



# In-Work Support Learning Paper

# Introduction

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This learning paper draws on evidence gathered as part of Ecorys' ongoing evaluation of the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme. It explores the ways that in-work support is being provided by BBO projects and the benefits of this. The paper begins by defining what is meant by in-work support and identifying the different elements this may encompass. It then provides examples of how participants are being supported in each of these ways whilst in work, highlighting the benefits of these approaches for participants and employers. Finally, this paper concludes with key points of learning from the evaluation which include an examination of the challenges faced when supporting participants in work and tips from project staff about how best to overcome these.

The purpose of the paper is to highlight good practice within BBO projects to date. It is intended for use by other BBO projects to provide inspiration for ways in which participants can be supported when they enter employment. It is also of interest for others delivering employment support and the key learning points identified could be useful consideration points when designing future employment projects.

## What is in-work support?

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Supported employment aims to help people gain, and successfully sustain, paid employment. It is a personalised model of support, which has commonly been used with disabled people and also to support disadvantaged groups including care leavers, ex-offenders and those in recovery from drug and alcohol misuse. It relies on partnership work, with involvement from the employer as well as other employees. It ultimately suggests that anyone can be employed (in paid employment) if they want to be as long as sufficient support is provided, with its ethos being the development and integration of suitable mechanisms to secure long term and sustainable employment.

According to the [National Development Team for Inclusion \(NDTi\)](#) supported employment can benefit both individuals and the businesses they work for. For individuals, benefits include

improved health and wellbeing, increased social inclusion and contributions to financial security. For the employer, supported employment can result in increased productivity and staff morale as well as reduced staff turnover. Findings from the Jobs First evaluation report (2013)<sup>1</sup> found that in-work support for people with learning disabilities was important, though the amount needed varied between individuals and it was crucial to provide the right amount of support depending on their individual needs. Support that was given included helping with job specific tasks and establishing work routines, guidance with the social elements of being at work and developing confidence. Job coaches also considered it important to gradually reduce the levels of support they gave participants, rather than cut off support completely once they entered employment. Ongoing links helped them to address problems as they

<sup>1</sup> Jobs First was commissioned by the Department of Health and ran from 2010-2012. Its main aim was to increase the number of people with moderate to severe learning disabilities who were eligible for and receiving local authority adult social care that moved into paid employment.

arose, with decreased support needed over time as participants became more confident and capable within their roles as well as established themselves as part of the team or built relationships with their co-workers.

More recently (2017), the role that in-work support plays in helping employment programme beneficiaries move into sustained employment has been explored by Sheffield Hallam University. Drawing on findings from

the national evaluation of the National Lottery Community Fund's [Talent Match Programme](#), they identify four broad areas in-work support can comprise of: practical measures to assist beneficiaries to sustain employment, guidance on work-related matters, supporting beneficiaries with non-work related issues that impinge on their ability to hold down a job and assistance provided to an employer to support a beneficiary's job retention.

Drawing on previous findings from the BBO evaluation, as well as targeted interviews, in-work support being incorporated into BBO delivery broadly fits within these areas, namely under the categories of:

- **Support with practical matters**
- **Support with work-related matters**
- **Support with non-related matters**
- **Support provided to employers<sup>2</sup>.**

Examples from within each of these categories are discussed in more detail below.

## Types of project incorporating in-work support in delivery

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Many different BBO projects include some element of in-work support within their delivery model. For some this was incorporated into their original project design, for others this has evolved as the need for it has been identified. For example at [New Leaf](#), customer feedback found that

**"the ending was very abrupt once they started a job and they would have appreciated much more support to sustain that job through the initial work"**, resulting in up to 12 weeks of in-work support being made available to participants.

<sup>2</sup> There are many ways that employers can be supported by projects. In this paper we focus on how in-work support provided to employers can lead to sustained employment for participants. Our learning paper on Employer Engagement provides a more general overview of work which can be done with employers to lead to positive outcomes and other steps which can be taken including changing attitudes and raising awareness and carrying out job brokerage.

