

Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH.

Report on an internship programme for young people with Learning Disabilities and/or Autism: The first three years

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October 2019

Background

The levels of employment are low among young people with learning disabilities and/or Autism, at around 6% of people with learning disabilities and 16% of people with Autism in paid employment. Young people with learning disabilities and Autism have significant problems in gaining and maintaining jobs. They face difficulties in learning practical skills while at school and lack work experience. Many learn work skills more effectively by doing tasks in real job environments, with support to guide their learning, rather than in special or simulated environments. The technique used within Supported Employment most relevant to helping people with learning disabilities and/or Autism obtain employment is job coaching. However, there is a lack of opportunity to experience work with adequate support while at school or college and individuals are commonly denied the assistance of a paid for job coach to assist them in finding, getting, learning and keeping a paid job.

In searching for appropriate ways to support young people with learning disabilities and/ or Autism into work, Internships have often been seen as a possible route. Project SEARCH is a supported internship model originally developed in the United States in 1996. Hosted by a large employer offering internships within the organisation, Project SEARCH works together with a local education agency offering an instructor/tutor and a supported employment agency. Project SEARCH programmes have previously been established in the UK in England and Scotland and in Ireland and the Netherlands in the E.U.

Each Project SEARCH site requires a partnership working between:

Host Business: Provides an on-site base and a variety of internships that teach core skills related to that business or organisation. The programme works within a large employer as they typically have high-turnover positions with several different job types offering complex but systematic tasks. Departments within the host business supply a work-based mentor who works with the job coach to support the intern.

College: Identifies and recruits interns to participate in Project SEARCH through an application and interview process. The college also provides an instructor/ tutor who implements an employability skills curriculum. The curriculum covers: Looking for a job, applying for a job, communication skills, safeguarding, manual handling, payslips, budgeting and managing money, information governance, health and safety, timekeeping, dressing for work and other topics as relevant to the employers' business.

Supported Employment Agency: Provides job coaching support for interns at the host business and in their initial job. The supported employment agency provides local employment knowledge and is skilled in vocational profiling and training in systematic instruction. The supported employment agency identifies appropriate work placements in conjunction with the host employer and provides individual job mentoring and coaching delivered by one or two employment advisers to support interns to carry out agreed role and tasks.

Evaluation method

The National Centre for Mental Health, Cardiff University was asked to undertake an evaluation of Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH as part of their wider involvement in the Engage to Change project. This report reflects the findings from the first three years of Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH in Wales.

Data was collected on all interns using a bespoke app installed on iPads or Android tablets. Data here included referral information, eligibility criteria, vocational assessments/profiles, equal opportunities data, soft skills assessments and monitoring forms.

In addition, the evaluation team undertook face to face interviews with a sample of interns from each of the project sites. In total 31 interns were interviewed, which represents all the interns from year one plus a sample from each site in years 2 and 3. Ethical approval from a NHS Research Ethics Committee had previously been obtained. Interns were provided with an accessible briefing document explaining who we were, why we were carrying out the evaluation, what they would be asked about, and what would be done with their information. They were also told that quotes from their interviews would be used but that their names would not be used. All agreed to take part. Interviews took place at a place of the young person's choice.

Interviews with the interns covered the following topics:

- Why they wanted to be part of DFN Project SEARCH
- Thoughts about the educational element of DFN Project SEARCH
- The jobs titles and tasks they did in the internship
- Who helped them learn their jobs
- Whether they liked the work and why
- Outcomes for them from working- what has changed in their lives
- Who they worked with, what they did together, and their views of mentors
- What support their job coach provided and their views of it
- Future options: will they work in the future and what will they do
- Any changes in support they would have benefited from
- Any advice for future interns

Data on the work placements that interns carried out within the University were collected by the Elite job coach/employment advisor and the Research Team.

The family members/carers of the interns were also contacted, provided with a similar briefing document, and asked if they too would be interviewed. 24 family members/carers agreed. Interviews took place over the telephone or at the homes of the family members. Interview questions replicated those asked to the interns. Finally, postal interviews and a web link to an online survey were sent out to the department managers and mentors within the host business.

Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH sites

With funding from The Big Lottery *Getting Ahead 2* grant, three Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH sites were set up in Wales between 2016 and 2019 (Table 1).

DFN Project SEARCH site	Host business/ Employer	Educator	Supported Employment Agency	Operating since
1	Cardiff University	Cardiff and the Vale College	Elite Supported Employment Agency	September 2016
2	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	Coleg Llandrillo Menai	Agoriad Cyf	September 2017
3	Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board ¹	Bridgend College	Elite Supported Employment Agency	September 2018

Table 1: DFN Project SEARCH sites description

Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH sites run for an academic calendar year, providing placements for up to 12 interns per site. Typically, interns are on site at the host business for 6 to 8 hours per day. The interns start the day in the onsite classroom setting working on the employability curriculum with the college tutor. The host business provides work placements of 5 days a week between the hours of 10.30am and 3.00pm. Interns are supported in placements by the job coach. Between these hours interns are totally immersed in the workplace. Interns return to the onsite classroom base at the end of the day for a further curriculum-based activity. Each intern usually undertakes 3 placements within the host business (one placement per academic term/10 weeks). This allows for rotation of internships across departments and a variety of internships to be offered. At the end of the placement each intern rotates to a new placement.

Internships are unpaid, although interns may be in receipt of some governmental financial support or benefits. The project culminates in individualized job searching with the aim to securing paid employment. At the end of the internship the host employer has the option to take on the intern as a paid employee or the internship ends. If interns do not successfully move into paid employment at the end of the project they will be supported by the main Engage to Change programme and continue working with the supported employment agencies who will provide ongoing support to secure employment for them, or will signpost to the most relevant service.

