Mentoring for Employment Success

A Review of the Literature

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©February 2014
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This literature review was commissioned by Remploy and the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) as part of a larger Big Lottery funded project entitled: ‘Mentoring for Employment Success’ (2012-2014). The main objective of the project was to:

Increase the chances of unemployed disabled and disadvantaged individuals (living in Greater Manchester) achieving and sustaining employment using volunteer based mentoring. The programme will support a number of positive outcomes for Remploy candidates including:

- Increased confidence, motivation, aspirations and self esteem
- Development of vocational and life skills
- Increased success in securing employment
- Increased success in sustaining employment

The review aimed to add value to the existing evidence-base of knowledge by critically evaluating the existing literature on a range of issues such as employment for all; employment and disabled people; definitions of mentoring; benefits and challenges of mentoring; peer mentoring, mentoring with young people and disadvantaged/disabled groups.

In order to reflect the changing nature of the lottery project over the two years e.g. in terms of the type of mentees recruited onto the programme (i.e. non-disabled), the review was edited to also include studies which focus on the ways mentoring is used to support both non-disabled as well as disabled individuals back into the workplace.

The review was also defined in its aim to identify factors, which contribute to success in employment for disabled groups, as well as identifying those factors, which help them gain entry into employment. However, the review’s main objective was to highlight the challenges disabled groups face in securing and retaining employment as well as identify factors which are most effective in helping combat these challenges. Through its findings, the review also helped shape the research design and evaluation of the project.

Although there is an attempt to define the concept of mentoring it was not the purpose of the review to provide a detailed discussion around the complexities associated with the term ‘disability although it is acknowledged that understanding these complexities is an important part of any effective mentoring programme.

It was also decided that due to the significant amount of material available (particularly from the US) and multi-faceted nature of the notion of mentoring the review should focus predominantly on studies undertaken in the UK and to studies concerned with, in the main, disadvantaged and disabled groups. The review entailed a systematic search of databases of literature including published articles, books, reports and conference papers. Searches were also conducted via the Internet (e.g. Higher Education Institution and Government websites) and in particular from agencies directly involved in mentoring work and supporting disabled groups.
There is strong evidence to show that, overall, work is good for the health and well-being of all individuals whether disabled or non-disabled (Waddell and Burton, 2006).

Evidence also shows how social disadvantage for any group in society can significantly impede success in the employment arena (UKCES, 2011; Freud, 2007).

Statistically, in the Greater Manchester area, it is low female employment rates in ethnic minorities that constitute the significant difference from the white employment rate and so this group may benefit from targeted support in gaining employment.¹

Although some evidence suggests early interventionist strategies and mentoring schemes help support recruitment and retention in work, there remains a paucity of research around the issue (e.g. Parsons, 2008; Finnegan, 2010). There also remains insubstantial evidence on the impact of peer mentoring on specific vulnerable groups e.g. adult disabled groups.

Developing strong linkages with employers and agencies is vital as is continued support and contact whilst individuals are in employment – mentoring programmes can help address this issue (Sayce, 2011; Cole, 2007).

Mentors themselves must receive specialist training as they often struggle to articulate and transmit their own knowledge to the mentee (Straker & Jones, 2006).

Some evaluations of peer mentoring schemes found that professionals across some sectors did not value peer mentors due to the mentors’ age and lack of experience (Johnsen and Quilgars, 2011).

Young people often resisted the employment and training outcomes as the focus of their mentoring relationships. Some sought support for more personal issues in their lives such as mental health problems or a way of making friends or gaining attention from adults (Finnegan, 2012; Cole, 2003).

Where individuals are in work, the critical factor that will ensure they remain competitive and attractive to employers is the extent to which they can address basic skill deficiencies, obtain new skills and obtain qualifications (Sayce, 2011).

There is insignificant data around the views of mentees from disabled groups – greater participatory research/evaluation work is needed.

The existing evidence suggests that some employers, not only remain unsure about disability legislation, but still feel that taking on a disabled person represents an additional risk and cost to the organisation (DWP, 2003; Bell and Heitmueler, 2009; Owen & Harris, 2012).

Disabled people registered on the Work Choice scheme particularly value the mediation role their advisors play with their employers (DWP, 2013).

There is a need for greater research that engages with, and empowers support workers, along with the people with learning disabilities they work for (Williams et al, 2008).

Benefits issues are still confusing, and are a real barrier for many disadvantaged groups, not just disabled ones. People with disabilities emphasised the importance of adequate and accessible information on welfare reform so that these groups can better understand how reforms will impact upon them (Owen and Harris, 2012).

Additional research is required to analyse and highlight successful work experiences of people with disabilities. Participatory research is an inclusive methodology, which enables disadvantaged groups to have a ‘voice’ (Williams et al, 2008).

Interventions that change post-16 disabled students’ decisions at key points (e.g. the decision about whether to stay in full-time education beyond age 16), rather than their skills directly, could still have a positive impact on education outcomes and hence employment prospects (Cole, 2007; DFES, 2004).

¹ http://neweconomymanchester.com – accessed 17 February 2014
The benefits of finding and staying in employment have been well documented (see Waddell and Burton, 2006), not only to the individual in terms of socio-economic and psychologically well-being, but for the economic health of the country. Subsequently, ‘increasing employment and supporting people into work are key elements of [any] UK Government’s public health and welfare reform agendas’ (Waddell & Burton, 2006:1). Waddell and Burton also conclude that:

…the balance of the evidence is that work is generally good for health and well-being, not only for healthy people, but also for many disabled people, for many people with common health problems, and for many social security beneficiaries (2006:34).

However, they also add that the above premise is linked to a number of other factors such as the nature and quality of the job, the social context and, of course, the individual themselves. They also acknowledge the powerful links associated between ‘worklessness, poverty, social disadvantage, and exclusion, social inequalities in health, regional deprivation, sickness, and incapacity’ (2006:35). These interlocking disadvantages can affect different people – disabled or otherwise – at every stage of their lives and one or more of them will often compound an already challenging situation:

Socially disadvantaged people are a very heterogeneous group, consisting of people who do not have the same opportunities to participate in society and the economy as others (UKCES, 2011:42)

Social disadvantage is a multi-faceted concept and is:

…often the consequence of a combination of linked and mutually reinforcing problems. These problems then lead to reduced access to, or even exclusion from, key aspects of life (UKCES, 2011:1).

