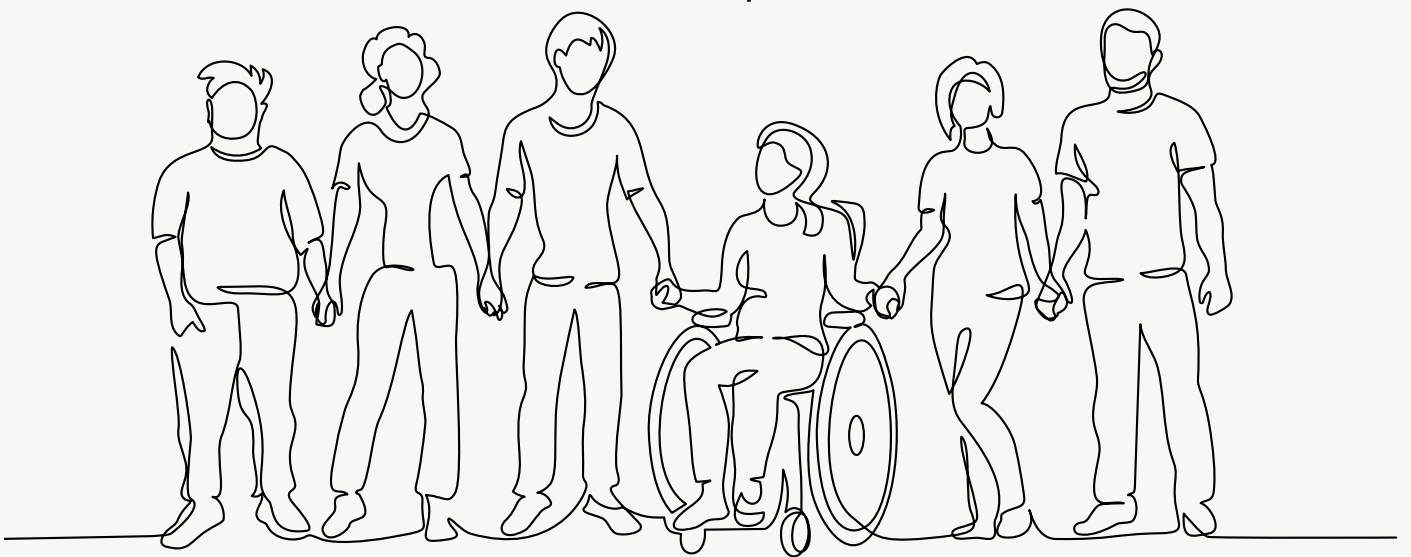


# A journey to employment for young people with additional needs

What can we all learn  
from St Martins School,  
Derby?

September 2020



## Foreword



**We all have different ways of living in and experiencing the world. When we bring people together with a range of experiences, it often reveals better ways of doing things that benefit us all. The young people and organisations featured in this important report from the Edge Foundation shows this to be the case.**

As a reader of this report, it is likely you have a professional and/or personal interest in special educational needs and disability (SEND). This would indicate that you've had an education that has shaped you to be interested in your wider community and are hopefully enjoying a full and rewarding life. This is what education is for – to enrich people's lives so they can pursue and achieve what they want from the world. We hope this for all our young people. Sadly, historically for our young people with SEND this hasn't been the case and the statistics in this report bear this out. However, more optimistically the report also outlines how we can make this happen. By listening to our young people and bringing schools, Further Education providers, employers and community partners together, we can increase the chances our learners with SEND will achieve their aspirations. This isn't just the right thing to do, it makes perfect business sense too.

At the [Education and Training Foundation](#), we are working with the Further Education sector to promote this ethos. We hope one day to see a workforce which is representative of our diverse society so learners know that if they can see it, they can be it!

**Teresa Carroll**, National Head for Inclusion, Education and Training Foundation



## Foreword



**In our current climate, society has been exposed to many areas of injustice. We have seen that over recent years the appalling gender pay gap be exposed and how black people are still appallingly treated in too many parts of our society. On top of this, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has hit marginalised communities with devastating effect. With the world starting to return to what will be a new “norm” now is the time to make changes and in particular, bring to light and remove barriers for disabled people to gain meaningful employment. This report exposes barriers that society creates and highlights the importance of being an inclusive employer.**

As we transition into the new “norm” now must be the time for employers to understand the benefit that diversity brings to an organisation. Inclusive recruitment and actively wanting to attract disabled people into the workplace is not just the right thing to do, it has a huge business case. Organisations must be shouting from the rooftops about their desire to attract diverse talent. We only need to look at some of the most influential people over the last 20 years to see that diversity of thought has been at the centre of innovation and world-changing ways of working; Steve Jobs and Bill Gates to name just two. Both individuals have publicly shared that they have neurodiversity. I would argue that their success is because of neurodiversity and not despite it.

