Pathways to Meaningful Lives:

How people who live with Learning Disabilities experience employment and the implications for policy and practice

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Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to the participants who kindly gave up their time to take part in the study and the stakeholders who provided invaluable assistance with participant recruitment. Without your support this report would not have been possible. We hope that you find it useful and meaningful.

We would also like to say a huge thank you to current and former colleagues at Healthwatch Essex, especially Samantha Glover for commissioning the work, Dan Potts for aiding recruitment, Rachel Horton-Smyth and Chloe Dench for their expert communications support, and Dr John Day for his support and guidance.

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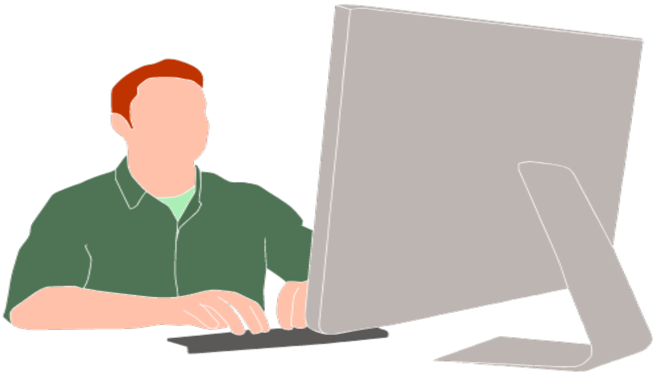
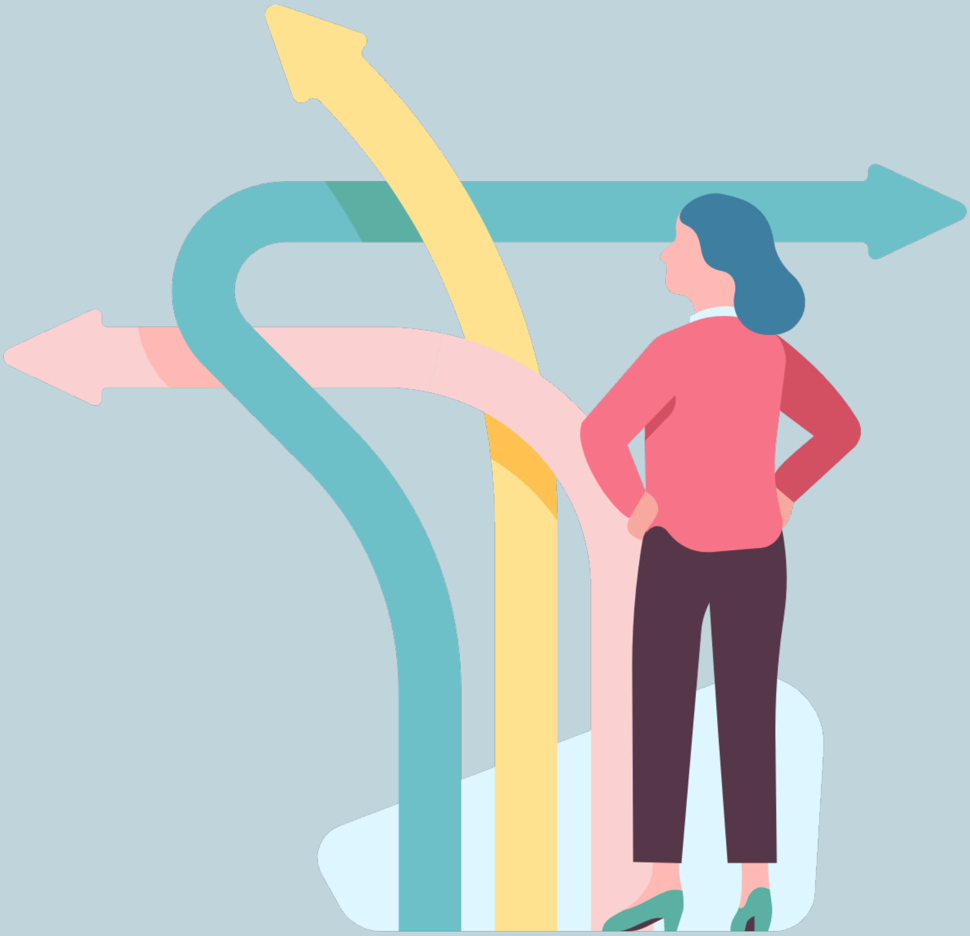


Introduction



Learning Disability and opportunities for employment

Approximately 1.5 million people in the UK have a type of Learning Disability (LD) (Office of National Statistics, 2019a). Within this population, around 21,133 18 to 65-year-olds with LD reside in Essex (Essex County Council, 2019). While reliable employment figures for this population are limited, a 2017 estimate asserts that only 7.5% of adults living with LD within Essex County Council's Adult Social Care services were employed (Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, 2017). This figure fell from 9.4% in 2015/16 and 10% in 2014/15, suggesting that a significant majority of this population fail to attain forms of employment (Ibid; Richardson, McPherson and Gladwell, 2018).[1] It is, therefore, argued that LD adults regularly miss out on benefits associated with employment such as improved wellbeing and quality of life (Ibid).

However, national approaches to boosting LD employment have been introduced. The 1995 Disability and Discrimination Act and the later Equality Act (2006), for example, were designed to protect people with disabilities from employment discrimination. Moreover, the 1996 Education Act and 2000 Children Act sought to guarantee that students in care or with special educational needs were supported when transitioning into work.[2] More recently, the English white paper entitled Valuing Employment Now: real jobs for people with Learning Disabilities (Department of Health and Social Care, 2009) and the 2014 Care act attempted to increase the number of people with disabilities in employment by personalising care provision and promoting independent living.

Local Authorities (LAs), schools and other statutory organisations have also sought to promote LD employment. For example, LAs and their partner organisations are responsible for supporting children with LD during transition. LAs like Essex County Council have, thus, produced 'transition protocols' that:

> …cover the work of agencies in Essex involved in supporting the transition of young people with disabilities and additional needs into adulthood.
>
> (Russel et al, 2012, p.5)

These protocols delineate that transition plans must be created for children with special educational needs and disabilities at the age of 14. In creating transition plans, LAs ask schools to work with other statutory organisations such as the English career advice service Connexions (UK Government, 2000). Moreover, schools are required to work alongside young people and their carers to Co-Produce plans (Beyer, Kaehne, Grey, Sheppard and Meek, 2008). In doing this, it is hoped that LAs, partner agencies, carers and service users will create cohesive responses to the unique challenges posed by transition.

However, transition plans regularly eschew the perspectives of young people. It is asserted that stakeholders frequently conceive of young peoples' perspectives as unworkable and uninformed (Carnaby et al, 2003; Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Equally, it is argued that transition plans suffer from 'ineffective or late planning', thereby reducing opportunities for Co-Produced outcomes (Beyer and Kaehne, 2008). Furthermore, Bates, Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2017) purport that LAs are not obliged to include employment within transition plans. Rather, employment is 'identified in guidance as a legitimate aim of transition planning' (Beyer et al, 2008, p.6). Accordingly, conditions such as a lack of available employment and support, as well as the notion that work is not 'a viable option' for young people with LD, reduces the likelihood that opportunities for work will be pursued during transition (Ibid, p.5).

Not every employment programme

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[1] 'Ibid' indicates that two or more consecutive references come from the same source.

[2] A child's transition period is the phase in which they leave education and child social care services and accesse employment and/or adult services. For more information, see Beyer et al, 2008.

falls under the purview of national government or LAs. Third- and private-sector organisations also administer programmes aimed at furthering LD employment. The Supported Employment scheme, for example, has been used to provide work-experience to people with LD across England. This outcome is achieved by supporting employers and providing in-work teaching to people with LD (Beyer and Robinson, 2009; Bates, Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2017). However, supported employment schemes have been criticised as 'having a bias towards people with LD on the lower end of the spectrum' (Ineson, 2015). This means that organisers cherry-pick people with less severe LDs (Schneider, 2008). Moreover, Supported Employment schemes are accused of being subject to 'output targets' (Ibid). These targets delineate appropriate types of support offered to people with LD and, therefore, reduce the capacity of service users to define the terms of their employment.

Learning Disability and in-work experiences

Employees living with LD also experience a range of problems. These problems often relate to a lack of understanding regarding labour rights and remuneration (Kocman and Weber, 2018). As such, workers with LD are regularly affected by uneven payments and undesirable working conditions (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman and Johnson, 2005; Judge et al, 2010). Furthermore, adults with LD frequently receive employment opportunities in which their responsibilities are not reflective of their interests and skills. In this way adults with LD are said to be at risk of underemployment, as well as of engaging in career opportunities that mean relatively little to them (Wehman, 2013; Mahoney and Roberts, 2009). This proposition is supported by Witte, Philips and Kakela (1998) who argue that workers with LD often receive assignments that are below their ability level and have fewer opportunities for promotion than their colleagues. Moreover, Rumrill et al. (2017) argue that workers with LD frequently experience work-related prejudice and discrimination. This risk, they suggest, is more pronounced for people who come from traditionally disadvantaged communities such as non-Caucasian racial and ethnic groups and women (Ibid). Such a proposition, thus, indicates that traditionally disadvantaged identity traits intersect with LD to produce distinct forms of workplace oppression (Lindsay et al, 2018). As such, Koch and Rumrill (2016) assert that workers with LD from minority backgrounds and/or who are women are likely to experience a double, or even triple, disadvantage.

Accordingly, the literature highlights a dialectic within experiences of employment for individuals living with LD. In this dialectic, people with LD are often othered in respect of their relationships to the economy and are understood to be non-economic beings who contravene conventions associated with workplaces. However, people with LD are also regularly asked to engage in forms of economic activity about which they have very little interest and connection (Wehman, 2013). This dichotomy suggests that people with LD are square pegs attempting to fit within the myriad round holes that constitute the UK's socio-economic landscape.

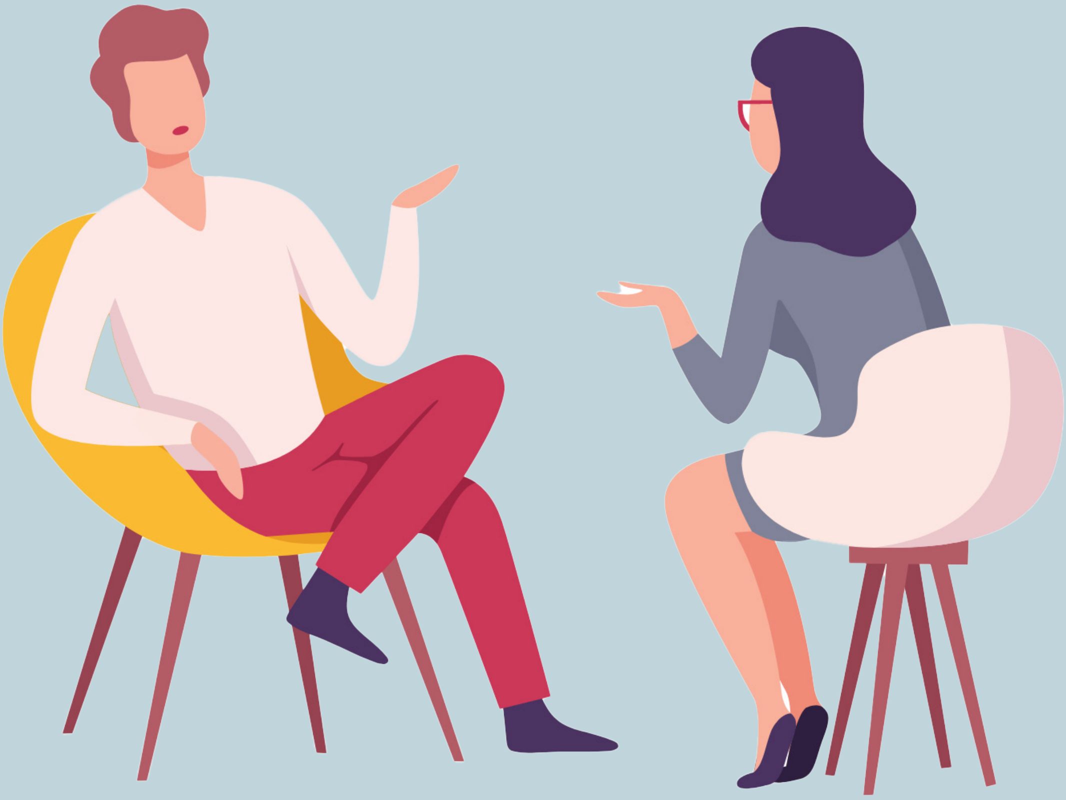
Building understanding of employment for people with Learning Disabilities

However, it is argued that adults with LD also have fulfilling experiences of employment (Rumrill et al, 2017). This proposition is often contingent on a multiplicity of factors including the types of support offered, rates of remuneration, opportunities for social interaction and even uniform colour (Ibid; Kocman and Weber, 2018). These assertions suggest that experiences of employment are subjective. It is argued that interactions between biological, social and economic factors affect how individuals living with LD understand

and experience employment (Bend and Priola, 2021). Accordingly, employment experiences may be influenced by a variety of situated variables, the constitution and condition of which may only be understood by examining the lives of people who are, or have recently been, in work.

Academic researchers have commented on the dearth of qualitative research exploring the work experiences of people with LD. For example, Ineson (2015, p.59) states that 'employment opportunities are almost never explored' for people with learning disabilities in the UK. This research project, therefore, provides insight into the working lives of people with LD and, thus, informs policy and practice. To attend to these aims, the research first examines interrelationships between lived experiences of the corporeal body and society. In doing this, the research suggests that biologically and socially situated experiences affect how individuals conceive of the world around them. After this, the research explores the utility of support, particularly that which is provided by networks embedded in homes and the education system, in promoting capacity to participate in employment and conceptualise and pursue aspirations. Finally, the research investigates how people with LD experience employment by studying variables such as employment status and organisational culture.

The Study



Methodology

To study lived experiences of Learning Disability and employment, 17 adults who live with a Learning Disability (LD) and had been in employment, volunteering or work-experience in the last 18 months were recruited and interviewed. This purposive approach occurred alongside the use of maximum variety sampling as a means of recruiting individuals with a range of employment related experiences. Thus, the report contains in-depth narrative data from individuals who were or had recently been in paid employment, volunteering and/or work-experience at the time the data was collected. Moreover, the report includes data from individuals who attended different categories of school (mainstream or special educational) and achieved distinct types of qualifications (*See figure A*).