One of these key aspects of life is paid work and disadvantage in the labour market can lead to further socio-economic hardship, which can subsequently have a devastating effect on individuals, families and communities as a whole.

The unemployment rate in Greater Manchester is 9.4%, above the UK average of 7.7% with around 76,700 Greater Manchester residents claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance in August 2013. Worklessness is one of the most significant challenges facing the area, with an estimated half a million working-age residents (31.1%) either economically inactive or unemployed.

Greater Manchester has only a marginally higher proportion of black and minority ethnic individuals than the national average, but has a significantly higher proportion of working age black and minority ethnic groups. The differences in ethnic minority employment rates are a significant issue for Greater Manchester although it is low female employment rates in ethnic minorities that constitute the significant difference from the white employment rate. Ethnic minority employment levels have actually increased during the recession, despite a fall in the employment rate though employment rates are lower than the national average across all qualification levels, with the greatest difference amongst those with no qualifications.

David Freud argues that, whilst the extent to which disadvantages work together and reinforce each other is striking…multiple disadvantage does not receive the attention it deserves because of the Government’s “client group” approach (2007:10). He also argues that intensive, tailored support can significantly improve the way in which the unemployed re-engage with the labour market:

Therefore the objective of the rights and responsibilities regime should be to support the approach by helping people to make the transition back to work before they become disadvantaged, and to ensure that those with particular disadvantage receive the extra support that they need early in their claim (2007:88)

Other recommendations from his review include:

…a greater use of private and voluntary sector resources and expertise; a new focus on long term mentoring to tackle the problem of repeat benefit claimants; greater personalisation of employment support, with higher financial incentives for organisations to target resources at the hardest-to-help (2007:59)

Although Freud acknowledges the frequency and form of these interventions will vary and any programme must take into account the diverse needs of different individuals.

In 2011, the Government introduced the Work Programme to help the long-term unemployed move off benefits and into sustained employment. It is a single programme of support aimed at anyone who has been out of work for an extended period. It replaced all previous employment programmes except for Work Choice, which supports people with disabilities whose needs cannot be met through other work programmes, Access to Work or workplace adjustments. This might be because they need more specialised support to find employment or keep a job once they have started work.

This literature review aims to highlight the ways in which certain factors combined together can depress employment rates further and lead to long-term unemployment for certain specific groups – in this case disabled groups.

**Employment and Disabled Groups**

“I want the same choices as anyone else – to have the career I want.” (The Sayce Report, 2011)

Although significant progress has been made over the past decade across a number of key areas (e.g. education, legislation, technology and public attitudes) disabled groups still face a disproportionate set of challenges in gaining equal opportunities in employment compared to their mainstream peers.

There are currently over 11 million people with disabilities in the UK, 7 million who are of working age. In 2012, 46.3 per cent of working-age disabled people were in employment compared to 76.4 per cent of working-age non-disabled people. There is therefore a 30.1 percentage point gap between disabled and non-disabled people, representing over 2 million people (Office for Disability Issues, 2012). All the following groups have employment rates under 25 per cent: disabled people with no qualifications, people with serious mental health problems, and people with learning disabilities (Sayce, 2011: 44).

In the 12 months to March 2013, over one fifth (22.4%) of people aged 16-64 in Greater Manchester were disabled, higher than the national average of 20.8%. Less than half of all disabled individuals in Greater Manchester are in employment (43.9%), lower than the regional (44.6%) and national (49.0%) averages. There are particular concentrations of disabled residents within Tameside and Rochdale.

Disabled groups also continue to be discriminated against once in the employment arena with less likelihood of promotion and lower earning potential, both in terms of hourly pay (ONS, 2009) and average income levels (OECD, 2007). Disabled people are also significantly more likely to experience unfair treatment at work than non-disabled groups. In 2008, 19 per cent of disabled people experienced unfair treatment at work compared to 13 per cent of non-disabled people.

Furthermore, there are also a number of other variables, which can cause additional disadvantage in the labour market:

- Qualifications, age, gender and ethnicity play an important part. It is often the total effects of more than one characteristic which cause significant disadvantage: for instance, disabled people with low or no qualifications have an employment rate of 17 per cent (Sayce, 2011:36)

- It is having no qualifications at all that seems to put people at the greatest disadvantage in the labour market – even those with low level qualifications have an employment rate of almost 70% (Freud, 2007:26)

- Young disabled people are still ‘twice as likely as young, non-disabled people to be not in education, employment or training’ (Sayce, 2011:31) with Burchardt arguing that:

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Serious attention must be given to the question of equal pay, and to the widening gaps between disabled and non-disabled young people’s participation in employment as they move into early adulthood (2005:13)

Research studies also indicate that some employers, not only remain unsure about disability legislation, but still feel that taking on a disabled person represents an additional risk and cost to the organisation (DWP, 2003; Bell and Heitmueller, 2009; Owen & Harris, 2012). There is often a narrow interpretation of what employers see as a ‘disability’ (particularly in terms of capability and integration) and this can fuel misconceptions about the extra cost of employing a disabled person:

Employers don’t take people with learning disabilities seriously. They don’t understand that we’ve got a disability. (Williams et al, 2008:43)

For employers, there’s no incentive to choose people with learning disabilities to do a job [less productive], in fact in a tighter market there are clear disincentives (Williams et al 2008:210)

Employers also felt there was a lack of information aimed at them regarding the help that is available to employ disabled people (Watson et al, 2005) and existing evidence indicates more work should be done with employers to help to challenge their misconceptions about the capabilities and potential of disabled people (Cole, 2007:56).