Not only do employers need to realise the benefits of employing disabled people, but they also need to become aware of the good practices that are happening in inclusive recruitment and use services that are out there to ensure disabled people are supported and are enabled to reach their potential. An obvious example would be learning about [Access to Work \(AtW\)](#) and signposting disabled candidates to this incredible resource. AtW can fund assistive technology, training and workplace strategy coaching. I needed to look at this report and gain a crucial understanding of the barriers to employment, the benefits of employing disabled people and learn from the best practices that are currently in small pockets of society.

**Adam Hyland**, Co-founder & Campaigns and Equalities Director, Diversity & Ability



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## Introduction

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Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) face many barriers to their education, from resources or spaces being inaccessible to a lack of teaching differentiation to support their learning. Beyond school, these difficulties continue with many struggling to move into training, employment, as well as facing difficulties sustaining meaningful work.

In 2019 approximately half of disabled people were in employment (52%) compared with just over four out of five non-disabled people (82%) (ONS, 2019). Additionally, people with disabilities who are in employment are more likely to be in part-time positions and in elementary roles compared to their peers without a disability. This suggests that many are in jobs that are providing a lower level of security, particularly in terms of income. In more deprived areas across the UK, such as areas in the North of England and the Midlands, this figure is worse due to lower job opportunities, poor public transport and higher rates of unemployment (BASE, 2019).





The impact of Covid-19 has had severe repercussions on a whole generation of young people, in terms of disruption to their education and lack or loss of jobs and training opportunities. The effects of lockdown have already widened the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils, with those who need the most support less likely to be able to access their education and work placement opportunities. The job market is now in an even more precarious position for young people, but when considering those with additional needs, the struggle to make the first steps into employment is going to be even more challenging.

Prior to the pandemic, the Youth Census Survey (Youth Employment UK, 2020) highlighted that young people with additional needs faced additional barriers in receiving information, advice and guidance in terms of career support. For instance, 19% of those with additional needs had never had apprenticeships discussed with them, compared to 11% of those without additional needs. Of those students who were currently in or had attended college or sixth form, 73% of those with additional needs stated that they 'did not receive' visits to career shows, compared to 60% of those without additional needs. This lack of awareness and information about different options unsurprisingly leads to a lack of confidence amongst young people, with 23% of those with additional needs being 'not very confident' or 'not very confident at all' in being able to move into meaningful employment.

Being in employment is clearly beneficial for society and the individual. Employment provides financial security as well as offers health and social advantages. However, there are also considerable benefits for workplaces to employ people with disabilities, and these are often not recognised. Benefits include increased diversity of the workforce which brings in, for example, more creativity and attention to detail, as well as a diverse set of unique yet equally valid skills and perspectives. It also leads to the workforce as a whole becoming more inclusive and less ignorant and fearful of differences. St Martins School and Sixth Form, along with their partnership with DFN Project SEARCH at Debry Hospital, aim to breakdown some of these barriers and help young people with disabilities transition into the world of work, to ensure their backgrounds do not further disadvantage their life chances.

The following three case studies explores St Martins School, their Sixth Form offering at Horizons, and their internship scheme with DFN Project SEARCH. The report looks at how these three cases could provide models of good practice to support more young people with SEND with their journey into employment. The Edge Foundation visited the school, sixth form and hospital in March 2020 to gain insight into their practice and to speak to the teachers, young people and hospital staff.

*There are considerable benefits for workplaces to employ people with disabilities, and these are often not recognised.*



## St Martins school

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St Martins School in Derby, in the East Midlands, is a school for SEND pupils aged 11-19 years of age. The school is part of the Shaw Education Trust and currently provides almost 200 places across Derby city, Derbyshire and Nottingham local authorities. The school caters for a whole range of needs, notably though there has been an increase in the number of students with ASD and Complex Needs diagnoses being referred to the school. There are 64% FSM (free school meals) students on roll, which is significantly above the national average and reflects the socio-economic and deprivation index for the school and locality. The school is hugely driven by the frightening statistic that only 3.8% of young people in the city of Derby with a SEN will go on to get a job (Local Insight, 2019). Despite having a number of large employers in the city, such as Rolls-Royce and Toyota, these young people in Derby face poor prospects in terms of employment and social mobility.

