Working Paper

Journey from education to work

by Anne-Marie Hamer

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

Department for Work and Pensions

Working Paper No 111

Journey from education to work

Anne-Marie Hamer

A report of research carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions

© Crown copyright 2012.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.
To view this licence, visit http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/
or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU,
or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This document/publication is also available on our website at:
http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp

Any enquiries regarding this document/publication should be sent to us at:
Central Analysis Division, Department for Work and Pensions, Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield, S1 2GQ

First published 2012.

ISBN 978 1 908523 88 4

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other Government Department.

Contents

Acknowledgements v
The Author vi
Abbreviations vii
Summary 1
1 Introduction 3
1.1 Background 3
1.2 Research objectives 3
2 Methodology 4
2.1 Overview 4
2.2 Research sample 4
2.3 Topic guides 5
2.4 Interviews 5
2.5 Analysis 5
2.6 Journey maps 6
2.7 Customer background information 6
3 Main findings 7
3.1 General findings 7
3.2 Themes 7
3.2.1 Aspiration 7
3.2.2 Education 7
3.2.3 Voluntary work 8
3.2.4 Paid employment 9
3.2.5 Independence 9
3.2.6 Attitudes 10
3.2.7 Support from family and services 10
3.3 Customer journey maps 11

4 Conclusions 22
4.1 Barriers 22
4.2 Catalysts 23
4.3 Issues 24
Appendix Topic guides 25

List of figures

Figure 3.1 Karen's journey 12
Figure 3.2 Lance's journey 14
Figure 3.3 Matilda's journey 16
Figure 3.4 Paul's journey 18
Figure 3.5 Zara's journey 20

Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the Office for Disability Issues (ODI), which is part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The research was conducted by the DWP Insight Team.

The author would like to thank all of the young adults who agreed to be interviewed as part of the research and the organisations who helped to arrange these interviews.

The Author

Anne-Marie Hamer of the DWP Insight Team was responsible for writing this report.

Abbreviations

A2W	Access to work
DEA	Disability Employment Advisers
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LEAs	Local Education Authority
ODI	Office for Disability Issues

Summary

Background

This research was commissioned by the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) to enable them to further understand the experiences of customers aged 18-26 years with a physical or learning disability as they moved from education towards employment, in order to form part of the evidence base being used to support the development of a new disability strategy.

The primary objective of this research was to develop and further our understanding of the barriers and catalysts that hinder or help young adults with disabilities to make the transition from education into the world of work. This report presents evidence on the views of disabled young people regarding their interactions with the education system, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), support services and third party organisations as they come to the end of their education and start the process of seeking and gaining work.

Methodology

This was a small-scale qualitative study undertaken by the DWP Insight team. As such, the findings are not intended to be representative of the wider population, but nonetheless provide an authentic insight into the experiences of our respondents as they encounter barriers and catalysts on their journey towards employment. The research was subject to an extremely tight policy driven timetable.

The evidence was gathered through 12 face-to-face interviews during March 2012. Because of the tight policy timetable the team used an opportunistic sampling approach, making savings on both time and practical resources. The sample was generated through disability organisations and stakeholders who have ongoing working relationships with the DWP some of whom were involved with the development of the state disability strategy more generally.

Summary of key findings

- Most respondents showed strong aspirations to be both in paid work and to have a full social and family life.
- Respondents had engaged in secondary education, either vocational and/or academic studies and independent living courses often inspired respondents to pursue employment in a particular area. However, the research found examples of a lack of flexibility regarding facilities and courses.
- Respondent's interpretation of independence varied; some saw independence as being intrinsically linked to being in paid work, while others felt that they would never truly be independent as they would always need some form of support.
- Almost all of the respondents were involved in some kind of voluntary work and for some of our respondents this was recognised as a step forward in building their confidence and belief in themselves that they were capable of achieving paid work.
- However, the costs of travelling to voluntary work was often a barrier when no financial remuneration was being received, and some respondents felt that a lack of accessible travel and transport was a key barrier to them achieving what they saw as their full potential. In addition, respondents felt that voluntary work was becoming harder to find in an economic recession where graduates and professionals were struggling to find employment.

- Self-employment was viewed as a good alternative to paid work for disabled people because it allowed enough flexibility for respondents to deal with certain health issues and for them to carry on with their voluntary work. In addition, work placements and work experience were thought to offer positive outcomes to increase disabled peoples' chances of getting into paid work.
- Respondents believed that their abilities were often doubted before they were given an opportunity to demonstrate what they could do in terms of education, work and accessing services. Respondents felt that these negative attitudes limited the work opportunities available to them and that this also had a detrimental affect on their confidence to apply for work in the first place.
- Many respondents had strong family support which was a key factor in helping them to navigate a range of services which they perceived to be complex.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Government is committed to enabling disabled people to fulfil their potential and ensuring they have the opportunities necessary to play a full role in society. In order to achieve this vision DWP are developing a disability strategy paper to:

- provide direction and bring coherence to Government policies that impact on disabled people;
- provide clarity about the Government's long-term policy direction and outline short-term actions in terms of the support available for disabled people;
- utilise the views of stakeholder organisations regarding 'what works best' for the disabled people in their client group.

DWP Insight were commissioned by ODI to carry out research to develop further our understanding of the customer experience for the age group 18-26 and to create customer journey maps based on individuals perceptions of their own experiences moving from education to employment. This transition was believed to play a significant role in shaping the outlook of young people as they become adults.

1.2 Research objectives

The primary research objectives were to:

- Identify experiences, barriers and catalysts which determine the path taken by disabled young people from their time in education through to securing relevant employment or alternative provisions which allow them to participate fully in society and community and family life.
- Highlight key points in disabled young peoples' journeys that are potential barriers to them fulfilling their potential and/or essential catalysts to them fulfilling their potential.

2 Methodology

This research was carried out to complement a consultation exercise which was being conducted as part of the development of the Government's new disability strategy. As a result, the research was delivered to a tight policy timetable.

2.1 Overview

This was a small scale qualitative research study and as such the results should not be seen as representative of the population. However, it can be used to illustrate the experiences, issues and challenges faced by disabled young people in their journey from education towards employment.

The research was carried out during March 2012. It comprised 12 face-to-face in-depth interviews with disabled teenagers and young adults aged between 18 and 26 years. Fieldwork covered a reasonable geographical spread across England, given the small number of interviews. Additional support was used during interviewing for those young people with specific needs. Each respondent was given a £20 high street voucher as a thank you for their time. After fieldwork completion data was analysed thematically during a workshop with DWP Insight and ODI on 20 March. During this session we were able to establish key issues/themes and generate an understanding regarding barriers and catalysts.

2.2 Research sample

Because of the tight timescales for the project we used an opportunistic sampling approach which helped the DWP Insight project team save both time and practical resources. The DWP/ODI have ongoing working relationships with many external organisations and stakeholder intermediaries working with young disabled people. Many of these organisations and stakeholders had been involved in the broader development of the state disability strategy and they were invaluable when it came to contacting and recruiting our sample within such a tight timetable. The stakeholders were sent letters from the Insight project team explaining the nature and objectives of the research along with a request asking them to consider and contact suitable respondents for the research (in terms of age, location etc).

There were no concerns about the stakeholders 'cherry picking' respondents to participate as this research wasn't about who was doing well in a training course or applying for jobs, for example, but rather covered their experiences in moving from education towards the world of work, and each individuals experience was equally valid. The stakeholders passed the details of any individuals willing to participate in the research to the Insight project team who arranged appointments for the interviews at a time and place that was convenient and comfortable for the respondent. Organisations which were able to help us with recruitment were:

- Alliance for Inclusive Education (Allfie);
- Cardiff People first;
- Enham;
- Leonard Cheshire Disability;
- Petty Pool College;
- Whizz-Kidz.

