



Department
for Education

Evaluation of the strengthening of the supported internship programme Research report

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Mary's University**



Government
Social Research

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| List of tables | 5 |
| Glossary | 6 |
| Executive summary | 8 |
| Methodology | 8 |
| Key findings | 9 |
| Conclusions and recommendations | 14 |
| Introduction | 17 |
| About supported internships | 17 |
| Strengthening of the supported internship programme | 18 |
| Evaluation aims | 19 |
| Evaluation approach | 21 |
| Surveys | 22 |
| Qualitative fieldwork | 24 |
| Secondary data analysis | 25 |
| Costing of supported internships and value for money | 26 |
| Methodological considerations | 28 |
| Reading this report | 29 |
| Quantity and growth of supported internships | 31 |
| The number and profile of supported internships | 32 |
| Enablers of supported internship recruitment and engagement | 33 |
| Future demand for supported internships | 43 |
| Experiences of supported internships | 46 |
| Young people's experiences of supported internships | 46 |
| Employers' experiences of supported internships | 50 |
| Job coaches' perspectives on supported internships | 52 |
| Embedding quality in supported internship programmes | 54 |
| Exploring quality through SIQAF domains | 54 |
| Provider perspectives on changes in quality over the investment period | 58 |
| Facilitators of high quality provision | 61 |
| Role of the job coach | 61 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Person-centred planning | 62 |
| Commitment to the supported internship programme | 64 |
| Internships Work activities | 64 |
| Work mentor and other colleagues | 70 |
| Meeting business needs | 70 |
| Supported internships Pilot | 71 |
| Outcomes for young people | 73 |
| Employment outcomes and destinations over the investment period – EHCP interns | 74 |
| Employment outcomes and destinations over the investment period – Pilot interns | 77 |
| Key factors contributing to employment outcomes | 78 |
| Young people’s confidence | 80 |
| Preparation for work | 81 |
| Preparation for adulthood | 83 |
| Participation in society | 83 |
| Health and wellbeing | 84 |
| The wider impact of supported internships and value for money | 85 |
| Demand for and acceptability of a supported internship costing tool – findings from the costing feasibility study | 86 |
| Challenges with recording supported internship costs | 87 |
| Cost per intern | 88 |
| Exploring value for money | 88 |
| Supported internship programme - systemic challenges and risks | 97 |
| Securing sufficient supported internship placements | 97 |
| The changing labour market | 99 |
| Misunderstanding and misconceptions about SEND | 100 |
| Intern readiness – interns with EHCP | 101 |
| Intern readiness – Pilot interns | 103 |
| Parent and carer readiness | 103 |
| Funding and resources | 105 |
| Accurate and consistent messaging of supported internships | 108 |
| Staffing instability | 109 |
| Setting up new and extending supported internship provision | 110 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Conclusions and recommendations | 111 |
| Increase in the quantity and growth of supported internships | 111 |
| Perceived improvements in the quality of supported internships | 112 |
| Early indications of improving employment and wider outcomes | 113 |
| Emerging evidence of value for money | 115 |
| Systemic challenges persist in an ever more challenging labour market | 115 |
| Supported internships Pilot – early insights | 115 |
| Recommendations | 116 |
| Appendix 1: Theory of Change | 119 |

List of tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Surveys included in analysis | 23 |
| Table 2: Case study provider type | 25 |
| Table 3: Changes in quality - providers | 59 |
| Table 4: Comparing number of interns and number securing paid employment..... | 77 |
| Table 5: Cost per intern (with EHCP)..... | 88 |
| Table 6: Expenditure (with EHCP) | 89 |
| Table 7: Destinations (employment of interns with EHCP) | 90 |

Glossary

| | |
|---------|---|
| A level | Advanced Level |
| AtW | Access to Work |
| BASE | The British Association of Supported Employment |
| BSL | British Sign Language |
| BTEC | Business and Technology Education Council |
| CGR | CooperGibson Research |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development |
| CPR | Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation |
| CV | Curriculum Vitae |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| DLA | Disability Living Allowance |
| DWP | Department for Work and Pensions |
| EDI | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion |
| EHCP | Education, Health and Care Plan |
| FRS | Family Resources Survey |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| HMRC | His Majesty's Revenue and Customs |
| IDACI | Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index |
| ILR | Individualised Learner Record |
| LA | Local Authority |
| LDD | Learning Difficulty and/or Disability |
| LEP | Local Education Partnership |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| LEO | Longitudinal Education Outcomes |

| | |
|-------|--|
| NDTi | National Development Team for Inclusion |
| NEET | Not in Education, Employment or Training |
| NHS | National Health Service |
| NICE | National Institute for Health and Care Excellence |
| NPD | National Pupil Database |
| NSEF | National SEND Employment Forum |
| NSID | National Supported Internship Day |
| ONS | Office of National Statistics |
| PfA | Preparation for Adulthood |
| PIP | Personal Independence Payment |
| SEMH | Social, Emotional and Mental Health |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| SENCO | Special Educational Needs Coordinator |
| SEND | Special Educational Needs and Disabilities |
| SET | Supported Employment Techniques |
| SI | Supported Internship |
| SIQAF | Supported Internship Quality Assurance Framework |
| SLT | Senior Leadership Team |
| SMART | Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound |
| TOC | Theory of Change |
| TSI | Training in Systematic Instruction |
| VfM | Value for Money |

Executive summary

Supported internships are structured, work-based study programmes for 16 to 24-year-olds with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). The Department for Education (DfE) invested £18m to grow the supported internship programme and drive up the quality of provision, delivered through the Internships Work consortium from September 2022 to March 2025¹. The programme was expanded in 2023 to include a Pilot of supported internships for young people without an EHCP but with identified or unidentified SEND, social, emotional or mental health needs (SEMH), or Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD), who are furthest from the labour market.²

CooperGibson Research, with St Mary's University, was commissioned by the DfE to evaluate the investment in the supported internship programme. This report provides the findings of that evaluation. Accompanying the report are [Annex 1](#) (supplementary methodology and data tables) and [Annex 2](#) (case studies).

Methodology

The evaluation aimed to understand whether the policy investment led to an improvement in the quantity and quality of supported internships, and employment outcomes for young people. It also explored the cost of delivering supported internship provision and whether the programme delivers value for money.

A mixed method, multi-stakeholder, longitudinal approach was undertaken, to draw evidence from a wide range of sources, encompassing:

- 1,977 online survey responses and 19 case studies where interviews and focus groups were conducted with 192 respondents, including local authorities, providers, young people, job coaches, employers, and parents and carers
- analysis of administrative/national data sources ([Individualised Learner Record \(ILR\)](#) and [National Pupil Database \(NPD\)](#)) and programme monitoring data supplied by the Internships Work consortium
- a costing feasibility study followed by an online costing survey completed by 12 providers in 2024 (representing 452 interns) and 13 providers (439 interns) in 2025

¹ The Internships Work contract was extended for an additional year to March 2026 with a focus on targeted support and engagement. This evaluation report focuses on the original contract period and does not include the extension.

