

# Jobs First for people with learning disabilities?

## Exploring the boundary between support and activation

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### Introduction

Increasing employment and personalising public services have been two key aims of government policy across Europe and many other developed countries (Powell, 2011). The paper will explore the policy context and implementation aspects of the evaluation of Jobs First, a national 'demonstration site' project initiated by the English Department of Health, which aimed to combine both of these elements, in supporting people with learning disabilities<sup>1</sup> to get paid jobs.

After a brief summary of the Jobs First evaluation, the paper will set out a conceptual framework for thinking about activation policies, using Newman's (2007) approach relating degrees of compulsion, kinds of governance and subject positions. This section will be followed by an exploration of the role of the learning disabled identity (McVittie et al 2008) in explaining some of the differences in approach to employment of people with learning disabilities and non disabled people.

The paper will use some of the Jobs First evaluation findings to illustrate how employment for people with learning disabilities was presented by participants. It will identify the balance between supportive approaches and compulsion, as illustrated by the perceived benefits of employment and the kinds of interventions seen as valuable. The findings will be used to characterise Jobs First in terms of levels of compulsion, kinds of governance and identities or subject position open to people with learning disabilities.

It will be argued that the particular role of programmes such as Jobs First is both constrained as a Labour Force Activation policy initiative by, and a challenge to, the impact of the learning disability identity.

### Jobs First: Policy Background

Jobs First supports key central government strategies for adult social care in England, such as *Putting People First* (DH, 2008) and the *Vision for Adult Social Care* UK and (DH, 2010) and most recently in the government White Paper, *Caring for our future: reforming care and support* (HMG 2012). Jobs First was first announced as a commitment within the *New Opportunities* White Paper (HMG, 2009a) and was also a commitment within the *Valuing Employment Now* strategy (HMG, 2009b), a key policy initiative for people with learning disabilities. While Jobs First was a relatively small project, it illustrates the policy focus on

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<sup>1</sup> Known as 'intellectual disabilities' internationally (Carnaby, 1998)

employment for people with learning disabilities and the wider emphasis on employment as a goal of social services.

One of the central elements of Jobs First is the development of the personalisation of social care support, which underpins government efforts to ‘transform’ (DH 2008) adult social care systems (Manthorpe et al 2011). The personalisation agenda encompasses a broad range of policies over the past ten years. The overall focus is to support independent living through increasing choice and control over the support and equipment needed to enable people to live independent and full lives (Carr and Dittrich, 2008). A key mechanism for delivering personalisation has been personal budgets, which are often taken as a direct payment with which eligible people can arrange and purchase services, often from the private sector. Jobs First aimed to demonstrate how personal budgets could be used by people with learning disabilities and their families to purchase employment related support.

*Valuing Employment Now* (HMG 2009) set out the previous UK Labour Government’s aim: ‘to radically improve employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities in England, and particularly for people with moderate and severe learning disabilities’ (HMG, 2009: 12). The aim was to close the gap between the rate of employment for people with moderate to severe learning disabilities and the employment rate for people with disabilities as a whole.

Jobs First was a specific development mentioned in *Valuing Employment Now* (HMG, 2009) and was implemented at the same time and in some of the same areas as several other initiatives related to increasing employment of people with a range of disabilities or who face particular barriers to employment. Alongside these initiatives is Work Choice, which is a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) scheme that was implemented in October 2010. Work Choice offers support to people with disabilities or other factors making it particularly difficult to benefit from other DWP programmes, to get paid jobs. In one of the projects overlapping Jobs First, ‘Right to Control<sup>2</sup>’ people who are felt to be capable of working 16 hours or more a week are able to request that they receive money instead of the standard support offered to help them find work.

The current Coalition Government, elected in June 2010, has continued this policy emphasis on supporting employment for people with disabilities. In the *Vision for Adult Social Care* (HMG, 2010), employment was identified as an important part of the social care agenda. Employment support is presented as supporting the ‘Big Society’ concept at the heart of Coalition Government policy. Employment support is presented as a responsibility of local authorities:

Local government can be a catalyst for social action. In some areas, people will need the support of councils to stimulate a community response. This may mean encouraging and supporting **employment**, local mentoring and volunteering activity at an individual level’.

