

Towards Full Gender Parity

Preliminary Findings

Women often have lower employment rates and work fewer hours per week in transition-to-work programmes. This paper examines social and contextual factors that may affect their outcomes. While examining DFN Project SEARCH data, the findings can be used by organisations in the sector to identify and address potential gaps, and also to start a cross-sector discussion on how to ensure women have the same opportunities and outcomes as men in transition to work programmes.

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List of key terms

DFN Project SEARCH - a one-year transition to work programme for young adults with a learning disability or autism spectrum conditions, or both. Holder of Project SEARCH franchise in the UK and Iberia. [Find out more](#)

Education partner – school or college that delivers the Project SEARCH model

Graduate – a former intern

Host businesses – a company with more than 250 employees that offers interns placements and a room for the classes given by the education partner

Intern – a young person (nearly always between 17 and 24) who joins the programme

Project SEARCH – leading supported employment programme originated in the USA. [Find out more](#)

Programme specialist – DFN Project SEARCH employee who coordinates all partners in the programme

Site – a physical setting where the programme takes place. Often used interchangeably with programme

Executive Summary

This report discusses key factors linked to the outcomes of women¹ at DFN Project SEARCH. The data show that the differences in employment rates and weekly working hours of women and men are not statistically significant when only considering jobs found at **host businesses**. Women working for host businesses also earned slightly more on average than men working for host businesses.

The report also shows that women at DFN Project SEARCH had proportionally higher employment rates than women in general in the UK, and also that the gap in working hours and wage was much smaller at DFN Project SEARCH than in most regions of the UK.

While the data presented here comes from DFN Project SEARCH, the findings can be used by other transition-to-work programmes and organisations in the third sector. Recommendations to further improve the outcomes of women are presented in the last section of this report.

Summary of key findings

Hourly wage

Wages of women and men at DFN Project SEARCH have been steadily increasing in the past five cohorts. Wage differences in the past three cohorts were not statistically significant and in 2019/20 women earned more than men on average. The differences were much smaller than the UK's.

With the exception of 2020/21, **women** employed by **host businesses** earned exactly the **same** or **more** than men employed by host businesses in the past five cohorts, suggesting that gender parity is related to embracing the model and its values.

Working hours

While in the UK women are more likely than men to work part-time and also to have zero-hour contracts, at DFN Project SEARCH the weekly hours of women and men women employed by **host businesses** were almost exactly the same (26.2 and 26.9, respectively). The overall working hours gap dropped from 4 hours to 1 hour since the beginning of the gender research.

Employment rate

With the exception of the cohort hardest hit by COVID-19 (2019/20), the employment gender gap at DFN Project SEARCH was in line with or lower than the UK's. In Wales, Scotland and Ireland the employment gender gap at DFN Project SEARCH was below the national figure. In England, particularly in London, it was higher.

¹ The terms women and female interns are used interchangeably and refer to anyone who declared as being a woman when joining the programme

The role of families

While 84% of respondents to the Intern Satisfaction Survey said the level of support from their families was High or Very High (and the remainder medium), anecdotal evidence suggests that families tend to be more protective of women than of men. Interviews with tutors, job coaches, graduates, interns and programme specialists indicate that only in specific cases families may negatively (often unintentionally) influence the outcomes of women in the programme. Ways of engaging families are presented in the Conclusion and Recommendations section.

Job assignment

While interns and some sites said women and men could apply for any job, employment in certain areas was related to gender, as seen in the first section of this report. That said, women respondents and interviewees mentioned that they could work in a predominantly male role or sector, although some said they could face stigma and prejudice.

Background

There is ample evidence that women face more challenges than men in employment. Stigma, bias and unacknowledged prejudice materialise as occupational segregation², which limits the opportunities for women, reinforces stereotypes³ and salary differences, and inflexible working arrangements, which more deeply affects women⁴, not to mention differences in salaries between men and women working in the same job. Studies have also shown that an increase in the proportion of women working in a certain occupation is followed by a decrease in salaries.⁵ While women in education generally perform as well as, and often outperform, men, women “see fewer returns for this investment in the labour market”.⁶

A comprehensive gender pay gap study suggests that more subtle factors might also be at play, such as a tendency for women to select tasks with lower hourly pay.⁷ Another study found that women are more likely to shy away from competition.⁸ Those points suggest employment is even at deeper levels structured around traits most often found among men.

Challenges faced by women in transition to work programmes

It is only expected that societal challenges will also be faced by young women with a learning disability, autism or both moving into employment. According to a Public Health England report, men with a learning disability have consistently higher employment rates than women with a learning disability in England⁹. A literature review shows that lower outcomes for women, particularly around working hours, are common in transition to work programmes.^{10, 11}

There is more than enough evidence of the benefits of gender equity and diversity in the workplace, including innovation¹², productivity¹³, reputation¹⁴ and happiness¹⁵. Even if none of those was true, equity is an essential right.

The research

Data from five cohorts were used here, three of them before the COVID-19 pandemic (2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19) and two during (2019/20, 2020/21). The pandemic affected DFN Project SEARCH programmes in many ways, mainly because:

- There were fewer rotations available
- Interns and parents were worried about risks of infection, with many of them withdrawing from the programme
- Sites had to adapt the curriculum

² <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/161295/1/dp10672.pdf>

³ <https://meridian.allenpress.com/idd/article-abstract/38/2/89/8167/Gender-Differences-in-Supported-Employment?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

⁴ https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/bolotnyy/files/be_gendergap.pdf

⁵ <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/88/2/865/2235342>

⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14407833177007361177/1440783317700736>

⁷ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0229383>

⁸ Workshop on the advantages of a gender-sensitive approach to tackle youth unemployment in [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/workshop/join/2013/474437/IPOL-FEMM_AT\(2013\)474437_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/workshop/join/2013/474437/IPOL-FEMM_AT(2013)474437_EN.pdf)

⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613182/PWLDIE_2015_main_report_NB090517.pdf

¹⁰ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10804699/>

¹¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28836051/>

¹² <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0222443>

¹³ https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/An%20Institutional%20Approach%20to%20Gender%20Diversity%20and%20Firm%20Performance_4c0479f3-9d13-4af8-82da-7f1713af940d.pdf

¹⁴ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0361684318800264>

¹⁵ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11115-020-00479-0>

- Interns could not be in the host businesses for months
- Some host businesses closed down (temporarily or permanently)
- Redundancy rate in the UK was high
- Employment rates among young people in the UK, and even more so those with a learning disability, were low
- 296 interns in total decided to repeat the programme due to COVID.

