

Evidence submission: The transition from education to employment for young disabled people

Submission to House of Lords Public Services Committee

September 2023

Written evidence submitted by the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education on 21 September 2023

House of Lords Public Services Committee.

Inquiry: The transition from education to employment for young disabled people

Who we are

- The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) aims to eliminate equality gaps in higher education.
- We are an independent hub for higher education professionals to access research, toolkits, and evaluation guidance.
- TASO is an affiliate What Works Centre, and part of the UK Government's What Works Movement. This means that TASO is committed to the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of high-quality evidence about effective practice in widening participation and student outcomes.

The evidence in this submission is drawn from two key TASO reports:

- [What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability](#)
- [What works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students](#)

General

1.1 What barriers do young disabled people face when leaving education and entering the job market and workplace? Does this differ between different conditions or disabilities, and if so, how?

- In England, disabled students are more likely to drop out of university, have lower degree results and worse employment outcomes than their non-disabled peers.¹
- HESA survey of graduate outcomes data shows that 18 months post-graduation, the earnings gap between graduates with and without a known disability is around £600, over 60% smaller than the gap between male and female graduates. However, it should be noted that these gaps are based on those in sustained employment, and graduates with a known disability are less likely to be in such employment shortly after graduation. Of graduates with no known disability, 78% were in full- or part-time employment 18 months after graduation, compared with 73% of graduates with a known disability.²
- Graduates with a known disability were more likely to be undertaking unsalaried activities, such as caring, voluntary or unpaid work.³
- The research on barriers to disabled students accessing higher education reveals some relevant insights to the transition from education to employment:
 - Disconnects between how disability is managed in secondary schools compared to higher education, making the transition difficult to navigate – noting possible parallel disconnects between higher education and employment.
 - Physical barriers for disabled students in both digital and physical environments.
 - Fear of the negative impact of disclosure of their disability – many students do not disclose their disability due to associated social stigma or concerns about discrimination.⁴
- The evidence also shows that disabled students can be asked or required to disclose their disability multiple times, to different points of contact or administrative departments, and with insufficient clarity or signposting about the purposes of such disclosure. With further disclosure also required on entering the labour market.⁵
- There is a lack of quality evidence in a higher education setting on whether reasonable adjustments to support disability inclusion are effective, despite the sector's legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.⁶ More research is needed on the transition of reasonable adjustments from university to the workplace and further transparency is required around employers' commitments to different types of adjustments.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2022/employment-of-disabled-people-2022>

² Ramaiah B and Robinson, D, [What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability](#), 2023, p. 11

³ Ibid

⁴ Evans, C. and Zhu, X, [Disability evidence review with TASO](#), 2023, p70

⁵ Ibid

⁶ 'Reasonable adjustment' is the legal term in the UK context, as in Section 20 of the Equality Act 2010

1.2 Recommendations

- Data should be gathered in a more streamlined way where possible, with clear explanation of how and why data will be used, including signposting to any support that could be available for disabled students in a given workplace.
- One possible approach is a 'passport' that ensures that disabled students (and disabled people in general) do not need to further share or disclose their disability while also ensuring they have access to their rights and any appropriate adjustments. This approach has been piloted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It is understood to have been successful and the DWP plans for it to be rolled out further.⁷
- There is a need for better evidence on reasonable adjustments: on how they are delivered and their impact on disability inclusion. Without comprehensive research on reasonable adjustments, we cannot assess whether or to what extent they are achieving their intended impact for students.

Support for young disabled people

2. How effectively do education systems provide careers advice, guidance and support which meet the needs and career aspirations of young disabled people? How could this be improved, and what examples of good practice are there in the UK and abroad?

