

# 2015 Lead Scotland Conference Report:

Can we make things better? YES WE CAN!!

Delivering positive outcomes for disabled and disadvantaged learners

11<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Queen Margaret University



## Aims of our conferences

Lead Scotland enables disabled young people and adults to access inclusive learning opportunities. At a local level, we do this by providing direct support to learners through person-centred learning opportunities and individualised support to help them plan their learning journeys. At a national level, we provide information and advice on the full range of post-school learning opportunities, as well as influencing and informing policy development.

Our annual conferences allow us to bring together a wide range of partners to discuss and debate key issues around supporting learners with additional support needs, and help identify and take forward a range of actions to deliver real change.

## Policy context

Disabled people account for a significant proportion of Scotland's population, and make a vital contribution to our economy, culture and public life. Yet, they experience considerable inequalities in relation to education, employment and overall life chances. In comparison with their non-disabled counterparts, disabled people are around twice as likely to be unemployed<sup>1</sup>, around 3 times as likely not to hold any qualifications<sup>2</sup> and twice as likely to live in poverty<sup>3</sup>.

Removing the barriers to inclusive learning and employment is therefore vital in terms of improving educational attainment and earning potential, reducing reliance on welfare benefits and facilitating access to life-enhancing experiences.

The Scottish Government's refreshed Employability Framework recognises the effect of recent developments on individuals' employability and life chances, including:

- The difficult economic conditions
- The ongoing effects of welfare reform
- The reform of public services and recent spending cuts
- Measures being introduced through the reform of post-16 education

Many of these developments disproportionately affect people with additional support needs, making it imperative to work towards improving employment outcomes for a group already facing significant barriers to the labour market.

## Conference contributors

### Conference Chair:



Keith Aitken, award-winning journalist, broadcaster and one of Scotland's busiest events facilitators.

### Speakers:



Tress Burke, Chief Executive of Glasgow Disability Alliance

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<sup>1</sup> The Annual Population Survey, March 2013

<sup>2</sup> Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Employers' Forum on Disability, 2012



Dr Elisabeth Weedon, Deputy Director and a Senior Research Fellow of the Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity (CREID) at the Moray House School of Education ([www.creid.ed.ac.uk](http://www.creid.ed.ac.uk)), University of Edinburgh.



Ian Hamilton, BBC News Reporter

Keith Aitken, the conference chair set the scene, warming the room. The first speaker, Tressa Burke, Glasgow Disability Alliance, spoke passionately and wisely about social justice and engagement; noting learning provides emancipatory opportunities which don't and shouldn't exist in a vacuum. She inspired hope about the power of creative, inclusive approaches which are underpinned by co-production values and she posed questions to broaden thinking for the rest of the day. "Complex barriers to learning need new approaches through partnership working".

Dr Elisabeth Weedon, Edinburgh University shared research findings about disabled students in HE. She "discovered that students from emotionally and financially deprived backgrounds did the worst (alongside those with multiple disabilities) so this is something that needs to be explored in depth to find ways that really help them to achieve." (delegate). Her three key messages were: disabled people are not a homogenous group (impairment statistics skew results); disabled people with a low socio-economic status are potentially doubly disadvantaged, and more fine-grained analysis of access to university, retention and outcomes for disabled students by type of impairment is needed.

## Key themes

The key focus for this year's conference was around creative and inclusive approaches towards delivering positive outcomes for disabled and disadvantaged learners. This included a wide range of 'positive outcomes':

- Progression into and through various types of learning
- Moving on to employment or training
- Volunteering
- Developing various 'soft skills', such as becoming more independent, developing self-confidence and communication skills, independent travel, improved well-being, etc.

Key questions for contributors and delegates:

- How do we ensure that disabled and disadvantaged learners are given the right support to reach their potential?
- How do we support learners who may be disengaged, or those for whom 'positive outcomes' might not relate to qualifications or employment?
- How can we effectively support disabled and disadvantaged learners during key transition stages?

## Morning workshops

'Supporting disabled and disadvantaged learners into and throughout their learning journey'

### Jargon Busting



Jargon busting Bingo stimulated discussions about opportunities and challenges from words in use across sectors, within organisations and by disabled or disadvantaged people. Delegates assigned ambiguous or unhelpful terminology to the room 101 'Jargon Jar' in this workshop, facilitated by Rob and Kirsty at 3<sup>rd</sup> Horizons. Some notes taken during the workshop:

"We can create victims through labels"

"People create language to try to capture something powerful, e.g. co-production, but in different contexts this has different meanings and becomes a barrier to understanding."