These organisations were helpful in engaging with this hard to reach group and often provided practical support throughout the fieldwork process. However, it must be recognised that due to this recruitment method we were less likely to include the least engaged disabled young people.

2.3 Topic guides

The ODI disability strategy document was based around three key areas which provided a useful and meaningful structure for the development of the topic guides and other aspects of the research more generally:

- **Realising aspirations** – ensuring appropriate support and intervention for disabled people at key life transitions, to realise disabled people's potential and aspirations for education, work and independent living.
- **Individual control** – enabling disabled people to make their own choices and have the right opportunities to live independently.
- **Changing attitudes and behaviours** – promoting positive attitudes and behaviours towards disabled people to enable participation in work, community life and wider society, tackling discrimination and harassment wherever they occur.

The topic guides were used as informal 'guides' and the interviews were styled as a 'conversation with a purpose' rather than the more structured question/answer sessions typically associated with quantitative methods. The topic guides were used to focus the conversation on the issues we were most interested in and to ensure that we covered all the topics we considered important to the project.

2.4 Interviews

The interviews themselves took place either at the respondent's home or at an alternative location selected by the respondent which was convenient for them and where they felt comfortable and safe. Some were content to be interviewed in their home while others preferred a public location such as a café or at their college. Each interview was anticipated to last for approximately one hour and all were recorded on an encrypted Dictaphone with the respondents' permission. Each respondent received a £20 high street voucher as a thank you for their time and informed consent forms were signed by the respondents to say they were happy for us to use what they said as part of the project. This reassured them that everything said in the interview would be treated as highly confidential and their anonymity would be maintained throughout.

2.5 Analysis

Ideally, it would have been preferable to transcribe all of the interviews verbatim but because of time constraints this was not possible. The DWP insight team familiarised themselves fully with the recordings and with the issues we were focussing on taken from the disability strategy document. In this way we could pick out the relevant sections from the recordings to transcribe, as well as interesting, unusual, or illustrative quotes to be used as supporting evidence.

Analysis was carried out thematically. After becoming familiar with the recordings and with the structure of the state disability strategy document we could identify the main themes coming out of the interviews and these were plotted on a matrix for cross-referencing and so that key findings and supporting evidence were easily identifiable.

2.6 Journey maps

It was our agreed intention that once data had been collected we would develop journey maps for a number of the respondents interviewed. During interviews researchers, therefore, not only captured respondents' memories of events but also their feelings in response to these events. The journeys were reconstructed by DWP Insight to show a condensed journey over time for each respondent capturing key processes, emotions and pertinent quotes.

2.7 Customer background information

All people interviewed had a learning disability or a physical impairment or both. The majority of those interviewed lived at home with their families who were supportive of their aspiration to work. Eleven of the 12 people interviewed had not secured full-time paid employment at the time of interview. One person worked full-time. Two of the 12 lived independently with one requiring support for activities such as shopping and carrying out her voluntary work.

3 Main findings

3.1 General findings

The findings are structured in two key areas. Firstly, by the broad themes identified through analysis. Secondly, as a series of Customer Journey maps which show the interactions and impacts on individuals of key events and processes.

3.2 Themes

3.2.1 Aspiration

The research showed that all respondents had a strong aspiration to obtain paid work and some saw a lack of paid work as the primary barrier to their independence. All those with physical impairments aspired to Higher Education and most attended University. Poor health was cited as the main reason for not being able to complete a degree, as periods of ill health often meant missed work and assignments. In some circumstances, respondents were advised not to continue with studies when it was perceived that they would be unable to catch up.

> *'I've always wanted to do some form of work, right from when I was young.'*
>
> (Female, 23, Bucks)

> *'It's* [University] *just where I saw myself going. I didn't really consider anything else.'*
>
> (Female, 21, Bristol)

All the respondents came from strong supportive family backgrounds which proved to be invaluable when having to overcome the many obstacles faced while moving through the education system and on to seeking work. Several came from families that clearly recognised the value of education and paid work and the importance of becoming independent. Many aspired to and had a full social and family life.

> *'What I've wanted has always aligned, very happily, with what they've (parents) wanted for me. You know, go to university, get a good job, that sort of thing. They just want me to be happy really.'*
>
> (Female, 21, Bristol)

3.2.2 Education

All respondents had sought full time further education with several pursuing education to degree level. They reported that there was a lack of flexibility regarding facilities at schools, colleges and universities. Respondents felt that assessing different educational establishments in terms of how they could adapt for example by arranging for lectures to be in accessible rooms, or altering accommodation seemed to take a long time as did arranging for these changes once a selection had been made. This was particularly pertinent to attending university and in hindsight some thought a gap year would have been a good idea.

'The FE college I wanted to go to with my friends – I couldn't attend as they didn't have the facilities and weren't prepared to make adaptations for me.'

(Female, 22, West Midlands)

'In hindsight, I should have taken a gap year, everything takes longer to set up for disabled people.'

(Female, 23, Bucks)

Independent living courses attended by those with a learning disability often led to aspirations of paid work, for example respondents who had been taught to cook as a life skill aspired to find work in a kitchen. In some instances, higher education acted as a huge confidence booster although not all respondents completed a degree.

'They [her group] *decided for me as well ... It didn't seem the right thing to do, to come back ... I'd missed so much* [due to health problems]*.'*

(Female, 23, Bucks)

3.2.3 Voluntary work

Nearly all of the respondents had been involved in some kind of voluntary work (a spectrum of different roles were carried out from working at charitable organisations as advocates, working in a café or shop carrying out basic duties, or working in a bank). This voluntary work occasionally acted as a facilitator into short-term paid work.

'I did two months paid work in a fund raising office for a disability organisation – this started as voluntary work. I just wish I could find something permanent.'

(Female, 23, Bucks)

'It was originally voluntary work in the bank but when they met me they offered it to me as paid employment. It felt great that they were giving it to me on my own merit!'

(Female, 23, Bucks)

The cost of travelling to voluntary work had become a barrier as expenses came out of their Direct Payment and impacted on the amount they had to spend on support workers. Respondents felt that voluntary work was becoming harder to find as many graduates were now looking for voluntary work to gain work experience in a climate of high unemployment.

'I find it quite hard to get any voluntary work. I think they are getting snapped up by graduates who need work experience now to get a paying job.'

(Male, 21, Andover)

Having experienced voluntary work and its benefits many respondents wanted to continue to be involved in the voluntary sector in the future. It was not clear from this research why they saw voluntary work as important and how it impacted on their ability to secure full-time paid work.

3.2.4 Paid employment

Having paid work was a primary goal for nearly all respondents, although most could only see themselves working part-time due to their need to manage fluctuating health conditions. Other respondents believed that part time paid work would allow them to continue with their voluntary work. For the same reasons, self-employment was also raised as a good alternative for disabled people.

> *'I'm proud to say I've worked at Enham for two years. It makes me feel good.'*
>
> (Male, 21, Hampshire)

> *'I registered as a sole-trader and got advice from business links. That way I can do the hours I want and can fit it around my other voluntary work.'*
>
> (Female, 22, West Midlands)

Work placements and work experience were seen as a good thing to increase disabled peoples' chances of getting into paid work. Respondents felt that it would give them the opportunity to show what they can do, not what they can't do and as an essential tool to boost confidence.

> *'People assume I can't do things before I even try. I shouldn't really be stopped from doing something before I try, should I?'*
>
> (Female, 26, Bristol)

3.2.5 Independence

Respondents held widely differing views on the definition of independence. Some saw independence as living wholly unsupported. Others saw themselves as living independently with support assistants. They all, however, saw independence as being intrinsically linked to being in paid work and being able to support themselves financially.