- There is a lack of research looking at the impact of different possible approaches to improving the employment outcomes of disabled students.
- However, there is some suggestive evidence that connecting students to employed individuals with similar disabilities to act as mentors can improve students' sense of self-efficacy and motivation in seeking employment after graduation.⁸
- A recent TASO analysis of Access and Participation Plans (APPs) submitted to the Office for Students in 2020-21 found that just under half the higher education providers in the sample outlined approaches to supporting employability of disabled students. Although, there remains a need to evaluate the effectiveness of such approaches on students with differing profiles and patterns of disability and across professions.⁹
- According to the analysis, employability initiatives run by higher education providers to support disabled students place emphasis on internships (22% of APPs), professional mentoring opportunities with employers (24%), and specialist careers guidance (15%).
- 32 examples of employability initiatives being undertaken to support disabled students were identified.

⁷ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-15/189779>

⁸ Ramaiah B and Robinson, D, *What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability*, 2023, p. 44

⁹ TASO, *What works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students*, 2023, p5

- These include:
 - Employability initiatives embedded within curriculum
 - Specialist one-to-one support
 - Online support programmes
 - Initiatives with university partners to include local and national disability specialists and companies across different employment sectors
 - Financial support to attend specialist workshops and undertake placements
 - Specialist internship/placement opportunities
 - Mentoring approaches (e.g., Students are matched with a mentor from a similar background, and or with a similar disability within or beyond the institution; reverse mentoring engages disabled students act as mentors etc.).¹⁰

- Insights can also be drawn from a recent [TASO report](#) looking more broadly at the measures that education providers in the UK are currently taking to close employability gaps for disadvantaged students (including disabled students), as well as success, challenges and delivery consideration for education providers when engaging in this work.¹¹

- To generate these insights, we conducted a consultation with 27 relevant leaders across the further education and higher education sectors – adopting a mixed-method approach, using surveys and focus groups.

- The respondents to our consultation were most likely to target careers and employment interventions at learners who are BAME, care leavers, socioeconomically disadvantaged or disabled.¹²

- Several providers flagged that the students they most want to reach are frequently the hardest to engage. Five providers reported a low uptake for programmes targeted at learners with caring responsibilities, mature students and disabled students because these individuals often had commitments outside education that made it difficult for them to participate in extracurricular activities generally.

- As summarised in Figure 1, internships and work experience, employability skills and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) were the most common interventions targeted at the disadvantaged groups highlighted.

¹⁰ Evans, C. and Zhu, X, [Disability evidence review with TASO](#), 2023, p70

¹¹ Ramaiah B and Robinson, D, [What works to reduce equality gaps in employment and employability](#), 2023, p45