² Referred to in this report as the Pilot.

The evaluation design was underpinned by a co-produced [Theory of Change](#) with DfE and Internships Work, and was guided by an Advisory Group of supported internship stakeholders and a Young Researchers Group of supported internship alumni.

Key findings

Quantity and growth of supported internships

Evidence from a variety of sources was used to explore the number and profile of supported interns, which showed that there was an increase in the capacity/number of supported internships during the investment period (September 2022 – March 2025):

- 60% of providers and 36% of employers reported an increase in the number of supported internships they had offered
- the local authorities surveyed identified 4,619 interns (which included 240 interns without EHCPs on the Pilot) by end of the investment period (from a baseline of 2,243)³, and analysis of ILR data also indicated an increase, although not to the same extent^{4,5}
- almost all providers not involved in the Pilot (94%) agreed that there is a need for supported internships to support young people into work who do not have an EHCP; 63% agreed strongly

There was some evidence of increased engagement from local authorities, employers, new providers entering the supported internships market, and expansion of existing provision.

The findings taken from across the surveys and case study data show that there were three main enablers for the expansion of the supported internship programme. These were: (i) the significant demand and perceived need for the programme across all stakeholders; (ii) the contribution of the Internships Work programme to raising awareness and understanding of supported internships and with supporting the coordination of recruitment activities; and (iii) existing recruitment activities that were embedded in provider practice.

³ [Number of young people enrolled for 'Work based placements' for supported internship in England for 2021](#). Source: [Education, health and care plans, Work based placements](#).

⁴ Internships Work reported doubling the number of Supported Internships from a baseline of c.2,250 per annum by the end of March 2025. The local authority survey was administered by Internships Work and analysed by CGR.

⁵ EHCP/SEN2 data had a similar profile to ILR data, although due to data collection changes made during the investment period this data has not been included in this report (for further detail, see [The number and profile of supported internships](#)).

The evidence demonstrated there is a clear demand for supported internships and there were indications that there would be an increase in demand in the future, based on local authority and employer predictions.

Experiences of supported internships

The findings consistently indicated that interns' experiences of the supported internships programme were highly positive, with the vast majority (over 85%) of interns agreeing that they liked being on their supported internship, they enjoyed their work placement and were happy with the help they received from their tutor, job coach and employer.

Interns (both those with an EHCP and Pilot interns) frequently expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage in a workplace environment and reported that they developed constructive and rewarding relationships with both colleagues and peers. Less positive intern experiences typically related to difficulties with work placements or when job coaches lacked confidence in their skills and knowledge around negotiating placements and jobs that matched interns' goals.

Whilst the vast majority of job coaches felt satisfied in their role and confident in their skills and knowledge, particularly around supporting interns, some lacked confidence in negotiating placements and jobs that matched interns' goals.

Employers' experiences were also highly positive, with the vast majority satisfied with the amount (82%) and quality (87%) of support they had received. However, employers would value more training and support, particularly for those in their first year of hosting interns.

Embedding quality

Overall, the findings indicated that practices related to leadership, planning, preparedness and progress, were embedded across the case study sites. In contrast, partnership working was identified as more challenging by some case study participants.

During the investment period, the vast majority (85%) of providers in the surveys reported that the quality of their supported internship provision had improved, in particular for curriculum personalisation, vocational profiling and employment support for interns and training and support for job coaches. These findings were corroborated and extended by learning from the case studies with enhancements to practice including:

- strengthened initial assessment of interns to identify their needs
- extended transitional support for interns when beginning the programme
- ongoing assessment of interns' progress throughout the programme

- the use of digital tools to support SMART target setting⁶ and monitoring and supporting intern progress

Several case studies indicated that there had been a strengthening of quality assurance processes, including providers using the SIQAF and participating in peer reviews. Some local authority teams had started to adopt a more proactive role in monitoring the quality of provider delivery.

Facilitators of quality provision

The key facilitators of quality provision as reported by all stakeholders in the case studies were the:

- central and pivotal role of the job coach, whose support enabled interns to navigate workplace expectations and develop essential skills for employment
- importance of person-centred planning, through for example, detailed vocational profiling and placement matching
- sustained commitment of senior leaders, providers and employers to the aims and purpose of the supported internship programme such as recognising the critical role of work in enabling young people to achieve future independence
- contribution of the Internships Work activities such as the good practice shared as part of the SEND Employment Forums, job coach training and undergoing a Supported Internships Quality Assurance Framework (SIQAF) review
- supported internship programmes meeting the business needs of employers

Outcomes for young people

At the time of completing the surveys, providers indicated that 48% of interns from the current academic year (averaged over cohort 2 (2023/24) and cohort 3 (2024/25)) were in permanent paid employment towards the end of or shortly after they had completed their supported internship. Similarly, when asked about the previous academic year (averaged over cohort 1 (2022/23) and cohort 2 (2023/24)), providers indicated that 45% of their interns were in permanent paid work and just 17% were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).⁷ Local authority survey data suggested an employment rate of 32% for 2022/23, and 43% for academic year 2023/24. Other common destinations mentioned by employers and interns included voluntary work, unpaid internship, temporary employment or paid apprenticeship.

⁶ SMART targets are a framework for setting effective goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic/Relevant and Time-bound.

⁷ Providers were asked about destinations of the previous year of interns. However, it is not clear from the survey data at which timepoint this data was recorded by providers.

With respect to outcomes of the Pilot, whilst based on a small number of case studies and survey responses, findings to date have been similar to interns with EHCPs with reports of improved confidence and interns feeling empowered. The confidence gained often extended beyond the workplace, positively influencing family relationships and social interactions. Supported internships provided structure, purpose, and a supportive environment that promoted wellbeing. However, there were indications that this cohort of young people were more dissatisfied with aspects of their internship. Further evidence will be available after another year of evaluation (expected to report in spring 2027).

Three main themes were identified that contributed to interns' success in securing employment: (i) the proactive efforts of interns, both during and following the supported internship programme; (ii) the support provided by supported internship programme leaders and delivery teams (including job coaches and follow-on support); and (iii) the involvement and contribution of parents and carers.

Beyond securing employment, other notable outcomes included:

- increased confidence, which was identified as one of the most significant outcomes
- development of essential preparation for work skills, which was reported regardless of whether interns secured employment
- enhanced independent living skills, particularly travelling independently and managing personal finances
- increased maturity, engagement in society, and enhanced physical, social and mental well-being

Wider impact of supported internships and value for money

Findings from the costing feasibility study demonstrated a clear demand for a consistent and standardised approach to recording supported internship programme costs. A supported internship costing tool was designed and trialled as part of the feasibility study with positive responses on the acceptability of the content of the tool.

Findings from the costing surveys relating to 452 interns in cohort 2 and 439 interns in cohort 3, showed that the average cost per intern ranged from £14,676 in May 2024 (for academic year 2022/23) to £15,697 in May 2025 (for 2023/24).