(HMG, 2010: 12 **emphasis** added)

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<sup>2</sup> . Right to Control is an UK Office for Disability Issues (ODI)-led project that gives eligible disabled people a right to take a Individual Budget as a cash equivalent to a wide range of services funded by different English government departments

## *Jobs First Evaluation*

Specifically, Jobs First was designed to demonstrate the use of personalised funding provided to those adults with learning disabilities assessed as eligible to receive publicly funded social care<sup>3</sup> services and judged to be able to get paid jobs. Individualised funding, through the use of personal budgets, has been consistently seen by the UK government as one of the key means of providing personalised services for adults with disabilities (HMG 2012). However, another important aspect of the project was to explore the use of public funding from multiple sources. Jobs First aimed explore how far adult social care budgets, provided by the Department of Health and Local Authorities, could be combined with funding provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, which is responsible for welfare benefits and employment. It is this latter element that draws Jobs First into closer relation with labour activation interventions for non disabled people.

Jobs First's primary aim was to increase the number of people with moderate to severe learning disabilities, who are eligible for local authority adult social care, getting paid jobs. Employment goals were to be given priority over leisure and day care in reviews and assessments undertaken by social workers and care managers so that people consider 'Jobs First'. In addition, employment was to be considered when major life changes, such as housing, were being discussed. This fits with many of the aims of neoliberal mainstream labour activation policies (Newman, 2007).

The five local authority sites that took part in Jobs First covered a wide geographic spread, and included authorities of different types (unitary, county council and metropolitan boroughs). Overall population ranges from 179,122 to 683,791; the populations of people with learning disabilities who have a publicly funded service in each authority ranges from 540 to 1637. All the sites were well progressed with personalisation, all having over 25 percent of people with learning disabilities with personal budgets. Each site aimed to recruit 20 adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities, who were to use their personal budget to fund the support they need to find paid employment. The project started in April 2010 and was initially set to run until the end of March 2011. While the evaluation was to be completed by October 2011, there were many delays in securing the relevant data and the evaluation is finally due to report in October 2012.

The evaluation involved two distinct strands. First was a comparison study, in which the employment status and support needs of people with learning disabilities using Jobs First were to be compared with a group of people who receive standard services matched for key characteristics and selected from the same sites. Key impact information was collected at the point of entry into the project and again near the end of the evaluation and any changes over time examined.

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<sup>3</sup> Social care is the UK term for social work and for care services for people of working age with various disabilities and older people. It covers services such as personal care provided at home and social support with accessing community facilities. Local councils are responsible for providing and funding these services in the UK.

This paper draws on the second strand of the evaluation, which explored the implementation of Jobs First. Semi structured interviews were undertaken with 100 participants, (29 of whom were interviewed twice, making 129 interviews as set out in Table 1:

Perspective of interviewee	Interviewed once	Round one	Round two	Total
<b>01 Jobs First Lead</b>	2	8	8	18
<b>02 Senior Manager</b>	4			4
<b>03 Person with learning disabilities</b>	6	20	20	46
<b>04 Carer</b>	9			9
<b>05 Paid care worker</b>	9			9
<b>06 Social workers/Social Care workers</b>	17			17
<b>07 Job Coach</b>	12			12
<b>08 Employment service manager</b>	6			6
<b>09 Right to Control Lead</b>	2			2
<b>10 National</b>	4	1	1	6
<b>Total interviews</b>	71	29	20	129
<b>Total interviewees</b>	71	29		100

Interviews were mainly undertaken face to face, with a small number on the telephone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Transcripts were entered into N-Vivo. The initial stage of the analysis included a mixture of open and theoretical coding. Two members of the research team read a small number of transcripts, and developed a coding frame that was structured initially around the interview guides, which followed a relatively regular pattern. Data was coded by the researchers, during which time the coding frame developed. Text coded at each node was read and re-coded into overarching themes, which were then related to the main themes of the evaluation.