> *'I will never be fully independent. I'll always need carers.'*
>
> (Male, 22, Cheshire)

> *'I see getting paid work as my biggest barrier to leading as independent a life as I'll ever be able.'*
>
> (Female, 23, Bucks)

Travel and transport was raised by many as a particular barrier to their independence. Problems encountered were around accessibility, extra costs, and lack of experience or confidence to use public transport.

> *'Driving for me will mean a totally different quality of life.'*
>
> (Female, 23, Bucks)

3.2.6 Attitudes

There was a widespread feeling among respondents that people doubt their ability before giving them a chance to show what they can do, and that it was negative attitudes which limited the work opportunities available to them, rather than overt discrimination.

> *'People judge me before they see what I'm capable of. They don't give me a chance ...'*
>
> (Female, 26, Bristol)
>
> *'I see people's attitudes as being their problem. I just hate that it impacts on my opportunities.'*
>
> (Female, 22, West Midlands)

Because of this, respondents were put off from applying for work in the first place.

> *'I haven't applied for loads and loads of jobs partly because I know I'm limited and because you come up against such negative attitudes from people.'*
>
> (Female, 23, Bucks)
>
> *'Part of me wants to give up and just carry on with my voluntary work. It's just such an effort trying to find anything and why would anyone employ me when they could employ someone who can see?'*
>
> (Female, 26, Bristol)

3.2.7 Support from family and services

Many respondents had strong family support which seemed critical in negotiating support services and surmounting barriers. In terms of support for paid work Connexions was named as being helpful but some respondents said that the services provided by Jobcentre Plus in relation to signposting did not meet their expectations and had a perception that appropriate support was not available (Access to Work, Remploy and Disability Employment Advisers (DEA)).

> *'I handled some of it myself but my parents stepped in if it got too difficult.'*
>
> (Female, 21, Bristol)
>
> *'Every time I went to the Jobcentre they kicked me back to RNIB. They've never been any help to me at all.'*
>
> (Female, 26, Bristol)

Despite the availability of Access to Work and other support responses indicated that there was a desire for greater support for those in paid work in terms of finances (travel, support workers) and for more opportunities such as work placements to show ability.

> *'The way it's set up ... it's not set up for people who want to work. It's set up for someone who doesn't work ... I want to be like anyone else and in a job and paid but I just need a bit more support ...'*
>
> (Female, 23, Bucks)

3.3 Customer journey maps

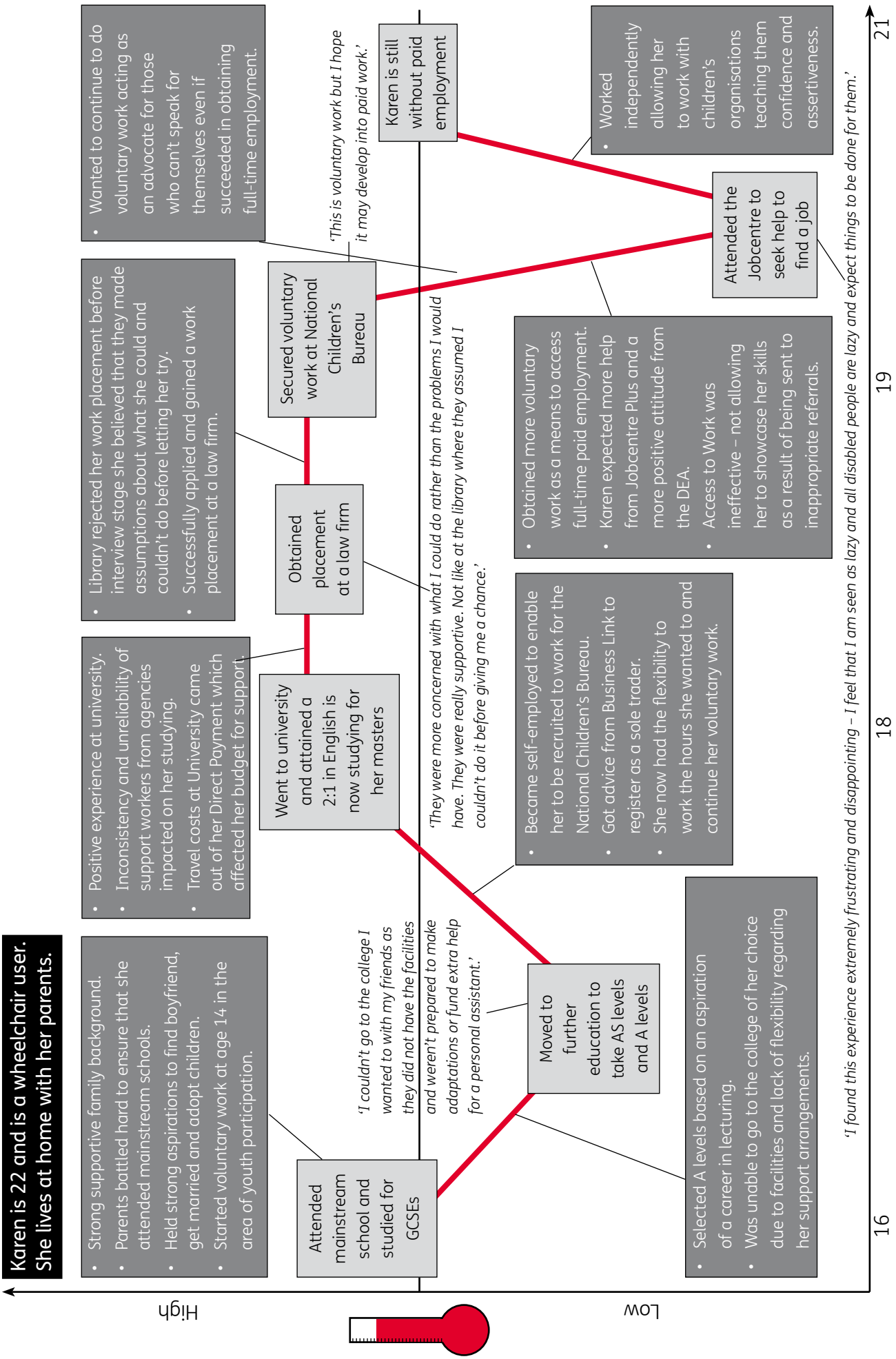
The structure of the discussion guide and subsequent analysis allowed us to develop a series of journey maps outlining disabled young peoples' experiences from education through to employment or alternative provision.

Journey mapping has a number of benefits and features allowing us to provide a high level of detail of interactions from the person's viewpoint. It also allows us to understand and share the experiences they had and helps us in identifying exactly what they go through, every step of the way, uncovering both the physical and emotional response to services and the challenges they encounter.

This has allowed us to identify a series of barriers and catalysts facing young disabled people in terms of fulfilling their potential.

The following pages show five journey maps which represent a cross section of the journeys experienced by the young disabled people we interviewed. These are the views of the individuals interviewed based on their memory of events as they happened. While these have been made anonymous to protect the identity of the young person they are true depictions and not composite maps. Each pictorial map is followed by a narrative version for each person showing their step by step journey.

Figure 3.1 Karen's journey



Karen is 22 and is a wheelchair user. She lives at home with her parents.

Step 1 Karen attended a mainstream school and studied for GCSEs. She had a strong supportive family and her parents battled hard to ensure that she attended mainstream schools. Karen started voluntary work at 14 working in youth participation. She had a strong work aspiration and aspired to find a boyfriend, get married and adopt children.

Step 2 Karen moved to further education to take AS and A levels. *'I couldn't go to the college I wanted to with my friends as they did not have the facilities and weren't prepared to make adaptations or fund help for a personal assistant.'*

Step 3 Karen went to university and attained a 2-1 in English and started studying for her masters. During this period she became self-employed to enable her to be recruited to work for the National Children's Bureau. She obtained advice from Business link to register as a sole trader. She had the flexibility to work the hours she wanted to and to continue her voluntary work.