Using the 4Es Framework⁸ to assess value for money and taking evidence from the surveys, case studies, costing surveys, programme monitoring information and national datasets, the supported internship programme overall has the potential to demonstrate a good case for value for money:

⁸ [opm-value-money-vfm-approach-v2-1.pdf](#).

- economy - the average cost per intern, and the expenditure profile of the providers in the costing surveys are broadly consistent with comparable sector norms
- efficiency - survey, case study and programme monitoring evidence indicated that the supported internship programme inputs were being used to achieve most of the targeted outputs
- effectiveness - findings on employment outcomes from the costing surveys align closely with those reported in the provider, local authority and intern surveys. These outcomes suggest that the programme is achieving its core objective of supporting interns into meaningful employment
- equity - survey findings indicated that the benefits of the programme were not the same for all interns, particularly with respect to gender and the SEND profile of interns

Supported internships also had positive outcomes for other stakeholders. Beyond meeting business needs, case study employers reported that supported internships had made their organisations more inclusive by, for example, changing how they recruited, trained, and supported staff. For local authorities, there was indicative evidence of the potential for significant savings to local authority budgets with EHCPs ceasing if an intern was employed. For many case study parents and carers, their child's participation on a supported internship had delivered significant personal benefits including a marked reduction in stress, as they no longer felt the need to advocate for their child in the same way.

Systemic challenges and risks of supported internships

There were common challenges regarding the recruitment of interns, their experiences, the implementation of high quality provision and intern outcomes. These barriers often functioned as systemic challenges within the supported internship programme for interns with an EHCP and those on the Pilot programme. These challenges were:

- securing sufficient employer placements that, for example, affected the range of placement opportunities open to interns
- the negative impact of the current economic landscape, with, for example, employers frequently expressing willingness to retain interns but did not have vacancies and/or lacked the financial capacity to create new posts
- misunderstandings and misconceptions about SEND and the perceived demand on time and resources by employers that could negatively affect the number of employers who signed up for supported internships and/or a placement experience for some interns
- interns' readiness for a supported internship, with anxiety about working (23%), travel (23%), making friends at work (16%) and their health (12%), reported by interns

- parent and carer readiness, with around half of job coaches surveyed reporting parent concerns around losing benefits (58%), and just over one-quarter (29%) that the cost of going to their work placement, were considered barriers. In addition, case study data identified parent and carer concerns around losing benefits if their child gains employment and anxiety about their child's integration into the workplace
- funding and costing challenges for providers, particularly with accessing Access to Work funding (53%)⁹, but also delivering supported internships within the available funding (28%), the cost of training job coaches (23%) and accessing high needs funding (20%)
- need for accurate and consistent messaging of the supported internship programme, with job coaches reporting a lack of awareness and understanding of supported internships amongst parents and carers (45%), young people (42%) and schools/careers advisers (38%)

Conclusions and recommendations

The range of data sources included as part of the evaluation consistently showed an increase in the number of supported internships during the investment period.

During the investment period, the vast majority (85%) of providers reported that the quality of their supported internship provision had improved, in particular for curriculum personalisation, vocational profiling and employment support for interns and training and support for job coaches. During the case study visits, several providers reported notable improvements in the quality of initial assessment processes to identify interns' needs, extended transitional support and the use of digital tools. Several case studies indicated that there had been a strengthening of quality assurance processes, including providers using the SIQAF and participating in peer reviews, and some local authority teams adopting a more proactive role in monitoring provider delivery.

Providers reported that 45% of their interns from the previous academic year (averaged over cohort 1 (2022/23) and cohort 2 (2023/24), were in permanent paid work and just 17% were NEET. Similar employment rates were found from local authority survey data (32% of interns from academic year 2022/23 and 43% from 2023/24, secured paid employment). These findings compare favourably with available data such as: an average 25% of supported interns in employment 1 year after their supported internship prior to

⁹ [Access to Work](#) is a discretionary grant scheme delivered by DWP which can assist in paying for practical support to enable disabled people or those with health conditions to overcome workplace barriers. Supported interns with EHCPs can apply for Access to Work funding to cover the costs of practical support in the workplace, if Access to Work guidance requirements are met. The DWP announced that from September 2025, in line with Access to Work guidance, they would only accept support plans for Access to Work for supported interns that request job coaching for 26 weeks or less and include tapering off. Interns who are taking part in the non-EHCP supported internships Pilot are not eligible to claim Access to Work funding.

the investment period¹⁰; 1.6% of the 2019/20 cohort of students with a SEN statement or EHCP had sustained at least 6 months of employment activity in their first year after finishing key stage 4, and 8.7% after 3 years¹¹; 76% of 16–24 year-olds receiving Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA) were NEET.¹²

Interns, their families, and professionals identified increased confidence as one of the most significant outcomes of participation in a supported internship programme for an intern. Regardless of whether interns secured employment, consistently reported intern outcomes included the development of essential preparation for work skills, enhanced independent living skills, and an increase in interns' engagement within society.

Using the 4Es Framework¹³ to assess value for money and taking evidence from the surveys, case studies, costing surveys, programme monitoring information and national datasets, the supported internship programme overall demonstrates the potential for a good case for value for money in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. There was less evidence for equity with some evidence showing that the benefits of taking part in a supported internship were not the same for all interns, particularly with differences found with respect to gender and the SEND profiles of interns.

With only four Pilot case studies completed as part of this evaluation, it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the similarities and differences between the type of programme for interns with an EHCP and in the Pilot programme. Preliminary analysis indicates that the programme is being delivered in a largely similar way for both cohorts. However, some early insights suggest there may be key differences worth noting. These were: (i) greater complexity with recruitment; (ii) additional time and resources at the start of the programme for initial assessments to identify the interns' needs; (iii) enhanced pastoral and mental health support; and (iv) additional and/or adapted training for job coaches and employees to take account of some of the differences in characteristics and backgrounds of the Pilot cohort of interns.

In summary, whilst the available evidence indicates that Internship Work investment has contributed to improvements in quantity, quality and employment outcomes of supported internships, further improvements are likely to be seen, particularly where practices have been established but take time to embed (for example, around quality). National, regional and local level structures established as part of the investment offer a potentially strong legacy but this requires leadership to drive forward further developments, especially in light of the systemic challenges that persist.

¹⁰ Noble J., (18 November 2022), [Supported internships: Only 1 in 4 SEND students in work one year on](#), FE Week. Source: FOI request to DfE (SEND survey, ILR and LEO datasets).

¹¹ National longer term destinations, [Explore Education Statistics](#), accessed 13th January 2026.

¹² Casey & Elliot (2025), [Unlocking the potential of young people furthest from the labour market](#).

¹³ [opm-value-money-vfm-approach-v2-1.pdf](#).

Key recommendations

Key recommendations are shown below. Further details of recommendations are provided in [Conclusions and recommendations](#).

