

Project SEARCH Supported Internship

The Local Authority became a host for a Project SEARCH supported Internship Programme that offers 12 young people with a disability, including learning disability and autism, the opportunity to experience a full academic year of work placements within the LA, supported by a wrap around team. This work has been led by the Work Inclusion Partnerships team.

People with disabilities, and in particular learning disability and autism, have historically missed out on employment opportunities. Nationally, approximately only 5% of people with a learning disability known to a local authority are in employment. It was identified that the local authority needed to respond to this disparity and a decision was made that a Project SEARCH programme would be delivered within the council.

The council hosted a Project SEARCH programme whereby 12 young people with a learning disability and/or autism are offered a one year supported internship. The intention is that these young people develop the skills, knowledge and experience to then apply for paid employment. This employment would be either within the council or the local businesses community, and support for these young people would continue whilst they are in paid work.

From year one of the programme all those young people who completed the year have now moved into paid employment. For those who required further support to enable them to have the skills to be employed they undertook a further programme locally which is also supported by the council.

Job outcomes that have been achieved to date have included an apprenticeship at the British Library, a Data and Admin Assistant working for Sustainable2, a College Learning Support Assistant, 2 ring fenced apprentice roles at LBH Tech admin, 1 competitively achieved admin apprenticeship at LBH.

A critical success factor for Project SEARCH is that a business hosting a programme should consider identifying paid roles that participants can apply for. It was greatly appreciated that the council ring-fenced two roles within Tech Admin services during the first year of the programme. This gives participants something to aim towards during the programme and allows the host business to benefit from a diverse workforce.

In addition to the positive outcomes experience by participants of the programme, it has been noted that mentoring and supervising a Project SEARCH intern has been significantly beneficial for LBH staff. These benefits have included council staff gaining experience in supervision and mentoring; improved communication; tackling tasks in a more flexible and accessible way; becoming more patient in their interactions; and gaining more first-hand understanding of neurodiversity in the workplace.