

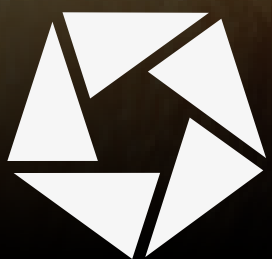


University of  
**Strathclyde**  
Business  
School



ACORNS TO TREES

SUPPORTING THE MEANINGFUL INTEGRATION OF ADULTS  
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES INTO MAINSTREAM SOCIETY



**Fraser of Allander Institute**

Scotland's employment landscape for  
people with learning disabilities

*March 2021*

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The Fraser of Allander Institute

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## Disclaimer

The analysis in this report has been conducted by the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI) at the University of Strathclyde. The FAI is a leading academic research centre focused on the Scottish economy.

The analysis and writing-up of the results was undertaken independently by the FAI. The FAI is committed to informing and encouraging public debate through the provision of the highest quality analytical advice and analysis. We are therefore happy to respond to requests for factual advice and analysis. Any technical errors or omissions are those of the FAI.

# Executive summary

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The Fraser of Allander Institute is [researching](#) the support and opportunities available to adults with a learning disability in Scotland. One area that has been consistently highlighted as lacking meaningful progress is employment opportunities.

It is clear that many people with learning disabilities would like more opportunities to have a paid job and, just as importantly, to keep their job and build a career. For many, this would unlock more choice and control over how to live their lives.

But it is also clear that very few people with a learning disability in Scotland have the opportunity to work.

In this report, we seek to assess the employment rate for people with learning disabilities in Scotland, analyse why it is so low, and consider what can be done to improve outcomes.

We find that:

- Employment outcomes for people with learning disabilities are poor and there is no evidence of progress being made.
- Employment is not a viable option for everyone with a learning disability, and it is important to recognise that this does not preclude people from leading fulfilling lives. Success does not mean everyone with a learning disability working – it means everyone who can and wants to work having the support and opportunities that enables them to do so.
- A lack of disaggregated data means that there is no reliable labour market information about people with a learning disability in Scotland.
- There is data on the pan-disabled employment rate. The Scottish Government is unlikely to meet its flagship ambition to halve the disability employment gap without improving opportunities for people with a learning disability.
- There is evidence of what works. Case studies presented in this report show that success is possible with the right support in place.
- The key challenge is replicating success at scale.
- Meaningful progress cannot be made by government alone. It requires all stakeholders, including employers, to take active steps towards more inclusive working environments.
- This presents an opportunity for government and employers to invest in the support that will unlock the potential of people with a learning disability.

# Introduction

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Many people with learning disabilities can and want to work. Our conversations with learning disability groups and individuals have consistently highlighted that increasing paid employment opportunities is one of their top priorities. Yet they face substantial barriers to accessing the labour market and their employment rate is far below other groups of the population.

As well as financial benefits, for many people meaningful paid employment opportunities can act as a key aspect of participating in society and an enabler of independent living.

Employment is not always a viable option for everyone with a learning disability, and it is important to recognise that this does not preclude people from leading fulfilling lives. But there are clearly many willing and able workers who feel locked out of the labour market because of barriers put in their way, including (but not limited to) discrimination. The ambitions set out in the Scottish Government's learning disability strategy, *The Keys To Life* (see Box 1), cannot be met as long as this persists.

In this report, we examine the available evidence to highlight the extent to which people with learning disabilities are excluded from the labour market and what can be done to improve outcomes.

## **Box 1:** Employment in *The Keys To Life*

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*“The Scottish Government is committed to helping people with learning disabilities who want to work, and it is our ambition that with the right support, they are able to find work in mainstream employment, suitable to their skills.”*

*The Keys To Life* is the Scottish Government's learning disability strategy, first published in 2013. Its initial publication recognised that people with learning disabilities should have the right to “participate in all aspects of community and society” and that employment opportunities are a key part of that. It recommended that a range of supported employment opportunities be developed to support people with learning disabilities into the labour market.

Since then, the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD) have mapped the employment landscape<sup>1</sup> in Scotland and established an employment task group to take forward its recommendations.

*The Keys To Life Implementation Framework 2019-2021*<sup>2</sup> stated a renewed focus on employment, with work being recognised as one of four key priorities. It committed the government to take action in these areas:

- Challenging attitudes amongst parents, schools, colleges and employers.
- Collecting better data to ensure people with learning disabilities are visible in employment statistics.
- Review the provision of supported employment in Scotland.
- Work across government to improve transitions into education and work for young people with learning disabilities.