¹² Ibid, p. 47

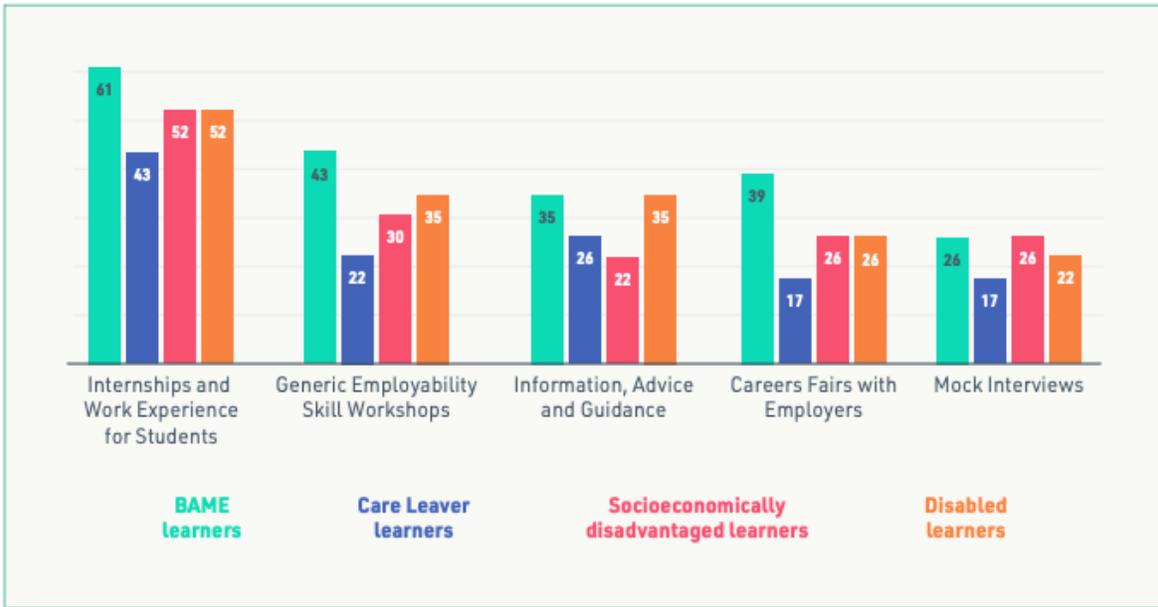


Figure 1: Interventions by percentage of consultees who offer them to certain disadvantaged groups

- Figure 2 shows that consultees generally found internships and work experience to be the most impactful targeted interventions. They viewed mock interviews as another high-impact intervention but tended to feel that IAG, employability skills training and careers fairs had less impact.

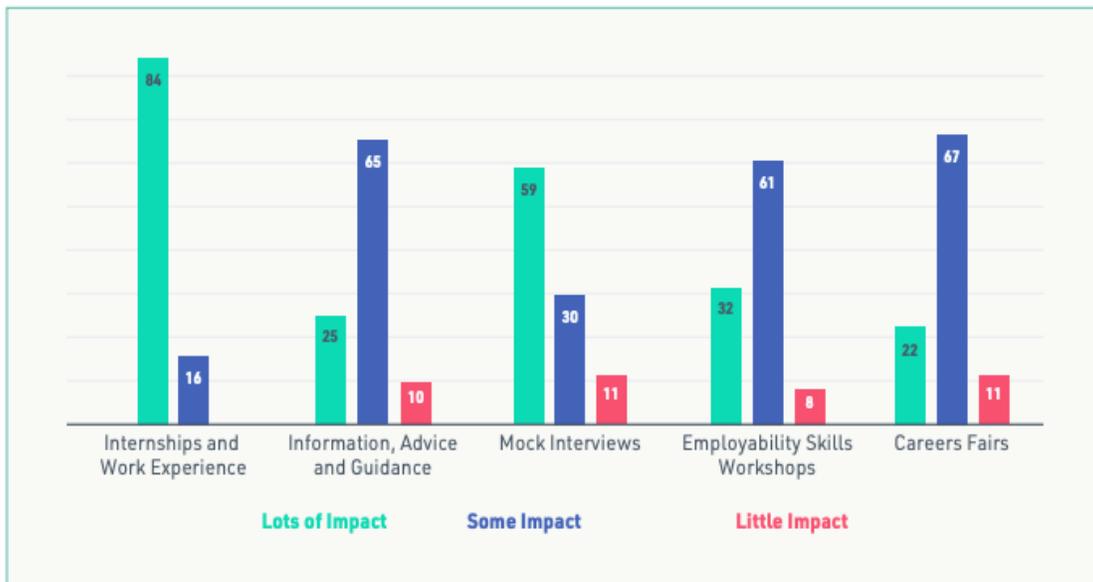


Figure 2: Targeted interventions by percentage of consultees reporting levels of impact

- Consultees raised the concern that bespoke programmes often failed to recruit enough of their target students. Figure 3 identifies the different rates of participation in targeted interventions by groups of disadvantaged students according to survey data from the report.

- The consultees felt that disabled learners were the most likely to be reached by targeted interventions.

