Article

The Transition to Employment in Wales and the Canary Islands for People with Intellectual Disabilities: Supported Employment

María Teresa Peña-Quintana * and Lidia E. Santana-Vega *

Department of Didactics and Educational Research, University of La Laguna, 38200 San Cristóbal de La Laguna, Spain
* Correspondence: mterep1007@gmail.com (M.T.P.-Q.); lsantana@ull.es (L.E.S.-V.)

Abstract: One of the most critical moments for young people with intellectual disabilities is their transition to adulthood and employment. It is necessary to make visible the talent of young people with intellectual disabilities to increase the level of employment in this group. Supported employment is a model of inclusion in competitive employment for people with special difficulties. In our work: (1) we analyse the educational system in Wales and the Canary Islands, from the perspective of students with special educational needs; (2) we address the process of transition to employment in both regions, highlighting the main milestones and obstacles to overcome; and (3) we analyse the current situation regarding Supported Employment programmes in Wales and the Canary Islands, highlighting their good practices, such as the Engage to Change Project and the Sinpromi Programme (both programmes promote Supported Employment and are presented as examples of good practice). Although Wales has a more developed vision than the Canary Islands, regarding the transition of young people with intellectual disabilities to employment, there are certain barriers that equally hinder the transition to employment in the two regions. Support, as an element to ensure equal opportunities and to promote the development of a more inclusive and sustainable society, is discussed.

Keywords: intellectual disability; supported employment; transition; equal opportunities; good practice

1. Introduction

Work plays a vital role in the quality of life of people. Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [1] states that: “Member States recognise the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities”.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [2] commits to leaving no one behind. To achieve this, it is necessary to take into account people with disabilities. In the 2030 Agenda, the quality of education, and inclusive education, is mentioned as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, and Article 24 includes the right to an inclusive education.

In recent decades, various authors have defended the idea of creating inclusive school communities. The concept of inclusion has gradually displaced the concept of integration. Inclusive schools seek to create communities that support all students, not just a category of students who are labelled as problematic. Inclusive schools focus on: assessing the needs of teachers, adapting teaching to meet special educational needs, providing support to students, promoting the role of counsellors during teacher training in schools, training counsellors in the field of career guidance for disadvantaged groups to promote their transition to labour market, and so on [3–7].

Wales and the Canary Islands are regions that belong to two states that widely recognise the rights of persons with disabilities. This recognition is evident in the legislative
Frameworks that correspond with national and European Union guidelines, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is ratified by the United Kingdom (UK) and Spain. Both countries have the fact that they have transferred certain competences in social, educational, and employment fields, for the design of policies that respond to the needs of their citizens, in common. Both regions have public and private organisations that develop projects and actions, which are aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to access dignified employment on equal terms and to have an independent life.

However, there are differences between the two regions due to a markedly uneven evolution over the years and highly heterogeneous local situations. An example of this is the fact that the first Spanish law to recognise the right to full integration of people with disabilities was passed in 1982 (Law 13/82 on the social integration of the disabled), whereas the UK’s Disabled Persons Act dates back to 1944. These legislative frameworks followed different paths that have led to the current Equal Opportunities Act in the UK, which came into effect in 2010, and the General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion in Spain, which came into effect in 2013. Both frameworks share common objectives, concepts, perspectives, actions, and so on, but they differ in a number of aspects. A comparison of the two regions can inform good practice.

There are no previous studies that have analysed and compared models of transition to adult life, or the level of employment among young people with intellectual disabilities, between the regions of Wales and the Canary Islands.

Access to employment for people with intellectual disabilities is one of the great challenges facing modern societies. Although progress has been made in recent years, there are still many barriers to achieving equal opportunities. Carrying out comparative studies on the progress made in different territories can contribute to accelerating that progress.

This article analyses existing measures in the educational systems of Wales and the Canary Islands that favour the transition to adult life and the employment of young people with intellectual disabilities. It also analyses specific existing policies in both regions that aim to help these young people become employed. Finally, it pays attention to supported employment as a transition model that can be used in the labour market for people with intellectual disabilities, and its application in Wales and the Canary Islands. Based on these dimensions, the following categories of analysis have been created.

This article: (1) describes the situation concerning the transition to employment for people with intellectual disabilities in Wales and the Canary Islands; (2) describes the general aspects of, and examples of, good, supported employment practices in both regions; and (3) it analyses what both regions have in common, and what is different, thus enabling implications for action to be discussed.