The University experience was a positive one for Karen although inconsistencies and unreliability of support worker agencies impacted negatively on her studying. The travel costs at University came out of her direct payment affecting her budget for support.

Step 4 Karen applied for a work placement at a library. She believed that the library rejected her work placement before interview stage by making assumptions about what she can and can't do before letting her try. Subsequently, Karen obtained a placement at a law firm. *'They were more concerned with what I could do rather than the problems I would have. They were really supportive. Not like at the library where they assumed I couldn't do it before giving me a chance.'*

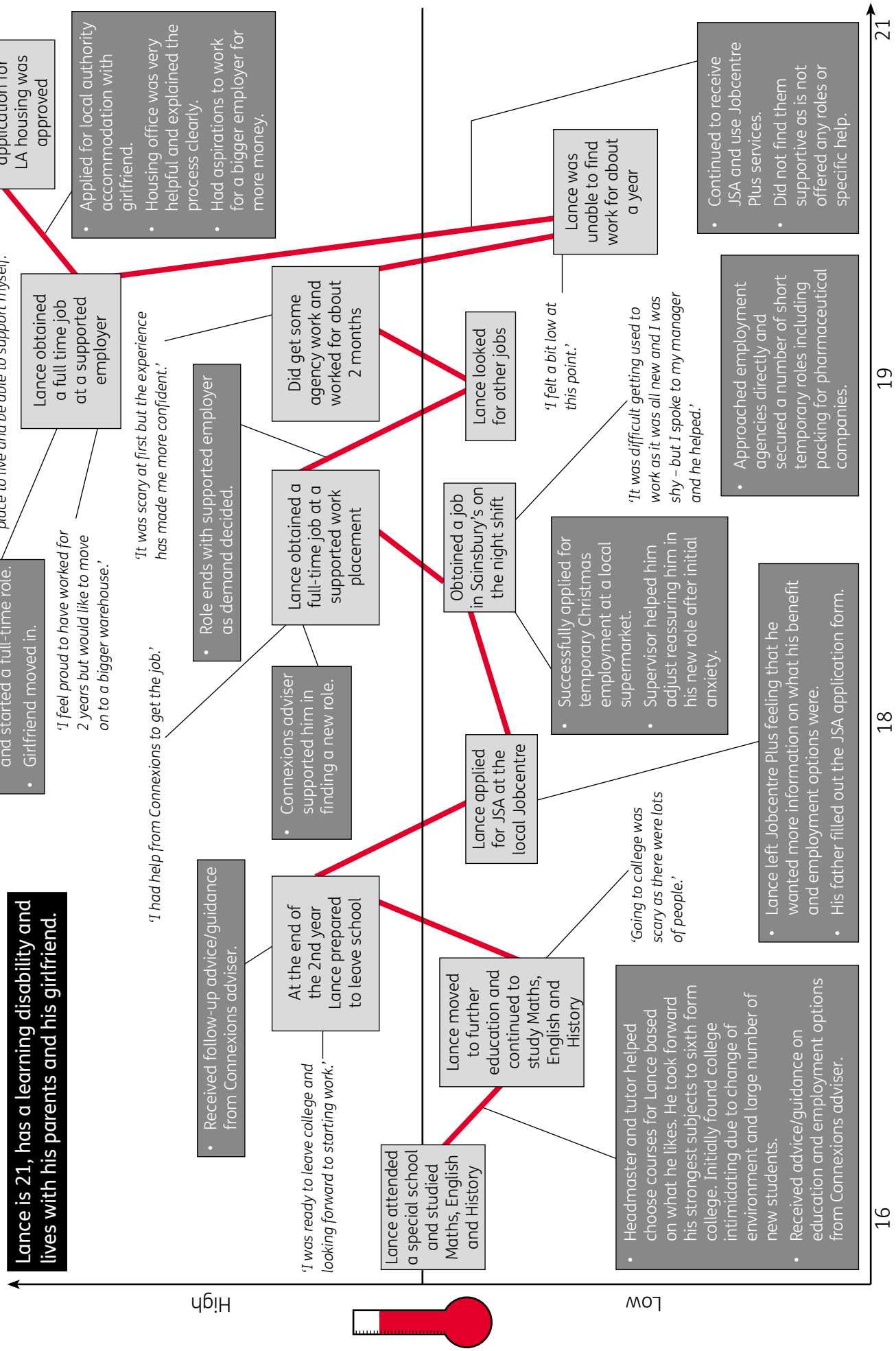
Step 5 Karen secured work at the National Children's Bureau *'This is voluntary work but I hope it may develop into paid work.'*

Step 6 Karen attended the Jobcentre to seek help to find a job. *'I found this experience extremely frustrating and disappointing – I feel that I am seen as lazy and all disabled people are lazy and expect things to be done for them.'*

Karen expected more help from Jobcentre Plus and the a more positive attitude from the DEA. She felt that support to access work in her case had been ineffective – not allowing her to showcase her skills as a result of being sent to inappropriate referrals. Karen felt she was further away from attaining her goal of full-time paid work.

Step 7 Karen is still without paid employment. She wants to continue to work voluntarily acting as an advocate for those who can't speak for themselves even if she succeeds in obtaining full-time employment.

Figure 3.2 Lance's journey



Lance is 21, has a learning disability and lives with his parents and his girlfriend.

Step 1 Lance attended a special school and studied Maths, English and History. His headmaster and tutor helped him choose his courses based on what he liked.

Step 2 Lance moved to further education. He took forward his strongest subjects. Initially, he found college intimidating due to the change of environment and the large number of new students *'going to college was scary as there were lots of people*'. He received advice and guidance on education and employment options from his Connexions adviser.

Step 3 At the end of his 2nd year Lance prepared to leave college. *'I was ready to leave college and looking forward to starting work.'* He received follow up advice and guidance from his Connexions adviser.

Step 4 Lance applied for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) at the local Jobcentre. He left the Jobcentre feeling that he wanted more information on what his benefit and employment options were. His father filled out the JSA application form.

Step 5 Lance obtained a temporary Christmas job at a local supermarket on the night shift. *'It was difficult getting used to work as it was all new and I was shy – but I spoke to my manager and he helped.'*

Step 6 Lance obtained a full-time job at a supported work placement. His Connexions adviser supported him to find this. Lance felt better about his situation and closer to his long-term goal of full-time work.

Step 7 Lance's job was terminated with his supported employer as demand declined. Lance looked for other jobs.

