



Department
for Education

Approaches to Supported Internship delivery

Research report

February 2020

CooperGibson Research

Contents

Glossary of terms	3
Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Aims	10
1.2 Methodology	10
1.3 Notes on the report	11
2. Delivering supported internships	13
2.1 Approach to SI provision	13
2.2 SI models	14
2.3 Funding and costs	25
2.4 Factors influencing models of provision	28
2.5 Changes over time	32
3. Success and challenge	34
3.1 Completion and success rates	34
3.2 Critical success factors	37
3.3 Challenges to success	42
3.4 Overcoming challenges	45
4. Development and support	47
4.1 Future development	47
4.2 Extending provision	48
4.3 Support for providers	51
5. Conclusions and recommendations	54
5.1 Models and approaches to SI delivery	54
5.2 Factors associated with success	54
5.3 Barriers to success	57
5.4 SI eligibility	58
5.5 SI suitability	59
5.6 Considerations for providers	59

Glossary of terms

AtW – Access to Work

DfE – Department for Education

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

GFE – General Further Education

HMRC – Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

ILR – Individualised Learner Record

LSA - Learning Support Assistant

MIS – Management Information Systems

PMLD – Profound and multiple learning difficulties

SI – Supported Internship

Executive Summary

Supported internships (SIs) are a study programme targeted specifically at young people aged 16 to 24 who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), want to move into employment and need extra support to do so. Generally available in England since September 2013¹, SIs are based primarily at an employer, usually last for one year and include extended work placements of at least six months. Providers are free to design their SI programme to reflect the local context and meet the needs of their learners.

The Department for Education (DfE) is currently seeking to develop its evidence base in relation to the progress of SIs, and commissioned CooperGibson Research (CGR) to conduct qualitative research with providers and stakeholders exploring the different models of SI delivery as well as the factors perceived to be associated with, and barriers to, delivering successful SIs.

Aims and approach

This research aimed to explore:

- The models and approaches to delivery of supported internships available for young people with EHCPs in England.
- The factors perceived to be associated with success for supported internships.
- Perceived barriers to the success of supported internships, and how these may be overcome.

CGR conducted a total of 50 in-depth qualitative telephone interviews with a sample of 42 SI providers and eight wider stakeholders representing or engaging with the SI sector.

Key Findings

The following sections summarise the main findings from the telephone interviews. For further detail regarding each of the following, see sections 1 to 5 of the main report.

Models and approaches

Providers were familiar with DfE's vision for SIs and nearly all said that their approach was consistent with this.² Where provision was not consistent with the DfE's

¹ Supported Internships were available in the UK prior to 2013 through [Project SEARCH](#). Project SEARCH was developed at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in Ohio (USA) in 1996, and was first piloted in the UK in 2010.

² I.e. that supported internships are based primarily at an employer, normally last for one year, include work placements of at least six months, include English and mathematics at an appropriate level and include job coach support. See DfE (2017), 'Providing internships for young people with an EHC plan':

description, this related to a lack of paid employment opportunities at the end of the SI, some young people not being based primarily with the employer each week, the job coach role being undertaken by an untrained individual, and/or delivery of the SI over two years.

There were three core elements to all SI delivery identified during this project: employer placement, off-the-job learning and job coach support.³ However, the way that these elements were delivered varied widely between providers. Such a wide range of approaches and variable elements meant that it was not possible to define a clear typology of models in the delivery of SI.

Providers reported that the needs and aspirations of young people determined the types of employers that the providers engaged, the placements supported, and the amount and type of support offered by the job coach. However, many interviewees (providers and stakeholders) said that a lack of employers willing or able to take on interns also influenced delivery. Providers based in rural locations reported that it was difficult to engage with large employers, or employers that were easy to access for young people.

In addition, interviewees commonly cited funding constraints as influencing approaches to delivery. This tended to be linked to the intensive level of one-to-one support and staffing required for effective provision, such as the provision of job coaches and the cost of specialist training such as in systematic instruction. Commonly, providers stated that SIs were funded through a combination of core 16-19/25 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and high needs funding. In addition, the majority of providers received Access to Work⁴ funding. The application process for Access to Work was regarded as complex, and there was a lack of clear understanding as to which programme elements were eligible for Access to Work funding.

Factors associated with success

Interviewees generally regarded the input of positive and supportive employers as a key factor in the success of the SI programme. Gaining commitment and understanding from employers at the start of the SI programme was felt to be

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties>

³ Job coaches were individuals appointed by the training provider to give individual one-to-one support to young people in the workplace.

⁴ [Access to Work](#) is a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support for those who have a disability or long term physical or mental health condition.

important for effective delivery, and lead to greater potential for securing employment at the end of the placement.

In addition, the majority of interviewees reported that the role and quality of the job coach was crucial to the success of SIs. Job coaches were described as supporting young people, employers and parents/carers. As a result of the wide-ranging nature of the job coach role, several providers and stakeholders emphasised the importance of specialist training provision for this role.

Other reported critical success factors in SI delivery were the encouragement and support of parents and carers, and young people being motivated to succeed.

Barriers to success

The majority of interviewees stated that parental anxieties, particularly in relation to the financial implications of gaining employment and potential loss of welfare payments, was a key barrier to the success of SIs.

In addition, providers commonly reported that engaging employers was a challenge. This was commonly attributed to a lack of understanding among employers regarding SEN and high needs, the challenges presented by specific sectors or the seasonal recruitment patterns of smaller employers, and the ongoing demand from providers for placements across a range of training programmes leading to employer saturation. Interview participants often perceived that a lack of available placements stopped them from expanding SI provision (e.g. not being able to generate buy-in among enough employers, or demand for placements in certain sectors outweighing supply).

Other perceived challenges to success by providers and stakeholders were complexities relating to Access to Work funding, unrealistic expectations or aspirations of young people, a lack of paid employment opportunities at the end of SI placements and the difficulties of recruiting and training job coaches.

Providers also highlighted that there were young people with a range of needs who would benefit from the SI programme, but who were not eligible as they did not have an EHCP in place. Furthermore, they suggested that some young people eligible for SI programmes would benefit more from other forms of education and training (such as apprenticeships). They suggested a need to review eligibility and selection criteria to ensure the long-term suitability of SI programmes.

Issues with data

This research identified inconsistencies between the sample data provided by the DfE to CGR and the data held by providers. Inconsistencies related to the number of young people on the programme or the length of time that a provider had SI participants for. A small number of providers said that this reflected challenges that they had

encountered in the way that SIs had been recorded on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), suggesting additional work is required to ensure accuracy and consistency in the recording of SI data going forward.

Recommendations for DfE and partners

1. Consider **updating guidance to emphasise that the primary goal of an SI is paid employment**. Any updated guidance should include an expectation that where paid employment is not achieved, the provider ensures a suitably positive alternative destination (e.g. volunteering) as a step towards paid employment.
2. **Additional research focused on assessing the quality of SIs that are currently being delivered** may be useful. This might lead to the development of a quality mark for providers offering SI programmes that are consistent with DfE principles/guidance.
3. A **one-stop information hub for SIs**, including recognisable branding and logos, would clearly demonstrate that the programme is a national rather than local initiative. This hub should include content for employers, parents and providers.
4. Consider investing in **developing the job coach workforce**, for example as a strand within the proposed SEND workforce development programme overseen by the SEND Leadership Board.
5. Future work to **standardise the way that SI outcomes and costs data are recorded**, and long-term impact tracked, may be helpful for providers to measure their success and for a national picture of SI provision and its value for money.
6. **Increased partnership working** between providers and external agencies such as JobCentre Plus could also be encouraged to help families work through any challenges. Separate research with providers and parents/carers could help to identify the financial impact of SIs and how this may be mitigated in future.
7. A separate, focused study would aid **understanding about funding levels/constraints** faced by providers, and explore ways in which the Access to Work application process could be streamlined. This should include clearer guidance for providers, which explicitly sets out the elements of SI delivery that are eligible for funding via Access to Work.
8. **Existing SI forums could be better promoted** to increase awareness among providers of the support available to them, encourage uptake and increase opportunities within local areas for peer-to-peer guidance and development.
9. The DfE should **consider widening eligibility criteria for SIs**, including whether to make funded job coaching support available to a broader range of learners who would otherwise not be able to sustain or benefit from an extended work placement because of their additional needs, disability or other vulnerability.

10. Consider **offering guidance on learner readiness indicators**: this would clarify that many young people need a post-16 pathway to employment that includes preparatory provision to allow them to build confidence, independence and understanding of career options, before they progress to an SI and from there to work.

Considerations for providers

In order to strengthen their SI offer, providers could consider:

- Ascertaining whether or not the Local Authority has set up an SI forum, and where it has, engaging with that forum to help SI activities such as brokering good quality work placements.
- Establishing whether the Local Authority provides job coaching training, and accessing this training where it exists.
- Accessing existing resources which can be used to explain SIs to different stakeholders, including those produced by [Preparing for Adulthood](#)⁵ and the [Education and Training Foundation](#).⁶
- Strengthening data collection linked to SI success, including longer-term tracking of learners post-completion, to determine the impact of SIs and sustainability of any employment achieved.
- Working closely with Management Information Systems (MIS) colleagues to ensure ILR data on SI learners is accurately recorded.
- Carefully defining and applying learner suitability criteria for SI programmes to ensure that those most likely to benefit from an SI are enrolled at a point when they are socially and emotionally ready to take the final step away from full-time education and training and into work.
- Ensuring that there are clear pathways through SEND provision to take a 16+ learner on a planned journey towards work, with the SI representing the final stage in that journey.
- Ensuring that SIs are distinctive from more general preparation for employment programmes, with an outcome of paid employment as the priority aim.

⁵ <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads>

⁶ <https://send.excellencegateway.org.uk/employers-and-employability>

1. Introduction

The 2016 Post-16 Skills Plan emphasised that young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) should be able to access the same opportunities as those available to all learners. Within this, it recognised that those young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) would ‘need particularly flexible and personalised provision’. Thus, the Plan outlined expectations that these learners would undertake a supported internship unless there was a ‘good reason not to do so’.⁷ Such personalised provision also supported the government’s intention, set out in its 2017 Work, Health and Disability Green Paper, to significantly reduce the disability employment gap.⁸

Supported internships (SIs) are a study programme targeted specifically at young people aged 16 to 24 who have an EHCP, want to move into employment and need extra support to do so. Generally available in England since September 2013⁹, SIs are based primarily at an employer, usually last for one year and include extended work placements of at least six months. Providers are free to design their SI programme to reflect the local context and meet the needs of their learners. However, providers should adhere to the following four principles:¹⁰

1. A significant majority of the intern’s time is to be spent at the employer’s premises. Interns will be expected to comply with real job conditions such as time keeping or dress code.
2. Interns must undertake some form of learning alongside their work placement, including English and mathematics.
3. Jobs must work for both the young person and the employer. This includes complementing the young person’s vocational profile, meeting business need and the flexibility to address barriers where necessary. Where possible, employers should have a job offer at the end of a work placement, should the intern meet the required standard.
4. Ongoing support (including Access to Work and job coaching) should be available during the internship, if the young person secures employment at the

⁷ See BIS and DfE (2016), *Post-16 Skills Plan*, p.31.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536043/Post-16_Skills_Plan.pdf

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/work-health-and-disability-improving-lives/work-health-and-disability-green-paper-improving-lives#work-health-and-disability-facts-and-figures>

⁹ Supported Internships were available in the UK prior to 2013 through [Project SEARCH](#). Project SEARCH was developed the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in Ohio (USA) in 1996, and was first piloted in the UK in 2010.

¹⁰ See DfE (2017), ‘Providing internships for young people with an EHC plan’:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties>

end of the SI, and to support young people who are not offered a job to continue to work towards this aim.

