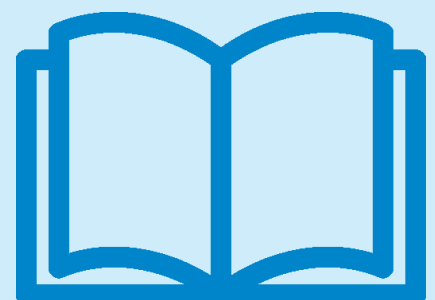# State of Gloucestershire

Opportunities and housing for disabled people and people with mental health challenges

Education & Training

Introduction

In 2021, Barnwood's Insights team carried out an Opportunities and Housing Survey. We asked disabled people and people with mental health challenges living in Gloucestershire to tell us about their housing and their experiences of accessing different types of opportunity.

Over 260 people from across the county responded to the survey. Those who took part in the survey told us they had a range of different impairment types. Looking at population data for Gloucestershire suggests that the proportions of respondents with different impairments broadly mirrors the overall county make-up. However, it should be acknowledged that these research findings may not reflect the experiences of all disabled people and people with mental health challenges in the county.

As well as carrying out the survey, we've also looked at the findings of research conducted by a range of other organisations, to contextualise the survey responses.

In this booklet, we share key findings from our survey and our review of research undertaken by others that are related to education and training.

This booklet is one in a series exploring the findings of this research by theme (other booklets look at employment, volunteering, housing and leisure activities).

For more information about the methodology of the research please contact **Roz Warden**, Head of Insights, on **01242 539935** or **roz.warden@barnwoodtrust.org**.

What have we learned?

Disabled people and people with mental health challenges face numerous barriers to accessing education and training opportunities in Gloucestershire.

Less than
1 in 3
people can do the education or training they want to do

1 in 2
people said that their **health** made it difficult to take part in education

1 in 2
people said that **information** would make it easier for them to take part in education

Many people said that their health was currently a barrier to undertaking education and training. Confidence, difficulties travelling and expense were also mentioned frequently.
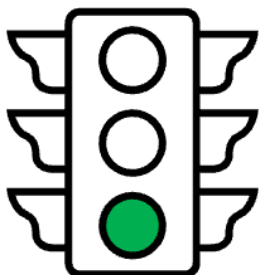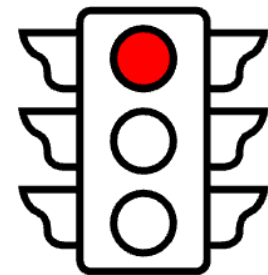
A lot of people, however, said that making it easier to find information about education would help them to access these opportunities. Other things that would help included having more choice, the right technology, or more help (e.g. from a Personal Assistant). This indicates that if conditions are changed then these barriers can begin to be addressed.

From insights to action...

Together, the research findings from the survey and other national data highlight the importance of proactive **engagement** with disabled people to generate solutions, **accessible information** provision, and greater **choice**.

For education and training, some suggestions for how you might do this are included below. More detailed recommendations can be found at the end of this booklet.

Engage | Engage with disabled people to identify what potential applicants may need to know before signing up to an opportunity

Inform | Consider how information is shared with disabled people – offer in-person and online information sessions; provide information about course materials, the accessibility of venues and adjustments that are available

Choice | Consider and address some of the barriers around courses or training events: location, timing, physical accessibility, digital inclusion and cost, for example

For a conversation about funding or initiatives to support your organisation to take forward actions from this research, please contact the Strategic Devolpment Management Team via **development@barnwoodtrust.org** or **01242 539935**.

Our survey findings:
Access to education and training opportunities

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- If being able to do education or training activities matters to them
- If they can do the education or training activities they want to do

We heard that:

- **59%** told us that being able to do education or training activities matters to them

- **44%** told us they cannot do the education or training activities they want to do

Less than
1 in 3
people can do the
education or training
they want to do

There were variations in the responses given by people with different impairment types:

- Less than a quarter of the respondents who told us they have an autism spectrum condition or a physical disability agreed that they can do the education or training activities they want to do (**20%** of respondents with an autism spectrum condition and **23%** of respondents with a physical disability)

- The comparable figures for the other impairment type groups ranged from **28%** (for people who reported having a mental health challenge) to **48%** (for people who reported having a learning disability)