- DfE should ensure the supported internship programme is embedded in all relevant Post-16 and Skills White Paper initiatives
- DfE in collaboration with the supported internship sector should consider how the work of the Internships Work consortium (including local SEND Employment Forums, Employer Ambassador networks, and strong links with wider networks, such as the National SEND Employment Forum (NSEF)) can be sustained to coordinate activities across the sector
- DfE in collaboration with the supported internship sector should review whether the SIQAF requires further development following its use during the Internships Work investment period, and how it can be better embedded within practice
- DfE and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should investigate how challenges in existing funding models can be addressed to ensure funding for internships is more consistent, sustainable and secure
- DfE, DWP and the supported internship sector should consider how the job coach role, fundamental to quality and outcomes, might be developed into a viable, rewarding and long term career pathway
- DfE and the supported internship sector should consider conducting further longitudinal research, particularly exploring longer term outcomes, the factors that support interns to remain in employment, a feasibility study of implementing the SIQAF nationally, and with local authorities conduct an audit of EHCPs ceased and subsequent financial savings to local authorities

Introduction

Supported internships are structured, work-based study programmes for 16 to 24-year-olds with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

The Department for Education (DfE) aimed to strengthen the supported internship programme, by making an £18m investment from September 2022 to March 2025. This was delivered through the Internships Work consortium (see [Strengthening of the supported internship programme](#), for further details) and aimed to enable the supported internship programme to grow sustainably, so that more young people could pursue a supported internship, while also driving up the quality of provision.

The programme was expanded in 2023 to include a Pilot of supported internships for young people without an EHCP but with identified or unidentified SEND, social, emotional or mental health needs (SEMH), Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD), or were furthest from the labour market.¹⁴

CooperGibson Research, with St Mary's University, was commissioned by the DfE to establish how, and to what extent, the investment in the supported internship programme had improved employment outcomes for young people taking part in a supported internship. The evaluation was also expanded to include the Pilot of supported internships (referred to as 'the Pilot' throughout this report). This is the final report for the evaluation.¹⁵ Accompanying the report are [Annex 1](#) (supplementary methodology and data tables) and [Annex 2](#) (case studies).

About supported internships

[Supported internships](#) are a structured, full-time work-based study programme for 16- to 24-year-olds with SEND, who have an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

Supported internships provide the opportunity for young people to achieve sustained, paid employment by equipping them with the skills they need for work, through learning in the workplace. Supported interns are enrolled and supported by a learning provider with the aim of spending most of their learning time in a work placement, facilitated by the support of an expert job coach. Work placements are delivered via a range of models, such as one role with one employer in a single placement, two or more placements with

¹⁴ DfE offered grants to local authorities to deliver the Pilot programme, including costs associated with in-work support provided by job coaches (as Pilot interns without EHCPs cannot claim Access to Work funding).

¹⁵ The Internships Work contract was extended for an additional year to March 2026 with a focus on targeted support and engagement. The Pilot of Supported Internships for young people without EHCPs was included in this extension. The evaluation was also extended for one year, to February 2027, but with a specific focus on the Pilot and with adjusted aims around exploring how well the Supported Internship model works for young people without an EHCP. The extended Pilot evaluation is expected to report in spring 2027.

different employers or rotating between different placements with a larger single employer. Job coaches also work with employers, increasing their confidence in employing individuals with additional needs and helping them to create and support a diverse workforce.

Alongside their time with the employer, supported interns complete a personalised study programme, which includes the chance to study for relevant qualifications, if appropriate, and English and maths at an appropriate level.

Supported internships generally last for a minimum of 6 months, and up to one year. The measure of success of a supported internship is a transition to sustained and paid employment.

Strengthening of the supported internship programme

Internships Work was a project funded by the DfE which was designed to support more young people with additional needs to have greater choice and control over their future, opening up opportunities that prepare them for adult life and independent living.

The Internships Work consortium was a partnership of three delivery organisations, including: the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi)¹⁶, the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE)¹⁷, and DfN Project SEARCH¹⁸. Between them, these delivery partners aimed to double the number of supported internships by 2025, and to work closely with local authorities, supported internship providers, job coaches and employers, to improve the quantity and quality of supported internship provision across England.

There were five key elements to the Internships Work project (see [Annex 1](#), Supplementary methodology for further details):

- support to local authorities to establish and develop SEND Employment Forums, and administrate and monitor Section 14 grants
- engagement and support for employers to offer high quality work placements by providing information, advice and training and a network of Employer Ambassadors¹⁹

¹⁶ NDTi: a not-for-profit organisation promoting inclusion and equality for people who are at risk of exclusion from any part of society.

¹⁷ BASE: the membership association for organisations that provide, or have an interest in, specialist employment support for people with a disability or other economic disadvantage.

¹⁸ DfN Project SEARCH: a one-year transition to work programme for young adults with a learning disability or autism spectrum conditions, or both.

¹⁹ In January 2024 Business Champions were rebranded to Employer Ambassadors.

- testing, developing and roll-out of a Supported Internships Quality Assurance Framework (SIQAF), including a self-assessment tool and a voluntary peer review process
- investment in training via job coach supported employment techniques and systematic instruction training
- communication and engagement activities designed to reach a broad audience

Evaluation aims

Four key aims underpinned the evaluation of the Strengthening of the supported internship programme for young people with EHCPs and of the Pilot.

Aim 1 - assess how, and to what extent, the policy investment led to an increase in the quantity of supported internships:

- explore awareness and understanding of the supported internship programme and the role Internships Work investment activities played in changing awareness and understanding of the programme
- identify factors that facilitate or prevent a young person or employer participating in the supported internship programme
- assess whether investment in the supported internship programme increased the number of young people and employers participating and whether there is demand for supported internships for young people without an EHCP

Aim 2 - assess how, and to what extent the policy investment led to an improvement in the quality of supported internships:

- explore the quality and consistency of supported internship provision, as defined by the SIQAF, and whether quality of supported internship provision has improved over the policy investment period
- gain a better understanding of the lived experience of young people and employers participating in the supported internship programme
- identify the facilitators and barriers to providing high quality supported internship provision
- understand the benefits and challenges of supported internships for young people without an EHCP

Aim 3 - determine to what extent the policy investment improved employment outcomes for young people with EHCPs:

- explore if and how the supported internship programme helps young people develop specific knowledge and transferable skills, and the impact of the

programme on young people's confidence, preparedness for work and preparedness for adulthood

- explore rates of sustained paid employment amongst young people participating in supported internships and identify the destination outcomes of interns who did not transition into sustained paid employment
- identify if there are demographic differences between supported interns who transitioned to sustained paid employment and those who did not

Aim 4 - examine the cost of delivering supported internship provision and assess whether this delivers value for money:

- conduct a feasibility study to assess whether education providers are open and able to record costs associated with supported internship provision and develop a non-burdensome approach by which education providers can record costs associated with supported internship provision for the duration of the Internships Work programme
- explore whether the supported internship programme delivers value for money