¹ Previously Abertawe Bro Morgannwg Health Board

Participants

Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH focuses on young people between the ages of 16 to 25 who have diagnosis of learning disability, specific learning difficulties or autistic spectrum condition.

In total, Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH has provided internships for sixty-one young people during the first three years of operation. 25% of interns were female and 75% were male. Table 2 gives an overview of intern numbers by year and their gender balance. The average age of interns was 19.5 years (range 17 to 24 years).

	Year 1 2016-17			Year 2 2017-18			Year 3 2018-19			Total 2016-2019		
	No of interns	M	F	No of interns	M	F	No of interns	M	F	Total interns	Total M	Total F
Site 1	11	8	3	11	8	3	11	7	4	33	23	10
Site 2	-	-	-	10	9	1	10	7	3	20	16	4
Site 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	1	7	8	7	1
										61	46	15

Table 2: Gender description across sites

The primary diagnosis of interns (Table 3) shows that in total 44% of interns had a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, 21% had a diagnosis of learning disability and 25% were either diagnosed with generalized learning difficulties/specific learning difficulties.

Additional diagnosis reported included: Williams Syndrome, Downs Syndrome, cerebral palsy, mental health issues, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and visual impairment.

Diagnosis	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Total
ASD	13	7	6	26
Learning Disability	8	4	1	13
ASD and Learning Disability	1	0	0	1
Learning difficulty/ SpLDiff	10	4	1	15
Other	1	0	0	1
Unspecified	0	5	0	5
Total	33	20	8	61

Table 3: Primary diagnosis of disability

Placement descriptions

After an induction period, interns progressively start the internships offered by the host business, lasting approximately 10 weeks per internship, typically for up to three rotations (range was 1 to 4 rotations). Site 2 offered 2 rotations due to lack of funding from the college and therefore restriction on college tutor hours (Table 4).

Hosting employers		Y1	Y2	Y3	Total
Site 1: Cardiff University	Internal internships	31	31	30	92
	External internships	2	4	1	7
Site 2: Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board		Not operative	20	26	46
Site 3: Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board		Not operative	Not operative	24	24

Table 4: Internships

A wide range of departments offered placements, providing a variety of internship opportunities to suit the interns' preferences and abilities.

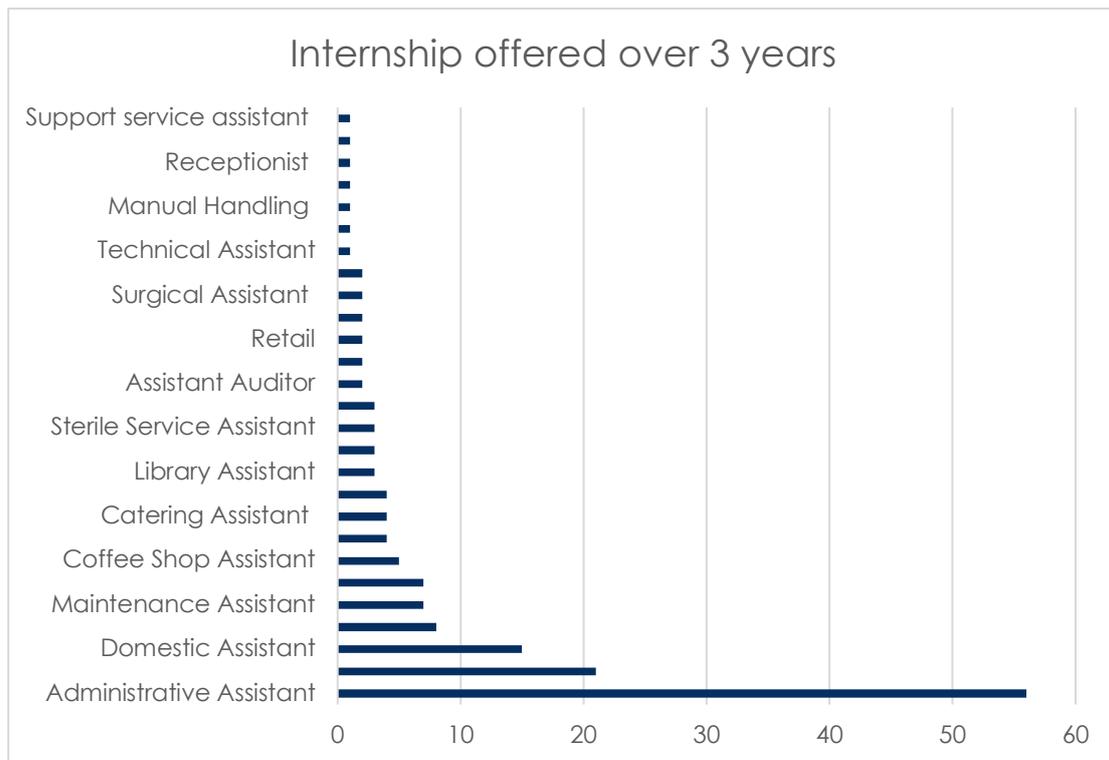


Figure 1: Breakdown of internship by title

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of internships for the first three years of Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH. Administrative Assistant was a popular role across the three sites, followed by Domestic Assistant, Maintenance, Coffee Shop and Catering Assistant roles. Some were business specific roles, such as Library Assistant for University settings or Surgical Assistant roles for Health Service setting.

Interns' perspective

Reasons for applying to DFN Project SEARCH

Young people from colleges were offered the opportunity to attend the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH introduction meeting and they were supported by the college to make this choice.

