

Skills
Development
Scotland



Funded Modern Apprenticeships and DFN Project SEARCH

March 2023

Introduction

This guide looks to give a better understanding of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) funded Modern Apprenticeships and DFN Project SEARCH, the linkages between both programmes and how they can provide a fantastic opportunity for people with a learning disability, autism or both to move into work.

Whilst some individuals from DFN Project SEARCH have successfully moved into apprenticeships, both SDS and DFN Project SEARCH are keen to do much more in this area, and by providing an overview of each programme, along with details on the process of how these two programmes can better connect, we believe that this will create more opportunities for disabled individuals. In developing this guide, SDS and DFN Project SEARCH have been working together to understand how a more inclusive pipeline can create more opportunities for disabled learners.

A recent 9 month pilot undertaken, successfully placed 9 DFN Project SEARCH interns into Modern Apprenticeships (20 individuals have been placed over the last 9 years) and we believe that by taking a more focused approach and following the principles outlined within this guide, we believe that this will create more opportunities for disabled individuals.

This guide is primarily developed for DFN Project SEARCH delivery organisations, Apprenticeship Learning Providers and employers.

What is DFN Project SEARCH?

DFN Project SEARCH is a one-year transition to work programme for young adults, (known as Interns), with a learning disability or autism spectrum conditions, or both.

Everyone deserves the right to aspire to the very best future, yet only 4.1% of people in Scotland, with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) go on to secure full-time paid employment.

At DFN Project SEARCH we work hard to challenge and change cultures, demonstrating how young people with a learning disability, autism or both can enrich the workforce, bring incredible skills and talent, encourage greater diversity and meet a real business need.

We partner with organisations across the public, private, and voluntary sectors to create supported employment internships for young people in their last year of education, helping them to take positive first steps into the world of work.

Our unique programmes around the UK have been established with various prestigious employers including hospitals, local authorities, universities, and a number of private sector businesses.

At the end of the programme, on average 70% of DFN Project SEARCH interns gain jobs, 60% of them achieving full-time permanent roles.

We believe in empowering all young people to enter the workplace with confidence.

For more information about the positive impact of supported internships for young adults with learning disabilities and/or autism, visit www.dfnprojectsearch.org/

How does DFN Project SEARCH work?

DFN Project SEARCH is the largest transition to work programme in Scotland and has been operating here for over 10 years. There are currently 18 programmes operating across the country from the Shetland Islands to the Scottish Borders.

In Scotland, over 500 young adults with a learning disability, autism, or both, have successfully progressed into paid work following successful completion of a DFN Project SEARCH programme. This has included a range of Modern Apprenticeship roles.

This free one-year internship for people aged between 16 and 29 provides classroom-based learning and work placements.

The classroom-based learning which is delivered at the host business site by a college lecturer, allows interns to develop employability skills and achieve appropriate qualifications.

Our interns also complete three integrated work placements with either the host business and / or other local businesses. With learning support provided by a job coach and a workplace mentor, to ensure that students gain all appropriate skills and knowledge for the role.

Completion of all three work placements provides students with up to 600 hours of integrated work experience, which supports their progression towards a sustainable job role.

Every intern receives support from a team that includes their parents, guardians, carers, college lecturer and job coach to create individual employment goals. These employment goals help determine the type of job each individual will be working towards.

Interns receive continuous coaching and feedback to help them learn.

Therefore, the knowledge, experience and skills gained from work placements are vital for them as they progress to integrated employment.

What do interns gain from completing DFN Project SEARCH?

Whilst each intern will experience their own personal benefits from participation in the programme there are a number of specific benefits that interns consistently gain. These are:

- **The opportunity to complete a variety of work placements with the host and / or other local businesses;**
- **Increased independence, confidence and self-esteem;**
- **Work-based individual instruction and feedback;**
- **Coaching and support from their college lecturer, job coach and workplace mentors; and**
- **The knowledge, skills and experience needed to get a job and keep it.**



What is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship combines a real job with a structured programme of learning and leads to industry-recognised qualifications. An apprentice is normally aged 16 or over and will be employed in their role, for one to three years (depending on the length of the programme). They earn while they learn, gaining a wide mix of skills and knowledge on the job, which may be supported by classroom-based learning from a university, college or independent learning provider. The training is agreed between the employer, the apprentice and the learning provider and is built around the job role to meet the needs of your business. This is formalised in a training plan. Given real responsibilities, apprentices will be treated as a normal employee, with an employment contract setting out their rights under employment law, including paid holidays and sick pay. Employers are investing time and efforts in the apprentice's learning and development. Equally, they are committing to a long-term period of training, so apprentices are usually motivated and driven to learn and succeed.