Within our evaluation work three different types of BBO project, where this support is particularly applicable and is often built into project delivery from the start, have been identified:

## London BBO projects

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Whilst sustained employment is important for all, for the London BBO projects, there is an additional results target which focuses on sustained employment:

**The number of participants who move into employment, including self-employment, on leaving who sustain work for 26 out of 32 weeks after entering employment.**

This target, which is identified as a percentage in each individual project's outline, requires London projects to maintain contact with their participants once they enter employment to ensure that they remain employed for a certain period of time.

Sustainable economic growth is a key priority in London reflected in several Mayoral strategies and priorities. As such all ESF funded projects in London, including those in the BBO programme, are required to work against this target.



## Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model projects

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The IPS model is used to support people with severe mental health issues into employment. It takes a 'place then train' supported employment approach, which differs greatly from more traditional models where a 'train then place' system is advocated. Research has found IPS achieves twice the rate of job outcomes for people with severe mental illness versus traditional employment support (Bond, 2013)<sup>3</sup> as well as help IPS clients sustain jobs for longer and earn more per hour (Hoffmann et al., 2013 and Burns, T., White, S., Catty, J., 2008)<sup>4</sup>. The IPS model follows eight principles:

1. **It aims to get people into competitive employment. Volunteering or sheltered work are not counted as outcomes**
2. **It is open to all those who want to work with no exclusions based on diagnosis, health condition or benefits claim**
3. **It tries to find jobs consistent with people's preferences**
4. **It works quickly, job search starts within four weeks, even if a client has been off work for years**
5. **It brings employment specialists into clinical teams so that employment becomes a core part of mental health treatment and recovery**
6. **Employment specialists develop relationships with employers based on a person's work preferences, not based on who happens to have jobs going**
7. **It provides ongoing, individualised support for the person and their employer helping people to keep their jobs at difficult times**
8. **Benefits counselling is included so no one is made worse off by participating**

(IPS Grow, 2020<sup>5</sup>)

Projects such as [Good Work](#) are taking the IPS model approach. This includes performing a rapid job search within 30 days of starting the project, meaning participants often enter employment quickly and then continue to receive support whilst in work. Coaches (plus other specialist advisers within the partnership) are able to provide up to three months of formal in-work support.

<sup>3</sup> Bond, G. (2013) Evidence for the Effectiveness of Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment

<sup>4</sup> Hoffmann et al, "Long-Term Effectiveness of Supported Employment: Five-Year Follow-up of a Randomized Controlled Trial" (May 2014): Study of 100 participants in Switzerland over 5 years; Burns, T., White, S., Catty, J. (2008) Individual Placement and Support in Europe: the EQOLISE trial

<sup>5</sup> <https://ipsgrow.org.uk/uploads/pdf/1.1-Investing-in-IPS-03.pdf>, p.6

## Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) model projects

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The ILM model is a tool that has been used to tackle long-term unemployment. Participants undertake paid work in specially established temporary jobs. In addition, they also receive support with activities such as personal development, job searching and training. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, an ILM aims to help those furthest from the job market by improving their general employability and **“providing a bridge back to the world of work”**<sup>6</sup>. Research undertaken by them has found that ILM projects can play an important part in helping the long-term unemployed to develop the skills and motivation needed to progress into long-term work as well as provide them with work experience.<sup>7</sup>

The ILM model allows projects to pay a participant’s wage for up to 400 hours. During this time, they can be supported by staff, giving them a chance to get used to the job and show their value to the employer. Projects such as [Bridge2Work](#) and the [Able, Capable, Employed](#) projects have used this model, with them noting that in-work support provided during this time has given employers, without the capacity to support new employees, the confidence to take them on as they know that the new employee will still be able to benefit from BBO support during this period.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/intermediate-labour-market>

<sup>7</sup> [ibid](#)



# Examples of in-work support in practice

## Support with practical matters

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Support with practical matters commonly takes place at the entry or initial stage of employment. Often, though not, this support is resourced by personal budget allowances for participants. Examples of this type of support are:

### Work clothes and equipment

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Some projects partner with other organisations that help provide clothing, such as Dress for Success. This is a charity that aims to help women in disadvantage back into the workplace by preparing them for an upcoming interview. Women are referred to Dress for Success by partner organisations and can then receive support from them. This includes a one-to-one styling session and providing clothes to help boost confidence and build self-esteem.