It was hoped that the variety of this sample would enable the report to examine how individuals from different backgrounds and with access to varying types of resources access employment-related activities. Moreover, it was expected that this variety would enable the research to understand how individuals with LD attribute meaning to and experience types of work-related activities.

Additionally, it was anticipated that analysis of this sample would enable the report to examine how experiences of employment and related activities are informed by a multiplicity of conditions. These are conditions that are grounded in participants respective lives and are, therefore, difficult to predict. However, analysis of the existing literature shows that variables related to the family, education, LD transition, local/national government and public institutions all, to differing degrees, affect how individuals' access and experience employment (Rooney, in Race, 2012; Hall, 2010; Beyer and Kaehne, 2008). It is suggested that these variables often shape notions of appropriate pursuits and inform capacity to achieve aspirations. For example, they may influence the extent to which individuals seek paid work, as well as their understanding of appropriate types of employment (Hall 2010 & 2004). In this way the report sought to maximise variety by recruiting participants from a range of demographic groups: particularly accounting for location of residence, age and gender (*see figure B*).

To recruit participants, relevant stakeholders from the Health and Social care sector in Essex were identified and contacted. These stakeholders came from public, private and third sector organisations and worked in front-line and strategic roles such as those of Job Coach, Advocacy Facilitator, Occupational Therapist, commissioning director for a Local Authority and Transformation Lead for an NHS CCG, amongst others. Participation was also promoted through Healthwatch Essex's social media channels and monthly newsletter. Through these methods the researcher engaged in conversations with stakeholders from 18 organisations, thereby gaining a practical understanding of the national and local policy environment. Moreover, these conversations resulted in stakeholders promoting the research to service users and clients who live with LD and were or had recently been in employment, volunteering or work-experience.

After receiving ethical approval from Essex County Council to conduct a research project examining the lived experiences of individuals who live in the county, the researcher sought to begin contacting potential participants. However, following the implementation of lockdown restrictions introduced to limit the spread of Covid-19, forms of remote communication were employed to build rapport and control risk. As such, potential participants were initially contacted using telephone numbers gained through stakeholder contacts. These initial telephone conversations were used to build researcher and participant trust: an outcome achieved through informal discussions about topics chosen by potential participants. Furthermore, they were used to gain preliminary understanding of their employment experiences.

Following initial communications, the

Participant Pseudonym	Paid employment	Volunteering	Work-experience	School type	Last qualification
Tamsyn	Y(es)	N	N	S(pecial)	NVQ
Nigel	N(o)	Y	N	M(ainstream)	NVQ
Cameron	N	Y	Y	S	NVQ
Roger	N	Y	N	S	NVQ
Bob	N	Y	N	S	No qualifications
Ralph	Y	Y	N	S	NVQ
Angela	Y	N	N	S	No qualifications
Alfie	N	Y	N	M	NVQ
Daisy	N	Y	N	S	NVQ
Rahul	Y	N	N	M	NVQ
Reece	Y	N	N	S	No qualifications
Reginald	Y	Y	N	S	NVQ
Charlie	N	Y	N	M	GCSE
Linda	N	Y	N	S	NVQ
Thea	Y	N	N	M	NVQ
Andy	Y	N	N	S	No qualifications
Lydia	Y	N	N	S	No qualifications

(Figure A: participant experiences of work and education at the time of interview)

Participant pseudonym	Age	Gender	Location	Index of Multiple Deprivation	Job Type (sector)
Tamsyn	42	F(emale)	U(rban)	22.73	Administrative
Nigel	39	M(ale)	U	24.49	N/A
Cameron	19	M	U	28.01	Work-experience (administrative)
Roger	36	M	R(ural)	23.15	N/A
Bob	64	M	U	19.48	N/A
Ralph	38	M	U	35.91	Service
Angela	53	F	U	55.37	Service
Alfie	26	M	U	18.57	N/A
Daisy	33	F	U	4.35	N/A
Rahul	20	M	R	8.01	Administrative
Reece	56	M	U	46.44	Service
Reginald	37	M	U	33.17	Service
Charlie	34	M	U	41.84	N/A
Linda	30	F	R	10.62	N/A
Thea	32	F	U	33.77	Professional
Andy	58	M	U	32.89	Professional
Lydia	65	F	U	36.32	Professional

(Figure B: participant demographic data at time of interview) researcher sent potential participants an easy-read information booklet describing the aims of the research and their rights as participants. After this, the researcher engaged potential participants in a second remote conversation wherein their understanding of the study was evaluated and preferred interview times and methods were discussed. Once second remote conversations had been completed, the researcher sent potential participants an easy-read consent form. Upon completing the consent form, participants were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview by telephone or video conferencing technology. Each interview was organized using a semi-structured interview guide based on information gained through prior exploration of the literature and initial conversations with participants.

In total, 17 interviews ranging from 30 to 90 minutes were recorded using audio-recording software and transcribed verbatim. Transcribed testimony was then analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA): a method that enables researchers to consider and assess patterns pertaining to experiences of phenomena and 'the factors and processes that underlie and influence' them (Braun, Clarke and Weate, in Smith and Sparkes, 2016, p.5). To realise TA, the researcher employed the methodological model emphasised by theorists such as Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (in Willig and Rogers, 2017). In this model, TA is understood as a multi-stage process in which researchers first familiarise themselves with the data. The researcher, thus, gained an initial detailed understanding of interview testimony by 'being observant, noticing patterns and quirks and starting to ask questions' (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun in Willig and Rogers, 2017, p.23). After this, the researcher generated codes which attached meaning to specific segments of data. These codes were then arranged into themes by combining codes to create larger patterns.

Finally, the researcher engaged in processes of reviewing and defining (Ibid). The researcher, thus, sought to re-engage with the data to ensure that codes and themes were meaningful, while creating an emergent narrative from the data being analysed. In doing this, the researcher was able to create a narrative that reflected the lived experiences of the subjects being studied. This inductive approach enabled the researcher to discuss themes ranging from the value of networks and cultural resources in promoting access to employment to the significance of employment status and organisational culture in affecting in-work experiences.

Theoretical foundations of the research

To explore the interplay between participants experiences of disability and their social worlds, the research employs an embodied approach. This approach asks that we consider how experiences are informed by interactions between the materiality of living and the conditions that structure society. As such, the approach rejects the theoretical schism between the biological and social models of disability. These models purport that experiences of disability are informed by biological and clinical variables such as 'cure, remedy or repair' or social constructs (Devine and Mobily, in Spracklen, Lashua, Sharpe and Swain, 2017, p.747). Such approaches, therefore, view cognition as an adjunct to the important matters of the body or society. In this way they deny individuals a role in interpreting and acting upon their social worlds (Wacquant, 2015).

By contrast, an embodied approach enables researchers to consider the diversity of populations of disabled people. Instead of only understanding disabled people as passive victims of biology or structure, embodiment offers a means of exploring how experiences of disability are 'both felt and socially constructive, by virtue of the body's outward facing orientation within the world' (Cluley, Fyson and Pilnick, 2020, p.11). This proposition suggests that experiences of 'social circumstances and physical environments' in relation to lived bodies enable individuals to make sense of and interact with the world (Day, Burns and Weed, 2021, p.6). As such, researchers may find that the emotions, feelings and senses of those who live with disability vary depending on how their bodies interact with the conditions from and within which they originate and operate.

The application of an embodied approach enables the research to examine how social and cultural capital affect experiences of Learning Disability.[1] Broadly defined, social capital refers to the human networks that can be utilised by members for support (Bourdieu, in Stehr and Grundmann, 2005). Strong intra-network relationships are defined as bonding social capital and enable members to receive collective support through the transfer of norms, expectations, obligations and trust (Giesbers et al, 2022). Additionally, cultural capital is composed of institutional and symbolic resources, such as qualifications or knowledge, which enable individuals to participate in given contexts (Bourdieu, in Stehr and Grundmann, 2005).

In discussing the impact of capital, the research asserts that those who live with LD may be empowered to participate in new contexts because of norms, knowledge and experience transferred within networks. However, it is not clear whether these assets have a direct impact on capacity to engage in contexts such as workplaces (Brouwer, Jansen, Flache, and Hofman, 2016). Access to networks have provided interviewees with the confidence to cope with and succeed in given contexts.[2] This relationship suggests that confidence in one's ability to succeed may be a 'characteristic through which the effects of capital are mediated' (Ibid, p.111). In this way the variable of self-efficacy may be important in promoting an understanding of the link between capital and the capacity to attain employment and lead a meaningful life.

In this study, self-efficacy is defined as one's perceived capability 'for learning or performing actions at a designated level' (Schunk and Meece, in Urdan and Pajares, 2006, p.72). Access to capital influences self-efficacy by increasing the richness of one's formative experiences, improving access to specialist support and promoting relevant norms (Ibid). By contrast, poor access to capital may inhibit self-efficacy and reduce notions of capability. For example, networks in which experiences of a context are limited may not support self-efficacy when members are taking part in that environment. This outcome may be noticed when adolescents are the first of their immediate families to attend university (Dumais and Ward, 2010).

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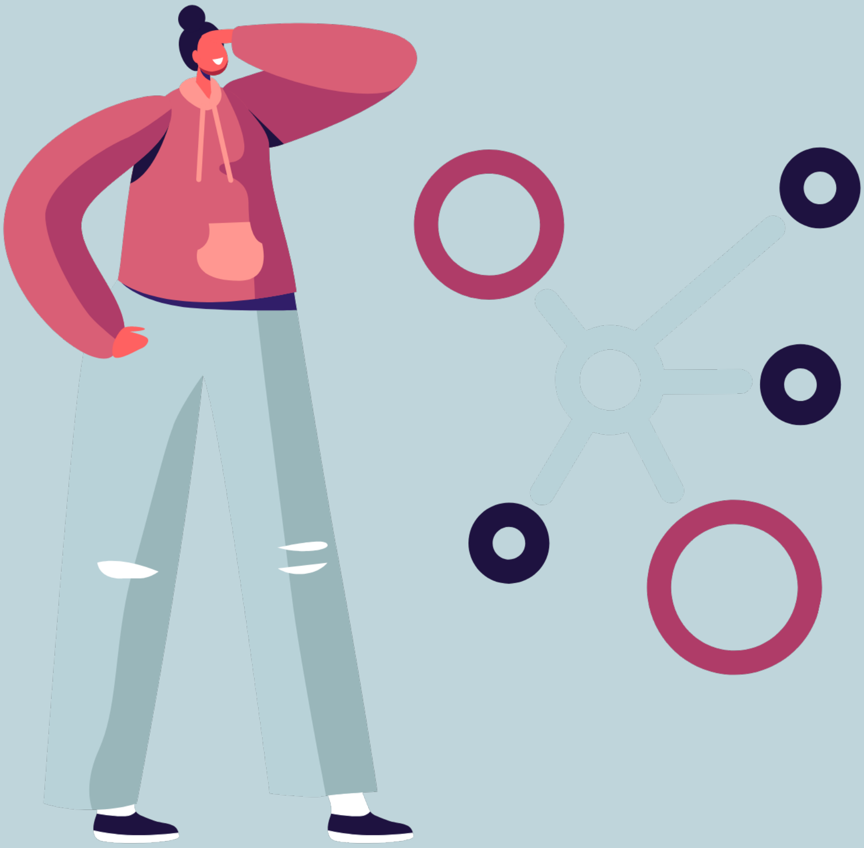
[1] In the proceeding chapters of this report social capital is broadly referred to using the term networks, while cultural capital is referred to as cultural resources.

[2] See chapters 1 and 2 for examples of how network membership may enable individuals to attain confidence and particate in given contexts.

Chapter 1:

Learning Disability, Networks and the Search for Purpose



In this chapter, the research explores how interviewees navigate the everyday realities of their lives and promotes the notion that no two individuals experience aspiration and purpose in the same way. In doing so, the research proposes that understanding is embodied and argues that the accessibility of support is an important variable in appreciating how people with LD pursue their aspirations. As such, the research contends that trusting and supportive networks embedded in families and institutions enable individuals to cope with challenges and work towards the attainment of their aspirations. Finally, the research suggests that these networks empower individuals to feel confident when participating in novel contexts and taking on new tasks.

Embodying disability

> *There's 2 people in a wheelchair, like they're more disabled those are…Some of them's more disabled than me you know?*
>
> (Lydia)

In the testimony of interviewees, LD is described as a facet of identity. It is not, therefore, understood to be a defining feature of personhood. Nor is it viewed to be the crucial variable from which a person's character may be comprehended. Rather, it is considered that LD is a component factor, the experience of which imposes on and is affected by a multitude of situated conditions.

This means that LD may be regarded differently depending on the conditions in which people operate. The extent to which LD plays a role in (dis)enabling a person in space is contingent upon the many conditional factors that constitute an environment. Equally, the capacity to participate may be affected by traits such as impairment type, class and ethnicity. These traits also affect one another. As is demonstrated in the preceding extract, traits orientated around physical impairment such as having to use a wheelchair often intersect with LD. This intersection may promote a changed relationship between the person and environment: an association characterised by how those who operate in space comprehend the confluence between wheelchair use and LD.

In environments characterised by low levels of understanding about the capabilities of people who use wheelchairs, wheelchair users may be perceived to lack agency. Depictions of reduced physical independence promoted when users struggle to access buildings and types of infrastructure often act as catalysts for visions of substantive disability. The enduring nature of man-made structures contrasts with the 'seeming unacceptability of impaired bodies' when attempting to interact with and use spaces such as offices, train stations and housing (Hansen and Philo, 2007, p.495). This suggests that 'the very concreteness of our surroundings' affects our 'everyday assumptions about disability and ability': reifying the struggles of those who live with limited mobility (Boys, in Boys, 2017, p.53).

This proposition is central to why interviewees, who themselves live with moderate to severe forms of LD, conceive of others as "more disabled" (Lydia). People with LD, like Lydia, are frequently provided with visual representations of the disabling consequences of physical impairments. Visual cues such as the use of specialist equipment designed to aid mobility promotes differentiation between those who live with impairment and access space and those for whom interactions between illness and space distort notions of accessibility. In this way the interaction between the experience of living in a body that moves unaided and the perception that others cannot meet this standard fosters an embodied vision of the self as capable.