How do apprenticeships work?

Apprenticeships are offered by employers and a learning provider. Employers work with the learning provider to make sure the training is tailored to the needs of their business and the apprentice's role. The programme is formalised in an individual training plan, which is signed by the employer, the learning provider, and the apprentice. The apprentice will be supported whilst undertaking their training and study. Most of the training is on the job, with time off for college if required (agreed in advance), but some flexibility may be required, for example for visits by the assessor or completion of assessments. If day release for training is tricky because of where the employer or the apprentice is based, then alternatives with learning providers will be explored. Time at college may be by day or block release. The learning provider helps the apprentice to achieve their qualification and will assess any additional support needs required including any reasonable adjustments. They can also signpost and support individuals to apply for Access To Work (ATW) and will also help them identify potential additional training opportunities at the end of the apprenticeship.

Content of the apprenticeship programme

Each apprenticeship programme has a framework. Employers and learning providers use the framework to make sure that apprenticeship programmes are delivered to the same standard, no matter where the apprenticeship takes place. There are various frameworks to suit different types of apprenticeships, and these are designed by the Sector Skills Council¹ in partnership with industry and learning providers. The industry frameworks include a competence-based qualification such as an SVQ², core skills and optional units that allow the learning provider to tailor the learning programme to the needs of business, or the apprentice's specific role. The learning provider will help employers decide which framework is most relevant to the job and will incorporate optional units relevant to the business. Core skills include numeracy, communication, information technology, problem solving and working with others. Apprentices need to gain a minimum level in these to successfully complete the qualification, with core skills usually part of the framework.

Benefits of employing a Modern Apprentice

- employers receive help from SDS towards training
- develops the skills of new recruits or existing employees
- attracts new talent to sectors
- employees gain recognised qualifications
- improve productivity and staff morale
- reduce recruitment costs.

Skills Development Scotland contributes towards the cost of training (depending on the age of the MA and the selected framework) and, in some cases, a contribution may also be required from the employer. An approved Learning Provider supports the employer and the MA with the training. There are over 80 types of Modern Apprenticeship across all sectors. A number of the job types available can apply to most businesses, such as IT and digital technology, business administration, customer services and procurement.

The employer area on www.apprenticeships.scot has all Modern Apprenticeship frameworks and eligibility requirements. Modern Apprenticeships are available at Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) levels 5 to 11. You can find out more about qualification levels on the SCQF website.

¹ A Sector Skills Council is an employer-led organisation that covers specific industries in the United Kingdom. Their goals are: to support employers in developing and managing apprenticeship standards, to reduce skills gaps and shortages and improve productivity.

² Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) is a certificate of vocational education in Scotland developed by Sector Skills Councils, in partnership with industry and awarding bodies.

Benefits of employing a DFN Project SEARCH intern as a Modern Apprentice

As well as the significant benefits noted above there are additional benefits to be gained for both the Learning Provider and the employer from employing a DFN Project SEARCH intern as a Modern Apprentice.

Firstly, it is important to note that a good number of DFN Project SEARCH interns across Scotland have already progressed into a range of apprenticeships, with achievement rates of approximately 80%.

We believe that is due to DFN Projects SEARCH interns demonstrating their ability to harness their recent and relevant experience of:

- **Accessing and integrating into a variety of workplace environments;**
- **Successfully meeting role requirements within appropriate occupational areas;**
- **Successfully meeting workplace requirements for attendance, timekeeping and conduct;**
- **Balancing workplace delivery requirements alongside qualification attainment.**

A range of independent research and analysis has provided compelling evidence that those with learning disabilities, autism or both, including DFN Project SEARCH interns, benefit their employers in the following ways. They:

- **Support the attainment of more inclusive and equitable workplaces;**
- **Enrich the workplace by bringing in new perspectives;**
- **Allow staff members to consider how services and processes are delivered, which leads to improvements which support both fellow colleagues and the customer base;**
- **Perform as well as, if not better in some circumstances, than other employees;**
- **Are more punctual, take less sick leave and stay longer in the job.**

Next steps

Learning Providers and DFN Project SEARCH sites are encouraged to engage and to build relationships which will support all interns. This can be formal through participation of a Learning Provider on a sites' Business Advisory Committee or informally through the actions noted within the attached Appendix.

