Profiling:** Engaging with the individual and their circle of support to build a comprehensive picture of preferences, skills, strengths, and support needs.
- **Employer Engagement**: Employers are proactively engaged and the business case for supported employment clearly articulated.
- **Job Matching/ Securing Employment**: Job coaches collaborate with employers to find suitable job matches based on the individual's profile and job analysis.
- **In-work Support and Career Development**: On-the-job training, systematic instruction, and continued support to facilitate independence, integration, and career progression.

Good Support: what people told us they need:

People told us very clearly what good support to find paid work looked like. Key themes were the importance of values; working at their pace and support being individualised. And those supporting them having experience and expertise in working with people with learning disabilities. Where they had access to a job coach this was viewed as a trusted person.

"People who believe in us and what we can do".

"We all have different skills and abilities and need opportunities to build on these skills through more variety of work placements."

"Help people take small steps, no pressure, informal".

Help to "find out about vacancies, help to understand, help with interviews, mock interviews, rehearsing, writing notes."

Support in work to learn the job – "*break things down into chunks, clear instructions, list of tasks, actions, steps. Help to be accepted. To socialise.*"

The importance of the supported employment model in helping people with learning disabilities overcome barriers to employment and the role of job coaches in facilitating this process.

Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards

- BASE UK in collaboration with other partners has developed the *Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards*. Evidence shows that closely following the stages of the model and embedding the core values of supported employment leads to better outcomes for individuals and employers.
- The SEQF Model Fidelity concentrates on the 5 stages of supported employment, with business results and key performance indicators embedded within, so services can assess how closely their service delivery is following all aspects of the 5-stage supported employment model, which is also known as *model fidelity*. (Quality in Supported Employment Delivery | British Association for Supported Employment (base-uk.org)).

The full accreditation process includes:

- A self-assessment tool.
- SEQF Model Fidelity external assessment by external auditors from BASE.
- SEQF Accreditation.

Evidence of Supported Employment outcomes:

- Data provided by Dr. Beyer shows that locally commissioned supported employment services achieve outcomes for 38% of their beneficiaries.
- The Engage to Change evaluation reports a 30% outcome rate, with 60 out of 233 young people securing paid jobs in North Wales.
- A study by NDTi found that services following evidence-based models, as outlined in this section, achieved better value for money and job outcome rates of 43%.
- These statistics indicate that supported employment models can significantly improve employment outcomes for people with learning disabilities, surpassing traditional approaches like voluntary work, sheltered workshops. and mainstream employment support models.

Engage to Change Partnership:

- Engage to Change was a five-year national project funded by the Welsh Government and the National Lottery to assist young people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties, and Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) in obtaining paid jobs.
- Led by Learning Disability Wales, it involved Elite and Agoriad Cyf supported employment agencies, offering job coaching, paid placements, and paid jobs in regular workplaces. It also established three DFN Project Search sites in North Wales.

- The National Centre for Mental Health at Cardiff University conducted an independent evaluation of the program.

Key findings from the evaluation include:

- 39% of 420 young people gained paid employment through the program.
- Those who had more significant support from the project had a higher likelihood of employment.
- Well-trained job coaches played a pivotal role, recognized by participants.

Summary:

- With the right job and support, people with learning disabilities can potentially work.
- Barriers to employment exist, such as economic viability, skill gaps, or resource constraints.
- Supported employment and job coaches can help more people with learning disabilities find, secure, and maintain jobs, yielding significant benefits.

The following sections explore the other barriers to paid employment and how supported employment can address them.

Recommendations:

- The North Wales Learning Disability Partnership adopt the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards as the benchmark for the provision of quality assured supported employment services to people with learning disabilities.

"Working and welfare benefits"

Overview: This section focuses on the feedback received regarding "Working and Welfare Benefits." It explores the impact of these concerns on individuals' employment aspirations and identifies actions required to enable informed decisions about employment. The strategy aims to balance the financial considerations of individuals with learning disabilities who may be in supported living accommodation.

Working and Benefits: what people told us they need:

Key themes were again, the importance of being able to trust those giving them advice on working and benefits combined with knowing where to go to get this advice. Accessibility of this advice was also key - both in terms of the format of information and people's ability to understand it.