2. Supported Employment Model

Supported employment is a model of inclusion in competitive employment for people with special difficulties that is being developed in Wales and the Canary Islands. It is based on an individualised support system, which consists of a provision whereby essential help is provided to a person so that they can carry out work activities by themselves, at a certain moment in their life [8]. It is one of the most complex and necessary mechanisms with which to promote personal development and the authentic integration of people with disabilities [9]. It is also a socially responsible practice that is implemented in companies [10].

Supported employment provides an “employment–training” model, where a job is found for a person before they are trained in tasks, as opposed to a traditional “training–employment” model, where people receive generalised task training before they find a job. Previous research has found that the training–employment approach is less effective in helping people with an intellectual disability get a paid job due to the problems that many have in transferring learning from training environments to real environments [9,11,12].
The idea underlying the supported employment model is that all people can have a real and paid job if they are motivated and receive enough support [13]. Real work means that the terms and conditions for people with disabilities are the same as for people without disabilities; this includes salary, equality in terms of benefits, health and safety conditions, and career development opportunities. Supported employment aims to provide help to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to obtain and maintain a job in the employment market [14].

Supported employment is a flexible process that anticipates and meets needs, and it is based on the following principles [14].

Customer Commitment: Many potential users of supported employment services are users of day centres, and they receive support from mental health or other assistance-based resources. The organisations that promote supported employment try to encourage these people to explore employment as a way to improve their quality of life.

Creating a professional profile: This is the process by which the aspirations, learning needs, individual skills, previous experiences, and working preferences of the users are identified. Family members and other professionals who provide support to the user are involved in defining the profile.

Commitment of entrepreneurs: The third crucial element is the marketing process that involves entrepreneurs. This stage of the process aims to understand the employers needs and recruitment processes, and to help employers overcome any barriers and prejudices they may have concerning the inclusion of people with disabilities in terms of employment.

Adjustment of the job post: Once the employer’s commitment is assured, an analysis of the position is carried out. This analysis checks everything that is included in the formal description of the post, and it investigates various aspects of the job in depth, including health and safety protocols. This analysis can lead to reconfiguring the job in a way that adapts to the profile of the worker; alternatively, it may generate new jobs that better fit their characteristics and are profitable for the employer.

On-the-job support: Support for on-the-job training is individualised and provided when necessary to ensure an adequate performance and good use of resources. The support is not only aimed at achieving adequate levels of performance, but it also aims to improve the person’s social integration; therefore, it can be given both inside and outside the workplace. It is important to promote the involvement of employers and employees.

Career development: The supported employment model will encourage the career development of workers by promoting training opportunities and the acquisition of greater responsibilities in the company. Several authors [15], point out the relevance of support services for people with disabilities so that they can experience a life where they are included in certain activities more often, and so that they can attain a better quality of education (Goal four of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030). Moreover, a quantitative research study presents the results of the Generating Professional Skills (GPS) program for the development of vocational maturity based on training itineraries, which was carried out by the University Unit of Attention to People with Disabilities. The results of these programs show increased levels of vocational maturity, knowledge, and competency in students with disabilities.

3. Method

In social science studies, there are three ways of using comparison: historical analysis, statistical analysis, and qualitative study. There are also three ways to consider a comparison: against the context of justification and the control of hypotheses; against the context of discovery and the generation of new hypotheses; and as a logical and systematic procedure that is, in strict terms, called the comparative method. The comparative method is more of a research strategy than a research technique [16]. The comparative method tries to find similarities and differences in order to confront two or more institutions, geopolitical units, or processes at a given moment, or during an extensive period [17,18]. In our work, we
have used the comparative method to confront two transition systems (educational and labour) that young people with intellectual disabilities must encounter.

To carry out our study, a comparative analysis was carried out on the models concerning the labour-based and educational transitions to adult and working life, that primarily affect people with intellectual disabilities in Wales and the Canary Islands. Information was collected through a review of various technical documents and the legislation was also analysed. Once the state of the art referential framework was made, the categories of analysis were established based on the objectives established in the study. Table 1 shows these categories and their corresponding indicators.

**Table 1. Categories of analysis and their indicators.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Analysis</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition to employment</td>
<td>Attention to Diversity</td>
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<td>Transition paths</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Difficulties for transition</td>
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<td>Supported Employment</td>
<td>Legislative framework</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Promoting Organisations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Job Coach</td>
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<td>Funding programmes</td>
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<td>Families’ expectations—individualised attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples of good practice in Supported Employment</td>
<td>Objectives and characteristics</td>
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<td>Users</td>
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<td>Territorial Scope</td>
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<td>Funding programmes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organisations involved in Supported Employment</td>
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**4. Results**

The geographical distance and the socio-economic and cultural differences between Wales and the Canary Islands are considerable; however, despite these differences, both regions share a vision of people with disabilities in which the following aspects stand out.