A report by the Department for Work and Pensions (2003) concluded that disabled people were more likely to be employed in the voluntary and public sectors than in the private sectors (2003:2). Many people with disabilities felt that they had very limited choice in the types of work and hours (predominantly part-time) available and who would hire them (Williams et al 2008:200). There were also issues around a disabled person’s level of access to information about their rights once they actually became employees. Some research studies (Barnes, 2003; Williams et al, 2008; Harris, 2011) call for a major change in the social model of disability and the concept of paid employment as the only legitimate kind of work:

A radical re-appraisal of the meaning of work for disabled people that goes beyond the rigid confines of paid employment is long overdue (Barnes, 2003:11)

In a bid to address some of the above issues, The Sayce Report outlines a vision for greater equality of opportunity and greater equality of outcome (2011:33). The report argues that it is vital that more equitable ways are developed to ensure disabled groups:

- ‘get in’ – more disabled people doing apprenticeships, work experience, work placements, and on-the-job learning;
- ‘stay in’ – better promotion of Access to Work for retention; and
- ‘get on’ – whether setting up your own business or mutual, or gaining skills for career development (2011:7)

Sayce also argues that where specialist disability employment programmes exist there appears to be little logic in the range of programmes that have been developed or as others argue little in the way of effective communication about what is available (Watson et al, 2005; Williams et al, 2008; Owen and Harris, 2012):

One of the main barriers...centered on communication about welfare to work programs, and in particular the lack of information given to people with disabilities. There was disconnect between policy discourse about welfare to work and informing people with disabilities. (Owen and Harris, 2012)

According to Owen and Harris, recent neoliberal reforms challenge the notion of a welfare state and instead shift the emphasis away from the government to the individual instead. Indeed many of the disabled groups interviewed felt it was up to themselves to find out what they were entitled to and often employment advisors and social workers knew less than them:

A number of people with disabilities said that their social workers and employment advisors often encouraged them not to find employment because they did not know how it would impact other parts of their benefits. The lack of this information was a barrier to many people with disabilities (Owen and Harris, 2012)

There are a number of issues, which can ultimately affect a disabled person’s chances of gaining entry into the


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workplace. A review of research carried out for the Department for Work and Pensions in 2006 identified the following barriers to work for people with learning disabilities:

- low expectations of work among people with learning disabilities themselves, their carers and ‘professionals’
- confidence and skill levels
- little focus in schools, further education and day centres on employment related activities and a lack of work-based support for people to access
- lack of knowledge/understanding of what support is available to people with learning disabilities and their employers and how they can access it
- lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities of different agencies
- real and perceived benefit barriers to employment;
- need to improve training of Jobcentre Plus and other advisory staff

The review outlined a number of recommendations from these findings including preparing disabled people for work opportunities at an earlier stage e.g. during school and FE colleges.

In a 2010 study conducted by the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) and Remploy, disabled groups were asked what they considered were the main challenges they faced in gaining employment. The responses included:

- Long term sickness
- Age
- Learning difficulties
- Stigma
- Speech impediment/stammer
- Interviews

A number of key areas can be developed to help combat some of these challenges including greater personalised support, bespoke training (particularly around applications, interview techniques, confidence-building etc), greater liaison and collaboration with employers. Mentoring and peer support have proved effective in helping people to gain and stay in employment and ‘in particular, focusing quickly on searching for work and having access to learning, mentoring and buddying in the role tends to work better than prolonged preparatory activity outside the workplace’ (Sayce, 2011:59).

Similarly, the DfES (2004) also pledged to develop new opportunities for transition to work by:

- improving opportunities for community based and supported employment
- strengthening links between local Learning Disability Partnership Boards and employers
- enabling professionals and parents to have access to clear information, on benefit rules and employment and explore options for encouraging young people able to work between 5-16 hours per week to seek employment
- disseminating examples of young people with learning disabilities who have successfully gained employment

(DfES, 2004:69)

In 2010, the Department for Work and Pensions’ (DWP) commissioned a specialist disability employment programme, Work Choice, which provides employment support to disabled people who cannot be supported through mainstream employment programmes and their employers.

The aim of Work Choice is to provide a voluntary, tailored, coherent range of specialist employment services, which can respond more flexibly to the individual needs of disabled people and their employers and make better use of resources (DWP, 2013:8). A recent evaluation of the scheme by DWP (2013) found that:

Overall, both participants and employers involved with Work Choice were positive about the support they received from the programme:
In the comparison of Work Choice and Work Programme delivery, providers reported that there was less contact time on the Work Programme, and overall the support delivered was less personalised. Work Choice was reported to offer proactive, intensive and tailored in-work support to participants and their employers, with Work Programme in-work support reported to consist mainly of telephone support to participants.

The voluntary nature of the programme also meant that some Disability Employment Adviser (DEAs) felt that the programme was unlikely to be successful for individuals whose health condition might affect their motivation, especially those with some mental health conditions.

Providers articulated a strong view that mainstream provision was not able to offer adequate support for some disabled people, particularly within the current funding model. The vast majority of providers and all of the Jobcentre Plus DEAs interviewed identified a definite need for a specialist disability programme alongside mainstream provision:

Some disabled people who appear to meet the Work Choice suitability criteria do not get the opportunity to see a DEA and be considered for the programme (DWP, 2013:53).

The report recommended that DWP continue to fund and develop specialist disability employment support as a separate specialist area of provision.

One of the main positives highlighted in the report by disabled groups was the support they received from the advisor, which they often preferred to confide in rather than their employers. A number of providers cited examples of where they had stepped into resolve issues with the employer who had perhaps failed to fully understand the individual’s needs or disability:

“I would say there’s two sides to it, one is the mentoring, the reassurance that you’re on the right track, you’re doing the right thing and the other is the job coaching.” (Provider, Steady State Wave DWP 2013:130)

As disability groups and organisations continue to argue, there remains a fundamental need for a change in attitude towards people with disabilities (e.g. Pillai et al. 2007; Scope, 2011). A survey carried out on behalf of SCOPE found that:

The majority of disabled people experience discrimination at least once a week — if not on a daily basis — and disabled people feel that public attitudes towards them have got worse over the past year...58% of people thought others did not believe that they were disabled and 50% of people said they felt others presumed they did not work.7

There should also be a clearer recognition of the role and responsibilities of the individual, the employer and the State in achieving equality for disabled people (Sayce, 2011:17) and greater co-ordination and partnership between relevant agencies, departments and service; although their level of engagement will ultimately be shaped by the resources available and the training provided. Government reports (e.g. DfEE, 1999) and various research studies (Atkinson et al. 2002; Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007; Bloxham, 1996; Payne, 1998) have all highlighted the potential benefits of more effective collaboration between agencies (Straker & Foster, 2009:3):

By combining their professional expertise, knowledge and skills, and involving the child or young person and family throughout, practitioners can identify needs earlier, deliver a coordinated package of support that is centred on the child or young person, and help to secure better outcomes for them. (CWDC, 2007:4).

