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**Supported work experience and its impact on young people with intellectual disabilities, their families and employers**

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Review

Supported work experience and its impact on young people with intellectual disabilities, their families and employers

Introduction

The Regional Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transition to Employment (Real Opportunities) project set out to address systematic gaps in support for employment for people with intellectual disabilities and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and to implement a number of the approaches identified through research that can assist transition to adulthood. The European Social Fund Conversion funded initiative was designed to fill a gap in existing provision and to establish what could be delivered through a comprehensive, well staffed, approach to transition support.

New initiatives are needed as people with intellectual disabilities experience very low levels of paid employment compared to people with disabilities in general and the non-disabled population. In 2013 only 7.1% of people with intellectual disabilities were employed in England<sup>1</sup>. An estimate of the number of adults with ASD employed is 15% (Rosenblatt, 2008), although this may be lower for younger people (Townesley *et al.* 2014). The pursuit of employment does not feature prominently in transition planning, although it contributes to the chances of the young people with intellectual disabilities becoming more confident and increasing their level of independence (Kilsby and Beyer, 2002). As a result, in the past very few young people with intellectual disabilities entered supported employment programmes in the UK between the ages of 16 and 19 years (Beyer, Goodere and Kilsby, 1996). There is evidence from policy makers that this situation has not changed substantially since the 1990's (Melling *et al.*, 2011) and also that few young people transition to supported employment after post-16 education and training (Ofsted, 2011). Young people with ASD also face significant barriers to gaining employment wherever they are (Hendricks, 2010; Roux *et al.*, 2013) and entry to work aged 16 to 24 can be as low as 8% (Townesley *et al.*, 2014, p 22). When young people with intellectual disabilities do pursue employment, many still find a shortage

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<sup>1</sup> Data source: ASC-CAR L1 (NI146; Adults with learning disabilities in employment)