Support in the form of purchasing work clothes is not limited to interviews but can extend to clothing needed for the job itself. Work equipment, such as work boots are also often needed and can be bought for participants. Without support in this area, participants facing financial barriers to buying clothes or equipment would not have been able to start work in the first place.

### Equipment to help set-up in initial stages of self-employment

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Sometimes participants need help with the initial costs of setting up their business. Working For Carers provide financial support to help participants purchase equipment that will allow them to have a sustainable business in the long run. Examples of this include supporting

someone who was setting up as a fitness consultant with the equipment they needed and helping another participant with their start-up costs for becoming a massage therapist by buying them a massage table.

## Transport – costs and usage

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Help with transport costs can extend beyond travel to the job interview. Some projects provide travel expenses in the period leading up to a participant's first pay cheque. Covering commuting costs in the first weeks of employment can be the difference between whether a participant is able to take up an opportunity or not.

Practical support can also be provided in terms of helping people to use public transport. At Good Work, a lot of participants have social

anxiety. This means that for some getting on a bus to a workplace is terrifying. Coaches work with participants to help them overcome this fear, for example by going on dummy rides with them, encouraging them to try the journey at a quieter time of day and using graded exposure. Providing them with this support enables them to have the confidence needed to be able to travel to their place of work, meaning there is more chance that the employment there will be sustained.

## Other costs that need to be covered until first pay cheque

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Depending on the target group(s) projects are working with, or the specific needs of the individual, there may be other costs that need to be covered until the first month's salary has been paid. Tackling Multiple Disadvantage (TMD) supports homeless people with complex, multiple needs and provides money toward lunches, noting that things like this as well as travel are **"essential expenses that people need to get them through to their first pay cheque"**.

TMD also provides accommodation and housing support as many participants are not stably housed when they start work. They have supported people who are rough sleeping into

work, by paying for a hostel until their first pay cheque, before helping support them into somewhere more permanent. In an instance where they did this, the participant was able to sustain their employment. Without this practical support, and access to a bed and a shower, it was highly unlikely they would have sustained employment. As they sum up, without the resources to support them practically during the initial stages of work, **"they would not be able to get to that first pay cheque. It would physically be impossible to get there without being hungry and no doubt unkempt and possibly unwell"**.



# Support with work-related matters

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Support with work-related matters includes advice given in relation to workplace behaviour as well as help dealing with work-related issues. Examples of support in this area are:

## Supporting participants in the workplace by modelling the job for them

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Job modelling by BBO staff can provide individual support to participants that they would not otherwise be able to get from employers, who do not have the capacity to provide this. As the example from [Good Work](#) below shows, this form

of in-work support has helped the participant transition into the job and for them to sustain their employment there.

### Role modelling tasks at Good Work

A participant was supported by their Health and Wellbeing Coach and Work and Employment Coach when he started employment at a local independent supermarket. He had never worked before and had a diagnosis of paranoid-schizophrenia, a learning disability and some physical difficulties too. When he began work, the coaches alternated in working the shifts with the participant to provide role modelling for tasks so he could learn by copying and direct instructions.

One of the coaches who worked with him commented:

**"I think because it was an independent supermarket, they just didn't have the staffing level to provide that level of support to him. They were incredibly understanding and were really grateful for our input because they could see that once that participant had got the hang of it he'd be fantastic and really dedicated, that work ethic just shone through, but it was just that he needed that kind of hands on, practical support from the offset. So, without it, I don't think he would have stayed in the job because there wasn't anybody else who could have provided it."**

They also noted that without the support he received, the participant could have been left feeling frustrated and that they could not carry out the role. As it was his first paid job, it was crucial he had this support and he is still in this role now.