# Disability employment in Scotland

Expanding employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities is an explicit aim of *The Keys To Life*. Furthermore, the Scottish Government has adopted a flagship ambition to halve the disabled employment gap by 2038. These aspirations tie in with other economic priorities around inclusive growth and building a wellbeing economy.

These ambitions are unlikely to be met without significant improvement in employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

Annual Population Survey data shows that Scotland's disability employment gap in the year to September 2020 was 33.2 percentage points. This is based on the core definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010. To meet the target of halving the gap (with 2016 as the baseline year), a further 104,000 disabled people would need to be in employment. This represents 27.7% of the 375,000 disabled people not in employment.

It is not known how many of these 375,000 have a learning disability, but it is likely to be a substantial proportion, given that people with learning disabilities are less likely to be in work than the pan-disabled population (see below). Therefore, meeting the disability employment gap target will be far more difficult, if not impossible, without movement in the employment rate for people living with a learning disability.

Furthermore, it is likely that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment has not yet fully materialised. Until now, progress made towards closing the disability employment gap in Scotland has occurred during a time of rising employment. It remains to be seen whether sufficient measures are in place to continue progress against a backdrop of more challenging labour market conditions.

## How many people with learning disabilities are in work?

Estimating how many people with a learning disability are in work is difficult for a number of reasons:

- The data sources and surveys that are used to compile official employment statistics collect data about survey respondents' disability status, but this is not disaggregated. This means that for disabled respondents, whether or not their disability is a learning disability is not recorded.
- There is not always an agreed definition of learning disability. People who are living with a learning disability will not necessarily have received a diagnosis of a condition which fits neatly into a 'learning disability' box. Some people that would normally be regarded as living with a learning disability might not identify as such.
- Collecting data on disability requires individuals to self-identify as disabled, yet many disabled people choose not to disclose their disability to their employer or if taking part in surveys.

Lack of data is part of the reason why people with learning disabilities often feel invisible in policy debates. The issues that this presents are explored in this short [article](#).

Notwithstanding the difficulties with data, there is some evidence that suggests very low levels of employment amongst this group of the population in Scotland.

*The Keys To Life* draws on data from the eSAY Project, which suggests that 25% of respondents

were either in employment or training for employment. The eSAY Project surveyed learning disability service users, and this figure is from 2010<sup>3</sup>.

Perhaps the most informative dataset available today is reported annually by the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD). Similar to the eSAY Project, the SCLD's annual population statistics uses data collected by local authorities and provides information about users of adult learning disability services in Scotland<sup>4</sup>.

The most recent data shows that of the 23,584 adults with a learning disability known to local authorities, 4.1% were known to be in employment. After removing "not recorded", the employment rate rises to 8.4%. A very high proportion (51.5%) did not have their employment status recorded.

It should be emphasised that these percentages are of all adults with a learning disability known to local authorities in Scotland. Much of this population, for example those with a more profound disability, may not be in a position to seek employment and this does not diminish their ability or right to lead a fulfilling life.

The above figures are backed up by very similar data collected in the same way by local authorities in England<sup>5</sup>, and it is striking how little these figures have changed over time.

However, these figures should be treated with caution for two obvious reasons, the first being the high proportion reporting "not recorded", the second being the fact that this dataset is a survey of adults with a learning disability known to local authorities. It is believed that tens of thousands of adults with a learning disability do not engage with learning disability services, as we [recently analysed](#). This means the survey cannot be (and does not claim to be) representative of all adults with a learning disability in Scotland.

It also means that this figure may underestimate the learning disability employment rate if people with a learning disability not known to local authorities are more likely to be in work than those who are known to local authorities. There is no way of concluding with certainty, due to a lack of disaggregated disability employment data.

The reality is that there is no comprehensive dataset providing labour market information about people with learning disabilities in Scotland. However, from the evidence that is available it is clear that outcomes are far worse than for other groups of the population. The employment rate for Scotland's non-disabled population during October to December 2020 was 81.6% and for Scotland's disabled population was 44.3%.

As well as the gap in the employment rate, there is also an extensive body of evidence showing that disabled people in work earn less and are more likely to work part time than the population average. There is no reason to believe that the picture is any different for adults with a learning disability.

