



Employers Information for Supported Internships

What are supported internships?

A diverse workforce creates many benefits for businesses. The UK has 10 million disabled customers, which equates to 20% of all customers, with a combined annual spending power of £80 billion. Having a disability-inclusive workforce can enable employers to understand and access this sizeable market.

There are many ways in which employers can increase the number of people with disabilities in their workforce, including supported internships. Every supported internship is different, as every young person has different abilities and career aspirations.

- A supported internship is a course offered by Colleges and Training Providers throughout England to young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. They aim to help these young people achieve paid employment by giving them the skills and experience they need through learning in the workplace.
- If you are reading this, it might be because your local college, Training Provider or Local Authority has contacted you to ask if you would be willing to host a work placement which is intended to last for at least six months.
- Employers are equal partners in supported internships, and your role is critical to their success. The extended work placement is the most important part of a supported internship because it gives a young person with learning difficulties the chance to show that they can perform a real job in a real workplace.
- All young people and employers have support from an expert job coach. Employers do not pay for job coaches (this is arranged by the provider). The level of support offered by each job coach will be agreed with the employer, and the input will depend on the needs of both the young person and the employer.

As an employer, you will be fully supported throughout the work placement. This will include help with:

- shaping the placement, if you need it, with the provider doing an initial assessment at the job matching stage, which should prevent interns being placed in unsuitable environments in the first place.
- having the best young person 'matched' to your placement in discussion with you.
- support from an expert job coach throughout the work placement, including on site for as long as necessary and afterwards only a phone call away.
- help to identify and implement reasonable adjustments for the young person, which are free to the employer (with government funding).

Why host a Supported Internship?

There are lots of good reasons to host a supported internship work placement. As well as making a contribution to society and increasing the diversity of your workforce to reflect your customers and society, the benefits to your business include:

- Developing an ethical corporate image can be fundamental to business success. A study found that 87% of consumers preferred to use companies that hired people with disabilities, and that 92% felt more favourable towards companies that hired individuals with disabilities.
- Working alongside a young person with a (learning) disability can increase your organisation's understanding of your market. For an average business, 20% of your customers are disabled people. A workforce that reflects the diverse range of customers it serves, and the community in which it is based, is good for business.
- The extended work placement can act as an extended working interview - giving you an increased chance of getting the right person to fill your vacancies and bringing new skills to your workforce.
- There is evidence that taking on someone with a (learning) disability can increase staff retention and reduce absenteeism.
- Offering a placement will increase an employer's disability confidence, with job coaches available to supplement any in-work training that the employer provides. The intern can also undertake additional learning in college identified by the employer, to work on qualifications that the employer would want their workforce to have.
- There may be an opportunity to give a junior member of staff mentoring or supervisory experience if they act as a 'buddy' to the intern.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will it cost me to offer a supported internship work placement?

Extended work placements for supported internships are usually unpaid, because participating in an extended work placement is part of the young person's programme of study at their school or college. The primary goal of a placement is to help a young person with learning difficulties to develop the skills they need for paid employment. Funding for job coaches and reasonable adjustments will be arranged by the college or training provider.

Will the young person fit into my workplace?

If you are thinking about hosting a placement, the college or training provider will work with you to understand the role you have available, to ensure the best job match between the intern and you. The college/provider may also suggest 'job carving', which means working with you to tailor the extended work placement to best meet your business needs, whilst utilising the strengths and abilities of the young person.

This might mean that tasks carried out by other employees can be given to the intern, freeing up resource for other staff. Employers who have offered supported internships have found that it decreases the workload of their staff and teams.

What happens if things go wrong?

Even though your provider and the job coach will make every effort to match you with the most suitable young person, sometimes things can go wrong.

If the placement starts going wrong, be honest and act quickly. Contact the job coach and explain your concerns, so that any issues can hopefully be resolved quickly. It may be a skills gap, a difference in expectations between the intern and employer, a behaviour concern or simply a misunderstanding by the young person or employer. Identifying the problem quickly is the best way to resolve it, thereby hopefully avoiding a possible breakdown of the placement.

If it becomes clear that the work placement is no longer viable, the job coach will work with you to bring it to an end. Either the job coach or the provider will discuss why things went wrong, and whether it's a good idea to consider placing another young person with you.

What do I, as an employer, need to do?

Getting the right young person into the right job role with the right employer is critical to the success of an individual internship. The job coach will work with you to identify a job role that fulfils a real business need for your organisation, and ensure that someone is matched to the job role for the extended work placement. The role can develop over time as you get to know what the young person can do.

You will need to provide effective line management and supervision of the intern as you would with other employees, although a lot of support will be provided by the job coach - especially at first.

What support will I receive during the internship?

The job coach will work with you to arrange the induction and settling in period, and provide as much support as is needed throughout this time.

The job coach will also support you to make any reasonable adjustments that may be needed. These often cost nothing and can be of benefit to other employers as well. Where there is a cost, the job coach could apply for government funding to cover it.

As the young person becomes more confident and able, the job coach will gradually withdraw their support, but you will still be able to contact them at any time if any issues arise.

What happens at the end of the internship?

The aim of supported internships is to prepare young people with learning difficulties for paid employment. As the intern has been fulfilling a real business need in your organisation, you should consider whether you can take them on as a paid member of staff at the end of their internship. This won't always be possible: you may not be in a position to recruit, or the intern may not have met the required standards. You can still play an important part in helping an intern achieve employment elsewhere, e.g. by providing a reference, recommending the intern to other employers, or giving honest feedback to the training provider college or job coach about the skills and/or behaviours that the young person still needs to develop.

Want to get involved?

Contact:

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- Careers for Young People, Warrington Borough Council, 01925 442211, www.careersforyoungpeople.co.uk, careersservice@warrington.gov.uk