The capacity to walk unaided is not the only variable that affects how those living with LD embody notions of disability. In a different environment, individuals with LD and a sensory impairment may experience alienation and pursue forms of resistance. In Rahul's interview, for example, he describes how a visually impaired left eye diminished his capacity to take part in college activities:

> *So, for instance, I could have been, I was in a visual, working with cameras, working with visual piece. Working with film and movies and TV. And sometimes I felt that I wasn't very… because of my perception skills and my condition, my left visual impairment, I felt things were a little bit challenging.*
>
> (Rahul)

This extract demonstrates that the capacity to participate in space may be informed by how sensory impairment is embodied by situated notions and experiences of disability. The school environment mentioned in Rahul's testimony is depicted as one in which visual capacity is emphasised. It is, thus, a space in which the primacy of sensory capability is reproduced through activities such as "working with cameras" and creating "stop-motion" animation (Ibid). In this way, the pedagogical approach exhibited in the extract may be viewed to validate those who do not live with types of sensory impairment, diminishing the agency of students who are incapable of immediately working with relevant equipment and taking part in pertinent activities.

In describing his college experience, Rahul indicates that there was a distinction between how the institution understood and accommodated for his impairments. In a later part of his interview, Rahul emphasises that institutional actors sought to mitigate for his LD by exposing him to practical forms of learning and providing personalised support. In asserting this Rahul implies that institutional actors understood how to accommodate for his LD:

> *We do have frequent calls and frequent communication. So, for instance, I would have a call at the beginning of the week to explain my work, and to explain what's happening.*
>
> (Ibid)

This excerpt indicates that those living with LD may have greater agency when operating in arenas in which understanding of this type of impairment is established. Thus, people living with LD may, in circumstances in which appropriate support processes are built into the landscape, struggle to take part in given arenas as a product of alternative facets of their identity. These may be facets of identity that 'are not socially constructed' but represent fundamental barriers to agency such as impaired vision in a media studies classroom (Thanem, 2008, p.589). In these circumstances embodiment may be developed through the isolating experience of inaccessibility. As Rahul mentions, the interaction between the body and the immediately disabling constitution of the external environment fostered the supposition that his context was "challenging" (Rahul). It is, therefore, apparent that disabilities that provide essential barriers to participation may promote notions of identity defined by social discordancy.

However, Rahul's challenging college experience did not mean that he failed to study visual media. Rather, his testimony indicates that his embodiment, as a person who lives with LD and a visual impairment, was characterised by resilience. Whilst he acknowledges that his visual impairment was a major obstacle in pursuing learning, he purports that "I didn't let that challenge affect me, but I needed a little bit more help" (Rahul). He, therefore, describes how he felt compelled to fight for his place in the classroom by asking figures of institutional authority for support. As such, Rahul sought to both access and harness the few networks of support that had been made available to him: participating in mentoring programmes and actively applying for internships administered by the college. In doing this, Rahul argues that he gained "positive practical experiences" of the media that, subsequently, enabled him to conceptualise and pursue related career aspirations (Ibid).

Examinations of interviewee experiences demonstrate that embodied notions of disability are also manifested through experiences of LD. For example, Roger purports that awareness of the severity of his LD informs his capacity to engage in desirable activities. In suggesting this Roger offers an example of how this awareness interacts with the traditions that inform the governance of a residential care home:

> *Because I'm not allowed out. I'm in a care home. Unless it's absolutely essential. I'm not allowed to go to football training, college, work, anything like that. At the moment, it's affected me massively in terms of all my jobs I'm meant to be doing but I can't.*
>
> (Roger)

This extract suggests that cases of LD may be pathologized within residential institutions. Moreover, it shows that those who inhabit such arenas are regularly reminded of their difference as a product of the treatment that they receive (Goodfellow, 2012). For instance, the supposition that the severely learning Disabled require near-permanent surveillance and restraint emphasises the agential schism between residents and those for whom societal freedoms are well-established.

This supposition is most evident in the way that Roger discusses his desire to engage in paid work. He argues that the constraining nature of his living situation has disenabled him from attaining employment. This is because he is not able to leave his care home for long enough to acquire regular shifts:

> *Most people go for are cashiers, store manager or whatever else, but never ever do they put down under 16 hours (of work). People who've got learning disabilities, try and help them out. Not once have I seen.... I even passed a supermarket, there was a store opening, they wanted staff in for under 16 hours just to mop the floors and hoover and whatever else. I would have done it if I wasn't stuck in my house.*
>
> (Ibid)

In suggesting that people who live with LD require "help" to gain employment, Roger demonstrates that members of this population may feel that they are characterised by their diagnosis. He indicates that people with LD may be viewed as overtly vulnerable citizens who require a leg-up to participate in the economy. As such, he observes that his perceived identity conflicts with notions of productivity that regularly characterise contemporary employment. For example, he feels that paid work requires a demonstrable capacity for commitment. To him, participation in employment is founded on one's ability to make a choice to conclusively dedicate oneself to a role. In this way he feels precluded from participating in workplaces as a product of his limited agency.

It is, thus, apparent that Roger's embodied experiences make him feel 'out-of-place' within spaces in which conceptualisations of LD are underpinned by notions of vulnerability (Hansen and Philo, 2007, p.496). He indicates that his limited agency, both in respect of the material conditions in which he lives and the inflexibility of social actors who might grant him opportunities for progression, means that he is socially disparate. Moreover, he asserts that this inequality will only be resolved through the provision of flexible and empathetic support:

> *If they want paid work, there needs to be more support for employees, they need to think I've got a guy here who's got learning disabilities, a guy who's got dyslexia, and epilepsy, why? He's only allowed to work 16 hours; that we can work on. We can see what jobs we can give him. That's the way to look at it. Not oh, here's a guy with learning disabilities, put him to one side and forget about him.*
>
> (Roger)

Like Lydia's and Rahul's experiences, Roger's testimony indicates that embodied notions of disability are situated by lived experiences of interactions between the body and social world. Individual agency and the capacity to lead a meaningful life may, therefore, be influenced by experiences of factors such as mobility, sensory impairment and LD when navigating contexts such as schools, workplaces and care homes. This proposition suggests that individuals from within the same population interact with situated factors, such as institutional governance arrangements, and, therefore, understand the world differently.

Nevertheless, analysis also shows that the provision of support, or a lack thereof, affects how individuals with LD understand their lived experiences and participate in given contexts. As discussed, embodied experiences of disability may be informed by access to supportive contexts. These are contexts in which networks of family members, teachers or colleagues support individuals to learn about and discover relevant norms, attain cultural knowledge and participate in relevant activities. As such, interviewees frequently highlight the value of network membership in empowering them to participate in given contexts and enabling them to pursue their aspirations.

Inaccessible networks and the (non)pursuit of aspirations

As discussed, people living with LD are likely to experience similar phenomena differently as a product of the relationships between themselves and their social worlds. This proposition means that factors such as one's perceived capacity to participate in culturally relevant activities may differ amongst the population (Thanem, 2008). In the literature it is argued that, while most people can adapt to an environment, the extent to which people with LD may 'ameliorate or circumvent the given conditions of (an) environment' in ways that do not diminish agency often fluctuates (Imrie, 2004, p.756). For example, traditions related to social class, ethnicity and disability, as well as those (re)produced through governance arrangements, are viewed to affect capacity and, ultimately, influence opportunities for participation in given contexts (Thanem, 2008). Interviewee testimony supports this proposition. For people like Roger, the capacity to pursue aspirations is limited by a lack of exposure to networks through which obligations of support and norms of trust and reciprocity are shared. For example, he asserts that he has "a vague dream that… I had what I wanted to do but it's a lot of money to do it. I would love… I love music. I would like to get some proper equipment, DJ decks, licence. It would be nice so I could have my own music. That's what I would have done" (Roger). However, he also states that he has no understanding of how to achieve this aspiration:

> *I've never been encouraged because there isn't anywhere in the area that has the ability to do the DJing.*
>
> (Ibid)

In this extract Roger indicates that restricted access to relevant networks has diminished his capacity to pursue his career aspirations. His testimony demonstrates that he has had limited involvement in education and has, for several years, lived in a residential care home: an environment that has restricted his capacity to access community assets, indulge his creativity and apply for relevant work. This isolation has meant that he now finds it difficult to conceive that he could ever attain regular paid employment, let alone work towards the fulfilment of his musical aspiration. For instance, he proposes that "I've got more chance of seeing a pig fly before I ever get a paid job" (Ibid).

Network access is not the only variable that imposes on the pursuit of aspirations. Interviewee testimony suggests the network quality also has an effect. Participants purport that they often feel that the time and effort it takes to participate in environmentally conducive activities reduces their capacity to engage in new arenas. This is because they frequently compare themselves to, and are compared against, other network members. For example, Cameron asserts that his self-efficacy during college was impeded because he had to "work twice as hard" as his peers, many of whom were able to progress without much effort (Cameron). This outcome, he argues, reduced him to "the point of mental exhaustion. It is mentally exhausting to have to work twice as hard as your peers to just prove that you're adequate" (Ibid).

Cameron's experiences indicate that network membership may limit participation in given contexts. This is because Cameron's network did not distribute resources equally. Rather, those who were able to complete tasks with relative ease gained favourable access to resources such as institutional validation, thereby discouraging Cameron from conclusively committing to his course. This experience is mirrored in Lana's interview. Lana asserts that she, as someone who lives with severe LD, gained minimal value from networks embedded in her secondary school. While her peers were taught to consider their transitions into adulthood by exploring norms conducive to workplaces, her inability to articulate herself meant that her aspirations were regularly overlooked. At the time, this inability was not something that she considered to be important, preferring instead to improve her language and speech skills. However, she now feels that this inequality has been detrimental to her capacity to attain employment:

> *Even though they helped me great with my speech and language, and to get a little bit more independence and learn how to eat, learn how to cook, and how to wash, get my English and everything up. Difference is they didn't even teach me what is the way of the world and say for example, "If you want to be a chef, then there's a couple of things you should know, it's going to be fast-paced," or something else.*
>
> (Ibid)

The impact of network membership on the pursuit of aspirations is also noticed when interviewees discuss access to cultural resources. To them, cultural resources attained through networks embedded in schools and workplaces act as indicators of belonging. Cultural resources demonstrate that one's identity corresponds to the norms and processes that inform ontologies in given contexts. For instance, the acquisition of paid work may be contingent on the applicant providing proof of relevant "experience" and "a degree" (Roger). Thus, a perceived inability to acquire these indicators may reduce understanding of one's suitability to "get a job":

> *What annoys me the most, people who get a job are from other countries, university, people who have a degree or experience. I don't have neither of these, because I struggle with the reading and writing part of it.*
>
> (Ibid)

The inability to access cultural resources may, therefore, be an important factor in understanding how individuals conceptualise and pursue future-beliefs. Several interviewees suggest that the importance of qualifications in demonstrating capacity actively discourages them from engaging in socio-economic activities. This is because they, like a large proportion of those living with LD, have not participated in higher education (Office for National Statistics, 2019b). In this way interviewees suggest that they feel estranged from a range of professional and non-professional careers. They are frustrated that their capacity to participate in these arenas is regularly defined by the extent to which they have, or have not, collected objects demarcating their competencies. Accordingly, interviewees argue that requirements for cultural resources constrain their ability to participate in economic activities and pursue aspirations:

> *Because I know that often when people leave school, and particularly special needs schools, they feel that they're inadequate, they don't have enough qualifications, that they're just going to be worthless*

(Cameron)

In this way interviewees often claim that they are pushed into arenas wherein participation is not defined by the capacity to accrue cultural resources. Institutional and/or organisational valorisation of cultural resources explicitly and implicitly drives those living with LD to regularly pursue opportunities that they define as "unskilled" (Daisy). Thus, interviewees suggest that they are not just excluded from professionalised arenas wherein the need for expertise is explicit. Rather, they indicate that they regularly understand themselves to be unsuited to roles such as cashier and stock taker. While the majority may view these roles to be unskilled, interviewees like Daisy argue that they require demonstrable numerical competence. Accordingly, low self-efficacy, born as a product of reduced access to cultural resources, may limit agency beyond those arenas in which conventional notions of skill and expertise are valued.

Network access and the pursuit of aspirations

While many interviewees suggest that the inaccessibility of networks, limited quality of networks and/or the inability to attain cultural resources have hampered their capacity to pursue aspirations, a number emphasise that interactions with supportive networks have empowered them to lead meaningful lives. These interviewees contend that access to networks embedded in the family or within public sector organisations have enabled them to overcome barriers to participation and engage in desirable activities such as specialised college courses and paid employment. In this way these interviewees propose that their experiences of support have encouraged them to conceptualise future-beliefs as constructs founded on the capacity to pursue and realise their goals and ambitions (Hansen and Philo, 2007):

> Thea: *But most of the time I like to do it on my own. I like to try and do things on my own.*
>
> Interviewer: *Do you?*
>
> Thea: *Yeah, I like to try and be a little bit independent.*
>
> Interviewer: *Oh, okay.*
>
> Thea: *But there are things I struggle with that I do need support with.*

In this extract Thea suggests that her aspirations are associated with notions of agency. The perceived necessity to overcome forms of "struggle" and become "independent" demonstrates that, unlike Roger and others, Thea may be capable of playing an active role in defining her place in the world. In this way Thea's proposition that she "like(s) to do it on my own" illustrates that she has a history of navigating environments as a means of achieving her ambitions (Ibid). However, Thea's testimony also indicates that her capacity for agency may be contingent on the availability of willing support. To Thea, willing support acts as a bridge to independence, enabling her to overcome struggles that she might otherwise be incapable of surmounting. This is because her history of receiving support has enabled her to feel confident that others want "to help me" (Ibid).