The main reason for applying to the project was getting a paid job at the end of the course, as stated by a large group of interns (18 out of 31). Six young people wanted to gain more experience working in large organisation and four reported they wanted to increase their confidence. Four young people followed other's people suggestions to apply for this course and two decided they would have a go, even if they were not sure of what they were applying for. Three people thought this opportunity would support them to broaden their horizons and two thought they would have received help applying for jobs from DFN Project SEARCH staff. Some people recognised that their social life would probably improve as a result of applying for this course (Figure 2).

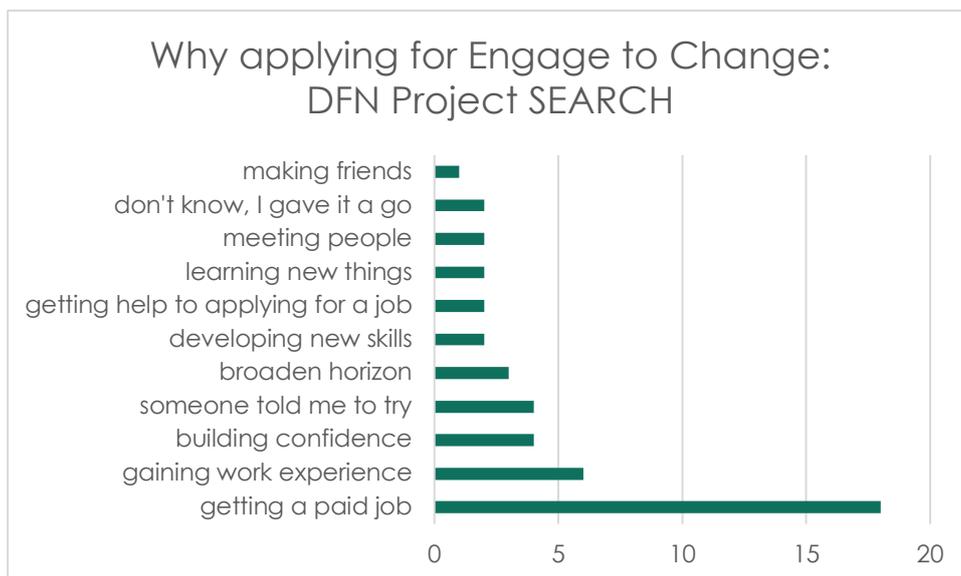


Figure 2: Reasons for applying to Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH

Interns' view on teaching and job coaching

Interns reported that they had been learning a wide range of useful skills during the teaching session that they attended twice a day. Some examples were: looking for a job, applying for a job, practicing having conversations, budgeting and managing money.

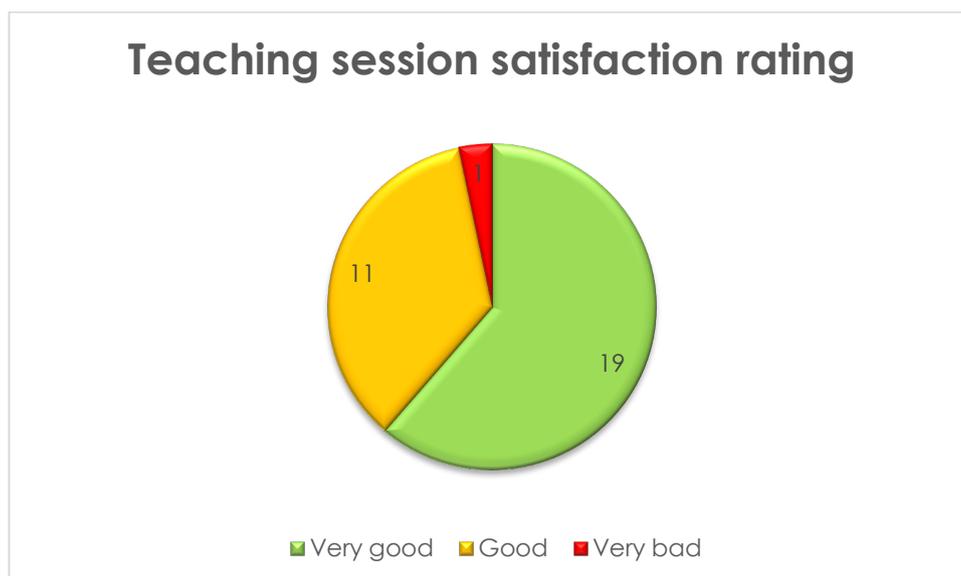


Figure 3: Teaching satisfaction rate

Many interns across the site reported their experiences in the training and education room to be good or very good (Figure 3). The teaching sessions were supportive for confidence building and the development of new skills.

Intern 30: It helped me learn new things, helped my confidence and helped me come out of my own shell. It helped me take care of myself

properly with safety and stuff and I learnt how to move patients safely and just all sorts really.

Intern 7: Probably gain more confidence when it comes to maths, I hate maths, but the instructor is one of those people that pushes you. In a good way. She tells you not to put yourself down, not everyone can be good at everything. Not everyone is perfect, everyone makes mistakes, and if we were all perfect, we would all be boring!

Teaching sessions were a good opportunity to think about independent living and to learn useful skills to enhance independent living. It also helped to learn about wages and what a wage looks like, in preparation for paid employment.

Intern 13: Been learning about wages that was good because I didn't really know what they looked like or what they mean, so it was good to learn that because if I had started a job I wouldn't have known.