An in-depth analysis of DFN Project SEARCH three pre-COVID cohorts (2016/17 to 2018/19) and subsequent research of the 2019/20 and 2020/21 cohorts revealed two areas to be addressed:

- Women worked significantly fewer hours per week than men
- Women had a lower employment rate on average

The data also showed that the differences in wages, which were significant in 2016/17 and 2017/18, have decreased to the point that in 2019/20 women earned more than men on average per hour.

While the employment rates were not statistically significantly different in any of the pre-COVID cohorts (2016/17 to 2018/19), it was in 2019/20 and also when data from the five cohorts or the three pre-COVID ones were combined, but not in 2020/21.

In all other areas, women and men had similar outcomes. Recruitment of women was slightly higher than the proportion of women with an Education and Health Care (EHC) plan in England or the Individualised Education Programme (IEP) in Scotland, which was around 30%. Completion rates were similar for men and women. In Ireland the proportion of women and men enrolled in the programme was almost exactly the same.

For DFN Project SEARCH, full gender parity will increase overall outcomes, fulfil equality commitment, and inform strategies that can be also adopted by other organisations in the sector.

Introduction

A literature review indicated that lower employment rates and fewer working hours are common in transition to work programmes and also that women face greater employment barriers in society. Based on those, this piece of research analysed DFN Project SEARCH outcomes at two levels: societal and contextual (related to the programme).

An extensive statistical analysis was done and, in line with the in-depth research mentioned earlier, age, classroom size, gender of supporting staff, and region interns live were not related to their outcomes. Younger interns tended to have slightly higher employment rates and those from ethnic minorities tended to earn slightly more in some regions. The key finding, however, was that the employment, wage and working hours gaps at DFN Project SEARCH were usually lower than the UK's, clearly indicating societal factors were at play.

The second phase included interviews with tutors, managers and job coaches from 15 sites, two women from the DFN Project SEARCH Youth Advisory Group, and programme specialists. The main points were: families play an important role (which is in line with other transition to work programmes studies and our Female and Intern Satisfaction surveys) but many are as supportive of their daughters as of their sons; there is a limited number of women in a position to enter the programme (which is a societal factor as only 28% of those with an Education and Health Care Plan are women, and this is required to join the programme in England), and some sites were not aware of the differences in outcomes of men and women. To answer the last point, DFN Project SEARCH will send each site a breakdown of their outcomes by gender, ethnicity and primary disability.

The third and final phase consisted of a survey sent to all interns who were women. Respondents largely reported being treated the same by supporting staff regardless of their gender. A small proportion of respondents preferred to interact with women but most of those had not interacted with a man in the same position. They also said that their families were very supportive. Another survey (Intern Satisfaction survey) showed no difference in the level of support from families of women and men, according to the interns themselves.

At the end of the analysis, a new statistical analysis was done to understand how the outcomes of women could be further improved. This time we compared in greater detail the outcomes of interns hired by host businesses and those externally hired. We learned that **host businesses** paid on average women the same as, or more than, men, and that the hourly gap was much smaller, only 40 minutes compared to over 4 hours when looking at only external employers. This suggests that businesses that join the programme are more aware of potential gender gaps or become so due to the model.

That said, external employers are, and will continue to be, an essential part of the DFN Project SEARCH model. We need, therefore, to start a dialogue to increase their awareness of potential gender disparities in their recruitment and employment, which is discussed in the Conclusion and Recommendations section.

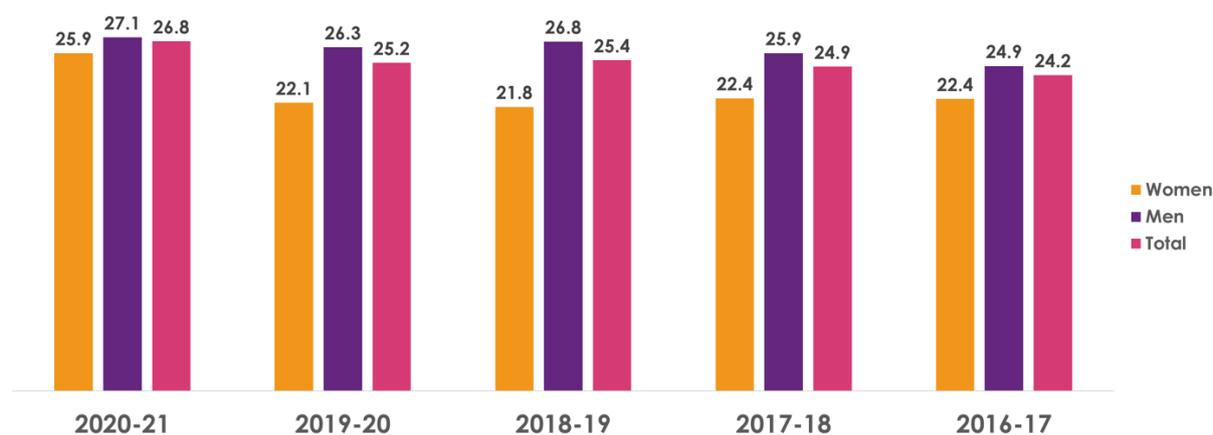
In summary, this piece of research shows that DFN Project SEARCH has been largely mitigating the challenges faced by women (the exceptions are noted in the report alongside recommendations) and that there are no statistically significant gaps among interns hired by **host businesses**.

Part 1 - Statistical Analysis

1.1 Weekly working hours

In the first four cohorts the differences between the number of hours men and women worked per week were statistically significant. There was, however, a substantial decrease in 2020/21. As discussed later, this was partially due to the higher proportion of interns finding jobs in host businesses.