Evaluation approach

The scope and breath of these aims and objectives have meant that the evaluation needed to draw evidence from a wide range of sources. The evaluation team designed a mixed method, multi-stakeholder, longitudinal approach for this evaluation, which ran from spring 2023 to spring 2026. The evaluation encompassed:

- 3 cohorts of supported internships for young people with an EHCP - cohort 1 (September 2022 - July 2023)²⁰; cohort 2 (September 2023 - July 2024); cohort 3 (September 2024 - July 2025)
- 2 cohorts of supported internships as part of the Pilot for young people without EHCPs - year 1 (January - September 2024); year 2 (September 2024 - July 2025)

The evaluation design was underpinned by a co-produced Theory of Change with DfE and Internships Work ([Appendix 1 – Theory of Change](#)) and comprised:

- online surveys and case study interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including local authorities, providers, young people, job coaches, employers, and parents and carers
- analysis of administrative/national data sources ([Individualised Learner Record](#) (ILR) and [National Pupil Database](#) (NPD)) and programme monitoring data supplied by the Internships Work consortium (for example, local authority survey data, training and forum member feedback data, quarterly reports)
- a supported internship provision costing feasibility study and a costings survey completed by providers to explore the resource implications of delivering supported internship provision

The evaluation was guided by an Advisory Group, which included representatives from education membership bodies, colleges and further education providers, including job coaches, local authorities, employers and governmental public service departments. The role of the Advisory group was to provide guidance on the design and approach of the evaluation, including reviewing research materials, support in accessing stakeholders to include in the research, and discussing emerging findings.

Throughout the evaluation, there was an emphasis on ensuring the participation and voice of young people with experience of supported internships. Four former interns participated in a Young Researchers Group throughout the period of the evaluation. Their role was to contribute to the design of the research materials such as the intern interview and focus group topic guides and support with the design of intern research invitations

²⁰ Due to timings for commission of the evaluation, the only data collected for cohort 1 was the intern follow-up survey.

and information sheets. The members of the group tested surveys before they went live and helped design the [intern friendly summary of the findings](#) of the report.

Surveys

Online surveys were administered to interns, employers, job coaches and supported internship providers. All surveys were reviewed by the Advisory Group and initially piloted with a small number of respondents prior to full fieldwork launch. Intern surveys were also reviewed by the Young Researchers Group.

Access to interns, employers and job coaches was initially made via providers, who were asked to pass on baseline survey invitations to the relevant stakeholders. Following surveys were administered either via providers or directly to respondents:

- intern endline surveys were also primarily administered via providers (a small number of interns from cohort 2 responded to direct invitations – see [Reading this report](#))
- intern follow-up surveys were administered directly to interns utilising email addresses that they had provided at the endline survey for contact after their supported internship had finished
- employer endline surveys were administered via direct email invite to those that had responded to the baseline survey

In total, 1,977 online surveys were included in the final analysis after data cleaning (Table 1, see [Annex 1](#) Table 3 for a more detailed breakdown):

- baseline and endline surveys with supported interns and employers, conducted towards the beginning and end of the internship academic year for cohorts 2 and 3²¹
- follow-up surveys with interns, conducted between 7-9 months after the end of the academic year for cohorts 1 and 2 and between 3-4 months after for cohort 3²²
- surveys with providers and job coaches towards the end of the academic year for cohorts 2 and 3
- surveys with job coaches towards the end of the academic year for cohort 2
- for the Pilot, baseline, endline and follow-up surveys with supported interns were conducted for year 1 and year 2. Some questions about the Pilot were included in the provider and job coach surveys²³

²¹ Due to extremely low response rates from interns aged under 18, their survey responses were excluded.

²² A shorter timeframe was necessary for the cohort 3 follow-up survey to fit within evaluation timelines.

²³ Note that some Pilot supported internships did not follow the typical academic year and had different start and end dates, therefore fieldwork windows were flexible to accommodate this difference.

Table 1: Surveys included in analysis

| Survey | Number of completed surveys |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Intern baseline | 882 |
| Intern endline | 347 |
| Intern follow-up survey | 133 |
| Employer baseline | 202 |
| Employer endline | 46 |
| Job coach survey (cohort 2) | 119 |
| Provider survey | 100 |
| Pilot intern baseline | 88 |
| Pilot intern endline | 45 |
| Pilot intern follow-up survey | 15 |

Survey sample profiles

Tables 4 to 36 in [Annex 1](#) detail the profile of the survey respondents. The following is a brief summary of each of the sample profiles (see [Annex 1](#) Supplementary survey sample profile for a more detailed summary):²⁴

- intern baseline, endline and follow-up surveys (EHCP and Pilot for those without an EHCP):
 - responses were received from across England, with the largest proportion received from the South East and London and the fewest from the South West
 - broadly speaking, the majority of respondents were white (although the proportion of other ethnicities was higher at the endline and follow-up surveys), male and aged between 18-20, however respondents' ages were more evenly spread for the follow-up surveys
 - communication and interaction was the most common area of special educational need, followed by cognition and learning, with physical and/or sensory needs the least common
- employers - the majority of employers were from large companies with 250+ employees and had been hosting supported internships for 5 years or less, with a significant proportion being in their first year of hosting supported internships

²⁴ Note that these are sample characteristics of those that chose to respond to the online surveys and therefore may not represent the characteristics of all supported interns, employers, providers or job coaches.

(baseline 37%, endline 28%); organisations operated across a wide range of sectors, with the largest being health, care and social services (baseline 22%, endline 24%), followed by catering and hospitality (baseline 13%, endline 7%)

- providers and job coaches - responses were received from providers with a wide range of experience in delivering supported internships; the supported internship models used varied, with around one-third offering a combination of work placement models

Qualitative fieldwork

The qualitative fieldwork took a case study approach to explore the four evaluation aims. A case study focused on one intern and the wide range of stakeholders around them. Each case study involved a 1-day visit to a site²⁵ from the evaluation team to undertake face to face interviews/focus groups with as many stakeholders as possible and the remaining interviews took place online or by telephone. A case study comprised of the following activities:

- interview the local authority (SEND Commissioning Officer or supported internship lead) and provider (supported internship lead)
- focus group or interviews with current interns
- focus group or interviews with job coaches
- visit an intern whilst on placement to conduct an observation of their placement, interview the intern, their job coach and employer or workplace mentor
- interview with a current intern's parent and carer
- interview with a graduate intern and their parent and carer
- interview with a young person who did not participate in the supported internship programme, and their parent and carer

There were 19 case studies in total across cohorts 2 and 3 of the evaluation - 15 case studies of supported internship provision for young people with EHCPs and 4 for those without (the Pilot).