The positive impact of support is also noticed in Cameron's testimony. As in his experience of college, Cameron's participation in a mainstream secondary school meant that he was regularly exposed to environments that emphasised his perceived atypicality. Perceptions of his deficient cognitive functioning, evidenced in his struggles to engage in "the maths, the Englishes, the sciences", perpetuated notions of his supposed difference and promoted the idea that he may be "left behind" (Cameron). Unlike his college experience, however, the availability of willing support provided by the school encouraged him to feel that he had the capacity to pursue his aspirations. This is because his "Year 11 form tutors, as well as plenty of other teachers, really were absolutely fantastic in helping me get to that goal, to be ready for that transition" (Ibid). Cameron purports that these teachers built a network of support around him. This network was designed to enable him to gain "independence" and "self-responsibility" by providing access to cultural resources such as work-experiences (Ibid):

> *I can take some positives from, particularly from the secondary school experience of having good people around me and having good influences, steering me in the right direction.*
>
> (Ibid)

The harnessing of available support is also important in Charlie's testimony. In his interview, Charlie alludes to the notion that agency may be improved through foundations of support offered by the family. He indicates that his family acted as a form of social organisation akin to that of the school in Cameron's testimony. This is because the mutually trusting and solidaristic nature of both interviewees' relationships with their teachers and family members provided important routes through which to obtain social and cultural resources (Putnam, in Crothers and Lockhart, 2000). Thus, experiences of family members supporting one another are shown to have promoted trust in their ability to cooperate in the distribution of resources such as the provision of time and space to attain voluntary experiences:

> Charlie: *I'll spend some of my time doing that, and the rest of that time would be hopefully still with this group, and I'll be there to help at home whenever that's needed, just like now.*
>
> Interviewer: *And you think that's manageable?*
>
> Charlie: *Yes, I believe it can be manageable. Because I'm not the only person here caring, I've got my dad and my brother here as well, so they can pick up certain things that I might not be able to do all the time.*
>
> (Charlie)

In this extract Charlie highlights the significance of support in enabling him to pursue his aspirations. It shows that support from his family enabled Charlie to spend time away from his care responsibilities and work for a volunteer organisation helping other Learning-Disabled people. Thus, Charlie's understanding of the availability of support enabled him to overcome barriers, such as the requirement to act as a carer, and pursue his long-term aspiration to work as a sports coach for people with disabilities.

This experience is mirrored by Nigel who suggests that the pedagogical approach of a college tutor did not enable him to feel capable of gaining the qualifications needed to attain a paid job in healthcare. For example, he proposes that his tutor "didn't really have much time for you": a condition that reduced his capacity to ask for help and, ultimately, comprehend pertinent information (Nigel). As such, Nigel alludes to the importance of conceptualisations of temporality in affecting his capacity to participate in arenas such as classrooms. The discrepancy between Nigel's slower pace of learning and the brisk tempo of his tutor suggests that competing temporal priorities promoted an inaccessible learning environment. Thus, Nigel accessed resources embedded in his familial network as a means of overcoming barriers to learning and gaining relevant qualifications:

> Nigel: *...it meant a lot of extra studying. I used to study at home as well, because a lot of it I couldn't pick up in the lessons, so I'd be doing a lot at home as well.*
>
> Interviewer: *Why couldn't you pick it up in the lessons?*
>
> Nigel: *Because it wasn't really made easy to understand. And because I wanted to pursue it, there's some days I'd go to college from nine 'til, say, four, and then I'd be studying at home until about nine o'clock at night.*
>
> Interviewer: *Wow.*

> Nigel: *Just because I wanted to be able to achieve the qualification, and I thought that was the only way that I was going to be able to do it.*

In this extract Nigel demonstrates that he was able to use his network to "study at home" (Ibid). In doing this, Nigel illustrates that his "close" relationships with his parents enabled him to expect that he could use his family home as an arena in which he could learn at a pace that suited him (Ibid). Accordingly, Nigel's capacity to pursue his aspirations was informed by his seemingly unconditional access to resources of support provided within his familial network.

Cameron, Charlie and Nigel's experiences indicate that access to networks underpinned by values of trust may be important in promoting agency. This is because the bonds between members of their respective networks were sufficiently strong as to (re)produce expectations and obligations regarding supporting behaviours (Giesbers et al, 2022, p.2). For example, Charlie and Nigel both demonstrate that their families' respective histories of supportive behaviour contributed to the development of expectations that they would be supported. These beliefs, consequently, enabled both interviewees to overcome barriers to participation and pursue involvement in desired activities. Similarly, Cameron indicates that his experience of developing close relationships with specific teachers over time enabled him to confidently participate in activities associated with the workplace:

> *He'd have those chats with me as well, and sometimes I think when exam season ended, I would help out in his PE lessons, which was a real learning experience for me because I got to be in a position of the teacher helping out on a lesson and leading a warm-up.*
>
> (Cameron)

It is, therefore, possible to suggest that access to supportive networks may enable those living with LD to take part, and potentially succeed, in contexts such as schools, volunteer organisations and workplaces. This is because networks may provide access to otherwise inaccessible resources such as exposure to contextually significant norms, the provision of cultural knowledge and experiences or, indeed, the endowment of assets such as a serene location in which to revise. These resources may, in turn, be harnessed as routes through which to access further contexts such as colleges and workplaces.

Implications for policy and practice

In this chapter, the research introduces an embodied approach to the exploration of LD. Proponents of this approach assert that disabled people, amongst other population groups, negotiate between biological and social backdrops as a means of understanding how to act within given contexts. As such, the application of this approach enables researchers to study variations in how individuals with disabilities interact with and respond to environments such as schools, colleges and workplaces. For example, the research demonstrates that individuals living with LD and sensory impairment may embody forms of resistance within contexts in which their sight loss is perceived to be inherently disabling. Equally, it suggests that interactions between the governance of a residential care home and the perceived vulnerability of individuals with LD may promote embodiment characterised by alienation.

In applying an embodied approach to the study of LD, the research explores how individuals cope with and participate in their surroundings. The research, thus, demonstrates that individuals living with LD often require access to supportive networks to enable them to participate in given contexts and pursue their aspirations. Equally, it suggests that participation may be promoted when individuals attain cultural resources that demarcate capacity and membership of a sub-culture or strata. This is because resources, such as access to work experiences, have enabled individuals to pursue culturally specific aspirations like sports coaching.

By exploring how individuals cope with and participate in given contexts, the research introduces the following recommendations for Health and Social care policy and practice:

- Organisations across the public, private and third sector should engage with notions of embodiment as a means of understanding the inherent complexity of LD. In this way, organisations may comprehend that the actions and behaviours of population members are products of negotiations between their lived bodies and the contexts in which they are operating. Thus, the application of an embodied approach gives agency to those who live with LD by acknowledging their capacity to (re)interpret space. For example, it enables organisations and institutions to understand how and why individuals cope with or resist aspects of their socio-economic contexts and, consequently, tailor mechanisms of support to address these findings.
- Public sector organisations and institutions should promote meaningful stakeholder networks grounded by norms of trust and reciprocity. This outcome can be achieved by replicating the normative and procedural characteristics of networks, wherein participation and access to resources are structured fairly. Thus, networks should not mirror those power relations often found in public sector organisations. After all, it is well established that public sector organisations, both explicitly and implicitly, lionise the power of providers at the expense of citizens (Bevir, 2010). Rather, public sector organisations should seek to mirror established networks in which members work together in 'pursuit of members' perceived shared interests' and pursue collective action (Scott and Marshall, 2009, p.96).[1] In doing this, individuals who live with LD and do not have strong familial or community ties may be supported to increase their self-efficacy and participate in new contexts.
- Public sector organisations should play a proactive role in enabling individuals with LD to attain cultural resources. While it is difficult to ask members of this population to take part in established processes that measure competency such as A-level or degree-level exams, it may be possible to promote alternative and inclusive means through which to assess and demonstrate skills. For example, schools, colleges and Local Authorities could provide opportunities to access cultural resources that demarcate a person's ability to travel independently, speak to members of the public and/or proficiently use a computer. These resources should be recognised by employers and voluntary organisations as demarcations of capacity and, therefore, act as means through which individuals attain further economic and social capital. This may be achieved through the provision of inclusive qualifications that delineate skills and competencies, demonstrated via the use of portfolios such as those provided by the Naturally Talented Me platform.[2]
- Public sector organisations and institutions ranging from schools and colleges to health and social care organisations should conceive of individual self-efficacy as a construct in which they can play a major role.

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[1] These types of networks may be noticed when analysing varieties of Co-Production in the UK and abroad. For example, programmes such as Local Area Coordination may be understood as important normative and procedural examples of how networks of support should operate. For more information of varieties of Co-Production, see NESTA's guide to Co-Production at https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/right_here_right_now.pdf

[2] For more information on the Naturally Talented Me platform, see https://naturallytalentedme.co.uk/

Organisations and institutions should, therefore, seek to commit to long-term interventions in the lives of those living with LD. In this way public sector organisations may mitigate for the many complex issues faced by those who experience poor or inadequate access to networks embedded in families and the education system. The shape and constitution of these interventions should be informed by the everyday lives of individuals, meaning that every intervention may be subtly, or indeed substantially, different. For example, social services may consider the home lives of students who are failing to display a passion for, or at least an interest in, their post-transition futures. In doing this, practitioners may collaborate with individuals to explore the diversity of their future-beliefs and manifest plans through which to expose them to appropriate norms, knowledge and equipment.[3] This type of intervention would require that Local Authorities commission, design and deliver services based on outcomes, rather than the numbers of people using services. In this way services may be incentivised to work with individuals to realise their goals.

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[3] This type of collaborative working is apparent in multiple examples of Co-Delivery wherein operational actors, working for public sector organisations, interact with service users to interweave their respective objectives and collaboratively develop plans aimed at improving service delivery. For examples, see cases such as Nurse Family Partnerships and the Keyring Scheme described in Boyle, D. and Harris, M., 2009. The challenge of co-production. *London*: *new economics foundation*, *56*, p.18. and, Needham, C. and Carr, S., 2009. *Co-production*: *an emerging evidence base for adult social care transformation*. Social Care Institute for Excellence

Chapter 2:

Pathways to Employment: the family, education and the pursuit of aspirations

In the following chapter, notions of embodiment are employed to examine experiences of the family and education system. The research, thus, explores how families and schools impose on the pursuit of aspirations by examining how these bodies interact with the corporeal realities of participants. From this, the research conceptualises families as networks from which work-related norms, such as values of care, and cultural resources may be promoted. Furthermore, the research depicts the education system's commitment to academic rigour and evaluation as a factor in promoting student alienation, constraining their capacity to participate in learning and achieve necessary qualifications. Finally, the research contends that schools may develop strong and empowering networks involving teachers and students, thereby locating notions of success and achievement within the school gates.

Families and the transference of norms

The extent of access to and the quality of familial networks affect how people with LD conceptualise and pursue aspirations. Extant literature suggests that families who have the capital and desire to inspire relatives to follow their dreams regularly enable greater socio-economic agency (Byun, Meece, Irvin and Hutchins, 2012). Their capacity to provide support, share knowledge and increase exposure to novel experiences may encourage relatives to conceptualise and pursue aspirations and take part in activities such as higher education and paid work (Harper and Griffin, 2010). As such, supportive familial networks may be understood as important resources in enabling individuals to lead meaningful lives.

This supposition is evidenced in interviewee testimony. Interviewees describe how enduring familial networks regularly act as foundations for the pursuit of their aspirations. For example, they suggest that families act as catalysts for an emergent understanding of norms that enable them to access workplaces:

> *Because I was the only disabled member of my family, but I wasn't raised to be pampered, well I was the oldest daughter, oldest grandchild, but when younger siblings and younger cousins came along, I was brought up to rough and tumble with the best and have a laugh and have a giggle, and I guess because of that, because I wasn't pampered, it just stemmed from there really.*
>
> (Daisy)

Participants like Daisy, who were raised in close-knit families, highlight that they were often responsible for the care of relatives. Daisy suggests that her familial status as the "oldest daughter" meant that she was frequently asked to support a non-disabled sibling (Ibid). This, Daisy suggests, enabled her to manifest an identity defined by notions of responsibility and founded on ideals of care. Moreover, she purports that her formative exposure to this nurturing milieu inspired her to pursue career opportunities related to the provision of care:

> *I explained to the careers advisor why I wasn't, and I pointed to my brother and said he sort of inspired me.*
>
> (Ibid)

This extract indicates that the transference of norms within familial networks enables individuals to define their future-beliefs. In this sense familial networks may act as bridges to external worlds: teaching members to regard norms both valorised within their network and associated with a given career. For example, Daisy suggests that familial exposure to norms of care and support encouraged her to engage in a career path extending from the experience of looking after her brother to her contemporary ambition to regularly take care of children. This journey has, consequently, enabled Daisy to pursue a career in childcare and confidently take on roles as a childminder and nursery assistant.

Nurturing familial networks are also important in promoting access to cultural resources. Interviewees highlight the value of cultural resources such as the provision of knowledge delineating productive routes through which to pursue aspirations. For example, the provision of constructive guidance relating to relevant "next steps" in attaining paid employment is shown to enable younger relatives to begin their career journeys (Cameron). Cameron states that his parents' "advice" and "guidance" enabled him to focus on a career pathway, sports coaching, and apply for and attain work-experience in related professional environments (Ibid). Similarly, Daisy explains that constructive guidance provided by a family member encouraged her to attain and pursue work-experience from a relatively formative period in her development. She, thus, suggests that familial support enabled her to understand how to build on her caring values and attain a career in childcare:

> *So mum set me out with a little babysitting job with some of the community friends, and so if I wasn't babysitting in the evenings or the person wasn't going out she didn't want to turn me away, she'd say to me, "oh, do you feel able to come and get my child and walk him to school because I've got to do this, this, and this?" and I said, "of course, no problem"*
>
> (Daisy)

Cultural resources may also be accessed through exposure to specialist equipment. For example, Alfie asserts that formative experiences of observing his father using sound engineering and recording equipment promoted an interest in pursuing related career pathways. This act of observation, Alife suggests, inspired him to learn more about the role and, subsequently, dedicate significant portions of his early-adult life towards the achievement of this aspiration. In this way, formative exposure to relevant equipment may have promoted an understanding of a given career pathway:

> *Yeah, I was quite young. I looked at it and went, 'Sounds interesting'. At this point I didn't even know that you could do a bit more than this. I was very interested in it. Obviously, I wasn't allowed to touch it. After that, after a while, I bought my own…. I didn't buy it myself, but my dad had spare equipment and I thought I might as well use it. So, I used it for a bit and then I had that for a few years and then I started upgrading.*
>
> (Alfie)

However, familial networks are not always defined by norms of care and/or the provision of cultural resources. Analysis of interviewee testimony shows that family members often emphasise the supposed vulnerability of their relatives and, thus, critique their ambitions. This tendency is exemplified in the way that families have discouraged relatives from learning to drive by stating that they "don't think you'll be able to get the car" and "that will be your struggle, is actually getting the licence" (Thea). Furthermore, it is demonstrated when families encourage relatives to pursue careers in which they will not require significant levels of in-work support:

> Thea: *Then I used to work in retail, but I wouldn't go back into retail because you don't get paid much.*
>
> Interviewer: *No.*
>
> Thea: *The money's not great.*
>
> Interviewer: *No.*
>
> Thea: *Even though my mums like I should go back into it because it's the only thing I can do on my own really.*

The promotion of pro-safety norms designed to temper ambitions may be attributed to the familial desire to protect "vulnerable" relatives (Ibid). As discussed, individuals living with disabilities experience contexts differently due to the interrelationship between the corporeality of their bodies and the situated variables to which they are, and have been, exposed. Thus, activities ranging from learning to drive to obtaining paid "admin work or library work" are often intrinsically challenging for those who struggle to concentrate and/or are easily overwhelmed (Ibid). Equally, the aspiration to pursue employment that does not involve "working outside on the trolleys" may be hindered by difficulties in comprehending information (Reginald). For instance, Reginald suggests that an inability to quickly process information pertaining to professional responsibilities has meant that he has spurned opportunities to work as a cashier, amongst other roles.