Chart 1. Weekly working hours of men and women in the past five cohorts



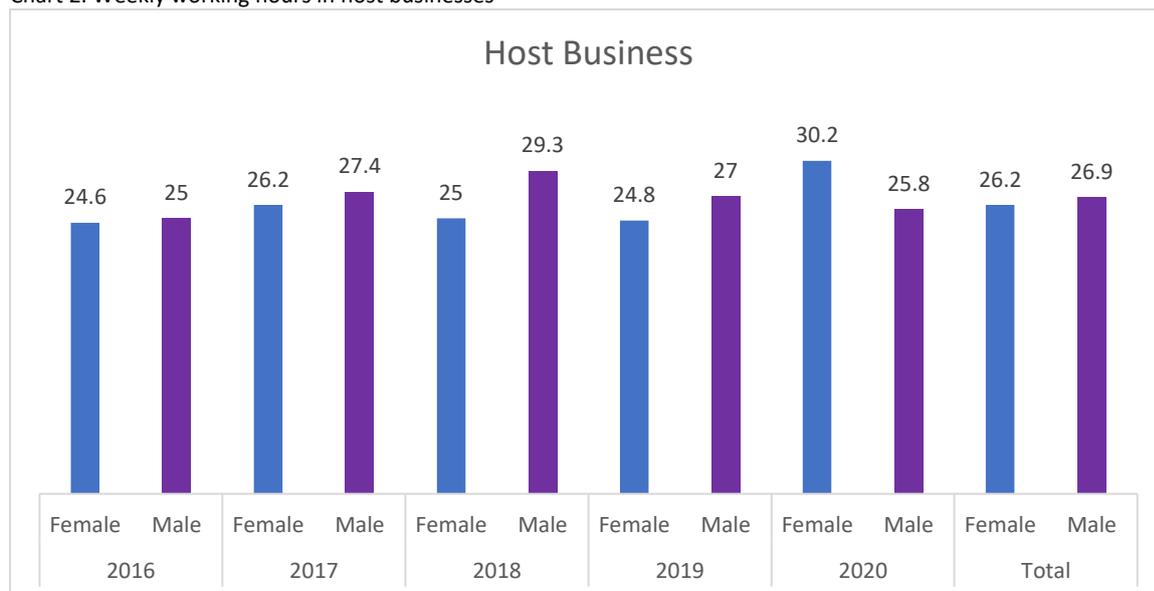
The gap in the first four cohorts was narrower in Wales but present in every region of the UK. In 20/21 there was no gap in London, where previously there was a significant gap. In Wales, it was in favour of women. In Ireland, where there is one site, women and men worked the same number of hours. When combining all cohorts, the difference was slightly over 4 hours per week.

There are strong indications that the gap reflects societal challenges. As a reference, 87% of men but only 59% of women in paid work are full-time workers. Women also represent 54% of those in involuntary part-time employment, 52% in temporary employment, 54% in zero-hour contracts, and 60% in part-time self-employment.¹⁶

When analysing DFN Project SEARCH data from **host businesses** only, the gap was narrow and in favour of women in two of the five cohorts. In total, the difference was of 42 minutes per week, as seen below.

¹⁶ Please see: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EMPLOYMENT-2019.pdf> there is no data available that allow for a direct comparison, which would look specifically at hourly differences between working young women and men in the UK. The data shown is the best reference point found.

Chart 2. Weekly working hours in host businesses



The table below compares the weekly working hours of women and men working for host businesses and external employers. The average difference at host businesses was of only 42 minutes. In contrast, it was four hours and 18 minutes for jobs found externally. When only considering jobs at host businesses, the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 1. Weekly working hours at host businesses

Year	Gender	Host businesses	Other
2016/17	Women	24.6	21.5
	Men	25.0	25.2
	Total	24.9	24.1
2017/18	Women	26.2	20.2
	Men	27.4	25.1
	Total	27.1	23.6
2018/19	Women	25.0	20.1
	Men	29.3	24.8
	Total	28.2	23.3
2019/20	Women	24.8	20.3
	Men	27.0	25.5
	Total	26.5	23.9
2020/21	Women	30.2	24.0
	Men	25.8	26.9
	Total	27.1	26.1
Total	Women	26.2	21.2
	Men	26.9	25.5

While the NHS, where interns on average work more hours, is the main DFN Project SEARCH host business, that alone does not explain the difference. The findings suggest that companies that adopt the model are not only engaged in recruiting people with a learning disability and, or, autism, but also

ensure that it is equalitarian from a gender perspective. Other differences between host businesses and external employers are discussed in section 1.7.

It is important to mention that while in the UK only **32% of adults** with a learning disability were working for more than 16 hours per week, at DFN Project SEARCH **89% of interns** worked 16 hours or more per week, even though nearly all of them were under 24 years.¹⁷

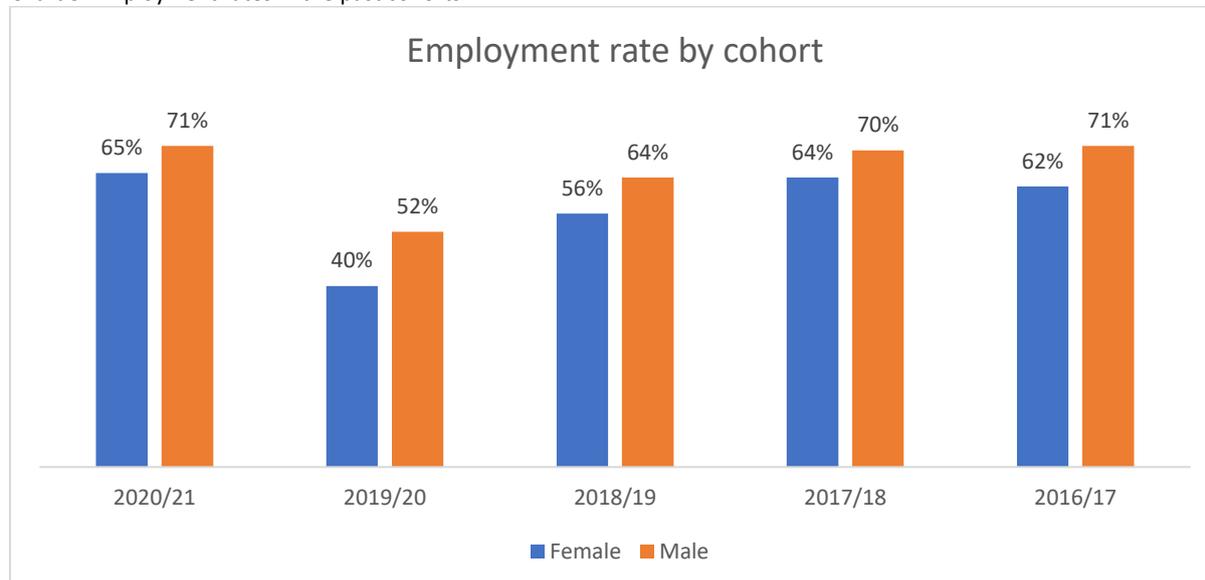
1.2 Employment rate

Men were more likely than women to find employment when grouping the data from the past five cohorts. Pre-COVID data (2016/17 to 2018/19) show that 60% of women and 68% of men secured employment, 65% in total. Such a difference is statistically significant.