Case study sample and respondent profile

The case study methodology adopted a purposive sampling approach (where participants are selected based on key criteria) to ensure a diverse and representative selection of supported internship provision. This was considered essential for capturing a range of perspectives and experiences across different contexts. Sampling criteria were carefully defined to include factors such as the type of provider, internship model, the

²⁵ Three cases studies took place completely online due to practical challenges at the case study site and/or with stakeholder availability.

range of SEND of the interns, completion of the SIQAF, employment sectors where interns were placed, and geographical region. These criteria were designed to reflect the complexity and variation within the supported internship landscape, enabling the evaluation to generate rich, and meaningful insights.

To identify suitable case studies, invitations were sent to all providers in March 2024 and March 2025, inviting them to nominate their provision for inclusion. In addition, members of the Advisory Panel were asked to make nominations of their own or other relevant provisions, which were subsequently followed up. Once nominations were received, the sampling criteria were applied to select the most representative cases. This process ensured that the final set of case studies offered a balanced and comprehensive view of the sector.

Table 2 outlines the case studies by provider type (See [Annex 1](#) Table 37 for a breakdown by region). In total, case study interviews and focus groups were conducted with 192 participants ([Annex 1](#) Table 38).

Table 2: Case study provider type

| Provider type | Interns with EHCPs (15 case studies) | Pilot - Interns without EHCPs (4 case studies) |
|---|---|---|
| Further education college | 6 | 2 |
| Further education specialist college | 4 | 1 |
| Specialist education/supported employment provider | 3 | 1 |
| Special secondary school | 1 | 0 |
| Social enterprise | 1 | 0 |

Source: Case studies

Interview and focus group transcripts were imported into NVivo²⁶ for analysis. A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify patterns and key themes relevant to the research questions. This process involved coding the data, grouping similar codes, and refining them into overarching themes that captured the core insights from participants' experiences and perspectives.

Secondary data analysis

Secondary data analysis used national datasets and Internships Work programme monitoring information to complement the primary research.

²⁶ NVivo is computer-based software designed for qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis.

Analysis of national datasets

[Annex 1](#) outlines the approach to analysis of ILR and NPD data to explore the number and profile of interns from academic year 2018/19 to 2024/25. This timeframe allowed data on the number of interns (relating to aim 1) to be explored across the Internships Work investment period and included a baseline prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ILR data provided detail on demographics of interns, including their age, ethnicity, sex, SEND status, deprivation decile, as well as information about their prior attainment, funding source, benefit status, programme completion status, qualification achievements and reasons for withdrawal.

The ILR data was matched to Spring Census and key stage data from the NPD to provide additional detail of interns' previous type of establishment, English and maths achievement at key stage 2, and prior attainment and progress at key stage 4.

Internships Work monitoring information

CooperGibson Research liaised closely with the Internship Work consortium throughout the investment period to collate programme monitoring information which could contribute to the evaluation. This involved Internships Work sharing: their quarterly reports and project management documentation (including KPI monitoring); Internships Work (particularly SIQAF) website analytics; local authority survey data and summary analysis; SEND Employment Forum and training feedback data and monitoring survey data; Employer Ambassador feedback data; job coach training feedback data and summary analysis; and SIQAF statistics and summary analysis. Where possible, CooperGibson Research has analysed the raw data for use within this evaluation report.

This evidence has been drawn on to supplement the primary research and analysis of national datasets, particularly local authority surveys and training feedback data. The source is acknowledged throughout since this data was not collected independently.

Costing of supported internships and value for money

The fourth aim of the evaluation examined the cost of delivering supported internship provision and assessed whether it delivers value for money (VfM). It comprised of three data collection and analyses activities:

- a feasibility study to assess whether providers were open and able to record costs associated with supported internship provision and develop a non-burdensome approach by which providers could record costs associated with supported internship provision
- a costings survey completed by providers to explore the resource implications of delivering supported internship provision

- an analysis of relevant data taken from the surveys, case studies and costing surveys to explore whether the supported internship programme delivers value for money

Costing feasibility study

A mixed methods approach was adopted to conduct the supported internship costing feasibility study. This involved:

- the development and refinement of the supported internship costing tool throughout the feasibility period
- meetings with the Advisory Panel and the Delivery Partners (DP)
- focus groups and interviews with providers representing all types of provision
- a pilot costing tool survey

A detailed description of the approach is provided in [Annex 1](#).

Transcripts from the meetings, focus groups and qualitative responses in the survey were written up after each phase of data collection and analysed thematically to identify and describe the main findings across the different data collection methods including the open question in the survey, which asked for the respondents' experiences of completing the costing tool.

Costing surveys

The costing tool developed through the feasibility study was sent as an outline survey to providers to complete anonymously in May 2024 and May 2025²⁷. Due to a low survey response after the first round, the number of questions in the May 2025 survey was reduced to encourage a higher completion rate. In total 45 surveys were submitted, but after data cleaning, 25 costing surveys were analysed from a range of provider types, internship models delivered and across regions ([Annex 1](#) Table 39). A costing survey for the Pilot cohort was conducted in May 2025 but with just 3 responses it was not possible to conduct meaningful analysis.

Value for money

Our approach to value for money was influenced by the 4 Es framework²⁸ that provides a structured approach to evaluating programmes. The 4 elements are:

²⁷ The costings survey required providers to submit data for the previous full academic year - 2022/23 data was collected in May 2024, 2023/24 was collected in May 2025.

²⁸ Laws and Valters, (2021). [Value for money and adaptive management](#).

- Economy - explores the extent to which the costs of the supported internship programme are reasonable considering the required quality and intended outcomes of the programme
- Efficiency - looks at how quickly and easily the programme inputs (staff, time, resources) are converted to outputs/activities
- Effectiveness - within the framework is demonstrated by the evidence that the supported internship programme was delivering the desired outcomes and where possible achieving results that were transformational and sustainable
- Equity - addresses whether the benefits of the supported internship programme are distributed fairly and the extent to which it promotes inclusive development for interns by reducing social and economic disadvantage

Selected data were taken from across the various data sets including the surveys, case studies and costing surveys and where possible compared with relevant nationally available data to address the 4 elements of the framework.

Methodological considerations

There are several methodological considerations which should be taken into account when reading this report. Further details are provided in [Annex 1](#).