Sayce argues there are three key factors, which would help, improve equity for disabled groups within the workplace:

Education, health and social care systems that raise the aspirations of disabled people and their families, and prepare people from day one for a successful transition (or retention) into sustainable employment and career paths.

Fair access to all routes into work, including work experience, internships, apprenticeships, university, learning on the job schemes, and support for setting up a business. For example, this review encourages the move towards a portfolio of evidence for apprenticeships to improve accessibility for talented people who have missed out on earlier qualifications.

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A fair and simple benefits system that means disabled people can be confident that they are always better off in work, including self-employment, and an end to stigmatisation of benefit claimants. (Sayce, 2011:26)

This last issue is particularly apposite as the 2012 Welfare Reform Act comes into force and in particular the introduction of Universal Credit, which some have claimed (The Children’s Society, 2012), will leave disabled groups worse off:

- 100,000 disabled children stand to lose up to £28 a week
- 230,000 severely disabled people who do not have another adult to assist them could receive between £28 and £58 a week less than currently
- Up to 116,000 disabled people who work could be at risk of losing around £40 per week.

In September 2012, The Guardian published the contents of a leaked draft letter from the DWP in which it announced it would cut a percentage of weekly benefit from sick and disabled benefit claimants if they failed to take steps to get back into the workplace. As Richard Hawkes, chief executive of disability charity Scope argues:

> Much of the welfare reform debate has focused on disabled people as benefit scroungers and many disabled people feel this has led to the public being more sceptical about disability issues and more hostile and those who receive welfare support (Hawkes, 2011)

He continues:

> It is visibility and increased familiarity in everyday life that challenges negative perceptions and attitudes towards disabled people. Unless disabled people can contribute to society, attitudes will continue to deteriorate and they risk being further excluded from society.

Further cuts to welfare benefits could see disabled groups being unfairly targeted: Scope believes 600,000 people will eventually lose their financial support when the new Personal Independence Payments (PIP) completely replaces Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Hardest Hit, a coalition of 90 disability groups, said replacing DLA PIPs with personal independence payments in 2013 might force 50,400 out of work. 

Effective monitoring and evaluation of employment programmes is particularly important to ensure they are supporting those most in need (Sayce, 2011). It is vital that projects conduct detailed assessment and diagnostic tests to ensure the right support mechanisms are in place throughout the life of the scheme. There is also a need for research that engages with and empowers support workers, along with the people with learning disabilities they work for (Williams et al, 2008).

Disabled groups are not a homogenous unit and support initiatives need to recognise the diversity of needs and requirements they will have to accommodate. The Employers’ Forum on Disability also argues that: ‘the assumption that disabled people are fundamentally different and “not like me” can only be challenged through face-to-face personal relationships with disabled people.’ Mentoring is the hands-on experience that policy alone cannot provide. (RADAR, 2005:8)

8. The Guardian accessed 3/09/12
In 2010, there were over 1.6 million working age people with no qualifications according to a review undertaken by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), which concluded that:

The prospect of employment for people with low skills has barely changed in recent years and has worsened during the recession, especially so for people with no qualifications (2011:8).

In Greater Manchester, 201,000 people aged 16-64 have no qualifications. This is 12% of the working age population compared to the UK figure of 10%. People with low skills and no qualifications are at a significant disadvantage in the labour market and disabled people are around three times as likely not to hold any qualifications compared to non-disabled people, and around half as likely to hold a degree-level qualification. In addition, 19.2 per cent of working age disabled people do not hold any formal qualification, compared to 6.5 per cent of working age non-disabled people.

Clearly, it is vital to ensure young disabled people have access to the same educational opportunities as their mainstream peers and that we seek to change the way society perceives disabled people. Burchardt also emphasises the importance of raising the aspirations of disabled people:

Aside from their instrumental importance in securing good educational and occupational outcomes, positive aspirations for the future – and being able to make choices in pursuit of them – are important aspects of autonomy (Burchardt, 2005:10).

Although Burchardt’s study reveals that at aged 16 aspiration levels between disabled and non-disabled peers are similar, by early adulthood this gap has widened and previous ‘high aspirations are not translated into comparable educational or occupational attainment’ (2005:13). However, it should also be noted that raising aspirations for non-disabled groups, particularly those from low-skilled families (UKCES, 2011: 35) is also vital:

...many individuals in such situations do not see much point in undertaking additional learning or obtaining qualifications. Such feelings may be reinforced when those around them – other household members or the wider local community – share their sense of anomie (Fetcher, 2007 in UKCES, 2011: 36)

As before, other variables such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and parental aspirations also play a part in affecting aspiration levels - for both disabled and non-disabled groups (Burchardt, 2005; DfES, 2004). However, Burchardt also found that other factors specific to disabled groups should also be taken into consideration including: number of conditions, nature of impairment, age when disability occurred:

A fairly consistent pattern with respect to the nature of impairment emerges across different measures of aspiration: young people with mental health problems, those with more severe impairments or more complex needs, and those who became disabled later in childhood, are all likely to have lower aspirations than other disabled young people (2005:38)

Undoubtedly, there are also issues around the kind of specialist transition support on offer for disabled groups post-16:

Making the transition beyond compulsory education can be a particularly difficult time for young people with learning difficulties and complex needs with new funding structures and arrangements for making additional provision to be negotiated, numerous professionals involved and, often, narrower opportunities for progression (DfES, 2004:71)

Disabled young people are more likely to assess the process of transition from school to their current activity as ‘very difficult’ or ‘difficult’, and the difference between disabled and non-disabled young people in this respect is statistically significant (Burchardt, 2005:46).