Other findings:
Access to education and training opportunities

National research indicates that disabled people and people with mental health challenges are disadvantaged in their access to learning opportunities. For example, children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are consistently more likely to be excluded from school, for fixed periods and permanently, in comparison to children without identified needs[1]. In the 2020/21 academic year[2]:

- The rate of suspensions (fixed-term exclusions from school) was around **four-and-a-half-times** higher for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and over four times higher for children receiving SEN support, than those with no identified SEN

- The rate of permanent exclusions was around **two-and-a-half-times** higher for children with an EHCP and **five times** higher for children receiving SEN support than those with no identified SEN

There is evidence of improvements in access to education in some areas. For example, the Higher Educational Statistics Agency found that disabled students represented **15.2%** of the higher education student population in 2020/21. This was an increase from **12%** in 2016/17[3].

Our survey findings:
Barriers to education and training opportunities

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- What, if anything, made it hard for them to do the education or training activities they want to do

We listed barriers that people might experience and asked them if they faced any of these or any other barriers.

The three most frequently reported barriers were:

- My health (e.g. my disability means I need a lot of rest) (**49%**)
- I don't feel confident enough (**46%**)
- It's difficult for me to travel to places (**41%**)

Other common barriers reported included 'it's too expensive for me' (**37%**), 'I don't know what's available for me' (**34%**) and 'I need other people to help me' (**23%**).

Although health was identified as a barrier to taking part in education or training activities, respondents also reported a range of ways in which opportunities could be more accessible and inclusive. This reflects the social model of disability which describes how people are not disabled by their impairment or health condition but by barriers in society (for example, inaccessible buildings).

Barriers to education

Health 49%

Lack of confidence 46%

Travel 41%

Other findings:
Barriers to education and training opportunities

A study that investigated the barriers to accessing adult education in London identified a range of barriers people face. **Two fifths** of the individuals who participated in this research were disabled people. The barriers identified through the research included[4]:

- A feeling that the onus is on disabled people to advocate for themselves and educate others about their needs

- A lack of willingness to make reasonable adjustments

- A lack of willingness by institutions to provide information in a physical format (rather than on the internet) and a lack of information about accessibility within course literature

- Significant additional costs associated with accessing education, including care costs, travel costs and course fees

- Being primarily reliant on social connections to find suitable and affordable courses

A House of Commons Education Select Committee inquiry into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in 2019 identified a number of areas where there was evidence of barriers to educational access and outcomes, including[5]:

- Unclear pathways and "patchy opportunities" for children and young people with SEND

- Limiting, low expectations of young people

- Pupils with SEND facing a lack of choice and inclusivity at college

- A reluctance amongst some colleges to run courses for students with SEND

- Post-16 options being "determined by what the market is prepared to offer, rather than by the needs of young people"

Our survey findings:
What would help?

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- What, if anything, would most help them to take part in education or training (we use the term 'enablers' below)

We provided a list of possible enablers and asked them to select the three that they would find most helpful.

- Being able to easily find information about what activities are available was the enabler selected by the greatest number of respondents (**45%**)

At least a **fifth** of the respondents told us that they would find the following conditions most helpful:

- Lots of choices of activities they could do (**35%**)

- Having the right technology (e.g. access to a phone, tablet, computer, or the internet) (**35%**)

- Getting help when doing activities (e.g. support from a personal assistant) (**30%**)

- Inclusive practices (e.g. learning materials in different formats) (**24%**)

- Having their own car or van to travel to activities (**20%**)

1 in 2 people said that **information** would make it easier for them to take part in education

Other findings:
What would help?

Research indicates that the following conditions would improve the educational opportunities available to disabled people and people with mental health challenges:

- Establishing better links between education providers and employers[6]

- Giving greater consideration to the learning environment, so that it is fully accessible to disabled people with a range of physical and non-physical needs[7]

- Surrounding disabled people with other disabled people through peer-support to increase their capacity to aspire[8]

Recommendations

The recommendations which follow offer an approach that organisations and providers can take to establish what changes may be most impactful for the disabled people and people with mental health challenges they seek to work with. This approach recognises that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring greater choice and accessibility for disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

If you would like to discuss any of the recommendations related to this research, contact the Strategic Development Management Team via **development@barnwoodtrust.org** or **01242 539935**.