CooperGibson Research (CGR) was commissioned by the DfE in order to develop the evidence base on SIs by conducting qualitative research with providers and stakeholders to explore the different models of SI delivery, as well as the factors perceived to be associated with and barriers to, delivering successful SIs.

1.1 Aims

This research aimed to explore the:

- Models and approaches to delivery of supported internships available for young people with EHCPs in England.
- The factors perceived to be associated with success for supported internships.
- Perceived barriers to the success of supported internships, and how these may be overcome.

1.2 Methodology

CGR conducted 50 in-depth qualitative telephone interviews with a sample of SI providers and wider stakeholders representing or engaging with the SI sector.

The sample of providers was selected from a database provided by the DfE: this used Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data, which is self-reported by providers, to identify providers with learners participating in SIs from 2013/4 to 2018/19. Key characteristics were identified, such as numbers of supported interns, age, gender and ethnicity of the intern cohorts. This data was linked to DWP and HMRC data to identify employment outcomes where possible.

The sample of providers was selected to represent a range of types of SI provider. This included General Further Education Colleges (GFE colleges), sixth form colleges, specialist colleges, local authorities, charities, public organisations and the private sector. Data provided by DfE was used to purposively sample providers based on their profile of cohorts from 2013/4 to 2018/19, considering:

- Size of provision – number of interns recorded each academic year. Priority was given to those with over five interns consistently, to ensure that the discussions could focus on the ‘model’ of provision rather than individual interns. Those with larger cohorts were included where possible. Providers were also highlighted where they had shown a significant increase or decrease in number of interns over the period.
- Maturity and delivery pattern – providers recorded in the ILR as having SIs for the two years or more were prioritised. The sample also included some

providers with interns only in the current academic year, some with intermittent delivery and some who had not recorded interns in 2018/19 but had in previous years. Those which did not consistently have interns recorded in the last two years or more, were omitted.

- Where possible, those showing sustained employment figures were targeted.
- The sample was monitored to ensure a reasonable geographic spread and location type (urban and rural settings) for providers.

The telephone interviews were semi-structured, guided by a series of core questions allowing some flexibility for interviewees to highlight any other areas or issues they felt appropriate. All interview scripts were collated within qualitative data analysis software and coded using a grounded approach to identify trends and patterns within the data. Comparative analysis was undertaken between the responses provided by stakeholders and SI providers.

1.2.1 Sample

In total, 50 qualitative telephone interviews were carried out. These comprised 42 SI providers, and eight wider stakeholders. Table 1 provides a breakdown by provider type.

Table 1: Interview sample by provider type.

General Further Education college	23
Local authority	7
Private provider	7
Specialist college	2
Sixth form college	1
Third sector provider	1
Other (umbrella organisation)	1

The eight interviews with wider stakeholders included organisations representing the Further Education (FE) and training sector, organisations that are involved in supporting young people with complex needs, and two employers.

1.3 Notes on the report

- The above criteria were used as a general guide for sample selection since providers highlighted some inaccuracies in the ILR data ([see section 3.1.1](#)). For example, the number of interns recorded was reported to be different to that in the data or the number of years where intern figures were recorded was different (e.g. data showed that providers had interns in 2018/19 only whereas providers reported that they had been delivering SIs for a number of years).

- The remit of this project focused on approaches to delivery from the perspective of providers and a small number of wider stakeholders. Two employers were included in the sample for the latter. However, it should be noted that in-depth analysis regarding the views and experiences of employers in relation to SI programmes would require a larger sample than this study allowed. Due to the small sample, schools offering SIs were also not included.

2. Delivering supported internships

This section summarises the approaches to SI delivery that the 42 SI providers and eight stakeholders described during their telephone interviews. It highlights the common characteristics of delivery, the changes that have taken place over time and the perceived funding and cost implications of the programme.

2.1 Approach to SI provision

At the start of each discussion, research participants were reminded that DfE describes supported internships as:¹¹

- Being based primarily at an employer.
- Normally lasting for one year.
- Including work placements of at least six months.
- Including English and mathematics at an appropriate level.
- Including job coach support.

Providers were generally familiar with this description, and nearly all agreed that their approach to the delivery of SIs was consistent with it:

‘Yes [all of our internships are consistent with this description]. From the start we had very high aspirations that it was a specific type of study programme, and not glorified work experience’. (*Local authority provider*)

However, during further discussion with providers and stakeholders, it became clear that in some cases provision became more aligned to the DfE description as the SI progressed. For example, in the first months of their SI a young person may be in college more than in the workplace, but in most cases this would gradually increase over the course of the programme ([see section 2.2.3](#)).

In a very small number of cases, providers recognised that their provision was not consistent with the DfE descriptor despite being described as an SI. The following inconsistencies were reported by a small number of interviewees (across providers and stakeholders):

- A lack of paid employment opportunities being made available to young people coming to the end of their SI placements.

¹¹ See DfE (2017), ‘Providing internships for young people with an EHC plan’: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties>

- Some young people attending placements for three days or less per week (which was seen as not adhering to the principle of being based primarily with the employer).
- Assigning the role of job coach to those who interviewees perceived to be untrained or unqualified individuals.¹²
- A small number of providers delivering the SI over two years, for example where young people required a lot of support to prepare for the work environment. In these examples, the first year was regarded as a preparatory stage before progressing onto the internship itself.

There was a general consensus among providers that SI delivery needed to remain flexible in order to meet the needs of the young people enrolling onto the programme. They recognised a need to adhere to the expectations set out by the DfE, whilst at the same time ensuring that provision could be tailored adequately to ensure that each individual young person had the opportunity to achieve the best and most appropriate outcome for them personally. This focus on flexibility and personalisation was emphasised through the range of approaches taken by providers in delivering SIs, and especially in the management of work placements ([see section 2.2](#)).

2.2 SI models

When asked to describe models of the SI programme, providers offered feedback around approaches that they took to a range of elements of delivery. While generally consistent with the DfE principles, SIs looked somewhat different across the sample analysed due to the range of variable elements that were combined in different ways by different providers.

Such a wide range of approaches and variable elements creates challenges in defining a clear typology of models in the delivery of SI. Although there are three core elements to all SI delivery (employer placement, off-the-job learning and job coach support), each of these is approached differently by the range of providers due to a number of influencing factors, not least the need to tailor provision to accommodate individual learner needs, interests and preferences ([see section 2.4](#)).

According to providers participating in the telephone interviews, key variables in the design and delivery of SIs included:

- Target learners.
- Fixed/rolling starts.
- Number of days per week in the work placement.

¹² For more detail on the training of job coaches, see [section 2.2.7](#).

- Division of time between on/off-the-job learning, and the location of off-the job learning.
- Number, type and size of employers involved.
- Number of placements per learner.
- The role of the job coach.
- Other support on offer.

Each of these variables is discussed separately below.

2.2.1 Target learners

Age

The majority of providers interviewed said that the young people undertaking SIs were generally aged 18 or over. Several commented that although younger age groups were eligible to participate in SI programmes, internships tended to be more successful (in terms of gaining employment) if the young people involved were aged 18 or over. These providers suggested that progressing from school directly to an SI could be daunting for some young people, and two or three years in further education/training prior to starting an SI was helpful for developing skills and confidence.

'On the whole 16 is too young, [as these interns] don't have the necessary life experience. Going into work is a huge step. [Young people] haven't mixed much outside of a structured environment like school. Coming to college they need to take more responsibility, [which is] a learning curve... The [supported internship] programme is very short, so the younger ones need a bit more time to prepare, do some additional courses, mix with their peers in a different environment'.
(*Specialist college*)

Where they did enrol learners aged 16 – 18, a small number of providers reported that they split young people into two cohorts (16 – 18 and 19+) for their off-the-job learning and support.

Complexity of needs

Perceptions varied about the suitability of SIs for different learner groups. Providers often reported that the SI programme was available to all young people with an EHCP. They most commonly described young people on SI programmes as having a range of needs, including physical and/or learning disabilities, emotional and behavioural needs.

Some providers saw SIs as appropriate for any learner with an EHCP and accepted all onto the programme.¹³ This was also the view of some of the stakeholders interviewed. However, other stakeholders raised concerns based on the provision that they had seen being delivered that there was a reluctance amongst some providers to enrol young people with more complex needs. Thus, where selection criteria were discussed with providers, a small number reported that they were doing this on the basis of which learners they thought were most likely to benefit from an SI or whom they assessed as being ready to embark on an SI.

'[Interns have] various needs... There is some element of selecting candidates. Because they are going to do to three days a week of full-time [work] placement for the supported internship, we need to make sure that we have candidates who can cope with this'. (GFE college)

Selection processes used by these providers included considering a young person's readiness for managing the demands of being in the workplace for several days each week (e.g. establishing a routine, being consistently punctual, independently travelling to and from work each day and managing relationships with colleagues whilst also coping with the tasks required by the employer). Providers said that they also considered whether the SI programme offered young people adequate preparation time for stepping into employment.

'What I like to do is have a...meeting with all of the young people and choose from that so that we are selecting the right candidates that are going to manage [the programme], because it is quite intensive. If you have been in college before, only doing 2.5 days a week, and then come to this full-time programme, it is a massive ask'. (GfE college)

Providers said that, in cases where the selection process indicated that an SI was not felt to be appropriate, they would suggest that the young person completed additional training or college courses to prepare for future progression onto an SI. Some were reviewing provision for young people with high needs or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), to ensure that progression routes were appropriate for this cohort.

Readiness for SI

Regardless of previous experience, providers and stakeholders agreed that a young person's motivation to work was particularly important to their success. A common

¹³ This is in line with government's intention that 'all young people with EHC plans should undertake a supported internship, which includes an extended work placement, unless there is a good reason not to do so'. See BIS and DfE (2016), *Post-16 Skills Plan*, p.31. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536043/Post-16_Skills_Plan.pdf

theme running throughout the interviews was that a young person had to ‘want to work’, be ready for work and have a good understanding of the expectations of employers and providers in the completion of SIs.

To develop this sense of work readiness, many providers recommended that learners should enrol on an SI after they had completed one or more years of further education, often in the provider. For example, many providers recruited interns through internal pathways for progression, following foundation courses or pre-internship programmes. These included generic employability courses, entry level or level 1 vocational courses, or bespoke internal programmes set up by the providers.

[Young people] benefit from a year in college, being in the college setting, being independent with a peer group. And then going into SI. We found this allows them to cope with the SI better’. (*Local authority provider*)

Providers suggested that prior study or experience in a college setting before enrolling onto an SI was important to success. This meant that issues such as preparation for work, job profiling and travel training could be addressed prior to the SI, ensuring that young people were well equipped to move into provision consistent with the DfE’s description of SIs ([see section 2.1](#)). Stakeholders, however, were concerned that this preference for prior experience meant that some providers focused on attainment levels as an indicator of potential SI success (in terms of securing employment). Nonetheless, in interviews providers were less focused on specific levels of attainment and tended to talk more broadly about the need for young people to be prepared for work to ensure success. Foundation courses that included a work experience opportunity, entry level or level 1 courses, were commonly regarded by providers as an effective pathway into an SI.

2.2.2 Fixed or rolling starts

Most providers stated that there was a fixed start period for the SI programme, which was generally September each year. A small number of providers offered starts on a rolling basis, and reported that they did so to meet the needs of young people and employers.

For providers, the work of engaging and matching employers for their SI programme would often begin in the April before a September start. The majority of providers, and particularly those working with a range of employers each year, thought that job profiling (working with employers to analyse job roles to identify the tasks required of the job holder) was important, and should ideally occur before the internship began.

Undertaking job profiling prior to the start of the SI programme was also perceived to leave the maximum amount of time during the SI for the placement itself.

In addition, many providers commented that SIs could be more successful where a young person had input into the choice of placement. This included working with young people to identify their aspirations and wishes, skills and assessment of specific support requirements and any potential challenges they may face in placement (e.g. communication needs, independent travel).