Intern 16: It helped me, [...] doing simple tasks in the morning, and some topics that were really helpful, such as independent living, budgeting, paying bills, (what to do) when we shop, discussing what is essential to have and what is a treat, a luxury.

Interns were asked to describe the job coaching they received over the year with Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH. Job coaching was described positively by the interns who reported that they had been supported in many ways, such as increasing professional attitudes, but also dealing and coping with stressful situations.

Intern 24: See what working life is, he helped me to become professional in some working areas, he helped me in stressful moment, to calm down. He was giving me the confidence.

The job coach also came to the fore as an important source of learning in the workplace. The interns' reported that they were helped practically and within their job placements.

Intern 5: Helped me get through all these placements, helped me when I needed it. Anything that I didn't understand or if I needed help with something or if there was something, I wasn't sure about or if I was worried about something.

The Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH approach helped interns by increasing their confidence in their capabilities. They became more confident, for instance, when talking to new people. Interns have also been helped to not be afraid to communicate when something was wrong.

Intern 29: They have come to the workplace and said I need to communicate more, push ourselves more and to our limits

Overall, the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH project job coaching received a high satisfaction rating, with the majority of interns rating it to be good or very good, while 3 interns classed it to be neither good nor bad (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Job coaching satisfaction rate

Mentor support

Interns had been engaged with successful and less successful internships, but all of the interns were able to describe in detail what their tasks were for each internship. Within each placement every intern had a designated line manager and mentor. Mentors undertook task analysis and allocated work tasks to the intern in conjunction with the job coach. They also provided general support within the placement on both employment and social levels.

Some described their mentor to be really supportive, helping them to learn the task and to perform at their best.

Intern 16: They helped by explaining the task, it was quite easy to understand. They showed examples of what I had to do.

Mentors provided opportunities for interns to get out of their confidence zone and to try something new, in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

Intern 14: At the last week I was on the phones and I liked doing that, I asked if I could go on the phones because I hadn't done that for the whole internship, and they said yes. They were supportive and they were all friendly, so it was quite nice.

Interns were generally very satisfied by the support received by their mentors. Support received on over 55 placements was rated, with 51 received a rating of good or very good (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Mentor satisfaction rating

In the few cases where there was a problem with the mentor it was because the intern felt that the mentor had just been there to give them work, rather than to help or support them, and in another case the intern felt that they could not “connect” with the mentor.

Fifty-one mentors completed a questionnaire to provide a feedback from the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH programme over the first three years of operation.

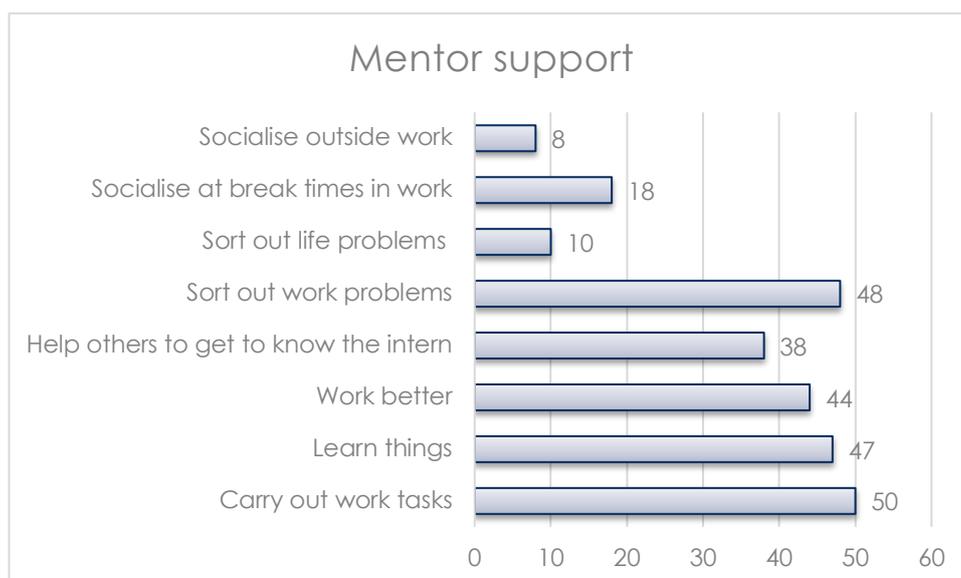


Figure 6: Mentor support description

A good level of support was reported, with mentors supporting their interns to carry out work tasks, sort out work related problems, learning new things and optimising the way the interns were working. Thirty-eight out of fifty-one mentors supported other colleagues to get to know the interns better. Fewer

mentors have been supporting interns with socialising at break time or outside work and a few have been supporting with sorting out life problems (Figure 6).

Mentors and interns reported a positive relationship in the workplace. A mentor having more than one intern over the year highlighted the positivity of having interns as they socialised during working hours.

Mentor 23: Really well. We only socialised during working hours, but I enjoyed talking about what things they liked to do and what they did on the weekend.

Some interns were really shy and withdrawn at the beginning, but their confidence grew over time. Common interests and social life events supported the conversation between mentors and interns.

Intern 26: Talked to them about work during the first internship but in the second internship my confidence grew bigger and I could talk to them about my social life as well as work, I was nervous to talk to my colleagues at first but as I got confidence to know them better I thought I could talk to them about my social life.

Mentor 34: We have a few things in common which has helped us to engage together at break times.

Outcomes of DFN Project SEARCH for the Interns

Interns reported that the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH programme had boosted their confidence, providing work-based experience and helped them to find the most appropriate type of job to match their profiles². The majority felt that the project had added to their prospects of a job in the future, either as a positive contribution to their skills or as a CV entry. Several interns reported they had the opportunity to learn in a job they did not know about before.