*The school is hugely driven by the frightening statistic that only 3.8% of young people in the city of Derby with a SEN will go on to get a job*

As the Head Teacher, Debbie Gerring, explains ‘most of our students, if they have the right support network around them, could go into work. Many of our students are able, but the statistics show that they will have a bleak future if we don’t do something about it.’ Given these prospects, the senior leadership and teaching staff at the school ensure that through unique aspects of their education, such as a specifically designed curriculum and a thorough careers programme, they prepare their students for a pathway into employment.

### The SHAPE curriculum

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St Martins School has developed the unique SHAPE curriculum, the focus of which is ‘on creating confident individuals, successful learners, and responsible citizens’<sup>1</sup>. The curriculum is designed around five key elements which are at the core of all learning and experiences that happen within the school and during interactions with the wider community. These elements are:

- SAFETY
- HEALTH & HAPPINESS
- ASPIRATION & ACHIEVEMENT
- POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION
- ENTERPRISE

Alongside the SHAPE curriculum are a set of skills and attitudes that have been cited in employer surveys as being valuable. These skills and attitudes underpin all teaching and learning at the school. These include skills such as self-management, effective participator and team worker, along with attitudes such as resilience and independence. Employers have highlighted that these are the skills they want from all their employees but are not adequately being displayed by young recruits.

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1. St Martins school: <https://www.stmartinsschoolderby.co.uk/gallery/shape-information/>

*We think that [the SHAPE curriculum] prepares our students to move into the world of work. Straight away our students face a hurdle because of the minimum qualification requirements employers stipulate for their job candidates. Our students will generally finish school with entry level 2 or 3 qualifications, for most jobs this is not good enough. In fact, the capability they demonstrate in their skills would allow them access to many jobs, if they were able to bypass the qualification ‘gatekeeping’.* (Head teacher)

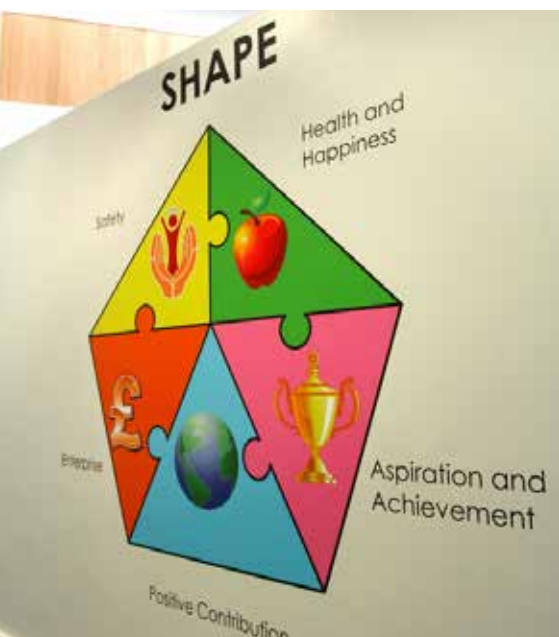
In each lesson the teacher informs pupils which particular skills and attitudes will be targeted and developed, ensuring they are truly lived out and continually practiced. There is a reward system to support pupils in achieving these important skills, this includes attendance tokens to reward pupils for turning up to lessons each day – an important aspect when in a job! This explicit linking of the skills and attitudes to lessons and awards, supports pupils’ ability to both recognise and self-reflect on their achievement and development. This will help the young people to articulate their experiences of demonstrating skills successfully when in a job interview with a potential employer. A Year 11 pupil reflected on his career ambition and how he needs to develop his skills to help achieve this:

*I’d like to be a technician perhaps for the NHS. I think I need decision-making skills for it, because sometimes I may get a bit confused, it’s something I need to improve on. And my communication skills as well, because sometimes I get a bit confused about what other people are saying or what I’m saying about.* (Year 11 pupil)

Due to the increased barriers SEND pupils unfortunately face, the head teacher highlighted that above all, they must be supported to develop resilience:

*The number one employability skill it is important for our students to develop is resilience, it is really really important, and something that our students find really difficult. So we talk to them a lot about that and try to make the curriculum very open ended – open ended tasks that don’t necessarily have a right or a wrong answer.* (Head Teacher)

*An explicit linking of the skills and attitudes to lessons and awards, supports pupils’ ability to both recognise and self-reflect on their achievement and development.*





## St Martins School, Derby

Developing resilience cuts right across the whole school. This is a skill that will support them in their everyday life as well as during their transitions from education to work. Pupils at St Martins School were very much aware of this and were able to articulate some of the ways the school supports them in developing this important skill:

*Resilience is like when you are struggling for something, sometimes in your mind you feel like you want to give up. It's like for me when I do sports, I do coaching at school and I was struggling since the beginning of the year, but then as I learnt to develop to keep trying I got better and better at coaching. (Y11 pupil)*

### Careers education

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Careers education is a central component at St Martins School and aims to link learning to what pupils' futures may look like. To do this, the school works closely with employers and community partners to help combat the hurdles that their pupils are likely to face in the job market. In order to give thorough independent careers advice and guidance, the school forges links with a wide range of external partners to ensure pupils have a broad set of information and experiences to guide their choices. To support and prepare them for their next steps post-16, the teachers additionally organise trips to different providers such as Derby College and Horizons (their partner sixth-form centre), to help pupils understand what happens in these new environments. Career education activities at St Martins school may be similar to what employers offer to mainstream young people. However, these activities are carefully planned, designed and fine-tuned to suit SEND pupils interests, aspirations and needs.

As they progress through the school years, St Martins young people become better and better at making those outside world connections due to their increased exposure to employers. For pupils at the school, it is even more important than for a mainstream school to develop and maintain close links to employers. This link can be a helpful introduction initially and may lead to long term partnerships supporting SEND pupils' future opportunities.

### Employer encounters

The school has worked hard to ensure a high number and range of different employers visit the school, enabling pupils to have face-to-face interactions. This includes giving pupils work experience to ensure they get exposure to the world of work in a real way. It also consists of working with employers and external partners on real world cross-curriculum projects which pupils may work on during their lessons. For example, pupils used their science knowledge and design & technology skills to carry out a 'Mission to Mars' challenge, in collaboration with Rolls-Royce. This included using programmable LEGO robot kits to attempt to create a range of products to help collect ice from the Mars polar regions, which will be later harvested into drinkable, fresh water. Rolls-Royce worked flexibly with the school to alter some of their programmes in order for them to be accessible to pupils with SEN.

*When these employers get in touch to introduce their programme, which are made for the mainstream schools, I will go back to them and ask if they will work with us to adapt their offer? It doesn't have to change massively but they'll need to be adjustments made,*

*As they progress through the school years, St Martins' young people become better and better at making those outside world connections due to their increased exposure to employers.*

*not to fundamentally change what they do but just so that our students can access it. The employers we work with are usually brilliant. They are flexible and happy to work with us. It soon becomes a win win situation.* (Head Teacher)

A Year 11 student and budding photographer explained the voluntary placement she participated in with another local employer.

*Last year I got put in a placement at the Quad [a local creative arts and events centre] in a photography group, I've been with them and they've taught me quite a lot and I've had my work published at the Format Festival, which is an international photography festival. At the Quad I also developed communication skills because I was talking to strangers who I didn't know. I got more independent because we went off quite a lot by ourselves and learnt camera skills, like learning how to use the equipment.* (Year 11 pupil)

### Careers and enterprise days

Another element of the careers education is the annual careers days and enterprise days. All employers develop their activities keeping the needs of St Martins School's pupils in mind.

The careers day is a large two-day event held in school every year. The timetable is collapsed for all key stage 3 and 4 pupils for both of these days, and instead of the usual lessons, pupils have a chance to interact with whole host of employers who attend the event. Pupils take part in a stimulating range of activities set by employers. The days include motivational talks, introductions to a particular business, what exactly being in work means, mock interviews, CV writing, and specific business tasks for pupils to complete, such as the Jury's Inn Hotel challenging students to put covers on duvets. Other activities from the career days have involved additional preparation from pupils; for example, a local hotel invited a group of pupils to their restaurant for an afternoon tea. The pupils got involved in the kitchen to see how an afternoon tea is made and served. Afterwards, pupils develop their own afternoon tea for all those hotel staff who later visited the school on the careers day.

*Careers days include motivational talks, introductions to a particular business and what exactly being in work means ...*



## St Martins School, Derby

The enterprise days have also been a resounding success, and have been likened to St Martins version of 'Dragons Den'. Local businesses visit the school for the day as judges and the challenge is set and explained in the morning assembly. The students will then go off in their allocated groups to work on the task as a team. In the afternoon the 'dragons' will make their way around the classrooms to judge the different teams as they present their outcomes. This is another excellent technique to get the pupils encountering different people and organisations, particularly building their communication, problem-solving and team-working skills.

