



# **Taking control of employment support**

**October 2013**

This paper was written by Neil Crowther and Liz Sayce. We are interested in stimulating debate and welcome feedback and discussion on the proposals

October 2013

[www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

# Taking control of employment support

## Executive summary

Employment support programmes, including the Work Programme and Work Choice, are largely failing to help disabled people find and keep jobs, - especially those who face the most significant labour market disadvantage. Successive governments have set up huge, centralised employment programmes and the stark truth is that they have not worked:

- The National Audit Office concluded that the last government's 'Pathways to Work' programme *'has turned out to provide poor value for money and the Department (for Work and Pensions) needs to learn from this experience.'* The programme, statistically speaking, made no difference to disabled people's employment prospects
- The current government's Work Programme set a (modest) performance target: 16.5% of people on the out of work disability benefit Employment and Support Allowance should secure sustained employment through the programme. Government figures from July 2013 show only 5.3% of new Employment and Support Allowance claimants had secured employment (a 95% failure rate). Optimistic projections suggest this might rise to 12% as the most recent recruits go the full course of the programme (a failure rate, at best, of 88%)
- The Work Choice programme, set up for those disabled people facing the greatest barriers to employment, has slightly better results with about 31% securing employment. However a recent evaluation commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions shows that it is not serving the very people it was set up for – those with the most complex needs. Since 2011/12 it has helped only 58 people with serious mental health problems per year get jobs in the whole of Great Britain, whereas one NHS Trust in just one area of London helped more than three times as many people (201) with serious mental health problems (239 posts in one year) to get jobs, using the proven individual placement with support model. The outcome payment model in Work Choice means providers are subject to perverse incentives to take on those with the fewest barriers.

It is time for a radical re-think.

Disability Rights UK asked disabled people for their experiences and views of employment support. Over 500 disabled people responded to our survey and gave their experiences and perspectives on what they found most helpful and unhelpful in getting and keeping work. We also analysed research evidence. We found:

- There is a huge appetite for a personalised service. We asked whether respondents would like to know more about the resources available for their support, and types of support available, in order to have a say. 78% of respondents said yes. We asked whether they would like to decide how the money on their employment support is spent. 74% said yes. Research shows that a personalised plan helps people experiencing barriers or with support needs to find and keep a job and that with individually tailored support, job outcomes are typically twice as good as with more traditional vocational support. Only 36% of respondents to our survey had had a personal plan. 58% said they would like one.
- There appears to be a gaping gulf between what disabled people want and what they get. Research shows mentoring by someone in a field you are interested in is effective. Only 16% of respondents had been offered this. 38% asked whether they would want this type of mentoring said yes. Mentoring by someone facing similar barriers can also be useful. 12% said they had been offered this. 46% said they would want it. Research consistently shows that work experience and learning on the job improves employment prospects: yet only 13% of respondents had been offered this.
- Most respondents had not had support from the Work Programme. Support to get and keep work came most commonly from family (44%), friends (35%) or a disability organisation (33%).
- 63% said the support they had received did not help them get a job

Existing programmes are failing Britain's employers, whose success increasingly relies on accessing the widest possible pool of talent, including disabled people. They are providing extremely poor value to the taxpayer, with the government continuing to waste millions of pounds on programmes which do not work. The Work Programme is projected to cost £3-5 billion over 5 years, yet is not working for a core group: people living with disability or long-term health conditions.

It is time to cut out the middleman, releasing the money that is presently being wasted and transferring control of employment support to those who know how it can be used best - disabled people and employers. The incentives are

instead currently targeted at providers – and are often perverse. The government should focus on influencing and supporting the people who can really transform employment opportunities: employers and disabled people.

Disabled people require effective support which genuinely improves their position in the labour market. Our survey found that disabled people want to be involved in shaping and directing such support. Successful employers positively embrace people with potential and the desire to learn and develop. Working together, we believe successful employers and disabled people are best placed to work out the support each requires to achieve these goals.

That is why the following approach should be piloted and evaluated:

1. Disabled people should have far more opportunity to gain experience and skills through work, rather than the endless ‘work preparation’ favoured by the current centralised schemes. This could include work trials, work placements, traineeships, internships and apprenticeships.
2. To facilitate this, employers and disabled people should be given the opportunity and power to choose how to spend the budget for disability employment support (including Access to Work funding), with specialist advice as necessary.
3. This budget should also be used to facilitate access to learning and qualifications in - or linked to - the workplace. This could take the form of on-the-job vocational qualifications, attending a local college, distance learning or accredited continuous professional development.

The pilots should explore the benefits of this approach across a range of groups and scenarios, including:

- areas with high growth in small and medium sized employers
- people who have left employment since acquiring an impairment
- people with low levels of skills and qualifications, including young people not in employment, education or training and
- people with significant mental health problems and/or a learning disability (who have particularly low employment rates).