For several interns, Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH helped in what they enrolled for- getting a paid job. Table 5: Paid employment outcomes, summarises the job roles, hours worked, host employer sites, year and current employment status for the young people starting employment at the end of the course.

² A “profile” is prepared for each intern which summarises their aspirations, desirable work tasks and learning band support needs.

Job Title	Site, Year	Hours a week	Paid/ Unpaid	Status October 2019
Retail assistant	Site 1, Y1	18	Paid	current
Coffee Shop assistant	Site 1, Y1	16	Paid	Changed job, same business area
Technician	Site 1, Y1	24	Paid	current
Admin Assistant	Site 1, Y1	22.5	Paid	current
Mail Person	Site 1, Y1	10	Paid	current
Assistant Technician	Site 1, Y1	16	Paid	current
Admin Assistant	Site 1, Y1	12	Paid	finished
Bank Catering Assistant	Site 2, Y2	20	Paid	current
Kitchen Porter	Site 2, Y2	16	Paid	current
Pharmacy Assistant	Site 2, Y2	37.5	Paid	current
Bank Health Care Assistant	Site 2, Y2	30	Paid	current
Admin Assistant Apprentice	Site 2, Y2	20	Paid	current
Kitchen Porter	Site 2, Y2	16	Paid	current
Medical Laboratory	Site 2, Y2	37.5	Paid	current
Admin Assistant	Site 1, Y2	20	Paid	current
Domestic Assistant	Site 1, Y2	17	Paid	current
Event Assistant	Site 1, Y2	16	Paid	current
Courier	Site 1, Y2	35	Paid	current
Domestic Assistant	Site 1, Y2	17.5	Paid	current
Health Care Assistant	Site 2, Y3	37.5	Paid	Not in this job after moving to a new house
Domestic Assistant	Site 2, Y3	37.5	Paid	left
Admin/Receptionist	Site1, Y3	16	Paid	current
Admin Assistant	Site1, Y3	14	Paid	current
Pharmacy Assistant	Site 3, Y3	37	Paid	current
Admin Assistant	Site 3, Y3	16	Paid	Paid placement turning permanent
Admin Assistant	Site 1, Y3	8	Paid	current

Table 5: Paid employment outcomes

Several former interns are still looking for a job and are attending job clubs supported by the Engage to Change Project. They are applying for jobs while some are waiting to hear about interview outcomes. At present the employment percentage for each year are as follow (Table 6):

	Employment ratio	Total of interns for the year
Employment Y1	64%	11 interns
Employment Y2	57%	21 interns
Employment Y3	24%	29 interns

Table 6: Employment ratio

Confidence building and outstanding needs

With regards to the future, interns were asked at the end of Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH course to think about their needs again and which area they needed help with.

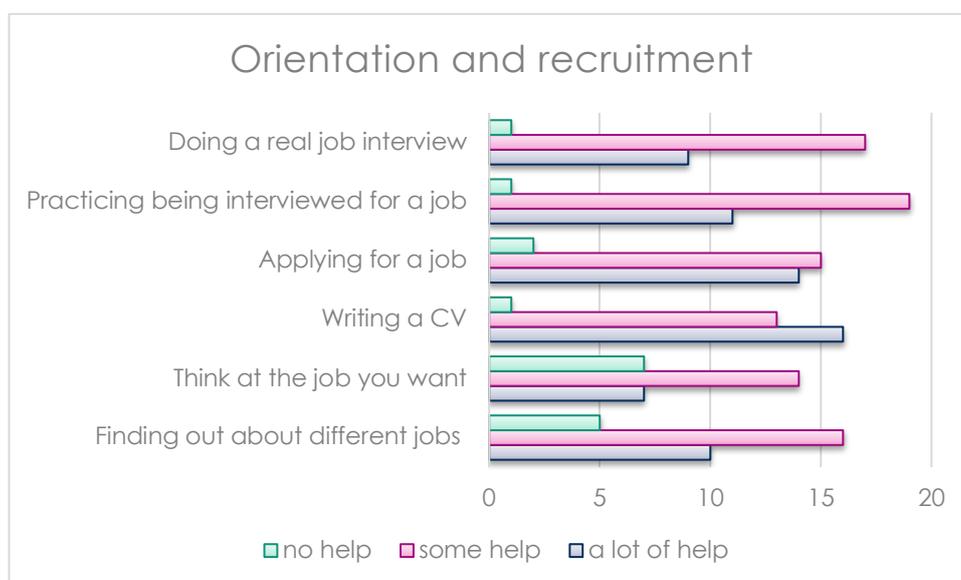


Figure 7: Help needed at the end of Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH course

The majority of interns still felt they needed a lot of help or some help in most areas. Writing a CV, applying for a job, undertaking interviews and sorting work related problems were the areas of most concern to the interns (Figure 7). However, the majority of the interns reported that they did not need support with learning a new job and with how to be a good worker, as they experienced and learnt it within the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH framework (Figure 8).

