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Benefits of Extending SEN support to ages 16 to 25

This paper, commissioned as part of the Committee for Employment and Learning's inquiry into post-16 special educational needs, discusses briefly research findings regarding the benefits of extending Special Educational Needs support to the age of 25.

Introduction

This paper was commissioned by the Committee for Employment and Learning as part of its inquiry into post-16 Special Educational Needs (SEN) support.

The paper provides a literature review of research findings, which identify the benefits of extending Special Educational Needs (SEN) support to people with learning disabilities from ages 16 to 25.

This paper examines benefits identified in the literature in the contexts of:

- Education and Training - **Section 1**; and,
- Social Interactions - **Section 2**

Thereafter, **Section 3** provides concluding remarks based on the previous sections, including potential issues that may be of interest to the CEL.

1 Education and Training

A number of studies identify benefits associated with education and training for young people aged 16-25 with learning disabilities. Those benefits are discussed below.

1.1 Wales' Individual Development Plans

In 2012, Wales launched a consultation on reforming its SEN system, which included the introduction of Individual Development Plans (IDPs). These would act as a replacement for a SEN statement and would support, in a similar manner to Education and Health Care Plans (EHC Plans) in England (discussed below at sub-section 1.3), a young person with learning disabilities from 0 – 25.¹

Considering the role that the IDP would play in this transition process, the consultation document argued that:²

The extension of the IDP to those aged 19–25 will offer the prospect of improved transition arrangements into further or higher education, work-based learning and/or adult services. The current arrangements for the transition to adulthood of young people with the greatest needs are often disjointed and ineffective and many vulnerable young people are consequently left without adequate support. This undermines the benefits gained through specialised education, health and social care support during their childhood.

¹ Welsh Government, 26 June 2012, Forward in partnership for children and young people with additional needs, <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/consultation/120710senconsultationen.pdf>

² Ibid, p.7

1.2 Supported internship programmes during transition

From the literature, it appears that the support received following such a transition can also play an important role. This was evidenced in an evaluation report of a Government funded supported internship programme. The programme was launched in autumn 2012, and operated in 15 Further Education (FE) colleges across England. It was designed for young people aged 16-24 year olds, who had a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA).³ As stated in the evaluation report:⁴

The majority of the learning takes place in the workplace, and is tailored to the individual needs of the young person, equipping them with the skills they need for work so that they can achieve sustainable paid employment.

Operation and delivery of the programme was guided by four principles:

- A substantial proportion of learning to take place in the workplace;
- Additional learning to be provided outside of the workplace;
- The job roles undertaken to meet learner and employer need; and,
- Appropriate support to be offered throughout to both learner and employer.

In total 190 young people with learning disabilities completed the programme. Of these:

- 36% gained paid employment;
- 26% gained voluntary work;
- 14% were progressing to FE or training; and,
- 25% had no employment or plans to enter FE or training.

The evaluation report stated:⁵

All parties who took part in the supported internship trial saw their involvement as beneficial to themselves and to the interns. Interns had gained in confidence, self-esteem and independence, learned new specific and transferable skills, developed more positive attitudes and a better understanding of the world of work and had qualifications and experiences to include on their CV's

However:⁶

All staff involved in delivery thought that the trial offered value for money, based on the benefits to, and achievements of, the interns. However, without a longer term study to determine whether or not future savings have

³ LDA's were assessments carried out for young people with disabilities who wished to attend FE colleges in England.

⁴ Department for Education and CooperGibson Research, December 2013, Supported internship trial for 16 to 24 year old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: An evaluation, p.9
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263205/DFE-RR314.pdf

⁵ Ibid,p.94

⁶ Ibid p.13

been made over the lives of the interns, it is not possible to be certain at this stage of value for money has been achieved.

As such, the supported nature of the internship programme helped young people with disabilities learn new skills, increase self-confidence and gain qualifications for their curriculum vitae (CV), all of which support any future transition into employment.

1.3 England's ECH Plans

A significant development in the support provided to people with learning disabilities aged 16-25 in England was the creation of Education and Health Care Plans (EHC Plans). Introduced under the Children and Families Act 2014⁷, EHC Plans were designed to simplify the Special Education Needs (SEN) and Post-16 SEN system, with a single plan covering people with learning disabilities from birth (or from when they are assessed).⁸

Whilst there has yet to be an evaluation of how successful the new system has been, EHC plans were piloted through the Pathfinder Programme, which operated across thirty-one local authorities in England.⁹

The Pathfinder Programme was launched in 2011 and had the following objectives:¹⁰

- To develop a new birth to 25 assessment process and a single Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP);
- To explore how the voluntary and community sectors can introduce more independence to the process;
- To ensure the full engagement of children and young people and their parents and families;
- To ensure the full engagement of schools and colleges; and,
- To improve choice, control and outcomes for children and young people through the use of personal budgets and direct payments.