2. A legislative framework that defends non-discrimination in any area of life.
3. Recognition of the right of persons with disabilities to an inclusive education and employment.
4. Both systems value the ecological intervention model, according to which the environment should be modified to achieve full inclusion (including the use of reasonable adjustments in the workplace).
5. The involvement and commitment of non-governmental organisations in the development of employment projects.
6. In both countries, people can work and retain their welfare benefits under specific circumstances. People will always be financially richer if they undertake paid work than if they receive benefits only.

In relation to the transition to employment and supported employment, the common and different aspects of both countries’ models are reflected in the following tables.

Table 2 shows the differences and similarities in relation to the transition to employment, highlighting: (1) significant aspects concerning attention paid to diversity in schools; (2) transition paths to employment and adult life in Wales and the Canary Islands; and 3) difficulties in transitioning to employment in both regions.
Table 2. Differences and similarities in relation to the transition to employment in Wales and the Canary Islands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>Canary Islands</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attention to diversity:</strong></td>
<td>Legislative framework regulating the attention paid to diversity and providing coverage up to the age of 16 (SEN Act 2001. Replaced by The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Wales Bill). Gradual approach to students’ needs (School Action, School Action Plus). Priority is given to early care. Transition plan to adult life carried out at school, involving entities outside the school, and starting at the age of 14.</td>
<td>Legislative framework regulating attention to diversity (Decree 25/2018). Educational response that varies according to the needs of the students (Implementation of ordinary measures, extraordinary measures and exceptional measures). Priority is given to early care. Formal plan for transition to adult life and employment. No involvement of entities outside the school in the transition to adult life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition path:</strong></td>
<td>Colleges welcome young people up to the age of 25, once they have completed their compulsory schooling, providing them with training in life and employment skills, and the possibility of obtaining a specific qualification. Day Centres as an option once they leave school. Training programs in real work situations. Supported Employment Programme.</td>
<td>Existence of Adapted Vocational Training and Special Units (enclave classrooms) that prepare for adult life and employment. These welcome students up to the age of 21. Day Centres as an option once they leave school. Vocational training programs promoted by public and/or private entities. Access to a Special Employment Centre. Supported Employment Programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difficulties for transition:</strong></td>
<td>Lack of information flow between professionals and organisations. Lack of connection of entities working in supported employment with the educational system. Low youth and family employment expectations. Lack of information for parents and caregivers. Not all existing training programs increase the likelihood of employment. Job skills programmes combined with practical employment experience are needed. Funding programme requirements must promote access for all young people, not just the most able. Lack of supported employment programs</td>
<td>Lack of connection between school and after-school services. The educational stage lacks educational content conducive to subsequent inclusion. Low youth and families employment expectations Lack of information among young people and families concerning training and employment alternatives after the educational stage. Contact with employment programmes takes place in the last year of schooling or after completion of school. Training and employment alternatives that are not consistent with the inclusion path developed, as is the case of the occupational centre or special employment centre. Lack of adapted training programmes and little diversification of them. Lack of supported employment programs</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 3 shows aspects related to supported employment in Wales and the Canary Islands, highlighting: (1) how it is contemplated in the legislative frameworks, (2) the entities that are promoted at a national level, (3) the job coach, (4) financing of the programmes, and (5) families’ expectations and individualised attention as the main reference.

Table 3. Supported employment for people with intellectual disabilities in Wales and the Canary Islands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>Canary Islands</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative framework:</strong></td>
<td>Recognition of supported employment as a valid alternative for persons with intellectual disabilities. Legislative framework focused on the right to equality and non-discrimination of all groups (Equal Opportunities Act, 2010). There is no specific mention of supported employment.</td>
<td>Recognition of supported employment as a valid alternative for persons with intellectual disabilities. Legislative framework focused on the rights of persons with disabilities (RD 1/2013, General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion). Supported employment is included and defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisations promoting supported employment:</strong></td>
<td>British Supported Employment Association (BASE) in UK.</td>
<td>Spanish Association for Supported Employment (AESE) in Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job coach:</strong></td>
<td>Official recognition of the job coach and the skills he or she must possess. Description of the skills and competences in the NOS. Lack of job coaches to reach as many people as possible.</td>
<td>The job coach is not officially recognised. This profession is not included in the National Code of Occupations. Lack of job coaches to reach as many people as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding programmes:</strong></td>
<td>There is no funding at the state level. Most Supported Employment agencies in the UK receive funding from local sources, national agencies, and European Funds. Employment promotion programmes prioritise the inclusion of the largest number of people, which is to the detriment of the inclusion of people with more severe disabilities.</td>
<td>The Royal Decree 870/2008 recognising supported employment and establishing a system of funding, does not seem to have worked optimally for the development of this model. Some regions in Spain have their own funding programmes. Employment promotion programmes prioritise the inclusion of the largest number of people, which is to the detriment of people with more severe disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Families’ expectations and individualised attention:</strong></td>
<td>Lack of aspiration for employment from within the families themselves. Families are more interested in education and training but have little information about available resources. A clear commitment to individualised attention and Person-Centred Planning that favours Supported Employment programmes.</td>
<td>Lack of aspiration for employment from within the families themselves. Families are more interested in education and training but have little information about available resources. Person-centred planning remains experimental and anecdotal, but there is an awareness of the need for individualised programmes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 shows the characteristics of two experiences of supported employment carried out in Wales and Canary Islands, highlighting: (1) the objectives and characteristics of the scheme, (2) the users, (3) the scope of action, (4) funding, and (5) organisations that develop the scheme.