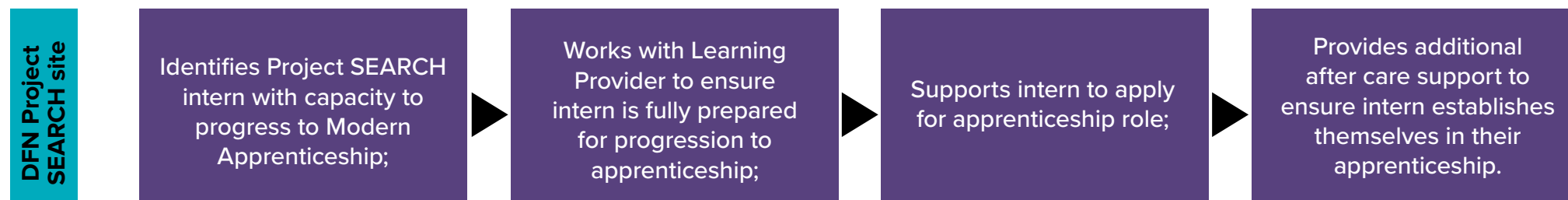
Engagement will provide opportunities for both Learning Providers and DFN Project SEARCH sites to:

- **Utilise an alternative Added Value Process (noted below) to identify potential Modern Apprentices much earlier in the process;**
- **Build knowledge, skills and experience specific to occupational frameworks;**
- **Establish and build relationships with specific employers;**
- **Ensure DFN Project SEARCH interns are fully prepared to progress to MA positions; and**
- **Reduce the time taken for recruitment and selection processes.**

Usual process



Added Value Process



Learning Providers who engage in the added value process will achieve the following benefits:

- **Access to an additional stream of suitable, well-prepared and appropriate candidates;**
- **Assurance that there are no increased risks in employing a DFN Project SEARCH intern in comparison to any other individual or group of potential candidates;**
- **Support the attainment of a more inclusive and equitable apprenticeship programme;**
- **Additional opportunity to consider how you deliver your frameworks, which could lead to improvements which supports development for colleagues and all apprentices, not only those with additional support needs; and**
- **Further opportunity to assist in meeting SDS contract requirements, in terms of Quality Assurance (Continuous Improvement) and Equality outcomes.**



FAQs

Q1.

What incentives are there to help take on an apprentice?

Funding may be available through your Local Authority. Check eligibility and find out more in the employer area of [apprenticeships.scot](https://www.apprenticeships.scot)

Q2.

How much does a Modern Apprentice cost?

Employers must offer a contract of employment long enough for an apprentice to complete their apprenticeship. Employers must pay an apprentice's wages. Employees pay is set by the employer. National minimum wage levels for apprentices are set by UK Government – although many employers choose to pay more.

Q3.

Will the Modern Apprentice need time away from the workplace for training?

It depends on the type of apprenticeship they're doing. Most of the time they will be based in the workplace, but in some sectors they'll require some off-the-job training. This usually happens at a local college or training provider. It may involve day-release, maybe once a week, or in a block over a number of days or weeks.

Q4.

How much support does a Modern Apprentice need?

It depends on their role and level of training undertaken. Like any new employee, as they become accustomed to work processes and behaviours, they'll need less and less support. TIP: Assign a mentor or buddy to your apprentice so they have a 'go to' person to talk to about all aspects of the business. They will also need someone in the workplace to support their learning.

Q5.

Are there other types of apprenticeships available?

Graduate Apprenticeships are delivered by universities and colleges in partnership with employers. They allow new or existing employees to work towards a degree level qualification whilst in full-time employment. More information is available on [apprenticeships.scot](https://www.apprenticeships.scot)

Q6.

If individuals don't meet the minimum requirements for qualifications would appropriate experience gained through a rotation be considered.

This would need to be discussed with the Learning Provider on a case-by-case basis. DFN Project SEARCH sites and learning providers should develop links to ensure useful conversations can take place.