“If I get a paid job, I still want my benefits and wages from a job”. “If I got a job, I would be worried about my money being taken away.”

“We don’t always trust people to give us advice.”

“More people need to know where to get this information.”

“Information in easy read and that is easy to understand.”

Issues:

- Many adults with learning disabilities fear losing welfare benefits when considering paid employment. Concerns include worries about income being taken away.
- The concerns stem from a lack of access to good quality information and advice on how paid employment affects welfare benefits.
- Permitted working rules, which allow individuals with disabilities to work up to 15 hours a week while retaining benefits, are often unknown.
- Many individuals with learning disabilities rely on family members to manage their money, making it crucial to involve them in discussions about working and benefits.
- The benefits system is complex, requiring expert assistance for navigation.
- Trust in official sources of advice is lacking among people with learning disabilities.
- Official information on working and benefits in easy-to-understand formats is scarce.
- Transitioning from welfare benefits to full-time paid employment can affect care and support packages and accommodation costs for those in supported living.

Summary:

Providing impartial and high-quality advice on the impact of working and benefits is a critical intervention within the supported employment model. Addressing the concerns and distrust of individuals, their families, and caregivers is essential to encourage engagement with supported employment services.

Recommendations:

- Integrate expert welfare rights advice into the supported employment process to ensure that individuals and their families/ carers have a clear understanding of how employment impacts on income.
- Collaborate with DWP and other welfare benefit advice agencies to create accessible information and guidance on working and benefits for individuals, families, and their support networks.
- Investigate options to review charging policies for those in paid employment to prevent financial disadvantages and incentivise employment.
- Explore and test peer approaches that highlight the rewards of paid work and how income can increase, combined with early interventions with young people and families to change mindsets.

Additional Note: The North Wales Together programme has started developing easy-read information on the impact of earnings on benefits, but further partnership work with DWP is required to make this information official and widely available.

"A cycle of low aspirations and expectations"

Overview: The evidence from citizens about their experiences regarding the cycle of low aspirations and expectations for individuals with learning disabilities. Despite the aspirational nature of this strategy, many individuals and families may be discouraged from engaging with supported employment services due to this cycle. The section aims to identify practical ways to address this culture.

Low expectations and aspirations: what people told us they need:

The strongest message was about the right for people to make this decision for themselves and to be provided with more choices and options than the traditional routes of unpaid work. And for those around them to have higher expectations about what they can do and achieve, including social workers.

"If I can learn to ride a horse, I can learn to do a job."

"Social workers should speak to people about paid work."

"Old fashioned mindset is limiting people."

“Listen to us, let us speak for ourselves.”

“I want choices like everyone else – offered one thing!”

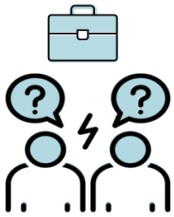
Issues:

- There is a prevalent culture of low expectations and aspirations for individuals with learning disabilities, which can discourage them from believing in their abilities and pursuing paid employment.
- This culture often begins at birth and persists throughout an individual's life, leading to the belief that paid employment is the exception rather than the norm for people with learning disabilities.
- The very low employment rate of people with learning disabilities combined with the trend for people to be placed in unpaid work placements with little focus on progression further perpetuates the myth that they do not aspire or are not capable of undertaking paid employment.
- Some individuals view attending segregated day and work opportunity services/ unpaid work placements as their "job," which is a misconception of real employment.
- Breaking this cycle requires increasing the number of people with learning disabilities in paid employment across various sectors and occupations.

Summary: Breaking the cycle of low aspirations and expectations necessitates providing individuals and families with informed choices about paid work. This involves challenging preconceptions about employment and offering tailored support to address specific learning needs.

Recommendations:

- Develop an integrated approach to the provision of supported employment, making it an essential component of social services care and support for people with learning disabilities.
- Promote a culture of "work first" within operational services in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 focus on work as a well-being outcome.
- Develop a coordinating role to support operational teams in implementing the recommended changes, drawing from successful models such as Progression Coordinators and Person-Centred Planning Coordinators.
- Commission research and consultancy support to help local authorities align day and work opportunity services with this strategy’s aspirations.