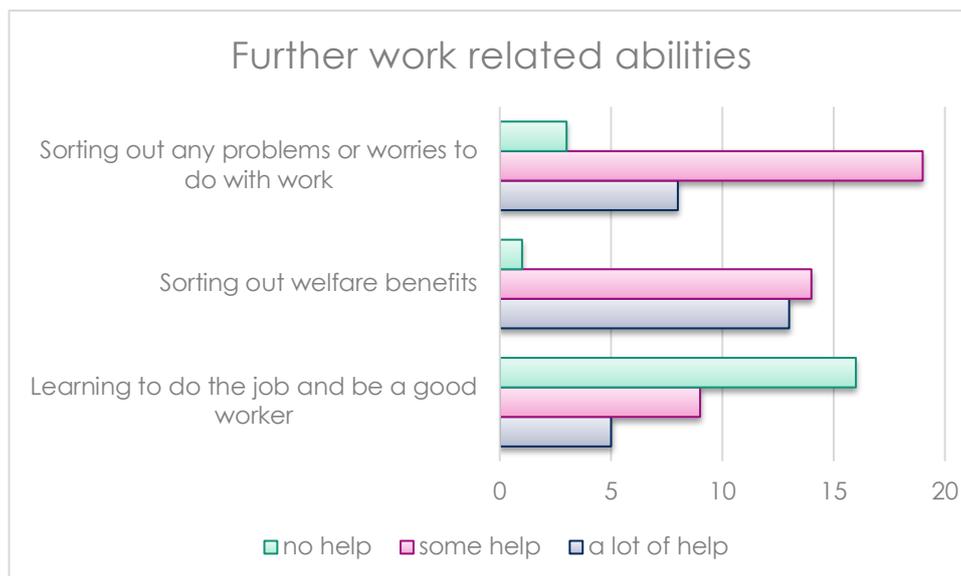


Figure 8: Help needed with work related abilities

The interns were asked if Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH influenced their wider lives. Greater confidence, friendships, personal independence and increased communication skills were reported.

Intern 13: Given me more confidence speaking to people, given me a new idea of the job I actually want.

Intern 20: [DFN Project SEARCH] Done me a world of good, made me feel better and made me feel welcome, I feel like the staff have got to know me well, both the Project SEARCH and the hospital staff

Intern 3: Helped having conversations at the right time. Maybe..... Talk about what's happening in the news. Making conversation, managing money and budgets.

Skills development over time

Employment Advisors measured the skills people developed over time for every intern at different stages of the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH process. At present we have data for 43 interns assessed at vocational profiling stage, on the first visit after they were admitted on the course. Skills were also assessed at the end of the first internship (29 interns), second internship (35 interns) and at the end of the third internship (22 interns). A follow-up has been completed with seven interns now in employment. Figure 9 shows some of the skills measured at vocational profiling stage, at the end of the second and at the end of the third internship. Some skills were particularly developed during the course such as being able to concentrate, to work without mistakes, being able to perform a range of tasks, the use of initiative and working without support. Other skills improved, such as working physically hard, remembering and following instructions. Communicating with others improved from a baseline at vocational profile stage but fell back at the end of the third

internship. A more comprehensive analysis of the skills will be completed when more skills reviews are performed by the interns at the point that they achieve paid employment.

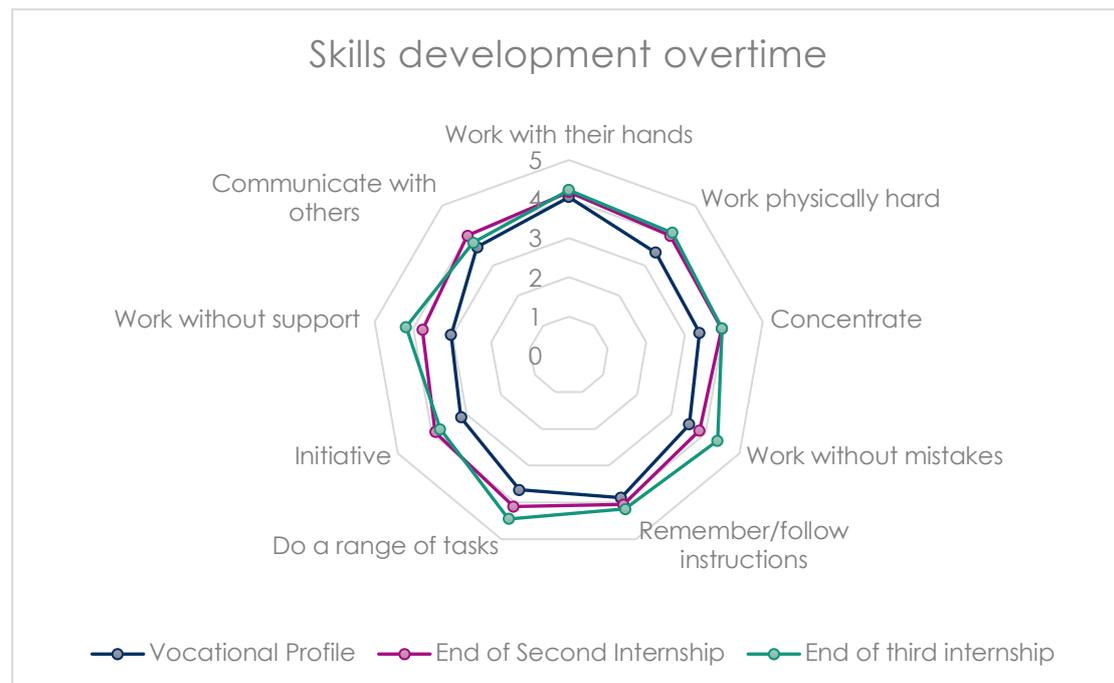


Figure 9: Skills development

Impact on the intern mind set

A parent reported how DFN Project SEARCH has helped her daughter to change her mind set, moving from an education mind set into real life:

Parent 1: I think it has made her more focussed, we have been away for a few weeks and when she has been talking to people she has been saying when she gets home, she has to look for a job. [...] so, I think it's transitioned her from education into real life.

