

Evaluation of Engage to Change

Project SEARCH: Report on an internship programme for young people with learning disabilities after one year

Andrea Meek
Dr. Elisa Vigna
Dr. Stephen Beyer

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Project SEARCH Background

The levels of employment are low among young people with learning disabilities and/or Autism, at around 6.7% of people with learning disabilities and 18% 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 better 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 into work, Internships have often been seen as a possible route. Project SEARCH started at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in Ohio USA with the aim to develop placements for people with intellectual disabilities in the hospital which could be utilised as springboards for lasting employment opportunities. The programme was developed in co-operation with a local school and vocational training provider, Cincinnati Children's Hospital. The host agreed to supply internships for people while they were undergoing training in the workplace with a focus on gradually increasing the transferrable skills set of each intern. All internships are unpaid. Project SEARCH in the USA now offers many internship projects based in hospitals and other large scale employers across the country.

Project SEARCH has previously been offered in England, Scotland and Ireland. Under the Engage to Change project the first Project SEARCH site was set up in Wales in September 2016 under the Big Lottery funded Engage to Change Project.¹ Engage to Change is a consortium that is delivering paid placements and employment for young people with a learning disability or autistic spectrum conditions across Wales. Over the 5 years of its operation it will work with 1000 young people aged between 16-25 supporting paid placements and paid jobs through job coach supported employment model and seeks to place 600 in paid work. In this particular element of its work, Engage to Change established a partnership between Elite Supported Employment Agency who provide job coaching element, Cardiff and The Vale College providing the education element and Cardiff University who are the host employer.

Cardiff and The Vale College identified and recruited interns to participate in Project SEARCH and provided the education element of the project delivering an employability skills based curriculum through an Instructor. Elite identified appropriate work placements in conjunction with Cardiff University and provided individual job mentoring and coaching to support interns to carry out agreed role and tasks. This was delivered by an Employment Training

¹ <http://www.engagetochange.org.uk>

Consultant.² Cardiff University provided work placements of 5 days a week between the hours of 10.30am and 2.30pm. Each placement was to be for at approximately 10 weeks duration and at the end of the placement each intern would rotate to a new placement. Cardiff University also provided work place mentors for each Project SEARCH intern.

The National Centre for Mental Health, Cardiff University was asked to undertake an evaluation of Project SEARCH as part of their wider engagement in the Engage to Change project. This report reflects the findings from Year One of Engage to Change: Project SEARCH.

Participants

Twelve young people originally entered Project SEARCH. One intern withdrew from the project for personal reasons. All interns were students attending Cardiff and The Vale College and were in danger of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) at the end of the academic year. Three were female and eight were male. The ages ranged from 18 to 23 years. All lived in Cardiff. Table 1 outlines primary and additional diagnosis for the eleven interns who completed Project SEARCH.

Table 1. Diagnosis of disability

Primary Diagnosis	Number of interns
Learning Disability	6
Learning Difficulty	1
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	4
Additional Diagnosis	
Cerebral Palsy	2
Mental Health issues	1

Evaluation method

The Cardiff University evaluation team at NCMH carried out interviews with the eleven interns with learning disabilities and/ or Autism who completed Project SEARCH. 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 use. All agreed to take part. Interviews took place at a place of the young person's choice. Interviews with the interns covered:

- Why they wanted to be part of Project SEARCH
- Thoughts about the educational element of Project SEARCH

² Please note that throughout this report the Employment Training Consultant is referred to as a job coach as this was the term respondents recognised.

- 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, 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

The family members/carers of the interns were also contacted, provided with a similar briefing document, and asked if they too would be interviewed. 9 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.

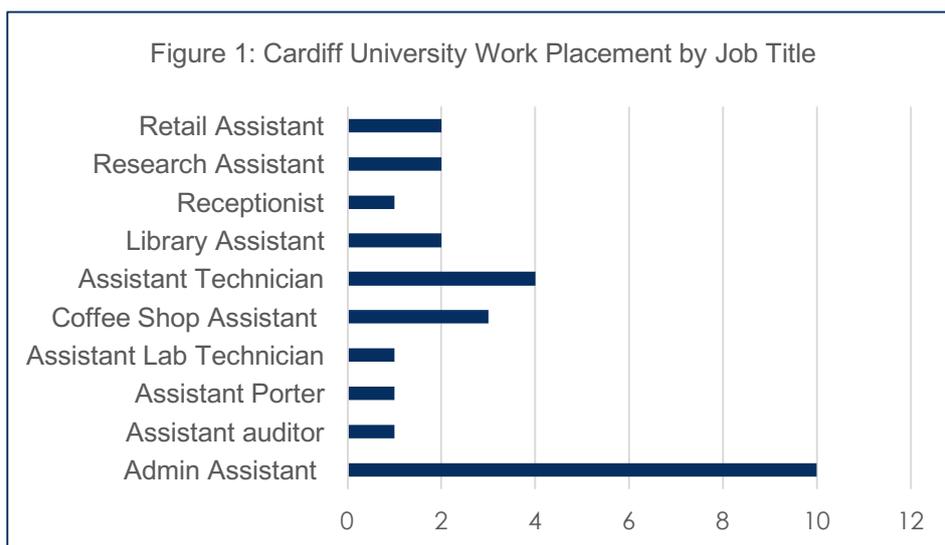
Data on the work placements that interns carried out within the University were collected by the Elite job coach and the Research Team.

Postal interviews were sent out to the Project SEARCH mentors in the University and to those responsible for the departments in which the interns were placed. Topics covered included:

- Did Project SEARCH provide effective support to the young person
- Did Project SEARCH provide effective support to the department
- How satisfied were they with aspects of the interns performance
- Their initial thoughts about having a young person with disabilities working in their department
- The work performance of the worker and any value they added to the department
- Issues of support, any problems arising and solutions sought for these
- Would they continue to employ the person if support was available

Results

The Cardiff University internship placements began in September 2016 and ended in June 2017. The data below is based on figures for the 11 participants who completed Project SEARCH. In total 17 Cardiff University departments provided a total of 38 work placements (interns experienced between one and 4 placements each). Figure 1 reflects the breakdown of placement by job title.



Interns' perspective

Reasons for applying to Project SEARCH

Of the eleven interns, eight decided to join Project SEARCH (PS) because they wanted a paid job after they finished the course. One intern applied because he wanted more work experience, another for curiosity (it was a new course) and another intern because other friends were applying for it.

All of the interns stated that they had enjoyed the college experience before Project SEARCH. Nine interns had previously undertaken some form of work experience while in college or school, of these, one had been in an unpaid job. Six interns reported that during college/school they thought that they would get a paid job in the future, but others had been unsure.

Intern 3 "I Imagined I would but I didn't know what kind of job I was looking for - maybe an office? Wanted it to be physical and active."

Intern 5 "I wasn't even really thinking about that because I wasn't sure that even when I left I thought well what am I going to do now? I really didn't know what I could have done after college."