“Employer attitudes and recruitment practices”

Overview: Employer attitudes towards the employability of individuals with learning disabilities. How supported employment can help these individuals secure job opportunities. The role of public sector "anchor" organisations in employing people with learning disabilities.

Employer attitudes and recruitment practices: what people told us they need:

People were very realistic and thought employers needed support as well. When asked about the recruitment practices of big employers like local authorities, every step was felt to be inaccessible.

“Employers need to be supported to understand an individual’s preferred manner of communication and understanding of tasks they are given to complete.”

“Speak to and help employers and let them know what support they can get if they employ someone with a LD.”

Someone to explain to employers:

“What I can do! How best to work with me. That I need praise. I might take longer but I will get the job done. What I can offer.”

“Easy read job adverts, job descriptions application forms.” (Local Authority vacancies)

Even then – “would still need help with understanding and filling in the form as not everyone is good at reading and writing.”

“Being able to do a work trial so the manager can see what I can do.”

Employer attitudes:

- Research indicates that employers often have lower expectations and more concerns about hiring people with learning disabilities compared to other disabled groups.
- Employers with no prior experience in employing individuals with learning disabilities have concerns about productivity, social performance, supervision needs, accidents, sickness absence, and customer perception.
- However, employers who have experience employing individuals with learning disabilities are generally more positive about their work and value to the company.
- These experienced employers find that employees with learning disabilities exhibit reliability, dependability, good relationships with co-workers, and loyalty, all of which are highly valued.
- The same research emphasises the importance of supported employment and job coach support in helping individuals with learning disabilities secure and maintain employment.
- Job coaches and disability professionals assisting employers and employees were considered the most helpful ways to support the employment of people with learning disabilities.

The role of Public Sector "anchor" organisations:

- Public sector anchor organisations can benefit from supported employment programmes that facilitate the employment of people with learning disabilities.
- Partnering with local supported employment services can help these organisations employ individuals with learning disabilities effectively.
- BCUHB and some local authorities are already leading the way in this regard by collaborating with supported employment providers through programmes like DFN Project Search/supported internships.
- Making job vacancies more accessible and exploring alternative recruitment pathways can further facilitate the employment of people with learning disabilities by public sector organisations.
- Such initiatives can have positive ripple effects on other stakeholders for example, other public sector organisations, local communities, local employers, and local and national government policy.

Maximising paid roles for people with learning disabilities as experts by lived experience:

There have been promising developments in North Wales (and elsewhere) to maximise opportunities to create paid roles for people with learning disabilities as experts by lived experience.

Examples include:

- The partners of the NWLDPG co-fund the *Regional Coordinator for the North Wales Flyers*, the regional self-advocacy group for people with learning disabilities. This paid role is reserved for someone with a learning disability. In

return the North Wales Flyers work with the NWLDPG to co-produce service improvements based on priorities identified by The Flyers and local self-advocacy groups.

- The North Wales Together programme funded Conwy Connect to establish the *Health Check Champions project*. Based on the successful Ace Anglia model in Suffolk, the project employs people with learning disabilities to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of health checks and health screening to their peers, parent/cares, providers of support etc. The Champions are recruited from the learning disability population and are now co-funded by the BCUHB, Learning Disability Division.
- North Wales Together have a created a new role in the regional team for a *Learning Disability Champion* to enable the team and the partners to more effectively co-produce with people with learning disabilities.

While relatively small in scale these examples highlight the opportunity to meet co-production requirements and expectations in a way that demonstrates that lived experience is valued and valuable to the public sector.

And the added value that peer-to-peer approaches can make to public sector priorities such as reducing health inequalities amongst the learning disability population through increased uptake of health checks/ health screening.

Summary: This section highlights the importance of changing employer attitudes and increasing the employment of people with learning disabilities by public sector anchor organisations. By adopting supported employment programmes and making adjustments to the recruitment process, these organisations can provide meaningful job opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities. The other opportunity is to identify opportunities for paid roles based on their expertise by lived experience that enable and enhance the delivery of public sector priorities.