### A rounded education

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St Martins School has been building up their excellent curriculum and employer engagement activities over the last few years to support their pupils. The school ensures that every level of the pupils' education includes real-life encounters with the world of work and the wider community, in order to develop awareness of different careers, and build employability and life skills. These activities are important for all young people to ensure they gain a full understanding of different jobs and opportunities available to them, and what steps they need to take to support their aspirations.

The school note that employers who they engage with are supportive of the school and have shown an enthusiasm to get involved in some experiences to specifically support SEND pupils. However, a reflection from the school is that many employers lack knowledge and experience of SEND employees, let alone school pupils. Employers therefore face the unknown and don't know what adjustments (physical and other) are required to accommodate SEND students nor employees (Open University, 2019). At St Martins, employers are more than happy to attend the school and to provide some activities for the students but are more reluctant to offer a meaningful employment opportunity such as an internship. This illustrates there are still significant barriers that exist for SEND young people:

*We have to ensure that we are realistic for our pupils here. We aspire massively for our pupils but you have to also have a realism; the support that surrounds them to get them into the world of work through DFN Project SEARCH is a very important element.* (Head Teacher)

*A reflection from the school is that many employers lack knowledge and experience of SEND employees, let alone school pupils.*







## Horizons Sixth Form

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Horizons Sixth Form is a vocational post-16 provision for young people with SEND, similar to a sixth form college, for those who have attended St Martins School and for other young people across Derby and the surrounding areas. Horizons is based in the local market in Derby town centre. Upstairs in the market, the students have a converted classroom space alongside a fully working printing business and small exhibition space. Here students access work placements, further education (FE) preparation courses and learn key employment skills.

Around 30 students attend Horizons, doing three days a week on-site and two days in the community - working on projects with local employers, such as those from catering and health and beauty sectors, and artists. All students here study English and maths which they take part in every morning. The afternoons are spent focussing on developing different life and employability skills. As one Horizons' student explains:

*After lunch we do skills lessons like leadership sessions – we speak about different types of leaders from different parts of the world and see which ones we like. We then have lots of social and leadership activities, for example we have walky talkies and we go out into groups in the town centre and give instructions to each other about where to go. (Horizons student)*

The learning environment is not intimidating, differing from a large school or college environment, it provides a small safe space to work alongside peers and adults. At the same time Horizons supports the young people to access programmes and then transition to further education or employment by allowing a greater degree of independence and equipping them with essential skills. For example, the bus station is across the road from the site so many students have learnt to travel independently. They are also allowed to go out at lunch on their own or with friends:

*The learning environment is not intimidating, like a large college might be, but provides a small safe space to work alongside peers and adults.*

## St Martins School, Derby

*I use my maths skills when I've been going out to get my own lunch and have to pay. I'm becoming more independent going out.* (Horizons student)

Students have also been able to recognise how their skills have been developing: *'I use social skills like now [in a focus group], out in public, on public transport, in local places and places we are not familiar with, it's good to build up social skills.'*

Students also learn and execute a number of other important skills during their days at Horizons. From working in teams on shared projects, such as designing and making an information leaflet together, to communication and enterprise skills:

*Talking in front of the class helps me to build confidence and helps me communicate better.* (Horizons student)

*In school we did Prince's Trust and in college we are continuing that, which is basically enterprise and money-making so we learn to like manage a business.* (Horizons student)

## Running a business at Horizons

Another way students' enterprise skills are developed 'on-site' is through the centre's very own fully-operational printing business. The business operates from the town centre market, making and selling customised leaflets, key rings, logos and other items. Students take turns in different roles, which helps them to understand the mechanics and responsibilities of a business. They in turn develop key skills such as money management, creativity, customer service and problem-solving. The students enjoy the chance to fulfil these different roles:

*Some of us have the opportunity to work on the front desk of the business – people call up and ask questions and we have to deal with that. We learn problem-solving skills trying to work out how to deal with their inquiry.* (Horizons student)

*Students' enterprise skills are developed 'on-site' through the centre's very own fully-operational printing business.*







## Community connection

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Post-16 years old, the idea is that the young people have an even greater exposure to different individuals, organisations and the outside world, building upon the encounters many had at St Martins school. Horizons help students transition from the nurturing space of school and exposes them in different ways to different encounters and different employers, otherwise, the jump to independent living can be too big. This is done through regular real-world projects, enterprise activities and work placements.