# What are the barriers?

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Even accounting for the imperfectness of the data, it implies that thousands of people are locked out of Scotland's labour market because of their disability, even though many of them want to work. Why is this?

Employment barriers are a well-established economic concept<sup>6</sup>. Someone with a learning disability might face multiple employment barriers and these will be unique to individual circumstances. But there are commonly reported, systematic barriers that apply to the population in general.

One example is the attitudes of employers, who might be unaware of the capabilities of people with learning disabilities. Surveys have consistently found evidence of misplaced nervousness amongst employers about hiring disabled people, often due to fears over productivity or additional cost<sup>7, 8</sup>.

Another barrier could be low aspirations and expectations from family members and schools, which in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This conclusion was reached in a largescale study<sup>1</sup> conducted by SCLD, in which evidence around the destination of school leavers was cited.

Application processes and job adverts might be inaccessible for many people with a learning disability, who may require support to process and understand information. Our research with people with learning disabilities supports this finding, as it has been specifically mentioned as a barrier by learning disabled groups. Also, some evidence has emerged<sup>1</sup> over anxiety of a loss or reduction in benefit entitlements as a person moves into employment.

But perhaps the most prevalent barrier is a lack of support. In order to access the labour market, people with learning disabilities often need support that is unique to them. Our conversations with the SCLD Expert Group highlighted examples of practical support that can make a significant difference. This could be, for example, help looking and applying for jobs, assistance finding interview locations, or training to improve employability skills.

Support may also be needed in the workplace once employment has been found. This could be small adjustments to working practices or investment in support workers that enable someone with a learning disability to reach their potential as an employee. But this support is not always available, which acts as another employment barrier.

The benefits of delivering this support flow to the individual and their employer too. If the right support is in place, someone with a learning disability can make a productive contribution at work. Evidence suggests that hiring people with a learning disability tends to mean hiring someone with reliability, work ethic and loyalty<sup>9</sup>, as well as establishing a more diverse workforce.

The employment barriers outlined above will be familiar to many disabled people, not just those with a learning disability. But some aspects of these barriers are especially relevant to the learning disabled population, particularly the type of practical support needs, the misconceptions that employers might have, and the low aspirations surrounding young people with a learning disability.

Furthermore, the barriers outlined above are barriers to simply accessing the labour market in the first place. Once in the workforce, people with learning disabilities can face even greater barriers to retaining their job, building a career and earning equal pay.



# Employability support in Scotland

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Given the substantial systematic barriers to employment that people with learning disabilities face, there is a need to support them to overcome these barriers. Here, we set out the main employability support that is available in Scotland.

There are several employability programmes in Scotland and even more so following further devolution of powers over employment support in 2017. Their aim is to support those who are furthest from the labour market into sustainable employment. These employability programmes tend to be delivered by independent or third sector providers, but are procured by a variety of routes, for example via social work, local authorities, the Scottish Government, Health and Social Care Partnerships, the criminal justice system and economic development agencies.

One model of employability programmes that studies have shown to be effective for disabled people<sup>10,11</sup> is supported employment models. Project SEARCH is an example of this (see below). Supported employment programmes assist potential workers to identify their skills and ambitions to match with suitable jobs, engage with employers to find jobs, and provide job coaching and in-work support for the employee and employer. This ‘hands on’ partnership approach can be used as a stepping stone to long-term employment.

As highlighted above, the support that people with learning disabilities need to access the labour market is often specialist, yet very few employability programmes are specifically designed for people with learning disabilities. The take up of mainstream employability programmes, such as Fair Start Scotland, by people with learning disabilities has historically been very low<sup>1,12</sup>. Furthermore, many employability programmes that do exist can be vulnerable to the changing financial backdrop in the public sector, as highlighted in our [recent report](#).

## A patchwork system

The result is that employability support provision for people with learning disabilities operates as a patchwork across Scotland, with programmes being localised in their approach and commissioned by a variety of agencies. There does not appear to be a strategic model of delivering consistent employability support for people with learning disabilities at a national scale, with long-term funding settlements in place.

Indeed, the financial model that is often adopted for employability programmes can be detrimental to people with learning disabilities. Programmes can be commissioned with part of the financial settlement being dependent on successful placing of service users into job vacancies. For example, Fair Start Scotland adopts a funding model in which 30% of payments to employability support providers are guaranteed and made up front, whilst 70% are tied to employment outcomes<sup>13</sup>. But this can result in systematic ‘creaming and parking’, in which those who need the least support are placed into jobs at the expense of those furthest from the labour market<sup>14</sup>.