In this way familial attempts to shield relatives from the normative and procedural realities of given contexts may be grounded by a desire to protect them from distress. By discouraging relatives from participating in difficult and complex activities, family members may feel that they are helping them to avoid frustrations and maintain existing levels of self-efficacy. Interviewees like Thea and Reginald, who upon experiencing difficulties in their respective workplaces found that they, in turn, were less confident in their capacity to pursue their aspirations, underwent reductions in their self-efficacy and experienced feelings of purposelessness. Accordingly, families may encourage relatives to eschew seemingly unrealistic aspirations and, instead, practice activities considered to be "safe" (Reginald).

Nevertheless, interviewees who suggest that their career pathways have been informed by pro-safety norms often indicate that they would rather pursue more demanding aspirations. Thea articulates that she has gained little job satisfaction from roles that family members perceive to be safe. In doing this she highlights the monotony of a previous retail assistant role, stating that "I did fitting rooms, helping customers with any questions or queries they had and putting stuff out on the shop floor like homeware and clothes. It was mostly doing clothes I was putting out" (Thea). As such, Thea argues that "it doesn't really interest me, working in retail", thereby indicating that her family's caution stifled her capacity to pursue compelling employment (Ibid). Thus, while the valorisation of safety norms may protect individuals living with LD from experiencing diminished self-efficacy, it is apparent that cautious familial networks may also deny them opportunities to participate in roles from which they attain purpose.

In demonstrating the value of norms and providing access to cultural resources, familial networks may enable members to discover, define and pursue their future aspirations. For example, familial networks are shown to have shared caring norms that encourage members to develop and pursue related career goals. However, interviewees also propose that the sharing of norms does not inevitably lead to the conceptualisation and pursuit of aspirations. It is argued that familial networks often promote pro-safety norms that constrain aspiration development and diminish capacity to identify potentially meaningful career opportunities. Nevertheless, analysis shows that familial units are not the only locations from which aspirations are conceptualised. Interviewees argue that educational institutions play a similar role in enabling individuals living with LD to develop and pursue future-beliefs.

School experiences and alienation

> *You were sort of punished a little bit. I can remember a story of a teacher giving out all these books to all the students in the class, and I wasn't given one because she said there was no point because I couldn't read it.*
>
> (Nigel)

Interviewees argue that opportunities for learning that promote understanding of the self and inform future-beliefs are affected by how schools, and those who work in them, understand, empathise with and accommodate for their students. In doing this, interviewees purport that educational opportunities for students living with LD are often constrained by the prevalence of reified notions of their capability, as well as incontestable conceptualisations of academic norms and processes. For example, they propose that education is often inhibited by neglect resulting from the incompatibility of the curriculum, institutional commitment to assessments and the provision of limited work-experiences, amongst other factors. Moreover, interviewees contend that these incongruities limit capacity to conceptualise and pursue aspirations beyond the school gates.

Limited notions of capacity have a damaging effect on the experiences of students living with LD. These notions impose on how teachers interact with their students, basing pedagogical practices on the belief that LD students cannot cope with the rigours of the classroom (Goodfellow, 2012). As shown in the preceding quote, Nigel describes how limited perceptions of his identity meant that he was denied access to textbooks while attending secondary school. He purports that his teacher saw "no point" in handing him the material as it was assumed that he "couldn't read" (Nigel). As such, Nigel contends that his disabled identity marked him out as being undeserving of learning. Moreover, he indicates that he was viewed to be an 'other' in respect of how his educators and classmates perceived his capability (Goodfellow, 2012 pp.74-75).

In suggesting this, Nigel proposes that he was exposed to a different learning environment in comparison to his peers. He argues that the actions of his teachers informed perceptions of his difference: a supposition evidenced by his admission that he was singled out by peers who regularly took "the mickey" (Ibid). In this way, Nigel was not able to harness the many opportunities for exploration and discovery that were available to his classmates. Instead of spending his classroom time developing post-school ambitions, Nigel was left to his own devices. He asserts that he was cut adrift from the rest of his peer group due to the supposed limitations of his disabled identity. This meant that Nigel was left to discover his passion for healthcare provision within his familial network.

Analysis of Charlie's testimony depicts similar shortcomings. Charlie argues that his primary school reduced his access to in-school support due to his limited capacity to engage in "basic maths and English type things" (Charlie). This, he suggests, resulted in him being removed from his classroom and separated from his peers:

> *There really wasn't a great deal of help. Or we couldn't find it anyway. Thankfully, some of the teachers there were really understanding. One of them actually, out of protest, because she said, 'He needs help and we need to get him help', but nothing was happening so, she, out of protest, for a while she refused to teach me out of protest to try and get me some help.*
>
> (Charlie)

As in Nigel's experience, Charlie's testimony shows how institutional neglect may produce deviations in experiences of education. Charlie's suggestion that he did not receive adequate support to take part in primary school classes indicates that his interests were disregarded by figures of institutional authority. Moreover, the notion that this institutional disregard led to a teacher refusing "to teach me out of protest" reveals that Charlie's scholastic attainment was even overlooked by those who he believed to be on his side (Ibid). In this way Charlie, like Nigel, may be perceived to have been left to reside in an institutional space separate to that of his peers. For example, Charlie explains that he was not taught basic academic skills like spelling or writing. Furthermore, he reveals that this disadvantage has contributed to enduring anxieties about his ability to pursue activities requiring literacy.

However, alienation from education is not only promoted through the potentially discriminatory actions of teachers.

Interviewees also argue that a school's curriculum can, in and of itself, prejudice the attainment of students living with LD. It is suggested that the academic focus of many schools often serves to alienate children with LD, promoting the notion that life-chances and opportunities may only be realised through scholastic attainment:

> *Because I know the education system is very one-dimensional. It accommodates one particular skillset and that is academic people. It's people who are good at the maths, the englishes, the science. Which is absolutely great, don't get me wrong. But there's people out there that are being left behind, and there are now people who are maybe good at engineering, drama, PE.*
>
> (Cameron)

As demonstrated in the preceding extract, the (re)production of "one-dimensional" notions of attainment may serve to reify the subordinate institutional position of students living with LD (Ibid). Cameron argues that the valorisation of conventionally academic disciplines in primary and secondary schools disadvantages those who do not immediately have the "skillset" to appreciate complex and often abstract information (Ibid). In doing this he purports that schools are often indifferent to the diversity of their students' capabilities and passions and, instead, adhere to the system-wide requirement to prioritise the academic. These students are, therefore, at risk of being "left behind" because their skills and interests are perceived to be ancillary:

> *Schools don't really embrace that, they focus mainly on the results, not the well-being of the student and that is why people of LD and autism may struggle.*
>
> (Cameron)

This proposition is also evidenced in the way that Cameron discusses examinations. In his interview, Cameron portrays examinations as gateways to preferred futures founded on assessments of scholarly intellect and capability. He indicates that examinations promote tension between idealised conceptualisations of one's post-school future and the requirement to adhere to established metrics of academic success. For example, Cameron reveals that his post-school aspiration to be a sports coach was inhibited by the apparent necessity to do well in his exams and, subsequently, attend college.

This tension, Cameron purports, resulted in a temporary disinclination to pursue his aspirations. Cameron emphasises that tensions between the pursuit of his aspirations and the prospect of participating in English, Mathematics and Science assessments promoted a sense that his identity was inconsistent with the attainment of his career goals. As such, Cameron was implicitly separated from the act of in-school learning. In forcing him to accede to the pursuit of an end-goal that was, in his perspective, complex and inaccessible, Cameron was made to feel that there was little point in engaging with the majority of his school's syllabus. Thus, he admits that he spent much of his class time "bored" and "play(ing) up":

> *I'm quite a practical person, so at times I would probably maybe play up a little in lessons, because I was just bored of just sitting there, just doing worksheet after worksheet after worksheet. And that was something that just bored me.*
>
> (Ibid)

The dialectic between the requirement to accede to mainstream metrics of success and the supposition that people with LD may find these obligations alienating is also apparent in Daisy's testimony. She argues that students living with LD often understand that they will not thrive within education yet are forced to oblige to its rigours by those who hold institutional power. In doing this she proposes that those living with LD are often left behind by a school system that only cares about scholastic attainment. Daisy contends that these systems are often, in and of themselves, exclusionary as when people with LD fail to prosper, or even take part, in examinations they are understood to be failures. This left behind group are then frequently compelled to pursue a narrow range of post-school opportunities that bear no relation to their respective aspirations:

> *Because of my Learning Difficulties I wasn't going to achieve well at GCSEs, she said, "but with your skills and lack of knowledge you'll be better off sitting behind Tesco's and working on a checkout"*
>
> (Daisy)

Finally, interviewees propose that educational alienation may be promoted through the provision of work-experiences. While some describe school facilitated work-experience as enabling them to learn "what it's like to have a job" (Thea), many others stress that the types of experiences offered were informed by institutional perceptions of their capability. For example, Bob indicates that limited notions of what he could and could not do affected the types of formative work-experiences to which he was exposed:

> *We had to work with the caretaker in our last year and we worked on the farm. So, we had the caretaker who cleaned the school, cleaned the toilets and all that. And on the farm, we would pick potatoes and we never had animals, but we had to do hardcourt, and all that.*
>
> (Bob)

Bob's supposition that he "had to work" in certain types of employment demonstrates the pervasiveness of pre-existing conceptions regarding the capacity of people living with LD (Ibid). While these experiences may have been useful, and the roles even enjoyable, the extract suggests that Bob was made to engage in forms of labour over which he had little control. Bob indicates that he was not provided with opportunities to consider types of work beyond those that his school offered to him. Moreover, his testimony suggests that decisions regarding suitable forms of work-experience were founded on notions of what was socially and economically appropriate for someone living with LD. In this way Bob is depicted as having been powerless to consider and conceptualise career aspirations while attending school.

This experience is mirrored in Daisy's testimony. As discussed, Daisy suggests that pre-existing perceptions regarding appropriate work roles for people living with LD meant that her post-school ambitions were frequently ignored. She purports that her schooling did not enable her to adequately understand opportunities for a post-education career beyond that of working in "Tesco's" and, instead, left her feeling "stifled" (Daisy). Similarly, Lana argues that limited institutional notions regarding the capacity of people with LD in the workplace resulted in the promotion of extremely narrow forms of work-experience. Like Bob and Daisy, Lana suggests that she was pushed to engage in a type of work in which she had little interest:

> *They could have given me the choice and the options to say if you want to be a chef, or you want to be something else, all those related experiences. But they got back to me, and they say, "We don't have room for this, but you can go to Morrisons and supermarkets."*
>
> (Lana)

The promotion of "Morrisons and supermarkets" as realistic forms of work-experience suggests that educational institutions may implicitly adhere to limited definitions of LD (Ibid). Schools are depicted as viewing the person, not as a complex organism in need of academic, social and economic support, but as a being defined by the supposed constraints of his or her biology. In the minds of interviewees, this delineation promotes a sense that their dreams are less important than considerations such as "health and safety rules" (Ibid). They perceive that the institutions of which they are a part consider them to be devoid of the necessary functionality to cope with the complexities of their ideal workplace environments. Accordingly, Interviewees like Lana describe school facilitated work experience as a wasted opportunity that did not provide an understanding of "what is the real world" (Ibid).

This evidence suggests that explicit and implicit forms of exclusion diminish experiences of education for people with LD. In having no affiliation with the school system, little connection to the syllabus and/or the act of being assessed and participating in constrained forms of work-experience, students living with LD may struggle to perceive of educational institutions as environments in which they may be supported to pursue their aspirations. As such, participants indicate that their respective experiences of in-school marginalisation regularly promoted an understanding of education as explicitly and implicitly exclusionary. Thus, interviewees frequently sought to separate their experiences of education from the attainment of their post-school ambitions: preferring instead to pursue their goals outside of the school gates.

In-school networks and the transference of norms

While many interviewees highlight that they lacked power when attending school, others propose that access to caring and nurturing teaching environments enabled them to increase their confidence and pursue aspirations. As described, school systems that limit learning opportunities and define appropriate pursuits often promote conceptions of the self as antithetical to aspiration and success. In reifying academic primacy, insisting on testing and advancing restricted forms of work-experience, schools may encourage students living with LD to consider education to be inherently alien. These students may, therefore, view schools as environments to overcome rather than places in which to develop future opportunities. Accordingly, interviewees frequently regard schools as subordinate to familial networks in respect of how they are empowered to their pursue aspirations. However, several interviewees purport that school systems may mirror supportive familial networks. As discussed, empowering networks enable individuals living with LD to increase self-efficacy. This is because they ideally expose members to individualised and reliable forms of support, act as systems in which environmentally appropriate norms are shared and provide access to cultural resources. While many interviewees contend that these networks are regularly found in the home, others share experiences of public institutions in which actors have worked together to build trust and share resources. This proposition is demonstrated in Cameron's testimony. He shows how a network of teachers and auxiliary staff members, including therapists, enabled him to pursue his coaching ambition by highlighting culturally pertinent norms such as empathy and composure: emphasising their value through role playing activities and examples of best practice. Equally, it is supported by Tamsyn who shows that trust in her drama teacher's capacity to provide an accommodating and tolerant learning environment enabled her to gain self-confidence:

> *He would teach things slowly to me, so I can understand. He had patience. He wouldn't think that 'because she hasn't got it, I'll give up'.*
>
> (Tamsyn)

These experiences contrast with those discussed in previous sections. Unlike the experiences of Daisy, Bob, Lana and others, Cameron's and Tamsyn's testimonies demonstrate that access to networks of support promotes self-efficacy within sub-cultural milieus. Tamsyn's self-efficacy grew because of relationships with teachers who sought to understand and accommodate for her identity. Although limited to a few hours a week, this supportive environment enabled Tamsyn to feel that she had found a space in which she belonged. The welcoming nature of her class empowered her to engage in activities about which she had previously been unaware and take on challenges that she had hitherto thought to be complex. Accordingly, Tamsyn indicates that the supportive character of her network enhanced her capacity to pursue activities relating to drama, such as attending “performing arts college” and getting “the part of Beauty in Beauty and the Beast” (Tamsyn).