In response to this area of concern, several studies (DfES, 2004; Burchardt, 2005; Cole et al, 2007; Lloyd, 2008; Sayce, 2011) identify the need for greater interventionist strategies aimed particularly at post-16 disabled groups. Cole et al (2007) point to the lack of support and expertise offered by further education colleges around potential exit routes for disabled students:

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12 UKCES (2011) Low Skills and social disadvantage in a changing economy – Briefing Paper Series
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Colleges and the local LSCs need to think about ‘exit strategies’...and to ensure that appropriate support services are available to help people get paid jobs. The consensus from the literature is that this sector needs to be more outcomes-focused and to emphasise routes to employment as the norm (Cole et al, 2007:34)

In the report Removing Barriers to Achievement (2004), the DfES also recognised the need for improvements in post-16 advice for both disabled and mainstream groups:

Ensuring greater flexibility and responsiveness to individual needs is central to our 14-19 agenda... Our policies for the 14-19 phase will encourage high and realistic expectations of all young people and provide a broad range of learning opportunities. We want to encourage institutions to offer a full range of opportunities tailored to individual students’ needs (DfES, 2004:69)

Despite the issues disabled young people experience gaining entry into HE, there remains relatively few programmes designed to increase participation in HE directly, although the Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge, which was introduced in September 2001, aimed to raise aspirations and participation in higher education of individuals aged between 14 and 19, with a special focus on individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. During its initial phases the initiative did not specifically focus on disabled groups though after guidance from Action on Access and the Higher Education Academy policy documents identified them as a targeted group (Wray, 2013:2).

Wray’s study found that both non-disabled and disabled students had similar reasons for not choosing to enter HE e.g. lack of financial resources and it was only their school experience where the disabled students felt their needs had not been met by the schools and teachers whether they were in special or mainstream schooling (Wray, 2013:7). Teachers had sometimes advised them to take vocational options, as they perceived them to be less academically able than their counterparts. In contrast, some of the non-disabled students felt the ethos of the school to be very academically driven where they expected you to progress to university. Other disabled students who were already in Further Education felt University was perhaps a step too far for them:

I think for me I’ve spent too long in education. I just want to go and get myself a job. I think this place is kind of like a uni but the barriers to me if I was going to go to uni is accessibility. You’ve got to find the right access, the uni’s got to be able to cater for you and you’ve got to have the right equipment (disabled FE learner) (Wray, 2013:8)

Although there is conflicting evidence around whether disabled students fare less well than their mainstream peers once in HE (Wray, 2013), there are obvious issues such as access, learning support resources, staff perceptions, social isolation which can compound their difficulties further. Furthermore, despite many disabled students achieving success within HE they still struggle to access the same employment opportunities as their peers (AGCAS, 2010). Mentoring programmes can help bridge the gap between HE and employment and provide these groups with the support they need to successfully make the transition.
What is mentoring?

The original model depicted in Greek mythology portrays ‘Mentor’ in the role of guardian, friend, guide and teacher although Colley (2000a) argues that the Odyssey is in truth a brutal story of a powerful prince mentored by an omnipotent deity (Colley, 2000a). Over time the term ‘mentor’ became synonymous with the notion of an experienced person; one who advises, guides, teaches, inspires, challenges and corrects, and serves as a role model:

Mentoring is often described in terms of a formal relationship between a young person and an adult, through which the more experienced adult provides support and guidance for the young person (Russell, 2007:3)

The process whereby an experienced, highly regarded, empathic person (the mentor), guides another individual (the mentee) in the development and re-examination of their own ideas, learning, and personal and professional development (SCOPME, 1998)

Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be. (Parsloe, The Oxford School of Coaching & Mentoring)

Some critics (Roberts, 2000; Hall, 2003; Straker and Jones, 2006; Russell, 2007) argue that the most problematic issue about mentoring is in fact how we attempt to define it. Hall (2003) describes it as a ‘very fuzzy and ill-defined concept (Hall, 2003:10) with Phillips contending that:

Mentoring can hold a range of meanings and the terminology reveals a diverse set of underlying assumptions. For example, youth mentoring has been associated with programmes aiming at coaching, counselling, teaching, tutoring, volunteering, role modelling, proctoring, and advising. Similarly, the role of the mentor has been described as role model, champion, leader, guide, adviser, counsellor, volunteer, coach, sponsor, protector, and preceptor. A similar range of terms may apply to the mentee, protégé, client, apprentice, aspirant, pupil etc. (Phillips, 1999 quoted in Hall, 2003: 9)

Over the years, the concept has developed further depending on the different contexts and professions involved and predominantly depending on an individual’s assumption of what the role entails (Colley, 2003). Whilst it is often viewed as a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences, the dynamics within the partnership can vary considerably depending on a variety of factors e.g. age, experience, gender etc.

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation define their approach to mentoring as: ‘A one-to-one non-judgemental relationship’ in which the: mentor, voluntarily gives time to support and encourage …the relationship is typically developed at a time of transition in the mentees’ life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time. (MBF, 2006:16)

Jones and Straker (2006) argue that the way in which mentors perform their roles as evaluators, assessors and ‘critical friends’ will inevitably influence the quality of the mentoring relationship and largely determine the extent to which a critical, reflective or a conformist, passive attitude towards certain areas of development (in this case success in employment) is promoted:

While in some relationships the differential in status and power is somewhat tempered by the nurturing, collaborative, supportive environment within which mentoring occurs, in other situations it may prevent the mentee from becoming an active participant in and having some ownership of the learning process, and, ultimately, from emancipating themselves (2006:182)

They also argue that despite the growing popularity of the use of mentoring across many professions and contexts, there remains little evidence of the codification of mentors’ knowledge. Mentors can often struggle to articulate and transmit their own knowledge to the mentee.

The research literature generated during the past 15 years also suggests that the pastoral and affective dimension constitutes an essential element in the mentoring process (Watkins, 1992; Hagger et al, 1993; Tauer, 1998; Jones, 2002; Jones & Straker, 2006) in addition to the importance of diplomacy, a good understanding of people and empathy. Colley (2003) concludes that mentoring can mean different things to different people. As such, Colley proposed that definitions of mentoring should take into
account two broad approaches; mentoring as a function, and mentoring as a relationship.