The Scottish Government recognised this risk in the creation of Fair Start Scotland<sup>15</sup>, but concerns have been raised by third sector providers that such risks have not been mitigated<sup>16</sup>. Given the relatively short time that devolved programmes have been operational in Scotland, it remains to be seen whether ‘creaming and parking’ is systematic.

Furthermore, the ‘payment by results’ model pushes more financial risk onto the provider. Many of



the specialist support programmes for people with learning disabilities in Scotland are provided by third sector organisations that have ‘branched out’ into employability support for people with learning disabilities. However, third sector organisations often have less ability to take on financial risk, which may result in fewer specialist support programmes being available than would otherwise be the case.

## **The role of government and employers**

The attitudes and misconceptions of employers, including managers and colleagues, have been highlighted above as a commonly reported barrier to employment faced by many disabled people, including those with a learning disability.

The untapped talent of people with learning disabilities represents an opportunity to create a more diverse workforce and access the benefits that brings. Many employers recognise that there is a strong business case for a diverse workforce that better reflects their customers. Evidence of this can be found in equality and diversity policies that many employers adopt.

But the outcomes presented above show that there is clearly a gulf between ambition and practice. Many employers might not be aware of the barriers to employment that their organisation or business creates for disabled people. It is therefore important for employers to take steps to recognise and address these. There are many good examples that employers can follow, some of which are set out below.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated how flexible work places can be when sudden change is forced upon them. Many organisations have had to change the way they work and, in the process, have made the timing, location and content of jobs more flexible. If more agile working practices become the norm post pandemic, then this presents an ideal opportunity for employers to shape their workforce in a way that provides more opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

This is an example of what it means to be an inclusive employer. It is difficult to see how outcomes can improve without employers putting into practice what is set out in equality and diversity policies.

But it is also difficult to see this happening without support from government, perhaps through more supported employment programmes, such as the ones set out below. Crucially, supported employment models support both the individual and the employer.

As with so many issues covered in this wider research project, progress on employment outcomes is not something that can be delivered by one section of society acting in isolation. It requires all stakeholders, which in this case includes government and employers, to take active steps towards a more inclusive society for people with learning disabilities.

# What works?

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Improving employment outcomes for people with learning disabilities, and doing so at scale, is challenging. Whilst there are no learning disability-specific employability programmes operating within the public sector, there are Scottish success stories that provide a blueprint for what works. With this in mind, the following programmes have been highlighted to provide evidence of good practice, examine the challenges to improving outcomes, and demonstrate the benefits of success – to people with learning disabilities, employers and wider society.

## DFN Project SEARCH

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DFN Project SEARCH is a year long transition to work programme for young people with a learning disability or autistic spectrum condition. The programme is international, having started in the US in the 1990s, and now has 16 programmes operational in Scotland. It is targeted at those who display a willingness to work and require specialist support to enter the labour market.

DFN Project SEARCH operates as an annually recurring supported employment scheme, with each programme taking on an average of 10 interns per year. Each programme works as a partnership between:

- a host employer, which must be large enough to offer interns placements in different roles on a rotational basis,
- an education partner, which in Scotland is usually a college,
- a supported employment partner, usually a locally authority.

Each programme has an onsite tutor (funded by the education partner) and a job coach (funded by the supported employment partner), which acts as a key mechanism to overcome many of the employment barriers outlined above. Their role is to support the interns and the host employer too.

Interns work in a variety of full-time roles in the host employer, gaining experience of the workplace and enhancing their employability skills. A daily debrief is held each day with their tutor and job coach, in which interns are assessed against standards that would be expected of anyone in their job roles.

### Outcomes

DFN Project SEARCH has achieved recognition<sup>1</sup> for its high success rate. This is backed up by evidence – in 2018/19 (the last year for which data is available) 66% of interns gained employment following graduation, 54% in full time permanent jobs (data provided by DFN Project SEARCH). This compares with job outcomes below 20% in other programmes, as reported by SCLD's employability mapping report<sup>1</sup>. The most common employment roles are domestic assistant, food service and preparation, and office administration.

Perhaps more encouraging is the relatively high rate of employment amongst interns who graduated more than one year previous. Longitudinal data provided by three sites shows that, of those who found work after completing the programme, between 77% and 90% are still employed.