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3 of appropriate employment opportunities through which they can pursue  
4 competitive paid work (Butcher and Wilton, 2008). In addition they also face a lack  
5 of personal support, limited transportation options, and they are anxious and  
6 uninformed about welfare benefit regulations, all of which act as a barrier to moving  
7 into work (Heslop *et al.*, 2002; Morris, 1999a,b; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002).  
8 Normal routes to employment through government Jobcentres and their main  
9 employment programmes, such as the WORK programme, have a poor record of  
10 placing people with intellectual disabilities (Snell, 2011; Mencap, 2012). Even the  
11 more specialist disability work programme, WORK CHOICE, had under 15,000 people  
12 with intellectual disabilities referred between 2010 and 2013, and achieved a 25%  
13 employment outcome rate (DWP, 2013, Table 4). Supported employment (a job  
14 coach focused model) has proved effective at placing people with intellectual  
15 disabilities (Beyer and Robinson, 2009) and people with ASD into employment  
16 (Howlin, Alcock and Burkin, 2005; Hillier *et al.*, 2007). However, there are great  
17 inequalities in the availability of supported employment services that will work with  
18 young people with ASD in school or college (Townesley *et al.*, 2014).  
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33 Research from the US has identified factors that increase the likelihood of  
34 employment upon completion of school for this population (Peraino, 1992). For  
35 people with mild intellectual disabilities successful completion of high school, rather  
36 than not graduating, can lead to higher employment rates (Wagner *et al.*, 2006;  
37 Scuccimarra and Speece, 1990). Other factors that have been shown in the past to  
38 increase the likelihood of employment after leaving school include: receiving  
39 vocational-technical training rather than an academic curriculum (Humes and  
40 Brammer, 1985); duration of community based training and age appropriate  
41 integration with non-disabled peers (White and Weiner, 2004); and use of a job  
42 coach (Howarth *et al.*, 2006).  
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53 Research also suggests that work experience during school transition has an impact  
54 on employment outcomes for disabled young people. In the US, having had a  
55 summer job or part-time supported job experience while at school (Hasazi *et al.*,  
56 1985; Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997) has in the past  
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3 led to higher employment outcomes. While this data is somewhat old, the results  
4 have been confirmed by more recent studies also. In a national longitudinal study of  
5 outcomes from 1997 and 2008, work-based schemes increased the likelihood that  
6 young people with disabilities gained employment on graduation (Shandra and  
7 Hogan, 2008). In a study of over 13,000 US graduates from special education, Benz,  
8 Lindstrom and Yovanoff (2000) found that participation in vocational education and  
9 paid work experience was, among others, a significant predictor of entry into  
10 employment. Test *et al.* (2009) also found that paid employment/work experience  
11 while at school was positively correlated to successful post-school employment  
12 outcomes. Sixty-two percent of participants in New South Wales's Transition to  
13 Work programme were people with intellectual disabilities and after two years of  
14 real work experiences and work placements this group achieved a 51% employment  
15 rate (Ageing, Disability and Home Care Department, 2009).  
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28 In the UK a study of young people with intellectual disabilities found that 21.5% of  
29 participants who had work experience in their final year, and who were supported  
30 by an employment specialist, were employed after leaving (Beyer and Kaehne,  
31 2008). The Bridges programme in the US, run by the Marriott Foundation, placed  
32 6000 young disabled people in paid internships in their last year of high school, with  
33 89% receiving job offers at the end of the programme. Two years later, 57% were  
34 employed (Marriott Foundation, 2004). Also in the US the Project SEARCH model  
35 provides one-year internships in hospitals and other large employers, with on-site  
36 job coach and teacher support. It has delivered higher than US national average  
37 employment rates for its graduates (Rutkowski *et al.*, 2006). The UK Project SEARCH  
38 programme delivered between 33% from 2011 and 51% employment rates for  
39 graduates with intellectual disabilities from 2010-2012 (Kaehne, 2014).  
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51 Studies have found that people with intellectual disabilities increase adaptive skills  
52 as they move into competitive employment, even if it is from sheltered work, and  
53 the authors suggest that working in the competitive workforce is particularly  
54 significant in enhancing adaptive skills (Stephens, Collins and Dodder, 2003; West *et*  
55 *al.*, 2005; Green, 2014).  
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5 There are also indicators that work experience is helpful for non-disabled young  
6 people wanting to get a job. Sims *et al.* (2013) identified a range of positive  
7 outcomes from work experience for those young people Not in Education,  
8 Employment or Training (NEET) through a pilot study of different models in 25  
9 colleges. Over 9700 placements were provided for disadvantaged young people,  
10 including those with Intellectual Difficulties or Disabilities. Case studies suggest that  
11 work placements were predominately aimed at giving young people a 'real world'  
12 experience. Work experience increased employment skills, including teamwork,  
13 communication and interpersonal skills, enabling students to become more work-  
14 ready. Some students gained, or were in the process of securing, employment or  
15 apprenticeships following their work experience. In a UK survey of 15,025 young  
16 people, the National Education Business Partnership Network (NEBPN) showed that  
17 90% of those completing work experience understood why it is important to do well  
18 at school; 89% were more prepared to work hard in lessons and coursework; 93%  
19 reported that work experience had improved their confidence; and 66% that it had  
20 assisted with their future career choice (NEBPN, 2008).  
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35 There are also a number of contextual variables that influence the success of  
36 transition to employment for people with Idisabilities or ASD. Family carers and  
37 young people should play a central role in transition decision-making in intellectual  
38 disabilities and their path to a paid job. Family members are the main providers of  
39 support for a young person, they often have a particular view of the aspirations and  
40 preferences of the young person, and may often influence their choices (Smart,  
41 2004; Doren, Gau and Lindstrom, 2012). Too often transition processes are  
42 implemented without effectively eliciting the views of young people themselves as  
43 these tend to be dismissed as unworkable or uninformed (Carnaby *et al.*, 2003; DfES,  
44 2001). Where involved, family carers can be over-protective, and be a barrier to the  
45 increased independence of the young person by limiting exposure to new  
46 experiences (Bowey *et al.*, 2005). Family carers tend to express general  
47 dissatisfaction with professionals (King, 1997), but more positive relationships are  
48 possible when professionals provide clear and appropriate information and  
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3 interventions and acknowledge the parents' involvement, expertise and needs (Case,  
4 2001). Generally, the success of transition will be influenced by how informed  
5 families are about the opportunities available, and how much they are involved in  
6 the process. Often, however, staff with expertise in employment who know the  
7 labour market are commonly not involved in setting transition goals with young  
8 people (Shogren and Plotner, 2012). The abilities of young people can also be a  
9 barrier to employment, with poor levels of independence (Carter, Austin and  
10 Trainor, 2012; Roessler, Brodin and Johnson, 1990); few experiences of jobs (Baer *et*  
11 *al.*, 2003; Luecking and Fabian, 2000), and poor social skills (Carter, Austin and  
12 Trainor, 2012) all making it difficult for them to become employed.

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22 In employment terms, successful transition is dependent on the work carried out  
23 with families and young people to inform them of how employment can be possible.  
24 Successful promotion of employment as an option in transition planning is only likely  
25 to be successful if all barriers are tackled. This requires families to be supported to  
26 plan and for clear advice and information to be available around employment.  
27 Effective support is needed to allay the anxieties of families and young people  
28 around becoming more independent through employment and young people's own  
29 difficulties must be addressed.

### 30 31 32 The intervention

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39 The Real Opportunities project has built on research evidence and a model piloted at  
40 Trinity Fields Special School in the Caerphilly Borough Council area in the previous  
41 decade. The project's model takes an holistic view that experiences in a number of  
42 areas of young people's lives need to be supported if they are to be successful in  
43 gaining employment post-school. The target group for the intervention was young  
44 people aged 14 – 25 years who have "severe and complex needs", primarily those  
45 with a intellectual disability, and those with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and their  
46 family carers. The majority of those young people involved in the project were  
47 referred from special schools and had a Statement of Special Educational Need. The  
48 Real Opportunities initiative is centrally managed and administered, is delivered  
49 through new staff funded by the European Social Fund and delivered by 9 regional  
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3 “Hubs” introduced in a phased way during the project in each of the following areas:  
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5 Caerphilly, Torfaen, Carmarthenshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Pembrokeshire, Bridgend,  
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7 Rhondda/Cynon/Taff, Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot. Not all children in  
8  
9 participating schools within these catchments were referred to the Real  
10  
11 Opportunities project as provision was related to need for the services they offered.  
12  
13 Young people who were part of the Real Opportunities project could receive  
14  
15 employment support, but not all were referred for this service. Young people  
16  
17 referred for employment support were taken through a vocational profiling, a  
18  
19 “getting to know you” process where the aspirations, learning needs, individual  
20  
21 skills, former experiences and job preferences of the participant are identified (BASE,  
22  
23 2014). Work placements were individually identified to meet their established work  
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25 aspirations and needs.

