



Bridging the gap between employment and social care for people with learning disabilities: Local Area Co-ordination and in-between spaces of social inclusion

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies the growing gap between the spheres of paid employment and social care for people with learning disabilities. Social inclusion and independence remain closely associated with paid employment; social exclusion and dependency with receipt of care. The paper argues that, as employability and supported employment programmes increasingly select only the most able, and social care is ever more restricted to those in most need, an expanding number of people with learning disabilities are occupying a third or in-between sphere where the opportunities for work or care are limited. The paper draws on research undertaken for Scottish Government and interviews with policy makers and practitioners at national and local scales. The paper presents a critique of the array of employment programmes, arguing that their narrow and outcome-focused approach excludes most people with learning disabilities from opportunities for employment. 'Local Area Co-ordinators' present in many areas in Scotland provide personal support and 'brokerage' to facilitate access to, in some cases, employment and, perhaps more importantly, to other 'work' experiences (including voluntary work) and community capacity building. The 'progressive localist' network building work of Local Area Co-ordinators can potentially bridge the gap between the spheres of employment and social care, and in doing so contest the deterministic relation between social inclusion and paid employment.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Western neo-liberal governments have sought to end the supposed financial and social dependency of disabled people on the welfare state, through constraints on benefit entitlement and initiatives to further access to paid employment (Lindsay and Houston, 2011; Roulstone and Prideaux, 2012). Paid work has become the key marker of gaining independence and securing 'social inclusion' (Hall, 2004); yet the labour market remains a precarious and exclusionary space for many disabled people, and many remain in need of substantial care and support (Roulstone and Barnes, 2005).

People with learning disabilities (PwLD) are in a particularly complex and challenging position with regard to employment and social care. Poor educational qualifications, low expectations of families and carers, and an aversion amongst many employers to mental impairment, have meant very few are in paid work, and for those that are the jobs are commonly of low status (Hall,

2004). Despite this, UK and Scottish learning disability policy cites paid employment as central to a 'normal' life (Department of Health, 2001, 2011; Scottish Executive, 2000, 2003). Segregated spaces of employment, including sheltered workshops, are closing; improving individuals 'employability' for full-time paid work within mainstream employment contexts is now favoured. At the same time, eligibility criteria to access a range of care-related funding are being tightened (Roulstone and Prideaux, 2012). This paper reflects on the increasingly dual spheres of paid employment and social care for PwLD, through an examination of employability and supported employment programmes in Scotland. The paper argues that these programmes construct opportunities for only a small number of people, those (perceived to be) capable of entering full-time (defined as over 16 h) paid work in mainstream 'open' employment; in a separate sphere those deemed to be in greatest need receive social care support. However, the paper further argues that there is a growing largely unrecognised third sphere of PwLD, unable to benefit from employment initiatives yet judged able enough not to be eligible for social care, and presently encouraged to seek support from resources within local communities.

The still dominant rhetoric of social exclusion/inclusion is characterised by the nature of an individual's or social group's engagement with the competitive economy, specifically paid

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employment, bluntly cleaving society into those ‘inside’ who are working and those ‘outside’ who are not (Levitas, 1998). Cameron and Palan (2005) characterise this binary as two ‘distinct socio-economic spaces, characterised by different socio-economic velocities’ (15), with the excluded unable to match the work and consumption ‘pace’ of the included. Those in the socio-economic ‘slow lane’, not in employment and often ‘far from’ the labour market, are, in this binary imagining, considered to be in need of social care and protection (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011). The paper argues that this constructed division between the worlds of employment and social care – neatly captured by the New Labour Government phrase ‘Work for those that can, security for those that cannot’ (Hyde et al., 1999) – is particularly stark for PwLD. For the minority, paid employment, perhaps through supported employment, is possible; for the majority, many who have aspirations to work, there are few options, with most remaining dependent on a shrinking social care sector. The paper argues that this dominant construction of two spheres presents: Firstly, a very narrow (and for many impossible) imagining of ‘work’ as full-time paid employment, assuming a work readiness and ‘sturdiness’ amongst those PwLD going into work, and an inability to be involved and make a work-based contribution amongst those seen as ‘legitimately’ not expected to work (Roulstone and Prideaux, 2012). Secondly, an orthodox understanding of ‘care’ as dependency and security for people who are unable to be properly present in and make a contribution to society (Conradson, 2003). The paper further argues that it is in the expanding third sphere, of those neither in paid employment nor ‘deserving’ of social care, that there are both financial and practical challenges for PwLD and their families, and opportunities for imagining a space of activity and hope in-between the binary division of employment and care. Within local areas, in social networks of PwLD, their families and supporters, organisations and agencies, and the wider public, other ways of being engaged with, and included within, society can possibly be generated. For example, opportunities to experience and gain from ‘work’ more broadly conceived, including unpaid and voluntary employment (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The paper examines how ‘Local Area Co-ordination’ – a network of community-based independent advisers in Scotland – can possibly provide the support, guidance and ‘brokerage’ for those many PwLD in this third sphere, through local scale network and social capital building. This Scottish initiative reflects a long-standing desire for a ‘whole system’ approach to social care provision for disabled people, drawing on the resources and services within the wider local community to respond to the ambitions for choice and opportunities amongst many more disabled people in a context of reduced funding (Department of Health, 2010). The paper argues that, whilst such an approach can be critiqued for ‘externalising’ the risks and responsibilities of social care to individuals and families (Roulstone and Prideaux, 2012, p. 112), a more positive ‘progressively localist’ interpretation can perhaps be developed, focused on the place-specific interrelationships and networks present within local communities (Featherstone et al., 2012). Local Area Co-ordinators, the paper argues, through building social relations, trust and knowledge with PwLD, can re-vision ‘work’ as multiple forms of contributions within local communities, and so begin to challenge the deterministic relationship between gaining paid employment and securing social inclusion (Levitas, 1998), in turn building a broader sense of gaining attachment and ‘belonging’ to others and to local spaces (Mee and Wright, 2009). In addition, the facilitating and brokering actions of Local Area Co-ordinators can shift the emphasis of care from dependence and protection towards assistance and support to enable PwLD and others to form the relationships and be in the spaces they wish to be (which for some may mean employment). Geographers of care have argued for ‘care’ to be considered as a relational process, based on interde-