'In late July/early August, the interns come in and spend a day with the team to check that the groupings work well. This can be a tough experience for them, [we] need to make sure they gel as a group and get on. The job coaches [also] start the interns' profiling...In September, [the young people] spend two weeks in classroom, job coaches continue with profiling and make diagnostic assessments...After that the interns start going out [to employers]'. (*GFE college*)

2.2.3 Balance of time between on and off-the-job learning

There was much variation in the ways in which young people were reported to split their time between the provider and the employer during the SI, and when they would start their time with the employer.

Use of time

Generally, the proportion of time spent each week in placement was led by the needs of the young person or what the employer could accommodate. This could be split into three broad categories:

- **Split week:** This involved splitting the days of the week between the provider setting and the workplace. There was a fairly even split between interns spending three or four days per week with the employer (plus one day in college), and those spending two days with the employer (plus one or two in college).¹⁴ Some providers reported that the balance of days was dependent on the needs of each individual intern, and could also change throughout the SI. For example, interns would often increase the number of days they spent in the workplace over a period of time (see phased approach below).
- **Split days:** A small number of providers offered an approach whereby young people would start and end their day in the provider setting, and then spend a block of hours each day in the work setting. This approach tended to be used

¹⁴ Where providers provided a split of time that equalled less than five days, information was not given as to how the rest of the week was spent by young people.

where off-the-job learning was delivered by the provider at the workplace or in a local community setting near to the employer.

- **Phased approach:** Several providers offered a phased approach to placements, beginning with one or two days per week with an employer and building up time in the workplace. This would mean that gradually, young people were predominantly based with the employer by the end of the SI programme.

‘Young people are with the employer for at least two days a week. Sometimes more. If they start on two days a week it gives us scope to increase their hours as they go along. It gives them time to build up their stamina. Some interns will progress to 30 hours a week, leading possibly to employment. Others might just do eight hours a week if they have higher level needs’. (*GFE college*)

Approach to placements

There were three common approaches used by providers in terms of when employer placements would start: either at the beginning of the SI programme, after a period of pre-placement training with the provider, or as part of a phased programme of support where the presence of the job coach faded over time. Each of these could be used with any combination of the three approaches to ‘use of time’ listed above (e.g. an intern could have a phased introduction to their placement but still be on a ‘place and train’ model of SI).

- **Place and train:** This approach, commonly associated with supported employment,¹⁵ was used by many providers where interns were placed directly with employers from the beginning of the SI programme.
- **Train and place:** This was an inversion of the above ‘place and train’ approach and supported the development of work readiness among interns where they may have not had as much pre-SI experience as others ([see section 2.2.1](#)). Thus, a small number of providers said that interns would spend the majority of the first half-term (and anywhere up to the full first term) of the programme in the provider setting, developing employability and social skills, English and mathematics, identifying their interests and understanding workplace expectations and the world of work. Following this, the intern would then start with the employer (e.g. after the December break).
- **Place, train and fade:** This was an important concept for several providers, who noted that it was important that job coach support faded over time. This was reported to encourage independence among interns and offer them more

¹⁵ <https://www.base-uk.org/employers-supported-employment>

opportunities for the potential of paid employment at the end of the internship ([see section 2.2.7](#)).

2.2.4 Off-the-job learning

All providers interviewed reported that off-the-job learning was delivered continually throughout the year of the SI programme. As well as English and mathematics, a range of other skills and/or qualifications were taught to young people depending on the provider offer. These included independent living skills, ICT/digital skills, employability qualifications, training in how to use Job Centre plus, safeguarding, money management and supporting personal wellbeing (e.g. yoga, arts and crafts).

Providers commonly stated that, where possible, off-the-job learning was personalised to reflect young people's individual needs. Opportunities for young people to reflect on their personal progress were a key part of the programme for many. To facilitate this, several providers mentioned the use of learning diaries, which the interns would complete each week and then share with the employer and job coach and/or provider every half-term. Ongoing peer interaction was also perceived by a small number of providers to be an important element of off-the-job learning, and they would offer this by delivering group learning sessions as well as one-to-one support.

The level of English and mathematics tuition delivered by providers was often dependent on the prior attainment of young people, and was tailored to the ability levels of each young person. This was not always formally assessed, although several providers noted that young people may undertake bite-size qualifications, pre-GCSE courses and in some cases GCSE qualifications.

Many providers offered off-the-job learning related to the vocational profile and interests of the young person, or which linked to the placements that were being undertaken. These included courses related to horticulture, engineering, food hygiene, first aid, and health and safety. The importance of interns developing skills, or undertaking qualifications, that were relevant to employment in a specific role was also highlighted by wider stakeholders. Some suggested that this was good practice, because employers were perceived to value job-related experience over more generic 'employability skills'.

Off-the-job learning was most commonly located in the provider setting (see placement time versus provider time in [section 2.2.3](#)). However, some providers delivered off-the-job learning on the employers' premises, or in a community venue (such as a library) nearby. The factors influencing this approach to delivery varied, and included geographical considerations (e.g. travel time between provider and employer settings for learners and staff), employer capacity or willingness to provide space for off-the-job learning sessions, and the wishes of young people. One provider suggested that

delivering off-the-job learning away from the provider setting was a valuable means by which interns could be encouraged to develop their independence. It also helped underline the difference between an SI and a college course, positioning it clearly as a pathway to work.

'[Off-the-job learning] takes place on the employers' premises. We used to do it at the college but then we found that it impacted on [the intern]. Some of them have been at the college for six years. It was hard for them to get out of the mindset of you are now going into employment. So we remove them from the situation to help develop them further and the confidence and just generally understand the world of work. So that has been a better way of dealing with it'. (*GFE college*)

2.2.5 Number of employers

Employers were perceived by all to be integral to delivery. The most common approach taken by providers was to work with a number of employers (usually smaller organisations) each year. They felt that this multi-employer approach enabled closer job-matching for young people ([see section 2.2.6](#)).

Some providers described how they worked exclusively with one or two large employers, where interns either remained in one role throughout or, more commonly, rotated through roles within different departments. This would see a young person carrying out different job roles within the same organisation.

'Interns try a range of trial placements...in the nine months of the SI, hopefully leading to paid employment. The college looks at the interests of the young people and places them in a number of job roles. The young person chooses one employer that they would like to work with, and then [experiences] a range of roles [with that employer] that can be job carved'. (*Local authority provider*)

Providers using this approach thought that it allowed young people to experience a range of occupations and therefore enabled interns to make a more informed choice regarding their future employment. Some providers noted that there was also some flexibility for young people within this model, and that interns were encouraged to take up short placements and try out different settings or departments until they found a role that they enjoyed.¹⁶

¹⁶ See [section 3.3.2](#) for the challenges of working with, and generating buy-in among, employers (across both approaches).

2.2.6 Number of placements

Providers participating in the telephone interviews were split fairly equally as to whether they offered young people the same work placement throughout the duration of the SI programme, or several placements with different employers.

Where they preferred one placement for the full year, providers described the consistency in routine and support that this offered to the young people involved. This was perceived to increase the potential for paid employment at the end of the programme. The latter was particularly the case where large employers were involved, as they were felt to be more likely to have a higher level of staff turnover and therefore more chance of a vacancy available for the intern at the end of the SI.

Those providers that suggested several placements were valuable noted that this offered young people more understanding about the variety of roles available to them. Providers also stated that this approach was used where placements broke down, or where employers were unable to commit to a full year's placement.¹⁷

Recruiting employers

Employer engagement tended to be part of the role of tutors delivering the SI programme for the provider, job coaches and SI co-ordinators employed by providers.

Many providers said that they recruited employers and identified placements using existing networks and relationships that they had built up over time. They described a bank of employers that they worked with regularly, although they were continually looking to add contacts to these databases. A few said that these employer contacts were held centrally by the provider and were engaged with a range of programmes as well as SIs (e.g. apprenticeships delivery); this sometimes meant that the demand on employers for placements could be high ([see section 3.3.2](#)).

Another approach described by providers (including several of those which had banks of regular employer contacts) was engaging and recruiting new employers to the SI programme after young people had been enrolled (i.e. they carried out job profiling with young people to understand their wishes, and then worked to identify employers and placements that matched these wishes, instead of relying only on the employers that they already knew and worked with). Providers felt that this approach enabled them to more closely match placements to a young person's vocational profile. Providers felt that such job-matching enhanced the quality of provision in terms of meeting need and helping to ensure positive outcomes for young people.

¹⁷ Where an intern and an employer were both happy with the progress of an existing arrangement, but the intern was due to move to a new placement, the proposed move would not take place where there was already potential for paid employment to be secured.

'Lots of work is done by the job coaches to get out and promote the advantages of having supported interns. This is just filtering through with employers now. If we have a supported intern where none of our recruited employers fits, we will work to find the correct employer'. (*GFE college*)

2.2.7 Role of the job coach

All providers and stakeholders interviewed perceived job coaching to be a critical element of SI delivery. Providers described job coaches as having a pivotal role in the programme, as they not only supported young people in the workplace but also employers and their staff.

'Job coaches work lots with employers and the existing workforces in organisations to get them ready for supported interns. There are lots of [challenges for young people on the SI programme] that are social not just academic, so it is important that the workforce is well prepared'. (*GFE college*)

Ratios ranged from one-to-one job coach support to (commonly) three to four interns per job coach. A small number of providers stated that there was one job coach to support between five and ten interns, although these individuals were helped by learning support assistants.

Generally, job coaches travelled to visit the intern in the workplace on a regular basis. Providers often noted that job coaches were trained in areas such as systematic instruction and acted as a mentor and a 'safe person...to turn to' for the intern (local authority provider).¹⁸ However, there were also some challenges highlighted by providers and stakeholders in terms of the recruitment and training of qualified job coaches – [see section 3.3.4](#).

Many providers and stakeholders emphasised that it was important that the support provided by job coaches decreased over time. This was felt to encourage independence for the young people on internships and was sometimes referred to as a 'place, train and fade' model of delivery (rather than the 'train and place' approach, or phased introduction to the workplace as described in [section 2.2.3](#)).

¹⁸ Specific details as to the level of training undertaken by job coaches, or the type of qualification obtained by job coaches, were not provided during the interviews.

'All [interns] have a one-to-one job coach when they go out to work placements. We slowly increase the intern's hours [in the workplace], but not the job coach [support, which we] taper off on a very individual basis'.
(*Specialist college provider*)

2.2.8 Additional support mechanisms

Many providers noted that young people on the SI programme were able to access the range of support services that all learners in their provision were entitled to, including welfare, counselling and pastoral support. They could also access careers guidance and signposting to other external agencies that may be able to help with specific issues such as queries regarding benefits payments.

Several mentioned that learners with EHCPs would be assigned a personal tutor or learning coach by the provider, who would provide additional one-to-one support where required (in addition to the job coach; this would be more akin to a learning mentor). Other providers mentioned that specialist teams such as those offering speech and language therapy, physiotherapy or behavioural support were available if required by young people. One provider reported that it held a weekly social meet-up for interns to spend time with other young people on the programme – 'which is good, as they can be quite isolated [on placement]'. (*Third sector provider*)

During placements, mentors or buddy systems had been established by several employers. For example, this would be a line manager or colleague working in the same team who would act as a direct point of contact, both for the intern and the provider.

'They have one named person as a buddy to give targeted intervention [in the workplace]. The buddy feeds back to college on what needs to [be covered] during college learning'. (*GFE college*)

Providers and stakeholders perceived buddy systems to be valuable, as they offered a named contact for the young people in the workplace with whom they could raise any questions or concerns, gain help or ask for instructions on how to carry out a particular task. This was felt to offer an additional layer of continued support, particularly when the job coach was unavailable or to help ensure that sustained employment could be achieved over the longer-term.