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27 In response to research that suggested people with intellectual disabilities had poor  
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29 experience of work environments (Baer *et al.*, 2003; Luecking & Fabian, 2000) Real  
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31 Opportunities included work preparation and employment support delivered by  
32  
33 small job coaching teams in each Hub to find work experience placements, support  
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35 people in these to learn work experience tasks, and then to find people jobs when  
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37 they left school. The inclusion of a large work experience programme in the Real  
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39 Opportunities project built on the fact that work experience while at school  
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41 promotes work choice (NEBPN, 2008) and higher levels of employment outcomes  
42  
43 after transition (Test *et al.*, 2009). The initiative built on the research by promoting  
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45 skill development through placement in competitive, ordinary work settings  
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47 (Stephens *et al.* 2003). Use of a supported employment model with on site job coach  
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49 support has been shown to be effective (Howarth *et al.*, 2006) and this was the  
50  
51 project’s preferred support model for placements. Three selected employment  
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53 services provided this service: ELITE Supported Employment; Mencap; and REMPLOY  
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55 with the National Autistic Society [people with ASD only). The work preparation and  
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57 employment teams also identified local employers and provided advice, training and  
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59 staff mentoring schemes to widen work experience and job opportunities to young  
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61 people with intellectual disabilities or ASD. The services used vocational profiling as a  
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63 process to match work placements to young people’s preferences.



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5 In response to family influences on employment, Real Opportunities provided  
6 support for families in transition planning by providing Person Centred Planners and  
7 Transition Key Workers to help families and young people consider employment  
8 positively alongside other life choices and to challenge family over-protectiveness  
9 (Bowey *et al.*, 2005). The availability of supported employment agencies met the  
10 need to provide clear, expert advice to families (Shogren and Plotner, 2012) on  
11 employment options in their transition plan (Case, 2001). In response to personal  
12 barriers faced by young people, Real Opportunities provided courses to improve  
13 their basic levels of independence (Carter, Austin and Trainor, 2012). The project  
14 also provided Social Inclusion Workers to provide age appropriate integration with  
15 non-disabled people to assist with social skills and engagement barriers (Carter,  
16 Austin and Trainor, 2012), including support in activities by age-matched peer  
17 mentors. Where behavioural problems were acute enough to impact on activity and  
18 employment, additional psychology input was available on an individual basis.  
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31 In this study we set out to establish the impact of the work experience and  
32 employment teams by describing the placements provided, any change in the skills  
33 of young people, and the responses to the placements by employers, young people  
34 and their families.  
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#### 40 Methodology

41 Data was collected by the three employment services taking part in the Real  
42 Opportunities project. For those young people referred to employment providers  
43 and receiving a placement, data on the job title, employer name and start and finish  
44 dates of work placements were recorded. Between one and three placements were  
45 offered to each young person. In addition, data on "distance travelled" were  
46 collected by job coaches for each young person and for each placement. This  
47 included information on the young person's work skills, and their vocational  
48 preferences, at the end of each placement. This data was recorded by the job coach  
49 supporting them on placement, using a set number of skill items and appropriate  
50 Likert scale responses scale (e.g. performing "Very well," "Well," "OK," "Not too  
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3 well,” or “Not at all”). Job coaches received a half day training on the instruments  
4 and were provided with definitions of the categories used in the data collection  
5 tools. Data relevant to this study were the young person’s ability to: communicate  
6 with others; concentrate; work without mistakes; do a range of tasks;  
7 lift/carry/push/pull things; work physically hard; work quickly; walk/move easily;  
8 balance; stand for long periods; sit for long periods; use stairs; use a computer; use  
9 initiative; work without support; and remember/follow instructions. The  
10 performance data were eventually coded as 1 (“Not at all”) to 5 (“Very well”) and  
11 the significance of differences between first and second work experience placements  
12 were determined using a Wilcoxon Signed-ranks test, a test for paired ordinal data.  
13 We analysed all data provided by services for young people participating in the work  
14 element of the Real Opportunities project, this amounting to 405 work experience  
15 placements for 297 young people on the project.  
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28 At the end of each placement, a written questionnaire was completed by the  
29 employer offering the work experience that allowed them to comment on the  
30 support provided by the employment service, the performance of the young worker,  
31 along with some qualitative comment. Work performance areas rated included:  
32 working skills; following safety rules and given instructions; attendance record;  
33 punctuality; quantity and quality of work; Initiative; Interest in task; breaks taken  
34 according to rules; productivity; relationship with co-workers and supervisors; and  
35 personal appearance. Employers were also asked whether they would consider  
36 hiring another person with a similar disability and if they would employ this young  
37 person after placement if adequate support is provided. Employers were also asked  
38 if offering this young person a work experience placement had had any positive  
39 effect on: productivity of other staff; the attitudes of other staff to work; the public  
40 image of their company; and customers.  
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52 A random sample of 24 young people and 25 related family members who had  
53 previously consented were interviewed to provide more detailed information on  
54 placements and their impact. Young people were interviewed face-to-face at school  
55 and families were interviewed on the telephone. In each case interviews were  
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3 recorded with consent. Ethical approval was obtained for the procedures followed in  
4 the interview aspect of this study through the NHS Research Ethics Committee for  
5 Wales. Interviews were carried out by two of the authors. Interviewers were trained  
6 to administer the questions. Mock interviews were carried out by each interviewer  
7 with post-interview discussion used to clarify question content, concepts and  
8 interpretation. Interviews for families covered: the strengths and weaknesses of  
9 placements; the quality of support by employment services from the Real  
10 Opportunities project; the impact on views of employment; expected post-school  
11 placement; and whether paid employment was a likely outcome now or in the future  
12 following these work placements. Questions were initially closed with closed  
13 responses, (e.g. *Did you receive feedback from the Agency on how your son/daughter*  
14 *did in their work experience? Yes/No/Don't know*) with open-ended follow-up  
15 questions to establish reasons for answers (e.g. *How was this feedback given to*  
16 *you?*).