## Workplace etiquette

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Participants have also been supported with understanding general work etiquette and customs they may not be familiar with, which has helped them settle into their workplace. Examples of this include opening a door for

someone, saying thank you, everyone signing people's birthday cards and going for after work drinks. Encouraging/promoting with these things can help to ensure interaction and inclusivity with other employees.

## Supporting participants by troubleshooting

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Whilst some participants may be good at repetitive tasks within their role, they may have difficulties with on the spot problem solving. Ways in which they have been supported to overcome this include coaches talking to employers to determine what should be done when certain situations do occur and also

creating crib-sheets for participants to follow in scenarios which may be unfamiliar or difficult for them. Examples of these include: the process to follow when feeling unwell, what to do when someone disagrees with you at work and anger management techniques.

## Information about workplace rights

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At [Working For Carers](#) some partners have run workshops including about rights in the workplace and talking to line managers. They note that carers do not always know they have the right to request flexible working or what that might mean for them in practice. It is not just about giving them the information, it is also about giving them examples of this – such as working from home half a day a week, compressing hours or agreeing reduced hours. The way support is given varies – project staff

may step in directly and speak to the employer, or they may help to prepare the participant to go on and have the conversation with their employer by themselves. They note that when providing information, it is important to include practical examples and case studies, showing how the situation was approached, how the conversation with the employer went and what the outcome was.

## Reasonable adjustments

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Another way BBO participants are being supported is through requests for reasonable adjustments to be made in the workplace. As the case study examples below show, these requests can range from a change in work and break times

to adjustments to the work environment, all of which can have a positive impact on sustaining employment

### Break time adjustments at Good Work

At [Good Work](#), the standard one hour lunch break employees were given was too long for one participant. Their coach spoke with the HR manager and it was agreed that instead of having the hour as one block, it could be broken into four x 15-minute breaks, which were taken throughout the shift. The coach noted this alteration was

**“so much better for him and his concentration and he felt rested after those 15 minutes rather than have a big long hour break that he wouldn't fill and use”.**

### Multiple adjustments at Good Work

At Good Work, a participant with Asperger's wanted help explaining her condition and what she found difficult to her employer. BBO staff supported her in asking for reasonable adjustments. These included that despite the office being a hot desk environment, agreeing she could use the same desk each day as having a different desk daily was unsettling for her. They also agreed that she could have regular breaks rather than it being a set one at lunchtime. As the participant found travelling on public transport at busy times very difficult due to noise sensitivity, her working hours started later and finished earlier too. Arrangements were also made with her manager for her to be able to attend an autism friendly swimming session twice a week, which was important for her wellbeing.



## Reasonable adjustments at Bridge2Work

At [Bridge2Work](#), a participant who was autistic was having difficulties with the working environment. In particular he had problems with blinds moving, people walking past in his peripheral vision and the sound of the air conditioning distracting him. These things led to performance levels dropping.

Whilst the employer did not usually allow people to use headphones and listen to music, the coach negotiated that he could wear headphones - with agreed music - that would not distract from the job, but that would blot out the noise around him. This allowed him to perform his role more effectively.

The coach notes that

**"because they [the employer] trusted us to provide that advice, they therefore gave it a go and it made so much difference to them... And he became a valued member of their team, just by doing something as simple as that."**

They felt that without the assistance provided to get the adjustment made, the employment would not have been sustained (at the point they stepped in to help, the employer was looking at going down a disciplinary route).

**"He would have lost his job; they were very clear on that. They couldn't sustain the difficulties they were encountering with him and if we couldn't have come up with a solution, they were looking at dismissing him."**



## Advice on how to talk to line manager/other staff when have a grievance

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As well as helping to make adjustments, BBO staff can also support participants when they have grievances with others in the workplace. For example, at one project, a participant had an issue with their line manager as they felt they were being stigmatised and discriminated against. Though they had been open about their barriers to employment as part of the recruitment process, the line manager was not understanding or taking these needs into account as promised. With the support of his coach, the participant

raised a grievance, which was upheld, and the manager was reprimanded and subsequently left the organisation. Whilst the coach did not go into the workplace itself, they helped the participant to confidently and professionally approach the situation with the employer. This included providing information about their rights and helping with writing the letter and advising how to personally conduct themselves when raising these issues.