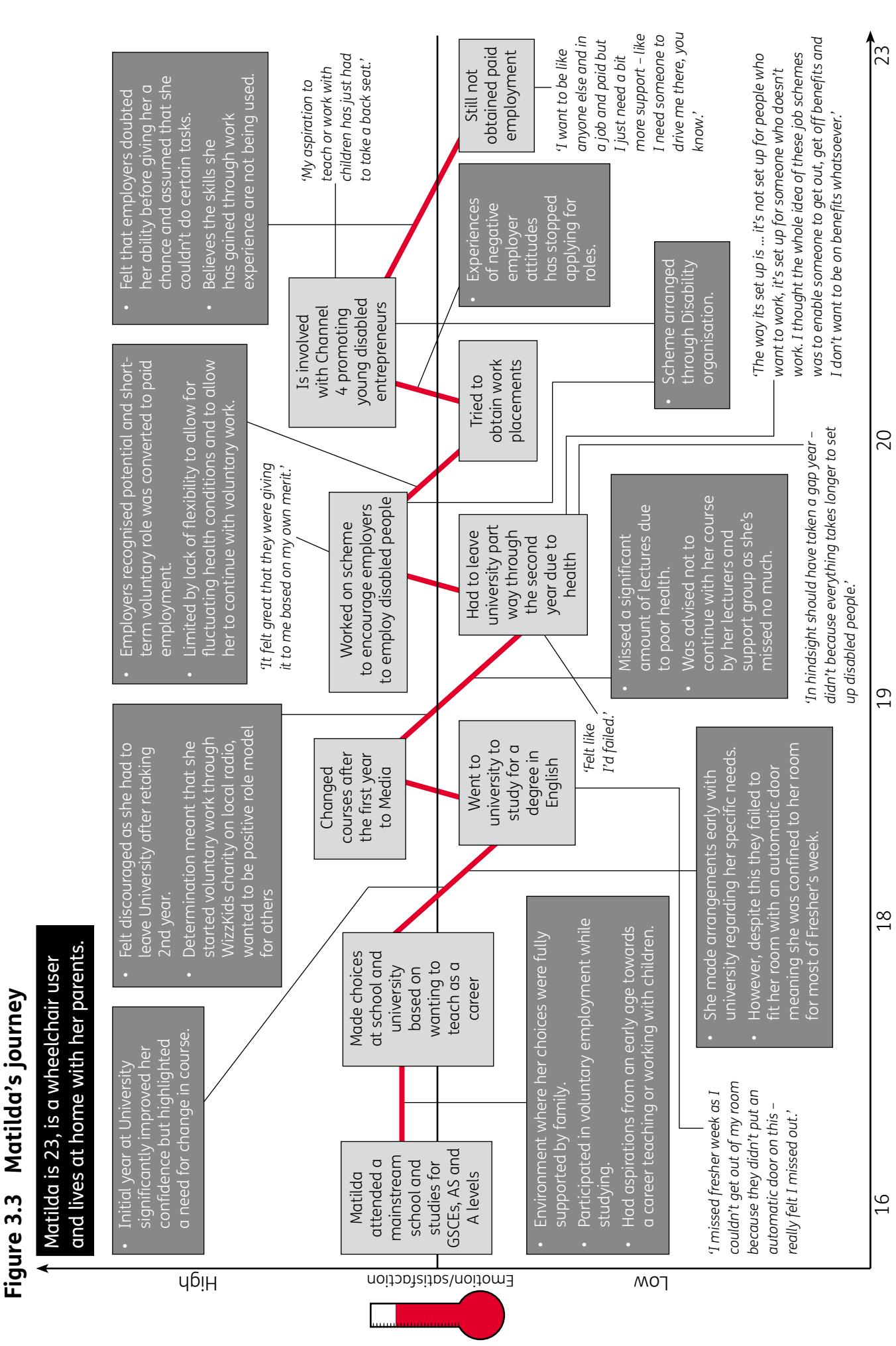
Step 8 Lance got some agency work and worked for about two months. He approached employment agencies directly and secured a number of short-term roles. *'It was scary at first but the experience has made me more confident.'*

Step 9 Lance was unable to find work for about a year. He continued to receive JSA and used Jobcentre Plus services. He did not find them supportive as they did not offer any roles or specific help. *'I felt a bit low at this point.'*

Step 10 Lance was contacted by his previous employer and offered a full-time role. His girlfriend moved in with him. *'I feel proud to have worked for two years but would like to move on to a bigger warehouse.'*

Step 11 Lance applied for Local Authority accommodation with his girlfriend. The housing office was very helpful and explained the process clearly. He has aspirations to work for a bigger employer for more money. His application for Local Authority housing was approved.

Figure 3.3 Matilda's journey



Matilda is 23, a wheelchair user and lives at home with her parents.

Step 1 Matilda attended a mainstream school and studied for GCSE, AS and A levels. She participated in voluntary employment while studying. She had aspirations from an early age towards a career teaching or working with children.

Step 2 Matilda went to university to study for a degree in English; her choices were based on her early aspirations to teach. *'I missed fresher week as I couldn't get out of my room because they didn't put an automatic door on this – felt I really missed out.'* This was despite the fact that she had made arrangements early with the University regarding her specific needs.

Step 3 Matilda changed courses after the first year to media. The initial year at University significantly improved her confidence but highlighted a need for a change in course. During this 2nd year she missed a significant amount of lectures due to poor health. She was advised not to continue with her course by her lecturers and support group as she had missed so much. *'In hindsight I should have taken a gap year – because everything takes longer to set up for disabled people.'*

Step 4 Matilda left University part way through the second year. *'I felt like I'd failed.'* She started work voluntarily for WhizzKids charity on the local radio – wanted to be a positive role model for others.

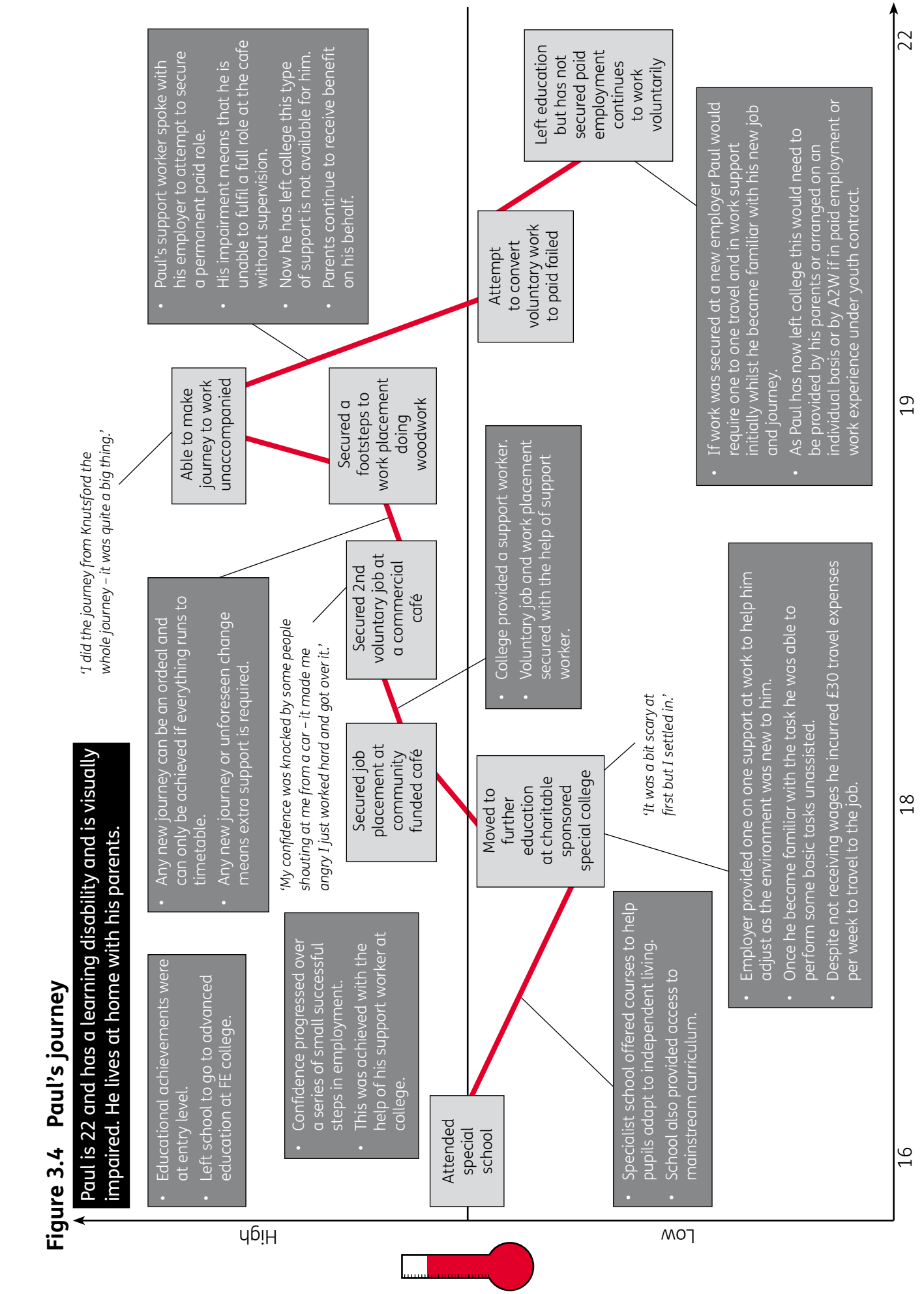
Step 5 Matilda worked on a scheme to encourage employers to employ disabled people. This was arranged through a disability organisation. Employers recognised her potential and the short-term voluntary role was converted to short-term paid employment.