Students have taken part in a number of different projects set by local employers and community groups that are of current importance to that organisation. For example, a group of students worked with a local building company to develop some allotments in the city. Students learnt many aspects of the planning and design process, and were involved in the handiwork to fulfil these designs. They also felt a sense of pride in their accomplishment since the allotments were a public display in their community for families and friends to view and share their achievements. These real-life projects mean that students get experiences of working with employers and are also helping to deliver meaningful assignments. Sometime these encounters can take them out of their comfort zone, however, this is crucial for their learning and development in order to put them into situations that will develop their confidence, independence and skills that are vital for the future.

The placements further offer students opportunities to see what positions in the community may be available to them and how their learning in the classroom can support them in such job roles. One student, who is a train enthusiast, described his recent work placement opportunity, which was an excellent match for him:

*In my placement my roles at the station was to make sure the engines went out on time and making sure they have permission going into the yard. I'd like to be shed master, one of the most important jobs. I will need good communication skills and time management skills for that job. I would definitely like to work on the railways in the future.* (Horizons student)

The unique range of creative and exciting experiences students at Horizons encounter throughout their two years at the sixth form, means that they are being exposed to the possibilities of what they may wish to do in the future. This is accompanied with explicit teaching of key skills and attitudes, as well as opportunities to put these into practice in an on-site business. This aims to ensure that when students leave Horizons they are more fully prepared to be independent and active citizens.

*Horizons help students transition from the nurturing space of school and exposes them in different ways to different encounters and different employers.*





## DFN Project SEARCH at Royal Derby Hospital

People with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged in terms of gaining and sustaining employment, and face a number of barriers, ranging from negative attitudes and perceptions to employers lacking the necessary physical aids to support people with disabilities in the workplace. DFN Project SEARCH is an international programme of supported internships for young people with learning disabilities which helps them realise their potential and ultimately assists them in gaining full paid employment. We saw how DFN Project SEARCH has been put into practice at Royal Derby Hospital, where the one-year programme allows young people to experience three 10-week placements across a variety of roles, supported by on-site tutors and a specific self-development programme.

### Learning on the job

In September 2019, a group of nine young people were recruited to the hospital's first intake of DFN Project SEARCH, to spend a year internship within the hospital. The interns are mostly around 18 years old and many have recently completed their education at school or Horizons. During their placement year, the interns have the opportunity to work in a number of different roles and departments across the hospital, including the canteen, car parking, administration, portering, patient catering and pathology. Each intern participates in three 10-week placements working with a different team each time and supported by a team mentor. Across the hospital we met several interns who were thriving in their various roles. Amongst all the young people, there was a sense of pride, confidence and satisfaction that their internships had fulfilled them with. Below are a few descriptions of the interns' experiences.



*Each intern participates in three 10-week placements working with a different team each time and supported by a team mentor.*

1

*One enthusiastic intern had spent the last few weeks working in the staff canteen. His tasks involved clearing and cleaning the tables and generally ensuring the space is in a presentable and useable state for the hospital staff. Also in the canteen an intern with a speech impairment was helping behind the counter serving the staff lunches and helping to prepare the food. His interpreter explained that since starting in his role, the young intern's confidence had grown immensely. He was much more comfortable interacting with the customers and was finding new ways to communicate visually, in order to become more independent from his interpreter. He was now confident to fulfil his role even when the interpreter was not there.*

*It is important that the young people are able to label the skills and knowledge they are developing and pinpoint their success and areas for improvement.*

2

*In the pathology department another of the interns was checking and labelling patient samples, recording these on the computer, and preparing them to be sent to be tested. His job involved a high degree of attention to detail and a long concentration span, which his team members praised him for. He has learnt the job processes quickly and became a valuable member of the team. The intern expressed how he had enjoyed the opportunity to concentrate on the task at hand and organising his work, and clearly felt proud of his role.*

3

*Yet another intern was in his first day in his new role in the patient catering department. He had already quickly got to grips with his responsibilities and was appreciating seeing a new area of the hospital and working with new colleagues. He explained 'since starting here I have learnt new skills such as following instructions, listening skills and social skills. I've been working in the hospital since September and when I started I was worried that I'd get lost in the building and also worried about having to talk to people I don't know. But now I know my way around and I'm confident to go and talk to people I don't know.'*

## Structured support

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Alongside the 'day job', where the interns spend 10am – 3pm every working day, they also take part in complementary on-site classroom sessions. For an hour every morning, before their hospital shift, the interns spend time as a group learning and refining skills, learning about issues such as workplace conduct, health and safety, and generally supporting their hospital roles and how to be successful in the wider working world. For example, this may involve a session on practicing how to give a good interview with a potential employer or good practice for communicating with colleagues.