Recommendations:

- Collaborate with North Wales Together and local authorities to explore reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process and improve access to job coaches.
- Investigate practical models that can both support individuals and local authorities as employers, for example supported internships.
- Identify opportunities to add value to public sector priorities by creating paid roles for people with learning disabilities as experts by lived experience.
- Explore how social value in procurement can benefit people with learning disabilities seeking employment, such as incentivising provider to offer job try-outs or work placements.

Tap into the talent toolkit and film for North Wales employers:

A toolkit and film created by the North Wales Employer Engagement Working Group providing a business case for employing people with learning disabilities.

Local supported employment agencies will use these resources to engage local employers and promote the support available to grow a network of employers willing to provide job opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

7. The North Wales Supported Employment Landscape

Overview: The current state of supported employment services in North Wales as defined by the strategy. The strategy emphasises an individualised approach delivered by specialist job coaches, following the 5-stage supported employment model. However, it identifies gaps and challenges in the existing provision.

The current offer for young people (aged 16 to 24 years):

- Engage to Change (E2C) was a national programme until June 2022, providing young people with learning disabilities, autism, and learning difficulties access to specialist job coaching support, including supported internship programmes.
- The legacy of E2C led the Welsh Government to introduce measures to improve access to employability programmes for those under 25, including shared supported apprenticeships and funding for job coaches in Jobs Growth Wales Plus Traineeships.
- North Wales has five supported internship programmes for young people with learning disabilities and autism four of which are funded through Pathway 4 of the Further Education Independent Living Skills Curriculum.

Analysis:

- When mapped against the five stages of the supported employment model, the current provision of job coaching funded by the Welsh Government reveals gaps and limitations.
- Selection criteria apply to this provision making it inaccessible for all young people.
- The full-time nature of these programmes may not suit all individuals.
- There is a lack of longer-term support for graduates of Pathway 4 supported internships who do not find paid employment by the end of the programme due to the funding only covering the academic term.

The current offer for adults (Aged 25+) & analysis:

- For adults, apart from Flintshire County Council, there is no 5-stage supported employment offer across the region.
- The ReAct Plus program introduced by the Welsh Government aims to provide access to job coaching for adults but faces challenges related to funding, a clear mechanism to access specialist job coaching, and the capacity of the supported employment market in North Wales.

Summary:

- The section concludes that a comprehensive 5-stage supported employment offer as defined by the SEQF model fidelity standards does not currently exist for individuals aged 14 and above with learning disabilities in North Wales.
- The Welsh Government's provision, influenced by the legacy of Engage to Change, needs further development to meet the needs of all individuals, particularly those aged 25 and above.

- The 5-stage supported employment model and specialist job coaching need to go hand in hand and align with the standards set out in the SEQF model fidelity to ensure that people with learning disabilities receive high-quality support to find, maintain, and flourish in well-matched employment.
- The lack of such a comprehensive and quality assured 5-stage offer represents a critical obstacle to achieving the aspirations of the strategy.

North Wales Together Employment Workstream:

- In 2022-2023, North Wales Together provided sub-regions with a small grant to start implementing the strategy.
- Introduction to Supported Employment training was conducted to increase understanding and awareness of the 5-stage supported employment model with the social work teams.
- While this activity raised awareness, it is noted that the current level of investment from North Wales Together is insufficient to address the issues raised in the strategy at a regional level.

8. North Wales Supported Employment Model for Learning Disability Services

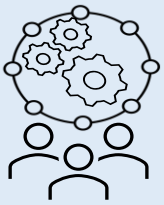
The core recommendation in this strategy is that the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership implement a new supported employment service model for learning disability social services in North Wales in partnership with specialist support employment services.

Overview: The model is designed to address the findings of the strategy and aims to provide individuals with learning disabilities the same opportunities for paid employment. It emphasises a whole-system approach to system and service transformation and seeks to bridge the gap between the current state of services and future aspirations. The model is *sub-regional* with two local authorities working together to share resources and learning.

Aim: to embed access to paid employment as a distinct care pathway within learning disability social services and as an alternative to traditional day/ work opportunity services and long-term unpaid work placements using a partnership approach with specialist supported employment services.

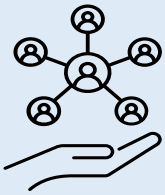
The Model Components: The model consists of a range of elements that work together to create a comprehensive approach. This is illustrated below.