Jamie Cairney – Customer Service Assistant, Cineworld

Jamie struggled with secondary school trying to understand the demands placed on him, dealing with new relationships and all the time coming to terms with being on the autistic spectrum. Jamie left school feeling bitterly disappointed by not gaining the qualifications he had been aiming for but with a lingering sense that he loved learning and discussing politics and world affairs. Jamie had always been fascinated by Russian history and culture and in fact threw himself into learning the Russian language through You Tube and watching hundreds of old classic Russian films.

After school he enrolled at college to help him get the Highers he failed to achieve at school. Jamie really loved college life but still struggled with the discipline of academic life and getting his views across in a coherent and concise way.

He left college in summer 2018 feeling lost and a little disillusioned. He wanted to get a job but didn't know where to turn. His mum heard about DFN Project SEARCH, an intensive full time work experience programme designed specifically to support young adults with learning disabilities and / or autism get and keep a job.

Jamie and his mum went along to speak to someone in the Supported Employment Service about DFN Project SEARCH. He was supported to apply, got a place and started in August 2018 based at the programme in the University of Strathclyde. He completed two of the three ten week work experience rotations within the University of Strathclyde and in February 2019, while still on Project SEARCH, felt he was ready to start planning his next step. DFN Project SEARCH encouraged him to apply for a Modern Apprenticeship in Cineworld. Jamie was already a self confessed film buff. Project SEARCH supported Jamie with interview rehearsals and made contact with Cineworld and the MA learning provider to ensure that they were aware of Jamie's autism and that he required a little more time for the full interview as a reasonable adjustment.

Jamie's enthusiasm and love of films shone through on the day and despite his initial apprehension he was offered the apprenticeship position with Cineworld the next day. Here was an opportunity to gain a sought-after customer service qualification at the same time as working in one of the biggest multiplex cinemas in the UK all while earning a wage. Each week his job coach would catch up with Jamie in the cinema café and discuss any issues or support required. Everyone realised that

Jamie responds better to one-to-one support and reassurance and through his job coach he was continually encouraged and supported in his first six months. Within three weeks of starting the position Jamie was offered the weekend shift at the opening of one of the biggest cinema events of that year Avengers End Game. Jamie did so well that weekend that his manager offered him more and better paid weekend shifts.

Working in Cineworld had a huge positive impact on Jamie's confidence and sense of accomplishment. He completed his Customer Service award through Lifetime Training. By offering Jamie structured, one to one support he excelled. His knowledge and experience handling customer service, retail and hospitality in one of the busiest cinemas in the UK has helped renew his sense of achievement and he is now considering going on to university.

The Modern Apprenticeship route into employment for young people with autism or learning disability may well offer the best balance of training, one to one support and real world work experience. Being paid at the same time as you learn and gain valuable experience is another great benefit.

People with autism make great employees in a job that matches their skills.

“ The staff at DFN Project SEARCH supported me get ready for the interview and I got the job. I have completed my Modern Apprenticeship with support from my job coach and colleagues. ”



Connor Burt – Facilities Management Assistant, The City of Edinburgh Council

Connor left school in 2016 and knew he wanted to get straight into the world of work. Due to his diagnosis of Autism and ADD, Connor knew he'd require support to prepare for employment, which he gained through Edinburgh DFN Project SEARCH (EPS). EPS allowed Connor to complete work experience placements within the council, which helped build his skills and confidence. One of his placements was working in the Facilities Management (FM) team, where Connor showed incredible motivation and a real aptitude for the role. The FM team were so impressed with Connor, they worked with the EPS team to create a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) position for Connor.

Through the MA, Connor's confidence continued to grow. He developed a deeper understanding of how his work added value to the team and the positive impact that it had across the council. Whilst Connor became a very diligent worker and outgoing employee, he was initially a bit nervous about progressing onto an apprenticeship. Connor said; 'I thought it would be just like school but it's not, it was a much better fit for me'. Connor has undergone some significant on the job training and skill building during his apprenticeship and this growth has made him an incredibly valued member of the team.

Colleagues noted how keen he was to learn as much as he could. As well as building employability skills, Connor worked incredibly hard to develop his social skills, and after just six months was able to be the lead contact on sites for FM, which was a great responsibility for someone so early in their career.