Likewise, at the end of the working day, the interns return to the classroom to spend an hour after their shift reflecting on how their day has gone. They are supported to join up what they have achieved in their roles and their wider skills development. It is important that the young people are able to label the skills and knowledge they are developing and pinpoint their success and areas for improvement. As one of the mentor's explains: *'I think it's a very successful way of building on many daily skills like communication, teamwork and gaining confidence.'*

## St Martins School, Derby

As well as their individual daily reflection, there is a formal assessment process. During each rotation the interns are individually assessed on their development. Twice for each rotation, the on-site tutor meets formally with the manager and parents. On a regular basis the DFN Project SEARCH coordinator also spends time talking to the interns' managers and generally ensures that any issues that are raised are responded to quickly. This also helps to shape some of the learning that needs to be prioritised back in the classrooms. Within each role an assessment sheet is completed alongside the team's manager to assess individual job performance, keep a record of progress, and highlight areas where interns may be struggling. This can direct where extra support may need to be prioritised for the individual or what topics may form part or all of a group session. The Job Coach states: 'I have high expectations of them and they know this, which is why they are continually encouraged to push boundaries, try new things and develop themselves.'

### Valuable members of the team

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Feedback from the NHS staff so far has been fantastic. The teams working alongside the DFN Project SEARCH interns have been very positive about the experience and have found the interns to be excellent assets in supporting the hospital's work. One Head of Service declared: 'We loved having the DFN Project SEARCH team on board with us. Not only was the project an eye opener for the team, I think it was a real education for the guys we had on the team. Both [interns] were a credit to the project.'

*The teams working alongside the DFN Project SEARCH interns have been very positive about the experience and have found the interns to be excellent assets in supporting the hospital's work.*





Along with raising awareness amongst existing staff around disabilities and highlighting ways they need to make their workplace systems and structures more accessible, DFN Project SEARCH has also been seen to provide further benefits for existing members of staff at the hospital. For example, by providing an excellent model for existing staff training and development practises:

*It has helped me personally to consider aspects of my own tutorial style. Seeing the adaptations made to help the interns gain understanding, [I] have filtered across to my everyday training systems. As a business we have looked at how we can integrate staff and support them into the working life whether or not they have special educational needs or not.* (Learning & Development Manager at ISS Royal Derby Hospital)

Having a mentor, as well as on-site tutors, is crucial. Initially some interns may require an extra level of support when starting their new roles and sometimes may need a slightly longer settling-in period. Nevertheless, once they are settled in, they are usually performing at the same level as any other permanent member of staff:

*Seeing an intern progress from needing virtually 100% job coach support to hardly any in the space of a few months is awe inspiring. I think the real benefit of this project is that it promotes independence and opens doors.* (Job Coach)

Their roles as interns support the young people's development of some specific technical skills but also essential skills that will be important for any job they may have in the future. For example, the independence and self-management skills they need on a daily basis, from turning up on time and getting themselves to work navigating public transport, to time-keeping. In addition, crucial communication skills are being developed, such as speaking and listening with team members, managers and other staff and visitors around the hospital.

*[the interns] learn about becoming independent in various ways, they learn how to contribute to team working, how to be safe in the workplace together with their rights and responsibilities of being an employee, how to become financially independent. They gain realisation of the skills they already possess and have the chance to build on those skills and learn that they are transferable in many different roles in the community.*

(DFN Project SEARCH Tutor)

*The biggest gain from being involved in this Project is seeing the interns in July with the initial wayfinding visits to the hospital, then walking in nervously in September, watching them grow in stature to confident young adults, ready for the work environment.* (Learning & Development Manager)

It cannot be understated that the real work experience opportunities that DFN Project SEARCH has given these young people are incredibly valuable for them - their self-confidence and their personal and professional development. At the same time, the interns are making a valuable contribution to the hospital. This has been the first year of the project at Royal Derby Hospital so we are yet to see what the next steps will be for this current cohort of interns. However, it is hoped that at the end of the

*Crucial communication skills are being developed, such as speaking and listening with team members, managers and other staff and visitors around the hospital.*





## St Martins School, Derby

programme many, if not all, of the young people will progress into permanent roles at the hospital, having proved themselves as capable and valuable members of staff and work-ready. The project has been successful in other NHS Trusts and at Barts Healthcare, where 52% of students who completed the internship went on to secure paid employment. When compared to the woeful rate of employment nationally for people with disabilities, this really goes to show how real work placement opportunities can really make the difference to a young person's life.