Illustration 3: North Wales Supported Employment Model



North Wales Together Regional Team
Central Coordination role. Responsible for funding, performance management, evaluation and planning and development support to sub-regions.

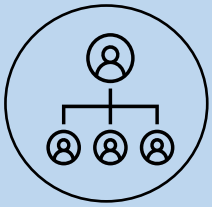
Senior Management/Management Team
Vision and long-term strategic direction for the service transformation.



Operational Teams
Engage citizens/families/carers – identify those with an aspiration to paid employment.

Promotes work as positive and possible.

Provides wraparound support as required.

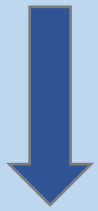


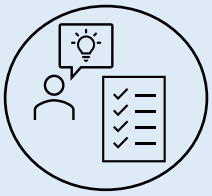
Employment Pathway Coordinator
One point of contact for operational teams for all employment issues using a Multi-Disciplinary Team approach.

Receives all referrals into the service from the teams.

Supports individuals and circle of support to identify best local service/ options to meet their needs and employment goals including specialist support employment/job coaching service.

Feedbacks progress to operational teams.





Supported Employment/Specialist Job Coaching Service
Provides dedicated specialist job coaching service to the operational teams.

Adheres to the 5-stage supported employment model of best practice and its core values. Leads on employer engagement.

All referrals into the service come via the EPC.

Peer Champions
Employed by the Supported Employment service on behalf of the partners.

	Use their lived experience to raise expectations and aspirations with stakeholders including employers. Lead by example.

Roles and barriers addressed: Each part of the model addresses specific barriers and contributes to the different stages of the 5-stage supported employment model:

Barriers addressed:	Stage of supported employment model:
North Wales Together Regional Team: access to the right model of support, working and benefits, culture of low expectations and aspirations, employer attitudes.	✓ Contributes to all 5 stages working well regionally.
Senior Management Team: access to the right model of support culture of low expectations and aspirations, employer attitudes (i.e., local authority)	✓ Contributes to all 5 stages working well locally.
Operational Teams: culture of low expectations and aspirations, access to the right model of support.	✓ Contributes to Stage 1 (participant engagement), Stage 2 (vocational profiling) and Stage 5 (in-work support) where wraparound care and support is required.
Employment Pathway Coordinator: access to the right model of support, working and benefits, culture of low expectations and aspiration.	✓ Contributes to Stage 1 (participant engagement) and Stage 2 (vocational profiling).
Specialist Supported Employment Service: access to the right model of support, working and benefits, cycle of low expectations and aspirations, employer attitudes.	✓ Covers all stages from 1 to 5.
Peer Champion(s): working and benefits, culture of low expectations and aspirations.	✓ Contributes to Stage 1 (participant engagement) and Stage 3 (employer engagement).

Summary:

- The model represents a significant shift towards a comprehensive supported employment approach.
- It acts as a bridge to transform learning disability services from reliance on day, work, and job-finding services to a pathway that prioritises paid employment.
- It seeks to address the culture of low expectations and aspirations among individuals with learning disabilities and their families.
- The model outlines a mechanism for funding supported employment and specialist job coaching for individuals with learning disabilities in North Wales through the coordination role of North Wales Together.

Recommendations:

- Implement the Supported Employment Service Model for learning disability services across each of the six local authorities.
- The North Wales Learning Disability Partnership should work with North Wales Together to secure additional funding from the North Wales Regional Integration Fund to roll the model out across the region.

9. The Benefits of Supporting more People to Find, Get, Learn, and Keep a Job

Improved health, wellbeing, and quality of life:

- Employment and socioeconomic status significantly impact physical and mental health.
- People with learning disabilities often experience health inequalities.
- Unemployment is associated with higher mortality, poorer health, and psychological distress.
- Good work positively affects health and wellbeing, offering greater autonomy, reduced depression, and anxiety, and improved overall wellbeing.
- Studies show that individuals with learning disabilities in paid employment report better physical and mental health.
- Employment can lead to a reduction in challenging behaviours and improved behaviour.
- Joblessness is linked to social exclusion, while employment reduces societal devaluation and enhances self-esteem and control over one's life.
- Supported employment generally returns higher rates of satisfaction compared to sheltered work options.