pendent networked relationships between individuals, professional carers, families and organisations (Power, 2008; Hall, 2011).

The paper draws on in-depth interviews with key social care policy makers and practitioners at national and local scales in Scotland, part of data gathered for a research project commissioned by the Scottish Government Health and Social Care Directorate and the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability.² The research formed part of a wider programme of research and policy development within Scottish Government to support the introduction of personalised or ‘self-directed’ care support for disabled and older people (Ridley et al., 2005; Homer and Gilder, 2008). The research took place as the ‘National Strategy for Self-Directed Support’ (Scottish Government, 2010a) was being published and the accompanying ‘Social Care (Self-Directed Support) Bill’ (Scottish Government, 2011a) was being developed; as such, the research was very much part of this rapidly changing policy landscape, and was reflective of and used to inform these documents and legislation. In many ways the research was fortunately timed, as we were able to witness ‘policy in the making’; in other ways, it presented difficulties for interpretation, as the respondents were interviewed in an ever-changing policy context.

National scale interviews – with Scottish Government Health and Social Care (2) and Employability, Skills and Lifelong Learning Directorates; Skills Development Scotland; Job Centre Plus Office for Scotland; In Control Scotland; Shaw Trust (a third sector employability agency); and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) – focused on their knowledge of self-directed support, the development and potential of the policy and practice of such support, the position of PwLD within employment (and employment programmes), and the role of self-directed support in facilitating access to employment. Local scale interviews – with local authority social workers (2) and employability staff (4); JobCentre Plus Employability Advisers (2); supported employment organisation staff (3); an NHS occupational therapist (1); a care support centre adviser (1); local further education college (1); and Local Area Co-ordinators (5) – took place in three local authority areas (named here as ‘East’, ‘West’ and ‘Central’ Scotland), with the majority of data gathered in the ‘East Scotland’ authority; these interviews focused on similar themes to the national scale interviews. All interviews were fully transcribed and thematically coded, using ‘in vivo’ and ‘a priori’ codes. It is important to state that the paper is concerned with the development of policy and practice, and to acknowledge the absence of the voices of PwLD in this changing environment of employment and care. This clearly gives the paper a particular tone, and places on it distinct limitations in terms of drawing conclusions.

The paper is in three main sections. First, we examine how the dominant welfare-based constructions of ‘employment’ and ‘care’ sort PwLD into those who are ‘able’ to work and those in need of care. Second, the limited opportunities for PwLD in employability and supported employment programmes in Scotland are evidenced, drawing on interviews with policy makers. Third, the possibilities offered by Local Area Co-ordination in both supporting the increasing number of people outside employment and not entitled to social care, and creating opportunities to be active and to contribute within local communities are examined. The Conclusion argues that the increasing number of PwLD in neither employment nor care demands a dismantling of the social exclusion/inclusion binary, and the shaping of new localist forms of belonging for PwLD.

² The Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability (SCLD) (established 2001) is a charity made up of 12 partner organisations, including disability charities and universities, funded by the Scottish Government, to develop and monitor changes to social care and services set out in review of provision for PwLD, ‘The Same as You?’ (Scottish Executive, 2000).

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