Step 6 Matilda tried to obtain work placements but was limited by the lack of flexibility to allow for fluctuating health conditions and to allow her to continue with voluntary work. *'The way it is set up is ... it's not set up for people who want to work. It's set up for someone who doesn't work. I thought the whole idea of these job schemes was to enable someone to get out, get off benefits and I don't want to be on benefits whatsoever.'*

Step 7 Matilda was involved with Channel 4 promoting young disabled entrepreneurs. *'My aspiration to teach or work with children has just had to take a back seat.'* Matilda's negative experiences of employers' attitudes to her stopped her applying for roles. She felt that employers doubted her ability before giving her a chance and assumed she couldn't do certain tasks. She believed the skills she has gained through work experience are not being used.

Step 8 Matilda still has not obtained paid employment. *'I want to be like anyone else and in a job and paid. I just need a little more support – like I need someone to drive me there, you know.'*

Figure 3.4 Paul's journey



Paul is 22 and has a learning disability and a visual impairment. He lives at home with his parents.

Step 1 Paul attended a special school – the specialist school offered courses to support pupils in adapting to living independently alongside the mainstream curriculum. His educational achievements were at entry level.

Step 2 When Paul moved to high school he chose to attend a charity run special college which continued to offer support with living independently along with academic subjects. *'This was scary at first but I settled in.'*

Step 3 Paul secured a job placement at a community funded café – college provided a support worker. This was a voluntary job secured with the help of a support worker.

Step 4 Paul secured a second voluntary placement at a commercial café – again college provided a support worker.

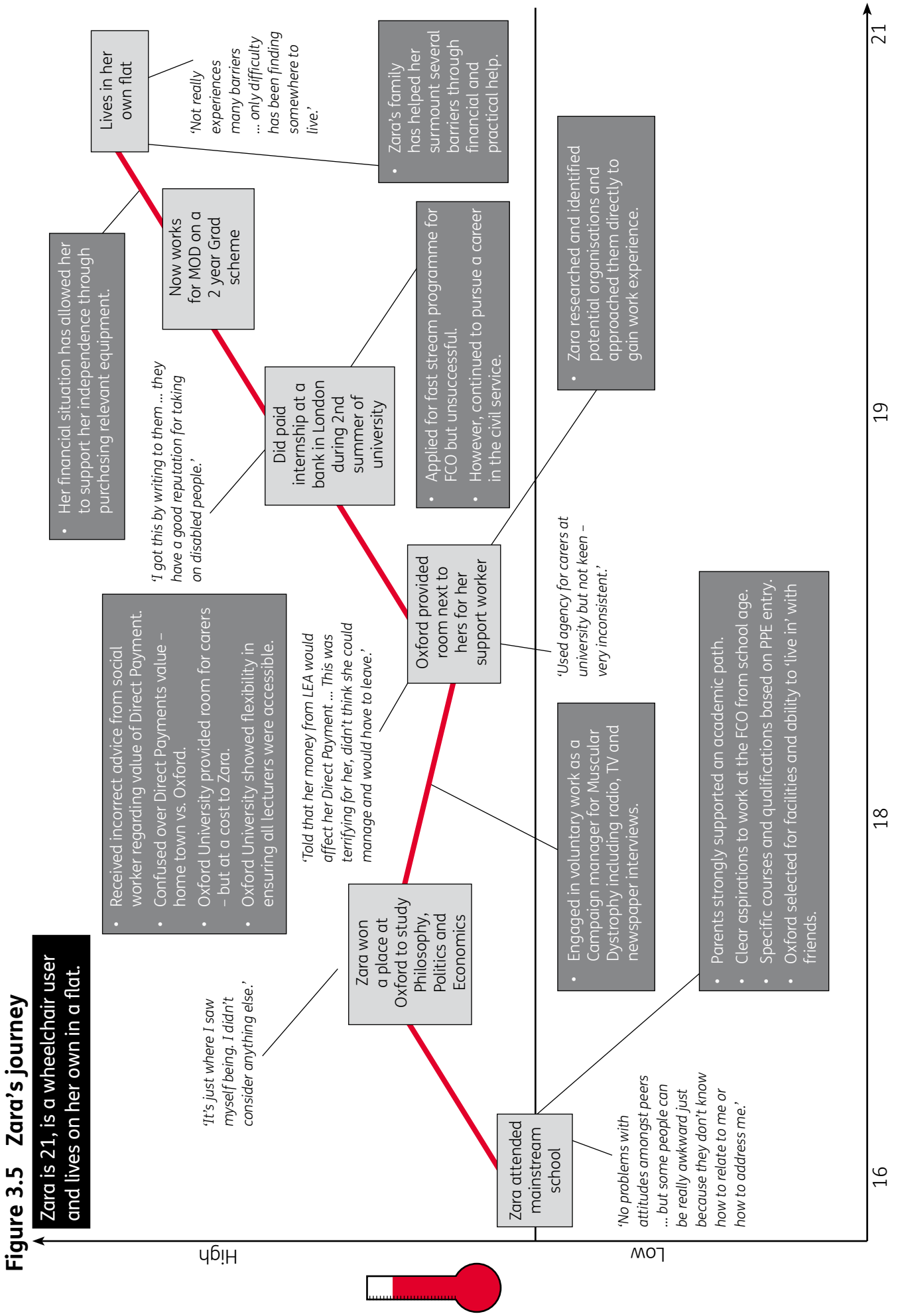
Step 5 Paul secured a 'footsteps to work' placement doing woodwork.

Step 6 Paul was able to make the journey to work unaccompanied. Paul received travel training from college and was initially accompanied on journeys before progressing to travel on his own. *'I did the journey from Knutsford the whole journey – it was quite a big thing.'* This was a real highlight for Paul and a step nearer to independence. Paul explained that even a small change such as a different type of bus (white rather than yellow) could completely disorientate him as he wouldn't know where the bell was to request his stop.

Step 7 Paul's support worker spoke with his employer to attempt to secure a permanent paid role. The employer felt unable to offer him a paid role as he was unable to fulfil a full role at the café without supervision.

Step 8 Paul left education but had not secured paid employment, he continues to work voluntarily. In any new role to which Paul had to travel to, he would require support while travelling, until he became familiar with his new journey.

Figure 3.5 Zara's journey



Zara is 21 and has Muscular Dystrophy, she is a wheelchair user and lives independently in a flat.

Step 1 Zara attended a mainstream school. *'I had no problems with attitudes amongst peers ... but some people can be really awkward just because they don't know how to relate to me or how to address me.'* Her parents strongly supported an academic path and she had a clear aspiration to work at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) from school age. She selected specific courses and qualifications based on her aspiration to study, Philosophy, Politics and Economics at University.

Step 2 Zara selected Oxford University to apply for based on the facilities it had and its policy that all students live in for the duration of their studies. She successfully won a place at Oxford. *'It's just where I saw myself being, I didn't consider anything else.'*

Step 3 Zara engaged in voluntary work as a campaign manager for Muscular Dystrophy including radio TV and newspaper interviews.