Similarly, Cameron’s confidence in his capacity to pursue coaching improved through his access to supportive individuals who shared sub-cultural knowledge and work-experiences. This transference of resources may be interpreted as akin to that of a traditional master-apprentice relationship, wherein the latter actor receives dedicated specialist support to promote content-specific learning:

> *I would help out in his PE lessons, which was a real learning experience for me because I got to be in a position of the teacher helping out on a lesson and leading a warm-up, and he prepared me and helped me with the session plan actually as well.*
>
> (Cameron)

Thus, while Cameron and Tamsyn both highlight that they have struggled to cope with other aspects of their lives, their testimonies indicate that the pursuit of aspirations may be informed by emerging confidence gained through access to culturally situated networks.

Similar experiences are noticed in Roger’s testimony. While Roger emphasises that he is frustrated with his social life and residential status, he suggests that he has had productive interactions with his college tutors. This, he asserts, is because they altered their pedagogical approaches to suit his desire for practical learning. This accommodative outcome, subsequently, enabled Roger to build his understanding of “valeting” as a career, get his “own car cleaning kit” and begin earning “five pounds doing the cars for my carers” (Roger).

Such an outcome contrasts with alternative facets of Roger’s life. As discussed, Roger’s social world is defined by explicit and implicit limitations. His time spent living in a care home and his perceived inability to pursue professional goals, for example, has meant that he often feels restricted. However, Roger’s recent history of meaningful interactions with staff at a local college has enabled members of his in-school network to develop a purposeful teaching plan that pertains to his interests. As such, he indicates that he often conceives of staff members as partners who work with him to ensure that he receives a vocational education. Accordingly, his testimony indicates that school systems may, in circumstances in which staff-student relationships are defined by shared access to resources, promote the pursuit of employment.

Cameron’s, Tamsyn’s and Roger’s experiences suggest that they participated in networks from which they accessed support and attained cultural resources. While other aspects of their lives are characterised by perceived impotence, these interviewees found that their respective learning experiences enabled them to access networks in which their interests and needs were recognised and acted upon. Despite their challenging home situations or, indeed, difficult experiences during other phases of their education, Cameron, Tamsyn and Roger were able to harness mechanisms of support obtained through interactions with caring and empathetic staff and advance on their perceived interests. This evidence suggests that empowering institutional networks may, in circumstances wherein network resources are distributed evenly, promote the capacity to conceptualise and pursue aspirations.

Implications for policy and practice

In this chapter, the research contends that individuals who can access and harness supportive networks embedded in the home or public institutions may cope with interactions between social phenomena and their disabilities and participate in given contexts. Thus, individuals who are capable of accessing strong familial networks, wherein membership resources are distributed evenly, are likely to experience greater capacity to conceptualise and pursue aspirations. This outcome may be a product of increased self-efficacy caused by the transference of norms between members, the sharing of equipment and instruments and/or the provision of support.

Equally, access to strong networks originating in schools promotes capacity to engage in meaningful post-education roles. Students living with LD who are exposed to school-based networks in which resources are distributed evenly are empowered to shape their educational experiences in ways that reflect their interests. This outcome is apparent when students are provided with content-specific learning, exposed to accommodating learning environments or when decision-making power is shared as a means of enabling students to define their own learning objectives.

In exploring how families and educational institutions enable individuals to pursue aspirations, the research presents the following recommendations for policy and practice:

- Public sector and community organisations should collaborate with families to both understand the goals of relatives living with LD and promote norms that are pertinent to these aspirations. This type of inter-organisational collaboration is particularly important during a child's transition. At this stage, individuals are frequently dislocated from assets embedded in communities due to the requirement to leave their secondary school and stop using children's social care services (Young-Southward, Cooper and Philo, 2017). Thus, the promotion of norms pertinent to given career pathways and knowledge of routes through which to realise aspirations may be significant in empowering individuals to pursue future-beliefs within and beyond the transition period. This intervention would, therefore, go beyond existing transition plans by viewing aspirations as primary constructs through which to guide the provision of support before, during and after the transition period.[1] To achieve this, stakeholders should work with families to produce person-centred outputs, such as the promotion of norms of care, creativity, patience or empathy, that match given aspiration profiles.
- Public organisations such as libraries, community groups and local private sector organisations should collaborate with families to provide cultural resources that build understanding of given contexts. For example, community or private sector organisations with expertise relating to music production or drama, amongst other areas, should offer learning-based groups wherein individuals living with LD are exposed to cultural rituals and artefacts via the provision of expert tuition.[2] Equally, individuals from within these types of organisations should offer their services through processes of time-banking, wherein young people engage with practitioners from relevant industries and/or assets within communities to build their skills and capabilities.[3]

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[1] It is apparent that aspirations are already used as variables through which to construct transition plans. However, it is also clear that interviewees, as well as much of the extant literature, conceive of transition plans as providing citizens with limited decision-making powers. Thus, transition plans that focus on aspirations may incentivise organisations to view transition periods as opportunities to co-design and realise shared objectives, thereby placing the individual, as well as their family members and carers, at the centre of the decision-making process.

[2] See the Risky Business drama group in Kent for an example of how local community groups may be employed as routes through which cultural knowledge and expertise are distributed: https://www.bemix.org/Pages/Category/types-of-support

[3] Time banks have a long, if relatively informal, history in the UK. From the 1990's to the present day, myriad time banks have emerged as a means of coping with inconsistent access to services, particularly forms of social care. These localised and devolved organisations enable members of

- Schools and Local Authorities should mitigate for the potential alienation of students by locating notions of aspiration and success within the education system. Interviewees regularly highlight experiences of dislocation when attending school. They express that they often felt atypical in comparison to their peers: an outcome (re)produced via exposure to an esoteric and impenetrable academic syllabus, obligations to participate in examinations and limited work experiences. To attend to this aim, practitioners should promote a diversity of learning opportunities and school facilitated work experiences. These opportunities and experiences may be co-produced by individuals living with LD and educators as a means of ensuring that they are relevant to the interests and aspirations of students. This collaborative exercise may be viewed to mirror that of the limited agency offered to students attending 6th form colleges and universities, all of whom are provided with opportunities to reflect on their aspirations and decide whether to take part in future written examinations and/or practical assessments.

- Schools should promote empowering in-school networks. Interviewees frequently describe having lived parallel lives when attending school and/or college. They suggest that many of their in-school activities and interactions were characterised by perceptions of their limited ability and apparent atypicality: reducing their desire to engage in and pursue given subjects and aspirations. However, various interviewees suggest that these experiences were tempered by reciprocal exchanges with operational staff members. These reciprocal moments enabled students to develop a common sense of belonging alongside staff members who recognised their potential and nurtured their nascent interests. In this way networks of supportive staff members can empower students to both develop and pursue their burgeoning aspirations. Thus, schools should seek to formalise what have previously been informal and de-facto networks of support by mirroring the empowering and content-specific approaches to education highlighted by interviewees. Accordingly, schools should seek to empower and incentivise staff members to play key roles in developing the content-specific attainment and aspirations of students outside of existing contact hours. This may be realised through opportunities for older students, who have a keen and demonstrable interest in a given subject, to shadow or support staff undertaking relevant activities. Equally, it may be achieved via opportunities to co-design their academic objectives, beyond those relating to assessments, as well as the drivers through which their goals may be achieved.

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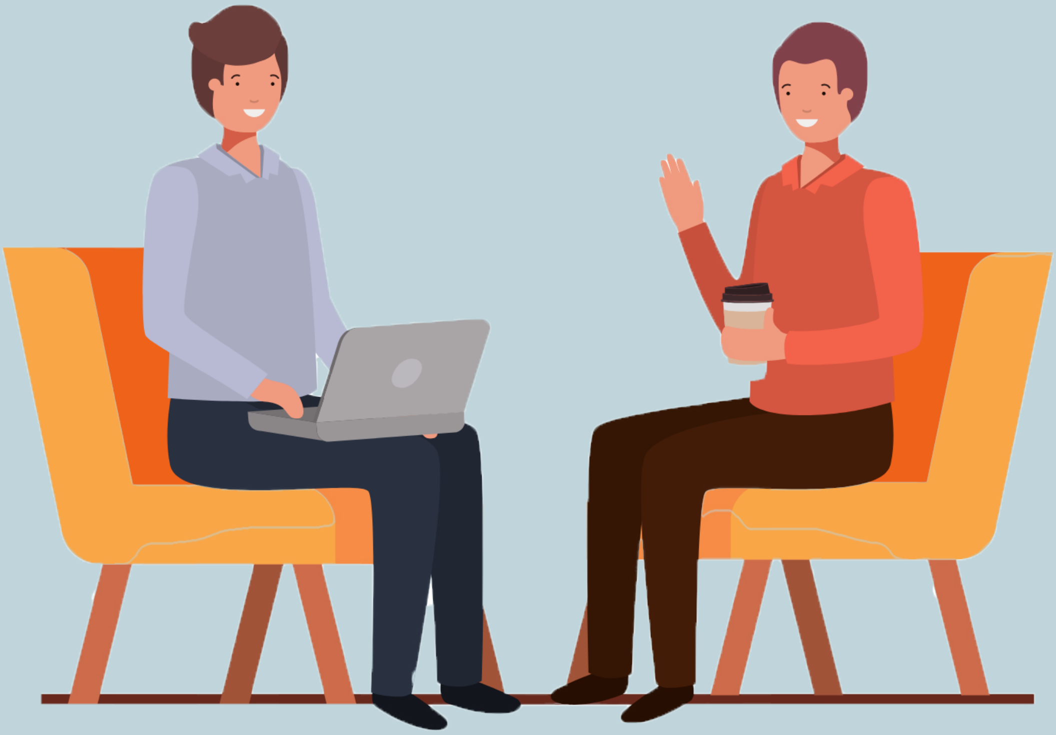
communities ‘to exchange services, the value of which is defined by the amount of time required’ to provide requisite care or support (Arcidiacono in Cruz, Ganga and Whalen, 2018, p.23)

Chapter 3:

The World of Work: aspiration, status and organisational culture



In this chapter the research builds on previous analysis regarding the embodied identities of individuals living with LD and the routes through which members of this population conceptualise and pursue aspirations. As such, aspirations are defined as explicit, or indeed implicit, products of situated experiences; developing from the biological and social conditions from and within which interviewees originate and operate. After this, the research turns to experiences of the workplace and investigates how individuals living with LD conceptualise types of employment and cope with and respond to organisational cultures. In doing this, experiences of work are shown to be affected by the search for agency and organisational priorities relating to notions of time. Thus, the research ends with a discussion exploring how the promotion of in-work networks mitigates for the impact of these conditions, stating that relational associations within organisations foster employee development.

Conceptualising aspiration for people living with LD

Analysis suggests that aspirations emerge from interpretive and iterative processes in which individuals alter their expectations based on interactions between themselves and their surroundings. Experiences at home, interacting with family members and at school may, therefore, inform the development of future-beliefs: enabling individuals with Learning Disabilities (LD) to (re)construct their aspirations through exposure to norms, activities, equipment and support. Previous chapters of this report contend that experiences of familial units in which norms are valorised, work-experiences are promoted and/or specialist equipment is supplied influences ideation regarding appropriate future roles and affects capacity to work towards given objectives. Equally, prior analysis asserts that school experiences inform future-beliefs. Content-specific learning provided by networks of committed staff members, the provision of patient and empathetic learning environments and the promotion of student decision-making power may enable students to conceptualise future-beliefs and work towards aspirations.

These propositions suggest that notions of aspiration differ depending on the lived understanding of individuals (Sirin et al, 2004). For example, the role of the sports coach may be viewed to inhabit several functions. To Cameron, a coach is an innovator and father-figure who provides creative and thorough instructions to others:

> *I've coached all varieties, but I think the main thing from football coaching you can take for example, is that you're not just a coach, you're a father-figure, you're an innovator. You're practically that person that they will go to in that time-period.*
>
> (Cameron)

As discussed, Cameron's desire to become a coach derives from his school experiences. His membership of a network of committed teachers and staff members who taught him to value empathy, exposed him to norms of trust and patience and provided explicit opportunities for work-experience, enabled him to conceptualise coaching as a caring and creative profession. This experience is mirrored in Charlie's testimony. Charlie's history of receiving tailored support from a local sports-based therapy group promoted an interest in pursuing coaching as a career. As such, he now seeks to replicate the care that he has received by obtaining a coaching role wherein he helps others living with disabilities:

> *I suppose I've been lucky in the people I've met there because they've all been just naturally understanding and aware because the Sport for Confidence group does cater largely cater to people with disabilities, whether they be physical disabilities, mental disabilities or learning disabilities. There's two or three OTs in every centre that Sport for Confidence is at, and the coaches*

> *go through psychology-type training themselves, so everybody who is an actual worker there has either training or maybe even have a condition themselves, so they are all amazingly accommodating, they always take things like that into consideration.*
>
> (Charlie)

Cameron's and Charlie's testimonies indicate that network membership enables individuals living with LD to valorise given value-sets. As previously suggested, network membership exposes individuals to norms that are important within cultural milieus. Thus, the preceding testimony highlights that the transference of norms within networks may play an important role in promoting future-beliefs. Accordingly, roles that are perceived to embody given value-sets may be viewed as aspirational to those who have previously been members of networks in which similar or associated ethics were valorised.

The transference of norms within and between networks is also important in promoting developmental aspirations. Interviewees state that aspirations are often linked to a desire for development and the pursuit of long-term career objectives. For example, the decision to volunteer in a charity shop or theatre may enable individuals to gain work-experiences in given industries or sectors. This proposition is supported by interviewees, such as Alfie, who contend that they participated in voluntary work as a means of developing their knowledge and transitioning into paid employment. Equally, early-career workers may accept employment opportunities in cafes or bars as a means of gaining, what they consider to be, skills such as money handling and knowledge of how to present oneself to customers.

> *it's important that when you work in say retail or any kind of job and it involves customers and people that you have a smiling face.*
>
> (Cameron)

Notions of aspiration may, therefore, be understood along a continuum. Interviewee testimony shows that aspirations may exist in both the short and long term and that these dualities may interact with and inform one another. Thus, developmental aspirations may act as catalysts for future careers by encouraging individuals to participate in roles wherein they are exposed to norms that may be important in proceeding positions.