- access to participants for the surveys and case studies was via providers, therefore it is possible that some self-selection or non-response bias may have impacted the findings
- evaluation timings impacted when the surveys could be administered which may have affected response rates - cohort 1 was only included in the intern follow-up survey; the administration of baseline surveys for cohort 2 was delayed; and due to the 2024 election, administration of the cohort 2 endline surveys was delayed
- due to low survey response rates amongst interns aged under 18, only interns aged 18 years or over were included in the online surveys and within the analysis (younger interns were included in the qualitative element of the evaluation)
- intern endline survey administration was changed during the evaluation to improve response rates from emailing the survey to interns directly, to accessing via providers, therefore it was only possible to identify 92 respondents that completed both the baseline and endline surveys which limited sub-group analysis and no significant changes between baseline and endline responses were identified; as a result, analysis of intern data in this report is based on all respondents
- response to the costing survey was low, therefore the data is not representative of all providers; and issues around the accuracy of the financial and programme data submitted in the surveys limited the completeness of the dataset and reduced the number of surveys viable for analysis

- longitudinal analysis of cohort data to explore change over the course of the investment was not feasible due to low endline survey completions amongst interns and employers and limited completion of surveys for both cohort 2 and 3 amongst providers (n=15) and employers (n=7); analysis has primarily been conducted on all responses and based on 1 response from a provider or employer, this has been identified in the report as 'unique responses'
- secondary data used for this evaluation had some limitations and therefore, should be treated with some caution:
 - Aim 1: Quantity – a range of data sources were used to explore the number and profile of supported interns over the investment period, due to limitations in different datasets. These limitations included: a lack of independently collected local authority survey data with variations in the way questions were asked and responded to within this survey; lack of response to surveys amongst providers; variations in recording supported internships in ILR submissions and a further education sector focus in the ILR data collection which may lead to under-reporting and inconsistencies in administrative/national data
 - Aim 2: Quality – SIQAF monitoring data could not be used to explore quality due to SIQAF scores not being available for analysis, and limited numbers of peer reviews/follow-up reviews; evaluation surveys and case studies were used to explore quality, although these have their own limitations
 - Aim 3: Outcomes – tracking medium term employment outcomes (6 months after completion) through use of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data was not possible due to lag in data availability within the timeframe of the evaluation. Also, ILR data does not record employment outcomes of interns. Evaluation survey data, and local authority survey data collated by Internships Work were utilised instead, however they do not represent all supported internships

Reading this report

- for the intern baseline and endline surveys, sub-group analysis has been conducted by the gender and age of the intern, main area of special educational need (excluding physical/sensory due to the low base at the endline-stage (n=23)), ethnicity (white versus other ethnicity) and whether the intern had secured paid employment or not (endline-survey only). It was not possible to conduct analysis by supported internship model due to low base sizes and intern numbers or outcomes data could not be linked to the specific model employed
- sub-group analysis for the other surveys was limited due to the relatively small base sizes achieved

- analysis to identify significant differences between baseline and endline surveys and sub-groups has been conducted at the 95% significance level, which means that we are 95% confident the result is due to a real difference rather than random sampling error
- the symbol * has been used to denote significant differences between baseline-endline data and is shown next to the percentage which is significantly higher
- where data has been combined into a 'net' figure (e.g. very/quite satisfied, agree/strongly agree, a little/much improved etc.) this may not equal the sum of the individual percentages due to rounding
- rating scale (Likert scale) data presented in the main body of the report is primarily based on the net 'top 2' (e.g. very/quite satisfied, agree/strongly agree, a little/much improved etc.) and/or the most positive response (e.g. very satisfied, strongly agree, much improved etc.)

Quantity and growth of supported internships

This section explores the how, and to what extent, the policy investment led to an increase in the quantity of supported internships. It outlines the number and profile of supported internships over the Internships Work investment period, enablers and facilitators of growth, and future demand for supported internships.

Summary of findings

Evidence from a variety of sources was used to explore the number and profile of Supported Internships. The data showed that there was an increase in the capacity/number of supported internships during the investment period. Also, the Pilot was established within the investment period, with 240 interns in its second year. However, complexities and inconsistencies in data collection around supported internships made it difficult to conclusively validate the extent to which there had been an increase as a result of the investment. That said, amongst those responding to the evaluation surveys:

- 60% of providers and 36% of employers reported that their capacity/the number of supported internships they offered had increased
- providers said that the number (72%) and range (67%) of employers that they worked with for supported internships had increased
- the local authorities surveyed identified 4,619 interns (which included 240 interns without EHCPs on the Pilot) by end of the investment period (from a baseline of 2,243 in the first year)

There were three main enablers for the expansion of the supported internship programme: (i) the significant demand and perceived need for the programme, as expressed by interns, their families, and professionals; (ii) the contribution of the Internships Work programme to raising the awareness and understanding of supported internships and with supporting the coordination of recruitment activities; and (iii) existing recruitment activities that were embedded in provider practice.

The evidence demonstrated there is a clear demand for supported internships and there were indications that there would be an increase in demand in the future, based on local authority and employer predictions. There is also a clear appetite amongst education professionals for supported internships for young people without EHCPs and the programme was considered a suitable model.

The number and profile of supported internships

Due to the complexities and inconsistencies in data held around supported internships (see [Methodological considerations](#)), a variety of data sources were used to explore any growth in supported internship provision over the investment period. A summary of the profile of interns is provided in [Annex 1](#) (Table 94 onwards).

Overall, the data consistently suggested that there had been an increase in the capacity/number of supported internships during the investment period.

- local authority survey data ([Annex 1](#) Table 40) showed an increase in the number of interns from 2,243²⁹ in the first year of the investment activity to 4,619 interns (including 240 interns taking part in the Pilot) towards the end of the Internships Work contract (March 2025)³⁰
- Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data showed a steady increase from 1,975 supported internships in 2018/19 to 2,707 in 2021/22 (prior to the investment period; Internships Work were contracted from September 2022 and for academic year 2022/23 (the first year of the investment) there was a drop in numbers to 2,456, but with recovery to 2,861 in 2023/24³¹ ([Annex 1](#) Table 94)

Figures provided by the ILR data were somewhat lower than those supplied by local authorities and the Internships Work consortium. This could be due to a number of factors, such as, under-reporting and inconsistencies within ILR returns, and inconsistencies or over-reporting by local authorities. EHCP/SEN2 data had a similar profile to ILR data, although due to data collection changes made during the investment period this data has not been included in this report.³²

Additionally, perceptions of growth of supported internships were expressed by providers, employers and local authorities in their survey responses:

- 60% of providers reported that their capacity/the number of supported internships they offered had increased in the previous 2-3 years, 30% that it had stayed the

²⁹ [Number of young people enrolled for 'Work based placements' for supported internship in England for 2021](#). Source: [Education, health and care plans, Work based placements](#).

³⁰ The Internships Work consortium was tasked with doubling the number of Supported Internships from a baseline of c.2,250 per annum to c.4,500 per annum by the end of March 2025. Sources: Local authority survey data, Internships Work.

³¹ [Annex 1](#) provides a summary of rules applied during the ILR data cleaning process. The data, however, may include multiple records for individual interns in certain circumstances. This and any discrepancies (e.g. where there were duplicate intern records with slight differences) was minimised as much as possible through the data cleaning process.