Benefits also flow to the host employer. Testimonies highlight that the programme provides them with a “*legitimate talent pipeline*” and enables them to fulfil Corporate Social Responsibility aims. Perhaps the strongest evidence of these benefits is that the programme is recurring and host employers continue with the programme year after year.

### **Replicating the success of DFN Project SEARCH**

Whilst not for everyone, DFN Project SEARCH is clearly an important part of the employability landscape for young people with a learning disability. It is important to assess why Project SEARCH has achieved successful outcomes and whether these success factors can be replicated at scale.

Testimonies from those involved with Project SEARCH highlight a narrow focus on jobs and interns gaining employment throughout the programme as a key factor in its success. Interns are provided with specialist personalised support to meet high expectations so that they can find open employment after the programme. This is borne out in the data around long term outcomes highlighted above.

Long term, annually recurring partnerships with large employers also provide the chance for continued improvement of the programme and is an employment opportunity in itself, with around a third of interns gaining employment at their host employer after completing the programme.

These two factors – partnerships with large employers and the recurring nature of the programme – might also provide a route to achieving success at scale, as each new programme added results in exponential growth in the accumulative number of interns graduating. However, there is a particular challenge around achieving scale in parts of rural Scotland.

The success of DFN Project SEARCH and the challenge to replicate it at scale highlights an opportunity for both employers and government. In particular, large employers and the public sector (the NHS being a prime example) have the capacity to meet demand and there is potential to take a more proactive approach, such as with NHS England’s learning disability [employment pledge](#). Further funding and incentives for employers could be provided by government to help kickstart additional Project SEARCH sites or similar programmes.

## Breaking Barriers

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Breaking Barriers is a programme offered by the University of Strathclyde in partnership with ENABLE Scotland and host employers, such as Scottish Power. It started in 2018 with 8 students, and has increased to 20 students in the 2020/21 cohort. It offers people with a learning disability the opportunity to gain a Certificate in Applied Business Skills from Strathclyde Business School and the chance to apply the skills learnt on the course via work experience at host employers.

Following the success of Breaking Barriers within Strathclyde Business School, the programme will be disseminated across the other Faculties within the University of Strathclyde, starting with the Faculty of Engineering in 2021.

The award winning programme is similar to Project SEARCH in that a partnership approach is taken and students are exposed to a variety of work roles on a rotational basis while at their host employer. Support is provided for the students and their host employers.

### Outcomes

Very few school leavers with a learning disability go on to attend higher education institutions<sup>1</sup>. There is little evidence that this will improve without more direct intervention and Breaking Barriers helps to achieve this by providing a pathway to the experience of higher education and, ultimately, employment for people with learning disabilities.

For this research, we interviewed Breaking Barriers graduates and it is clear that they had never considered higher education until this programme became an option. This feeling, and a more general lack of ambition for young people with a learning disability, has been cited<sup>17</sup> as a reason for poor employment outcomes.

As well as offering a place at a leading business school, Breaking Barriers also focuses on employment. Students participate in placements at host employers to gain work experiences. Many go on to gain full time employment upon completion of the programme, and as Breaking Barriers develops, it will be interesting to see if this trend continues.

In terms of the impact on individuals' lives, the evidence is clear that Breaking Barriers has had a positive impact. Common benefits reported by graduates are the applicable and practical skills gained, but also increased confidence and the benefits of a university experience.

*"I was very isolated before Breaking Barriers, with very little experience in any professional environment. I didn't feel like I could ever get into a professional environment before this."*

### Replicating the success of Breaking Barriers

Whilst Breaking Barriers is changing the employment prospects of young people with a learning disability, and enabling employers to engage with potential recruits and meet their corporate social responsibility objectives, space on the programme is limited. To change the employability landscape in the long term, more programmes like this may be needed. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity for employers and higher education institutions to replicate Breaking Barriers.

# Success stories

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Throughout this research, we have been keen to elevate the voices of people with learning disabilities. It is important to highlight examples of people with a learning disability in employment, the positive contribution they make at work and how this benefits them. With this in mind, the following case studies are presented.

## Case study 1: Cameron

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After finishing school in 2013 Cameron didn't know what to do with his life. Whilst at school, he received plenty of support to help him with his additional support needs. *“As soon as you leave school, that support suddenly disappears.”*

### Cameron's employment journey

Cameron started Project SEARCH in September 2013 in East Kilbride. His placement was in Hairmyres Hospital and he completed rotations in audiology, orthopaedics and porting. He found these rotations useful, as they provided variety and the opportunity to learn different skills.

