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Mencap NI Consultation Response
Equality Commission Employment Key Inequalities

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Introduction

Mencap is the leading voice of learning disability in the UK. Everything we do is about valuing and supporting people with a learning disability. Our vision is a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included.

Currently in Northern Ireland, adults with a learning disability face a multitude of barriers, both environmental and attitudinal, in gaining access to full time paid employment. This paper is an organisational response to the Draft Statement of Inequalities in Employment.

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is 'a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities which affects someone for their whole life. The level of support someone needs, depends on the individual and the extent of their learning disability. With the right support most people with a learning disability can lead independent lives.'¹

In the UK, 2.16% of adults are believed to have a learning disability. In Northern Ireland there are 42,000 people with a learning disability, including 31,000 adults.²

Lack of Data

A lack of data sets and disaggregated data is a significant issue in Northern Ireland, compared with Britain and Europe. Mencap recommends the Equality Commission makes reference to the specific issue of limited available data in relation to people with a learning disability. For example, there are some discrepancies in diagnosing, recording and monitoring individuals with a learning disability within the healthcare system. There is also a significant lack of data about young people with a learning disability who are not in education, employment or training. In our view, robust data and reporting strategies are key in predicting current and future needs for children and adults with a learning disability.

Learning disability and mental health should be distinct

Mencap NI recognises the need for the Equality Commission (Raeside *et al* 2014) to collapse LFS data into more manageable groups to facilitate analyses. However, we are concerned about the alignment of learning disability with mental health given the differences between them, and the often mistaken assumption that learning disability is a mental health condition.

¹ www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/what-learning-disability

² These approximate figures have been calculated using learning disability prevalence rates from Public Health England (2016) and population data from the Office for National Statistics (2017).



Mental health problems refer to a range of emotional, psychological and psychiatric problems, including depression, anxiety and schizophrenia. They can affect anyone at any time and may be overcome with treatment, which is not true of learning disability.³ Approximately 40% of adults with a learning disability also have a mental health problem, however, cultural assumptions align learning disability as a mental health problem instead of a reduced intellectual ability.

Including learning disability with mental health in this way also distorts the statistical significance of adults with a learning disability accessing the labour market. Northern Ireland government does not publish data on how many people with a learning disability are in paid work, although it has been highlighted as an area of need in the NI Employment Strategy for Disabled People 2016-2021. Comparatively in England, less than 7% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority in England are in paid work⁴ compared with 39% of significant mental ill health. **Mencap recommends that the Equality Commission separates employment data on learning disability and mental health.**

Accessible Childcare

Mencap welcomes the Equality Commission highlighting both the difficulties with accessibility and affordability of childcare in NI compared with the rest of the UK. It should also be noted that parents of children with a disability, including a learning disability, experience particular barriers to employment with regards to the lack of suitable childcare. Children with a learning disability or developmental delay have diverse needs requiring suitably trained and qualified childcare staff. A higher staff ratio is also needed in mainstream childcare provision to appropriately support the development of children with a learning disability, and so they can be included in activities with other children.

In the experience of many parents we work with, professionals across mainstream early years settings may not have the specific knowledge relating to the needs of children with a learning disability. This includes an understanding of the barriers faced by children and families in accessing services, and associated adjustments that might be made.

Young Adults with a learning disability who are classified as NEET

Compared to their peers, children with a learning disability are more likely to be exposed to adverse life events;⁵ and are at greater risk of experiencing less favourable outcomes. This includes being more likely to grow up in poverty⁶, experience mental health difficulties,⁷

³ <https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/research-and-statistics/health-research-and-statistics/mental-health>

⁴ Health and Social Care Information Centre (2016)

⁵ Emerson, E (2013) Commentary: Childhood exposure to environmental adversity and the well-being of people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 57(7), 589-600.

⁶ Public Health England (2015) The determinants of health inequities experienced by children with learning disabilities. Public Health England, London. Shahtahmasebi, S; Emerson, E; Berridge, D; Lancaster, G (2011) [Child disability and the dynamics of family poverty, hardship and financial strain: Evidence from the UK](#). *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(4), 653-673.

⁷ Kiddle, H; Dagnan, D (2011) Vulnerability to depression in adolescents with intellectual disabilities. *Advances in Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities*, 5(1), 3-8. Emerson, E; Baines, S; Allerton, L; Welch, V (2011) Health inequalities and people with learning disabilities in the UK: 2011. Department of Health, London.



have poor educational attainment,⁸ and not be in education, employment or training by age 19.⁹

Prejudicial attitudes both within and outside the workplace

The statistics presented here only focus on the attitudes highlighted in Equality Commission surveys. It does not demonstrate if there any changes in attitudes pre and present and post-employment.

Benefits of Supported Employment through Workable Programme

Many European Social Fund (ESF) projects and the Workable NI programme, provide substantial evidence of adults with a learning disability being supported to secure the skills, confidence and experience necessary to successfully participate in and retain paid employment and the need to develop this further. At 31 October 2017, the Workable programme was currently supporting 938 people with significant disabilities, around a third of whom have a learning disability, to retain paid work. The current ESF programme is also on target to help 13,000 disabled people across NI to progress towards and into employment between 2015 and 2022 – many of these also have a learning disability.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your consultation on the Key Inequalities in Employment. Please feel free to contact us if you require any further details or information: fiona.cole@mencap.org.uk

Recommendations

- Disseminate issues and statistics in key inequalities to include individuals with a disability.
- Consider highlighting the lack of disaggregated data in statistical information on individuals with a learning disability.
- Discontinue aligning mental health and learning disability in LFS data, as it is unrepresentative of adults with a learning disability.
- Give specific recognition that young people with a learning disability are more likely to be NEET than individuals without a learning disability.
- Highlight the lack of accessible, professional childcare for children with a learning disability.
- Measure if attitudes change with employers/employees before during and after working with someone with a learning disability.

⁸ Public Health England, *ibid* n.2

⁹ Tunnard, J; Barnes, T; Flood, S (2008) One in ten: Key messages from policy, research and practice about young people who are NEET. *Forum* 21, 3, 46-53.