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19 Families were also asked to rate the help their son or daughter received from the  
20 employment services involved in the project on a scale from 1 ("very poor") to 5  
21 ("very good"). We also asked them "In the **past**, how likely did you think it would be  
22 that your son/daughter might get a paid job in the future?" on a scale from 1 ("very  
23 unlikely") to 5 ("very likely"). Further, we then asked family members "**Now**, how  
24 likely do you think it is that your son/daughter might get a paid job in the future?"  
25 on a scale from 1 ("very unlikely") to 5 ("very likely").

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28 Interviews for young people with intellectual disabilities or ASD covered: what they  
29 liked or didn't like about placements; what they had learned; how well they got on  
30 with workmates; the support they had from employment services from the Real  
31 Opportunities project; the impact on views of employment; what they wanted to do  
32 now when they left school; if they thought they would get a job in the future.  
33 Questions were generally simple and open-ended, (e.g. *What was good about the*  
34 *work experience?*). There were some closed questions relating to support (*Did you*  
35 *get enough support from the agency during the work experience? Yes/No/Don't*  
36 *know*) but these were followed-up with open-ended questions to establish reasons  
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3 for answers (e.g. *IF NO, What was missing?*).  
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### 8 Results 9

10 Data was provided for 297 young people. Thirty-five people (12%) experienced ASD  
11 as their primary disability, the remaining majority being young people with  
12 intellectual disabilities. Table 1 shows the number of young people who achieved a  
13 work experience placement between October 2011 and October 2013. The  
14 distribution of placements reflected targets set within the programme, this in turn  
15 being related to funding allocations and number of young people referred to the  
16 project. 63.6% were males. The mean age of those taking part was 17.8 and there  
17 were students placed aged from 15 to 21. Of the 297 young people found  
18 placements while at school over this period, 103 young people were supported in  
19 two placements, and 5 young people in three placements. A total of 405 placements  
20 were supported in all across nine local authority areas by the three employment  
21 services involved in the Real Opportunities project up to the point this data was  
22 collected after October 2013. We present data on 297 young people (17%) from a  
23 total of 1748 who received any kind of service through the Real Opportunities  
24 project up until this point. This number of young people going through this process,  
25 across a number of labour market areas in South and West Wales, suggests that  
26 work experience in community placements is possible for these groups, if support is  
27 provided throughout.  
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### 44 **Table 1 here** 45 46

47 Table 2 summarises the job titles of the placements taken up. Work placements  
48 were generally assistant positions, entry level, requiring no qualifications. It shows  
49 also that there was a good range of work placements. The largest group of  
50 placements was in retail workplaces across the full range of shop, sales assistant and  
51 shelf-filling posts in clothing, grocery and other retail outlets. Nursery and play  
52 assistant posts were the next largest group of placements. Kitchen assistant posts  
53 formed a significant third group but, if taken together with other catering linked  
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3 placements, such as café assistants and assistants in pubs and restaurants, food  
4 preparation and food delivery was the largest group overall. We also looked at the  
5 differences between the type of first and subsequent placements each person had.  
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7 We found that 62% of those with two placements had a different category of second  
8 work placement to their first. The average length of time in each work placement  
9 was 5 weeks (range 1 to 21 weeks).  
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### 14 **Table 2 here**

#### 15 Changes in the work performance of young people over placements

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19 We obtained consistent data on 84 out of 103 young people who had two  
20 placements. Figure 1 illustrates the difference in performance on a number of work  
21 skill indicators on the young person's first placement compared to their second  
22 placement. We looked to see if there had been any improvement in general  
23 performance as the young person's supported experiences increased. While Figure 1  
24 is only indicative, it shows that there were gains in 13 out of 17 areas reported by  
25 job coaches between the two placements. It also shows that generally young people  
26 were performing at the "OK" to "Well" level in areas related to understanding and  
27 independent action (e.g. working without support, remembering/following  
28 instructions) and "Well" to Very well" in relation to physical skills (lifting/carrying,  
29 standing, using stairs). "Using initiative" was the lowest reported level in placement  
30 1, between "not too well" and "OK."  
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### 44 **Figure 1 here**