In February 2014, he began working at the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD) as an admin assistant. Since then, his career has gone from strength to strength and what was an initial 2-year contract has turned into sustained employment for Cameron. Today, he still works at SCLD as a development worker.

When asked about the skills he has gained, Cameron doesn't hesitate when he says *“confidence”*. Compared with how shy he was at school, he is now presenting webinars on Zoom, answering phones and confidently telling his story. He has also gained plenty of practical skills that were out of reach until he started work, such as skills in IT, organisation and communication, as well as skills like minute taking. *“Every day is a learning curve for me”*.

Having a job has had substantial benefits in other aspects of Cameron's life. For example, he has recently bought a house, in large part thanks to the confidence he has gained at work and the obvious financial benefits of employment.

### What support does Cameron receive at work?

Cameron receives support at work to help him develop new skills and reach his potential. Some of this support is practical, such as a Livescribe pen, which can be used to help organise notes, and software, such as echo desktop and text help read and write. Some of this support is more general, such as the supportive atmosphere created by his managers and colleagues.

Much of the support Cameron receives at work is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions' Access to Work scheme, which is available to employers of disabled people. He is keen to encourage other employers to access the funding that can unlock the potential of disabled employees.

## Case study 2: Stewart



Stewart participated in Project SEARCH in Glasgow in 2013. Here, he shares his journey into employment and highlights the difference it has made to his life.

His story is an example of how, with the right personalised support in place up front, someone with a learning disability can achieve sustainably successful outcomes in the labour market and be a reliable productive employee held to the same standards as other employees. Today, Stewart continues to work and has done so throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Stewart's journey into employment

I attended an Additional Support Needs Secondary School for six years. After school like lots of young people I started college. Towards the end of my college time my lecturer spoke to me about a new programme starting in Glasgow called Project SEARCH. It would give me up to thirty weeks of full time work experience as well as the opportunity for me to improve the other skills I would need to get and keep a job. I started the first programme in a Glasgow hospital in August 2013.

I always wanted a job and started applying for jobs while I was on Project SEARCH. I applied for part time work I could do as well as continue on Project SEARCH. The job coaches and lecturer helped me and I got my first job as a member of the domestic staff in the college in November 2013. My hours are 5.45 – 8.30am Monday until Friday.

I worked part time and finished Project SEARCH completing three different work rotations. I worked as a domestic, in catering and as a porter. I then got my second job as a catering member of staff within the NHS and started in June 2014. My hours in the hospital are 3.30 – 8.30 Monday until Friday. I now had two jobs!! My job coach helped me settle into both my jobs and learn all the things I had to do.

Even once I thought I knew my job I found out the hospital was closing and I was being moved to the new super hospital being opened in Glasgow. My job coach worked with me so I learned how to do my job in a completely different hospital. I settled in well but was glad I had some extra help in the early days. Things were very different in the new hospital.

I am still working in both my jobs. I haven't had a day off or been sick or late since I started working in 2013. In 2018 I won the Scottish Health Young Achiever Award. Me and my job coach picked up the award in a great night out at a hotel in Glasgow.

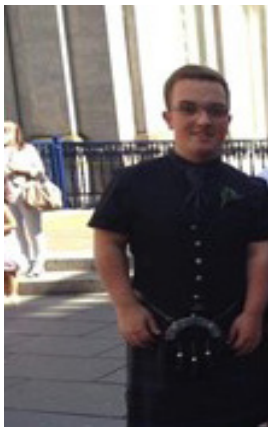
Having a job means a lot to me. It has built my confidence and helped me meet new people. I like earning my own money; going on holiday with my dad and I can put money into the house to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table.

I am lucky that I can still call my job coach and get support. I have spoken to other employers about my journey to work at training events run by the Supported Employment Service. I want employers to know that I do have skills and am a good worker and so are other people with learning disabilities.



## Case study 3: Jordan

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Jordan works at Thera Scotland as Service Quality Director. His story shows that someone with a learning disability can reach leadership positions within an organisation.

### **Jordan's journey into employment**

When I finished college I started a 6-month paid job with Capability Scotland as Admin Assistant at one of their day services where I would do general admin tasks. After this, I started a work placement with Barclays Bank which I loved but they couldn't give me a paid job. I then started my second paid job with Values Into Action Scotland (VIAS) as Admin Assistant which I did for 18 months before starting a new role as Quality Checker in the company for 5 years. My job title changed to Consultant in the last year.