Interns views on teaching and job coaching

When asked to think about the PS teaching sessions interns reported they had been learning a wide range of useful skills, such as looking for a job, applying for a job, making conversation about things, budgeting and managing money. It also helped them to be "more mature" as reported by an intern. Two interns reported their experiences in the training and education room and how it helped with their confidence building and development of new skills.

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!"*

Intern 8 *"[...] when we came onto this course my confidence wasn't that good but when we were organising that (Christmas Party). I was the chairman so I was in charge of making sure everyone knew what jobs they were doing, if they needed help and making sure everyone knew what the deadlines were. So that really helped bring my voice out and my confidence."*

One intern explained that the classroom work was not really helpful for him as the information was useful, but the work was too much.

Intern 12 *"It doesn't much, I have to drag my way most of the time. I want the information, but I don't want the work that goes with it!" "It is a waste of effort, the tasks are the same all the time".*

The job coaching was described positively by the interns who perceived they had been supported in many different ways. The job coach also came to the front as an important source of learning in the workplace. The interns' reported they had been helped practically 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 Project SEARCH approach helped them by increasing their confidence in their capabilities, they became more confident, for instance, when talking to new people. Interns have also been helped not to be afraid to communicate when something was wrong.

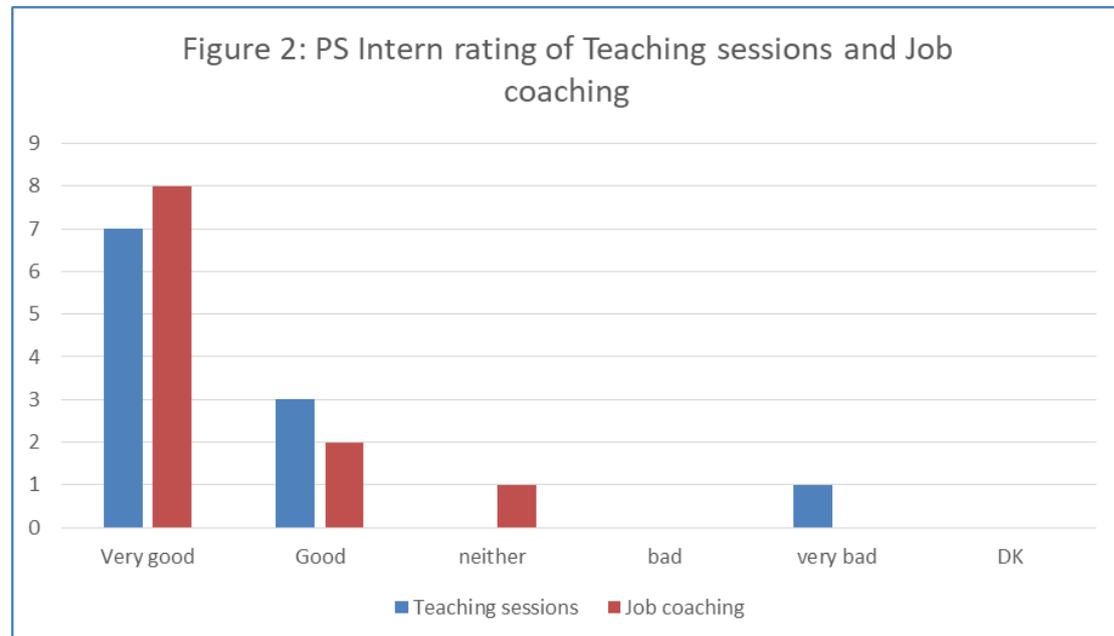
"Probably gain confidence when talking to new people. I think it is also reassuring knowing that you are not on your own, even though you sometimes feel like it, the job coach is always there reminding you."

Interns have also been helped not to be afraid to communicate when something was wrong.

"Helped not to be afraid to say something (silence). If you think it is not right you can say it".

"Be honest to the instructor and the job coach, they only 'pounce' on you because they want you to do well, and if you say 'oh I can't do that' then they'll say 'oh you can do that' only because they want you to go the extra mile! "

Interns were asked to comment on their feelings regarding the teaching and job coaching they had received throughout PS. The interns were particularly satisfied by the job coaching and by the teaching sessions. Figure 2 outlines the results.



Internship placements and Mentor support

Interns had been engaged with successful and less successful internships, but all the interns were able to describe in detail what their tasks were for each internship.

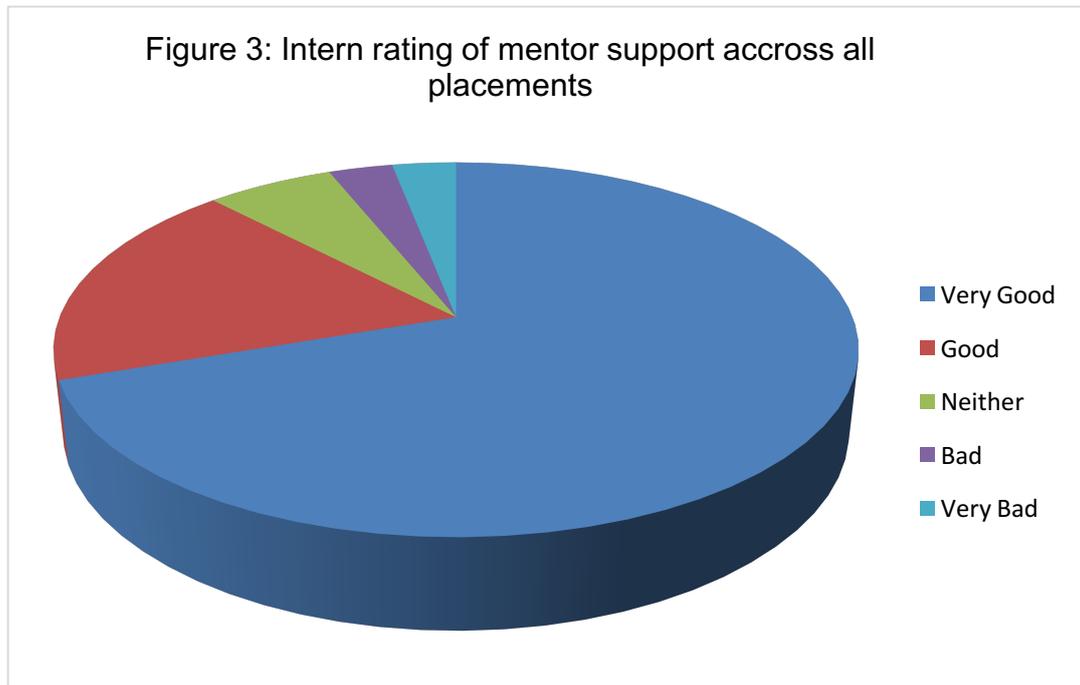
“I had to do email enquiries from students about courses, open days etc. I had to answer emails or direct to the right person. I had to meet student, greetings and welcoming them. I had to ring staff up and say students are waiting (not confident at the beginning, but now yes).”