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47 Table 3 shows a non-parametric test of significance of difference between each of  
48 the two placement ratings. It shows that only 6 of the changes between placements  
49 were statistically significant. There were no significant changes in the physical skills  
50 between placements, these remaining largely positive. The largest significant gains  
51 were in the understanding and independent action skill areas. In understanding,  
52 there were significant changes in: concentrating; communicating with others; and  
53 remembering instructions. In independent action, there were significant changes in:  
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3 doing a range of tasks; using initiative; and working without support. Most of these  
4 are behaviours that are learned over time for most people and it is encouraging that  
5 these young people seem to gain in these skills in the same way. It is important to  
6 note that, with job coach support available at the workplace, there was capacity to  
7 teach young people these skills in a practical way and to problem solve, rather than  
8 through simulated training. There was an insignificant, negative change, in the use of  
9 computers. The change could be because of more complex requirements in  
10 computer use in second placements. However, use of a computer was not as  
11 common as for the other skills, being relevant to only 36 people, and the statistics  
12 here will be less reliable as a result. Overall the data suggest that young people with  
13 intellectual disabilities or ASD did increase some important skills through  
14 placements.  
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26 **Table 3 here**  
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30 The views of employers of the impact of work placements from their perspectives

31 We received evaluation feedback from 247 out of 405 placement employers (61%).  
32 The vast majority reported that the employment agency from Real Opportunities  
33 involved with them “provide effective support” to the young person (99%), and to  
34 the company (96%). We also asked the employer to provide feedback on the  
35 performance of the young person while on the placement across a number of key  
36 work performance areas that in the past have been reported to be important to  
37 employers. Table 4 provides a summary of their responses. We can see that the vast  
38 majority of employers who provided feedback were satisfied with the performance  
39 of the young people in all significant areas of performance. This is encouraging as  
40 these appear to be transferable competencies that any future employer would  
41 welcome. Taking into account “neutral and “dissatisfied” responses from  
42 employers, the only areas where there was ambivalence was in the young person’s  
43 “initiative”, their “productivity” and “interest in the task”. This underlines the  
44 importance of good job match between the work and the broad interests of people  
45 concerned, if they are to be motivated by the nature of the job to work well.  
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**Table 4 here**

Employers reported that they were now likely to employ another person with similar disabilities to the person placed (96.2%) and that they would continue to employ the young person if adequate support was provided (82.5%). In response to questions about the impact of the work experience placement on their company, employers gave generally positive responses (Table 5) on the impact of having young people in their workplace had on staff productivity, on their attitude to work, on their company image and on customers. Only a minority felt there had been an impact on the overall diversity within the company. The results suggest that the work placements had been well received and beneficial in more general ways to the company as well as the young person.

**Table 5 here**Reactions of young people and families

We were able to carry out interviews with 24 young people selected at random from those who had been involved in work experience placements through the Real Opportunities project up until October 2013, and who had given informed consent to participate in the research. We also interviewed one representative of each young person's family, again with consent. All young people reported that they did get enough support from the agency during their work experience. Only three young people reported that they hadn't liked a work experience placement. Three central themes emerged in what they liked. First, people liked doing practical things rather than what they were doing at school. Second, the young people liked being in an adult environment and being treated as adults. Third, young people reported being treated well by co-workers and that they had enjoyed meeting new people.

We asked young people what they wanted to do next after they left school. Six young people already had a paid job of some kind through the project, either for 2-4 hours per week in the evening or at weekends, or for 1-2 days per week. A further two young people had a volunteer position for 2-4 hours per week. These jobs were

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3 seen as the first stepping-stones to a career. We asked the group what they would  
4 do next after leaving school. Going to a further education college was the most  
5 popular next step (50%) followed by getting a paid job (33%). When asked “Do you  
6 think you will get a paid job in the future?” all but one of the 24 young people said  
7 they would, with most young people reporting a concrete idea of what job they  
8 would like to do.  
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15 We went on to ask 25 family members their views of the supported work  
16 placements their relatives went on. Twenty-three of the 25 family members  
17 reported that the placements had taught the young person about work. Their  
18 responses had three main themes: that the placements had helped build the young  
19 persons confidence; that they had helped them cope with new people and that that  
20 had been an enjoyable aspect of the work; and that it had taught them the  
21 disciplines of work (e.g. getting up, working to an employers requirement, time-  
22 keeping, and that one’s appearance matters). A majority (65%) of family members  
23 thought that “the work experience has improved his/her chances of getting work in  
24 the future.” Again, a majority had received feedback on the young person’s  
25 performance at the work placement from the employment service involved. A small  
26 majority reported that the work placement had had an impact on their family’s view  
27 (52%), with 28% saying that feedback from the employment service had been  
28 important in influencing the family’s views of employment.  
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42 Families rated the help their son or daughter received from the employment services  
43 on a scale from 1 (“very poor”) to 5 (“very good”) and overall scored their  
44 satisfaction at 4.7. In response to the question “In the **past**, how likely did you think  
45 it would be that your son/daughter might get a paid job in the future?” they  
46 reported an average score of 2.4, close to unlikely. Further, when asked if “**Now**,  
47 how likely do you think it is that your son/daughter might get a paid job in the  
48 future?” family members reported an average score of 2.7, again close to unlikely.  
49 Their reasons for this pessimism were the problems of travel distances to work being  
50 too far and the lack of job vacancies generally. While some had remained positive,  
51 some negative, five (20%) family members had become more positive during the  
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3 work placements, largely through seeing what could be achieved with support. A  
4 majority (52%) of families said that the employment agency had changed the way  
5 the young person thinks about work, largely due to increasing their confidence,  
6 demonstrating to them what they can do, and showing them the social and financial  
7 benefits of having a paid job.  
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### 11 12 13 Conclusions

