

Policy statement by BASE

The BASE NEC has developed the following policy statement to ensure a consistent approach to discussions with policy makers.

1. Strategic Policy

1.1 BASE supports the national aspiration of 80% of the working age population being in employment and it is essential that a socially inclusive approach is actively pursued to reach this. People with a disability need to be proportionally represented within the workforce if we are to achieve this goal. There must be a narrowing of the gap between the participation rates of different customer groups. This approach should be based on the social model of disability rather than the medical model.

1.2 A renewed focus is needed on strategies designed to equalise employment rates so that all disability groups achieve parity in economic participation. BASE fully supports a focus on those groups at greatest risk of social exclusion and the targeted approach of the *Valuing Employment Now* and *Work, Recovery and Inclusion* strategies. We must ensure that definitions such as those used in PSA16 do not incidentally exclude people on the margins of these definitions from receiving the individualised support they may require.

1.3 Effective communication and partnership working is needed at cross-Government levels to ensure that initiatives are coordinated, avoid duplication and enhance transitions into employment. Policy development should include employers, customers and provider representation.

1.4 Local targets should be set to improve employment rates and local strategic partnerships should be responsible for reporting annual progress in achieving them. Ringfenced funding may be required to achieve this.

2. Commissioning

2.1 The supported employment model has a relevance to all economically disadvantaged groups. Customers should have access to high quality evidence-based employment support irrespective of postcode.

2.2 BASE believes in the “place and train” or “individual placement and support” approach to supporting disabled jobseekers. This requires the minimum levels of prevocational support needed to achieve sustainable employment. BASE does not recognise “job readiness” as a helpful concept.

2.3 We would encourage the joint commissioning and co-location of services. Resources should be sufficient to ensure that funding is appropriate to achieving the objectives of higher employment rates. Further work is needed to fully understand the costs of providing individualised employment support. Cost benefit analysis indicates that supported employment offers opportunities to invest to save.

2.4 There must be recognition that locally based providers have a clear role in delivering local, regional and national strategic aims. They are well placed to develop clear linkages with local services, influence local strategy and remain locally accountable for the quality of their provision.

2.5 Local authorities should consider the merits of commissioning “place and train” supported employment services as an alternative to further education where appropriate. Education providers have a clear role in accrediting skills development once a person is employed.

2.6 Resources should be transferred from day services to employment support. Mental health services should recognise the therapeutic value of work and invest accordingly.

2.7 Social enterprise, self employment, micro businesses and supported business models should be recognised as a part of the broader offer to customers.

2.8 The public sector should maximise opportunities for ethical procurement and reserved contracts under Article 19. Social clauses should be used to influence the involvement of supply chains in creating training and employment opportunities.

3. Employers

3.1 Employers are key customers of the supported employment services and should be encouraged to contribute to the planning, delivery and evaluation of services. There is a clear business case for employing a diverse workforce. BASE favours a human resources approach based on diversity management rather than equal opportunities.

3.2 There should be encouragement for capacity building measures so that employers encourage a positive attitude towards maintaining a diverse workforce. Diversity management should be an integral part of human resources qualifications and the Investors in People Framework. Reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process should include working interviews where jobseekers can demonstrate their competence as an alternative to formal interviews.

3.3 Employment support should aim to maximise the confidence and capability of employers so that they are able to develop their own management practices and processes to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. There needs to be a coordinated approach to making guidance information available to employers.

3.4 Employers should be engaged and supported effectively. They should be supported in making reasonable adjustments to the workplace and job duties. Employers should be compensated for long term staff absence that results from a disability condition.

4. Education

4.1 There should be higher expectations of achieving employment outcomes for disabled school leavers. Work needs to be undertaken to raise the aspirations of individuals with a disability, their family/carers and supporting professionals. A greater awareness of employment issues by education professionals would help this aim.

4.2 All disabled learners from the age of 14 should have access to advice and guidance services to support their pathway to employment. Transition plans should be person-centred, formalised, implemented and audited. Transition planning and independent guidance should be available to all disabled people up to the age of 25 years.