“I had to deliver mail internally. I use a map and it is much easier now.”

“I do the fake drugs for the students to practice their exams, in one of the glass bottles you have to put sugar in it and water injections and stuff. I prepare them ready for their exams and I tidy up the cupboards and fill up the drugs and stuff. I like that one better than the library, it's more fun. I like doing the drugs in the SDL student practice rooms, like tidying the cupboards, there is a load of stuff I like, I like doing everything.”

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. Interns were asked what word best sum up their feelings about the workplace mentors. Figure 3 outlines the responses, with a high percentage of “good” and “very good” responses.



Two mentors were given a “bad” or “very bad” response as during one internship the intern felt that the mentor had just been there to give them work rather than help or support them, and during a second internship the intern felt they could not “connect” with the mentor.

Good support was often noted in relation to the mentor showing the intern what to do in the workplace, the physical presence of the mentor and the option to be able to openly approach them if needed was appreciated by the interns.

Intern 5 “Every day when I went down to the first floor to my placement I would say hello so he knew I was there and I would go and sit at the desk and log onto the computer and he would come over and he would check that I knew what I was doing and I knew how to do it properly and if I wasn’t sure he would sit with me and make sure I understood what was going on and if I got stuck on something he was always there to speak to, and his boss who’s a nice guy, he was always there if I needed help and he understood what I was doing.”

Intern 6 “(Helped me) lot’s, they were good as gold. If I did not understand I said I do not understand and they said that’s OK, we will explain it again, and they did”.

Intern 10 *"She explained the task lot more clearly than usual, demonstrate first and do it. She was good".*

Where interns gave a negative rating of mentor support this was in relation to the level of support or that mentors appeared too busy to support the intern.

Intern 12 *"X was fine, Y was very bossy. She walked away when I needed help. I was so bored of what I was doing."*

With regards to social interaction, the interns experience differed by the placement they were in, but overall the interns reported that they had interacted with other staff members about non work related topics.

Intern 5 *"We got on really well, I think we did talk about, like if it was a Friday we would talk about what was going on the weekend or like what we might be doing, or if there are any events going on are we going to them. Like one time I told him about when I went to one of the comic cons in town and we had a nice talk about that."*

Intern 7 *"They were easy to get along with. At lunch I would go down to the canteen to eat my lunch and watch YouTube, I like that time to myself."*

Intern 10 *"No good, can't have a conversation with her. I did not connect with her."* (When he moved to the other coffee shop) *"With C and her sister, we had jokes, humour."* (Different coffee shops)

Being a part of a team at the University had been an important outcome for the young people. This suggests that successful social contact with co-workers is important to the long-term success of the young people in employment.

Planning meetings involving the intern, mentor, job coach and a parent/ carer were a regular part of Project SEARCH. Interns were asked how helpful these were to them. The majority of interns found these helpful, explaining that they gave an opportunity to talk about how they were getting on

Intern 4 *"Very helpful, it helped to find out what strengths and weaknesses we have."*

Intern 9 *"Yes, talked about what I need to improve on and stuff."*

Two interns offered some suggestions with regards to the planning meetings,

Intern 7 *"I thought they were quite annoying, a waste of time. And I kind of think like, we are 20 to 22 years of age and I found it quite like childish that our parents had to come in, like a parents evening, so it kind of made me feel like I was still in school."*

Intern 10 *"It did not help much. You must take your parent, but I am over 18. If your parent can't make it they re-arrange the meeting. If I really do not want it or they (parents) don't want it, they should not go. Why should you bring parents? [...] but this should be our choice".*

Outcomes of Project SEARCH for the Interns

Interns reported that Project SEARCH boosted their confidence, helping them to find the type of job they want to do. All 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. One intern reported he had the opportunity to learn in a job he did not know about before experiencing it with Project SEARCH.

Intern 5 *"I have opened up a bit more with them and become better friends with a few other people. I have more skills, based on working on the computer here for example, like learning how to do the PDF files, how to log them, and other computer skills. Now I want a data entry job, similar to this, because honestly when I started this I didn't even know what it was or even if it even existed."*

All the interns reported they had a much clearer idea what sort of job they would like to apply for, meaning they have a clearer idea of what positions in the labour market would suit them. Out of eleven interns, ten stated that they now wanted to get a paid job after PS finished.

For several interns PS helped in what they enrolled for: getting a paid job. Tables 2 and 3 outline jobs gained and percentage paid employment rate of Project SEARCH by October 2017.

Table 2: Project SEARCH employment outcomes

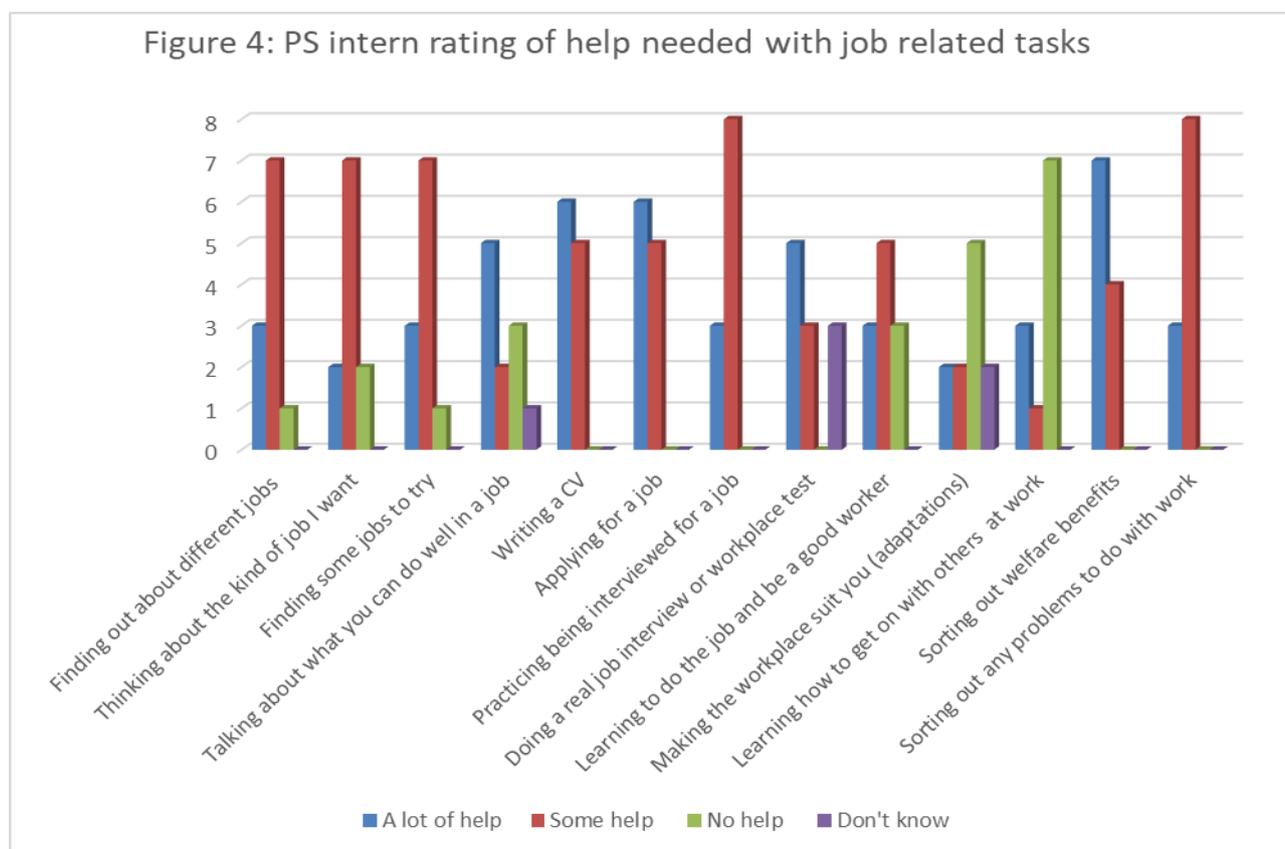
Job Title	Hours Per week	Paid/ Unpaid	Employer
Retail assistant	18	Paid	Simply Fresh (CAVC)
Coffee Shop assistant	16	Paid	Café Sio
Technician	24	Paid	Cardiff University
Admin Assistant	22.5	Paid	Cardiff University
Mail Person	10	Paid	Cardiff University
Assistant Technician	16	Paid-pending	Cardiff University
Admin Assistant	12	Paid-pending	Cardiff University

