

Talking points: Employment

The NNPCF is a membership organisation and our mission states that “we aim to empower our members to ensure that their voice is heard at a local, regional and national level.”

Working with our membership we have identified a number of key “talking points” - these are topics and themes that are the most important to our membership and the ones that have been prioritised by the NNPCF.

Based on feedback from our membership and from other partners and stakeholders, the “talking point” summarise:

- The lived experience of our members about each topic,
- What is working and what is not working, and
- What we would like to see changed.

The talking points have been created using a range of feedback which includes:

- Surveys (including the SEND surveys)
- Feedback from our annual conferences
- The topics raised at regional meetings
- Themes and topics raised by our membership on social media
- Face to face conversations with our membership

This talking point should be read in conjunction with the latest version of the Preparing for Adulthood talking point.

Employment

Employment is one of the four preparing for adulthood pathways:

- Education and employment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Being part of the community, having friends and relationships
- Independent living and housing options

Five years into the SEND reforms, many parent carer forums report that pathways into employment remain scarce even though their local area has good

quality, co-produced preparing for adulthood strategies (for example, an all age disability strategy in Calderdale, PFA strategy in Bedford Borough). Forums tell us that despite the appointment of transition representatives, PFA officers and employment co-ordinators, there are few employment opportunities and services on the ground are often lacking. Areas commonly identified are low numbers of supported internships, apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people with SEND.

The NNPCF would like to see a requirement for each Local Authority to have an Employment pathway as part of their Preparing for Adulthood strategy. The strategy and information about Employment support for young people with SEND should be on published on the Local Offer.

The NNPCF believes that there needs to be a clearer understanding of how local authorities and providers within the post-16 high needs system can work together to manage an increased demand for support for High Needs students to prepare them for employment, and what more can be done to make best use of resources. Funding also needs to be made available to FE colleges to support students with lower level SEN.

Pathways into employment

Parents report that the pathways into employment for their young people are confusing and at times difficult to access. For young people who are aged 18 or older the disability employment support provided by their local job centre can assist in developing the skills to help a young person to find and stay in work¹. This can include help with writing a CV or filling out an application form to support to do a job or health and wellbeing support. Information about disability-friendly supportive employers and government financial support including Access to Work is also available.

In addition, Local Offers should contain information about supporting young people to move into work including information on:

- Study programmes

¹ <https://contact.org.uk/advice-and-support/preparing-for-adult-life/getting-a-job/>

- Support available from supported employment services (including Job Coaches)
- Supported internships
- Traineeships and Training opportunities
- Apprenticeships

Families often report however, that information about what is available locally is very poor and, as a result, they do not understand the differences between these programmes, who provides them, how long they last or where they are delivered.

NDTI has published some information on pathways into employment²

The NNPCF would like to see clear national guidance that covers these different pathways and outlines which pathway may be relevant for individual circumstances and how to access them. We must also recognise that work may not be the right outcome for all young people with SEND. Those young people for whom employment, education or training is not the right answer, should be offered alternative choices and meaningful day opportunities.

Person centred solutions, including for those people on SEN support

Families report that routes into employment are often very rigid and cannot accommodate the particular requirements of their young person.

Greater flexibility in the pathways into employment (for example the ability to extend the supported internships if a young person is only able to work part time for health reasons) would make them a great deal more accessible for many young people with SEND.

Young people with an EHCP, or who have had an EHCP in the past, now have more flexibility in meeting the entry requirements for apprenticeships. These welcome changes were made following the Maynard Review³

² Employment <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/employment/routes-into-work-guide.htm>

³ Paul Maynard taskforce recommendations <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-improving-access-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/paul-maynard-taskforce-recommendations>

The NNPCF would like to see this sort of flexibility extended to young people who have previously been categorised as needing SEN support. Access to work options should be flexible to accommodate the strengths of those who face academic challenges.

Supported employment can be provided to people from aged 14, to support smooth and seamless transitions from education into employment, and support meaningful work experience. It can be provided in whole or in part by schools, further education providers, Connexions, providers of supported employment, welfare-to-work providers, Jobcentre Plus providers, family carers, day services and community supports.⁴

Providers of supported employment have a variety of job titles such as job coaches, employment advisers, and employment support officers. Jobcentre Plus staff and Disability Employment Advisors are often a key referral route onto supported employment.