'All of the employers that we work with offer a buddy system within [their] organisations. So not only is there a job coach on site, because the job coach is there to help with the employer and the intern [but] the buddies themselves over the years have become more proactive. They are very helpful to the young people for the on-the-job learning'. (*GFE college*)

One provider employed a part-time 'job development' mentor, who worked separately to the job coach and was available to provide support to those young people who had not secured permanent employment at the end of the SI programme.¹⁹

'The [mentor] will continue to work with them [for six months after the end of the SI]. If [the young people] are still not employed, we are always looking at why...and will then try and find alternative provision for them. [The mentor supports]...job applications, will have one-to-one sessions or small workshops [with young people]. The interns will have emailed us with all of the jobs they want to apply for, and [the mentor] will help them apply for them...goes to interviews with them, and will offer additional support to employers as well if an intern gets employed with them. [This includes] helping the employer access the Access to Work fund, because they might need a job coach to start with, for the induction. In the past, we have actually [provided this ongoing support] as job coaches. It hasn't really worked and it has had an impact and knock-on effect on our year because we are not then able to get ready for the following interns the next year'. (*GFE college*)

Some providers offered travel training to young people as additional support.

2.3 Funding and costs

The ability for interviewees to discuss financial data related to the SI programme was limited, as they were focused on delivery of SIs whilst other colleagues (outside the scope of the interviews) were responsible for financial management. Although they were generally aware of the sources of funding being used for provision, and were familiar with Access to Work processes as they were often involved in these applications, there was varied understanding among interviewees regarding the specific costs of different elements of provision. This means that CGR has been unable to draw any firm conclusions about the efficiency with which available funding is used or its sufficiency to develop and run successful SI programmes. Further focused research may need to be carried out with those individuals within the providers who are responsible for managing the financial aspects of SI delivery, and an examination of the types of data that may (or may not) be available.

Providers commonly stated that SIs were funded through a combination of core 16-19/25 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and high needs funding, depending on the requirements and needs of each learner. Several accessed high needs funding for all interns, and a small number of providers stated that this equated

¹⁹ It was not clear how this additional support was being funded.

to an additional £6,000 of funding per intern. Other providers said that the number of interns for whom they accessed high needs funding varied according to cohort.

‘I think last year one [intern received high needs funding]. This year [there are] four...Next year we have more high needs learners because we have more sensory learners who will need a communicator in college and on placement. There are two current learners in college who want to progress onto SI who will need health or nursing care’. (*GFE college*)

In addition, many providers reported that they received Access to Work funding. However, there were challenges commonly raised by providers regarding the latter (see [section 3.3.3](#)). Overall, the application process for Access to Work was regarded as cumbersome and complex, and there was a distinct lack of knowledge or clarity among interviewees as to the eligibility criteria and what could and could not be funded through Access to Work.

Where they did offer detail, providers stated that they had claimed Access to Work funding to cover the costs of the job coach, travel (for job coaches and/or interns), and meeting additional needs that interns had when they were in placement (e.g. for modifications to equipment).

2.3.1 Key costs

The majority of providers and stakeholders regarded the provision of job coaches and the work that they carried out whilst young people were in placement as a key cost of SI delivery. Interviewees felt that job coaches were particularly costly due to the specialist nature of the work and their need to be able to provide one-to-one support with interns, engage with employers, and liaise with parents/carers and external agencies. To increase the efficiency of the model, several providers noted that job coaches were tasked with carrying out multiple roles alongside the support of young people.²⁰

‘They do all of the pre-placement work and are out supporting during placement. They work with the pathway to employment program as well. All staff have two or three different roles because it makes it more cost-effective’. (*GFE college*)

²⁰ Although providers acknowledged the range of tasks designated to job coaches, it was not possible to ascertain the impact of this on job coaches themselves as this was outside the remit of this project.

'The job coach helps in the college and in the workplace and behind-the-scenes all the time. They are researching all the time. Engaging new employers, looking for new placements, doing health and safety checks'.
(GFE college)

Other key costs reported to be associated with the delivery of SIs were:

- Staffing costs, such as tutors and lecturers delivering qualifications and other support during off-the-job learning sessions.
- Management and administration overheads.
- Supplying equipment and resources, such as uniforms required by interns, and specialist classroom equipment required by individual interns to access off-the-job learning.
- Follow-on support, where it was provided for young people and employers at the end of the SI placement.
- Transport/travel costs for young people and job coaches.

When asked if there were any hidden costs related to the successful delivery of SI programmes, providers again spoke about travel costs for job coaches. Some also mentioned providing support for young people with CV writing and job searches (including for those unsuccessful in gaining employment at the end of the SI programme), clothing costs for young people (e.g. where specific items were required by employers), the costs of preparatory work such as job matching that took place before SI delivery started, and the cost of ongoing employer engagement.

2.3.2 Tracking costs

Individual interviewees from providers were commonly unable to provide information regarding the way in which SI costs were tracked. Some were unaware of financial tracking taking place. A few knew that a budget was set for the programme, and that costs were tracked against this budget (although they did not provide detailed budget data). Others reported that although financial tracking occurred, this was carried out by colleagues and they personally did not have access to this level of information.

Some providers reported that the costs of SI delivery were included within a core budget that covered a range of learning programmes, and that this was not broken down in enough detail to identify the costs specifically associated with the delivery of SIs. Two providers stated that they costed each individual SI, including elements such as number of job coach and tutor hours required, and how these hours had been used; there was, however, little reference among providers to the specific overall costs to develop and run the programme long-term. A small number noted that they would

hope to be able to track SI costs more closely in the future and were looking at ways in which they might approach this going forward.

There was little consensus among stakeholders either: a few perceived SIs to cost more to deliver than other programmes for this cohort, while other stakeholders felt that there was little difference in costs between programmes. Given the small sample involved in this research, the mechanisms for tracking costs of SI delivery may therefore require review as part of a separate piece of work.

2.4 Factors influencing models of provision

Providers and stakeholders reported that decisions made by providers regarding their approach to SI delivery were influenced by a range of factors. Predominantly, these were:

- Needs and aspirations of young people.
- Employer engagement and availability of work placements.
- Costs/funding.

Although each of these factors is summarised below, it was clear during the interviews that they were often interlinked and influenced each other. For example, the aspirations of young people needed to be considered alongside the availability of employers and appropriate work placement opportunities in the local area.

2.4.1 Needs and aspirations of young people

Many providers mentioned directly that the needs and aspirations of young people specifically impacted the nature of SI delivery, as it was necessary to ensure that provision was realistic, appropriate and met expectations. Some noted that they had learned lessons with previous cohorts, in terms of ensuring that young people were placed with employers or in roles that were appropriate to their needs.

[Matching placements to need] helps with their successes as well, because where we have learnt from previous students with [similar needs] who perhaps really struggle with communication, but are absolutely brilliant at the jobs they do...They [were] just not getting the right employer'. (*GFE college*)

The needs of young people therefore determined the types of employers that providers engaged, the job roles that they supported, and the amount and type of support offered by the job coach.

‘Some supported interns are ready to work whereas others need to be built up first. They need more work readiness, so they take longer in college before the placement. Next year we will have the interns split into two groups with ones who need longer in college to become work ready in one group and those ready for placement early on in another group’.
(*GFE college*)

Developing an understanding of the aspirations of young people was felt to be key in enabling providers to communicate effectively with learners so that they could set realistic targets at each stage of their programme, and balance their personal goals with an awareness of the local job market and the opportunities that were available to them. The latter was also influenced by the employers in the local area who were willing and/or had the capacity to take on interns ([see section 2.4.2](#)).

2.4.2 Employer engagement

A lack of employers who were willing and/or able to take on interns was regarded as a key factor influencing delivery some providers and stakeholders:

‘The [driver of the programme] is the employer pool having to react. There are lots of young people who would benefit from supported internship but there are not enough employers. If we had another three employers, we could easily fill placement spaces. We can’t however advertise for more supported interns if we don’t have the employers already on board’.
(*GFE college*)

A few providers stated that they used a multi-employer model because it was difficult, for example in rural locations, to engage with large employers who may offer placements to several interns simultaneously (or several placements for one intern in the same setting). In addition, the logistics of travel, both for young people and job coaches – again, often in rural locations – impacted on the placements offered, and therefore the nature of the job/role available for the young person.

‘It would be good to have more interns with one employer, rather than six different employers and 13 interns... Getting to know your employers’ business and what their expectations are, where they have vacancies, what their employment practices are [all help to steer the success of the model]... Sometimes [they are] not in the right sector [for the intern]. There are so many [providers requesting] employers for work placements, they are inundated and so [we] probably can’t scale [up SI provision]’.
(*Third sector provider*)

Alongside the limited availability of employers, providers also felt that approaches to delivery were impacted by the varying levels of awareness and understanding that employers had about the needs of young people with EHCPs, and by a lack of centrally available information for employers on the benefits and challenges of participating in the SI programme. Providers felt that these factors influenced employer decisions as to whether or not they could commit to the SI programme (and therefore the number of employers on board and the number of placements that providers are able to offer).

2.4.3 Costs/funding

Although individual interviewees were largely unable to provide detailed information on the funding of SI provision, they commonly felt that financial resources were having an impact on approaches to SI programmes ([see section 2.3](#)).

Providers and stakeholders cited a lack of resources to fund provision as a factor influencing models of delivery. Where funding constraints were reported, these tended to be linked to the intensive level of one-to-one support and staffing required for effective provision, such as the provision of job coaches and the cost of specialist training such as systematic instruction. The cost of this job coach support meant that some providers were limiting the number of interns that they enrolled onto the programme, or were sending interns into their work placements later.

'It would be good to have more staff, to employ job coaches who could identify employers and profile students so as to make those matches much sooner. But the resources are just not there'. (*GFE college*)

Due to the lack of funding, some providers stated that they had limited the number of days that learners spent in college/with the provider, or the amount of one-to-one support offered, in order to create efficiencies in staffing.

For others, funding constraints limited the number of employers that they worked with:

'For supported internships there are so many admin tasks around employers and building networks up... So this provider factor is a barrier. There are additional costs. The employer needs, how much training the employer needs, admin costs, recruitment costs for employers, health and safety testing. Every time an intern changes placement [either because the placement wasn't working or interns are undertaking several placements over the course of the programme], it adds money each time. Each time they change placement there is the same cost for the new employer'. (*GFE college*)

One provider reported that they were ceasing delivery of the SI altogether due to the perceived insufficiency of the funding available.

Providers also commonly mentioned that they found applying for Access to Work (AtW) funding complex, and that they were not clear about which elements of provision that AtW funding covered ([see section 3](#)).

Several providers reported that the complexities of applying for AtW funding meant they had not done so. Consequently, this had directly affected the types of young people that they could accept onto the SI programme. Stakeholders also reported that the complexities of AtW meant that eligible young people had not been offered opportunities to enrol on the SI programme. Where providers were not offering SIs, stakeholders thought this was largely due to funding constraints or the complexities of applying for AtW.

2.4.4 Other factors influencing provision

A range of other factors influencing provision were mentioned by smaller numbers of providers and stakeholders. These were:

- **The level of support given to young people by parents and carers.** For example, where parents/carers had anxieties or concerns ([see section 3.3.1](#)) some providers had increased the amount of work that they undertook to engage with the families of young people during delivery of the SI programme. This included the provision of group meetings/coffee mornings with parents/carers and employers, during which young people would be asked to showcase what they had learned. Other providers had engaged with external agencies such as local authorities and educational psychologists to determine how they could help to facilitate increased independence among young people, and ways to encourage the support of parents/carers. They reported that as a result they had seen young people develop their confidence and independence domestically as well as in the workplace.
- **Capacity or availability of job coaches to support young people.** Recruiting and training job coaches was a challenge for a few providers, including a perceived lack of suitable applicants or recruitment agencies being unable to supply appropriately skilled individuals. Providers suggested that this was due to the specialist nature of the job coach role, and the cost of the training required to fulfil the role effectively (e.g. training in systematic instruction). Where providers faced recruitment challenges for job coaches, this limited the extent to which some young people could spend time with employers. Providers felt that if they were able to recruit more job coaches, interns would be able to spend longer in their work placements from the start of the programme.