Table 3: Ratio of number employed to number completing Project Search by Oct 2017³

Employment Ratio	64%
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³ Project SEARCH excludes from outcome calculations any interns leaving within the first placement rotation period. Percentage here is based on 6 paid jobs from 11 completed internships. PS final job outcome rates are calculated in the April following graduation.

With regards to the future, interns were asked how much help they now felt they needed following Project SEARCH with regards to a number of job related tasks. 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 4 outlines these results.



The interns were asked if Project SEARCH had an effect on their wider lives. Greater independence in travel, expanding friendships, increases in skills and in areas of personal independence were reported

Intern 5 *“Regarding friends I definitely have become more friends with them. I knew some of them from college but it was mainly me and my friend M who stuck together but being on this course I have opened up a bit more with them and become better friends with a few other people”.*

Intern 7 *“Boosted my confidence up a lot more, I can feel myself starting getting better with Maths and English.”*

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

Views of Parents/ Carers

The research team approached the parents/ carers for each of the eleven interns who completed Project SEARCH. A total of nine agreed to participate, All were parents (mothers).

Employment and the future: the options before Project SEARCH

Parents recognised that the employment options for their young person approaching the adulthood were limited. A parent explained that college course provision was good, but none of the courses provided real options for the future.

Parent 1 *“I would say her options were limited, she'd been through the school system and done a residential course at X College but felt that all those courses, while they were good didn't give her any options for work experience.”*

One parent reported how Project SEARCH has been intended to be another course, useful to keep her daughter occupied for another year. Instead, Project SEARCH exceeded this parent expectations; the parent saw a daughter engaged in different work placements, different from the type of job and environment this parent ever considered for her daughter, such as an office.

Parent 1 *“I think initially, I'll be honest, I thought it would just take care of another year, kind of almost prolonging her education if you like, for a year, and I thought well if they can kind of keep her occupied if that's the right way of saying it for a year that would be ok, but it's exceeded my expectations and I think I've been able to see X in work placements and that she's actually coped and I didn't think that she'd... I always thought that if X was going to get a job it would be somewhere like a Cafe or something like that but to actually have the opportunity to see her working in an office environment I'd never considered that”.*

Other parents were surprised to see their young people coping with work experience they never imagined they would get. Parents reported their thoughts about how hard finding a job would have been for the intern. Parent responses showed that getting a job has not been considered to be a possibility and the only job they could hope for was “a basic job”, maybe for few hours a week, in a small environment, away from the crowd.

Parent 3 *“Initially I didn't have a clue other than me looking for a job for him and trying to find something that was, how to put it... very very basic even if he was going to get anything at all, I thought I'd be enrolling him in adult education classes for evermore and he'd be living at home and having no life basically other than anything I organised for him”.*

Parent 5 *"I do not think he ever thought he would ever get a job and to be honest we did not think he would be able to. All we thought he would do maybe a couple of hours a week in a back of a café, because all his work experience he did they tended to push him into a cafe, because it was a small environment and he could be at the back without speaking to customers. [...]"*

The same parent reported of being aware that their son was capable of much more, but there was not appropriate support in place to help him achieve it.

Parent 5 *"Because I knew he was capable of so much more, I just needed him to know that. He has always been a very negative person. If you ask him he always says: I can't do that [...] I knew that with Project SEARCH he would have the support he needed, to show him that he is capable of so much more".*

Impact on Interns skills development

Project SEARCH provided interns with a wide range of skills that were helpful while looking, settling and staying in a work placement. Firstly, Project SEARCH helped interns to change their prospect of getting a job.

Parent 2 *"Because it gave him more prospects of getting a job. Increased his communication skills, customer service, health and safety and self-confidence"*

Secondly, Project SEARCH increased communication skills, self-confidence and provided further employment skills such as customer service skills and health and safety knowledge.

Parent 8 *"I think it would boost his confidence and he would get some ideas about working. PS was an opportunity he enjoyed".*

Views of the Job Coaching and classroom based learning

The presence of a Job Coach was seen as important in supporting the young person and liaising with the workplace. Parent/ carer respondents appreciated the detailed initial training in the tasks of the job and training for travel to work and the fact that the Job Coach faded their input over time to leave the young person independent in that placement. Actions as simple as taking an intern to the placement, in order to familiarise them with a new context, people and experience were felt to make a real difference. One parent highlighted how positive it was for her daughter being supported in order to be "comfortable" in work.

Parent 1 *"Think it helped her gain confidence with the Job coach actually taking her, the actual physically getting there and I think as a parent*

we are a bit over-cautious and to allow somebody else to take that and see that she could do it.

Parent 7 *“(The job coach) went in and made sure X was comfortable in work, took her to job interviews, so she has done really good”.*

Parents identified several aspects that might have helped their young people in Project SEARCH. A small group learning context, such as the Project SEARCH learning room, facilitated the learning process.

Parent 1 *“Think it helped her work within a team, that kind of working within a smaller team because obviously she'd worked in a classroom before that, but that kind of working in a smaller team.”*

This parent also highlighted how the setup of the learning room as an office helped her daughter's learning.