Philip and Hendry (1996) identify five different types of mentoring from interviews undertaken with 150 young people:

1. ‘classic’ mentoring – ‘a one-to-one relationship between an adult and a young person where the older, experienced mentor provides support, advice and challenge’

2. individual–team mentoring – ‘where a group looks to an individual or small number of individuals for support, advice and challenge’

3. friend-to-friend mentoring

4. peer-group mentoring – ‘where an ordinary friendship group takes on a mentoring role’

5. long-term relationship mentoring with ‘risk-taking’ adults

Tolan et al (2008) describe mentoring as having four key characteristics:

- interaction between two individuals over an extended period of time
- inequality of experience, knowledge, or power between the mentor and mentee (recipient), with the mentor possessing the greater share
- the mentee is in a position to imitate and benefit from the knowledge, skill, ability, or experience of the mentor
- the absence of the role inequality that typifies other helping relationships and is marked by professional training, certification, or predetermined status differences such as parent-child or teacher-student relationships (2008:3)

Over the past few years the scale and variety of mentoring programmes available has risen significantly with the use of learning mentors and peer mentors in schools becoming increasingly predominant.
What is peer mentoring?

Despite this growing prominence, research around this area remains limited (O’Hara, 2007; Parsons, 2008; Finnegan, 2010) and definitions at times appear simplistic:

The difference between mentoring and peer mentoring can therefore be described as the mentors being of ‘the same age or same background’ as their mentees (Finnegan 2010:6)

Often the mentor has had a similar experience to the mentee – in the case of schools the main aim of peer mentoring in an educational context has been that of subject learning or as a ‘buddy’ programme to help ease transition from primary to secondary school:

Year 10 students were matched with Year 7 pupils using a number of criteria: same gender; had attended the same feeder school; lived in the same vicinity; had common hobbies and interests. Pupils were matched to encourage the formation of friendships and thus positive outcomes for both mentor and mentee (Parsons, 2008:10)

Peer mentoring is often viewed as more successful than conventional mentoring where the mentor typically has more power, status, and experience than the mentee.

In 2006 the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation was contracted by the Department for Education and Skills to nationally pilot a formal and sustainable peer mentoring scheme in 180 secondary schools in England, generating 3600 matched pairs:

The majority of the schools stated that ‘improved academic performance/attainment’ (55%) was the intended primary longer term outcome of their schemes, followed by reduction in bullying (29.4%), improved attendance (8.3%) and fewer exclusions (6.1%) (Parsons, 2008:6)

The research showed that young people engaged positively with the mentoring scheme and in particular valued working with colleagues - although impact data did not provide any conclusive evidence of its positive effect on issues such as attainment, behaviour and attendance:

Evidence from the case study schools suggested that matching seemed to be most successful when students were matched according to similar interests/hobbies and/or similar personality characteristics. Matching of boy to girl (mentee-mentor) was deemed to be less successful by the mentees and/or mentors (Parsons, 2008:6)

A young disabled people’s peer mentoring project carried out in 2003 took the innovative approach of combining the values and role models of mentoring with those of peer support. The project used peer mentoring to give priority to building up young disabled people’s self-esteem and confidence. An evaluation of the project (Bethell, 2003) found that traditional peer ‘mentoring’ could be too formal and was less effective, especially where young disabled people knew each other well and were becoming friends. Some young people benefited from the more flexible model of peer ‘support’ (2003:1)

However, the majority of young disabled people who had been trained and shared their experience with their peers felt they had obtained considerable benefits from the process:

I think it’s great. It’s a chance to pass on some of my experience and confidence and I would have liked it if it had happened when I was younger when I needed it. (2003:3).

It was important to mentees to share their experiences with people from a similar background to them as well as with someone who understood the issues from a disability perspective.

As Jones and Straker argue mentoring relationships:

...should seek to achieve an appropriate balance of power within the mentoring relationship in terms of age, experience and status, as well as reduce the potential for conflict arising from perceived differences in gender, culture, ethnicity or race. (2006:177)
Criticisms

Some evaluations of peer mentoring schemes (Johnsen and Quilgars, 2011) found that professionals across some sectors did not value peer mentors due to the mentors’ age and lack of experience. A peer mentoring scheme which matched teenage parents with peer mentors (mainly aged in their early/mid-twenties, who were themselves teenage parents) found that:

Stakeholders were very positive about the progress made by peer mentors, although emphasised the ongoing need for careful management of mentors’ expectations regarding what they should take on in a professional capacity (Johnson and Quilgars, 2011:35)

Others (Thomas, 2005) also argue that peer mentoring schemes often tend to focus on support work with under-represented groups in either HE or the workplace:

In both the workplace and higher education institutions, access to diverse mentors is limited. The well-documented glass ceiling suggests a critical shortage of minority and female mentors. Likewise, the limited number of minority faculty also creates barriers for minority students who desire minority mentors (Thomas, 2005:5)

It is clear that a lack of research around the area has led to gaps in terms of evaluating the success of peer mentoring schemes and that more analysis is required in this area.

Mentoring with young people

Over the years evaluations have focused on a range of mentoring schemes designed to support both young vulnerable people at risk (Clayden & Stein, 2005; Davies & Thurston, 2005) and those close to academic underachievement in schools (Golden et al, 2002; Nelson, 2003; Baginsky, 2004; Hutson & Cowie, 2005; Russell, 2007)

These studies highlight the positive impacts mentoring can have particularly in school settings and working with disengaged and disaffected pupils:

Mentoring programmes have been touted as effective intervention schemes, able to mediate the difficulty of disaffected and disengaged young people from dropping out of school, getting excluded and experiencing failure (Russell 2007:4)

Mentoring is playing an increasing role in the education and development of young people. The general purpose of mentoring is to help young people to realise their potential and become effective citizens (Golden et al, 2002:11)

In his study, Nelson (2003) concluded that the mentoring scheme had improved the literacy and communication skills of mentors and mentees, had reduced anxiety about the transition and had also improved pupils’ self-esteem and confidence. Younger and Warrington’s (2009) evaluation of a mentoring scheme addressing student achievement at GCSE and beyond highlighted the benefits of such schemes for those who came from families where education beyond 16 years was not an expectation (Younger and Warrington, 2009). They concluded these schemes had most impact in the short term rather than on longer-term aspirations (Younger and Warrington, 2009).