**Table 4. Experiences of Supported Employment in Wales and the Canary Islands.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Engage to Change Project (Wales)</th>
<th>Supported Employment Programme (Tenerife)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives and characteristics:</td>
<td>To increase knowledge and awareness of the needs of young people with intellectual disabilities and autism in the workplace. Through the project, information is provided on what works in relation to the employment of these young people in order to optimise policy decisions. Projects with a limited execution period. Individualised support is provided according to the supported employment model. The job coach plays a key role in accompanying and supporting the project throughout. The salary of the workers is covered by the project during the first 6 months.</td>
<td>To promote access to competitive employment for people with intellectual disabilities and to disseminate the supported employment model, as well as to raise awareness in society and among companies of the need to commit to the values of inclusion and respect for diversity as strategic management elements. Permanent service. Individualised support is provided according to the supported employment model. The job coach plays a key role in informing, accompanying, and supporting beneficiaries and companies. The salary of the workers is covered by the collaborating companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Users:</td>
<td>Young people with learning disabilities and autism between the ages of 16 and 25. Number of beneficiaries: 1000. Number of collaborating companies: 800.</td>
<td>People with intellectual disabilities of working age. People with autism are also included. There is no pre-set number of participants. Approximately 60 people are placed in employment each year through this program. There is not a pre-established number of collaborating companies, although there is a group of companies that have been collaborating with this service for several years. These companies, tend to stand out in the tourism sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial scope:</td>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>Tenerife Island</td>
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The project is being developed by a consortium of organisations, including two agencies of supported employment, organisations working in disability, and Cardiff University. The project is developed by a team of technicians and job coaches working in a public company belonging to a local administration.
5. Discussion

This section presents, in a detailed manner, the specific aspects related to transition to employment, supported employment, and good practices in supported employment according to region; then, an analysis of the main commonalities and differences is presented.

5.1. Transition to Employment in Wales

The UK educational system pays special attention to the transition process of students with special educational needs to post-compulsory education and employment. The Special Educational Needs Act of 2001 (SEN, 2001) regulates the rights of students with these characteristics and establishes a framework of action with which to attend to them. The regulations of this Act for Wales (SEN Code of Practice for Wales) [19] came into force in 2002, which sets out the guidelines to be followed by local authorities, schools, and early care centres to help them identify, evaluate, and assist students with difficulties.

Attention to diversity in the UK is characterised by a graduated approach to the needs of the students; these students go through different programmes, covering a wide range of intervention strategies (School Action, School Action Plus), and are developed by the schools themselves to meet specific needs. When these programmes do not result in significant improvements, or when the student has severe difficulties, the local authority that is competent in education matters is required to provide an official assessment (a Statement of Special Educational Needs) that guarantees specialised attention. These reports are reviewed annually to analyse progress and to introduce necessary adjustments [19].

The review that takes place at the age of 14 years (Year 9) is the precursor to the establishment of the transition plan to adult life. Participants in the delivery of the transition plans include: the students themselves, the parents or caregivers, professionals from social and health services, and Careers Wales. Careers Wales is an organisation that is contracted by the National Assembly of Wales to provide advice, information, and career guidance to young jobseekers in Wales. They are responsible, among other tasks, for identifying the most appropriate pathways for young people once compulsory school education is completed, and they also provide advice on the most appropriate job selection [20].

The SEN Act 2001, and the regulation that implements it, covers students with special needs up to the age of 16, which is when compulsory schooling ends. After this age, the needs of these young people are regulated by the Learning and Skills Act (2000). This Act states that once the young persons’ compulsory schooling is completed, the needs of the young people must be further assessed. Careers Wales is the organisation in charge of conducting this assessment, for both students with an existing official assessment of needs, and those without one (Paragraph 9.65 of the Regulation).