Parent 1 *“For her to gain confidence going back and for placements and things like that, the instructor was very good at doing that, and just being outside of a normal classroom, because although they had their room and it was a classroom in itself it was set up more like an office.”*

Parents reported the interns learned a wide variety of employment related skills, such as computer skills, CV writing, interview skills, timekeeping. One parent reported how surprised was to see his child talking in front of a crowd of people about their experience with Project SEARCH.

Another parent explained how Project SEARCH staff were able to adapt an incident which happened during a learning session into a learning opportunity. A parent reported how a misunderstanding that happened in the classroom, had been promptly addressed by the job coach, helping the intern to take more awareness of his and other people actions and help him to know how to ask when something is not understandable.

Parent 5 *“X was told to look for job, but it was not clear that was an exercise. He got himself in such a state, he had a complete melt down in the classroom. [...] He did not want to go back. The job coach actually came to the house and reassure him [...]. He agreed to go back. Since he came back the job coach took on board what is happening and they made sure to explain what it is happening and everything you know. [...] Some good came out of that situation! You have to take responsibility of some of it. Maybe you did not listen to what everyone else told [...] you are in a classroom, whatever is going on you should be listening to,*

Impact on the intern mind set

A parent reported how Project SEARCH has helped her daughter to change her mind set, moving from education to 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 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."*

Other parents highlighted how Project SEARCH helped her daughter to mix with people and go for a real interview. One young person was reported to have experienced a real permanent social change: from being sitting at home in their room, to being able to go out into town, football and socialising even after the end of Project SEARCH.

Another parent highlighted that her daughter had a very good group of friends and she felt good about herself, but now that the project ended she is back where she was before.

Overall, parents reported all-round changes for their children:

Parent 8 *"If you knew X first, when he first started and what he is now! He understands more, he is more confident, he has done brilliant!"*

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! And he comes out quite happy, it is great, and without PS he would not have happen. We were looking at more college courses to try and keep him in education because there was nothing else outside, but even that was restricting, this is amazing!"*

Impact on the family

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

Parent 1 *"I think that for us as her parents it's allowed us to see that she is more capable than we thought, that there are more options than we thought. I think we had quite basic expectations and our expectations have been risen".*

Indeed, a parent of an intern who is now in a permanent 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”.*

Project SEARCH also helped to take away some of this 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 many close people, such as relatives and friends noticed a positive difference 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”.*

Parent 8 *“He is a totally different person, lot of people said it, family, friends”*

Three parents said they did not notice any difference after Project SEARCH for the wider family.

Parent/ carer views on the future

The majority of family respondents felt that Project SEARCH had improved the young person's chances of future work. Most families went on to say that their views about employment had been over-turned and that they were now positive and less concerned about the future. Table 4 outlines the figures.

Table 4: Change in parent/ carer attitude to paid employment

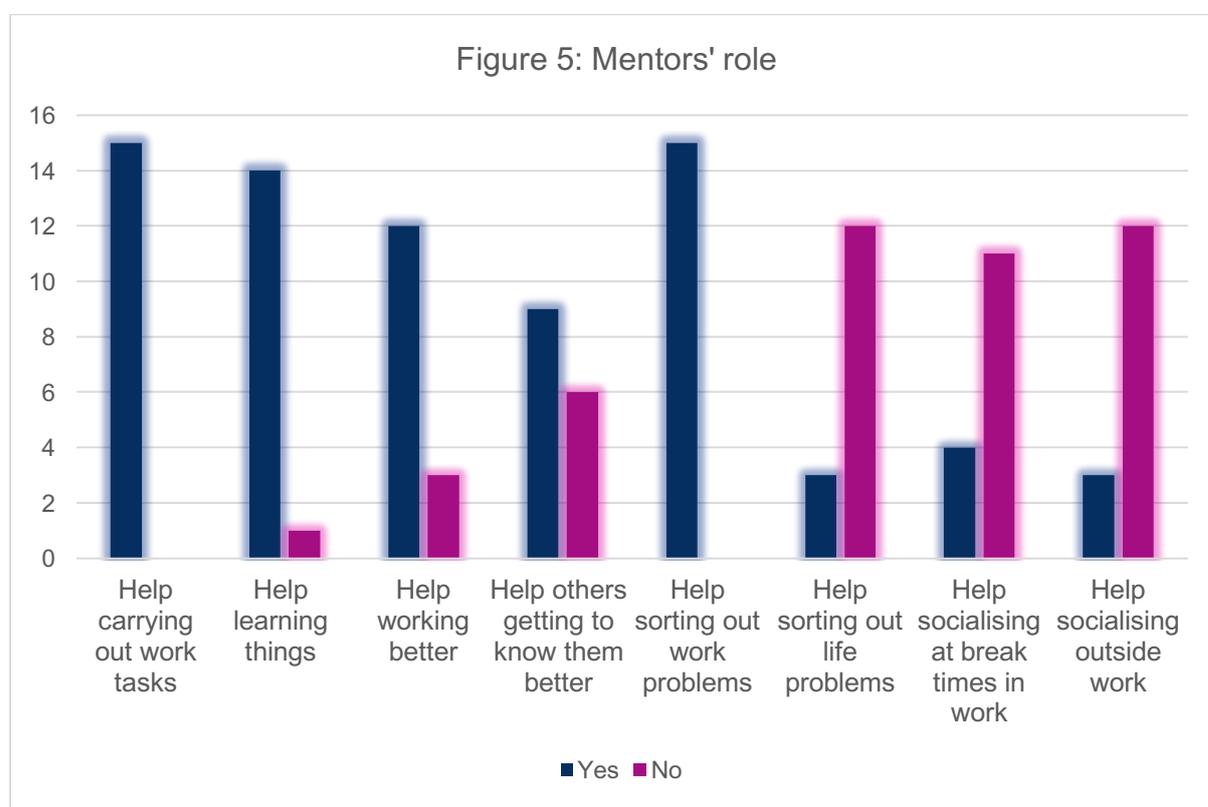
Did you think the young person would get a paid Job...?	YES	NO
In the past?	1	8
Now?	8	1

Seeing that employers could be positive about employing people with learning disabilities was an important factor. Ultimately, while the internships were highly important to the parents/carers they now wanted their relative to be employed in an on-going job and there still appeared to be a gap in transforming these positive experiences into a paid job for the young people who had not yet gained employment

Parent 7 *“While she was in work she had a very good group of friends and she felt good about herself but now we’ve come to the end and she’s back where she was now.”*

Mentors’ experience

Fifteen mentors (out of a total of 32) responded to a survey about their personal experience with Project SEARCH. We looked at how mentors felt about the support they received from Project SEARCH staff members, how they felt about their roles and what impact the intern had on them and on their organization.



The main role of mentors was to help the intern carrying out their work tasks and help sorting out work problems. Mentors actively helped interns to learn new things and to work effectively (Figure 5).