1 Proactively and directly engage with disabled people and people with mental health challenges to understand how to improve access to education and training opportunities. Co-production and co-design can help ensure that information about these opportunities is fully accessible

Engaging with groups of individuals who experience barriers to accessing meaningful opportunities and getting the support they need is vital to understanding how to address these issues. Working directly with people through co-production and co-design has the potential to generate solutions which encompass individuals' expertise about what would help.

For example:

Taking part in community outreach and networking events can be valuable for training and education providers as a means of engaging with a wide range of groups and individuals.

Gathering feedback about how inclusive current practices or opportunities are within staff surveys or learner evaluation forms can be useful in identifying barriers and potential solutions.

Direct engagement can also help ensure information that is produced about education and training opportunities is accessible. Incorporating lived experience and new perspectives around what makes communication accessible can help ensure information reaches everyone.

Undertaking regular engagement may be built into regular review processes and organisational policies to become standard practice. In carrying out this engagement, it is also important to consider creating an environment where people feel safe to share both the challenges they face and the support or conditions that could best meet their needs.

For example:

Engagement activities may identify additional information it is important to share as part of any communications about an education or training opportunity. For example, this may include not only directions to a venue but photographs and pictures of the internal layout, including what the room looks like, and where to find different facilities within the venue.

2 **Provide clear and accessible information about education and training opportunities in a range of formats and via multiple channels, along with the option for in person contact. Accessible information provision should consider all the useful information that might be provided to enable real choice**

Clear and accessible information is essential in ensuring people can take part in opportunities that matter to them. This means providing timely information in a range of formats from Easy Read to audio, large print, and braille across a variety of media, print and digital.

Clear information provision isn't simply about making written communications accessible. Having staff members available to answer questions and plan with someone around individual preferences and access requirements can make a huge difference to a person's experiences and be invaluable.

For example:

Education and training providers may look to expand the range of accessible formats and types of information about all aspects of a course. This may include marketing materials, application forms, and course materials themselves.

For example:

Education and training providers may want to routinely offer course participants the option to meet with a course provider or trainer, including visiting the venue itself to discuss any access requirements.

This can ensure that individuals have the option to chat through any questions or concerns, that they feel supported from the start and can build confidence to participate. Engaging with individuals in this way can help create the conditions that make an opportunity accessible for an individual.

3 Take proactive steps to ensure real choice is available and accessible to disabled people and people with mental health challenges about education and training opportunities. Choice is more than just a greater range of options, it's about making sure that what's currently on offer is accessible to everyone

Proactive steps to increase choice and variety through better engagement might include looking at current practices and support and thinking about and discussing factors where choice could currently be hindered.

For example:

Education and training providers may want to keep in mind that individuals may have experienced previous barriers to education and training, which can lead to barriers to accessing current opportunities.

It may be important to consider flexibility in what is essential in relation to previous education/ qualification requirements in order to access current education and training.
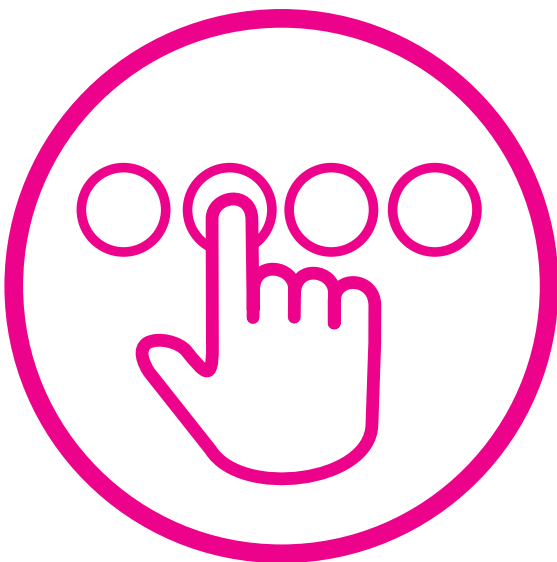
Current, available options might themselves be limiting choice. The conditions and context around an opportunity, such as the education and training environment, facilities within a premises, and accessibility of transport and parking are just as important as the variety of activities on offer.