'If we had more job coaches, I can't imagine the structure of the course changing too much. But we could have support in place so young people could do more days in the job to start with'. (*GFE college*)

A small number of stakeholders highlighted that some providers were not appointing qualified job coaches; two providers noted during their interviews that they had not used qualified job coaches during the previous year due to recruitment challenges and financial constraints. In these cases, the two providers had designated Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) or other mentors as the job coaches for interns. Some stakeholders raised concerns that in such cases, young people could be 'over supported' in their placement as LSAs would be trained in providing intensive one-to-one support, but are less likely to be trained in how to deliver that support in such a way that it faded over time and encouraged independence.

- **Existing frameworks of delivery.** Some providers stated that they had stuck closely to pre-existing models of delivery when designing their SI programmes. For example, they had attending training or information sessions delivered by national organisations, or they had reviewed practice that they had seen demonstrated by other providers or via branded models such as Project SEARCH.²¹

2.5 Changes over time

For most providers, SI delivery had changed over time, and all stakeholders were able to identify ways in which they had seen provision change as well. There were no common trends identified in the types of changes that were being made to programme delivery. Where they had made changes, these tended to be minor, such as amending the timings of placements – e.g. previously some providers had not used a phased approach to introducing young people to work placements and had changed to doing so. However, changes tended to be based on lessons learned over time as they looked to improve provision in terms of efficient use of resources and overcoming the challenges that they encountered along the way. The latter tended to be associated with strategies to improve employer engagement.

A few of the providers that worked with more than one employer during the delivery of SIs suggested that they had changed the way in which they engaged with employers. For example, they continued to identify new organisations that could offer placements, e.g. to provide young people with opportunities in different sectors, to build longer-term relationships for future cohorts, or to establish placements in larger or smaller working

²¹ <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads/supported-internships/project-search-a-model-for-supported-internships.htm>

environments. Some providers had implemented a range of different recruitment strategies to try to attract new employers, such as partnering with other colleges in order to share contacts and resources.

Other providers described changes such as:

- Working with schools at an early stage in the delivery of careers/progression guidance to promote the opportunities available for learners with EHCPs.
- Developing new partnerships with local specialists with the aim of delivering the programme more efficiently and enabling more time in the workplace for interns. For example, one provider was looking at working with an employer's existing training centre so that all elements of the SI programme (placement and off-the-job learning) could be delivered at the employer's site. Alternatively, another provider was considering moving away from working with a single employer and supported employment agency and toward partnering with a local FE college for the delivery of the SI programme in the future, so as to access specialised support for interns.
- Changing the type or format of off-the-job learning undertaken by interns, including an increased focus on employability skills, or delivering English and mathematics provision in smaller groups to help offer personalised interventions.

3. Success and challenge

This section explores the perceived success of SI programmes, as reported by the interviewees. It also includes the factors that providers and stakeholders perceived to be critical to the success of the programme, the challenges they had faced in its delivery and ways in which those challenges could be overcome.

It should be noted that those interviewed were not always responsible for the overall management of SI provision and therefore were unable to provide specific data regarding success rates, destination data, or sustainability of jobs achieved.

3.1 Completion and success rates

Most providers reported high SI completion rates, with low numbers of young people leaving their SI programmes early (e.g. one or two from a cohort of between fifteen and twenty). The reasons for those leaving early generally related to health and care needs. Some interns were reported to have relocated out of the area, or had moved to alternative training programmes such as apprenticeships as this was more appropriate for their needs.

In terms of outcomes, most providers estimated that at least 50 per cent of young people on an SI programme achieved paid employment at the end of their placements, with some suggesting that at least 75 per cent of young people achieved paid employment.²² Due to the wide range of approaches taken to delivery of SI programmes, there were no clear commonalities among providers who had suggested that a high rate of learners secured employment. For example, providers reporting high completion rates included those working with one large employer and rotating young people through different placements as well as those working with several smaller employers and keeping young people in the same placement for the entirety of the programme.

Other providers estimated employment rates below 50 per cent, including a small number reporting between zero and 25 per cent. Where interviewees did not provide detail regarding the proportion of interns moving into employment at the end of the SI, this was due to a lack of information or time available during the interviews. For example, tracking outcomes and/or progression data was not always within the remit of individual interviewees. A small number of providers reported that this was an area of the SI programme that they needed to develop.

²² Care should be taken with these figures as they are based on unprepared estimations during the telephone interviews – see [section 3.1.1](#) for issues highlighted with data. Furthermore, it was not always made clear by providers whether outcomes of paid employment were all jobs with the same employer with whom young people had completed their placement.

'We have the numbers of projected starts and actual starts. But I haven't got the statistics about success rates. It was something that we had identified, that we need not just the destinations but also clarity over progression'. (Local authority provider)

Interviewees generally did not provide details on the types of employment obtained by interns or the breakdown of hours they worked (including whether this employment was full-time or part-time). A few providers had tracked interns for two or more years following completion of the programme and were able to confirm that the majority of these young people had remained in employment.

3.1.1 Issues with data

This research identified inconsistencies between the sample data provided by the DfE to CGR, and the data reported by providers during the interviews. Errors in accuracy were highlighted by 15 of the 42 providers interviewed. These often related to a mismatch in the number of young people recorded on the programme (providers often reported more than the sample data suggested), or the length of time that a provider had SI participants (providers commonly stated that they had SI participants longer than was recorded in the sample data).

A small number of providers said that these inaccuracies were related to some challenges that they had encountered in the way that SIs had been recorded on the ILR.

'There was a problem with our data returns which might explain why SI figures differ between agencies. Our SEN2 return data says that there are no SI [in the area] at all. That is because the person doing the data returns didn't know that we did, so they didn't put them on the data return. There were also issues with colleges knowing what SI really is. One college told us that they were offering SI provision, but it wasn't. It was where a young person on a high needs course went on a work placement. Colleges don't always know what SI is...[they] still need lots of advice in filling out the ILR return'. (Local authority provider)

It has not been possible to explore this issue in depth during such a focused piece of qualitative research. However, the inconsistencies identified in the sample data are likely to have an impact on the overall data available for numbers of providers offering the programme, the number of young people enrolled, and the outcomes associated with SI funding. Future work to standardise the way that SI data are recorded may therefore be required.

3.1.2 Outcomes other than paid employment

Many providers highlighted that the experience of SIs led to a range of outcomes for young people in addition to, or other than, gaining paid employment. These outcomes were emphasised as being individual stories of success, which providers perceived as being just as important as gaining employment ([see section 5.2](#)).

In particular, some providers noted that interns were offered volunteering roles, and that this was a common outcome from SI provision. They suggested that a volunteer role would be offered where a young person had complex needs and needed time out of work for medical reasons, or where they would benefit from additional support as they continued to develop their skills and experience before entering into paid employment.

‘Two that finished last year are still in voluntary roles but are now ready to look for work...Some are not ready at the end of the programme to go straight into work’. (*GFE college*)

Providers also mentioned that progression into a volunteering role could be a preference for some young people and their families, for example where there were concerns regarding loss of welfare payments if employment was accepted ([see section 3.3.1](#)).

Some providers reported that interns developed soft skills such as increased levels of confidence and independence as a result of the SI programme. This included developing their understanding of social dynamics and communication skills, and learning to apply these skills appropriately in the workplace. However, these were currently not captured within outcomes data and some were looking into how this could be recorded in future.

‘For some learners with EHCPs [the main outcomes were] soft skills. [For example], having a learner who wouldn’t speak to anybody, who wouldn’t come to a group – and now they’re going to a work placement on their own. They are [making] huge leaps. [We] can’t assume that everyone starts at the same point i.e. they just need a work placement and they’ll be ok. [The programme] is so individual, we have learners [who] have never done anything like this – it’s a massive challenge for them’.
(*Private provider*)

Providers also reported that some interns progressed into further education and training instead of employment, following the completion of an SI.²³ For example, some reported that young people had chosen to complete additional qualifications and training in the specific vocational areas that they had learned about or experienced during the SI. Furthermore, several providers highlighted that apprenticeship programmes in particular were becoming an increasingly popular progression route from SIs.

'Employment success is [recorded as to] whether they started apprenticeship or other employment. Our ideal is for a supported internship placement to lead to an apprenticeship. There are many forks along the way, but this is the ideal [because...we can ensure [that there is] an appropriate apprenticeship pathway for as many occupations as possible'. (*Other provider*)

Other outcomes mentioned by providers included referrals to adult provision or other external agencies including adult social care, the development of employability skills, and the decisions made by some young people that they were not ready for work. These were regarded by providers as positive outcomes, even in cases where the young person had not yet secured employment. They suggested that the individual personal progress that interns had made meant that they had developed more confidence to make choices for their future, or had been provided with the ongoing support to do so.

'In our pilot last year, we continued helping the young people after the SI programme [where they did not move straight into employment]. They received support doing applications and CVs etcetera. We don't just drop them...We refer young people to [external agencies] and continue searching for jobs for them. We talk to the local authority let them know what has happened after the SI. The young person had an EHCP so the local authority [can also] look at what [can be offered going] forwards'. (*GFE college*)

3.2 Critical success factors

Providers and stakeholders were asked what they thought were the critical success factors for SIs. Although 'success' was framed by interviewers in terms of factors that enabled young people to secure and sustain employment, providers often linked these to the factors that influenced the effectiveness of delivery overall. Such corresponding

²³ It has not been possible to identify where this route was a positive next step towards employment, compared to those where this represented a backwards step into full-time education and training rather than employment.

relationships between delivery and outcomes were highlighted by providers in connection to what they regarded as four critical success factors for the SI programme:

1. Employer commitment.
2. The role of the job coach.
3. Family/carer support.
4. Motivation shown by young people themselves.

3.2.1 Employer commitment

Many interviewees said that the input of positive and supportive employers was a key factor in the success of the SI programme. Both providers and stakeholders talked about working hard to build relationships with employers that were supportive and could demonstrate their commitment to the ethos of SIs, in terms of providing ongoing training to interns, and offering paid employment where possible at the end of the placement.

‘Liaison with the employer [is important] so that the employer is involved in the actual programme, so that they invest in the young person. The job coach [carries out] reviews with the employer every six weeks [and] gets the employer to engage in setting targets for the learners – so that their business needs can be met as well as developing the young person. I think that works really well because then the employer has a real investment in the young person, because they are more engaged in the educational element of the internship. It is not just somebody coming in doing work for free for them’. (*GFE college*)

Providers felt that gaining such commitment and understanding from employers at the start of the SI programme was important for effective delivery and lead to greater potential for securing employment at the end of the placement. This was often linked to a pre-existing level of knowledge or understanding about SEND among employers. For example, providers reported that employers needed to be disability-aware, willing to job-carve, and have a well-prepared workforce. The latter was perceived to be particularly important in enabling an intern to feel like they were part of the workforce and to develop positive relationships with colleagues. Consequently, providers and stakeholders deemed employers who nurtured young people (for example by establishing work-based mentors or buddy systems) to be especially valuable for working effectively with young people and helping them to secure employment.

'Sustainment probably does rely a bit on [the young person having] someone to talk to.... someone to touch base with from time-to-time. There was a case where [a young person was successful], had gone into a job and their supervisor changed. They were scrabbling around [for support] and found the phone number of the person they used to work with [and tried to still ask them for help]. Long term sustainment relies on follow up support. Employers need to think more systematically about how...to continue to improve professional development of supervisors [and] understand a slightly different approach to management'. (*Wider stakeholder*)

A small number of providers felt that placements were effective (in terms of encouraging paid employment as an outcome) where an SI placement was regarded as a long-term job interview by the employer. This meant that at all stages of the programme, the young person and employer remained mindful to consider progress against the potential for sustained employment following the end of the SI.