The options available for the students at the end of the schooling stage are: (1) remain in their respective schools up to the age of 19, this is particularly relevant for those who are enrolled in Special Schools; or (2) to enter a college from the age of 16 to continue their training. The colleges are educational centres that offer a wide range of both academic and professional training [20]. Many offer courses for young people with intellectual disabilities and they are aimed at providing training in both everyday life and basic work skills. These courses can be accessed by young people between 16 and 25 years of age. Moreover, (3) it is possible to enrol in a local authority day centre if they meet the criteria, based on severity of need; and (4) to enter the world of work through a Supported Employment Programme or other training programmes in real work situations.

Although there are many regulations and guidelines aimed at supporting good practices in the planning of, and support for, the transition from school to adult life, there remain gaps in the system. The most noteworthy gaps are:

1. For many young people, employment is not seen as an option after compulsory school, nor is it even suggested as such. Colleges are still the most chosen option where the acquisition of skills and qualifications is the basic objective [21,22].

2. There is a lack of information available to parents and caregivers about employment options at the transition stage. Supported employment agencies tend to be the most
effective promoters of employment. These agencies need to be involved in transition processes very early on so that young people and their families are fully informed of their options. Supported employment agencies have a more direct, and closer relationship with companies, in order to facilitate the transition to employment of young people [22].

3) There is a lack of support staff to help young people to get a job when they are in college, and there are also too few organisations to help them find a job [22].

4) The combination of a well-structured training programme on skills for work, taught in colleges, and the practical experience of employment, developed through external employment agencies during the last year of training, facilitates improved access to employment [22].

5) Restrictions imposed by the funders of supported employment agencies must be overcome to reduce the risk that employment agencies will only promote the employment of the more able young people [23].

6) The information shared between organisations (schools, colleges, supported employment agencies) is vital for the planning and development of the transition plan; however, this information does not always flow effectively. In addition, some organisations that should be involved in the development of the transition plan are not, such as supported employment agencies [23].

Programmes such as the “Real Opportunities Project” have been developed in Wales to explore alternative actions that optimise results and inform policy makers about them. This project was based on a holistic view of the person, intervening in areas of utmost importance for obtaining a job [24]. The “Getting a life” project was created in England to show and promote what must happen for young people between 14 and 25 years of age so that they can have a paid job and a full life once they leave school. This project changed the idea of what is required to facilitate access to employment for people with learning difficulties, promoting itineraries for all young people with mild or severe disabilities [25]. The Project SEARCH scheme is now operating in the UK and other E.U. countries. Emerging in the United States in 1996, Project SEARCH is a one-year transition programme, the objective of which is to provide “on-site training” and paid jobs so that young people with learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorders acquire the necessary skills for competitive employment [26].

In December 2016, the National Assembly of Wales passed a new act, the Additional Learning Needs Act, which replaces the SEN Act of 2001. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill became an Act on 24 January 2018. The regulations of the new act state that all professionals involved in providing support to children and young people with disabilities must follow the principles of Person-Centred Planning to achieve higher levels of independence and employment. The Act recognises that, with the right support, the majority of young people can find work, live independently and actively participate in their community. Preparation for the transition to adulthood must begin in the early stages and must be focused on the young person’s views and wishes. It is also important that all professionals working with them share high expectations and aspirations regarding their future as workers [27].

The new law covers young people from 0 to 25 years of age; this feature of the new law eliminates the segmentation generated by the SEN Act that only covered young people up to the age of 16. The characteristic feature of the SEN Act is the preparation of an Individual Development Plan for all young people who are recognised as having an ALN, rather than focusing planning on those with the most pressing needs only (e.g., Statement of Special Educational Need under the 2000 Act). In September 2021, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) code went live across Wales.

Based on the analysis performed, the Welsh education system and the current legislation is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promotes inclusive education, as well as with Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which also recognises the right of all persons with
disabilities to education without discrimination, based on equal opportunities. It focuses its efforts on promoting key aspects of inclusive education, such as assessing the needs of teachers, adapting teaching to meet special educational needs, providing support to students, promoting the role of counsellors in teacher training in schools, promoting training to counsellors in the field of career guidance for disadvantaged groups so that they can transition to the labour market, and so on [3–7].

5.2. Supported Employment in the UK: The Engage to Change Programme in Wales

Although supported employment is not mentioned in the UK Equal Opportunities Act 2010, it has been successfully used for decades as a personalized model of support for people with severe disabilities.