Step 4 Zara started at Oxford. They provided a room next to hers for her support worker and ensured all her lectures were accessible. *'I was told that my money from Local Education Authority would affect my direct payment. This was terrifying as I didn't think I could manage and would have to leave.'* This was a low point for Zara as she received incorrect advice from her social worker regarding the value of her direct payment. This was compounded by differing rates payable by her home authority and in Oxford where she was living and having to seek support.

Step 5 Zara secured a paid internship at a bank in London during the 2nd summer of University. *'I got this by writing to them ... they have a good reputation for taking on disabled people.'*

Step 6 Zara applied for the Civil Service fast stream programme for FCO but was unsuccessful. However, she continued to pursue a career in the Civil Service and secured a job at the Ministry of Defence on a two year graduate scheme.

Step 7 Zara now lives independently in her own flat. *'I have not really experienced many barriers ... only difficulty has been finding somewhere to live.'* Her financial situation and strong family support has facilitated her independence.

4 Conclusions

A key objective of this work was to identify experiences, barriers and catalysts which determine the path taken by disabled young people from their time in education through to securing relevant employment. An analysis of the previously identified themes in combination with the customer journey maps has allowed us to identify a number of these barriers and catalysts and these are detailed below.

4.1 Barriers

The evidence shows that there are several barriers preventing respondents from fulfilling their potential:

- Some employers and service providers' negative perceptions of what disabled people are capable of seems to be a common and widespread barrier among our group of respondents. They felt that these organisations were more focussed on what they believe that they are unable to do, rather than giving them a chance to show what they can do, potentially limiting employment opportunities.
- Respondents did not cite their own impairment or health condition as being a primary barrier to being employed. However, it must be noted that poor health prevented some respondents from completing Higher Education courses and qualifications.
- A lack of flexibility in terms of education was cited as a reason why many were forced to drop out of their chosen educational path and this restricted their potential for educational achievement, future employment and potentially their long-term aspirations.
- There appears to be a general lack of awareness of support services, among some users of the system. In addition, there was evidence to indicate that the rights of disabled people were not clearly understood among professionals, service users and their support networks. In some cases respondents were given the wrong information by professionals, so they relied on family support to negotiate the system, which would have implications if that family support was not available.
- Local Education Authorities (LEAs) awards are based on support costs at the students' home address. However, agencies charge for support workers at a local rate which is often more expensive than that at the students' original locations, an issue if students study away from home. These differences in costs can mean that additional funds need to be found from elsewhere, which could be a barrier to attending Higher Education.
- The cost of travelling to unpaid activities such as voluntary work, training courses, and classes can be a barrier to how disabled people progress towards paid work. For some respondents, their travel costs came out of their Direct Payments. In these cases this meant a choice between adequate support and acquiring the skills and experience for future employability.
- What our respondents had to say:

  … about some employers and service providers' negative perceptions of what disabled people are capable of:

  > *'There's a lack of opportunities for people to show what they can do instead of people always making assumptions about what they can't do.'*
  >
  > (Female, 26, Bristol)

... about travelling expenses impacting on affording adequate care:

'Transport is the biggest barrier, to go anywhere because she has to be driven and this costs money, which comes out of her carer's money. It works out a lot as we live out in the sticks.'

(Parent of female, 26, Cheshire)

... about differences in awareness about barriers and living independently:

'I live independently now but have helpers if I need to go shopping or something, and to do my voluntary work.'

(Female, 21, Bristol)

4.2 Catalysts

However, the research also indicates that there are catalysts which contribute towards respondents being able to maximise their potential.

- For those respondents who wanted to access employment through the Higher Education route, a family background that encouraged and supported a strong focus on academic education and a career was clearly important. Those respondents who had reached Higher Education had all grown up with this kind of background and family support.
- Respondents that received complete and accurate information from professional bodies and support workers were enabled to make informed choices. A more supportive and encouraging attitude from professionals led to a more positive experience and greater opportunities.
- Self-employment and working freelance were identified by some respondents as a way of being able to carry out paid work with greater flexibility. This would help when managing fluctuating health conditions and also enable them to continue with their voluntary work.
- Respondents felt that voluntary work provided disabled people with the opportunity to gain work experience, demonstrate skills and capability to employers, and increase their confidence. For some it had acted as a route into short-term paid employment, while for others it served the purpose of increasing self-esteem by allowing them to act as an advocate for other disabled people.
- What our respondents had to say:

  ... about strong family support:

  'What I've wanted has always aligned, very happily, with what they've wanted for me. You know, go to university, get a good job, that sort of thing. They just want me to be happy really.'

  (Female, 21, Bristol)

  ... about the importance of voluntary work:

  'It started out as voluntary work ... but ended up as paid work once they saw that I could easily do the job.'

  (Female, 23, Bucks)

  ... about finances:

  'Biggest thing is the money aspect, to relieve us of the expense of her travel when the caring money runs out. To always be able to afford a signer so she can always do her voluntary work or more classes or even paid work.'

  (Parent, female, 26, Cheshire)

4.3 Issues

This research has identified a number of issues which have been shared with the Office for Disability Issues (ODI). The research will be used to enhance the evidence received as part of their 'Fulfilling Potential' discussion and inform development of the disability strategy.

Currently, practical assistance and adjustments in educational institutions has enabled some respondents to achieve their educational aspirations and participate fully in an educational environment. However, this research shows that:

- Some educational institutions do not offer sufficient flexibility in terms of in-term breaks or course structure. This led to suggestions from respondents to improve this situation. These included allowing time out from a course to manage fluctuating health conditions, enabling distance learning, having more flexible course structures and the ability to spread degrees over more than three years.
- Some universities and colleges do not make sufficient reasonable adjustments to ensure buildings and education provision are accessible for a disabled student. In addition, some students do not know their rights in respect of what universities and colleges must do to comply with the Equality Act.
- The Jobcentre Plus experience and service provision for young disabled people does not appear to meet all of the needs and expectations of those interviewed. Respondents suggested more work placements/trials and work experience to enable them to demonstrate their abilities to potential employers and improve their confidence and employability skills. In addition, they would also value more 'realistic' work trials provided by Jobcentre Plus.
- Respondents suggested that they would prefer more emphasis and advice on self-employment and freelancing through Jobcentre Plus and other professional bodies.
- While respondents had been able to secure voluntary placements with a range of employers these have not in most cases been converted to permanent paid work. It would be helpful if the factors behind this were understood in more detail.
- The respondents partaking in voluntary work were often incurring substantial additional cost for expenses such as travelling without any financial recompense from the work they undertake. While respondents made clear the benefits of volunteering it is not clear how much of a deterrent to seeking voluntary work these additional expenses are and if this then affects the movement into paid work. It would be helpful to understand this in more detail.
- Among those interviewed the overall standard of knowledge (across, disabled people, their families and all the relevant professional bodies including Jobcentre Plus) around service provision, and the rights of disabled people, did not appear to be consistently comprehensive and does not meet the needs of young people moving through education into employment.

Appendix
Topic guides

Prior to conducting this research a topic guide was drafted and agreed, however, due to the nature of the research this was only used as a guide and questions were individually tailored to each person being interviewed.

Outline discussion guide

Disabled Young Peoples' Journeys from Education to Employment

Need examples throughout

Objectives:

The primary objective of this research is to develop an in-depth understanding of the individual experiences of young disabled people as they have made the journey from education through to employment. What situations do they think worked well for them? What barriers did they come across, and how did they surmount them?

Interviewer notes

This document is a guide to the principal themes and issues to be covered.

Questions can be modified and followed up in more detail as appropriate.

In this interview, the key themes we want to cover are: realising Aspirations (ensuring appropriate support and intervention for disabled people at key life transitions, to realise disabled people's potential and aspirations for education, work and independent living), Individual Control (enabling disabled people to make their own choices and have the right opportunities to live independently), and Changing Attitudes and Behaviours (promoting positive attitudes and behaviours towards disabled people to enable participation in work, community life and wider society, tackling discrimination and harassment wherever they occur).