As Quality Checker and Consultant, my role was to check the quality of support people received from support organisations and giving organisations a list of recommendations for them to implement. I also took part in co delivering some training courses to NHS staff and other professionals.

### **Working in a leadership role**

In May 2020 I started my current job with Thera Scotland as Service Quality Director where I run the organisation alongside the Managing Director checking the quality of support we offer to people. I am also involved in any decisions on how the company is run and I have an Executive Assistant who supports me in my role with diary management and taking notes at meetings for me.

On an average day I do phone/video calls with the people we support. I write Board reports and Senior Management Team reports detailing what things I have been doing and what issues I have had. I am attending meetings alongside the Managing Director and I am involved in decisions with running the company.

I have an Executive Assistant who supports me in my job with diary management, taking minutes at meetings and any other support I require. I also have the other Service Quality Directors and have built up a great working relationship with the Managing Director, who have all given me great help and advice. My line manager who is part of the Group Executive Team has been really supportive to me and my Executive Assistant listening to any issues we have had and giving us great advice.

Having a job benefits my life because it has helped me to lead an ordinary life like everyone else. I have had a few jobs, I have a girlfriend and I have my own home. I have also achieved a lot of qualifications and my confidence and self-belief have improved so much over the last few years. I now want to help other people with learning disabilities to lead meaningful lives with that little bit of support like I have had. Having a job has changed my life and it makes me sad that the statistics for people with learning disabilities in paid employment is very low and I hope one day this will change.

The best thing about my job is knowing that what I am doing is for the people we support and for them to be supported to achieve their dreams and aspirations. I work with lots of amazing colleagues who help to inspire me every day.



## Case study 4: Lewis, Joe and Michael

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We interviewed Joe, Lewis and Michael, three graduates of the Breaking Barriers programme, to gather evidence on the impact that the programme has had on their lives. All three are currently in jobs that they enjoy and are excited about their career prospects.

What was striking about the interview was that Breaking Barriers has clearly had a profound impact, not just on their careers, but on their lives. None of them had even considered the work they now do a possibility for them and they now have a different idea of what is possible for their future. This is indicative evidence of young people with a learning disability not being aware of their own potential and capabilities, let alone employers.

Between them, Joe, Lewis and Michael took courses in hotel management, customer service, business management, digital marketing and management science. They all undertook placements at Scottish Power and have since gone on to gain employment.

### Lewis' story

Whilst on Breaking Barriers, Lewis took on 3 placements at Scottish Power, working as an admin assistant and in a research role for the legal department, quality testing an app in the digital department, and also working with engineering design and standards.

Within a few months of completing Breaking Barriers, he was back at Scottish Power on a 'Year in Industry' scheme run by the Engineering Development Trust between September 2019 and September 2020. He was placed with engineering design and standards again, which sets standards for how processes are carried out within the network. He is now on the business management graduate apprenticeship programme in the same department, whilst studying towards a degree in Business Management.

### Joe's story

Joe heard about Breaking Barriers from his careers advisor. During our interview, he talked about the skills he gained whilst undertaking his work placements at Scottish Power. The key one is increased confidence. On top of this, Joe says that his communication and IT skills have progressed significantly. It is notable that a lot of these skills are adaptable employability skills that can be applied in different professional settings.

Since finishing Breaking Barriers, Joe has had two jobs. His first was at Scottish Power, but he now works at ENABLE Scotland as an admin assistant and has worked in a couple of departments. About the future, he says that he enjoys his role at ENABLE Scotland but if he is ever ready for a new challenge, *"I'm so settled in myself that I don't think I'll have a problem with that."*

### Michael's story

Since completing Breaking Barriers, Michael has taken on a cleaning job with a large services company and has now gone on to a full time post at Abby Cleaning. he says that this is the company he wants to stay with and *"work up the ladder"*. The full time hours suit him and he enjoys the variety. *"I like not staying in the same place doing the same job over and over again. The way I see it, it's like a new challenge to me wherever I go."* He also gave a speech about his time on Breaking Barriers to a large audience - something he never thought he was capable of.

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If you would like to contact us regarding any element of this report or our future work, please contact [robert.watts@strath.ac.uk](mailto:robert.watts@strath.ac.uk).

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