The scenario is more complex when data is disaggregated by cohort. As shown below, men had higher employment rates in every cohort, but only in 2016/17 and 2019/20 they were statistically significant. When combining the past five cohorts (including two cohorts affected by covid), 56% and 64% of women and men were employed, respectively. The apparently large difference needs to be contextualised. If only six more women had got jobs in each of the previous cohorts there would be no employment gap, which means it is not difficult to achieve **employment parity**.

Please note that the chart includes data from the cohorts affected by COVID-19, which had inevitably lower employment rates.

Chart 3. Employment rates in the past cohorts



¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-with-learning-disabilities-in-england/chapter-2-employment>

The next table shows the statistical tests of employment rates in each of the previous five cohorts. When a statistical test is not significant any difference is probably due to a natural variation in the sample.

Table 2. Statistical test of the employment rates

Year	P-value	Result
2020-21	P-value 0.295	Not statistically significant
2019-20	P-value 0.027	Statistically significant at 5%
2018-19	P-value 0.13	Not statistically significant
2017-18	P-value 0.567	Not statistically significant
2016-17	P-value 0.004	Statistically significant at 1%

While not always statistically significant, the gap was found in every cohort and needs to be addressed, as outlined in the recommendation section.

An important point is that the DFN Project SEARCH employment gender gap is similar to the UK's, as shown in the table below. As a note, interns who did the programme in 2019/20 and looked for jobs between mid-2020 and early 2021 were heavily affected by COVID-19. In that cohort, 89 interns decided to repeat the next year and many rotations were cancelled. Such a unique year may explain the significant gap in employment. In the following year, however, the DFN Project SEARCH gap was the same as the UK's.

Table 3 – Employment rate gap comparison

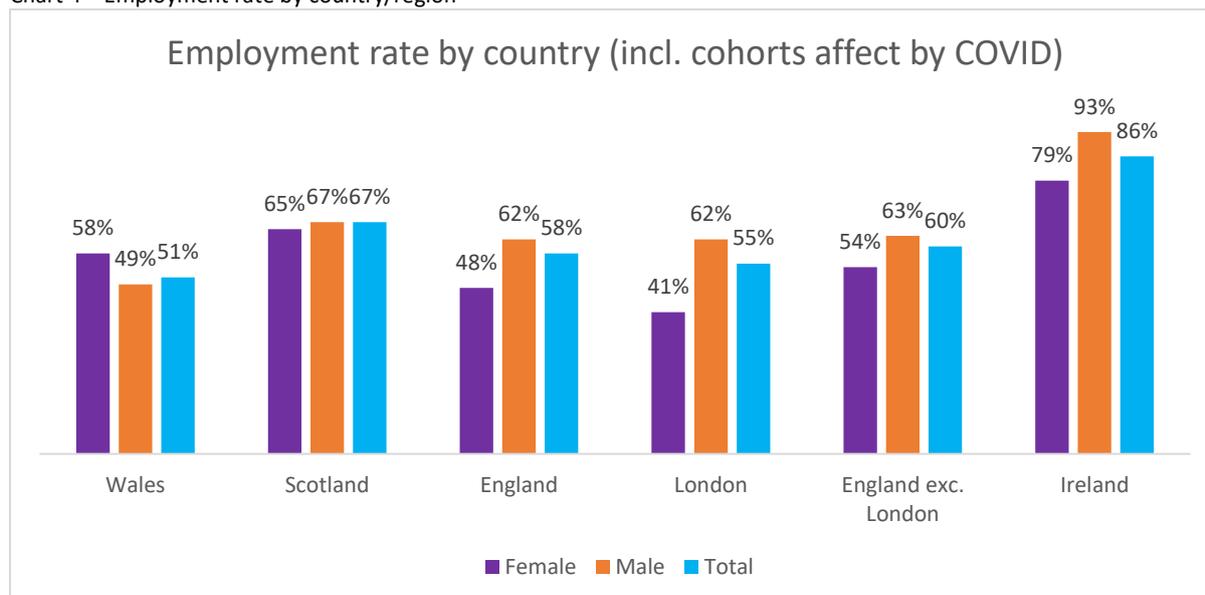
Year	UK gender employment rate gap ¹⁸	DFN gender employment rate gap
2016-17	13%	15%
2017-18	13%	9%
2018-19	12%	14%
2019-20	10%	30%
2020-21	9%	9%

Wales was the only region where women in the programme were more likely to find employment than men. Women in sites in Wales had in general higher outcomes than those in other regions/nations, which seems related to two factors: interns in Wales were more likely to be employed by host businesses (47% in contrast to 38% in the other regions) and the small sample size, which makes it more susceptible to variations. Additionally, the second site in Wales with the highest number of interns addressed potential gender issues in the classroom and engaged families, both of which seemed to contribute to gender parity.

It is worth highlighting the high employment rates in the site in Ireland. The seemingly large difference in employment of women and men represents only four interns.

¹⁸ ONS, Labour Market Bulletin, Table A02 SA, 15 February 2022.

Chart 4 – Employment rate by country/region



The full-time mean gender pay gap in the UK is widest in England and narrowest in Wales and wider in England than in Scotland in every year between 1998 and 2020. Within England, the widest gaps are to be found in London and the South East.¹⁹

DFN Project SEARCH employment gap in Scotland was 3%, whereas the national average is above 10%. When looking at pre-COVID data, women at DFN Project SEARCH were **more likely** than men to find employment in Scotland.

On average, the gender employment gap at DFN Project SEARCH sites in England was higher than the national figures, particularly so in London, even though some of the sites where women had the highest outcomes were in that city. London is unusual in other aspects studied here. For example, in 2018/19 men at DFN Project SEARCH earned considerably more than women but in the following cohort it was the reverse. At the moment there is no clear indication of why some of the outcomes in London change so dramatically from one year to the other, but London is known for having some of the largest social gaps in the UK (ethnicity pay gap, gender pay gap, income distribution), which might account for the results we find in the programme. We will continue to monitor sites in London to further our understanding and ability to mitigate any disparities.

The table below compares the employment gender gap of the UK and Ireland and DFN Project SEARCH. With the exception of London, the rates are similar to or smaller than the national figures. Please note that a negative gap means it is in favour of women.