Financial benefits to the individual:

- Many individuals with learning disabilities can earn up to £167 per week while working less than 16 hours (permitted work rules).
- Working full-time offers clear financial benefits.
- International evidence suggests that individuals are generally better off in full-time employment.
- The complex UK benefit system and concerns about losing benefits can complicate the transition to full-time work.
- The strategy aims to support individuals in working without increasing poverty levels.

Cost/ benefit argument:

- High-quality supported employment can lead to significant financial savings for local authorities, health boards, and the government.
- The primary savings come from diverting or reducing the need for more costly forms of care and support, such as managed care and day/work/job finding services.
- The supported employment model is seen as an "invest to save" approach.
- Studies comparing the cost of supported employment to that of day/work opportunities consistently show that supported employment is more cost-effective.
- Examples include the Kent Supported Employment Service and North Lanarkshire, which both found that supported employment is a more cost-effective option compared to traditional day/work services.
- Investment in supported employment can be cost-effective, considering the higher lifetime costs associated with health care, mental health services, and other support services that may be reduced by the protective effects of employment.

Summary:

- Supporting more people with learning disabilities to find, get, learn, and keep a job offers numerous benefits.
- Employment positively impacts health, wellbeing, and overall quality of life.
- Financially, individuals can benefit from paid employment, even within the permitted work rules.
- From a cost/benefit perspective, investing in supported employment can lead to significant savings by reducing the need for more expensive care and support services.

Overall, there is a strong argument for investing in supported employment to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities and achieve positive health and social care outcomes.

10. Conclusion

- This strategy has thoroughly examined the obstacles to employment faced by individuals with learning disabilities known to social services and has drawn the following conclusions:
- People with learning disabilities can work successfully in various occupations when they have the right support, job match, and employer. Stereotypes should not limit their opportunities.
- Work is not the only way for individuals to achieve equality and inclusion, but it has a powerful role to play and individuals with learning disabilities should have the right to choose if paid employment is right for them.
- While some individuals may find and maintain employment through mainstream employability programmes or independently, the current low employment rates suggest that the majority will require specialised supported employment.
- Supported employment is an evidence-based model that yields positive outcomes, especially when it aligns with the BASE UK Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards. This strategy recommends using the SEQF model fidelity standards as the benchmark for any supported employment service provided.
- Concerns about the impact of employment on welfare benefits, as well as a pervasive culture of low expectations, hinder individuals from realising their social and economic potential.
- Current local authority day and work opportunities can contribute to a culture of dependency and lack focus on progression. These services, a form of managed care and support, are also costly compared to supported employment. The proposed supported employment model has the potential to realise cost efficiencies.
- Employer attitudes pose challenges to advancing people with learning disabilities into the workforce, but employers, including local authorities and the Health Board, are part of the solution. They can lead by example in recruiting and employing more individuals with learning disabilities. This includes paid roles as experts by lived experience.
- Health and social services stand to gain the most from supporting more individuals with learning disabilities to secure paid employment. This is a regional issue requiring a regional approach to ensure equal access to employment for everyone in North Wales.
- The strategy recommends the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group (NWLPG) implement a new supported employment service model to serve as a bridge from their current state to their aspirations outlined in this strategy.

11. Recommendations

The strategy outlines actionable steps and initiatives to address the identified barriers and support the inclusion of individuals with learning disabilities in paid employment.

The recommendations are grouped according to those that are about the Regional Supported Employment Model and those that address wider system barriers.

Regional Supported Employment Model:

1. The North Wales Learning Disability Partnership adopt the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards as the benchmark for the provision of quality assured supported employment services to people with learning disabilities.
2. Integrate expert welfare rights advice into the supported employment process to ensure individuals and their families/carers have a clear understanding of how employment impacts income.
3. Explore and test peer approaches that highlight the rewards of paid work and how income can increase, combined with early interventions with young people and their families to change mindsets.
4. Develop an integrated approach to the provision of supported employment, making it an essential component of social services care and support for people with learning disabilities.
5. Promote a culture of "work first" within operational services in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 focus on work as a wellbeing outcome.
6. Develop a coordinating role to support operational teams in implementing the recommended changes, drawing from successful models such as Progression Coordinators and Person-Centered Planning Coordinators.
7. Implement the Supported Employment Service Model for learning disability services across each of the six local authorities.
8. The North Wales Learning Disability Partnership should work with North Wales Together to secure additional funding from the North Wales Regional Integration Fund to roll the model out across the region.