Mentors reported how they have been acting as “first point of contact” for the interns; their influence spaced from introducing the working system in place for

that organization, planning and reviewing work to making the intern comfortable and welcomed.

Mentor input rarely involved non-work related activities, although three mentors described supporting their interns to sort out life problems. Working alongside a Project SEARCH intern had a positive role because more than half of mentors helped other people within the organization to get to know the intern. Four mentors supported their interns socializing at break times and three were involved in social activities outside the workplace (Figure 5).

Some interns were quiet and shy at the beginning, but mentors reported that they generally interacted quite well with their mentors as interns got to know their new work environment.

Mentor 11 "We got on fine- we only worked together for one day per week [...] but I'd say X became more relaxed and more comfortable after the first few days, chatting more freely about non work things".

Mentor 1 "Got on well. Once initial shyness had passed was very open. We chatted about all sort of things. X is really friendly and keen to help".

Two mentors reported they had lunch with their interns, while another two interns went out as a team for the Christmas meal and for a team building activity.

Thirteen mentors judged the interns' contributions to the working environment as positive or extremely positive in term of time saving for the organization:

Mentor 2 "X's contribution during one of the busiest times of the year was integral to the running of the department. Her tasks enabled the technical team to cope with 2 sets exams and intense teaching".

Having a Project SEARCH interns helped to get to know young people with additional needs, value their abilities and willingness to achieve in employment. One intern also helped the mentor improving computer skills.

Mentor 3 "Gave us a better understanding of young people with additional needs in the workplace and support they require. They both (2 interns) had a lovely sense of humor and were very helpful, finished jobs to the very best of their ability".

Mentor 1 "She was happy to get on with delegate lists so that I could focus on other aspects. Has helped me with my computer skills!"

Only one mentor reported time was lost to finalise the job with the intern, while another report that the intern was able to complete the task only under close supervision.

Mentor 4 "X was able to complete part of the task set, but only under close supervision. X really struggled with the work and circumstances at

home, meaning his time here was cut very short. I was frustrated we did not seem to have found him an appropriate task.”

Besides the positive aspects of being a mentor, there has been some difficulties highlighted by some of the mentors. One mentor reported that the workload increased because of mistakes made by the intern, especially when tired.

Mentor 6 “I have found that he made a lot of mistakes, especially when tired, and I often found myself re-explaining very simple concepts such as alphabetical order to him. All in all having him in the office increased rather than reduced our burden. I often found myself re-doing the work X had taken all day to do”.

A mentor reported that further guidance would have been helpful to understand what tasks would have been appropriate for that intern.

Mentor 10 “At the start of the project I was a lot unsure about what work would be appropriate to give the interns. I did not want it to be too hard or too basic! More guidance in the beginning to what kind of work. In our office the work is often quite varied, but we did manage to find some regular tasks in the end”.

The extra commitment was not viewed as a disadvantage by another mentor, but only something a mentor need to consider when taking an intern.

Mentor 2 “Being a mentor/co-worker added to my workload, I don't think this was a disadvantage as such, but important to note that it will if you want to mentor closely”

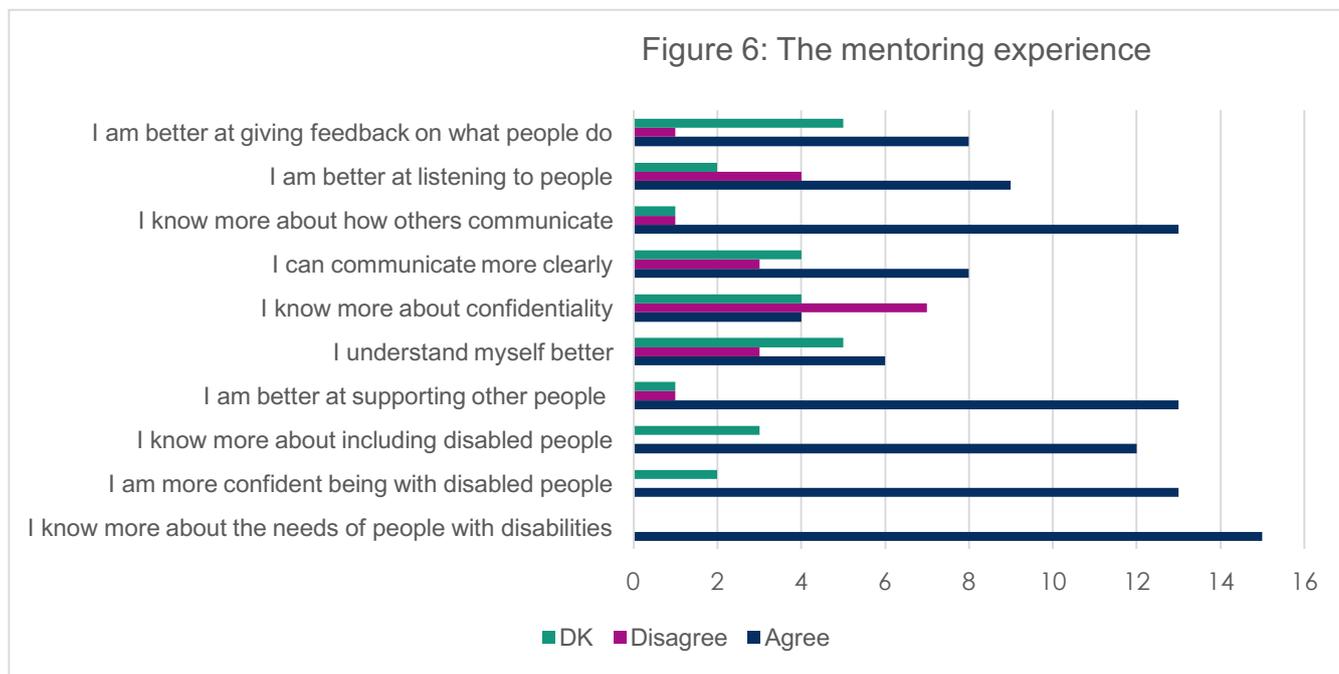
Mentor 3 “I would not say it is a disadvantage but anyone going to becoming a mentor or co-worker need to be aware of exactly what is expected of them and be made aware fully of any extra work required as in paper work, meeting etc.”

The working environment the intern was working in influenced the mentor habits and tasks, because the intern could not be left unattended.

Mentor 11 “As all of the tasks that X had to do were lab based, this meant that I was unable to leave him unsupervised for all of the periods where he was working at Earth. This was somewhat of a disadvantage, as I manage 3 labs in different parts of the building and often work between them. As I only worked with X for one (short) day per week, this was not a major problem- but this would make a full time internship very difficult.