"We can use our sphere of influence to change what is said within our organisations"

## Positive approaches and delivering outcomes for disabled young people who are furthest away from employment

Lead Scotland's Suzi Hughes led this workshop using case studies from her [Activity Agreement](#) work. Activity Agreements through the new Scottish Government 'Opportunities for All' agenda ensure that all young people, disengaged, (or at risk of disengaging) between 16-19 years are provided with the opportunity to participate in learning and training. She showcased the [Outcome Star](#); a tool she uses to measure change and progress towards self-reliance and other identified goals.

"Very competent facilitator, interesting tool". (Delegate feedback)

## Transitions

The [Principles of Good Transitions 2](#) document underpinned Scott Read from ARC Scotland's workshop, which began by unpacking key terms and concepts.

"Transitions need to be embedded within wellbeing and positive outcomes not just the destination" (Notetaker).

He explored areas where legislation interacts and where "legislation rubs up against the holistic approach from agencies" (Notetaker). Case studies of young people and families going through transitions stimulated discussion about the impact of families unfamiliar with their rights and highlighted the need for more effective multi-disciplinary and multi-agency planning and execution.

## ECU and Lead Scotland Research on disabled learner progression through college

The ECU recently commissioned Lead Scotland to undertake [research to explore why disabled people are not progressing up through the SCQF levels as well as non-disabled people](#). The workshop, based on the research, pulled out key findings such as 70% of disabled learners being clustered at SCQF level 5 or below, compared to 57% of non-disabled learners. 43% of disabled learners said they didn't progress to the next level primarily for reasons related to lack of support. Delegates chose two recommendations where they could make a difference in their organisational context. The note taker captured some feedback from delegates:

- Recommendations should go to local authorities as well as to government and the Scottish Funding Council
- Barriers to entry becoming higher – pressures on colleges to meet new business objectives, less outreach
- 'Meaningful' outcome more relevant than 'positive' outcome
- More work necessary on mental health issues and reluctance to disclose
- Lack of joined up partnership around transport. A Scottish Government working group has been set up.

## From college into work

Developing materials and strategies to make this transition a reality for students with learning disabilities was the focus of the workshop led by Andy Miller, Programmes Manager, Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability (SCLD), Emma Hopkins, Lecturer, Glasgow Clyde College and David Kelly, Student, Glasgow Clyde College.

Their input highlighted 'A Natural Progression' that identifies key factors in moving from college to work effectively, and they illustrated this 'transformational collaboration' in action through the Project SEARCH model. David brought the model to life by talking about his experience of being involved as a student.

"Very informative, captured attention well, good discussion" (Delegate evaluation)

## Transitions in Higher Education

Danny Gallacher, Glasgow Caledonian University, led a workshop about the support the University offers to students on the Autism Spectrum, highlighting the importance of linking support across key stages in transition, from pre-entry, progressing through each level and preparation for life after graduation. The [social eyes programme](#) is used as part of a structured, joined up programme of support offered to students. A practical workshop exploring the 'nuts and bolts' behind effective joined up support.

## Afternoon Sessions

'Employability and progression to employment'



After a diverse morning exploring innovative ways of supporting disabled and disadvantaged learners to progress into and through their learning journey, the afternoon's focus moved to employability and progression into employment.

Ian Hamilton, BBC journalist gave a thought provoking and inspiring speech to kick-start the afternoon sessions including personal anecdotes from navigating his learning and professional journey as a blind person.

"I really enjoyed Ian Hamilton's (BBC journalist) talk and was inspired how he was able to describe the importance of challenge for people who faced a disability. He compared it to being an artist and how it had taught him resilience. The balance between support and challenge is something worth thinking more about. I thought he was an excellent role model and I have discussed with my colleagues how we need to bare this in mind in our courses." (Delegate)

## Improving access to employment for disabled and disadvantaged young people

With the Government's Youth Employment Strategy aiming to reduce youth unemployment by 40% by 2021, this workshop explored the ways in which colleges are catering to the needs of young disabled learners in a heavily employability-driven landscape. Edinburgh College's Curriculum Manager Mike McCabe and two Work Placement Co-ordinators, Pam Sembay and Jennifer Adamson, facilitated a discussion around their current offerings of integrating further education with employability to prepare learners for the world of work. The college currently offer a programme of [Access Continuing Education \(ACE\)](#) courses, designed for learners leaving specialist educational provision or with high support needs. Work placements and practical vocational experience make up a core element of the courses on offer and delegates agreed that it was vital colleges are offering as much practical work placement experience as possible to prepare young learners for the world of work. It was acknowledged that the key to success was developing further positive links with a diverse range of employers and that feedback from employers revealed a need for further support. The college hope to employ an additional work placement co-ordinator to support this development.

