



Commissioning case study

Commissioning for better outcomes in Gloucestershire

The headlines

- Gloucestershire has developed an employment strategy aimed at increasing the number of adults with learning disabilities moving into employment. As part of this strategy it ran two pilot-supported employment services, one externally commissioned and one in-house, which have informed its 'make or buy' decision;
- Since April 2013 more than 100 people with learning disabilities have started work and the employment rate of adults with learning disabilities is now 19 per cent compared to the national average of 7 per cent and a starting position in Gloucestershire of 5.9 per cent;
- Engaging with employers was the toughest nut to crack and it is important to gain their confidence. Gloucestershire uses employers to talk to other employers and to promote their good experience. As an employer itself, the council recognised that it needed to develop opportunities for disabled people within its own organisation and this helped it to engage further with employers; and
- Gloucestershire was a participant in wave 1 of the Commissioning Academy

“ I love my job and I work very hard. This is my first paid job and it makes me feel so proud. ”
Lorraine, service user

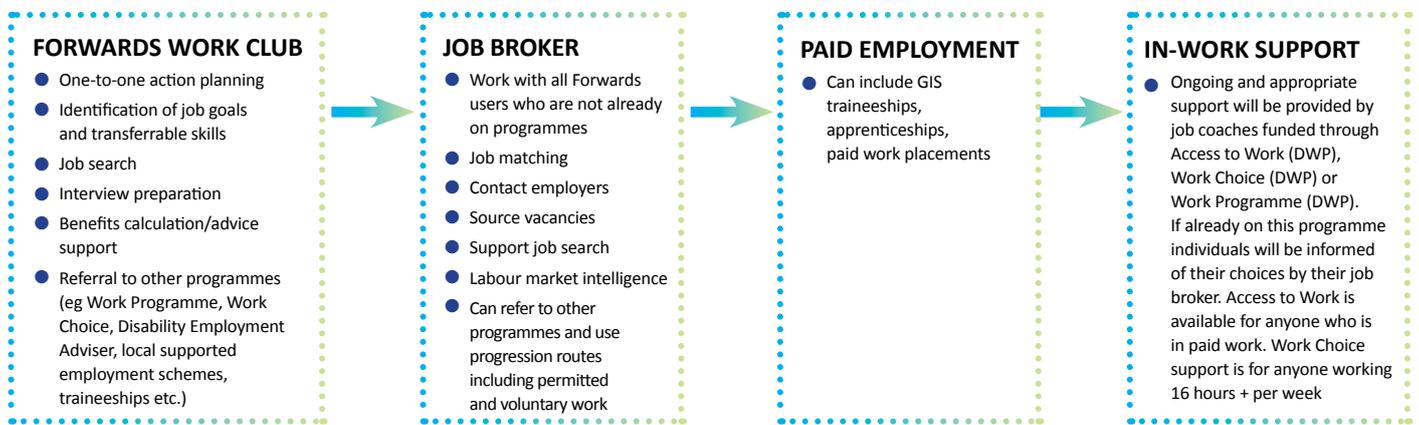
What is the context?

In 2013 the council established an enablement service for adults with learning disabilities who had the potential to go out and about independently. The service aimed to support people in finding out more about activities in their area, to help them with making friends and to build on social networks where they lived.

Recognising that employment was critical to enabling people with learning disabilities to live independent and valued lives, the council decided to offer a supported employment service as part of the wider enablement service. It acknowledged, however, that it did not have the skills internally to run such a service and therefore seconded a suitably experienced and enthusiastic DWP employee into a new role of learning disabilities employment commissioner. The brief of the employment commissioner was to develop an employment strategy which would see an increase in the number of people with learning disabilities in paid employment.

Throughout 2013 and 2014 Gloucestershire designed and developed a comprehensive pathway, which started with assessment by the enablement service, and which clearly identified roles and responsibilities both internally and externally for ensuring that disabled people received the right service at the right time.

Gloucestershire learning disabilities employment pathway



What commissioning and delivery model has been adopted?

A range of services and initiatives which responded to the needs of the service users, families and employers was commissioned. The council talked to 10 to 12 groups of service users to ask them about their key challenges in accessing employment. One of the initiatives was Dragon's Apprentice, in which four groups of service users developed sustainable business propositions, which were then presented to a panel of judges. The winning proposition was by a group from Stroud whose idea was to sell home-made smoothies using local ingredients at the local market.



