

Earning dough on the bread line

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The needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the North East are being put centre stage by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) this month with a firm commitment to ensure learning provision meets individual needs.

This commitment is being published in the LSC's first ever Regional Commissioning Plan, which sets out all the regional targets for the coming year. This new commitment will outline the LSC's priorities for this group of learners in the region, including investing in provision and raising the quality of provision and economic participation through sustainable employment.

This follows the publication of the LSC's national strategy for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a recent review in the North East which mapped the available provision and identified any gaps. The LCS in the region will be producing its own regional strategy early next year.

The recent review of provision found many areas of good practice in the region, including the experiences of profoundly deaf Michael Gleeson. The chance of a job in the bakery of his local superstore was like manna from heaven for the 23 year old.

Securing work was an achievement in itself for Michael, from Sherburn, near Durham. But he has risen to the challenge and quickly proved he can use his loaf.

Staff at the Tesco Extra store in Dragonville have really taken a shine to Michael, many of them learning some basic signing to improve communications.

And that has really helped him settle into his role, making sure customers' needs are met – at least in the bread section. “I enjoy my job very much. Everyone encourages me and I am very happy here,” he said through a signing interpreter.

“I never thought I would get a job like this, working with so many people and meeting customers but they have made me feel very welcome. I am saving up now to go out and buy some new clothes.”

After leaving the Newcastle School for the Deaf, Michael turned to New College Durham and a Learning and Skills Council backed initiative to support those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's Learning Support Team is dedicated to making all courses fully accessible and is currently supporting over 250 students of whom 20 have a sensory support need.

With this help Michael tried several courses and work placements to see what kind of job suited him best. Sensory Support Coordinator, Dudley Staples, said: “Coming from a very sheltered environment with only a handful of other students in his class, Michael had a lot to cope with when he arrived here. But he has done extremely well, grown in confidence and richly deserves this opportunity.”

His boss, Bakery Manager Craig Sargeant agrees, saying Michael has quickly settled in and is making good progress in his new role.

Chris Roberts, Regional Director, LSC North East, said: “We are committed to ensuring that high quality learning provision is available to meet the individual needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the North East. The recent review into provision highlighted that there are areas of good practice that we need to build upon. The report recommends the formation of a regional strategy for this group of learners, and that is what we are currently working on. We are building relationships with providers and other partners to ensure that provision is available in the region so that learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have choices and opportunities to improve their quality of life.

“Various pots of funding are currently available for this group of learners and we want to bring all of this together to ensure individual learners are getting what they need. Our role is to help everyone achieve their full potential through learning and training and by providing the right kind of support, we can have a dramatically positive impact on people’s life prospects. Michael has proved that barriers can be broken down and that problems can be overcome. I am sure he will become a valued member of the Tesco team – something he had never thought possible just a few months ago.”

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Picture caption: Michael (right) gets some instructions from Bakery Manager Craig Sargeant.

Editor’s Note:

Through Inclusion to Excellence, published in November 2005, was a strategic review of the LSC’s planning and funding of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The overarching recommendation contained in this was that the LSC should develop a national strategy for the regional/local delivery, through collaboration with partner, of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the post 16 learning and skills sector that is high quality, learner centred and cost effective.

The LSC's national strategy for this group of learners, Learning for Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities, was published in October 2006. The strategy outlines how the LSC, over the next four years, will prioritise its actions to deliver parity and support the sector to deliver the government's vision for improving the life chances of disabled people.

The Regional Review carried out into learning provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is due to be published later this month and the Regional Strategy will be published by April 2007

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world-class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

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