The British Association of Supported Employment (BASE) is the national organisation responsible for promoting the basic principles of the model, as well as the quality of services. BASE represents the group of organisations that directly support employment services, and its mission is to provide advice and information, promote exchanges concerning good practices, and deal with issues related to supported employment at a political level.

In 2012, BASE defined the description of the skills and knowledge technicians need to develop supported employment programmes. This description was included in the “National Occupational Standard” database (NOS), which specifies the knowledge and skills necessary to perform an occupation. This is the starting point for developing the content of training courses such as the Level 3 Certificate for Supported Employment. The description included in the NOS, regarding supported employment, was updated in July 2017.

The UK has a legislative framework that includes a wide range of financial aid to promote the employment of people with disabilities [28]. Supported employment has been recognised by the political class in England, Scotland, and Wales as a valid alternative for people with intellectual disabilities. Success has been linked to its reported benefits, as compared with other vocational rehabilitation alternatives; however, there is no specific financing programme that covers the model in all its phases [29].

Employment has been highlighted as being possible, desirable, and as a priority. Politicians agree with the fact that work is good for the health of people with disabilities [28]. This has led to the introduction of the Employment Support Allowance, a type of pension that includes the development of employment itineraries and skills assessment. In addition, there are several government programmes that cover some phases of supported employment such as:

Access to work: this is a programme that offers up to 25,000 pounds for physical adaptations of the workplace. It can also provide financing for the transport costs of the worker or for the services of a job coach. According to official figures, people with learning disabilities and mental health problems are minority users of this aid programme.

Most of the organisations that develop Supported Employment programs in the United Kingdom receive funding from local sources, national organisations, and European Funds.

Work Choice: due to its characteristics, this is one of the government’s financed programmes that offers the greatest possibilities for supported employment programmes. It can find training programmes and skills development, it helps people work on self-esteem and self-confidence, training for job interviews, adjustments to the job, follow-ups at work, and outside work. Such programmes can last two years or more for workers with significant disabilities.

Most of the organisations that run supported employment programmes in the UK receive funding from local sources, national bodies, and European funds.

The aim of the Engage to Change project is to support young people with intellectual disabilities and autism between the ages of 16 and 25 in order to gain access to paid employment. It covers the whole of Wales and aims to help a total of 1000 young people acquire transferable skills in the employment market, performing a paid work activity for a period ranging from 6 to 12 months, with the collaboration of 800 entrepreneurs.
The salary of the workers can be paid by the project itself for a minimum of 6 months as an aid to employers to employ people from the project. Within the framework of the project, individualised support is provided to young beneficiaries following the supported employment model in all its phases, including advice to collaborating employers.

The Engage to Change project develops the supported employment model according to the established definitions, and it is implemented in accordance with its principles. In this sense, it is based on an individualised support system, consisting of the provision of essential help provided to the person so that they can develop a work activity by themselves, at a certain moment in their life trajectory [8,14]. The idea underlying this project, is that all people can have a real and paid job if they are motivated and receive enough support [13].

One of the objectives pursued by the project is to increase knowledge and awareness of the needs of young people with intellectual disabilities and autism in the workplace. It aims to provide information on what works, regarding the employment of these young people, to optimize the political decisions that must be adopted in this area [22].

The project is funded by The Big Lottery Fund, in collaboration with the Government of Wales, and it has a budget of ten million pounds. It is run by a group of organisations that work in collaboration, led by Learning Disability Wales. This consortium is made up of the Elite Supported Employment Agencies and AgoriaidCyf, Project SEARCH, All Wales People First, and Cardiff University. Project SEARCH prepares the transition to employment for the young people participating in the project. The Elite and AgoriaidCyf agencies are responsible for the placement of young people in real jobs following the supported employment model. All Wales People First play the role of consultants for young people. Finally, Cardiff University acts as a body for consultation and evaluation and is responsible for collecting all the necessary data to meet the objective of informing and influencing policy decisions.

5.3. Transition to Employment in the Canary Islands

The Canary Islands have an educational system that is designed to enable students with specific educational support needs to achieve maximum personal, intellectual, social and emotional development; this system has created the conditions to identify their educational needs early, and to plan the educational response of students with specific support needs, in particular those with intellectual disabilities, who must receive attention throughout the schooling period (Act of 12 December 2010).