Colley (2003) found that young people often resisted the employment and training outcomes as the focus of their mentoring relationships. Some sought support for more personal issues in their lives such as mental health problems or a way of making friends or gaining attention from adults (Finnegan, 2012:13).
A good mentoring relationship is a learning journey for both mentor and mentee alike. Mentoring a young disabled person is a way of making it easier for someone who has little experience of the journey. Be it into employment, taking up new employment opportunities, or developing life skills (RADAR, 2005:6)

The term ‘disability’ is as multi-layered as the notion of mentor and it is important that the diversity of needs and levels of support are clearly determined and outlined from the outset of any programme. Knowledge of the client group is essential as Imber and Niven-Jenkins explain:

Disabilities are diverse, with significant differences of need between various groups. For example, people with learning difficulties have different support and developmental needs from, say, those with sensory impairments. Innovative projects have close knowledge and experience of their clients (Imber and Niven-Jenkins, 2007:18)

It is vital that this knowledge and experience is utilised throughout the life of the project from design to evaluation and dissemination:

When disabled people help run projects it is easier to engage with disabled clients, because they understand the issues and barriers better, and can inspire confidence in the project (Imber and Niven-Jenkins, 2007:21)

In 2010, MBF and Remploy undertook a consultation to explore the issues that disabled candidates face when finding work, making the transition from unemployment into employment, staying in work and making the most of the opportunities that employment can bring and whether mentoring could help them.

Candidates felt that the mentors could help them by:

- Keeping them motivated (60%)
- Helping them to be confident (54%)
- Preparing for interviews (60%)
- Supporting transition into work (40%)
- Support in keeping job (43%)
- Helping to resolve other issues that are impacting on their life (35%)
- 42% agreed that there was no stigma in having a mentor opposed to 17% who felt there would be

Findings from Bethell’s evaluation concluded that:

Barriers to independence can be reduced by supporting young disabled people to meet and work together on common issues to learn from each other and share experiences.

Linking young disabled people in one-to-one supportive relationships could be a valuable experience for both partners. Young disabled people who felt ready to work with their peers in this way and to share their experiences benefited from training in this approach.

The project found that traditional peer ‘mentoring’ could be too formal and was less effective, especially where young disabled people knew each other well and were becoming friends. Some young people benefited from the more flexible model of peer ‘support’. (Bethell, 2003:1)

How much they benefited depended on issues such as how well the project was facilitated, worker/management commitment to self-directed initiatives and to the principles of the disabled people’s movement as well as a commitment to equality issues. RADAR (2009) also found that:

Mentors must be sensitive to the setbacks that many young disabled people have experienced and the disillusionment and lack of confidence that these can instil (2005:18)

Butterworth et al (2012) found that mentees valued sessions, which were also provided after the training at the trainees’ offices or at a community employer with the goal of providing one-on-one instruction and guidance to the training participants.
Several studies (Dupuis et al., 2002; Joliffe and Farrington, 2007; Tolon et al. 2008; Knowles and Parsons, 2009) have suggested a link between positive effects as a result of mentoring interventions. Knowles and Parsons (2009) stated that 64 per cent of mentoring scheme coordinators in their evaluation of a peer-mentoring scheme attributed mentor and mentee enthusiasm, commitment and reliability to the successful implementation and development of a peer-mentoring project. It is also clear that the level of success is dependent on a significant number of factors including settings, gender, ethnicity, age etc. It was also evident from the literature that there remains insubstantial evidence on the effectiveness of mentoring interventions amongst adults — in particular disabled adults.

In terms of recruiting to new mentoring programmes, Imber & Niven-Jenkins argue this will be made easier if: they are geared to the client's needs; its purpose is made clear; confidentiality is assured; clients are engaged from the onset; they allow taster days so clients can opt out of schemes; suitable times and accessible locations have been planned and family support is available during the induction process (Imber & Niven-Jenkins, 2007:7). They add that employers should be involved in the plans wherever possible and that projects should:

- treat employers as customers, offer advice and support and nurture good relationships at all levels;
- make sure the job is done to their satisfaction and be available after work has started to offer help and advice; and
- evaluate results to guide future action

(Imber & Niven-Jenkins, 2007:9)

Much of the research (Imber & Niven-Jones, 2007; Finnegan, 2010) around this area highlights the importance of understanding and respecting the client group:

It is the foundation of trusting relationships, which in turn leads to confidence in working together. Respect will be exemplified by treating your clients and employers as partners, valuing their opinions, acknowledging their skills and experiences, and listening to and acting on their needs.' Imber & Niven-Jones, 2007:17)
A number of successful examples of mentoring programmes are outlined in Imber and Niven-Jenkins’ guide: *Good practice in helping disabled people back to work* commissioned by the European Social Fund (2007):

- The Employability Project of the Percy Headley Foundation in Tyne and Wear found that there was a need for an intermediary to help broker employment opportunities for their disabled participants. An employability planning group was set up and a local employers’ network was run in partnership with the Employers Forum on Disability. The project organised monthly events for disabled people, at which employees, employers and disabled people already involved in work placements discussed their roles and experiences. The presentations gave all clients an informed insight into the opportunities that were available.

- The North East Chamber of Commerce’s project emphasised review and ownership of plans. Guidance was given and objectives formulated to form the action plan. The action plan contained job search skills objectives to enable the participants to broaden their search for work. Objectives were reviewed every four weeks and appointments were available for the client with specialist agencies where needed. The project and the participant were jointly responsible for the action plan.

- The First Step into Work project at Voluntary Action Leicester provided a service for people who have a learning disability wanting to enter employment. Through their previous experience, they recognised that potential clients might experience literacy problems due to their learning disability thus causing a barrier to project participation. In order to resolve this, project literature and leaflets were produced in an accessible format using easy words and symbols. Along with this all project promotional materials were assessed by a steering group of people with learning disabilities.

- The Next Choice project for disabled clients made use of the Working Links’ office hub in Birmingham. By providing an employer room, clients grew used to an interview environment and felt more relaxed at real interviews. This innovation for disabled clients was already in use for other groups.