Table 4 – Comparison of gender employment gaps in the UK and Ireland

Region	Region rate	DFN PS rate	DFN PS rate Pre-COVID
London	16%	51%	38%
Wales	9%	-16%	9%
Scotland	9%	3%	-6%
England excl. London	11%	17%	19%
Ireland	12%	11%	31%

¹⁹ <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employment-occupation-type-and-gender-borough>

1.3 Gender and complex disabilities

An important question is whether there is a relationship between the complexity of interns' disabilities and gender and if so if they correlate with outcomes.

DFN Project SEARCH collects interns' primary disability and, when present, secondary disability, which is classified as: learning disability, autism and other less common conditions. While the **complexity** of the disability is not recorded, DFN Project SEARCH enrolment is designed to select those that have neither too complex nor too mild needs. If the recruitment is done according to the procedures, interns should be in between those two points.

While it is not possible to compare the complexity of interns' disabilities, we have assessed co-occurrence. The proportion of women and men with a secondary disability was almost identical, **38% and 37% respectively**.

Regardless of their gender, interns with a **secondary disability** were less likely to secure a job.

We also found that **women** with a **learning disability** had lower employment rates, worked fewer hours per week and earned slightly less on average than men with a learning disability. This is an important finding that influences the overall outcomes of women as interns with autism had similar outcomes regardless of their gender.

During the research we collected data that might explain it:

- DFN Project SEARCH partners and staff and studies discussed below suggested that women who get diagnosed tend to have more complex disabilities
- About two thirds of students with an Education and Health Care plan (EHCP) in England or IEP (Individualised Education Programme) in Scotland are men. While in line with the learning disability prevalence, recent studies have questioned that²⁰, arguing that women are less often diagnosed
- A study²¹ shows that in the UK women with a disability (including learning disability) face more discrimination than men with a disability, being less likely to be employed, to work full time, and to have supervisory roles

While societal challenges may largely explain the lower outcomes of women with a learning disability at DFN Project SEARCH, we will conduct an in-depth study to further understand it and develop strategies to solve it.

²⁰ Please refer to <https://edpsy.org.uk/features/2021/disproportionality-in-sen-referrals-why-so-many-boys/>
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09540250802190180?journalCode=cgee20>
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11881-997-0024-8>

²¹

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338252730_A_study_on_intersectional_discrimination_in_employment_against_disabled_women_in_the_UK

1.4 Gender and jobs

Are interns being assigned jobs based on their gender? A conclusive answer is not possible from the quantitative data as disaggregation by sector and gender leads to a small sample size in most cases.

Interviews with educators, career development partners, and interns indicate that tendencies to choose certain jobs based on gender (which is found in society at large) exist but, in general, interns can get jobs in any sector or role. In some cases, it is necessary to challenge prejudice.

As seen below, in four of the 11 largest industries there was a disproportional **number of interns** from a specific gender: women more commonly worked in utilities (which includes housekeeping) and assisted living, and men in healthcare, and distribution centres.

Table 5 – Number of interns by industry and gender

Employment Industry	Women	Expected Women	Men	Expected Men	All	Pvalue
Assisted living /Nursing home	11	6.4	9.0	13.6	20	0.03
Business Support Services	8	7.7	16.0	16.3	24	0.89
Distribution Centre	9	19.5	52.0	41.5	61	0.00
Education/School	14	10.2	18.0	21.8	32	0.15
Food Service/Restaurant	41	39.4	82.0	83.6	123	0.75
Government	18	16.6	34.0	35.4	52	0.69
Healthcare	92	109.8	251.0	233.2	343	0.04
Hospitality/Resort	17	17.9	39.0	38.1	56	0.79
Manufacturing	7	11.8	30.0	25.2	37	0.09
Retail	31	34.9	78.0	74.1	109	0.43
Social Services	6	4.2	7.0	8.8	13	0.27
Sports/Recreation	6	7.4	17.0	15.6	23	0.54
Utilities	7	14.4	38.0	30.6	45	0.02

In most industries, men worked more **hours per week** on average, in four of them the differences were statistically significant (government, healthcare, manufacturing, and utilities).

Table 6 – Statistical test of hours by industry

Industry	Women Hours	Men Hours	P-value	Women Count	Men Count
Assisted living/Nursing home	20.7	19.8	0.782	11	9
Aviation		31.2	Not Tested		6
Banking/Finance	25.0	23.0	Not Tested	1	3
Business Support Services	32.3	30.9	0.703	8	16
Childcare/Preschool	17.1		Not Tested	7	
College/University	18.5	22.2	Not Tested	2	25
Distribution Centre	29.4	29.0	0.905	9	52
Education/School	19.6	24.4	0.170	14	18
Food Service/Restaurant	20.1	22.1	0.231	41	82
Government	23.9	29.1	0.047	18	34

Healthcare	23.3	27.2	0.001	92	251
Hospitality/Resort	21.0	24.5	0.271	17	39
Information Technology	36.3	36.4	Not Tested	2	5
Insurance		21.0	Not Tested		1
Manufacturing	17.5	30.9	0.000	7	30
Military Installation		37.0	Not Tested		1
Museum/Zoo		27.8	Not Tested		4
Pharmaceutical	26.0	37.2	Not Tested	3	3
Retail	21.6	23.1	0.445	31	78
Social Services	15.7	22.1	0.155	6	7
Sports/Recreation	21.7	21.8	0.977	6	17
Utilities	16.3	25.2	0.043	7	38
Veterinary/Animal Care	21.0	15.0	Not Tested	1	1

As seen below, men worked more hours in nearly all **job categories**. The differences were statistically significant in professional services, and office and administration, reflecting the fact noted earlier that women with a disability in the UK are less likely to have full-time jobs.