### ***Labour Activation policies***

Labour Activation Policies have a long history, at least back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, when those overseeing the poor were involved in ‘sending vagrants to work’ (Patrick, 2012:6). Newman (2007) notes that the proliferation of activation policies marks changes in relationships between individuals and institutions and the increasingly market driven relationships between agencies and organisations involved in providing support and the state. Activation tends to involve an uneasy balance between coercion and support. For example, in the UK, people who have been unemployed for certain periods are required, on pain of losing benefits, to participate in the Work Programme (DWP, 2011), a scheme that provides support aimed at getting people back into work. Patrick (2012) notes that having conditional access to benefits is seen by all three main political parties in the UK as a key tool for labour activation, although there are small differences in the emphases on increasing the benefits of work (New Labour) and decreasing the value of benefits (Conservative). Patrick goes on to describe graphically the punitive approach to anyone who is assessed to be able to work but who is not in paid job. In addition to withholding of benefit, the rhetoric used is binary:

praising and exalting workers whilst demonising and demeaning those without work, but only those who rely on the state for support.

Underpinning all of the different kinds of activation policies, is the valuing of work as a positive aspect of life, to the point where it becomes a requirement for full citizenship (Newman, 2007). Consequently the emphasis on the value of work creates further exclusion for those people deemed to be incapable of working and those who are excused the coercive aspect of activation policies (Parker-Harris et al 2012; Patrick, 2012). In other words, those who cannot work are in some respects not seen as full citizens, because of the positive presentation of work as both a duty and a means to fulfilment and wellbeing. Patrick (2012) also notes that welfare to work policies across Europe have increasingly constructed work as a central requirement on almost all citizens of working age population, as a means of being included in society, so that:

...the economically inactive and unemployed [are] constructed as 'problematic' populations who need tough interventions if their behaviour is to be changed such that they become working and productive members of mainstream society.

(Patrick, 2012: 5)

Newman (2007) associates the balance coercive and collaborative elements of activation with four forms of 'regimes of power' (p7) or governance and thereby, forms of identity and subject positions. More coercive approaches, are linked to hierarchical governance (and also neoliberal states), involving a rule based bureaucratic mode of power. Individuals are assumed to respond to sanctions and incentives rationally, with some residual rights to services, but also withdrawal of rights for certain groups. Parker-Harris et al (2012) also note that policies in neoliberal dominated states tend to downplay rights to welfare, focusing instead on the need for individuals to change rather than structural changes needed to enable more people to move into the workplace, such as greater access and adaptations by employers. For Newman (2007) the more coercive approaches require individuals to become active and responsible citizens.

However, Newman (2007) also notes that activation policies tend to require people to collaborate with and act as a consumer of services, representing examples of network and managerial governance at the same time as being the subject of these more coercive elements as described above. Furthermore, policies attempt to empower people to adopt the aims of government as personal goals, representing a self governance approach. Consequently, Newman argues, activation policies, which tend to mix collaborative and coercive elements, create different and potentially conflicting identities and subject positions.

For example, in the UK the Work Programme is delivered by a set of organisations, (both for profit and not for profit) who bid to be providers, again highlighting a market driven approach, with managerial governance expressed in terms of the kinds of contract involved. It is interesting to note that the contracts for the Work Programme do not stipulate the kinds of support offered by Work Choice or Work Programme providers, but simply indicate a general target of getting people into jobs, that are sustained for set periods. With only a small amount of initial funding, providers are primarily paid by results, after people get and

keep jobs for a set length of time. While this represents a form of managerial governance, it is very light touch, in terms of the level of regulation. For example there are no requirements in terms of the training undergone by workers. This illustrates a move away from professions with strong identities and professional bodies, to a wider variety of occupational groups such as job coaches, with much more limited power base (Newman, 2007). Furthermore, while individuals are constituted as consumers of services, increasingly they have no choice, both in terms of whether to use the service and of which provider to consume, reflecting a hierarchical element. Again indicating the mix of influences, unemployed people are expected to collaborate with the agencies involved in order to become work ready and to get jobs, illustrating an element of network governance, in which individuals are encouraged to collaborate with services.

The paper will use Newman's (2007) framework that relates forms of governance with kinds of relationships and subject positions to examine Jobs First, as a particular kind of activation interventions. It will also compare Jobs First with interventions aiming to support and coerce non disabled people and those with less severe disabilities into getting paid work. It will examine the kinds of subject positions and identities this makes possible for people with learning disabilities, pointing to the different forms of governance this represents.