Introduction

- Introduce yourself and thank them for agreeing to talk to us.
- Tell them:
  - a bit about what the research is about;
  - that the information about them will be kept private by researchers and the Department for Work and Pensions;
  - that the findings from the interviews will be used by employees of the Department for Work and Pensions so they can write a report;
  - that their name will not be given to the Department for Work and Pensions or used in any reports.

  - that we would like to record the interview to make sure we report exactly what they tell us, ask and make sure they are comfortable with that.
- Ensure that they know we don't want this to be a formal question and answer session. More like an informal conversation where they can just talk to you about their experiences and how they felt about things.
- Offer some assurance to the interviewee that it's OK if they can't answer all the questions because they don't remember or don't want to share information about that particular experience.
- Ask if they have any questions.

Background

Respondent warm-up and introductions.

- First names, age, bit of background, what they like to do in spare time etc.
- Ask them if they'd mind telling you a bit about the barriers they face/have faced throughout education/employment – educational achievements-qualifications with you about your experiences from when you were at school up to the present day, about your experiences of any training you've had, any work you've done and any time out of work. I'd like to know about any barriers you've experienced and how you dealt with them, and also your successes, about what went well for you. Is that OK?

About school

1. **Firstly, can you tell me about when you were at school/in education and what courses you were taking?**

Cover: ask about school more generally:

- Which school college they attended
  Prompt – *mainstream, specialist*
- Courses they were taking?
- Age when they chose these courses?
  Probe – Was it your choice? Did you need support to attend school/college? Did you get it? Did you explore other options? Were you encouraged to choose a particular course? Who did you come into contact with at school or from local authority about your courses?

  Prompts – *Was your choice based on what you wanted to do on leaving education or other, i.e. what you were good at, enjoyed, what friends were doing, were there limited options for you?*

> **Interviewer note:** *We want to establish what they wanted to do on leaving school and if they were encouraged to think about work as an option and what was put in place to support them achieving the goals they set themselves.*

If interviewee states they hadn't thought about work etc – explore reason why not/were any alternatives explored?

2. **Who did you talk to about your choices?**

Cover:

- Who supported them at school/home/other
  Prompt – *If yes – what did they say about it? Did you get much support? Did you get encouragement? Who from– careers advisers, teachers, peers?*

  If no – *any reason why not?*
- Was there any career advice available to you?

3. **Looking back do you think these were the right choices?**

Cover:

- Did they have enough information/support to make the right choices?
- Would they do anything differently?

4. **What support do you think should be available to support young people like yourself make the right choices?**

Leaving school

5. **Tell me what age you were when you when you left school/education?**

Cover:

- Why they choose to stay in education until this age/leave at this age?
  Probe – *check about influences. Did you have other options?*
- What were people's attitudes towards your choices? Did they try to influence you?
  Probe – *who supported/influenced/discouraged?* More here.
- Did you feel prepared?
  Probe – *what had you done to prepare yourself, was anything put in place to support you, would this have helped, what would have helped most?*

Priorities

6. **When you left education did any other changes happen?**

Prompt – *where you live, benefits you received etc, health services, support network, etc*

Cover:

- What was your priority at this point?
  Prompt – *was it finding work or sorting out housing, support networks, benefits, transport, health etc.*

  Probe – *did you feel under pressure – to find work, to live independently, to stay living with parents.*
- What were people's attitudes towards you?

- Were you able to get/find the advice and support you needed?
- Did the people who supported you have different priorities for you/want different things for you? How did you deal with this? How did it make you feel?

Interviewers did it feel like a smooth transition from one period of your life to another or was it like a cliff edge, explore emotions – frightened, stressed, elated.

7. **What did you intend to do straight after leaving school?**

   Prompt – *did you have a plan?*

   Probe – d*id you intend to live independently, find work, and claim benefits in your own right, gap year, training courses, jobs, spells of unemployment etc.*

Cover:

Did this happen?

- **If yes** – *Did this go OK for you? What went well?*
- **If no** – *What went wrong? How did you feel? What support did you have?*
- **If no** – *Why not? What happened? How did you feel? What support did you have? What did you actually do straight after leaving?*

8. **What are you doing now?**

Note for interviewer – try to get an idea of what their 'journey' has been since leaving school in terms of what they've done. We want some kind of timeline of events.

Cover:

- Is this still what you'd like to be doing given the choice?
- **If no** – what would you like to be doing instead/what are you doing instead?
- What was it (if anything) that helped you decide to do something different?

You told me you wanted to work in xxxxxxx

Interviewer – tailor question depending on if they have managed to secure this work or not.

Cover:

- How they think they could get into this type of work?

OR

- What sorts of things supported you to get into this type of work?
- Do they think they can you do this on your own?

OR

- Do they think some support would help. What type of support?
- Do they think enough support from other people/organisations is available?
- Do you think you could have done things differently?

How independent are you

9. **Do you feel you are independent?**

Cover:

- Why do they think this is?
- What is it that most makes them independent?
- Do they feel more independent in part of their life and not others?
- How do they feel about this? Explore – do they feel that they are allowed to make their own choices/decisions, to lead their own life?

10. **What could be different that would allow you to be more independent?**

Prompt – encourage them to talk about societies/other peoples' attitudes towards them – does this affect their independence?

How people treat you

11. **Do you think you are treated differently by people since leaving education?**

    If yes – In what way is it different?

    If no – Why do you think that is?

Cover:

- Interactions with employers
- DWP
- External organisation
- Families/friends
- Local Authorities

12. **How would you describe the attitudes of people towards you?**

Cover:

- Steps that have been taken to make things easier to access (courses?) interviews and work?
- Other services? Do they make necessary adjustments for you so you can access their services?

Have people's attitudes towards you presented a barrier to your progression? Or have people's attitudes sometimes been of benefit?

13. **Do you have a support network in place?** You may need to explain what you mean by support network (family, friends, disability organisation, Local Authority professional etc)

If yes – can you tell me a bit about this?

If no – in what ways could a support network help you?

Cover:

- Is this different from when you were in school/education?
- Does it work?
- Any transitional problems? (in movement between school/education?)
- **If yes** – what were they? What could have helped?

Achievements

14. Thinking back have you achieved what you thought you would before leaving education?

Cover:

- Do they you feel differently about what they would like to do?
- Do they feel enough support is available – is it the right support?
- What could be different?
- Are they able to do all the things you would like to do? (living independently/social life/work/studies etc)
- **If no** – why not, what needs to be in place for this to happen?
  If yes – what kinds of things have supported you most in achieving this?

Did you have any role models when you were younger/now? Who were/are they? How have they influenced you?

A couple of final questions

15. What would you do if you were in charge of supporting young disabled people get the qualifications and jobs they really want?

16. Is there anything you'd like to say about what things have been like for you since leaving education to the present day that you feel are important that we haven't already spoken about?

This research was commissioned by the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) to enable them to further understand the experiences of customers aged 18-26 years with a physical or learning disability as they moved from education towards employment, in order to form part of the evidence base being used to support the development of a new disability strategy.

The primary objective of this research was to develop and further our understanding of the barriers and catalysts that hinder or help young adults with disabilities to make the transition from education into the world of work. This report presents evidence on the views of disabled young people regarding their interactions with the education system, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), support services and third party organisations as they come to the end of their education and start the process of seeking and gaining work.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:
Carol Beattie, Central Analysis Division, Department for Work and Pensions,
Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield, S1 2GQ.
http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

Published by the
Department for Work and Pensions
October 2012
www.dwp.gov.uk
Working Paper no. 111
ISBN 978-1-908523-88-4