Table 7 – Working hours by job categories and gender

Job Category by Weekly Hours	Women Hours	Men Hours	Women Count	Men Count
Agriculture/Greenhouse		32.5		3
Animal Care		20.0		2
Banquet Set-up		25.0		1
Barista	23.5	28.0	6	3
Call Centre	34.0	40.0	2	1
Cashier/Retail Clerk	22.3	21.2	9	23
Childcare	17.1	16.0	11	1
Clinical Sterilization	29.1	28.7	4	6
Construction	24.0	34.8	1	5
Courier/Delivery		34.7		8
Courtesy Clerk (bagger/carts/greeter)	20.0	29.4	2	7
Data Entry	30.1	26.3	4	15
Dining Room Attendant/Busser	12.0	25.6	3	10
Dishwasher	22.9	19.6	5	20
Distribution Centre Operative	31.7	29.1	8	48
Durable Medical Equipment Sanitization		37.3		2
Professional services	17.0	20.9	42	101
Food Preparation	18.4	24.2	25	51
Food Service (server, host)	20.7	21.5	30	64
Grounds Crew/Landscaping		31.3		15
Laboratory Technician	27.3	30.7	3	7
Laundry	12.0	22.0	1	14
Mailroom	25.3	28.7	3	14
Maintenance	16.0	29.4	1	26

Manufacturing/Production/Assembly	17.3	34.0	3	20
Office Administration/Clerical	23.1	28.9	42	93
Patient Care	27.5	29.7	34	31
Patient Transport	29.2	27.4	7	35
Quality Assurance		24.8		5
Receptionist/Front Desk	26.8	30.7	9	19
Sales	17.2	21.4	12	19
Security	16.5	23.0	2	4
Stocking/Materials Management	24.3	27.0	9	40
Teaching/Coaching	26.5	20.4	2	7

1.5 Wages

Differences in wages between women and men in the programme were not statistically significant in most cohorts (and in 2019/20 women earned more on average per hour), which is particularly relevant as in the UK women account for 70% of low earners.²² As discussed in section 1.8, women working for host businesses earned more than men on average.

Overall, interns of all ages earned considerably more than the minimum wage, up to 80% more among those under 18.

Chart 5 – Wages by age



²² <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Employment-November-2018-w-cover.pdf>

1.6 Gender distribution by sites

It is understandable that most sites interviewed were unaware of differences in the outcomes of women and men as we had not provided them with such a breakdown. All sites will receive a breakdown of their outcomes based on the gender, ethnicity and primary disability of interns.

1.7 Classroom distribution

There was no correlation between the proportion of women in a classroom and their outcomes. The data are summarised below:

- There were 19 classrooms with more women than men between the 2016/17 and 2019/20 cohorts. Of those 8, had higher employment outcomes than average, 3 had the same and 8 had lower
- 14 classrooms had the same number of women as men. Of those, 7 had higher outcomes, 2 had the same and 5 had lower outcomes

1.8 Employment at host businesses and external companies

The table below shows that host businesses paid considerably more than external employers and also that in most cohorts (2017/18, 2018/19, and 2019/20) women earned more than men on average, but not to a statistically significant level.

Table 8 – Wages by gender and type of employee

Cohort	Gender	Host businesses	External
2016/17	Women	£8.35	£7.94
	Men	£8.35	£7.92
	Total	£8.35	£7.92
2017/18	Women	£8.33	£7.81
	Men	£8.02	£8.05
	Total	£8.11	£7.98
2018/19	Women	£9.18	£8.46
	Men	£9.09	£8.67
	Total	£9.12	£8.60
2019/20	Women	£9.20	£8.57
	Men	£8.66	£8.55
	Total	£8.79	£8.55
2020/21	Women	£8.88	£8.69
	Men	£9.17	£9.09
	Total	£9.14	£8.98
Total	Women	£8.70	£ 8.12
	Men	£8.60	£ 8.39

Host businesses were also more likely to provide jobs that met DFN Project SEARCH criteria (full-time, paid at or above prevailing wage, non-seasonal and in an integrated setting), 87% against 80%.

Statistical Analysis Summary

- A gap of four hours between the **weekly working hours** of women and men was found in four cohorts (2016/17 to 2019/20) but in the latest (20/21) it went down to less than one hour, with the average increasing for both women and men. This coincided with the beginning of this piece of research
- The **weekly working hours** gap in the first **four** cohorts was narrower in Wales but present in every region of the UK. In the latest cohort, 20/21, there was no gap in London, and in Wales, it was in favour of women but the sample size was very small. There was no gap in Ireland, where one programme is operational
- The difference in the **working hours** of women and men employed by host businesses was very small and in line with or smaller than national figures
- From 2016/17 to 2019/20 most jobs were in the **16 to 20 hours** range but men were more likely to work more hours. In 2020/21 the difference was narrower
- **Wage differences** were not statistically significant in most cohorts and were smaller than in the UK. There was no difference in Ireland
- Women **earned** more than men in most cohorts when looking only at **host businesses**
- **Women's employment rate** was smaller than men's in every cohort and statistically significant when combined and also in the 2016/17 and 2019/20 cohorts
- Wales was the only region in the UK where women had higher **employment rates**. In Scotland, it was similar to the national figure and lower in London. In Ireland, they were just under the national gender employment rate gap
- The proportion of women to men with a **secondary disability** was almost identical
- **Women** with a **learning disability** as their primary disability were less likely to find jobs and worked significantly fewer hours than men in the programme
- Women were statistically underrepresented in **four sectors** (distribution centres, healthcare, manufacturing, and utilities) and over-represented in assisted living/ nursing home
- Men worked more **hours** in nearly all sectors and job categories
- The **perception of sites** on the outcomes of women did not always match the data
- There were 19 classrooms with women than men in the 2016/17 to 2019/20 cohorts
- In 27 programmes (classrooms) women worked **more hours per week** than men
- Quantitative data did not show a correlation between the number of women in a classroom and their outcomes

2. Qualitative interviews

Five DFN Project SEARCH's programme specialists, 15 partners (tutors, job coaches, and site managers), and two women from DFN Project SEARCH Youth Advisory Group members were interviewed. The key findings are as follows:

- All sites interviewed would like to have more women in the programme but have not usually been able to. The key barrier is the fact that only about 30% of students with a Health Care and Education Plan or its equivalent in Wales or Scotland are women, which is a requirement to join the programme
- Sites believe that the disproportional female/male ratio in the classroom does not affect the experience of women, which agrees with the statistical analysis and responses from women (next section)
- Sites rarely looked at the gender breakdown of their data
- Family is a key factor. Some interviewees argued that women are treated differently by their families, especially regarding safety (for example, commuting to work alone or in the dark). This, however, does not necessarily negatively impact their outcome
- Societal tendency to assign jobs based on gender is also found in the programme but not to a large extent, which agrees with the statistical analysis

2.1. Sites would like to have more women in the programme

Data on learning disabilities and gender in the UK is surprisingly limited. A Public Health England report²³ estimates that in England in 2015 there were 1,087,100 people with a learning disability, including 930,400 adults but there was no gender breakdown. The same report states that "all forms of SEN associated with a learning disability are more common among boys, reflected in the DfE statistics which report 4.4% of boys and 2.9% of girls being identified as having a primary SEN associated with a learning disability"²⁴. There was no attempt to estimate the UK figures based on those proportions.