### **Forms of governance and subject positions evident in Jobs First**

Employment is identified as a means of saving public money, another central goal of policy: 'Specifically, getting more people into **employment** has well-documented benefits including generating savings for the taxpayer' (HMG 2010: 23 **emphasis** added). This suggests a more subtle kind of coercion, or at least a stronger kind of motivation. In a climate of reducing spending on social care, the level of services available for people with learning disabilities is likely to reduce, which makes engaging with employment more attractive.

Many Jobs First evaluation participants pointed out the importance of the current cuts in public spending on services for people with learning disabilities as being drivers for people with learning disabilities to get paid jobs. In addition, reduced resources was felt to make implementation more difficult, potentially leading to a reduced quality of life for people with learning disabilities, creating a bind in terms of developing the approach, involving the need to make an 'invest to save argument' (JF 6 JF Lead MS28). This bind is nicely illustrated by the following quote from a Jobs First Lead in one local authority:

*It's undermined the confidence and the sort of culture change that we tried to do...There is this short term vision, really of, we haven't got any money now, so what we are doing is the bare minimum and making sure that people are safe and then moving onto the next person, because there is no capacity to do it any more than that.*

*JF6 JF Lead MS05 R2*

In addition to the cuts in public spending, welfare benefit changes were identified by many research participants as potential drivers for people with learning disabilities to get paid jobs. For example, this social care worker described how being in work was 'experiencing life as it should be experiencing life', a normative statement, which is followed by the perception that those who do not work would lose some of their benefits:

*It's about how we can then support them to actually either be gainfully employed in the correct so it's actually sustainable and the individual can actually experience life in the way they should be experiencing life, or we are actually saying, well, if you are not going to work then you are probably going to lose some of your benefits. You are probably going to lose this. It's just about being realistic and being, not treating anybody any different really.*

*JH6 Adult Social Care MS19*

These elements represents indirect coercion on people with learning disabilities rather than the immediate cutting of welfare benefits threatened for non disabled people who do not cooperate with the activation.

The *Vision for Adult Social Care* (HMG 2010), one the early policy documents setting out the direction for English social care taken by the Coalition Government, links employment support to a set of familiar themes in social care policy:

- Developing preventive services, as a means to 'meet emerging needs' (HMG 2010: 13).
- Widening the benefits of personalisation, through ensuring that access to employment support is available across the country (HMG 2010: 18).
- Development of a 'plural market' (HMG 2010: 21), which 'can also include more mainstream and universal service providers – for instance, those offering transport or leisure options, or employment and education support – which are able to cater for people's needs without operating exclusively in the social care sector' (HMG 2010: 21).
- Improving partnership working, in which closer working is to be developed by adopting a 'joined-up approach between social care, housing, employment and other sectors' (HMG 2010: 23).

These themes reflect elements of a managerial and network forms of governance, in Newman's (2007) framework. Organisations are encouraged work through contracts and market forces, through which government power is expressed. Individuals are therefore encouraged to take up a subject position as consumers of services provided by the market. In addition, the emphasis on partnerships requires collaboration both between organisations and between individuals and services.

One of the main aspects of the work undertaken in Jobs First sites was aimed at changing attitudes, both to promote the employability of people with learning disabilities and to promote the adoption of employment as a goal for organisations and institutions. This may be presented as an attempt to engage individual will 'as a resource enabling the transformation of welfare states through the transformation of obligations into commitments.' (Newman, 2007: 370), representing self governance. For example, this Jobs First Lead discussed the work that had to be done to overcome some of the concerns of people with learning disabilities and their families:

*Employment can feel like something that's quite worrying. At the start people feel worried about their own capability. Will I be able to do this? Will I get the sack if I have problems in the job?*

*JF2 Jobs First Lead MS06 R1*

### **Jobs First in relation to labour activation for non disabled people**

While the main aims of Jobs First may chime with those of labour activation, the genesis of the project comes out of a set of policy and practice developments that reflect the language of normalisation and social role valorisation, relating to removing the barriers to people with learning disabilities to live full and 'normal' lives as citizens in the community. These ideas have dominated policy and practice relating to people with learning disabilities over the past 40 years. From the very beginning, normalisation was linked with the possibility of people with learning disabilities doing paid work (Johnson et al, 2010). In the study, participants, who were mainly social care professionals, predominantly presented employment in terms of social inclusion and opportunity, rather than something that should be required of people:

*What we have done is given reassurances that it is not about taking something away... It's more about creating opportunities where we can for people into paid work, and for the benefits side of it our Welfare Rights team have joined forces with Job Centre Plus to be giving people 'Better off [in work]' calculations early on in the conversation.*

*JF 2 Jobs First Lead MS06R1*

*Valuing Employment Now* also presents work as something that people with learning disabilities want and need in order for them to live full lives as equals. However, there are phrases that denote a more instrumental or top down and 'hierarchical' approach with hints of a more coercive drive. The following quote neatly encapsulates both discourses:

If real disability equality is to be achieved, **work needs no longer to be seen as optional** for most people with moderate and severe learning disabilities. The default must be that **everyone will have the chance** to get a job. But there should be choice about what work people do, just as for non-disabled people.

*DH 2009:14 (Emphasis added)*

This mixed view about employment being an opportunity and a necessity was often mentioned by professional participants in the research as an important benefit of employment for people with learning disabilities. For example, one social care professional used a very similar phrasing, linking a normative sense with the positive aspects of employment:

*... I believe **everyone should work**, really. **Have the opportunity to work** at least.*

*JF4 Adult Social Care JH17 (Emphasis added)*

Thus the phrase 'work needs no longer to be seen as optional' or 'everyone should work' appears to suggest a coercive edge that is softened when linked to the phrase 'everyone will have the chance to get a job'. This second phrase, which again links the idea of work as an

opportunity, rather than something that people with learning disabilities ought to do. Indeed the whole of *Valuing Employment Now* presents the issue as removing structural barriers to work such as the availability (or lack) of good supported employment services and in changing the attitudes of society. While this policy document recognises that some attitudinal change is needed amongst people with learning disabilities and their families, this is presented as broadening horizons and developing a belief that people with learning disabilities are able to work rather than admonishments and threats about being work shy or somehow morally to blame for not taking part in work. Thus, this encouragement to change beliefs and establishing employment as a goal connects self and network governance, Newman's (2007) terms. There is an attempt to create a norm of work, where individuals take on the aims of state as their own, and where individuals are encouraged to be active citizens and responsible users of welfare. However, there is also the idea of collaboration with services and the involvement of multiple organisations in delivering policy, representing network governance.

There is certainly no hint of the sanctions based approach that is advocated for non disabled people, as manifested by the UK Prime Minister in the two quotes below. In a speech after the London riots of 2011, David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister, made the following comments about welfare:

For years we've had a system that encourages the worst in people – that incites laziness, that excuses bad behaviour, that erodes self-discipline, that discourages hard work...

I want us to look at toughening up the conditions for those who are out of work and receiving benefits...and speeding up our efforts to get all those who can work back to work

Cameron 2011a

Talking about the Welfare Reform Bill, earlier in 2011, the Prime Minister gave a mixture of motivations for increasing participation in work, citing the impact of the welfare benefit system in generating a dependency and disincentives to take on work. A punitive and coercive approach is very evident, with severe sanctions (eg of loss of welfare benefits for up to three years) if unemployed people refuse 'reasonable' job offers or fail to undertake community work in exchange for benefit:

So if you're unemployed and refuse to take either a reasonable job or to do some work in your community in return for your unemployment benefit you will lose your benefits for three months. Do it again, you'll lose it for 6 months. Refuse a third time and you'll lose your unemployment benefits for three years.

Cameron 2011b

Here the language focuses on the need for a tough approach and having conditions on people who are out of work, although as Patrick (2012) notes, these approaches and policies represent a continuation and extension of the broad ideas of the previous Labour Government, which introduced increasing levels of conditionality in benefit receipt. These

approaches represent hierarchical governance, in Newman's (2007) terms, where individuals are expected to conform through reacting to sanctions and rewards.