Supporting recommendations:

1. Advises the Welsh Government to recognise young people with learning disabilities aged 19 to 24 as a distinct group at risk of not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) and allocate resources to prevent this.
2. Collaborate with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other welfare benefit advice agencies to create accessible information and guidance on working and benefits for individuals, families, and their support networks.
3. Investigate options to review charging policies for those in paid employment to prevent financial disadvantages and incentivise employment.

4. Commission research and consultancy support to help local authorities align day and work opportunity services with the strategy's aspirations.
5. Collaborate with North Wales Together and local authorities to explore reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process and improve access to job coaches.
6. Investigate practical models that can support both individuals and local authorities as employers, for example supported internships.
7. Identify opportunities to add value to public sector priorities by creating paid roles for people with learning disabilities as experts by lived experience.
8. Explore how social value in procurement can benefit people with learning disabilities seeking employment, such as incentivising providers to offer job try-outs or work placements.

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Appendix 1

Draws on the BASE UK SEQF model fidelity assessment. Quality in Supported Employment Delivery | British Association for Supported Employment (base-uk.org)

Appendix 1: The 5-Stage Supported Employment Model

Definition: Supported Employment is a personalised model for supporting people with significant disabilities to secure and retain paid employment. The model uses a partnership strategy to enable people with disabilities to achieve sustainable long-term employment and businesses to employ valuable workers.

Supported employment does not adhere to a *work readiness model*. It is about getting people into competitive employment first with training and support on the job: a *"place, train and maintain"* approach.

The model is delivered by specialist job coaches/ supported employment practitioners. For a supported employment practitioner to practice competently he or she must apply specialist skills and knowledge that are informed by a set of core values (see p.13) as set out in the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model fidelity standards. Quality in Supported Employment Delivery | British Association for Supported Employment (base-uk.org)

Stage	Description
Engagement	Helping individuals to find out about the supported employment service and make an informed choice on whether it is the right service to meet their goals and aspirations. A policy of zero rejection is applied. Information is provided about the service in an accessible way to support informed choice. The approach is holistic and with permission includes the individuals circle of support. Tailored advice and information on working and impact on benefits is provided to decision making about pursuing paid employment.
Vocational Profiling	Person centred approaches are used to identify the individuals' preferences, experiences, skills, support needs, strengths, support networks, etc. This information is used to co-produce a holistic, accessible vocational profile which informs job seeking and job matching. The profile is a living document and regularly revisited and updated. Job try-outs can be an important element of this stage in different *real work environments*.

Stage	Description
Employer Engagement 	The service has a strong grasp of the local labour market and the business case for supported employment. Employers are proactively engaged and the business case for supported employment clearly articulated. Employers are recognised as customers and their business needs are fully considered. Engagement can be specific to an individual or general engagement aimed at building a trusted relationship and offering wider supports e.g., training in inclusive recruitment, advice on Access to Work.
Job match and securing employment 	Ensuring an effective job match is key to job sustainment and client wellbeing. This is achieved through undertaking a detailed job analysis of the work environment and matching this to the vocational profile. Job matching can be further supported through a variety of techniques such as: Carving or customising jobs. Agreeing reasonable adjustments. Completing a risk assessment to address equality and diversity, health and safety and safeguarding issues. Advice and guidance to the employer about Access to Work and other supports that can help them to ensure they are prepared to appropriately support the individual.
In-work support and career development 	The service support employees in the workplace, especially during the initial period in a new job role to support the employee and employer to overcome any issues or barriers. Natural workplace supports are maximised however techniques such as systematic instruction can be used to teach the person how to do the job to the standard required by the employer. Job coaches aim to be invisible in the workplace and over time the role of a job coach typically fades, in part because the job coach can identify and cultivate natural supports from co-workers and/or circles of support. Services will maintain the link with the person and the employer to monitor the quality of performance, the job match and support career development.