However, aspirations are not always informed by the transference of norms. Analysis shows that networks also promote future-beliefs by exposing individuals to cultural resources. For example, Alfie asserts that his father's passion for music technology has instilled a long-standing interest in sound engineering and promoted an understanding of the role's procedural and normative components (Ibid). Moreover, he states that this exposure led to him inheriting culturally relevant types of equipment such as "digital mixers" and "PA systems" (Ibid). Furthermore, he suggests that his emersion in the cultural milieu of the role enabled him to develop an understanding of sound engineering's rituals (i.e., the act of upgrading equipment) and artefacts (i.e., owning a mixer with "more channels") (Ibid). As such, Alfie proposes that he considers a career in sound engineering to be realistic and attainable, thereby enabling him to transition from dispiriting voluntary experiences to a job as a self-employed entrepreneur.

Furthermore, Interviewees contend that associations between networks and aspirations may also be noticed when individuals seek to escape from their lived and corporeal existences. To these interviewees, work is understood as a means of liberation. It frees them from their past and present by enabling them to, perhaps for the first time, attain semblances of situated self-sufficiency. As such, they propose that difficulties in one's social and familial networks act as catalysts for a desire to participate in that which will afford them greater economic and/or social agency.

This desire for liberation is noticed when interviewees describe the impact of newly found employment on the self after a period of using services provided by organisations such as Jobcentre Plus. Interviewees like Thea suggest that Jobcentre Plus holds significant power over those who use their services, and that the attainment of paid work enables service users to reassert their agency:

> Thea: *it's good not to have them on at me all the time. It's better, definitely.*
>
> Interviewer: *What do you mean by having them getting on at you all of the time?*
>
> Thea: *You know, hassling you to look for work and they'll ask like, "Have you applied for a job?" "What jobs have you been applying for?" Or they'll recommend me a job to apply for and they'll say "Have you applied for that job we recommended you?" Otherwise, if you didn't they would stop your money.*

Equally, aspiration may be formed around a desire for independence from one's social world. Angela argues that, throughout adulthood, her ambitions have been limited to simply obtaining paid work. In suggesting this Angela indicates that her aspirations intersect with a lack of familial support and a constrained understanding of employment possibilities for people living with LD. As such, she states that she readily accepted a contract with a fast-food restaurant chain: an opportunity that she considers to have been a "dream":

> Interviewer: *What would have been your dream job?*
>
> Angela: *Work at the fast-food restaurant.*
>
> Interviewer: *Yes?*
>
> Angela: *Yes. I really like it. I like work there, so…*

The modest nature of Angela's ambition conveys that, unlike those interviewees for whom networks of support were readily accessible, she was unable to spend time conceptualising her future-beliefs. Her testimony shows that she was not introduced to norms of care or achievement and/or provided with culturally relevant resources. Rather, her emotionally distant familial network and limited interactions with education promoted an inability to consider the future as an expanse of opportunities. Angela, thus, presents her familial and social worlds as circumscribed and monotonous, tempered only by a longstanding gambling addiction wherein she would use "a fruit machine seven days a week". Accordingly, Angela's attainment of paid work, irrespective of its perceived normalcy, enabled her to escape the routine of her social milieu and eschew her "out of control" behaviour.

This proposition suggests that, in and of itself, paid employment positively affects those for whom networks may be inadequate or inaccessible. For individuals like Angela, paid employment may provide opportunities to develop notions of identity founded on one's perceived independence. In this sense work may become a totem for a form of oppositional identity, wherein the act of participating in the workplace enables individuals to reject their routine and develop a sense of self that is, in some small way, liberated. Reece's testimony supports this notion. He suggests that his 16-year career at a fast-food restaurant has enabled him to do more than "just sit and do word searches" (Reece). Moreover, he proposes that his work enables him to see "more new faces", thereby indicating that the relatively sedentary nature of his homelife inhibits his capacity to socialise (Ibid). In this way Reece's participation in work has enabled him to escape from the relatively confined milieu of his home and manifest a sense of self that he has chosen. Accordingly, aspiration may be conceived of as a means of enabling individuals living with LD to attain relative independence from their existing or past social worlds.

The preceding evidence suggests that the pursuit of aspirations is informed by the extent of one's access to networks. This is because networks, embedded in the family or public sector institutions, regularly expose individuals to relevant norms and cultural resources. Access to these networks may, therefore, inspire individuals to pursue aspirations that are, or have been, appreciated by fellow network members; encouraging individuals to adopt similar aspirations to family members, amongst other individuals. However, aspirations may also develop through actions of resistance wherein individuals escape from existing social milieus and manifest new identities. This supposition indicates that networks are not inevitably accessible or adequate. Individuals living with LD may struggle to access supportive networks due to the limited nature of their social worlds. Equally, they may find that the networks of which they are a part distribute resources unequally. Thus, interviewee testimony shows that the pursuit of employment may be grounded in a desire for emancipation.

Organisational status and the experience of employment

While it is important to consider routes through which individuals conceptualise and pursue aspirations, analysis also highlights the value of exploring the many in-work conditions that impose on experiences of employment. Interviewee testimony shows that employment status affects experiences of work by influencing the extent to which workers perceive themselves to have agency. For some, agency is promoted when workers participate in activities outside of the workplace and/or control when and for how long they participate in work-related activities. These workers may, therefore, find greater meaning in part-time, flexible and entrepreneurial forms of work. For others, however, agency is linked to operational power. In these cases, the extent of one's agency is informed by opportunities to define one's role, as well as delineate one's working practices. These workers may, consequently, choose to participate in full-time and formalised work.

This proposition is supported by Tamsyn who, in comparing her experiences of temporary and full-time work, highlights the value of regular employment in promoting agency. In doing this Tamsyn suggests that her 8-year career as a receptionist, and now host, at a local charity has enabled her to consistently participate in relevant professional activities. Through this Tamsyn indicates that she is now trusted to make the role of "host" her own: harnessing her experiences of dramatic performance and of being a service user to improve her interactions with customers and colleagues (Tamsyn).

Tamsyn indicates that employers and colleagues alike trust her to exert control over her working-practices. She indicates that the consistent and enduring nature of her employment means that these actors are regularly exposed to her developing self-efficacy. The regularity of this exposure is, thus, depicted as an important factor in affecting employer and colleague trust and expectation: promoting Tamsyn's relative capacity through repeated demonstrations of her successful administration. By contrast, Tamsyn's testimony regarding her experiences of temporary work delineates that she felt mistrusted and unsupported by superiors who were frequently more concerned with her operational effectiveness. In this way she states that she experienced little connection to her temporary organisation:

> *There was one job, I remember I had to write things quickly and I couldn't write things quickly. I had to work things out as I remember. But they weren't as supportive as other job. Because it was a temping job, it didn't bother me as much as it would if it was a permanent job.*
>
> (Tamsyn)

In highlighting her perceived powerlessness, Tamsyn indicates that her "temping job" offered few opportunities to incorporate her experiences or personality within her role. This proposition is reflected in her previous employer's stipulation that workers "write things down quickly": a condition that suggests a strict and exacting organisational culture informed by values of productivity and efficiency. In this way operational autonomy may be a significant variable when examining experiences of employment. This is because it may delineate the extent to which individuals feel invested and capable of developing in their roles.

However, meaningful employment is not solely manifested through formalised roles that promote operational agency. Part-time workers living with LD suggest that they find work fulfilling due to the agency offered by their limited professional responsibilities. This, interviewees like Daisy assert, is because flexible and/or part-time work enables workers to "decide when no is no and when yes is yes" (Daisy). In this way flexible and/or part-time employment promotes reflexive conceptions of agency by empowering individuals to define the terms of their work. In doing this workers may ensure that professional responsibilities do not diminish the quality of their social worlds. For example, part time employment has enabled Daisy to maintain participation in various social and familial activities such as caring for siblings and improving her own mental and physical health:

> Daisy: *I'm still working just as hard as my sister does, but I've got time to say, 'well actually, I'm going through this, I'm going to take time away because family illness' and it's just as easy for me to do that then it is perhaps yourself sometimes.*
>
> Interviewer: *So, it enables you to be flexible?*
>
> Daisy: *Yeah, and also because I'm aware that if I put too much pressure on something is going to make me take a step back. It might be mental, it might be physical, again, and then I'm having to relearn new skills.*

Part-time and flexible employment may, therefore, be conceived of as a form of work that enables individuals living with LD to maintain, or indeed further, situated notions of social agency. While Tamsyn's experiences demonstrate that formalised professional roles promote meaning by enabling workers to augment and develop their operational activities, Daisy's testimony suggests that the opposite may also be the case. For her, work is meaningful because it enables her to pursue and develop alternative facets of her life. As such, the capacity to control one's time, attained through flexible employment opportunities, is an important factor in understanding how employment status affects experiences of work.

This conception is also evidenced in Alfie's testimony regarding entrepreneurialism. While most interviewees suggested that they want to work in organisations and as part of teams, Alfie indicates that his ideal employment type is that of the entrepreneur. This is because he conceives of entrepreneurialism as a catalyst for agency:

> *I wanted to get a job in it, I thought, 'You know what, let's start my own business because I can do my own thing, my own hours'. People say you are restricted, well you can work hours you want because you own it. But if you do it... work less hours, you'll get less jobs.*
>
> (Alfie)

In this extract, entrepreneurialism is depicted as enabling individuals to take ownership over their time. Thus, forms of flexible working are again portrayed as routes through which individuals, particularly those with diverse or niche interests and skills, develop identities that are grounded by more than their professional lives. This suggestion indicates that the capacity to define the passing of time plays an important role in influencing experiences of employment. Accordingly, interviewee testimony demonstrates that, for many, regular and formalised employment is not a panacea.

Consequently, the pursuit of agency is portrayed as a significant factor in affecting how individuals interact with, and participate in, forms of employment. Irrespective of whether individuals benefit from regular work, flexible roles or self-employment and entrepreneurialism, interviewee testimony indicates that meaningful work may be that which affords workers autonomy. Thus, opportunities to shape working practices, participate in leisure and caring activities or engage in entrepreneurial pursuits all promote purpose and increase satisfaction in given contexts. However, these are not the only factors that affect experiences of work. Rather, interviewees delineate that organisational cultures also affect notions of meaning and satisfaction.

Organisational culture and experiences of employment

Analysis shows that the procedural and normative constitution of activities associated with employment influences experiences of work. For example, organisational valorisation of productivity and efficiency are depicted as conflicting with the identities and needs of workers living with LD. Interviewees argue that ethics of speed and effectiveness, manifested through targets and reproduced via forms of workplace surveillance, exclude members of the LD population from effectively engaging in workplace activities. This proposition is reflected in Bob's testimony wherein he asserts that ethics of productivity have diminished his capacity to fulfil his duties:

> Bob: *One of them was at Morrisons, the manager there, he used to moan at me because I was a bit slow sometimes you know, and didn't get those lanes done in time so [laughs] that was a bit of pressure in the shop for ordering time you know.*
>
> Interviewer: *Why do you think that he did that to you?*
>
> Bob: *I don't know. [Laughs] I was just slow and he would say "you should be done by now, should be at the shop floor bit by now" and yeah I should run.*

Bob's supposition that he feels "pressure" to satisfy his superiors' demands highlights the potential dichotomy between the normative underpinnings of workplaces and the identities of workers living with LD. As discussed, many interviewees state that they struggle to cope with fast-paced environments due, in part, to their perceived inability to quickly understand relevant information and perform tasks. This condition conflicts with organizational demands for productivity, evidenced in Bob's employers' insistence that he "should be done by now" and in his own admission that he needs to "run" when participating in tasks (Ibid). Accordingly, competing temporal priorities may diminish experiences of work for individuals living with LD who do not have the capacity to challenge or overcome organisational cultures.

In a later part of Bob's testimony, he again suggests that opposing perceptions of time impact on experiences of work. In doing this, he states that pressures created by the pandemic have encouraged his organisation to ask staff to maintain their current levels of output, while cutting their working hours. As such, Bob now struggles to meet his targets in the time provided by his employer. Moreover, Bob indicates that he conceives of these difficulties as expressions of his limited capacity. His inability to work at speed and maintain tempo are, thus, conceptualised as intrinsic problems of the self, rather than issues caused by the ethics and practices of his employers. In this way competing temporal priorities are further depicted as affecting experiences of employment: reducing satisfaction by limiting agency and increasing "pressure" (Ibid).

Bob's apparent powerlessness is mirrored in Tamsyn's and Thea's respective interviews. Both participants present experiences of workplaces in which they have felt powerless to contest the normative foundations underpinning their activities. They argue that they have been exposed to environments in which notions of efficiency and productivity were elevated above norms of care and support. For example, Tamsyn states that one employer asked her "to write things quickly and I couldn't write things quickly" (Tamsyn) and Thea asserts that "I had to write down on a tally chart how many customers' documents I'd packed. The target was 70 per hour." (Thea). Accordingly, Tamsyn and Thea propose that they experienced diminished satisfaction in their respective roles due to their reduced capacity to achieve their objectives:

> *You do it so quickly that I couldn't do it quickly, and I got that sack from that job. I didn't do it quick enough.*
>
> (Tamsyn)

Understanding of the prisms through which employers conceptualise notions of time may, therefore, be important when examining experiences of work. Analysis of testimony shows that the valorisation of speed affects work-related experiences by reducing self-efficacy and diminishing the extent to which workers are invested in organisational goals. For instance, Thea's testimony delineates that her "struggle" to keep pace at work affected her confidence and encouraged her to blame herself for perceived failings:

> Thea: *I do struggle a lot and I do get complained at because I was taking too long to find items for someone.*
>
> Interviewer: *Oh, okay. And how did that make you feel?*
>
> Thea: *I think I was quite annoyed. I wasn't happy about that. I think it was my fault I was taking too long.*

Accordingly, employers may seek to improve experiences of work by limiting the impact of inconsistencies experienced by workers living with LD. Analysis shows that discrepancies between the normative foundations of workplaces and the identities and capabilities of workers limits the capacity of these actors to fulfil their duties. Moreover, interviewees indicate that failings are frequently individualised by workers who potentially view themselves as inadequate, particularly when compared to colleagues who do not live with disabilities. In this way organisations may develop internalised methods of support through which individuals living with LD overcome dichotomies that affect capacity and diminish satisfaction. These may be networks of support in which colleagues and employers work together to support one another.