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15 The employment rates of people with intellectual disabilities or ASD are the lowest  
16 of any disability group. If we are to improve this rate we need better preparation of  
17 young people to compete in the labour market. The research literature suggests that  
18 the supported employment model, with job coach support available in the  
19 workplace, is key to people with intellectual disabilities gaining paid employment  
20 (Beyer and Robinson 2009). It also suggests that experience of jobs while still at  
21 school is an important predictor of employment success as an adult, and that job  
22 coach support is important to delivering work experiences while in education (Test  
23 *et al.*, 2009; Howarth *et al.*, 2006). The Real Opportunities project has demonstrated  
24 that multiple work experience placements are possible, using individually designed  
25 placements with job coach support. The reactions of employers validate that young  
26 people with intellectual disabilities make effective workers, and that they would be  
27 hired if funding allowed. The performance of young people with intellectual  
28 disabilities in paid work is good within this supported employment model. However,  
29 family reactions to employment remained ambiguous. The work of the employment  
30 services were largely well received, but only a minority reported being positive about  
31 the young person getting a job in the future. The poor jobs market, geography, and  
32 availability of support were factors in this view.  
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49 Evidence from this study also suggests that young people build skills over multiple  
50 work experiences through supported employment and that it represents an effective  
51 vocational learning model. The problem of delivery is therefore not weaknesses of  
52 young people but the availability of effective job coaching services, and the  
53 resources to pay for them while people are aged 16-19 years of age. We have no  
54 data on any match between the young people's emerging preferences for work and  
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3 the placements they took up. Processes such as vocational profiling were in place to  
4 determine job match, but further research is needed to establish if the work  
5 placements found did match the interests of the young people and further their  
6 work choices. Without a good job match services run the risk of de-motivating young  
7 people and undermining the pathway to paid employment.  
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13 While this project did not set out to achieve paid jobs, a small number of those  
14 represented here did go on to achieve paid employment. Many others continued on  
15 to Colleges of Further Education. There remains a challenge as to how we support  
16 young people with intellectual disabilities who graduate from further education to  
17 move to the next step- paid employment. This study suggests that there is benefit in  
18 practical learning on the job with skilled on-the-job support.  
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26 If all options for adult life are to be supported in transition planning there is work to  
27 be done to inform young people and their families about how employment can be  
28 made possible. This is practical work. This study has shown that, by demonstrating  
29 through supported work experience that young people's skills can grow and that  
30 they can be successful in employment, we can help some families and young people  
31 to see paid employment as a realistic transition goal. Further work is required to  
32 ensure any such goals are followed through and that effective means of supporting  
33 people in jobs are made available. The availability of job coaches appears key in this  
34 respect.  
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#### 43 Further research

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45 More research is needed to determine whether greater investment in community-  
46 based work experiences with support would produce better employment outcomes  
47 than the existing balance of investment in vocational training. To this end, future  
48 research should determine whether people undergoing community-based work  
49 experience enter paid employment after school or college in greater numbers than  
50 those who did not.  
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#### 56 Lessons for research

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3 There are some weaknesses with this study. Outcome ratings were reported by the  
4 job coaches of the young people. Independent rating of performance would have  
5 been more objective. As there were missing data, we are also unsure whether there  
6 is a bias in the employer responses, with those who responded being the most  
7 positive, and employers with negative experiencing choosing not to respond. Further  
8 targeted follow-up of non-responders would be needed to confirm if any bias exists.  
9 There might also be a potential for bias in employer's rating of performance by the  
10 people because they apply lower standards to people with a intellectual disability or  
11 an ASD. Comparison with assessments with other non-disabled workers would help  
12 validate any such effect. The inclusion of a robust baseline skills assessment prior to  
13 entering supported work experience would also help to further validate outcomes  
14 and demonstrate which types of work placement are most effective in promoting  
15 development of skills.  
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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Young people placed in one or more workplaces by area**

Area	Number of young people	Number of young people by placements	Number of placements
Bridgend	27	One place: 27 Two places: 8	35
Caerphilly	53	One place: 53 Two place: 13	66
Carmarthenshire	19	One place: 19 Two place: 12	31
Merthyr Tydfil	34	One place: 34 Two place: 16 Three places: 2	52
Neath/Port Talbot	7	One place: 7 Two place: 1	6
Pembrokeshire	20	One place: 20	20
Rhondda/Cynon/Taff	103	One place: 103 Two place: 48 Three places: 3	154
Swansea	20	One place: 20 Two place: 4	24
Torfaen	14	One place: 14 Two place: 1	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>One place: 297 Two place: 103 Three places: 5</b>	<b>405</b>