3.2.2 The role of the job coach

Job coaches are individuals appointed by the training provider to give individual one-to-one support to young people in the workplace. Although approaches to this support varied, it typically included delivering personalised training to young people, encouraging them to become independent during the course of the SI, and liaising with employers, other colleagues in the workplace, and the families of young people where required. The majority of interviewees, including both providers and stakeholders, specifically emphasised that the role and quality of the job coach was critical to the success of SIs. The work that they undertook included delivering training and support on-site in the placement, including systematic instruction with young people to help them learn the job that they had been allocated by employers. They would also work with employers and the wider workforce to help them to understand the needs and requirements of each intern. Additional training and support included independent travel training with young people, and safeguarding training in the workplace.

'The managers and teams in the [employer's] department still have jobs that they need to do, so it is vital for the job coach to help train young person. Job coaches need to help train to make young people travel safe'. (*Wider stakeholder*)

Consequently, job coaches were described as the 'glue of the programme' and the conduit between young people, employers, providers and parents/carers ([see section 2.2.7](#)).

Many interviewees (both providers and stakeholders) said that job coaches would be involved with employer engagement, networking and promoting the SI programme to local businesses. They would also liaise with parents/carers and staff within provider settings (for a description of approaches to support in the workplace, e.g. 'place, train and fade', [see section 2.2.3](#)).

As a result of the wide-ranging nature of the job coach role and the range of specialist tasks involved, several providers and stakeholders emphasised the importance of training for job coaches. However, it should be noted that little specific detail was offered by interviewees as to what this job coach training should constitute or its current level of availability. Some noted the importance of training for job coaches in how to support young people with SEND appropriately in the workplace, and that the cost of this training could be prohibitive.

'What works best is if job coaches are trained. This is a huge critical success factor. When [job coaches] are appropriately trained, they know how to work with the young person and employer. And [they] understand how to engage with employers – that is [where the role is] most successful'. (*Wider stakeholder*)

3.2.3 Parental/carers support

The support and encouragement of parents and carers were highlighted by providers as especially important in increasing the prospects of young people in securing and sustaining employment. For example, supportive parents were said to be instrumental in ensuring that a young person maintained their motivation and would help them to identify suitable placements or job opportunities.

'[SIs are successful] where parents are on board and pushing the young person to [attend] their work placement [each] morning...Support at home is crucial. If a young person has had a bad day at work, they need that support at home'. (*GFE college*)

Providers and wider stakeholders therefore emphasised that clear communication was essential between providers, employers, young people and their parents/carers. They said that it was particularly important that young people and parents/carers understood what an internship involved and what the expectations were. This included ensuring that parents/carers had equally high aspirations for young people as the providers and employers did ([see section 2.2.4](#) on approaches taken by some providers to engage with families). One provider suggested that a formal agreement should be in place between all parties, so that expectations could be clarified and confirmed early on.

'Support at home [is crucial to success]. Having a real honest conversation [with parents and carers] about benefits at beginning of internship. Being absolutely clear that the purpose of the course is to get [the young person into] paid employment and they might have to sacrifice benefits'. (*GFE college*)

A small number of providers talked about the need to have a potential progression route established from the beginning of the SI, through discussion with the young person and parents/carers. This ensured that there was a clear pathway and aim identified for the conclusion of the internship.

3.2.4 Motivated young people

A common theme throughout the interviews, and highlighted by providers as a critical success factor for SIs, was that a young person needed to be motivated and willing to work. As noted in [section 2.2.1](#), many providers said that a key aspect of initially selecting young people for the programme was identifying those with the motivation and/or aspiration to work.

Providers felt that young people needed to set realistic targets for the SI programme (including maintaining their focus on employment as the main aim), and that these targets should be discussed and agreed with employers. It was therefore important to set clear and realistic expectations with employers in relation to specific aspects of the workday such as uniform standards, punctuality and patterns of work.

Providers suggested that the initial motivation and aspirations of young people could then be developed through honest and clear communications between young people and employers. They emphasised that this would help to foster determination, resilience and the motivation to succeed. In addition, they suggested that the development of positive relationships between young people and employers could be encouraged during the initial job-profiling and job-matching process, to ensure the placement corresponded well with the intern's interests and motivations.

'When [the] student has an input into where they choose where to work, they have buy-in [to the success of the programme]'. (*GFE college*)

Other factors mentioned by a few providers in sustaining employment were the ability of the intern to travel independently and the location of the role (so that it was easily accessible for them), and the provision of (or signposting to) high quality follow-up support for employers and/or young people at the end of the SI placement.

3.3 Challenges to success

Interviewees reported three main challenges to success for SIs:

- Anxieties of parents and carers.
- Employer buy-in.
- Complexities related to Access to Work funding.

3.3.1 Anxieties of parents and carers

Interviewees stated that parental anxieties, for example in relation to the financial implications of gaining employment and potential loss of welfare payments, are a key barrier to the success of SIs in helping young people gain and sustain employment. Several reported that benefits were commonly paid directly to parents/carers because the young people were dependents. Consequently, parents/carers were reported to be concerned that if the young person gained employment for more than 16 hours per week there could be a negative impact on wider household budgets, which they would be unable to mitigate.

Providers described examples of young people being offered employment at the end of an SI, but the opportunity being turned down because of parental pressure to do so.

'We work a lot with parents to [try to] put their minds at rest and educate them about the reality of the situation regarding benefits. This is just not something that we can always tackle... This is very hard when the learner wants the job and yet the family won't allow it....Job coaches become really frustrated. We do all we can to enable the young person to get paid work. Lots of intensive one-to-one support. We can see the capability in the intern and yet the parents [are not supportive]'. (*GFE college*)

Providers felt that, aside from the financial implications of such a change, parents/carers could have low aspirations for the young person and therefore not openly encourage them to succeed on the programme. Sometimes this was attributed to anxiety on the part of the parents/carers regarding the young person's increased levels of independence while on the SI programme, which they thought may not be sustainable in the long-term or after the support offered during the programme had faded.

3.3.2 Employer buy-in

As discussed previously, some providers reported that engaging employers was a challenge. Providers tended to attribute this to a lack of understanding among employers regarding SEN and high needs, including whether they would be able to manage and support young people adequately in the workplace.

‘Getting employers to realise what skills and attributes the young person has, rather than looking at what they can’t do could be a massive challenge. It is getting past that to get them engaged in’. (*GFE college*)

Several providers spoke about the challenges that they faced recruiting employers from specific sectors. For example, retail employers were perceived to be reluctant to take on placements between November and January due to the intensity of the work required through this period. Smaller employers often recruited on a seasonal basis, or did not have the capacity to work closely with interns. Large employers were felt to be difficult to engage due to the ongoing demand from providers for work experience placements across a range of training programmes.

Some suggested that employers may not accept that interns may struggle to learn appropriate behaviours such as punctuality. Others thought that large employers could be most difficult to engage; this was sometimes dependent on area and location, including rural areas with a limited employer base.

A small number of providers and stakeholders commented on the risk of employer saturation. Specifically, providers were concerned about the range of training programmes that required employer engagement and the availability of work placements or work experience opportunities. This often meant that larger employers had developed existing relationships with providers to support other training programmes. Stakeholders also mentioned the introduction of T levels and the consequent increase in demand for potential work placements. They suggested that traineeships, apprenticeships and SIs could be considered holistically as a package by providers, to mitigate these risks to employer engagement.

In addition, competition for employers meant that providers did not share employer contacts with one another. Providers indicated that this risked the interns’ individual aspirations for particular job roles being less central to delivery, if they were unable to source employers to match vocational profiles. A small number of stakeholders expressed doubts as to whether providers were genuinely aiming for paid employment for all interns; they suspected that some placements were being treated more like work experience. If the placements were not being set up with the explicit intention that they should lead to paid work, then they believed that the chances of paid work being offered at the end were much reduced. Providers themselves, however, consistently

described the core aim of the SI provision as to secure paid employment for the young people (see [section 3.1](#)).

3.3.3 Complexities relating to Access to Work

While most of the providers interviewed did not provide substantial detail relating to funding sources and levels ([see section 2.3](#)), they also commonly perceived that the process and procedure for applying for AtW funding was excessively complicated. Wider stakeholders made similar comments, explaining that an AtW application needed to be submitted per placement per young person, which could create substantial administration burdens on providers. They also reported that decisions on applications could be variable, and the reasons for such decisions unclear.

There was a degree of confusion among interviewees regarding what exactly could be applied for and when. Some providers had applied to AtW funding to cover transportation costs for young people, the costs of the job coach, and the job coach's travel to employers. Other providers stated clearly that these elements were not eligible for funding.

3.3.4 Other challenges

Several providers reported that young people could have unrealistic expectations or aspirations as to what they would achieve at the end of the SI, or the kind of opportunities that were available in the local area. If young people had a very fixed idea of the type of work that they wanted to do, providers found it challenging to identify an appropriate job match amongst the employers engaged with the programme. Furthermore, some providers noted that sustained employment was a challenge for young people where they were required to travel independently to the workplace and did not receive AtW funding to cover this.

A few providers and stakeholders noted that employers were not always able to offer paid work at the end of an SI programme, even where the intern was working to the standard required. They attributed this to a lack of entry-level opportunities, or a lack of roles requiring the skills that the young person had been able to develop during the SI programme. Smaller employers were reported to have restricted budgets and limited opportunities for sustained employment, although they were often easier to engage at the start of SIs. This latter point echoes the concern that some stakeholders raised, that placements were being set up when it was clear from the start that the employer was unlikely to be able to offer paid work at the end of the SI. Stakeholders described this as leading to something more akin to extended work experience than an internship ([see section 3.3.2](#)).

In addition, some employers were reported to not be prepared to make adjustments to formal interview and application processes, despite the statutory requirement to make reasonable adjustments, and this could create challenges for interns. One stakeholder also suggested that providers did not provide adequate information to employers about the types of follow-on support that were available to them at the end of the SI programme and once they had recruited an intern permanently.

3.4 Overcoming challenges

Alongside the challenges identified during delivery, providers and stakeholders offered feedback as to how these needed to be overcome, and where they had seen examples of practice in these areas. Their comments predominantly focused on the provision of information and guidance, as well as raising awareness of the opportunities available to young people and employers via SIs.

- **Engaging and recruiting employers:** some providers viewed effective employer engagement as being a core solution in overcoming the challenges they faced in delivering SIs. They commonly spoke of wishing to engage with larger employers, so that they could offer internships across a range of roles/departments. However, for engagement levels to increase, providers and stakeholders recognised that employers needed to understand more about the programme, the benefits of taking on SIs in the workplace, and the support available to them for doing so; this included providing information on ways to support accessible recruitment and raise disability awareness. Some suggested the need for more visible national branding ([see section 4.3.1](#)). No providers referred specifically to using existing materials, such as the customisable SI employer leaflet available via the Education and Training Foundation's website.²⁴ This suggests that providers are not aware of the range of resources already available to help them with employer engagement. One provider reported developing their own guidance documents, which they had found helpful to disseminate to employers as part of the engagement process.

'I made an employer guide to supported internships which has been very useful. I made a brochure explaining the programme. I do lots of work on site with organisations, for example twice a week I visit our large employer and work with HR and the job management team. They are then able to take information across the company. It is very useful to have information like this guide to give employers information at the beginning and then leave them to digest it as a point of reference'.