## Motivation to stay working when finding it hard

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Support with work-related matters can also take the form of motivating participants to stay working when they are finding things difficult. At [New Leaf](#), they have noted that participants quite often need help with the transition from being out of work to in work, such as having to get up and be out of the house by a certain time every day. This, alongside the pressure of work-related expectations, means it can be quite easy to think **“what's the point, I haven't seen any money yet, it's just all stress and strain and I don't need it,”** especially if self-confidence or mental health is poor.

In one situation a participant was finding employment quite difficult due to the different demands and pressures on them and was thinking of walking away. Their mentor talked her through it, calmed her down and helped her to understand why she was being asked to do different things as well as plan strategies to help feel less overwhelmed. They note that at times like this it is really valuable for mentors to continue supporting participants and tell them to **“hang in there, you will see the benefit of it, stick with it”**.

## Continued support to help get into more suitable role

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At [TMD](#), a key learning from their experience in London is that more than half of participants are not starting jobs that they believe will be sustainable. Instead, they are accepting minimum wage, part-time or zero hours ones, as their priority is to eat, get accommodation for the next

night and become more stable. For them, in-work support is therefore also about helping people to progress to a job that is economically sustainable for them and closer to their aspirations.

# Support with non-work related matters

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Support with non-work-related matters is also evident across BBO projects. In many cases this is a continuation of the holistic support that was being provided to participants before entering employment. Examples of this include:

## Financial support

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Financial support being provided whilst participants are in-work includes support with budgeting, finance plans and understanding payslips. There may also be continued support with financial issues that were present before the participant entered employment. For example, at [New Leaf](#), they note that as money advice cases can be long and drawn out, these have been kept open whilst people are in employment to allow them to reach a resolution.

There is also continued support with debts and benefits. At [Good Work](#) participants have access to a specialist debt and benefits adviser.

This is really important at the start of their BBO journey to make sure they will be better off in work. Then, once they are in employment it is necessary to make sure they declare what they need to and that they are able to budget in accordance with their new financial situation. Similarly, at [Bridge2Work](#) participants are supported with financial issues they may have, for example by being signposted to appropriate agencies and being helped with their benefits when these end or change due to starting employment.



## Support with accommodation and residency appeals

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At [TMD](#) continued support with accommodation and residence appeals is being provided. For example, staff are helping participants to move into more suitable and permanent accommodation. Someone is also being

supported to get evidence for their appeal for their habitual residence test, with their coach is working with the participant and a pro bono law centre advocate to do this.

## Well-being

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Participants' wellbeing is also an area which is being supported. Projects have noted that as the demands of a new job can be a lot to take, being able to provide emotional support is important, particularly as participants settle into

their employment. This can include helping them adjust to their new daily routines as well as with family difficulties which may occur as a result of them entering work.



## Continued long-term support

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At [Good Work](#) coaches develop an exit plan for participants. This is to try and ensure that before support is withdrawn that the participant feels comfortable with the support ending, or if not that they can signpost them to others who can work with them after BBO. These others may

include organisations who are already involved with the participants such as community mental health teams or support workers as well as peer ambassadors and family/friends.

## Support provided to employers as well as other employees

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Another area of in-work support identified is that being provided to members of staff at a participant's workplace. This can be directly with the employer/line manager as well as with wider colleagues. This kind of in-work support benefits both the participant and the employer/other employees alike and includes:

### Explaining participants' individual needs

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Projects have been supporting participants to make disclosures to employers and then talking to employers to explain what this means and how they can best support participants.