Another parent highlighted how DFN Project SEARCH has helped the young person to become the same as everybody else:

Parent 3: It has given him the chance to be the same as everybody else, working, earning his own money and being a grown up.

A parent told about how the help received from Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH made a difference for their child. It helped them to be more independent and socially included. This new attitude helped in wiping away worries that parents have around disability outcomes.

Parent 15: We have kept him in a bubble up to now, but now we can see him starting to make up his own lunch box and he is interested in taking care of his own money. He is just a lot happier, his wider routine and circle of friends have expanded, and he has started to go out with work to socialise. He wants to go out to socialise, is talking to us about going

out to the pub, and about getting girlfriend - this would finish it off for us really, when he got his diagnosis... we didn't know what needs he would end up with and what sort of life he would live. But now, he is so happy he has purpose.

Several interns have been travelling from the training room to their workplace independently for the first time, opening up new possibilities in their adult lives.

Parent 5: He has literally blossomed, he has! If anyone would have told me a year ago, he would have been walking on his own, straight to work I would never believe it (in tears) and actually a job, it is amazing!

Impact on the family

The families of the young people entering the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH internship all felt that the project had helped the young person to learn about work. Families reported that they were more positive about the young person and their capability. Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH helped to show families that there are more options and that families can actually raise their expectations about employment.

Parent 13: She enjoyed the course, teachers were good, nothing was too much, if we needed to speak to them, they were there and we had contact numbers, they were very friendly. I am more confident now that she is capable of achieving a lot more goals than what we expected her to because her confidence has boosted since being on the course, so that has helped a lot.

Indeed, a parent of an intern who is now in a permanent job position said she would like to see a progression in his career:

Parent 3: The job coach has assured me this is a permanent paid job so hopefully this is it for a few years now, but I would like to see a progression.

DFN Project SEARCH also helped to take away some of the families worries for the future:

Parent 3: It's mainly me and his sister and it's a big relief for me because I haven't got to keep thinking, right, what am I going to do with X now, because that's what it was, you know, once college finishes what am I going to do with him? [...] a massive relief for me.

Young people became more sociable within the family environment, spending more time with relatives, playing games with siblings and becoming generally more outgoing. Some parents reported that many close people, such as relatives and friends, noticed a positive difference in them in term of social skills and improved confidence.

Parent 5: *X is staying a bit longer with his family when there are conversations going on, before he did not take notice of anything. He is hanging around a bit longer.*

One parent said they would expect more jobs from the host employers, and that not all the interns had had an opportunity of a paid job at the end of the course.

Employers' experience

Fifty-two employers participated to the study, completing a paper or a web version of a questionnaire, 35 from Cardiff University over three years, 9 from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and 8 from Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (Table 7).

		Employers
Site 1	Cardiff University	35
Site2	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	9
Site 3	Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	8
TOTAL		52

Table 7: Employers completing the questionnaire

Employers generally felt that young people were well supported by Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH, as reported by forty-six out of fifty-one employers. Some employers felt more support was needed for the intern to accurately complete a task.

Employer 5: More support would have been beneficial with some of the above interns as they needed a lot of support from the team to complete certain tasks correctly.

According to one employer, support often came too late after a critical event as reported below.

Employer 9: X was often out of her depth and was in a role that expected good literacy and numeracy skills. The intern experienced panic attacks when under pressure and working on her own. Project Search staff were able to support but initially we felt it was often after the event. As X's confidence grew, we were able to support her more in the role. The ETC worked really hard to come up with some strategies to enable X to understand our classification schemes and sequencing.

An employer highlighted how the support was difficult to deliver because of a challenge in finding the correct form of support for the intern.

Employer 11: I would say that the PS team seem to be still searching for the correct form of support for X. There were significant efforts made to support him, but at times it was unsuccessful. I think this reflects the

complexity of his situation rather than any lack of effort or aspiration on the part of the E2C Project Search staff.

Seventy-three percent of the employers reported that having an intern their organisation had a positive effect on their organisation. Employers reported a positive change in their staff attitude and one reported increased productivity.

Employer 6: I think staff have become more aware of other people's personalities and abilities, and consequently more willing to help and understand interns and also their colleagues, which in turn has increased team productivity towards collaborative goals.

Eighty-two percent of employers reported that having an intern had a positive effect in creating a diverse workforce in their organisations.

Employer 30: It showed us there is a role for every one of us in creating a diverse and inclusivity culture in the Health Service.

Employer 3: Led to a better understanding of the individual strengths and weaknesses of the intern, highlighting areas where the intern is very capable, as well as those where further development is required. Intern acts as role model to others.

One employer reported that the intern had a lower working standard if compared to another new employee, but that the overall impact on customers was positive.

Employer 3: Service levels on occasions have been below that of a new employee, however, these occasions have become less frequent as the intern gained experience in the role. Overall impact on customers has been positive.

Feedback from employers on work ethos was positive overall, with great appreciation for interns' attendance at work. None of the employers reported negatively about attendance, punctuality and breaks. Interns were appreciated for their working skills and for the way they respected health and safety rules (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Work ethic employers' satisfaction rating

Outcomes for employers were generally positive and the quality of work was generally appreciated by employers, with only few exceptions. Employers were generally satisfied with the way that interns followed instructions they were given but were less satisfied with the initiative of interns. Figure 11 outlines these results.