Other initiatives included:

- a specific post to work with schools to ensure that there is a clear supported pathway into employment or supported employment services for those leaving education;
- Forwards, a public, private and voluntary sector partnership, is an established network of six work clubs, providing weekly support, information and guidance for people with learning disabilities who are looking for work;
- the 30/30 challenge which aimed to find 30 local employers who would offer a work awareness day to 30 young people aged between 14 and 18 with a learning disability; and
- the Saturday Jobs initiative which aimed to place young people into part-time work while they are still in education

The council also gave small start-up grants to four social enterprises which provide employment opportunities for

people with learning disabilities. These include Fresh Ground, a café based in Stroud; a social enterprise that recycles and renews furniture in the Forest of Dean; a car valeting service based in three car parks; and Sofab Sports which offers retail and football coaching opportunities. Approximately 25 adults with learning disabilities are now employed in these enterprises.

Gloucestershire wanted to assess which model of providing personalised packages of support would achieve the best results for both the council and for individuals. It therefore commissioned a supported employment service for 18 to 24-year-olds from a locally-based social enterprise with experience in this field, while the service for those over the age of 25 remained in-house. Alongside the two-year pilot, Gloucestershire commissioned training for staff from both the external and internal providers as well as for other partners. Initially the external service performed better in terms of outcomes for individuals than the internal service. This was largely because the focus of the internal service had previously been on providing care to individuals, and the staff needed not only to get up to speed with the technical aspects of employment support, but also to learn to shift their focus from care to employment. Alongside the generally available training, therefore, internal service staff also went through a development programme to help them understand the benefits of paid work to people with learning disabilities, as well as the employment landscape.

While the external provider achieved better outcomes than the internal service at first, the situation changed dramatically once the internal workforce had been trained and developed. In the second year, the outcomes for the internal service were significantly better than those for the external service. Partly this is because the internal service was better at developing relationships with other council services; and partly because internal staff instinctively understand the challenges faced by the individual, which can often be more disabling than their impairment. Often individuals have had a relationship with the council since childhood and are more comfortable working with people they already know and trust.

As it moves forward, the council is applying its learning to develop an all-age all-disability approach, Building Better Lives, in which employment, enablement and outcomes-based commissioning will be key components. While acknowledging the value that the external provider has brought, the council has now concluded that, at least for the next two years, commissioning an internal supported employment service will be more effective in facilitating the sustainable culture change it aims to see through the Building Better Lives approach.

Who are the key partners?

Gloucestershire listened to adults with learning disabilities about their concerns, challenges and barriers and then developed initiatives to help overcome these. The consultation showed that people with learning disabilities wanted to work but did not get the opportunity, as others would make assumptions about their capabilities and decisions on their behalf. The council recognised that it had a role in assisting the professionals and agencies working with service users to understand that there was a robust support network to help people with learning disabilities both to find and sustain paid work.

For each sector a 'business case' was developed which helped commissioners to engage with a wide range of partners including the Department for Work and Pensions, education providers, adult social care providers, adult social care teams, welfare to work providers, employers, families and carers, children's services, transitions teams, directors and cabinet members.

Involving education providers was initially difficult but improved once they understood the council's direction of travel. The working relationship was further enhanced by special educational needs and disabilities reforms that required employment to be included as an outcome in children's and young people's education, health and care plans.

Engaging with employers was the toughest nut to crack and it is important to gain their confidence. Gloucestershire uses employers to talk to other employers and to promote their good experience. As an employer itself, the council recognised that it needed to develop opportunities for disabled people within its own organisation and this helped it to engage further with employers. Key links with the Federation of Small Businesses and Local Enterprise Partnership helped it to understand employers' challenges; and, as a result, it developed initiatives like 30/30 Challenge which introduces employers to young disabled people in education.

Case study: Becky

Becky is 18 years old and in full-time education but also has a Saturday job at a charity shop. She secured her paid Saturday position through the council-commissioned Saturday Jobs project. She was keen to find a weekend job but lacked confidence and she was not competent at using public transport. Both of these affected her chances of finding anything where she could develop skills and build the capacity to sustain full-time work in the future. The charity shop was keen to offer a young person a Saturday job and this was felt to be an ideal opportunity for Becky to learn new skills and gain confidence in a supportive environment.