Forums report greater success in areas where job coaches are employed.

In the London Borough of Enfield, internships are available to young people aged 16 – 25 years with an Education, Health and Care Plan, and offer a pathway to employment. Since 2017, the Council has subcontracted the delivery of this programme to a local special school, and the SEND Employment Board (of which the PCF is a member) acts as the Governance providing the support and challenge. During the internship the young people are not paid, however they are taken on with a view to being offered paid employment at the end of the programme if the placement has been successful. There is no guarantee of a job, but of the 20 young people involved in 2018/19 21 (62%) were offered a job, 11 (32%) chose to extend their internship or go to College. Partnerships with local employers including the Council are key to the sustainability of the programme. Since September 2019, 8 interns have been successfully recruited to permanent roles within the Council. However, the programme has been impacted by the pandemic.

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https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/import/supported_employment_and_job_coaching.pdf

Disability confident employers

Many of the work programmes available focus on supporting the young person and the employer into a successful employment and there is strong evidence of the employability of people with disabilities. Although it has fallen by 2 percentage points, the disability employment gap remains high at 28.1 percentage points (this is the difference between the employment rate of those with a disability compared to the employment rate of people who are not disabled). Latest figures show that from April to June 2020, 53.6% of people with disabilities were in employment, up from 51.7% in March 2019. The employment rate for people without disabilities remained constant over the same period at 81.7%.⁵ These figures include the period of the first national lockdown due to coronavirus. It is encouraging that the percentage of people with disabilities who were in employment has not plummeted due to coronavirus, but the caveat is that these figures could be masked by the furlough scheme. The latest data from September 2020 shows that 24% of disabled people reported concerns about work during the current coronavirus pandemic, which is less often than non-disabled people (37%).⁶

Schemes to create more disability confident employers and so increase demand for disabled people in the workplace are key to addressing this.⁷ MENCAP have produced a document presenting the benefits of employing someone with a disability.⁸

The NNPCF would like to see details of the disability confident scheme posted on every local offer across the country.

⁵ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7540/>

⁶ Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain: September 2020
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsondisabledpeopleingreatbritain/september2020#disabled-peoples-concerns-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

⁷ Disability Confident Scheme <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>

⁸ MENCAP Good for business <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-06/2017.080.1%20LDW%202017%20guide%20DIGITAL%20V2.pdf>

The list of disability confident employers is growing all the time and covers a range of sectors⁹. We would like DWP to focus on adding more private sector employers to the list. The NNPCF would like to see a disability confident “kite mark” or sticker to encourage more small and local businesses to participate.

The impact of coronavirus on the employment levels of disabled people will need to be rigorously reviewed once the furlough scheme has ended to ensure that those with a disability who were in employment prior to the pandemic have not been disproportionately affected adversely.

Holistic support to get into employment – an “Employment Support Plan?”

Families report that often very simple, everyday activities and considerations are a major barrier to employment. For example, these include factors such as the accessibility of local transport services or the timing of social care visits (for example to provide support to get ready in the morning). Small adjustments in the wider support package for young people with SEND can remove otherwise intractable barriers.

The NNPCF would like to see a more holistic approach to employment taken that considers more of the barriers that disabled people face in to get employment. We would like to explore a holistic “Employment Support Plan” that outlines the support that will address these barriers in the same way that an EHCP addresses the support a young person requires to access education.

The government’s “Improving Lives” strategy¹⁰ refers to joined up support across three key settings – the welfare system, the workplace and the healthcare system. This should also include the social care system and communities more generally.

⁹ List of employers signed up to the disability confident scheme.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/949272/disability-confident-list-of-employers.csv/preview

¹⁰ Improving Lives, the future of Work, Health and Disability

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663399/improving-lives-the-future-of-work-health-and-disability.PDF

Benefits as a barrier to employment

Another barrier to employment is sometimes the poor support offered to families about what impact even a very modest salary will have on their family’s benefits. Families often express fears that paid employment for their young person will result in a fall in overall family income – often something that they cannot afford.

The NNPCF would like to see clear benefits guidance offered and signposting to specific benefits guidance as a part of pathways into employment.