The overall benefits of being a mentor within the Project SEARCH programme was about an increased knowledge of what the needs of people with a disability are. Mentors reported they were more confident around people with disabilities and felt they improved their understanding of what other people can communicate. They felt this experience enabled them to improve their supporting skills and improved their ability to include disable people in the

workplace. Mentors felt they generally improved their listening skills and that they felt more prepared while giving feedback on people's activity. Mentors did not feel the experience of being a mentor improve their knowledge about confidentiality (Figure 6).



The overall mentors' view about the project was extremely positive, with good to outstanding comment about it.

Mentor 10 "A really great and worthwhile project. Thank you for letting us be a part of it."

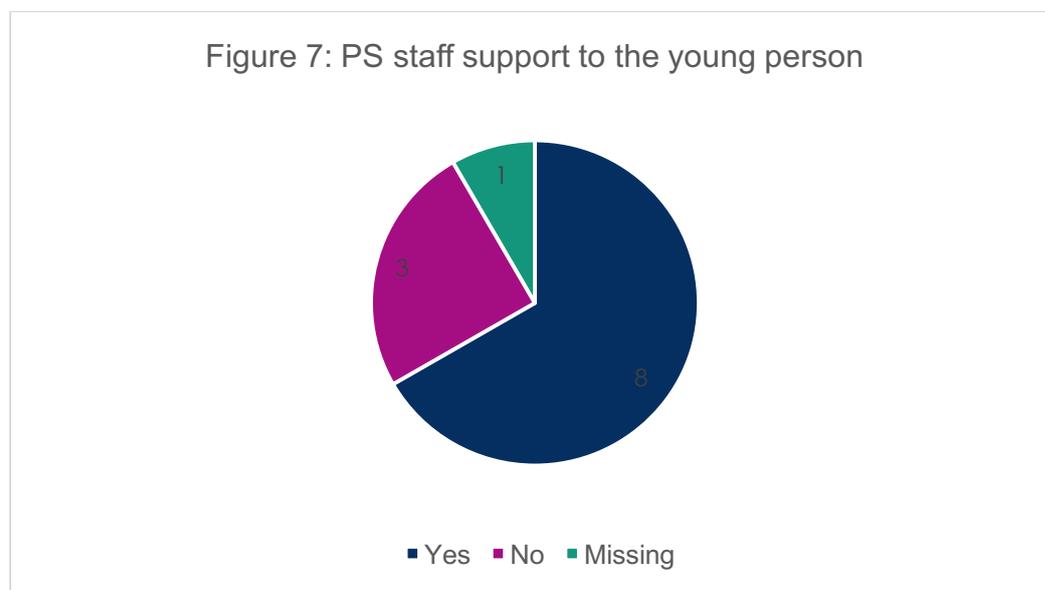
Mentor 2 "Fantastic programme. I look forward to working with more interns hopefully in the future."

Mentor 5 "It seems to be a scheme that gives youngster's with some learning difficulties a really positive work experience which is mutually beneficial."

Mentor 13 "I have a new appreciation of the importance of giving opportunities to young people with disabilities, which they wouldn't have otherwise. I am saddened by the thought that without Project SEARCH, X would not have had the opportunity to work with us and become the valuable member of the team he is today." (about an intern now employed at the University).

Employers' experience

Twelve employers out of a total of 23 contacted completed the Project SEARCH evaluation questionnaire. Employers generally felt young people were well supported by Project SEARCH staff as reported in Figure 7.



For the employers responding that their interns were not enough supported by PS staff, the main reason was that the support came 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.”

Eleven employers out of twelve would consider taking another PS intern in the future and seven out of twelve would consider to employ the intern in their organisation.

Ten employers out of twelve reported that having an intern in their organisation had a positive effect on other staff, even if sometimes it was challenging.

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.*

Ten employers out of 12 reported positive effects on their organisations approach towards a diverse workforce.

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."*

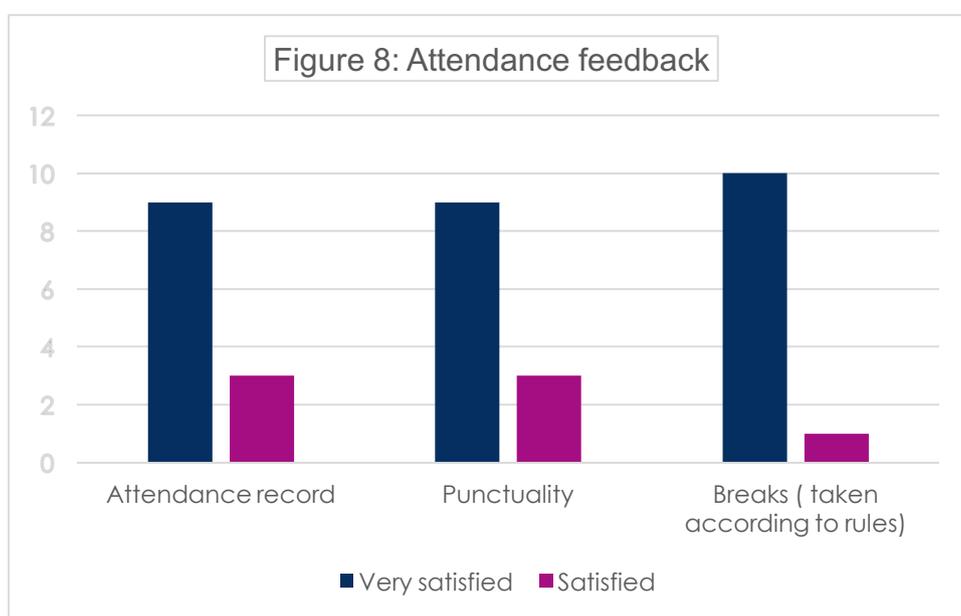
Seven employers out of twelve highlighted their interns had a positive effect on the image of their organisation.

Employer 9 *"From a Cardiff University perspective yes, the news articles and promotion of the scheme were well received."*

One employer reported that the intern had 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 was overall positive, with great appreciation for interns attendance to work. None of the employers reported negatively about attendance, punctuality and breaks as showed in Figure 8.



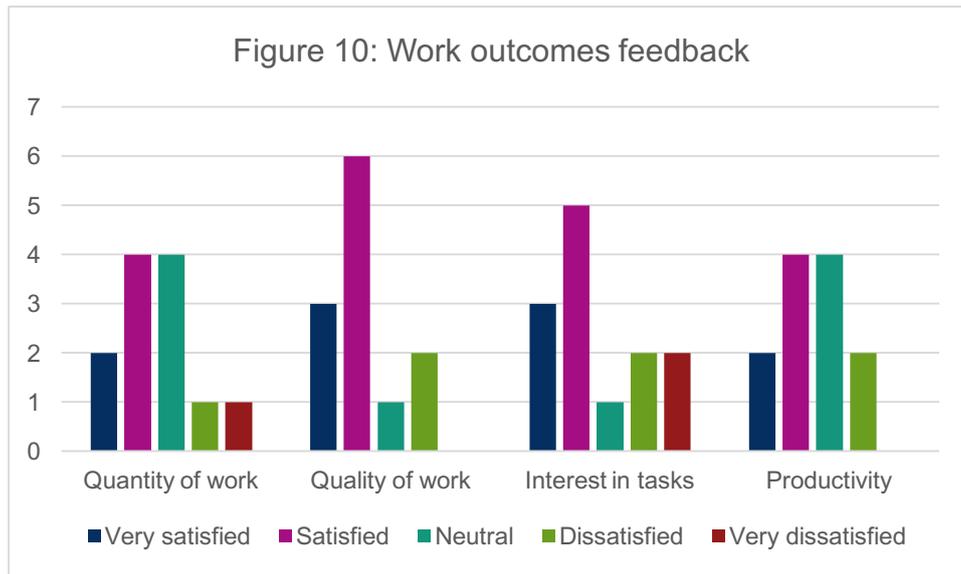
Great appreciation has been reported for the interns working skills, where only one employer provided a neutral feedback about it.