**Table 2: Work experience placements found\***

Work placement title	Number of places
Retail assistant	53 (17.5%)
Nursery/play assistant	23 ( 7.6%)
Kitchen assistant	20 ( 6.6%)
Leisure/Sports centre assistant	19 ( 6.3%)
General assistant	15 ( 5.0%)
Administrative/office assistant	14 ( 4.6%)
Café assistant	13 ( 4.3%)
Animal assistant	11 ( 3.6%)
Hair/salon assistant	10 ( 3.3%)
Car valet	9 ( 3.0%)
Gardiner	8 ( 2.6%)

Assistant librarian	7 ( 2.3%)
Pub/restaurant assistant	7 ( 2.3%)
Garage/Bodywork assistant	6 (2.0%)
Volunteer	5 ( 1.7%)
Production assistant	5 ( 1.7%)
Assistant mechanic	4 ( 1.3%)
Catering assistant	4 ( 1.3%)
IT assistant	4 ( 1.3%)
Stable assistant	4 ( 1.3%)
Care home assistant	4 ( 1.3%)
Farm hand	4 ( 1.3%)
Cleaner	3 ( 1.0%)
Warehouse assistant	3 ( 1.0%)
<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>17 ( 5.6%)</i>

\* Showing placements over 1% from 303 placements

**Table 3: Significance of changes in core skills between placements**

Area	Score Placement 1	Score Placement 2	Change between Placement 1 and 2	P- Significance of change <sup>§</sup>
Communicate with others	3.5	3.8	+	P=0.021* N=82
Concentrate	3.5	3.8	+	P=0.004** N=84
Work without mistakes	3.5	3.7	+	P=0.231 N=83
Do a range of tasks	3.9	4.1	+	P=0.006** N=83
Work with their hands	4.2	4.3	+	P=0.206 N=82
Lift/carry/push/pull things	4.0	4.1	+	P=0.407 N=84
Work physically hard	3.7	3.9	+	P=0.141 N=70
Work quickly	3.4	3.6	+	P=0.141 N=78
Walk/move easily	4.3	4.4	+	P=0.593 N=83
Balance	4.3	4.3	x	P=0.666 N=84
Stand for long periods	4.2	4.3	+	P=0.294 N=83
Sit for long periods	4.3	4.4	+	P=0.121 N=62
Use stairs	4.5	4.5	x	P=0.618 N=75
Use a computer	3.9	3.7	-	P=0.741 N=36
Use initiative	2.9	3.3	+	P=0.014* N=83
Work without support	3.3	3.7	+	P=0.013* N=83
Remember/follow instructions	3.7	3.9	+	P=0.042* N=78

<sup>§</sup> Wilcoxon Signed-ranks Test of significance.

\* Significant differences at 0.05 level.

\*\* Significant differences at 0.01 level or better.