(Provider, third sector)

²⁴ <https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf2876>

- **Addressing concerns of parents/carers:** Many providers reported that they tried to engage with parents and carers in a range of ways in order to explain the aims of the SI and to help to support them with questions and concerns that they raised in relation to pastoral issues, safeguarding and the financial impact of young people gaining employment. Some providers worked with external agencies to obtain information and support (including working through budget calculations with them). Providers would also work with external agencies to raise aspirations among parents and carers, and to highlight the long-term benefits to young people of participating in the workplace and gaining independence.
- **Marketing and promotion of SIs:** This included ensuring that the personalised approach of SIs was emphasised within information materials. Some providers suggested that schools should be encouraged to embed consideration of employment and training pathways, including SIs, into the support provided to young people with high needs at a much earlier stage in their education. They felt that this would also lead to the development of some skills required for employment prior to young people arriving at college, e.g. travel training.

Providers and stakeholders also mentioned: ensuring independent travel training was completed before the internship commenced, enabling the provision of a longer internship programme (e.g. two years) to enable increased skills development prior to young people applying for employment, and ensuring that the specific needs of young people were clearly communicated before they began their placements with employers.

Additional suggestions were made regarding the support that providers said that they would appreciate from the DfE – these are discussed in [section 4](#).

4. Development and support

This section looks at the ways in which the interviewees felt that SI provision could be further developed. This includes the development work that providers were already undertaking themselves, the support that they felt would help them build on the successes of the SI programme to date, and changes to policy or eligibility criteria that were suggested by some.

4.1 Future development

Reflecting the feedback on overcoming barriers, the promotion of SIs was a common focus for providers when asked about potential areas of future development. They were aware of the need to promote the successes that had been achieved to date, or they described the work that they were already undertaking to celebrate the achievements of young people progressing from their provision. This included the use of digital media such as video case studies to showcase the progress that young people were making, illustrate the possibilities to others, build employer awareness and increase engagement levels.

'We need to do more to sing out the successes and therefore build confidence below. One of the things that we have done on the local offer is to have seven or eight films [which] describe the story of young people...following their story to independent living... and promote that confidence [in others]. So we have got young people that we follow on the video, different types of young people following different types of routes so that people watching can identify with them'. (*Local authority provider*)

For others, however, the most suitable format for marketing these successes remained unclear, due to the range of stakeholders involved and the variety of messages that needed to be communicate to different audiences. This created confusion and frustration for providers, which suggests the need for support for providers in developing effective and appropriate marketing messages that can engage a range of audiences.

'We have strong case studies about how SI worked well. I need to think about what format and who do I need to get it to? It is a different marketing campaign for employers, SENCOs and young people and parents, because success means different things to different people... I'm planning now. We have learners offered the new apprenticeship pathway. We will use this as a success case study and advertise [to local employers]'. (*GFE college*)

Several providers commented that, alongside increased visibility, the timings of their SI delivery needed to change. This commonly reflected the perceived need for the programme to run on a rolling basis, rather than having fixed start times (usually September). These providers recognised that running the programme more akin to employment patterns rather than an academic year would be beneficial in developing the work readiness of interns (e.g. attending placements throughout the year rather than just during term time, and young people being required to request leave from employers). For other providers, the ability to offer placements at different start points meant that there would be increased flexibility within the programme itself, which better reflected the variety of young people applying for SIs.

Small numbers of providers said that, going forward, they would like to be able to track the progress of interns more effectively so that they could understand where young people progress longer-term, and offer more follow-up support for them (e.g. ongoing peer group networks).

4.2 Extending provision

During the telephone discussions, providers were asked whether they had specifically considered expanding provision. Many stated that they had either started the process of expansion, or they were considering how they could do so. This work took on a variety of forms and often involved:

- Working with employers and other partners to explore options for expansion or increasing the number of interns recruited to the programme.
- Developing new marketing/promotional campaigns to raise awareness of SIs.
- Creating different opportunities for recruiting interns and increasing the number to be supported each year.

These ideas were commonly being developed simultaneously rather than as separate strands of work. The employers that these providers were hoping to engage were larger organisations such as local authorities or national employers with a base geographically close to the provider. Providers believed that these organisations were likely to offer more potential opportunities for a larger number of recruits, as well as the being able to establish long-term relationships to help meet the needs of future intakes to the SI programme. In turn, some providers (and a small number of stakeholders) suggested that engagement with larger organisations would help to increase the visibility of the SI programme more generally. Consequently, interviewees said, this would support efforts to promote the provider's offer to young people.

'My next task is that I want the council to get involved... because [local councils are involved in other areas and] they are one of the biggest employers in our area. The number of different work opportunities

available there is quite...I think it would be a really good promotion for the internship. It would [offer] a massive variety of different roles and a really good opportunity for young people. Everything from administration to working in parks... [We need to be] going into the community, getting our message across that these young people really do want to work, and getting more external providers involved so that we have more options for them and more potential paid outcomes'. (*GFE college*).

Several providers were looking at opportunities for partnering with other providers or merging SI provision in order to help increase the capacity available for recruiting young people to the SI programme, for example through the creation of local hubs of provision.

A small number of providers were looking at the possibility of developing opportunities for creating placements and employment routes for SIs within their own organisations. For example, one suggested that the creation of a new food outlet on site would provide the option for interns to work within that space, gaining vocational qualifications and subsequently taking up employment to run it in the longer-term.

4.2.1 Barriers to expansion

Some interview participants (including providers and stakeholders) reported that a lack of placements stopped them from expanding SI provision. Interviewees felt that buy-in from larger employers was a challenge, the areas in which providers were located meant that transport/travel requirements made some placements inaccessible for young people, and that opportunities were becoming more challenging to secure in certain economic sectors.

'We have tried to get some very big employers on board...but we are struggling to get them...There are lots of services in the [health and care sector], for example. Porterage, washing, cleaning [but] these are now all out-sourced. That means we cannot work with one company to find placements. It is not so simple to place supported interns because the increased number of [subcontracted services] is a real barrier'. (*GFE college*)

A few providers and stakeholders noted that the development of future provision would be dependent on their ability to recruit appropriately skilled and qualified job coaches, because they felt that the success of the SI was often dependent on the work that job coaches undertook with young people and employers. This included the need to train job coaches so that providers were not reliant on part-time or agency staff, as this was felt by some to reduce the consistency of support available to young people.

'It is becoming clear...that we do need to free up job coaches to be able to act as job coaches. We are at a critical mass because we can't take on any more supported interns at some providers. That is because there are not enough job coaches to do the job coach role'. (*Stakeholder*)

More generally, some providers regarded limitations in staffing levels, a lack of space for delivering off-the-job training to interns, and a lack of funding as challenges to developing SI provision.

'Some young people are being referred to us now and need assessments and events early in the year before enrolment time so that we can work together and put together the best plan. We need to do taster days and work with parents early on. Barriers would be that we need more staff'. (*GFE college*)

4.2.2 Eligibility criteria

Some providers highlighted that there were young people who would benefit from the SI programme but who were not eligible as they did not have an EHCP in place. Several spoke of young people who had 'slipped through the net' in terms of obtaining an EHCP, but who also required a lot of support to access training and employment effectively.

'The EHCP is a requirement. Many young people have the same needs as those with the EHCP, but they don't have a plan so they can't access the supported internship. They would often manage a [work placement] if they could access support from a job coach. This would make their chances of employment much more successful. It is very frustrating'. (*GFE college*)

Providers also suggested that there were some young people eligible for SI programmes for whom other approaches to education and training would be more appropriate. These included those young people who lacked the independence and/or skills to cope with an SI or paid employment. As a result, this led providers to the suggestion that some learners required experience of a foundation study programme before commencing an SI, or should be signposted to other opportunities that would be more appropriate to their circumstances.²⁵

²⁵ The Post-16 Skills Plan suggests that 'All young people with EHC plans should undertake a supported internship, which includes an extended work placement, unless there is a good reason not to do so'. See BIS and DfE (2016), *Post-16 Skills Plan*, p.31.

4.2.3 Profile of young people and follow-on support

The age of young people eligible for SIs was queried by some providers. There were difficulties reported by some, where a learner began an internship before they were work ready/at a young age (e.g. before the age of 18) and did not gain paid employment at the end. Providers' concerns were related to the availability of follow-on support or further education/training for this cohort of young people. For example, providers reported that once a learner had completed an SI, this typically represented completion of education outcomes within an EHCP and led to the ceasing of the plan. Thus, where employment had not been secured by a young person, some LAs were not then funding further education opportunities.

4.3 Support for providers

Interviewees offered a range of suggestions as to the kinds of support that they would find useful from DfE in rolling out more supported internships to deliver sustained employment outcomes. Again, these focused on the additional promotion of SIs, guidance and clarity for different audiences, along with networking and training opportunities for SI providers.

4.3.1 SI branding

Reflecting other comments on the promotion of SIs, interviewees suggested that the DfE could help to increase the visibility of the programme, so that awareness was raised as to the opportunities that internships created for young people and employers. For example, several providers thought that the SI programme required clearer branding so that there was a nationally identifiable logo and format for publicity materials, much in the way that apprenticeships and other training programmes had become recognisable to employers. It was perceived by some that a quality assurance standard (e.g. a kite mark) for SI provision also would be a useful tool for demonstrating the validity and credibility of the opportunities on offer.

4.3.2 Guidance

Although a range of guidance materials is already available in relation to the delivery of SIs, providers appeared to be largely unaware of it or did not know where to look for it. As such, some providers and most stakeholders felt that there needed to be more guidance and information available as to what an SI was, what it entailed and the implications of enrolling onto one.

Interviewees suggested that this guidance needed to be made available to the range of stakeholders involved in the delivery of SIs ([see section 5.2](#)). Often the challenges for providers and barriers for young people were felt to be similar, i.e. a lack of understanding as to what SI provision was, the complexities of the funding system, and concerns regarding the future opportunities and pathways available to young people once the programme had been completed. Guidance documents were therefore felt to be particularly important for:

- **Parents:** To address concerns regarding the impact on welfare entitlements if a young person completed the SI programme, and the opportunities available to them as a result of engaging with the world of work.
- **Employers:** This included the need to promote the benefits to employers of engaging with the SI programme (e.g. filling recruitment gaps), what the SI was and how interns (and employers) were supported by providers throughout the duration of the programme. Several colleges had created their own guidance materials, including employer engagement resources. Whilst examples were available on the Excellence Gateway, it was clear that providers were unaware of these and how they could be used.
- **Providers:** Particularly in relation to the variable aspects of delivery, the approaches taken by other providers, and clarifying Access to Work criteria and application processes. Providers felt that it was important to share good practice, case studies and examples of how others had overcome challenges in offering bespoke support to young people, their parents/carers and employers. Stakeholders suggested that this also needed to include guidance relating to the role of job coach and the importance of the 'place, train and fade' approach, promotion of existing SI forums and signposting providers to Excellence Gateway resources.

'Guidance for supported internships for providers is really quite vague. It would be useful if [DfE] could introduce more structured, specific guidance for providers. [This could include] more case studies from providers with different models so that we could see other ways of doing things'. (*Third sector provider*)

Through the development of this guidance, providers thought that the DfE could take a role in raising aspirations and changing mindsets by sharing success stories and celebrating the achievements of young people undertaking SIs. Case studies of provision, the benefits to employers of recruiting interns and the progress made by young people through the programme were felt to be vital elements of any guidance and information going forward.

4.3.3 Networks and training

Where they belonged to existing SI forums, providers found these to be a valuable source of support and partnership working. However, membership or use of these appeared to be limited. Six providers mentioned that they belonged to SI forums, or were in the process of setting one up. Others stated that they would like regional networks to be set up either by local authorities or other central organisations to allow them to meet and share ideas, good practice, support, training and links to wider stakeholders. This latter point indicated a lack of awareness among providers about existing SI forums, suggesting that the promotion of these could be improved.