### Other factors

Evidence from Youth Justice Board (2005) stated that overall female mentors achieved more successful outcomes than male mentors with both female and male mentees and that female mentors matched with female mentees were especially successful. Younger and Warrington found in their school evaluation that overall boys expressed greater satisfaction with the scheme:

Some of the boys felt that mentoring had a strong impact on their results because of the strong motivation provided by their mentors, mixing encouragement and support with a demanding and challenging approach... A small number of girls and one boy were not at all positive about mentoring and felt that it was counter-productive because it was pressurised and occasionally ‘bullying’ in tone (2009:7)

Studies exploring the effect of ethnicity on mentoring success tended to be more mixed in their conclusions (Dubois et al, 2002; Young Mind, 2005; Newburn and Shiner, 2006)

The length of the relationship is also important in determining the success of the mentoring partnership – the longer the better; at least a year. Knowles’ and Parsons’ (2009) study of peer mentoring matches the YJB’s findings, stating that the most successful peer mentoring relationships had strong, supportive systems, administered by co-ordinators.
Challenges to effective mentoring

Criticisms have been raised (Hall, 2003) by some studies which ask what the purpose of mentoring is and whether those being mentored understand the processes at work and what they can get out of it. Hall argues that some critics regard mentoring: ‘as an ill-disguised attempt to maintain existing power relations by shifting attention away from social inequalities to the alleged inadequacies of individuals’ (2003:11). Piper & Piper also contend that mentoring can be seen as simply a way of re-enforcing the status quo or dominant ideologies at play in society:

…the naive application of mentoring entails collusion with the dominant ideologies and contradictions of a divided and unequal society, and that no change will be achieved. (Piper and Piper, 2000:79)

Russell points out that some studies argue: ‘that the manifestation of the concept has been built upon questionable ‘deficit’ models (Hall, 2003:5). These models Russell argues:

…seek to blame the individual young person and their family, rather than hold societal factors responsible…Interventions such as mentoring schemes are perpetrated within political discourse that shifts responsibility away from society and blames the individual.(2009:4)

Whilst some studies show positive, yet inconsistent results others also claim (Colley, 2003; Clayton, 2009) that mentoring interventions can actually prove to be counter-productive in cases where the aims and purpose of the scheme are not well defined and where the relationship between mentor and mentee becomes untenable.

Other studies (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2009; Johnsen & Quilgars, 2011) also found that lack of allocated time to develop the mentoring relationship effectively played a key role:

Mentee’s lives were often chaotic and perseverance was required in making appointments to meet (Johnsen & Quilgars, 2011:35)

The Youth Justice Board concluded after their 2005 study that the ‘evidence available here does not support a more widespread roll-out of mentor programmes as a means of preventing or tackling youth crime (2005:12) although they make a number of recommendations which they think are key to the success of future mentoring schemes. For instance, they found that the single most important barrier to programme delivery was the unwillingness of the target groups of young people to participate, raising the question of how to increase the appeal of future schemes to them.
The political dimensions of participation need to be framed within participatory democracy, a worldview in which communities are in control of the decision-making processes which affect their lives, giving voice to the most marginalised... (Ledwith & Springett, 2010:15)

The participatory approach explores relevant issues for disabled people in the form of a partnership with disabled people. This means that disabled people are expected to play an active role in the research. A key demand for the emancipatory paradigm has been that there should be meaningful input by disabled people at all stages of the research process (Hisayo Katsui & Mari Koistinen, 2008:3)

Paola Freire’s seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is seen by many (Craig & Mayo, 1995) as instrumental in the participatory action research movement. Since then the approach has developed significantly and several studies (Cole & Williams, 2006; Imber and Niven-Jones, 2007; Katsui & Koistinen, 2008; Williams et al, 2008; Sayce, 2011) acknowledge the value of participatory research as a way of ensuring marginalised and vulnerable groups’ experiences are valued and recorded. Participation is often highest where the participants own and generate the research process and as Ledwith and Springett explain: ‘participatory approaches to practice are about teaching people to question answers rather than answer questions’ (2010:21).

This review has already touched upon the importance of engaging disabled groups in all aspects of the research project (Imber and Niven-Jones, 2007) and also some of the difficulties disabled people encounter in trying to get their voices heard (Sayce, 2011). This is a challenge many disadvantaged groups face whether disabled or not. Group dynamics can mean that whilst some participants are dominant others are silenced and one of the defining aims of participatory research is to provide a way of empowering marginalised groups and ensuring their views and experiences are valued:

> Instead of research being inaccessible, distant, and part of their oppression, many would argue that it is vital that people with learning disabilities are in control of the research agenda (Williams et al, 2008:19)

They should also be clear from the outset about the research’s purpose and its intended outcomes. As Williams et al argue there is often a significant gap between exploring the design of the project to actually discussing what it might realistically achieve (Williams et al, 2008:37). It is crucial that new support programmes recognise the importance of enabling disabled people to ‘take an active role in constructing knowledge about their own situations and to lead, or take part in, research which concerns their lives’ (Williams et al, 2008:11).

To this end, Williams et al developed a workshop format, which gave precedence to the views of people with learning disabilities. As their voices can easily be silenced in mixed groups, with family members and professionals, they felt it was important to ensure they had a chance to formulate opinions and gain confidence in their views. They achieved this by offering a pre-session to people with learning disabilities. At the end of each of the pre-sessions, participants fed back to each other what their main points were (at the first round of workshops, these related to issues in their lives). They then chose how they would feed these back to the main workshop in the afternoon sessions. This workshop structure provided a clear way to ensure that the voices of people with learning disabilities themselves were strong (Williams et al, 2008:28).

Challenges

Some studies (Waller & Bitou, 2011) have raised concerns about using participatory research techniques with vulnerable groups around the notion of power and ethics when using participatory research techniques with vulnerable groups (e.g. children and disabled people) as it is often the adult who interprets the child’s perspectives.

This may also occur to an extent whilst working with disabled groups particularly those with learning difficulties and Waller & Bitou argue that participatory methods ‘should be grounded within ethnographic study and not seen as a replacement for it’ (2011:2).
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