The system prioritizes educational inclusion in ordinary centres, although the educational response varies according to needs. A graduated response can include: (a) ordinary measures aimed at promoting the full development of the capacities set out in a series of objectives and stages; (b) extraordinary measures consisting of curricular adaptations that may involve dropping other items in the curriculum; (c) exceptional measures that consist of the student’s schooling in special educational needs centres or enclave classrooms. The enclave classrooms are special needs units located in ordinary centres that exclusively provide an educational response to students with special educational needs. In these units, students who are able to participate in activities performed by the rest of the students are included (Act of 13 December 2010). The period of schooling of pupils in enclave classrooms and special education centres can be extended up to the age of 21. These units promote the acquisition of social and pre-employment skills that favour personal autonomy and facilitate social interaction.

The educational system in the Canary Islands offers Adapted Vocational Training Programmes for students between 16 and 19 years of age with special educational needs; these programmes promote the acquisition of skills for employment inclusion (Royal Decree 127/2014 of 28 February).

The Organic Law 3/2020 of 29 December (LOMLOE) has recently come into force. This Law uses the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as one of its key references. The Law establishes that there can be no discrimination on the grounds of disability. Moreover, the disability of a pupil cannot be a reason to offer him/her a lower
quality education. The right of parents and guardians to choose the school and the type of education is recognised. The law establishes Inclusive Education as a fundamental principle as well as the Universal Design for Learning.

Therefore, in line with what has already been established [3–7], it seems that in the Canary Islands, there is a concern for adapting teaching to meet special educational needs, providing support to students, assessing the needs of teachers, and so on.

In spite of the attention received during the school stage, one of the most controversial periods for young people with intellectual disabilities is the period that begins once the schooling stage is over. The transition of young people is a political challenge requiring creative solutions that reflect the social and vocational characteristics of the group going into employment [5,30,31]. This is especially true in the case of young people with intellectual disabilities, since success involves overcoming stereotypes and preconceived ideas regarding their abilities.

In the Canary Islands, there are no studies on the transition to employment and the adult life of students with disabilities; however, in line with research carried out in other contexts:

1. There is no systematic work that favours the post school labour inclusion [32].
2. These young people and their families suffer from a lack of information about the alternatives of training and/or employment once their school stage is over [22].
3. There is a clear disconnect between school and after-school services [33].
4. Regarding other services, programs, or projects in the post-school stage, information is reduced to any contacts made during the last year [33].
5. There is a lack of adapted training programmes and little diversification of them [32].
6. One of the alternatives offered in the post-school stage is access to an Occupational Centre where young people receive training in different types of skills and abilities but in non-inclusive environments, since all the students have some type of disability. Today, this alternative is rejected by many young people and their families, even in cases of severe disabilities, because it is not coherent with the inclusion trajectory that they have developed; therefore, there are difficulties in accessing inclusive services or projects beyond compulsory schooling [33,34].
7. Access to sheltered employment, in particular a Special Employment Centre, is an option given prior to ordinary employment; however, in the Canary Islands, there are around 60 Special Employment Centres of a reduced size, so employment opportunities for young people with intellectual disabilities are scarce. Moreover, as in the case of the Occupational Centres, these are segregated jobs, which are not consistent with the path of inclusion that has been developed.
8. Numerous studies show that access to a Supported Employment program is an optimal and necessary alternative for young people with intellectual disabilities [9,28,35]. The problem with this alternative is the scarcity of supported employment programmes [34].

In the island of Tenerife, Sinpromi is the only organisation that delivers this type of programme, though it relies on a staff of three job coaches; this is insufficient for the high number of young people who finish their schooling. This is compounded by the poor connection between the education system and employment resources for labour inclusion.

The current situation is that a high number of young people are left without any career plan and are without information concerning their socio-labour options [33,36].

5.4. Supported Employment in Spain: The Sinpromi Organisation in the Canary Islands

Supported employment first appeared in Spain at the beginning of the 1990s. Its subsequent development was possible, due in large part, to the provisions of the Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled (LISMI, 1982). Article 37 of this law states: “integration into the ordinary work system will be the primary purpose of the employment policy for disabled workers”. This law also promotes school integration in Article 23: “the person with disabilities will be integrated into the ordinary system of general education,
receiving the necessary support.” With these two Articles, among others, the LISMI laid the groundwork for the emergence of movements such as supported employment, which promoted integrated employment for people with significant disabilities [37].

Supported employment in Spain was publicly announced at the 1st International Symposium, organised by the Insular Council of Mallorca and the University of the Balearic Islands, in Palma de Mallorca, in December 1991.

The first two Spanish experiences of supported employment were presented in the programme of the congress: The Barcelona “Aura Project” and the “Treball amb Support” Programme.

The Spanish Supported Employment Association (AESE) was created in the mid-1990s, with the intention of promoting the development of supported employment in Spain and Latin America. AESE ensures the quality of the system, guiding the implementation of new services and advising the technicians who put it into practice, to ensure its correct implementation according to the European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) quality standards. Numerous supported employment programmes emerged throughout Spain in the 1990s, with funding from the European Social Fund, from programmes such as HORIZON.