Edinburgh College are also working in partnership with Edinburgh Council and Intowork to deliver the acclaimed [Project SEARCH](#). The success of the project and its high outcome rates have been widely publicised, and while there was debate amongst the delegates over the cost to run it, the group agreed the results justified the financial outlay.

## The Role of Employability Agencies



There are very few organisations across Scotland that specifically support people with disabilities to return to/enter work, but Remploy and Shaw Trust are both specialists in the field and have years of experience between them, working both with job seekers to prepare them to secure and sustain employment as well as engaging employers in national recruitment programmes. Remploy's workshop explored with delegates the changing perceptions of disability in the UK over the last 50 years as well as identifying misconceptions that employers

might have about employing disabled people. Remploy helps to break some of these barriers down by providing training, information and advice to employers around reasonable adjustments as well as challenging recruitment processes to help make them more accessible.

Through group exercises the delegates found that putting the employee at the centre of the process to make reasonable adjustments was imperative to avoid assumptions and misconceptions about what is required.

“Learning about the good things Remploy are doing to facilitate access to employment. Looking forward to connecting in future.”  
(Delegate)

## Disabled Students’ progression from university to employment

Chris Brill from the Equality Challenge Unit presented the findings from research undertaken to identify current practice within careers services to support disabled students into employment. Findings revealed that six months after graduation:

- 6% of non-disabled graduates were unemployed
- 14% of graduates with a physical impairment were unemployed
- 58% of non-disabled graduates were in full-time employment
- 30% of graduates with a social communication/autistic spectrum disorder were in full-time employment

The research showed improvement was needed in the level of knowledge careers advisors held in equality practice in recruitment processes, including how to disclose disabilities and how to approach arranging reasonable adjustments. Improvement was also required in engaging with disabled students to help them access careers services. Some examples of good practice from HEI’s around the UK were shared, highlighting innovative ways of engaging with disabled students and improving the level of specialist advice and support provided by careers services. ECU have produced a [guidance booklet for HEI’s to support disabled graduates into employment](#) backed by the DWP. Delegates also suggested using student unions and societies to reach more disabled students.

“I thought this workshop had an excellent core to its subject.”

“Research was really interesting and it was great to see what other institutions are doing.”

## What did people think about the conference?

This year’s annual conference was buzzing with 129 delegates in attendance across multiple sectors, networking and sharing knowledge. The conference stimulated a conversation during which learning providers, employers, employment support agencies, and other support organisations worked together to talk about overcoming barriers for learners to reach their potential. Feedback told us 79% of delegates made at least one new contact and over 90% of attendees advised they learned something new on the day. In addition, 79% of delegates said they felt inspired to put



something into action and 66% commented that they had a chance to share issues which were important to their own organisation.

“I have lots of information to disperse to partner organisations.”

“Great conference, well organised and useful and interesting topics.”

“I really enjoyed the conference; current topics were addressed and involved good discussions from different colleges and universities, also a very good networking opportunity. Thank you.”

“The conference was well organised, with good workshop topics and excellent speakers. Everyone seemed to enjoy the experience.”



Storify captures a flavour of the [#leadconference tweets](#) from the day.

## Since the last conference

We have been busy bringing partners together to create actions for more effective transitions into and from learning. Six focus groups in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness, involved 71 staff in schools, colleges, universities, local authorities, and other support organisations (in 2013/14 we had also worked with Contact a Family to listen to the voices of over 60 parents and practitioners across Scotland). The responses were analysed by a steering group of key agencies leading to recommendations shared with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning:

- There should be a statutory requirement to set up a Transitions Forum in each local authority region (this is being trialled in 3 local authority areas around the 7 '[principles of good transition](#)');
- There should be a national 'Transitions Coordinator' to coordinate developments in this area, and ensure that national policy and guidance relating to transitions is joined-up across all relevant policy areas;

- The Scottish Government's review of its 'Partnership Matters' guidance should ensure it is fit for purpose in relation to transitions (currently being refreshed by SG).

## What next

What issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations would you like to see explored at next year's conference in order to further develop and widen access to education for adult learners with additional support needs? Please email suggestions to [info@lead.org.uk](mailto:info@lead.org.uk)

## Thank you

Lead Scotland wishes to express our thanks to all those who contributed to the conference, as well as the Lead Scotland staff and volunteer team. We are also grateful to the Scottish Government for their financial contribution towards conference costs.