Connor's autism impacts his social skills and attention, which means that he can have difficulty in understanding non-verbal communication and it may take him a little longer to learn a task, but with the support of EPS and his team, he's developed ways to deal with this. He's working in a team that not only understands the importance of his learning and development, but also how his disability affects him, and they make sure he had the right support around him to be successful. His manager, Chris MacFarlane, said; 'One of the first things that really struck me about Connor was his willingness to get stuck into all aspects of the work. My team had never taken on an apprentice before, so we didn't know what to expect. It's fair to say we were blown away with Connor. I'd really encourage other managers, teams and organisations to give opportunities to young people and those with additional barriers. Whilst there might be barriers to overcome, they are so slight compared to the incredible achievements that can be made by individuals like Connor which have a lasting, positive impact on the team.'

Connor is a great ambassador for EPS and the MA programme, demonstrating it can be a very successful pathway into employment. He believes “employers should give more people like me a chance, we may surprise you”. Since completing his apprenticeship, Connor secured a permanent post within the FM team and won the ‘Modern Apprentice of the Year’ category in Edinburgh Evening News’ ‘Edinburgh Apprenticeship Awards 2021’. On his success, Connor said; ‘I never thought I would get here, its been an incredible journey and I’ve enjoyed every minute of it.’

“ I never thought I would get here, its been an incredible journey and I’ve enjoyed every minute of it. ”



Appendix

DFN Project SEARCH

Potential areas of engagement from learning providers

Area of Support	Potential Input	Comments
<p>Business Advisory Committee (BAC)</p>	<p>Engagement with local BAC would provide valuable input about the trends within local industry and within the employers whom they support with apprenticeships e.g. Which skills are in demand? What areas/businesses have turnover? Which businesses are growing and will need skilled work in a certain area? What areas are experiencing reductions in funding and may not be looking to hire?</p> <p>These are the questions we depend upon BAC participants to answer. Without their valuable input, we may only guess at the answers to these questions, making it even more difficult for our interns to find employment.</p>	<p>The BAC is business-driven and tends to consist of business owners, management or human resource professionals who have hiring authority or the ability to influence recruitment practices within their business or sector.</p> <p>Most BACS meet 3 / 4 times per year – with ongoing input on an ad-hoc basis throughout the programme i.e. August – June.</p>
<p>Programme Delivery</p>	<p>Engagement in supporting delivery of some of the activities which provide interns with the skills and knowledge required to achieve their goal of employment e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing industry input and feedback on available roles (apprenticeships) and requirements; • Participating in the review of work experience rotations and highlighting skills acquired (or those still needed); • Hosting supported internship work experience rotation(s); • Encouraging those employers who you work with or your industry network to also provide supported work experience rotations(s); and • Participating in mock interviews and providing feedback on CVs, application forms and interview skills. 	<p>All of those involved in DFN Project SEARCH should be committed to the goal of 100% employment for interns.</p> <p>N.B. The Learning Provider does NOT have to be a member of the BAC to engage in these elements of programme delivery.</p> <p>Input for all of these requirements would be on an ad-hoc basis throughout the programme i.e. August – June.</p>

Area of Support	Potential Input	Comments
Job Outcomes	<p>Engagement could add value in enhancing job outcomes by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting as an advocate for DFN Project SEARCH and, in particular, interns; • Encouraging those employers they work with to embrace inclusive forms of recruitment including work trials and supportive interview processes; • Taking positive action to enhance access to the MA opportunities they have available; and • Utilising any alternative and additional funding opportunities available to support those with learning disabilities and / or autism into employment e.g. SDS Enhanced Funding or Local Authority Recruitment Incentives. 	<p>N.B. The Learning Provider does NOT have to be a member of the BAC to support job outcomes.</p> <p>Input for all of these requirements would be on an ad-hoc basis throughout the programme i.e. August – June.</p>
Job Sustainment	<p>Engagement could assist in enhancing job sustainment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilising any alternative and additional funding opportunities available to support those with learning disabilities and / or autism sustain employment e.g. Access to Work. 	<p>N.B. The Learning Provider does NOT have to be a member of the BAC to support job sustainment.</p>

For more information and advice...

...on how to take on an apprentice visit the employer section of apprenticeships.scot or speak to an adviser through our free employer helpline on **0800 783 6000**.

For more information on becoming an apprentice please contact our free helpline on **0800 917 8000**

For more info on **DFN Project SEARCH**, contact:

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For more information on links between **DFN Project SEARCH** and apprenticeships contact:

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This guide has been developed in partnership with the following organisations:

DFN (David Forbes Nixon) Project SEARCH

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