Royal Decree 870/2007 was passed in 2007, which regulates supported employment programmes as a measure to promote the employment of people with disabilities in the ordinary employment market. Thus, it provides a legal framework for a model that was already being developed in Spain and was being financed by regional, European, and private sources. Supported employment is defined in the above decree as a set of orientation and individualised support activities in the workplace, for workers with disabilities and with special difficulties, regarding job placement. The support is performed by job coaches who conduct their activities in normalised companies within the ordinary employment market, in similar conditions to the rest of the workers who hold similar positions. The Royal Decree was repealed, along with others, with the publication of the Royal Decree-Law 3/2011 on urgent measures, in order to improve employability and reform of active employment policies. At present, supported employment is included in the General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their social inclusion (Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013 of 29 November).

In the Canary Islands, the Insular Society for the Promotion of Persons with Disabilities, Sinpromi, is the first organisation in the archipelago to launch a supported employment programme for the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in employment. Since 1994, it has facilitated access to employment for more than 1000 people with intellectual disabilities. Sinpromi applies the supported employment model, following the phases established by the EUSE quality standards and Toolkit [14]. Based on what has been observed in this experience, supported employment provides an “employment–training” model where a job is found for a person before training them in tasks, as opposed to a traditional “training–employment” model, where people receive generalised task training before a job is found [9,11,12].

Sinpromi has a team of employment technicians and job coaches working in three offices in the North and South of the island, and in the metropolitan area of Tenerife. It is worth mentioning that there has been a particularly high degree of implementation of this programme in the tourism sector. Tourism is the economic engine of the archipelago, and therefore, the sector which generates the highest number of jobs for the population living in the Canary Islands [38,39]. Although it is a sector that requires a professional qualification, the large number of jobs, which are of a simple and routine nature, fit the profiles of people with intellectual disabilities, and thus it is noteworthy. This fact, together with the intense awareness-raising work that has been carried out over the years in companies in the sector, has decisively helped achieve highly satisfactory results in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Research carried out in the Canary Islands shows that Supported Employment is a methodology that is highly valued by people with intellectual disabilities, professionals,
and their families, and it is notable for the fact that people are helped by a job coach throughout the whole process [40]. This accompaniment is necessary both for the worker and the company staff [41]. Despite this, there are scarcely any supported employment experiences available, and more institutional support is needed [42]. Support services for people with disabilities are necessary so that they can be included in more life experiences [15].

6. Conclusions

Although Wales and the Canary Islands face many common challenges, there appears to be some advantages to the UK system. In Wales, transition planning does involve agencies with wider responsibilities than the school alone, and employment is a legitimate focus. Although problems still exist in Wales in terms of delivering planned employment outcomes, it is now accepted that pursuing paid employment is a legitimate goal for people with an intellectual disability, and other agencies need to be involved to deliver employment.

In the Canary Islands, there is still no convincing rhetoric that advocates for the competitive employment of people with intellectual disabilities. Workers with intellectual disabilities who are currently working are diluted figures of employment, as are people with disabilities in general. The same happens to job seekers with intellectual disabilities.

There is a need in both systems to raise awareness among families, professionals, politicians, and society that we are dealing with people who have different abilities, but with the same aspirations and life goals of any young person. Being aware of this reality, and of the profound significance of the concepts of “non-discrimination and equal treatment”, it is thus necessary to design socio-employment orientation programmes that offer the necessary support. This would guarantee that the life trajectories of people with intellectual disabilities run in the same channels and in the same contexts as the rest of the population. Support is undoubtedly key, and it must be aimed at both people with, and without, disabilities. In the case of people with disabilities, the support will compensate for their difficulties and give them the same equality of opportunity as non-disabled job seekers. For non-disabled people, support will be directed towards reinforcing their attitudes of tolerance and acceptance of diversity, which are values upon which the Welfare Society for all should be built, which will continually grow and remain sustainable over time.

If we understand before condemning, we will be able to humanise the relationships between people by understanding each other’s differences without prejndgement.

The original contribution of our work lies in the fact that we have used the comparative method to confront two transition systems (educational and labour) that young people with intellectual disabilities face, in two geographical regions. It is also original and useful for professionals who work with young people with intellectual disabilities, and the analysis that has been carried out on the existing measures in the educational systems of Wales and the Canary Islands can promote their transition to adult life and their insertion into the labour market. It would be necessary to develop more comparative studies that analyse other periods of time that are different from the one carried out in this work.

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