A report supported by the Department of Health estimated that 191,000 people had a learning disability in England in 2011, which "includes 286,000 children (180,000 boys, 106,000 girls) age 0-17; 905,000 adults aged 18+ (530,000 men and 375,000 women), of whom 189,000 (21%) are known to a learning disability services".²⁵

The proportions provided by those reports (60% men and 40% women and 63% men and 37% women, respectively) are in accordance with an estimation given by the Department for Education (DfE), which stated that 64% of pupils with SEN support were men and 36% women in **England** as of **January 2019**.

Based on those three reports, women represent between 36% and 40% of the population with learning disabilities and/or SEN support. However, only 28% of the pupils with an Education and Health Care (EHC) plan are women. In England, nearly all DFN Project SEARCH interns have an EHC plan, which means that the actual proportion of women who could join the programme is around 28%.

²³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613182/PWLDIE_2015_main_report_NB090517.pdf

²⁴ pp. 28, idem

²⁵ <https://www.glh.org.uk/pdfs/PWLDAR2011.pdf>

Unfortunately, it is not possible to say if the proportion holds for the whole of the UK as each nation has a distinct plan. Wales does not have an equivalent to the EHC plan as the 'statements' are very different and data on gender are limited. The Scottish Individualised Education Programme (IEP) supports nearly 35,000 pupils, 32% of whom are women. Since 61% of the interns in the cohorts studied here are in England and nearly 32% are in Scotland, we expect that currently, about 29% of pupils who can join DFN Project SEARCH are women.²⁶ They, therefore, are less likely to be diagnosed, and, when they are, to receive support.

A site that had six women and men in one cohort and three women and four men in the previous one said it happened by chance when deciding to accept anyone who applied. Another site mentioned that when they tried to recruit more women, they ended up with interns who were not ready for the internship. A third site has now more women than men because they partnered with a school for visually impaired students, which has an even ratio.

A promising initiative developed by a site consisted of raising awareness of the need to reach out to more female students, show candidates and their families that the programme is viable, increase marketing activities within schools and arrange for families to visit sites. This resulted in half of the students of the 2022/23 academic year being women.

2.2 Sites believe that the disproportional female/male ratio in the classroom does not affect the experience of women

Respondents largely believe that the difference in the female/ male ratio does not affect the experience of women, arguing that they are used to it in the educational context.

Usually, the proportion of women and men (tutors, job coaches...) interacting with interns is similar and sometimes there are more women. One site mentioned that male interns seemed more comfortable with male tutors and job coaches even if they were not aware of it.

Some respondents mentioned that women might feel discouraged or intimidated to apply for jobs predominately assigned to men. One tutor said that unconscious bias might affect women more.

Women largely said that the female/male ratio is not a problem, as discussed in detail in the next section.

2.3 Most sites never looked at a gender breakdown of their data

This is our fault as we had not provided them with such data. All sites will receive a breakdown of their outcomes by gender, ethnicity and primary disability.

2.4 Family is a key factor

- It is well-known that family support is important for a successful outcome. Regular meetings and updates with families improve their understanding of the programme and how to support interns. Respondents gave a few examples of when families did not realise interns could get a

²⁶ Just under 5% of DFN Project SEARCH interns are in Wales, where the closest equivalent to the EHC plan is the statement. No gender breakdown of the statement according to the type of need was found.

job until they were offered one. Some job offers were turned down because of concerns from families.

Some sites where women and men had similar outcomes did not think families were more protective of their daughters, but the majority thought otherwise. Families tended to be particularly averse to night shifts, long commutes or commutes in the dark, and safety in the workplace (especially in a predominantly male one). Some respondents also mentioned that families were less inclined to think their daughters could become independent.

2.5 Societal tendency to assign jobs based on gender is also found in the programme

Most sites indicated that societal job assignment based on gender is also found in the programme. In some cases, there is a tendency for interns to choose types of jobs that “conform” societal expectations, with men, for example, preferring more physically demanding jobs and women those that involve interpersonal or care skills. That said, some women in the programme have challenged such stereotypes in their choices of employment.

3. Female Intern Survey

The survey was sent to all interns who were women in the 2021/22 cohort. About 40% of them (57) responded to it. The findings corroborate the interviews, with hardly any women reporting a difference in the treatment they received from staff and colleagues.

- Respondents largely said that the support they had from tutors, job coaches, colleagues and the staff was high or very high
- A very small proportion of respondents preferred to interact with female tutors, job coaches, colleagues or staff at the rotation, but most of them did not interact with a man in those positions
- The majority of respondents (84%) said they had the same chances of getting a job as men in the programme. Only 6% thought it was more difficult for women to get a job.
- In relation to their experience in the programme, they said they were not treated differently because they were women

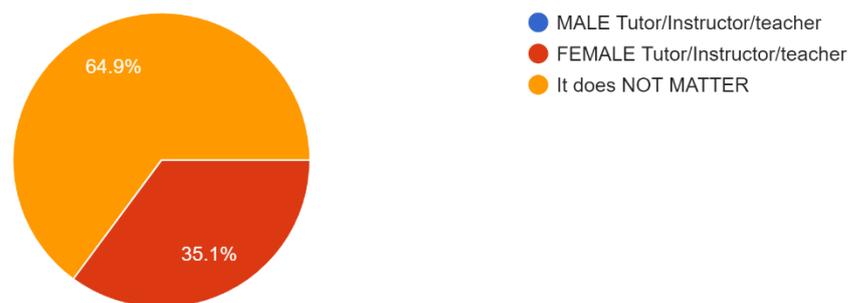
Women said that they felt supported by teachers regardless of their gender. No intern said the support received was low or very low.

Most respondents who preferred a female teacher did not have a male teacher. Respondents who had both said that the level of support they had from teachers regardless of their gender was the same (high or very high) in all but one case.

About two thirds (65%) of respondents said that the gender of their teacher did not matter, as seen below.