Consequently, while Jobs First also involves four elements of governance and related subject positions, the balance of influence differs from activation policies for non disabled people. The impact of cuts in public spending and services represents hierarchical governance. The role given to local authorities to develop new ways of encouraging independent sector organisations to start providing employment support and to develop new ways of contracting with them to allow for more individualised funding, involves managerial governance. Individual people with learning disabilities and their families are encouraged to relate to these new providers as consumers. People with learning disabilities are also expected to work with local authority staff and the independent sector providers collaboratively as partners with services, reflecting network governance. Finally, the work involved in changing attitudes and in working with individuals to take on employment as a goal represents self governance. Individuals are therefore being seen as active citizens through interventions designed to create work as the accepted norm. These roles are in tension, the implicit coercion removes the sense of the consumer who freely enters into purchasing services and commits to collaborate with those services. However, in Jobs First, there is much more emphasis on managerial, network and self governance, illustrated in the positive aspects of employment and less on the coercive elements, compared with labour activation programmes for non disabled people, thus potentially reducing the potential tensions between the different subject positions involved.

I turn now to a potential explanation of this difference in emphasis, exploring the role of the learning disability identity, which has been suggested to have a serious and limiting impact on the life chances of people to which it is ascribed.

### *Learning Disabled Identity*

There are numerous arguments about the appropriateness and value or otherwise of compulsion in labour activation, many of which focus on the aims of welfare and the neoliberal programme (Newman, 2007; Eichorst and Konle-Seidl, 2008). However, for the purposes of the paper, I will focus on the reasons for excusing people with learning disabilities from the same compulsion as non disabled people, rather than comment on this debate.

A social constructionist approach to the identity of having learning disabilities allows for an examination of how identity is ascribed and constructed by professionals, families and people with learning disabilities (McVittie et al 2009). Focusing on the social construction of identity, as opposed to an objective static state, allows for a study of how people with learning disabilities manage this identity in their interactions with other people, and how they resist its power (Beart et al, 2005; McVittie et al, 2008). The traditional identity ascribed to people with learning disabilities is based on deficits of intellectual functioning, often established through IQ scores, in addition to problems with activities of daily living such as shopping and using public transport. This creates a static and immutable identity that professionals and wider society usually manage and ascribe to individuals. Given the essentially negative meaning and associated stigma of this kind of identity, this is not likely

to be sought out by people with learning disabilities (Finlay and Lyons, 1998). Goodley (2001) argues that the learning disabilities identity is still strongly influenced by the traditional influence of physical and biological determination, rather than social and cultural construction. The developments in terms of the social model, which has been thoroughly applied to physical disability, have not been fully carried across to learning disabilities. Goodley notes that even disability activists have placed people with learning disabilities:

...into the category of naturalised, irrational 'other'. Closed in, isolated and confined by a 'mental impairment' devoid of meaning and history, presocial, inert and physical

(Goodley, 2001:211)

As Finlay and Lyons (1998) point out, people with learning disabilities face negative evaluations in terms of social competence and moral responsibility. Consequently, as Goodley (2001) argues, the behaviour of people with learning disabilities is often still perceived by professionals as being simply a consequence of their biological impairments, and therefore something they are not responsible ultimately for. Consequently, this has led to a reduced sense of moral responsibility.

Partly as a consequence of such negative aspects of a learning disability identity, there is often an (over)protective response to people with learning disabilities. Jahoda et al (2010) described a case study of a young woman whose carer was rightly concerned about the risks involved in certain activities, because of her particular health problems. However, Jahoda et al (2010) described how the carer's response resulted in a very restricted life for the person with learning disabilities. While the young person with learning disabilities accepted that there were safety concerns, there was also a desire to contest the restrictions and identity to which the restrictions limited her. Such protectionism is also linked by Jahoda et al (2010) to attempts to impose a child like persona and lifestyle on people with learning disabilities. One Job Coach in the Jobs First study, noted the emphasis on protection. He felt that calling social care day services 'work' (which many people with learning disabilities had been and still are encouraged to do) represented an over protective approach that reduced people's chances of working through deskilling people and reducing ambition and confidence:

*It's almost like you are deskilling people and taking away the belief for people to be able to do these things, to get on with the day to day running of their life, which is quite frustrating and people not knowing: 'I don't know what I'm capable of'.... It's got to that point where because you've almost been sheltered all your life. Work is a faraway thing...I used to work with MENCAP and [going to a day centre] was always referred to as ... 'going to work'.*