*The challenges for our young people gaining employment are clear. Our school approach provides students with a foundation of skills and attitudes that employers are looking for. DFN Project SEARCH is a continuation of this approach into the work place. It is a fantastic partnership. DFN Project SEARCH themselves provide guidance, a great network and systems, the Derbyshire Education Business Partnership provide the job coach, St Martins school provide the tutor and the employers at the hospital, ISS and the University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust, provide the internship opportunities and mentors. The partnership provides the wrap around support that our young people need in order to be successful in the workplace. The project brings benefits, not only to the interns, but to employers in turn, who report increased work satisfaction, improved attendance and productivity in departments that host interns. This is widely reported globally. We know it works. Despite the Covid-19 situation, one of our interns has already secured employment at the hospital with the Receipts and Distribution Team. Our hopes for the future are already becoming a reality. We look forward to exciting times ahead . . .*

(Debbie Gerring, Head of St Martins School)



*Our school approach provides students with a foundation of skills and attitudes that employers are looking for.*

The Royal Derby Hospital has been a supportive partner in offering young people with disabilities opportunities to gain work experience and to prove that they can be valuable members of the working environment. It is hoped that in the future the hospital will increase the number of departments where these young people may gain experience. It is also hoped that their experiences inspire other local employers to offer young people with disabilities chances to experience other potential job opportunities. DFN Project SEARCH mentors, employers and schools have to work together to make real difference in these young people's lives.

*This very successful internship programme for SEND students through DFN Project SEARCH at the Royal Derby Hospital is going to be significantly impacted from September due to the Covid-19 crisis. Places have been paused or cut short at the hospital for this year's interns and understandably access to their onsite learning base and mentor has been restricted. . . We hope to use this effective model in alternative contexts as an employability package in the coming year. We are determined that Covid won't present further barriers to our learners who are already severely disadvantaged when it comes to employment opportunities.* (Alistair Crawford, Teaching School Strategic Lead)

## Conclusion

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St Martins School, their sixth form Horizons, and their partnership at Derby Hospital with DFN Project SEARCH, illustrate excellent approaches to ensure young people with additional needs are being supported through their education, in order to provide a gateway into their futures and into the world of work. They aim to develop their pupils' skills and professional knowledge to be successful, in line with realistic expectations and local opportunities. The school does this by offering their unique SHAPE curriculum which is supported by continual referencing to and practicing key skills and attributes. A further key feature at St Martins school and sixth form is meaningful ongoing encounters with employers, from introductory talks and tasks during specialist careers and enterprise days, to engaging in real-world projects that have been curated by external partners and employers.

For DFN Project SEARCH the opportunity to learn on the job is immensely beneficial to the interns. A crucial success factor of this scheme is the ongoing support that is weaved in throughout the whole placement. This includes daily structured learning and reflection sessions, which helps interns understand the development of their skills and knowledge, as well as gain understanding of the professional world. Alongside this, a strong mentoring and support network for each individual intern helps sustain the placement and boosts the young person's confidence.

Developing educational real-world projects that support learning and offering meaningful placements are some ways to help realise better opportunities for young people with SEND. However, we cannot expect schools and colleges to do this alone. There is a need for strong support from the community and in particular from businesses, to ensure that they develop and adapt their opportunities to ensure they are not closed-off to certain members of society. It is evident that giving these young people opportunities with the right support network can see them flourish and be valuable members of the workplace and our society.

Some employers are seeking to increase their number of new recruits who have a disability. A survey by the Open University found over a third (38%) of employers have started to proactively recruit individuals with disabilities in the past three years (OU, 2019). For instance, by using external support from specialist recruitment agencies and training providers. However, not all employers are aware of the benefits that creating a diverse workforce can bring, and/or do not feel they have the knowledge and support to recruit and provide for these employees. Building a diverse workforce can unlock creativity and fresh thinking (OU, 2019); having employees from a wide range of backgrounds and with varied experiences can give businesses insights to new ways of working and understanding differing points of view. It can therefore be considerably beneficial to the success of a business as well as the development of the whole of the workforce.

*Building a diverse workforce can unlock creativity and fresh thinking; having employees from a wide range of backgrounds and with varied experiences can give businesses insights to new ways of working and understanding differing points of view.*

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**The Open University (2019). Access to Apprenticeships**

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## Further information

**St Martins School, Derby** <https://www.stmartinsschoolderby.co.uk/>

**Horizons Sixth Form, Derby** <https://www.horizons6thformderby.co.uk/>

**DFN Project SEARCH Derby** <https://www.uhdb.nhs.uk/project-search-derby/>

**DFN Project SEARCH – a model for supported internships**

<https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/supported-internships/project-search-a-model-for-supported-internships.htm>

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