At [New Leaf](#), a lot of participants have diagnosed mental illnesses. As a result, work with employers has been about general understanding of what this means as well as how it affects the person being employed, for example what their issues and triggers are and what medication they are taking. Discussions can help employers to understand how specific challenges can affect ways of working as well as how they can be supported. At [Good Work](#), in some cases coaches have shared participants' wellbeing plans with

employers which have helped to show them where their strengths are. Conversations with employers start before the person has started or been offered employment so that when they begin work, a supportive environment as possible can be in place for the individual.

Employment advisers in delivery partner organisations at [Working For Carers](#) have talked to line managers on behalf of the carer about their caring responsibilities and how they can manage their work around them. As the case study below shows, this can have benefits both for the employer as well as the participant themselves as there is an increased understanding on both sides before employment begins.



## Explaining carer needs at Working For Carers

At [Working For Carers](#) a participant was worried about going to work and not being able to manage work and caring. There can be the fear that employers will not understand about caring responsibilities, or they may be seen as a problem employee. Their employment adviser set up a meeting with the line manager so all three of them to talk about what caring responsibilities mean. At this meeting, the participant could talk openly about their responsibilities, but also give reassurance to the employer that they would not be an unreliable employee. The project noted that the impact of this discussion, which took place prior to employment beginning was that:

**"The line manager and the employee could work around that, they could have a system in place where the employee could flag up when they needed to take time off, sometimes at short notice, and how they would work around that within the organisation. And the impact of that was that the carer [the participant] came back and said 'I'm loving my job, I feel like I can stay in this job, I don't feel, all the nerves that I had about going back to work, I feel now they've been lifted.'"**



At [Accelerate](#), one of their delivery partners specifically work with people with learning disabilities and autism. They take a similar approach with talking to employers beforehand, so that everyone knows **“what the expectations of the person going into work are which is really important for people with learning disabilities”**. In a similar way to other projects, they talk about the assets and strengths of the person with the employer, but also make sure the role is realistic and can job carve it if necessary, to ensure it is suitable. Developing a relationship with the employer is really important. They bypass the traditional application process and make initial phone calls to employers to see who

would be receptive to an informal interview or work trial. They spend time with the participant to help them sell themselves/tell their story of why they want to work to the potential employer. At this point, a two-way relationship is formed. This allows the employer and participant to come up with solutions together – it is not about the partner saying what reasonable adjustments could be made, rather about the employer and participant problem solving together about how they could fit into the organisation. This collaborative approach provides consensus and clarity about the role and expectations within in it. This approach can also help to sustain long-term employment as seen in the example below:

### How working with employers has helped sustain employment at Accelerate

At [Accelerate](#), a participant who had started work in a primary school was supported to speak to her manager about her ambitions from the offset. These included wanting to progress beyond the entry level role and have opportunities for development. Once she had settled into the role her manager put her on a training course to become a Teaching Assistant (TA). The project has noted that as these ambitions were known at the start, the employer was already thinking about how if she proved herself in the initial role, they would help her move up to the next one. The participant is now part of the TA team and was supported well to achieve this. The employment has been sustained for more than two years, and the participant is really happy in their role. This shows how helping participants to express their goals to employers can help sustain employment in the long-term



## General training and awareness raising with employers

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As well as supporting employers to understand participant needs on an individual basis, projects have also been helping with training and awareness in more general areas. Examples include taking time to speak to employers about induction processes (including making instructions very clear) and about working with people with long-term conditions and mental health issues. Talking to employers can help remove any worries they may have as well as build relationships with them. [Good Work](#) have noted that as small-

medium sized businesses do not generally have occupational health teams or policies around mental health it has been **"really valuable that we can provide that additional support or training or awareness around things like reasonable adjustments, around things like mental health and troubles"**. Providing this kind of support to employers helps them to better understand and support employees which in turn can lead to more sustained employment.

## Communicating participant needs to other employees

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As well as working with employers/line managers, in some cases projects are also working with other employees to help them understand more about individuals' needs as well as how they can support them too, both of which can lead to sustained employment for the participant.