The journey to work involved two buses from Becky's home. She received some help initially through the employment support service, which provided travel training, and has quickly become confident enough to travel independently. Becky's disability means that she cannot learn via written instructions and responds best to verbal tuition, but she has started to learn new skills serving customers and has been good at using her creative display skills. Although she still has some gaps in her learning, Becky now has a really good idea about where her strengths are and where she needs some more support.

Her employer has been supportive throughout and has said how much she has progressed in a relatively short period. Becky leaves school this year for further education college. She will continue to travel independently and work at the shop with the aim of building her skills for the future where, thanks to her Saturday job, she should be able to find work within the field she chooses.

Gloucestershire maintains that by directing people into employment there are many benefits for the individual financially and in terms of their capacity to make a contribution to the community. It also believes that there are savings in welfare benefits and in social care budgets, as care packages are either reduced or avoided. It has commissioned a cost-benefit analysis to look at the extent of these efficiencies both to the taxpayer and to the social care budget.

Case study: Lorraine

Lorraine is 60 years old, lives in supported living accommodation, and recently started her first paid job in a pub.

Lorraine has been using council services for a number of years, initially living in residential communities and moving to supported living in 2008 when she started to access enablement services. She began to attend Forwards work clubs where she took advantage of the courses and received additional support from a job broker. Attending the council-commissioned drop-in sessions encouraged her to become more active socially and to develop her confidence, which has in turn allowed her to take up a paid role in a busy pub. Lorraine's progression to paid work was relatively rapid once she was equipped with the right skills.

The employment support service has helped Lorraine with making applications for Access to Work, which provides a job coach for Lorraine, and by contributing towards taxi fares given the location and hours of her work. Lorraine loves her job and is doing exactly what she wants to do.

What have been the key elements of success?

Support from the council's chief executive and leadership team and cross-party political support have resulted in both investment and in a commitment from the whole council. Having the confidence and trust of the council's leadership has enabled commissioners to take risks and to try things out.

Bringing into the council on secondment a commissioner with a working knowledge of Department for Work and Pensions processes and services ensured a robust working relationship was established. Staff, service users and other partners developed a confidence in the reality of people with learning disabilities being able to sustain paid work. Staff development was critical in developing skills and confidence.

Gloucestershire found that its credibility in the field locally grew as it infiltrated the business community. As awareness of what it was doing and its successes grew, commissioners found that organisations approached them and were keen to be part of the work.

Vikki Walters, Employment Commissioner at the council, also feels that welfare reforms have been a positive driver in getting people with learning disabilities into work in that they have normalised employment for people with disabilities and helped to reduce dependency on benefits.

Gloucestershire valued the learning it gained from participation in the Commissioning Academy and believes that this has influenced its approach to commissioning employment outcomes for people with learning disabilities.

“ The Commissioning Academy reinforced the need to be brave and to focus on needs and outcomes rather than services and this project is a brilliant example of doing exactly that. ”

Linda Uren, Director of Children and Families,
Gloucestershire County Council

What has been learnt?

Vikki Walters believes that it is essential to have commitment right through the business and she recommends preparing a good business case for the chief executive and leader to gain their active support from the outset.

Changes such as those that Gloucestershire has made cannot be delivered in isolation; developing relationships with the right people, influencing, and understanding what others can bring, especially those who may not seem like the most obvious partners, are all critical. For Gloucestershire, redesigning its pathway to employment for people with learning disabilities meant looking at all the resources and services available across the area, and taking decisions about what and what not to commission based on what was already being delivered by partners.

Changing behaviours, attitudes and long-established ways of working is a challenge, but can be overcome with wholehearted organisational commitment and with developmental support and training.



‘ The most important lesson is that it **can** be done. People with learning disabilities can find work and sustain work. They just need the right support. ’

Vikki Walters, Employment Commissioner,
Gloucestershire County Council

Who can I contact?

Vikki Walters, Employment Commissioner, Disabilities Commissioning Team, Gloucestershire County Council, email vikki.walters@gloucestershire.gov.uk telephone **01452 328645**

Other useful information

Everyone Deserves a Future
<http://youtu.be/a9L-LhI5C6c>

Everyone Deserves an Opportunity
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJXkMdJZhQ>

<http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/buildingbetterlives>