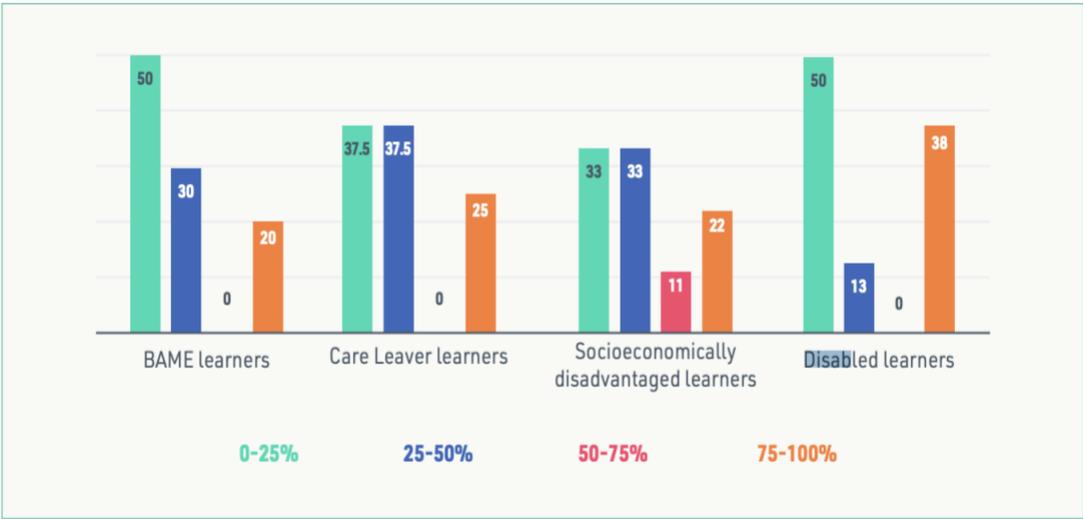


Figure 3: Disadvantaged groups by percentage of provider levels of participation in targeted interventions

2.1 Examples of good practice observed include

- Making IAG accessible and useful for disabled students by providing options to increase text size, text-to-speech and specific guidance directed at students with a wide range of disabilities.
- ‘Work simulations’, internships and mentoring can be effective approaches to supporting disabled students into work. Students with autism report wanting their education provider to support them during internships.¹³

2.2 Recommendations

- Higher education providers should develop and evaluate employment and careers programmes (work experience, IAG, mock interviews and careers fairs) specifically targeted at reducing gaps in employment outcomes for disabled students.¹⁴
- Higher education providers should develop and evaluate alumni or peer mentoring opportunities for disadvantaged and underrepresented students (including specific initiatives to support disabled students).¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid*, p.8
¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.8
¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.59

3. What are young disabled people’s experiences of the transition from education-based support to employment-related support? Do young disabled people face barriers to accessing support during this transition? Could these services be better linked, and if so, how?

- A key benefit from and reason for attending higher education is the positive impact on the labour market. The evidence on transitions to employment from higher education for disabled students is fairly limited. This indicates a need for further evidence on disabled students’ transition to employment and employability.¹⁶
- Support for this transition includes specialist disability careers services, external agencies and employers; skills development through coaching and mentoring; internships; work integrated learning; and opportunities to engage in research.¹⁷
- Stakeholder consultations with students with autism reveal their preference for work experience to prepare for the working world but also their concerns that employers may be hesitant to take them on due to their disability. Students with autism want their education providers to build close partnerships with employers and to act as champions in communicating their skills and value to facilitate offers of work experience.¹⁸
- There is some evidence that a combination of work experience with an employer and job simulation appears to be effective in improving their employment prospects.¹⁹
- There is little evidence available for students with physical disabilities, although there is some suggestive evidence that disabled students can also be supported into work through job simulation training. Being partnered with mentors with similar disabilities who are already in work may improve students’ sense of self-efficacy and motivation in seeking employment after graduation.²⁰

3.1 Recommendations

- Evidence suggests that transitions support can be effective for enabling disability inclusion. This evidence, particularly Type 3 research, is often based US experiences, where there is a legal or statutory requirement for HEPs to focus on delivering support during transition into HE.
- As transitions support is improved and expanded, it will be more feasible and important to evaluate what is working best to deliver on disabled student inclusion – both in accessing higher education and employment post-graduation.

¹⁶ TASO, [What works to reduce equality gaps for disabled students](#), 2023, p13

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p11

¹⁸ Ramaiah B and Robinson,D, 2023,p6.

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *Ibid*, p7.