At [Accelerate](#), project delivery staff work with employees to breakdown workforce preconceptions of learning disability, with the aim of encouraging increased awareness as well as interaction with participants. For example, they note that an employee may be fearful of interaction if they have experienced stilted or stunted conversation or because they are worried about saying the wrong thing. They can give staff teams training about disability, interaction and language to overcome these barriers and encourage conversation.

Whilst training may be focused of a particular condition, [Accelerate](#) encourage employers to ensure everyone in the workplace is clear about a participant's particular role. This can be particularly important if job carving has taken place and they are expected to do more (or less) of certain tasks normally associated with the position. Being clear about this with other employees from the outset ensures people are not asking questions about why they are not doing certain things and reduces the risk of bad feelings occurring. They also note that if employees understand what a participant is able to do or not do, they can be really receptive to this and may offer to help them with the more difficult sides of the role and will problem solve together as a team to make them feel included.



Project delivery staff at [Accelerate](#) also work with employees to create workplace circles of support to help participants settle into a job and sustain employment:

### Circles of Support at Accelerate

One project delivery partner at [Accelerate](#) tries to create a workplace circle of support for participants when they start work. They identify employees who will be able to look out for participants in difficult times, so they are not reliant on coming back to the project if there is a problem at work. Whilst participants can ring the project for help to begin with, their idea is that their first port of call should be someone who is looking out for them within their workplace, helping them understand the customs, workplace setting and environment. The emphasis therefore is not on the delivery partner being there to support the participant in the foreseeable future. Instead it should almost become part of the work culture to help the person integrate and know that there are ways of solving problems that are not reliant on the partner organisation being involved.

To create a workplace circle of support, once a person has started a role, (with their permission) the journey guide observes the participant to see how they are getting on with the job as well as interacting with other members of staff. This allows them to identify what they are struggling with, as well as who they could be turning to support (rather than going straight to the boss, or not asking for help at all). They then feedback on what they have observed to the participant and come up with a plan together about what the journey guide can facilitate to help support them.

For example if a participant wanted to feel more part of the team, they may reach out to people in the workplace and ask them if they saw the participant sitting alone at lunchtime, could they encourage them to come over and have a chat? They can also help to match people with similar interests (such as football) and foster relationships that would not necessarily develop instinctively. These can then be built upon, with the partner noting that genuine friendships with compassionate people have formed and helped to create

**“a really solid network within a workplace that ensures that you're not the person that they turn to when things are difficult or tough, it's actually their mate at work”.**

An instance of a circle of support working in practice is with a participant who had a cleaning job in a school. A teacher was quite rude to him because he did not do something right or understand and do something quickly enough. Another teacher, who had been asked by the BBO partner organisation to look out for the participant, saw it happen and made a formal complaint against the other teacher, who ended up leaving their position. Whilst this was not a pleasant experience, the impact of the actions has been long lasting:

**"There was someone there to look out for that guy and knew there wasn't something right and was willing to stand up and advocate for him. And actually, he's so happy in work now and there's a really, they kind of changed the culture of the organisation because of that. What is and isn't acceptable, what expectations are, who looks out for each other. It's kind of changed things internally because of that person being such a good advocate, such a good friend. And I know that he's so happy in his work now, he takes so much pride over it and that wouldn't have happened without that person being there. Because we can't be there 24 hours a day, we're not support workers, we're not there in every single organisation, so that's the idea of having that circle of support or good people to turn to."**

Their journey guide notes that without the colleague acting as an advocate, the participant would not have been able to verbalise what was happening or known that he was being unfairly spoken to. This could have led to him becoming unhappy and not feeling like he was doing a good job and he would have either left or just not turned up some days. The groundwork put in beforehand, to create a circle of support, helped this situation be managed in this way, giving peace of mind to both the participant and the partner organisation.

**"Once you've created something that's long lasting, it really works."**

## Communicating participant needs to other employees

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Projects have also been helping employers access schemes such as Access to Work for equipment and commuting costs (such as taxis if public transport is not feasible) for participants. For example, if someone were sight-impaired, they would advise them on how to access the specialist

equipment needed for them. Employers do not always know about this scheme, so it has been beneficial for them to be made aware of it, as well as for the participants who have been able to access the resources, they needed through it.