For example:

Education and training providers may want to review where and how to create extra flexibility within and across different courses. Offering courses and sessions in a range of locations and at different times, with options for remote or distance learning, may be supportive of a wider range of individuals taking part (including those who may require support from a Personal Assistant).
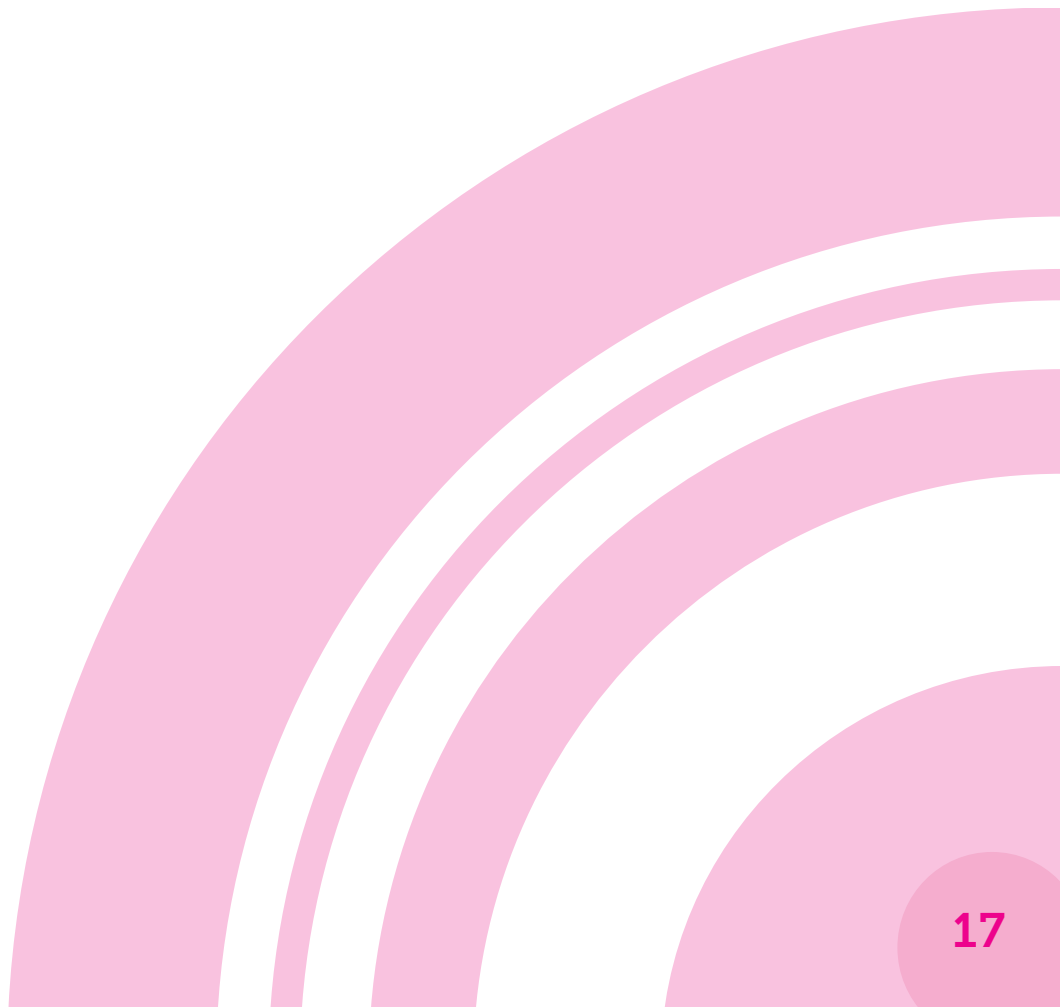
Sources

[1] Department for Education (2022) Permanent Exclusions and Suspensions in England

[2] Department for Education (2022) see Source 1

[3] Higher Education Statistics Agency (2022) Higher Education Student Statistics, UK (2020/21)

[4] Toynbee Hall (2022) More than just Education: A participatory action research project on adult education in London

[5] House of Commons Education Committee (2019) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

[6] Disability Rights UK (2015) Skills for Employment for Disabled People: A reflective report

[7] Flavell, L. (2013) Preparing to Include Special Children in Mainstream Schools: A Practical Guide Oxford: David Fulton Publishers

[8] Disability Rights UK (2015) see Source 6

Barnwood Trust would like to thank everyone who took part in this research and partner organisations who supported in developing and distributing the survey.

For more information about this research, including copies in accessible formats please contact Roz Warden on 01242 539935 or roz.warden@barnwoodtrust.org.

To get involved in conversations about taking forward the recommendations of this research, please contact the Strategic Development Management Team via development@barnwoodtrust.org or 01242 539935.