

New national day of action for supported interns

A new government-backed national day of action will be marked on Monday to boost the number of people with a learning disability or autism spectrum condition in employment.

Led by the charity [DFN Project SEARCH](#), the first-ever *National Supported Internship Day* showcases the contribution young adults with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) can make to the workforce.

In Edinburgh, the City of Edinburgh Council, NHS Lothian and Virgin Hotels will hold a series of events during this week, including a celebration of newly graduated interns.

Young people will take over the city's Project SEARCH social media channel on Monday to share what they are getting up to on their supported internships.

Employers in all sectors are also being called upon to redouble efforts to employ young adults with SEND and come

together to challenge the everyday misconceptions that all too often unfairly shape their life opportunities.

Councillor Mandy Watt, Depute Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, said: "Training and employment chances were pulled from under young people's feet because of Covid. So, one of our biggest priorities in the aftermath of the pandemic has been to improve opportunities and outcomes for our young people, including those with complex needs. I'm proud of the inspiring and talented group of graduates we've nurtured. Many have held internships with us while others have been supported by NHS Lothian and Virgin Hotels.

"This day of action, I want to call on other Edinburgh-based employers to follow suit. We require a variety of placements every year to ensure we're able to provide a full range of experiences to our young people and interested organisations should get in touch with Edinburgh Project Search. These are ten-week work placements beginning in September and the benefits are life-changing. They give special young people the same opportunities as their peers and space to shine. The placements can unlock confidence, build CV skills and be the difference between someone choosing to enter the workforce or feeling unable to. Plus, employers may well find their intern is exactly the type of person they've been looking for to expand their talent pool."



Luke Baillie completed a placement at Edinburgh Bus Station
Luke Baillie has been taking part in the programme and has a placement at Edinburgh's bus station. He said: "Project SEARCH gives us the chance to get real work experience, build our CV

and prepare for employment. It allows us to build our confidence and learn skills we otherwise wouldn't be able to access. It changes our lives."



Mackenzie Martin who completed a placement at Assembly Rooms Adam Gray, Regional Director of People, Scotland at Virgin Hotels Edinburgh, said: "At Virgin Hotels, our teammates are fundamental to our success. It is important to us that our teammates reflect the guests that we welcome to our hotels, inclusive of everyone.

"Being a host business with DFN Project Search Edinburgh is something we are incredibly passionate about and proud to be the first privately owned organisation to do so. National Supported Internship Day is a great way to shine a light on the incredible talents of the interns of the 2022/2023 Cohort, and showcase the positive impact that supported internships have on business, organisations and also the local community."

Most recent figures show that just 4.1% of young adults with a learning disability and/or autism in Scotland enter secure paid employment following education, compared to 80% of their peers.

Supported internships – work-based study programmes for 16 to 29-year-olds with SEND – dramatically change the employment outcomes for those who take part. DFN Project SEARCH figures show that 70% of people who complete their supported internships achieve this and successfully remain in employment.

Having meaningful paid employment is known to improve health and wellbeing and is central to individual identity and social status. If given the correct support and opportunities, young adults with SEND can thrive in a wide variety of jobs.

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, Claire Coutinho said: "Supported Internships provide brilliant support to young people with EHC plans, equipping them with the skills they need to have fulfilling and successful careers. This is why we are boosting investment for the internships by doubling their numbers, and through the extra £3m the Chancellor

announced last week we'll explore ways to extend this programme to young people with SEND and without an EHC plan.

“Ensuring successful transitions into adulthood is a central part of our SEND and AP Improvement Plan, through which we will make sure all children and young people have the support they needed, no matter where they live or what school they go to.”

David Forbes Nixon, Founder and Executive Chair of DFN Project SEARCH, said: “We created National Supported Internships Day to give every young adult with a learning disability the same opportunities as anyone else to transition from education to employment.

“There is often a fear factor among employers of getting it wrong in hiring young adults with a learning disability, but it doesn't need to be like that. It makes good business sense to explore the wealth of untapped potential among this group of enthusiastic and capable young people. They are keen, ambitious, and have an array of talent to offer employers.

More about SEARCH

- DFN Project SEARCH is a business-led, one-year transition to employment programme for young people with a learning disability and autism or both.
- The outcome of a DFN Project SEARCH programme is competitive employment that is in an integrated setting, year-round work (not seasonal employment) and more than 16 hours per week.
- The programme has supported more than 1,900 young people into paid work, working with over 100 host employers.[\[1\]](#) Our aim is to support 10,000 interns into work by 2030.
- The charity works in partnership with Local Authorities, education providers, families and host employers ranging from NHS Trusts to some of the UK's biggest

businesses such as DPD, GSK and Marriott Hotels. DFN Project SEARCH is part of a consortium called [Internship Works Programme](#) alongside the British Association for Supported Employment and National Development Team for Inclusion, who have been commissioned by the Department for Education, to double the number of supported internships from around 2,250 to 4,500 by March 2025.

- For more information about how to get involved in National Supported Internship Day visit: <https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/national-supported-internship-day/>