'We are members of an SI forum which the local authority started. Through this there are now a couple of external referral routes established into our SI [e.g. from special schools in the local area]. We are happy to [receive] referrals from them...so we are now their planned progress route...The SI forum [also holds] a networking event in September locally to raise profiles with parents and employers to breakdown their fears'. (*GFE college*)

4.3.4 Requests for change

Other suggestions were offered by a small number of providers and stakeholders and were related to changes to policy or eligibility criteria, rather than for support in the delivery or promotion of SI programmes. In summary, these suggestions were:

- Recognition, including incentives, for employers participating in the programme.
- A small number of providers felt that the DfE's 2018 SEND preparation for employment grant had been very useful in allowing them to appoint people to lead on SIs and develop networks in their region. They suggested that this funding should be continued.
- A small number of providers talked about developing SI provision by working with more mainstream schools and sixth form colleges. They felt that schools should include more information about the opportunities for young people with SEND within careers guidance. This included providing young people and their parents/carers with information about SIs at a much earlier stage in their education.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This final section provides a summary of the main findings emerging from the telephone interviews with 42 SI providers and eight wider stakeholders, and points for the DfE to consider in relation to models of delivery, critical success factors, challenges to delivery and areas where providers may require additional support.

5.1 Models and approaches to SI delivery

Providers generally regarded the models that they delivered as being largely consistent with DfE's four principles for SI delivery. However, stakeholders questioned one or two key elements, specifically in relation to the duration of work placements and the profile of young people accessing SI opportunities. There was some evidence to suggest that, in a small number of cases, there may be deviation from DfE's principles by providers (e.g. low proportion of on-the-job time).

All approaches to SI delivery included a core structure of three key elements – employer placement, off-the-job learning, job coach support – but there were variations in how each of these were delivered by providers. These variations in delivery could be attributed to providers' experience of what had worked well for them, plus decision-making driven by individual needs of each intern, local contexts and other constraints such as funding and employer capacity.

Most providers adapted their model of delivery to meet individual learner needs, interests and aspirations wherever possible. They also reported being impacted by the willingness and availability of employers to offer work placements to young people with SEND, and funding constraints.

The lack of financial data offered by interviewees in terms of costs/funding means that it has not been possible to draw firm conclusions about the impact of funding on the delivery models adopted by providers (see [section 5.3](#)). However, many providers made reference to funding constraints. They reported that a perceived lack of adequate funding had limited the number of job coaches/other staff recruited to the programme, the number of employers engaged and therefore the number of internship opportunities available within each cohort.

5.2 Factors associated with success

Although it was not in the remit of this study to identify a specific model that is most successful in terms of enabling young people to secure sustained employment, providers identified four core features which they commonly felt contributed to the success of the programme:

- **Employer commitment** to the success of SI delivery, including developing their disability awareness, being willing to job carve roles to suit young people and preparing their existing workforce so that each intern could be appropriately supported. Providers regarded work-based buddy systems or mentoring schemes (independent of the role of the SI job coach) as particularly valuable for establishing positive, support working environments for young people and enhancing their potential for securing employment.
- **The work of the job coach** was regarded as a crucial element of SI delivery by all interviewees involved in this research. Interviewees saw job coaches as pivotal because they supported young people, their parents/carers and employers. They therefore offered a vital point of connection between the range of individuals involved in the programme. Many providers noted that it was important that job coaches were trained in specialist skills such as systematic instruction and that this level of (commonly one-to-one) support for young people could be costly to deliver. Stakeholders raised concerns that job coaches were not always qualified individuals, and recruitment challenges were identified by providers. However, their role was considered to be instrumental to the effectiveness of overall delivery and the ability for young people to progress into employment.
- **Parental/carer support** for young people to develop their independence and secure permanent employment was felt to be fundamental for the success of the programme. Providers perceived that where parents/carers were seen to be supportive, they encouraged young people to remain motivated throughout the duration of the programme, supported them through the challenges that they encountered and helped them to find job opportunities. Several providers therefore highlighted that they had learned over to time to work closely with parents/carers throughout the duration of the programme, to ensure that information and communication delivered to them regarding the SI programme was clear and consistent.
- **Positive levels of motivation** being demonstrated by the young people themselves was also perceived to be fundamental to the success of the SI programme. Providers commonly reported that young people needed to 'want to work', demonstrate that they can manage the demands of being in the workplace on a daily/weekly basis, and a motivation/interest in succeeding in work. Where job-profiling was subsequently employed by providers to match young people with placements that reflected their interests, providers felt it more likely that the placement would succeed and the young person would progress into paid employment.

There were some tensions indicated between the specific definition of success suggested to providers – SIs leading to paid employment – and providers' perceptions

of the range of positive outcomes demonstrated by young people completing the programme. The latter included interns' progression from SIs to volunteering roles, apprenticeship routes (and other further education and training opportunities), and the development of soft outcomes such as, increased confidence, independence and communication skills. These tensions were reflected by some stakeholders who questioned whether providers were always setting up SIs with the explicit goal of achieving paid employment for young people; they suspected that some placements were being treated more like extended work experience, rather than having the realistic prospect of paid employment as an outcome. However, providers consistently reported that securing employment was a core aim of their SI delivery.

Recommendation: the DfE could consider updating its guidance to emphasise further that while such skills and independence development are welcome gains, the *primary* goal of an SI is paid employment (as per transition to adulthood). The guidance could encourage providers to consider such issues as: 'Is this the best time for the young person to undertake an SI? Will they be ready for the world of work following this programme, or would they be better to undertake some further preparatory work (perhaps focused on personal and social development and communication skills first)?'

Any updated guidance should include an expectation that where paid employment is not achieved, the provider ensures a suitably positive alternative destination (e.g. volunteering) as a step towards paid employment.

Interviews with providers highlighted a lack of accurate data on SIs currently held by DfE/ESFA (e.g. as a result of providers struggling to complete the ILR accurately). There also appeared to be a lack of comprehensive or systematic data collection at provider level in relation to destinations and long-term employment outcomes for young people following SIs, meaning that it is unclear as to the extent to which SIs are achieving the aim of securing paid and sustained employment for young people.

Recommendation: Future work to standardise the way that SI outcomes and costs data are recorded, and long-term impact tracked, may be helpful for providers to measure their success and for a national picture of SI provision and its value for money. The development of clear guidance would also be helpful for individuals compiling and submitting ILR data specific to SIs.

This report has focused on the perceptions of SI providers and wider stakeholders. As such, the project methodology did not include analyses of provision or practice, or data interrogation to establish causal relationships between features and outcomes.

Recommendation: A further piece of work focused on the quality of provision (e.g. a thematic review by Ofsted) may be useful. This might lead to the development of a quality mark for providers offering SI programmes that are consistent with DfE principles/guidance. However, the DfE would need to consider the need to balance flexibility for individuals with prescriptive quality requirements.

5.3 Barriers to success

A common issue raised by providers throughout the interviews was a lack of awareness of SIs among employers and parents/carers as key stakeholders in the programme. Many providers felt that this negatively affected employer engagement with SIs.

Recommendation: DfE could consider developing a one-stop information hub for supported internships, including recognisable branding and logos clearly demonstrating that the programme is a national rather than local initiative. This hub could include content for employers, such as case studies and testimonials to address concerns/queries and demonstrate how the programme has benefited them and/or their business. This would include presentation of the business case and demonstration of how SIs can solve recruitment issues/fill skills gaps, and also how supervisors and other staff can be trained to support interns in the workplace as buddies/mentors.

Providers and stakeholders indicated that there was significant parental concern regarding the potential loss of welfare payments as a result of young people engaging with the SI programme. Providers described examples of young people being offered employment at the end of an SI, but the opportunity being turned down due to parental pressure.

Recommendation: DfE could consider how a one-stop information hub may also be used to communicate with parents/carers, enabling them to more easily access better-off calculators and tools. This could include: the purpose and intention of SIs, particularly around securing paid employment, expectations that young people will be in the workplace and not primarily at college (and the implications of this on attendance patterns), the support young people will receive, ways in which parents could support young people during an SI and case studies showcasing positive outcomes.

Increased partnership working between providers and external agencies such as JobCentre Plus could also be encouraged to help families work through these

challenges. Separate research with providers and parents/carers could help to identify the financial impact of SIs and how this may be mitigated in future.

Providers saw funding for the delivery of SIs as a challenge, with the complexity of the AtW application process a very common point of feedback. However, many interviewees indicated that they were unable to provide specific detail about the way in which SIs were funded and the specific costs involved.

Recommendation: A separate, focused study would aid understanding about funding levels/constraints faced by providers, and explore ways in which the Access to Work application process could be streamlined. This could include interviews with those making funding decisions about SIs, those with access to budgetary data, as well as providers that have ceased to offer SIs. This study should also include the development or revision of guidance for providers, which explicitly sets out the elements of SI delivery that are eligible for funding via Access to Work.

Interviewees emphasised the crucial role of the job coach throughout the research. However, a shortage of trained job coaches risks limiting growth and potentially diluting the quality of SIs (e.g. where untrained job coaches are being deployed instead).

Recommendation: The government should invest in developing the job coach workforce, for example as a strand within the proposed SEND workforce development programme overseen by the SEND Leadership Board.

There appeared to be a lack of awareness among providers of existing SI forums. However, many providers noted that they would like to be able to network and share practice with others delivering SI programmes.

Recommendation: DfE and local authorities should consider how existing SI forums could be better promoted to increase awareness among providers of the support available to them, encourage uptake and increase opportunities within local areas for peer-to-peer guidance and development.

5.4 SI eligibility

Restricting SIs to those with EHCPs only may be leading to some learners who would benefit from the approach missing out, particularly given the inconsistency with which EHCPs are allocated across local authorities.

Recommendation: DfE could consider widening current SI eligibility criteria, including whether to make funded job coaching support available to a broader range of learners who would otherwise not be able to sustain or benefit from an extended work placement because of their additional needs, disability or other vulnerability.

5.5 SI suitability

Feedback from some providers suggests that the current policy position that SIs should be the default programme for post-16 learners with an EHCP (unless there is a 'good reason' for them not to take this route) may be leading to inappropriate selection processes and/or recruitment to the programme in some cases, e.g. learners who are too young, not yet ready, or possibly unlikely to benefit from an SI.

Recommendation: DfE could consider offering guidance on learner readiness indicators and clarify that many young people need a post-16 pathway to employment that includes preparatory provision to allow them to build confidence, independence and understanding of career options before they progress to an SI and from there to work.

5.6 Considerations for providers

On the basis of the findings of this research, providers might consider:

- Ascertaining whether or not the local authority has set up an SI forum, and where it has, become actively engaged in that forum as a means of coordinating planning and activity around SIs and in particular for brokering good quality work placements.
- Establishing whether the local authority is still providing job coaching training, as a result of the £9 million government grant delivered in 2018, and access this training where it exists.
- Familiarising themselves with available leaflets which can be used to explain SIs to different stakeholders including those produced by [Preparing for Adulthood](https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads)²⁶ and the [Education and Training Foundation](https://send.excellencegateway.org.uk/employers-and-employability)²⁷.
- Strengthening data collection linked to SI success, including tracking learners for six to 12 months after completion in order to determine the longer-term impact of the SI and sustainability of any employment achieved.

²⁶ <https://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/downloads>

²⁷ <https://send.excellencegateway.org.uk/employers-and-employability>

- Working closely with Management Information Systems (MIS) colleagues to ensure ILR data on SI learners is accurately recorded.
- Carefully defining and applying learner suitability criteria for SI programmes to ensure learners most likely to benefit from an SI are enrolled at a point when they are socially and emotionally ready to take the final step away from full-time education and training and into work.
- Where SIs form part of their offer for learners with SEND, ensuring that:
 - There are clear pathways through their provision to take a 16+ learner on a planned journey towards work, with the SI representing the final stage in that journey.
 - SIs are distinctive from more general preparation for employment programmes, specifically that they have as their primary goal, an outcome of paid employment and that a significant majority of the learning takes place in the workplace.



Department
for Education

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Reference: DfE-1819-AP035

ISBN: 978-1-83870-097-3

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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