# Key learning points

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## Within the workplace

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- **Support should be individualised:** As with the support provided by BBO projects before participants enter employment, in-work support should also be bespoke and about what works for the individual. It has to be flexible to meet each individual's needs and be driven by what the participant wants and is comfortable with (for example how much they want to disclose, who they want to talk to in the workplace about an issue, what exactly they want help with). It should also be delivered in a way that is accessible, for example thought needs to be given around how it will fit around working hours. BBO staff who have already been working with the participant are best placed to provide this support as they have knowledge of the individual's needs as well as having built up a relationship with them.
- **The amount of support needed varies:** The amount and type of support needed varies. Some people are fine without support, some "really appreciate having that comfort blanket there, but may not actually need to call on it" and others may need to talk to someone several times a week during the initial period of employment. For some, support may just be light touch, such as an occasional email asking how things are going. For others more formal support will be needed, for example with how to deal with issues they are experiencing in the workplace or helping them to make disclosures to employers. The amount of support needed also depends on the particular job and employer and how supportive they are. Thus, as with other elements of BBO project delivery, it is important to remember that each participant's needs will be different and as such support will need to be tailored to these.
- **The employer needs to be supported too:** As well as supporting participants, it is also important to support the employer too. Employers can be nervous about working with people with challenges and doing the wrong thing. However, having support from the BBO project can make all the difference to them. By enabling employers to understand more about conditions as well as individuals' strengths and weaknesses they can be better equipped to provide in-work support themselves and support the participant in the long term. Employers can be supported both before employment begins as well as during the initial stages of it.
- **Thinking about the longer term and linking in with others who can continue providing support is important:** Continuity of support is important for some participants. After contact with BBO finishes, some may still need to draw on support. Identifying colleagues, or other organisations or services available to them means that they can continue to be supported in the workplace, or outside it, as necessary. Creating a circle of support for the participant is one way of ensuring there are sustained support channels available once they have exited the BBO programme. Raising awareness or providing training sessions to other employees can also help increase understanding about participants' individual needs and how colleagues can support them.

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## Wider project delivery considerations

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- **In-work support needs to be thought out in the planning stages/built into delivery plans:** If and how delivering in-work support will fit into the project delivery models should be considered at the planning stage. IPS and ILM models lend themselves particularly well to providing in-work support. However, other projects have shown that it is possible to provide elements of in-work support outside of these methods of delivery. In all cases, thought needs to be given to the budget that will be available (for example to support the participant practically) as well as staff time and the management of caseloads to ensure there is the resource available for in-work support to be delivered.
- **Issues with recording results whilst offering in-work support:** Funding processes/criteria can make providing and recording in-work support difficult. In the case of the BBO programme, a participant can only be recorded as a positive result of 'in employment' once they have exited the programme. However, once they have been exited, funding can no longer be spent on them. This makes it difficult for projects to offer in-work support and can present a risk to grant holders who may want to help participants sustain their employment (especially in the case of London projects) but also need to get exit sign-offs. If these signoffs are delayed due to in-work support being offered, there is a chance that projects could lose contact with participants and them not count as an exit result at all. Within the current ESF process, thought therefore needs to be given to how aspects such as in-work support will be recorded on management systems in order to minimise this and ensure it is still possible to get the exit sign-offs needed.

In the future, programmes funders need to be mindful about the processes that are put in place, so projects are able to offer in-work support and the benefits it brings to participants, without possible negative repercussions occurring

**"It is a valuable thing to do and it is really worth investing in and putting time in and putting some of the programme's resource to - don't be put off by the technicalities and the complications that come with it."**



For more information on the evaluation contact us at [BBO@ecorys.com](mailto:BBO@ecorys.com)

Or visit:  
[www.buildingbetteropportunities.org.uk](http://www.buildingbetteropportunities.org.uk)

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