The interns were reported as being able to follow safety rules, with only two employer providing a neutral feedback on it.

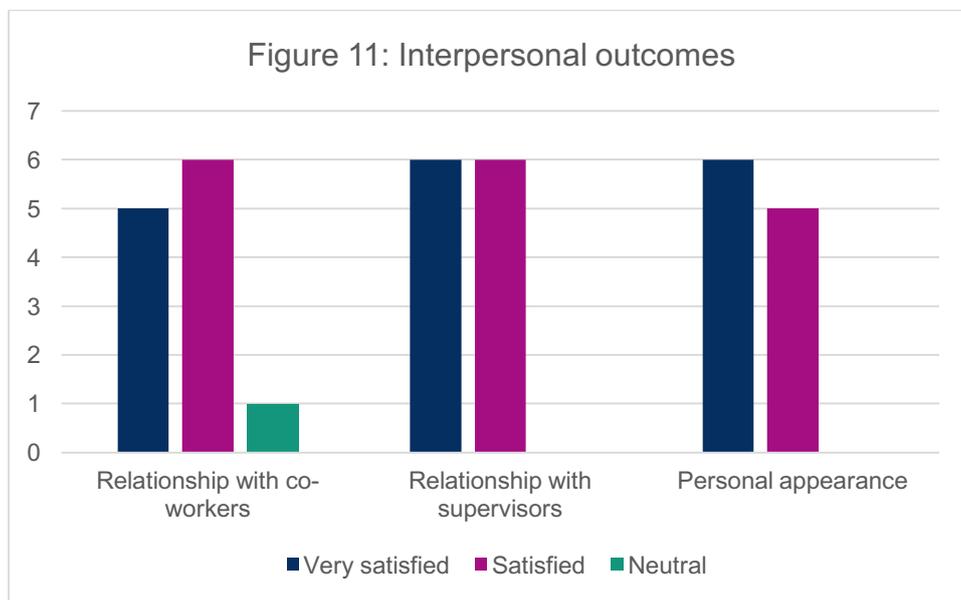
Employers reported positive feedback on following instruction and showing initiatives, but some dissatisfaction was recorded from one employer (Figure 9).



The amount of work the interns were doing was satisfactory for four employers, very satisfactory for two and neutral from four. One employer reported to be dissatisfied and one very dissatisfied about it. The quality of work was generally appreciated by employers, with only two reporting they were dissatisfied about it. Interns generally showed interest for the task, but two employers reported they were dissatisfied and another two reported they were very dissatisfied by their interns interest in tasks. Figure 10 outlines these results.



Great satisfaction was reported about interns personal appearance, with employers being satisfied and very satisfied most of the time. Employers reported great satisfaction about relationship with co-workers and supervisors (Figure 11).



Conclusions

Feedback from young people and parents/ carers involved in the first Project SEARCH site based in Wales showed many benefits to those concerned and few costs or draw backs. However, there were a few issues raised by mentors and employers. Young people learned much during the internships, had their confidence raised along with their belief that they could work. Friendship groups were widened and social interaction was increased. Job Coach support by Elite Supported Employment Agency and the classroom based vocational education

provided by Cardiff and The Vale College were seen as pivotal to the success of the internships.

Parent and carer views of their young person changed also, with Project SEARCH having raised their aspirations for their young person. The views of parents/cares underline the need for consistency and for agencies to continue to deliver the individual support required if families are to come on board with employment as a realistic option for young people. Elite Supported Employment Agency will continue to provide support from a one to one Job Coach and Employment Training Coordinator who will maintain support through future initial inductions into paid employment and signposting to follow up services for those not yet in employment.

Cardiff University staff reported an overall good experience with Project SEARCH with seven out of ten employers stating they would be (willing to employ the intern if support was available and with almost the totality of them (eleven out of twelve) willing to have another Project SEARCH intern in their department in the future. The interns were particularly appreciated for their work attitude, their attendance and behaviour in work. The lack of interest in the tasks highlighted by few employers might be linked with a failed job match. The amount of performed tasks and the quality of the job was criticised by some employers and that might be linked with the short amount of time the interns were spending on an internship and the lack of concrete strategies for improving productivity. Some interns took more time to adapt to a new work environment, new people and new tasks as reported by family and interns. Relationships in the workplace were positive, with a positive effect on University staff. Mentors reported new learning such as understanding the benefits of a diverse workshop. Mentors have been engaged with assisting the interns mainly with their learning and with their task, and less involved in social activities. The interns social involvement in the workplace should be investigated further, to understand if the 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, because they needed to check the accuracy of their task and assist the intern with some of their tasks. Care is needed that mentors are clear about the role they are being asked to play and are given adequate support by the 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 in order to 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 employability of the interns. A significant outcome of the Project SEARCH negotiations was that, as part of the partnership with Cardiff University, the young people will be given the opportunity to apply for vacancies as internal candidates within the University. This will allow the young people to establish themselves as part of the work force to ensure their permanent employment.

In terms of good practice, the hours that people work per week appear to be low. This may have been used to ensure people's underlying welfare benefits are not threatened. The future evaluation of paid employment positions gained by the Engage to Change Project SEARCH sites in Wales should investigate how dependent achieving part time or full time work is on young people's characteristics and personal 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 young people work in 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 Project SEARCH site in Wales has achieved a 64% employment ratio. The results from Project SEARCH outlined here offer a model for future internships for young people with learning disabilities and/or Autism. Discussions around the next cohort need to focus on a stronger path into employment. For Parents/ carers, there needs to be continued help into employment to capitalise on the great success of the internships for the young people. Expansion of the project into wider areas of Cardiff University, the local Health Board and other sites in Wales are logical steps. Project SEARCH represents a valuable addition to supported employment provision in Wales and formal recognition of the internship scheme is needed so that Access to Work funding can be utilised for the support hours/job trainer and paid elements of placements as they do in England for Project Search. This would allow the scheme to expand significantly in Wales.