Mitigating for dichotomies and improving experiences of work

Interviewees suggest that organisations mitigate for potential discrepancies between workplace cultures and the identities of workers living with LD by providing and improving access to networks of in-work support. In discussing positive experiences of employment, interviewees highlight that organisations often work best when staff are empowered to support one another. Interviewees indicate that bodies, such as local charity organisations, regularly encourage staff to develop reciprocal in-work networks by both elevating norms of care and incentivising workers to participate in caring behaviours. By mirroring these actions, interviewees suggest that organisations may develop caring ecosystems in which colleagues take on responsibilities for resolving one another's problems.

The utility of caring organisational ecosystems is apparent in interviewee testimony that presents intra-organisational relationships as having promoted accessible working practices for staff living with LD. For example, Lana suggests that colleagues have supported her to understand her in-work "strengths and weaknesses" and promoted her capacity to successfully participate in tasks in which she feels that she is skilled. Furthermore, Lana states that workplace superiors have enabled her to learn about norms and processes that are inherent to her role by teaching her "how the system goes, and how everything works" (Lana).

These experiences suggest that in-work

networks of support operate in similar ways to those found in the family or at school. Analysis of testimony shows that in-work networks may promote relevant norms by enabling new staff to shadow and learn from existing workers. These opportunities act as means to explore the normative and procedural constitutions of workplaces, as well as routes through which to promote continuous learning and discovery. In illustrating this, interviewees like Rahul highlight that employers should ideally build enduring cultures of collaborative learning which enable workers with LD to increase their knowledge, enhance their self-efficacy and, ultimately, take part in activities associated with the workplace.

Accordingly, interviewees suggest that in-work networks should promote values of development. It is argued that networks, in which members are trusted to learn from one another, develop their knowledge and enhance their relevant capacity, offer opportunities to participate in new activities and engage in novel forms of working. Interviewees like Reginald, for example, delineate that his in-work network regularly exposes him to new tasks and responsibilities. As such, he proposes that he has learnt to embrace novel opportunities and participate in activities about which he previously knew very little. In this way in-work networks that promote development may be understood as inherently trusting. Analysis of Reginald's testimony shows that his employers and colleagues understand that he is likely to learn and complete new tasks at a slower pace than his colleagues yet remain committed to exposing him to new experiences. This requirement for patience is also reflected in Ralph's interview wherein he proposes that colleagues have trusted him to engage in new activities:

> Ralph: *The workers would look at me and I was put on the spot a bit and I would do the Makaton and I don't know if it was the right Makaton, but I would do that and I felt like I was on the spot a bit.*
>
> Interviewer: *Was that not enjoyable?*
>
> Ralph: *Yes, I did enjoy that. I loved it.*

Furthermore, interviewees suggest that in-work networks should ideally enable staff living with LD to learn about and comprehend social norms. Interviewees propose that workers living with LD regularly struggle to join networks outside of the home or public sector organisations due to difficulties engaging with community organisations and assets. Interviewees like Ralph and Bob demonstrate that workplaces act as catalysts for the promotion of networks in which individuals participate in activities that (re)produce collaboration and that are often conventionally associated with friendship such as going to the pub or having a Christmas party:

> Bob: *I went out for a drink sometimes, that went okay, yeah. Good experiences.*
>
> Interviewer: *Where did you go?*
>
> Bob: *We went to some of the pubs and, you know, that were about then.*

This proposition is supported by Tamsyn who states that previous in-work networks have been akin to that of "a family" (Tamsyn). This is because Tamsyn's regular inclusion in workplace activities, such as eating lunch with colleagues, enabled her to feel invested in the goals of her organisation and the lives of her co-workers. Moreover, she articulates that she feels that these types of activities enabled others to understand her life and, subsequently, support her to resolve difficulties that she had been experiencing:

> *For example, say I'm moody sometimes and my moods can be... if I feel down, for example, in this family, they were all understanding.*
>
> (Tamsyn)

Accordingly, interviewees articulate that caring and trusting in-work networks enable individuals living with LD to participate in workplaces. While it is clear that many workers struggle with the tempo of their working practices, it is also apparent that the development of relationships between colleagues and amongst workers and their superiors empowers those living with LD to benefit from the myriad opportunities provided by work. Thus, organisations should promote norms of care and empathy through the development of operational systems of support that empower individuals to develop self-efficacy and participate in activities. Equally, organisations may promote greater access to social experiences: offering opportunities for workers to take part in cultural rituals such as eating lunch together and having a drink at a pub. These types of social experiences may enable colleagues to bond with one another and, subsequently, develop informal networks of support through which problems and difficulties can be resolved.

Implications for policy and practice

In this chapter, the research contends that the explicit, or indeed implicit, development of aspirations is situated against biological and social backdrops. Thus, individuals who are capable of accessing and harnessing resources distributed by supportive networks may be likely to conceptualise forms of aspiration associated with their familial and/or educational experiences. However, it is apparent that many individuals develop forms of aspiration as products of the inaccessibility or inadequacy of networks. These individuals may, therefore, manifest forms of resistant aspiration that derive from an inherent desire to attain self-sufficiency and agency.

The search for agency is also important when examining interviewees' in-work experiences. Analysis suggests that decisions regarding the formality and regularity of employment may be informed by a desire to govern one's professional operations or control how time is spent. Moreover, prevailing organisational cultures impact on experiences of work: manifesting instances wherein competing temporal priorities diminish satisfaction and reduce self-efficacy. Ethics of productivity and efficiency are, thus, shown to influence how interviewees understand and enjoy types of employment. Accordingly, interviewees highlight that organisations should be encouraged to promote and foster in-work networks of support as a means of enabling them to develop their capacity and mitigate for problems.

In exploring aspiration development and in-work experiences, the research presents the following recommendations for policy and practice:

- Public and private sector organisations should define aspirations as constructs situated against the many conditions that affect the lives of those living with LD. In this way organisations may comprehend that members of this population have greater aspirations than simply working in supermarkets or restaurants. Equally, organisations may grasp that, for many, work is a positive in and of itself: enabling individuals to escape from the mundane or destructive conditions of their social worlds. Analysis shows that these latter individuals are likely to have experienced difficulties accessing and harnessing supportive networks. As such, they may not have been supported to conceptualise and pursue forms of aspiration. By contrast, individuals with higher aspirations are likely to have been exposed to networks in which career goals were developed. These individuals may have accessed networks of family members or educators who promoted norms, exposed them to cultural resources, provided tailored support and/or distributed decision-making power. This contrast suggests that there is no universal vision of 'the good life' and that normative assumptions delineating the purpose of individuals living with LD risk alienating large swathes of this population (Sellar and Gale, 2011, p.123). Therefore, just as it is unjust to constrain the aspirations of individuals living with LD, it is also unreasonable to expect that everyone from within this population has the capacity to successfully develop and pursue aspirations beyond those of simply attaining employment. Accordingly, attempts at aspiration-raising must be accompanied by efforts to mitigate for inequalities in the material and social conditions of individuals: enveloping them in networks of support from which their capacity to aspire and achieve goals are developed.[1]

- Employees living with LD should have the choice to define the terms of their employment. As discussed, interviewee testimony indicates that the pursuit of employment is often informed by the desire for agency. Thus, full-time and formalised employment status may be interpreted as empowering workers to direct their operational routines. Equally, flexible and part-time employment is conceived of as enabling workers to interlace their professional responsibilities with the capacity to take part in and develop social activities, amongst others. Thus, the capacity to define the terms of employment should be afforded to employees on an ongoing basis, thereby enabling them to reflect on how experiences of work are affecting their lives. In doing this, employers will provide LD employees with ongoing opportunities to manage variables such as the frequency and breadth of their employment. However, it is unclear whether employees from within this population would necessarily have the confidence or capacity to make informed decisions regarding their employment status. As discussed throughout this report, individuals living with LD often struggle to access modalities of support through which they may be assisted to purposefully interrogate their experiences and assertively advocate for themselves. Accordingly, employers must support employees to make decisions regarding their employment status by providing relevant information and personalised assistance.
- Employers should explore how organisational cultures (re)produce conditions that are disabling for individuals living with LD. In the preceding analysis, interviewees portray cultures that emphasise values of speed and pace as restrictive. They propose that the valorisation of these norms conflicts with their understanding of their corporeal selves: manifesting dialectics characterised by competing perceptions of temporality. In these cases, the social and economic benefits of employment are tempered by an inability to productively fulfil responsibilities and achieve goals. This experience may be particularly acute when workers living with LD compare themselves, and are compared, against non-disabled colleagues: diminishing their self-efficacy and reducing organisational commitment. To address these issues, employers should be incentivised to work with employees to interrogate the conditionality and impact of prevailing organisational cultures and, if needed, co-design reforms underpinned by the lived experiences of workers and expertise of strategic actors. This collaborative ambition may be realised through formal methods of shared leadership in which decision-making power is 'broadly distributed among a set of individuals instead of centralised in the hands of a single individual' (Sommerville and Howard, 2010, p.448). Equally, it may be achieved via processes of intra-organisational learning, wherein workers and employers interact with, learn from and, ideally, shadow one another as a means of understanding the impact of existing cultures.
- Organisations should seek to improve on or develop intra-organisational networks of support. While many contemporary interventions employ individuals with

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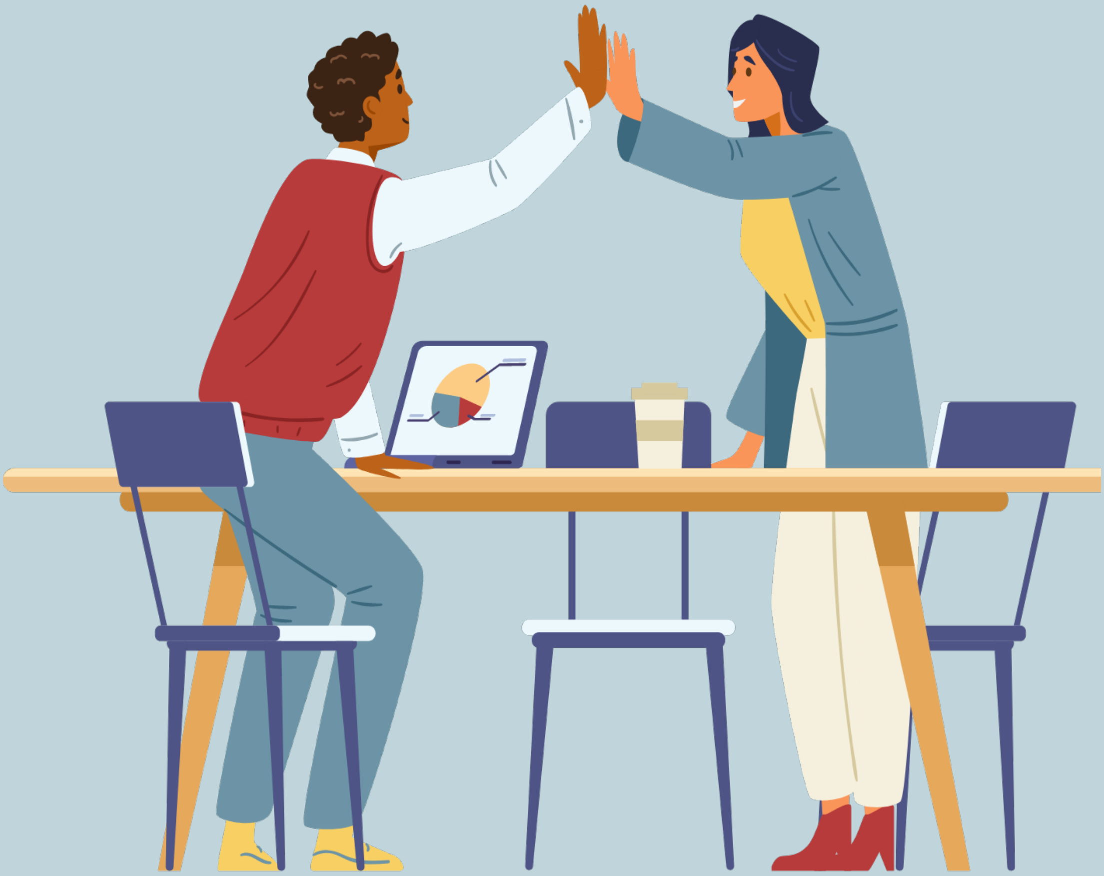
[1] A similar conclusion is reached in Sellar and Gale's 2011 research project exploring mobility and aspiration in OECD nations. In this piece the authors argue that institutions need to provide individuals with adequate access to resources through which they may develop the capacity to shape their futures. Moreover, they propose that equitable access to networks, wherein social and cultural resources are evenly distributed, may be used to realise this ambition.

little or no knowledge of organisations to assist workers living with LD, it is apparent that interviewees frequently favour relational forms of support that have been developed within their places of work. Thus, while processes that offer on-the-job coaching, such as inclusive employment, are important within the wider ecosystem of local and national employment support, formal and informal processes of in-work support may also be vital. This is because these latter processes enable individuals living with LD to ground themselves within the cultural, or indeed sub-cultural, milieu of their workplaces: promoting opportunities for relevant learning and socialising. Accordingly, employers should seek to foster both formal and informal intra-organisational networks of support by increasing practices such as shadowing and mentoring and highlighting the value of socialising within and outside of the workplace.

Conclusion



This study set out to investigate experiences of employment amongst adults living with Learning Disabilities. It has found that employment experiences are situated against biological and social backdrops that impose on how individuals cope with and participate in socio-economic activities. In discussing these backdrops, interviewees highlight the importance of supportive networks in enabling them to conceptualise and pursue their aspirations. Analysis shows that networks regularly expose members to norms that are relevant to prospective workplaces and enable individuals to access cultural resources such as equipment, experiences and knowledge. Moreover, networks provide opportunities for members to experience content-specific learning, adopt decision-making powers and participate in arenas the normative and procedural foundations of which are reflective of their identities. The capacity to access and harness networks is, therefore, an important variable in understanding how individuals living with LD transition, or indeed fail to transition, into desired professions.

Analysis also highlights the value of exploring the many in-work conditions that inform experiences of employment. Interviewees contend that employment experiences are regularly affected by the desire to attain forms of agency. In this way the capacity to influence operational decision-making or negotiate between competing professional and social pressures informs outcomes such as notions of workplace satisfaction and purpose. Equally, interviewees contend that experiences of employment are affected by exposure to organisational cultures. This proposition is particularly evident in how the ethics of productivity and efficiency are discussed. Interviewees highlight that the valorisation of these ethics moderates their capacity to fulfil their duties and, consequently, diminishes their self-efficacy. Thus, employers should seek to mitigate for these outcomes by promoting formal and informal networks of intra-organisational support. In doing this, employers will enable workers to gain confidence and develop interdependent and reciprocal relationships with colleagues.

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