*JF5 Job Coach MS24*

Programmes as Jobs First may be seen as promoting citizenship for people with learning disabilities, through providing a means for people with learning disabilities to distance themselves from the learning disabled identity (McVittie et al, 2008), giving an opportunity to develop other identities, as worker, colleague, shop assistant, etc. This was a strong theme in the research. Seeing employment as a means of changing perceptions of learning disability was identified as a key advantage of employment. For example, one of the Jobs

First Leads focused on the change in people's perception of someone identified as having quite severe learning disabilities, who had got a job working in a shop:

*She had become part of the collective and contributed to, and she was supported to play a role in the shop in the background work, and that changed her life. It very much changed people's perception of her. I think that was the crucial thing - was watching people's perception of her change.*

JF4 Jobs First Lead JH01 R1

However, by only being involved in the more positive, supportive elements of activation and being excused the more coercive aspects suggests that that in public policy, the fixed, learning disabled identity linked to biological features maintains a hold. As we saw above, employment is seen partly as a moral responsibility and increasingly as an essential requirement to enjoy full citizenship. Further, as Dowse (2009) notes, there is increasing emphasis placed on economic activity, rather than quality of life, as a goal of welfare, which is illustrated by programmes such as Jobs First:

The new technologies of welfare are economically driven and actively directed toward investing in the individual pursuit of independence, framing inclusion in terms of productivity and contribution, rather than self-fulfilment or quality of life.

Dowse, 2009: 573

## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the development of Jobs First as a particular kind of labour activation policy for people with learning disabilities. Activation in the UK, along with many others in Europe (Eichorst and Konle-Seidle, 2008), exhorts and coerces non disabled people into engaging with employment, through stringent tests and conditions placed on receipt of benefits (Houston and Lyndsay, 2010). People with learning disabilities are excused this direct exhortation and coercion. Engagement with Jobs First or other employment schemes has not become a condition of benefit receipt for people with learning disabilities and there is no intimation that this will become the case. The reduction in public spending on services to support disabled people, and the consequent reduction in quality of life for people who use these services represents indirect coercion and pressure to seek and get paid work. However, there remains a fundamental difference in the role for employment in relation to people with learning disabilities compared to non disabled people. Nonetheless policies such as *Valuing employment Now (HMG, 2009)* and related initiatives such as Jobs First acknowledge and promote the idea that people with learning disabilities are able to work. Furthermore the professionals involved in Jobs First who took part in our evaluation created employment as a predominantly positive goal that would enhance quality of life and represent inclusion for people with learning disabilities. There has been a general move towards promoting employment as a goal of welfare and long term care for working age adults. Jobs First, along with the other programmes aimed at increasing employment for people facing a range of barriers to getting work are typical of this general move.

In terms of Newman's (2007) framework linking forms of governance with subject positions, this implies that hierarchical governance approaches are not being focused on people with

learning disabilities in the same way as non disabled people. Consequently a subject position as ‘instrumental actors responding to new incentives’ (Newman, 2007: 14) is not available for people with learning disabilities. However, this group is expected to be: consumers (indicative of managerial governance); collaborators with services (indicative of network governance; and to a limited degree ‘worker- citizens’ (indicative of self-governance).

In a system that employs coercion for some, and policy rhetoric that links employment and citizenship, this difference in emphasis gives out a message that people with learning disabilities cannot be expected to take on the same responsibilities as non disabled people and are therefore never to achieve full citizenship. However, the lack of coercion may also have positive effects, given the evidence that the more supportive aspects of activation have better long term impact on employment and reduction in benefit use (Eichorst and Konle-Seidl, 2008). There is also less likelihood of the conflicting subject positions, which Newman (2007) argued may ensue from the balance of coercion and support approaches used in activation for non disabled people. For example there is a tension between a coerced actor and a positive collaborator. This creates a paradox in that the approach taken to increasing employment for people with learning disabilities may achieve aims of increased participation in work and therefore impact on the public perception of people with learning disabilities as citizens, while at the same time sending out a message that work is not as required from this group as it is for non disabled people.

### **Disclaimer**

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