**Table 4: Employer reports of performance of young person in key work performance areas**

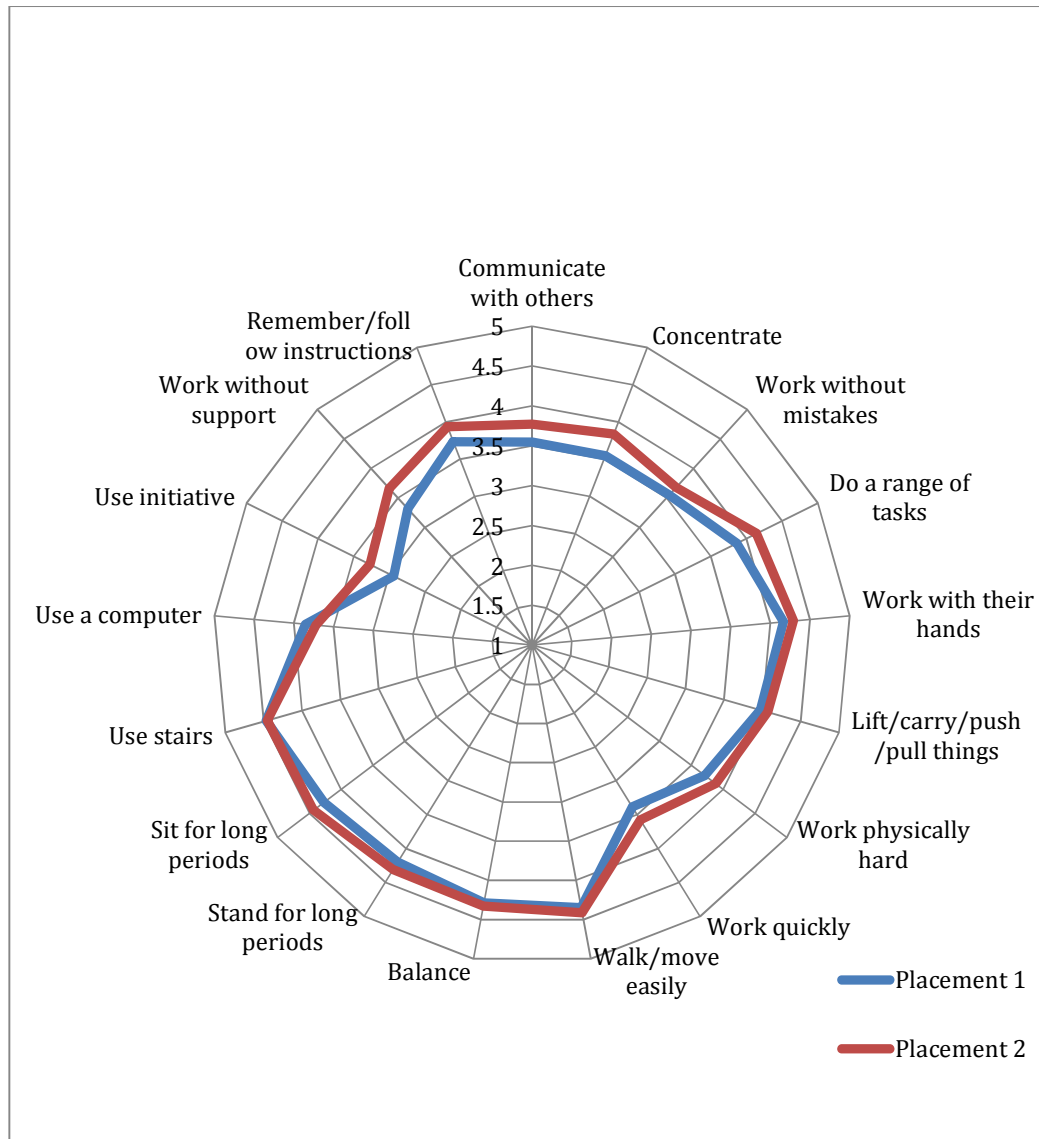
Skill Area	Very satisfied/Satisfied (No. of people)	Neutral (No. of people)	Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied (No. of people)
Working skills	95.9%	3.7%	0.4%
Following safety rules	98.8%	1.2%	0.0%
Following given instructions	96.4%	3.6%	0.0%
Attendance record	98.8%	1.2%	0.0%
Punctuality	99.2%	0.8%	0.0%
Quantity of work	94.3%	4.5%	1.2%
Quality of work	96.3%	3.3%	0.4%
Initiative	84.0%	13.6%	2.5%
Interest in task	91.9%	6.9%	1.2%
Breaks taken according to rules	98.8%	0.8%	0.4%
Productivity	90.9%	7.4%	1.6%
Relationship with co-workers	94.3%	3.6%	2.0%
Relationship to supervisors	98.8%	0.8%	0.4%
Personal appearance	99.2%	0.4%	0.4%

**Table 5: Employer reports of impact of work placement on their company**

Area of impact	Percentage of employers reporting a positive impact
<i>Employing the young person has had a positive impact on:</i>	
Productivity of other staff	65.0%
Attitude of other staff to work	73.3%
Diversity in the company	38.3%
Public image of the company	71.6%
Customers	70.3%

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Figure 1: Significance of changes in work skills between placements



# Article Title Page

[Article title]

**Supported work experience and its impact on young people with intellectual disabilities, their families and employers**

**Author Details:**

[Author 1 Name] Stephen Beyer

[Author 1 Affiliation] Institute of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

[Author 2 Name] Andrea Meek

[Author 2 Affiliation] South East Wales Trials Unit (SEWTU), Institute of Primary Care and Public Health, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

[Author 3 Name] Amy Davies

[Author 3 Affiliation] Institute of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

[Author 4 Name ]

[Author 4 Affiliation]

Corresponding author: [Name] Stephen Beyer

[Corresponding Author's Email] [beyer@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:beyer@cardiff.ac.uk)

*NOTE: affiliations should appear as the following: Department (if applicable); Institution; City; State (US only); Country. No further information or detail should be included*

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**Biographical Details (if applicable):**

[Author 1 bio]

[Author 2 bio]

[Author 3 bio]

[Author 4 bio]

**Structured Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The Real Opportunities project set out to implement a number of the approaches identified through research that can assist transition to adulthood in 9 local authority areas in Wales. Supported work experience was delivered by small job coaching teams in each area. This study set out to establish the impact of the work experience and employment teams by describing the placements provided, any change in the skills of young people, and the responses to the placements by employers, young people and their families.

**Design/methodology:** Data was collected over 24 months by participating employment services. Questionnaires were administered to employers. Interviews were carried out with a sub-sample of young people (24) participating and a family member (25).



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**Findings:** Over a 24 month period 297 young people received supported work experience. 262 young people had a learning disability, 35 an Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Up to three placements were delivered to each person, averaging 5 weeks per placement, with 405 placements in total. Sixty-two percent of those with two placements had a different category of second work placement to their first. These numbers demonstrated that work experience in community placements is possible with support. Young people improved work skills significantly between first and second placements. Employers reported high satisfaction rates with the young person's work in a range of key performance areas and company benefits from participation for other staff, company image and customer relations. Interviews with 24 young people and 25 of their family members reported satisfaction with support and placements. Six young people had paid work now, and 33% said they would get a job at some future time. Families reported changes in young person's outlook but their view of prospects of employment remained pessimistic due to the external environment.

**Research Implications:** Implications for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:**

Transition; Learning Disabilities; Employment; Work experience; Supported Employment; Autistic Spectrum Disorder

**Article Classification:**

Research

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**Running Heads:**

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