4.3 Work experience placements should be compulsory for all school pupils in years 10-11 and resources should address difficulties posed by the requirements for transport and workplace support. Young people should have the opportunity to be supported in Saturday and holiday jobs.

4.4 Vocational courses in further education should be required to contain significant elements of workplace learning, delivered in partnership between education and supported employment providers. Education providers should not be financially penalised because learners achieve job outcomes and leave education.

4.5 A more flexible qualification framework is required to support the accreditation of individual learning. There should be a clear recognition of the primary need for soft skill acquisition and funding streams should not concentrate exclusively on accredited qualifications.

5. Personalisation

5.1 BASE supports the aims of the personalisation agenda but urges a more ambitious approach that includes all relevant public funding streams. This includes mainstream funding through the education and employment sectors. Clarity is needed on whether the customer is purchasing a process or an outcome.

5.2 BASE believes that personalisation should not marginalise customers who may fall between funding streams or who do not meet FACS criteria. BASE recognises that the supported employment model has long delivered a highly personalised service to social care clients. It also recognises that supported employment can make an important contribution to the agenda of Adult Social Care in delivering effective low level preventative services for people with social care needs who do not meet FACS eligibility.

5.3 With this in mind, BASE favours a mixed approach to commissioning. We believe that strategically commissioned district services offer the most effective way of assuring a sustainable service infrastructure to support clients with social care needs on either side of the FACS banding criteria. BASE also believes that personal budgets should be available for clients whose social care support needs pass above an agreed threshold, and for customers accessing other relevant funding streams.

5.4 Individuals and their carers should be supported in managing the personalisation process. This may include support around recruiting support, and managing payroll and legislative requirements.

5.5 BASE recognises some of the inherent dangers to service provision associated with personalisation. We are not yet convinced that there is a demand to purchase such services and it has the potential to add an unreasonable, and unfunded, administrative burden to services. Issues of quality assurance will also need careful examination.

6. Welfare benefits

6.1 Everyone who requires it should have access to independent welfare benefits advice.

6.2 The benefits system should be simpler, more readily understood and include appropriate incentives for anyone moving into employment. There should be more integration of wages, benefits and taxation so that the 16 hour rule is less of an obstacle to progression.

6.3 Supported permitted work should have equal conditions regardless of whether a person has made National Insurance contributions. Part time work should be recognised as a valuable stepping stone to full-time employment for many people.

6.4 There should be research into the impact on earned income of living in supported care situations.

7. Employment programmes

7.1 National employment programmes should recognise the expertise of local and regional specialist providers. Services should be commissioned at a local or subregional level. There is little evidence that large supply chain procurement leads to better outcomes for people with significant disabilities and BASE believes that greater flexibility is needed with the DWP Commissioning Strategy.

7.2 Employment programmes should be funded by a combination of outcome funding and service fees. An individual's route through employment programmes should be tracked and measured (distance travelled), with clearly defined milestones and outcomes.

7.3 Financial and management systems should be fit for purpose and user friendly. A minimum of 85% of prime contract funding should be spent on service delivery.

7.4 Any subcontract arrangements should be fair to all parties and independent arbitration should be available if disputes cannot be resolved between contractors. DWP should demonstrate an active stewardship of the market and subcontractors should be able to communicate directly with them.

7.5 Contract management should be proactive in supporting improved delivery. Failing providers should be identified and supported. An inability to improve should result in the loss of contract.

8. Quality

8.1 All providers of specialist employment support should be subject to inspection using a common set of standards founded on evidence-based practice. Quality inspections should be proportionate and fit for purpose. Best practice should be identified and widely disseminated.

8.2 Providers should adopt quality assurance processes that are designed to enable benchmarking across the sector.

9. Workforce Development

9.1 A nationally recognised qualification framework is essential to reflect the wide range of skills utilised within the supported employment industry. A coordinated programme of workforce development is required and relevant qualifications should be available from a range of providers.

9.2 Accredited training in supported employment techniques should be available to the workforce within the social care, health, employment and education sectors.