Positive outcomes

A review of the Pathfinder Programme found that a little over half the participants¹¹ reported meeting agreed outcomes for both people with learning disabilities and their families. Please note: "outcomes" refers to the achievement of goals and objectives agreed between young people with disabilities, parents and appropriate professionals.

⁷ Legislation.gov.uk, Children and Families Act 2014, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

⁸ The previous system provided a SEN assessment for school age people with learning disabilities and a Learning Disability Assessment (LDA) for those aged over 16 and seeking to access further education or training.

⁹ Department for Education and Department for Health, March 2013, SEND pathfinder programme report, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/245604/pathfinder_progress_report_march_2013_v2.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid, p.3

¹¹ "Participants" refers to the parents or guardians of a young person with learning disabilities, who took part in the Pathfinder Programme

Parents of young people aged 16-25 commonly reported outcomes resulting from an increase in services or a transition to an educational setting.¹² A number of other positive outcomes were reported, including:¹³

- Additional one-to-one support promoted learning and development, for example, speech and language, reading and writing;
- The EHC plan helped drive progress towards outcomes in an area of existing support, by setting out clear objectives for learning and development, as well as 'softer' outcomes relating to social interaction; and,
- When a child or young person with a learning disability was in an education setting that most suited his or her needs, parents experienced improved relationships, performance at work and mental health.

As such, the additional support provided under the Pathfinder Programme helped to improve learning and development for people with learning disabilities.

Negative outcomes

It should be noted, however, that some participants reported negative outcomes, including reassessment under the EHC plan, which led to a reduction in existing support and consequently uncertainty and anxiety over the future of services and support.

1.4 Further education and training attendance

Accessing further education (FE) and training also has identifiable benefits for young people with learning disabilities.

For example, a National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) study in 2011 on planning for adult life and services for young people with learning disabilities found that FE offered them a greater level of independence.¹⁴ The report on the study's findings stated:¹⁵

They particularly value the opportunity to maintain contact with their friends, as well as access a wider social network.

As with the Pathfinder Programme, a number of issues were also identified, such as the need for greater support in helping them integrate into the college, a lack of

¹² Department for Education, August 2014, Evaluation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Pathfinder Programme, p.62 - 63

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/346265/RR356A_-_Qualitative_research_with_families.pdf

¹³ Ibid, p.62 - 63

¹⁴ National Foundation for Educational Research, 2011, young people with special educational needs/learning difficulties and disabilities: research into planning for adult life and services, <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SENT01/SENT01.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid, p.8

challenging FE programmes and insufficient opportunities to develop basic skills that facilitate progress to higher level courses.¹⁶

1.4.1 Savings to the public purse

Supporting young people with learning disabilities into FE and training can also have benefits for public finances.

A National Audit Office (NAO) report into the oversight of special education found that:¹⁷

Achieving greater independence and employment for people with disabilities would be likely to bring downstream benefits.

Indeed, the NAO found that:¹⁸

Supporting one person with a learning disability into employment could, in addition to improving their independence and self-esteem, reduce lifetime costs to the public purse by around £170,000 and increase the person's income by between 55 and 95 per cent.

As such, FE and training can have a variety of benefits for young people with learning disabilities, including helping them develop skills that aid them when seeking future employment, such as building confidence and providing transitional support when entering into adult service provision.

In addition, as found by the NAO, by supporting young people with disabilities in meeting their own aspirations, the government can reduce the costs of supporting someone with learning disabilities throughout their lifetime, consequently generating savings to the public purse in the long-term, at the very least.

2 Social Interactions

A significant impact for people with disabilities receiving post-16 SEN support is the development and retention of relationships and friendships. Those benefits are discussed below.