Chart 6 – Preferred gender of teachers

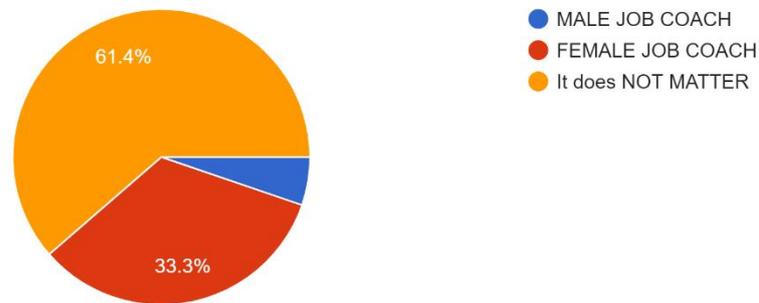
If you could choose, you would like to have a:
57 responses



Respondents who had female and male job coaches and had similar levels of support said that their gender did not matter. Once again, those who preferred a **female** job coach did not have a **male** job coach. Just under two-thirds of respondents said that the gender of the job coach did not matter.

Chart 7 – Preferred gender of job coaches

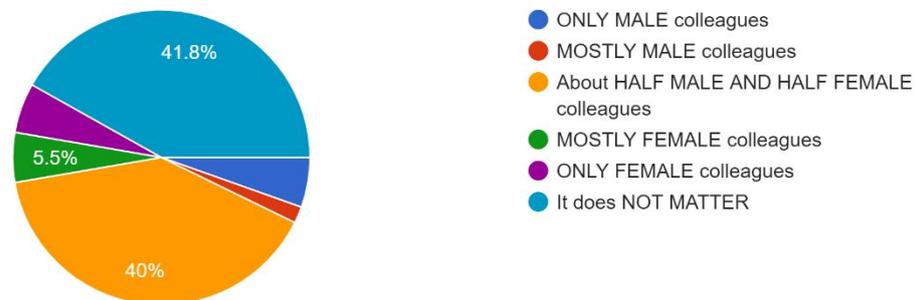
If you could choose, you would like to have a:
57 responses



Respondents who preferred a classroom with only or mostly women were in predominantly female classrooms. In total, 42% said the proportion in the classroom did not matter and 40% preferred half female and half male. Only 5% preferred a classroom with women only.

Chart 8 – preferred classroom distribution

If you could choose, you would like to have a classroom with:
55 responses



In line with the above, 50% said that the gender of the staff in their rotation did not matter, and 6% preferred to work with women only.

Chart 9 – Preferred gender of staff

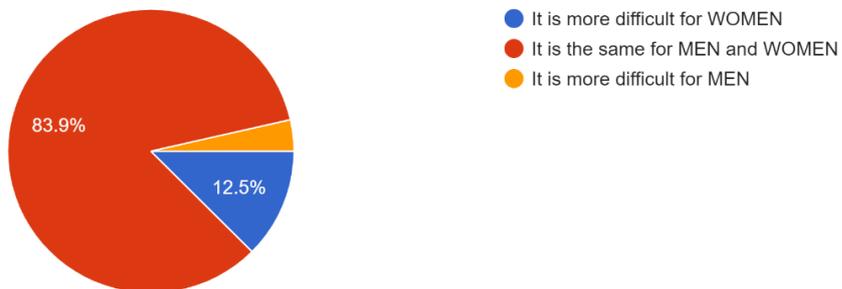
If you could choose, you would like to have a rotation with:
56 responses



Respondents largely said that it was as difficult for women as for men to get a job.

Chart 10 – Perspectives on getting a job

Do you think is it more difficult for WOMEN or MEN to get a job DFN Project SEARCH?
56 responses



Conclusion and Recommendations

This piece of research was motivated by the need to understand the gap in the employment ratio and weekly working hours of women and men in transition to work programmes, with a focus on DFN Project SEARCH. It also examined the wages of those two groups. Data from interns employed by **host businesses** show that women earned slightly more in three of the five latest cohorts and worked a similar number of hours per week on average. Such findings suggest that the adoption of the model is related to gender parity.

Statistical tests and qualitative data indicate that the existent gaps are related to societal challenges faced by women in the UK, with differences in DFN Project SEARCH programmes being smaller than in the UK.

Seven recommendations that can be used by other programmes are presented here.

- 1. Send sites a breakdown of the outcomes of their interns based on gender, ethnicity and primary disability**

While gaps may not be clear in a single site, in a single year, a data breakdown will increase awareness of partners and allow for closer monitoring of outcomes

- 2. Share successful practices to recruit more women**

This can be streamlined into the recruitment process and further discussed during events promoted by DFN Project SEARCH, such as the Inset Day

- 3. Continue to offer sites courses on how to identify and address unconscious bias**

DFN Project SEARCH has been offering such courses and an evaluation of their impact will be conducted

- 4. Continue to engage with families to raise their expectations / dispel worries**

Several strategies were shared by sites, including:

- Create a network or sessions with Youth Advisory Group members, graduates and their families to mitigate worries and concerns, and inspire families
- Set up regular family meetings and updates
- Reinforce that the goal of the programme is paid work
- Increase families' understanding of the value of paid work
- Explain how employment will affect welfare benefits (not only for women)
- Discuss safety and independence at (or on route to) the workplace – and strategies to increase them
- Challenge gender stereotypes

- 5. Engage with external employers to ensure their outcomes are similar to host businesses'**

Women and men working for **host businesses** had similar wages and weekly working hours, which suggests that inclusion is achieved by businesses that adopt the DFN Project SEARCH model. It is important to extend such outcomes to external employers, which could be done by:

- Suggesting external employers examine their gender gap (and also ethnicity and disability)
- Continuing national discussions on inclusion and equity
- Sharing the findings of this research

6. Continue to engage the Government and key stakeholders to review the Education and Health Care Plan assessment

While the actual proportion of women with a learning disability is debatable, with recent studies arguing that the ratio is even and that the difference is due to inadequate diagnoses and access to support, currently less than one-third of young people with an Education and Health Care Plan in England or its equivalent in Wales and Scotland are women. DFN Project SEARCH will continue to raise this point with government bodies, civil society and other organisations in the sector.

7. Further investigate complex findings

As seen, the outcomes of women at DFN Project SEARCH in London varied considerably, being sometimes below the figures for the city. The impact of COVID-19 may partially explain the differences but further research is needed.

It was also found that women with a learning disability had lower employment rates and worked fewer hours than men with a learning disability in the programme. This is partially linked to the fact that more women with a learning disability had a secondary disability and fewer found jobs in the host business, but a separate in-depth study will be conducted. There was no gap between women and men with autism. Overall, interns with a learning disability had the same or slightly higher outcomes than those with autism or other disability.