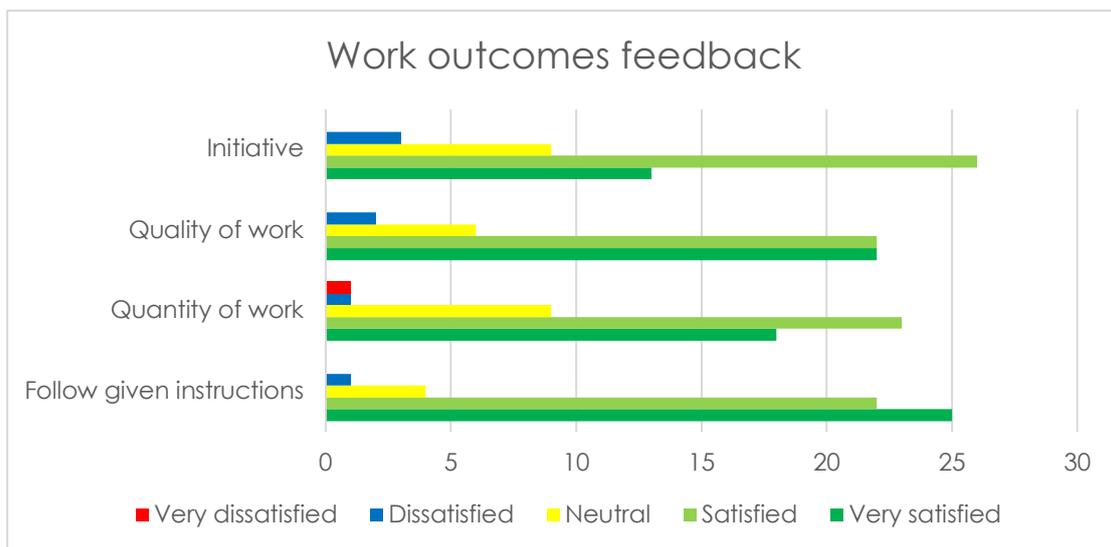


Figure 11: Work outcomes employers' rating

Conclusions

Feedback from interns and parents/carers involved in the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH sites in Wales showed many benefits to those concerned and draw backs. Interns learned much during the internships, with evidence of skills development in areas such as working accurately, concentrating and doing a variety of tasks. Employment became a realistic option for several interns and a number gained paid employment. Social interaction was increased within placements and being a part of a team had been important for the interns. This suggests that successful contact with co-workers is important to the long-term success of the young people in employment. Growth in confidence was reported by most respondents. Job coach support by the partnership supported employment agencies, and the classroom based vocational education provided by the local Colleges, were pivotal to the success of the internships.

Parent and carer views of their young person changed also, with Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH having raised their aspirations for their young person. The views of parents/carers underline the need for consistency and for agencies to continue to deliver the individual support required if families are to support employment as a realistic option for young people. The supported employment agencies will continue to provide one-to-one support through employment advisors who will maintain support through initial inductions into paid employment and signposting to follow up services for those not yet in employment.

Host business managers and mentors reported that, overall, they have good experiences with Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH. Their willingness to employ the intern if support is available is a positive outcome and reflects the importance of onsite job coaching. However, it is important to develop natural supports within the workplace for job coaching to be withdrawn. Interns were particularly appreciated for their work attitude, their attendance and behaviour in work. Quality and quantity of work was of a high standard overall. Relationships in the workplace were positive, with a positive effect on host business staff. Employers reported new learning such as understanding the benefits of a diverse workplace and increased disability awareness. Mentors have been engaged with assisting the interns, mainly with their learning and with their task, and were less involved in social activities. The interns' social involvement in the workplace should be investigated further, to understand if their social inclusion in that organisation is typical and therefore comparable with other employees within the same organisation. Some mentors reported that their workload increased with the intern present in their workplace because the mentor needed to check the accuracy of their task and to assist the intern with some of their tasks. Care is needed to ensure that mentors are clear about the role they are being asked to play and that they are given adequate support by the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH team.

Previous research has shown that a significant factor in developing greater independence for young people with learning disabilities or autism is to have experiences similar to their mainstream peers. Ordinary activities will ultimately

enable young people to make informed choices. Contact with the general population in a real work environment increased the self-confidence, self-esteem and the employability of the interns. A significant outcome of the Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH negotiations is that, as part of the partnership with host businesses, the young people are given the opportunity to apply for vacancies as internal candidates or as bank staff. This allows the interns to establish themselves as part of the workforce.

In terms of good practice, the hours that people work per week appear to be low, with some notable exceptions. This may have been to ensure people's underlying welfare benefits are not threatened. The future evaluation of paid employment positions gained by Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH sites in Wales should investigate how dependent achieving part time or full-time work is on interns' personal characteristics and circumstances. Young people generally learn job tasks and settle in socially more quickly when they work more hours per week. The goal should be to increase the number of hours interns work in paid employment.

Gaining and maintaining a paid job is one of the most difficult issues in the lives of young people with learning disabilities and/or autism. The first three years of Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH in Wales has achieved a 43% employment rate. The results outlined here offer a workable model for future internships for young people with learning disabilities and/or autism within Wales. Discussions for the future need to focus on developing a stronger pathway into employment. Expansion of the project into more departments within the current host business sites, and into other sites in Wales, are logical steps. Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH represents a valuable addition to supported employment provision in Wales. Formal recognition of the internship scheme is needed so that Access to Work funding can be utilised for the job coach support hours and other costs associated with placements, as it is in England for Supported Internships, including DFN Project SEARCH.

Having meaningful work opportunities in real work placements over an extended time period helps young people with learning disabilities and/or autism to develop greater independence and ultimately enables them to make informed choices. Engage to Change: DFN Project SEARCH opportunities in a real work environment increased the self-confidence, self-esteem and employability of the interns. Internships helps to improve the vocational skills and personal performance of interns in work and life. Job coaching and a targeted curriculum are key to achieving this.