2.1 Redressing isolation

In a number of studies it was found that people with learning disabilities can become isolated.¹⁹ However, by having access to a setting such as an FE college, employment or day centre, people with disabilities are able to retain and create friendships. Indeed,

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ National Audit Office, 4 November 2011, Oversight of special education for young people aged 16–25, p.21
<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/841303f2-e9b3-4916-b217-583edffe633a1.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibid, p.10

¹⁹ The Scottish Government, 2013, The Keys to Life: Improving quality of life for people with Learning Disabilities,
<http://www.gov.scot/resource/0042/00424389.pdf>

a Scottish government consultation into support for people with learning disabilities in Scotland, entitled “*The Same as You?*”,²⁰ identified a number of priorities to tackle loneliness amongst people with learning disabilities, including enhancing their social networks.

The Scottish Government’s review of the strategy found that well-planned learning opportunities at, for instance, day centres or FE colleges, can have a significant long-lasting effect.²¹

They can improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities and help them to take advantage of other activities and employment. They can also help them develop independent living skills so that they rely less on others.

In 2013, research undertaken by the Scottish Government examined the impact of its special educational needs system. Findings revealed that:²²

Continuing attendance at college or university has...become part of the weekly life experience of many adults with learning disabilities, giving them social opportunities to get out of the house and make friends, and their experiences indicate that there is a need to develop appropriately supported continuing educational experiences that offer the opportunity to develop and maintain interests and skills.

The Scottish Government’s report, entitled “*Putting learners at the Centre: Delivering our ambitions for post-16 education*”²³, found that in 2010, 2,408 people with learning disabilities in Scotland received a college place in Scotland. The report stated that:²⁴

People with learning disabilities, in common with other students, derive enormous additional benefits from college life – the chance to build up social connections and develop social skills. For this group of learners though, who may be learning the skills to live independently, it is particularly important that they get the chance to build up these social connections close to home.

2.2 Personal development

A review of the Pathfinder Programme²⁵ found that the introduction of EHC plans had led to a number of positive outcomes in terms of the personal development of people with learning disabilities.

²⁰ Scottish Government, *The Same as You?*, <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/1095/0001661.pdf>

²¹ *Ibid*, p.57

²² The Scottish Government, 2013, *The Keys to Life: Improving quality of life for people with Learning Disabilities*, p.92
<http://www.gov.scot/resource/0042/00424389.pdf>

²³ Scottish Government, 2011, *Putting learners at the Centre: Delivering our ambitions for post-16 education*,
<http://www.gov.scot/resource/0038/00388858.pdf>

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.6

The process of developing the EHC plan, for example, in which a person with Learning Disabilities attended meetings and voice their own opinions as to what support they would like helped build confidence around professionals and the ability to express their views.²⁶

2.2.1 Public purse savings

As noted above, support, such as developing independent living skills, can benefit the individual concerned. However, it also can reduce the costs of supporting people with LD, consequently generating savings to the public purse in the long-term, at the very least.

A 2011 NAO report found that:²⁷

We estimate that the cost to the public purse of supporting a person with a moderate learning disability through adult life (16–64) is £2–3 million at today's prices. Equipping a young person with the skills to live in semi-independent rather than fully supported housing could, in addition to quality-of-life improvements, reduce these lifetime support costs by around £1 million.

3 Summary

Sections 1 and 2 identify a number of benefits arising from the literature, which indicate that support for young people with learning disabilities can have positive impacts for the individual concerned and their families. This was show in relation to education and training, such as the benefit derived from the piloted internship programmes and the independence offered by FE programmes.

In addition, access to FE or training programmes can have important social benefits for people with learning disabilities, allowing them to develop and carry on friendships and relationships. This has important benefits for the development of social skills, self-confidence and tackling loneliness.

A further benefit of such support, as identified by the NAO in both sections 1 and 2, is the savings made to the public purse in the long-term, when investing in support for young people with learning disabilities in the short-term. This type of spending, which is sometimes called 'preventative spending', appears to be a prudent use of limited resources, especially in the context of on-going serious budget constraints, when there are challenging spending decisions for the foreseeable future.

²⁵ Department for Education and Department for Health, March 2013, SEND pathfinder programme report, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/245604/pathfinder_progress_report_march_2013_v2.pdf

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ National Audit Office, 4 November 2011, Oversight of special education for young people aged 16-25, p.10 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/841303f2-e9b3-4916-b217-583edffe633a1.pdf>

The Committee may wish to note the following:

- **Has the Department for Employment and Learning developed any programmes of support for people with learning disabilities which could be considered “preventative spending”?**
- **If so, what has been the impact of these programmes?**