³² Education, health and care plans, based on SEN2 data collection, DfE. Accessed on [Find statistics and data - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#). 2024/25 data was reported for the academic year. Previous to that, data was reported by calendar year. From the reporting year 2023 (as at January 2023, 2022 calendar year), the data collection changed from aggregated figures at local authority level, to a person level collection. This was a major change in approach and as such there are time series breaks and important data quality caveats.

same and 7% that it had decreased.³³ Similarly, 59% of providers said they had increased the number of job coaches they had/worked with, 34% said it had stayed the same and 5% that the number of job coaches had decreased³⁴

- at the baseline survey, 36% of employers reported that the number of interns they were hosting had increased compared to the previous year, 48% said it had stayed the same and 11% that it had decreased
- the majority of providers said that the number (72%) and range (67%) of employers that they worked with for supported internships had increased over the previous 2-3 years. No providers said that the number or range of employers had decreased³⁵
- throughout the investment period, the proportion of local authorities stating that they had a supported internship offer for every young person who needed one increased from around one-quarter (26%) to half (51%) ([Annex 1](#) Table 41). Whilst improvement was seen here, there remained nearly 3 in 10 (29%) local authorities which said they did not have a supported internship offer for all young people who needed one (and around 21% did not know)³⁶

Supported internship Pilot

In the second year of the Pilot programme, the 12 local authorities responding to a survey indicated that there were 240 interns, ranging from 2 to 55 interns and an average of 20.³⁷

Enablers of supported internship recruitment and engagement

The range of data sources referenced in [The number and profile of supported internships](#), all suggest that the number of supported interns has increased in recent years. The following sections discuss the main factors which may have contributed to this growth, including: a need for an appropriate pathway, Internships Work activity, and embedded provider support for intern recruitment and engagement.

³³ 3% said don't know. Reasons that the number of Supported Internships they offer had decreased were: difficulties in recruiting eligible young people (n=3), cost of running supported internships is too high/lack of funding (n=2), capacity/staffing issues (n=2), fewer employers engaged/willing to place supported internships (n=1) and interns reluctant to travel (n=1).

³⁴ 2% said don't know.

³⁵ 24% said the number of employers had stayed the same and 4% said don't know. 30% said the range of employers had stayed the same and 3% said don't know.

³⁶ Source: Local authority surveys, Internships Work.

³⁷ Internships Work Y3 Baseline Summary_3.3.25, report provided by Internships Work.

The need for an appropriate pathway

The case study interviews indicated that one of the primary factors contributing to the increase in the number of supported internships during the investment period was a significant demand and perceived need for the programme, as expressed by interns, their families, and professionals across various sectors.

Many interns and their parents and carers said that pursuing another academic college or university course was not an appropriate next step. Instead, they sought a more practical, work-based learning experience offered by the supported internship programme, rather than a traditional full-time academic environment.

By the end of my time at [college] I had really had enough of the college lifestyle. I wanted to do this as you are treated more like an adult, and it is more of a work setting. You feel like an employee. – *Supported intern*

Many of the interns were uncertain about the sector in which they wished to work and often had limited or no prior work experience. This lack of experience was frequently attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic or the absence of opportunities during school years. The supported internship programme addressed these challenges by providing immersive workplace experiences, enabling interns to explore different roles. Even if the supported internship employer might not have been able to offer permanent employment at the end of the programme, interns described how they felt that they would be in a better position to apply for jobs, having gained valuable skills and experience.

We talked about it and thought that it would be a good idea to get me that extra knowledge and experience to put on my CV [curriculum vitae]. That would help me get a better chance of getting a job. I didn't do any work experience at secondary school because of COVID-19. I've not done any before. – *Supported intern*

Some interns had found school or college difficult and/or had been out of education for a while. The supported internship programme with a personalised and tailored approach offered an environment where a young person might regain their confidence.

Parent of a current intern describing how a supported internship was an appropriate next step after college

He was not in the right mental health to start any next steps...certainly not university. He needed to regain confidence and an understanding of his capabilities before he could move on to anything else.

We have just gone through such a learning curve with him, working in tandem with the [name of supported internship provider]. If he hadn't done a supported internship here, I don't know what would have happened to him. I genuinely don't know what he would have done after college.

He would have completely failed at university even with additional help that they say they offer, because he wouldn't have been equipped to go and ask for the help that he needed. He wouldn't have known what to ask for.

He had enough of education, because he thinks that it's the education system that has made him feel like he has all of his life, that stigma.

We went to university open days and at each one the colour would literally drain out of his face. Fortunately, his sixth form college were aware of the supported internship provider. And as a parent you are not aware of these things, are you? The college suggested about coming and looking.

Initially he was not keen on the suggestion – it went against the flow of what everyone else was doing. We caught him on a good day to suggest looking around. He came in and immediately you could see that he was comfortable. It doesn't feel like college here. You feel like you are in a creative workplace. You are treated as a professional so that integrity went with it.

Interns and their parents and carers were asked what they would have done if the supported internship had not been an option. The overwhelming response was that there was no other option, commonly they said, 'staying in their bedroom'. These perspectives were reinforced by both providers and local authority professionals.

There's a definite need for supported internships. I sometimes think what would these learners be doing, there's not much out there in terms of social care and it could be a slippery path for some of them as a lot of them haven't got great home lives. They would just be at home in their bedrooms doing nothing. And I think eventually they'd just have really poor mental health and not live very happy lives. – *Supported internship provider*

A recurring concern for providers was that many young people with SEND were frequently enrolled in courses at the same level, without achieving substantive academic progress or advancing toward employment outcomes. Participants described this pattern as a form of “churn”. Several contributing factors were identified, including parental or carer apprehension about leaving full-time education, limited awareness among providers regarding supported internships, and insufficient expertise in assessing whether a young person was ready to commence a supported internship programme.

Internships Work investment activity

The Internships Work consortium carried out a wide range of communications and awareness raising activities to support growth of supported internships, including: attendance and presentations at many forums, conferences and events; meetings and collaborative work with wider stakeholders such as regional Local Education Partnerships (LEPs), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), careers hubs and local authorities; and news articles and bulletins, website content and social media activity. A communications strategy was embedded in their offer, including a ‘one stop shop’ for supported internships with resources and information, and communications ongoing throughout the investment period.

A key activity was delivery of an annual National Supported Internship Day (NSID) to celebrate supported internships and raise awareness. This involved drop-in events for parliamentarians, corporate roundtables, breakfast receptions with guests in Parliament and advocacy workshops. Social media campaigns reached 9.8m people on the 2024 NSID.³⁸

Perceptions of change in awareness and engagement in supported internships

Providers and job coaches felt overall that awareness and understanding of supported internships had improved over the previous 2-3 years:

- the majority of providers said that awareness and understanding of supported internships had improved amongst their local authority (79%), Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) professionals (76%) and education providers (72%)
- the majority of providers and job coaches said that awareness and understanding of supported internships had improved amongst young people (providers 71%, job coaches 70%), parents and carers (providers 68%, job coaches 68%) and employers (providers 65%, job coaches 69%)

Some of the case study participants indicated that the activities undertaken through the Internships Work programme were instrumental in driving an increase in supported

³⁸ NSID Annual Report v2, Internships Work.

internship opportunities. For example, one local authority reported that the number of supported internship placements rose by 44 between 2020/21 and 2023/24.

In the survey of local authorities, many comments were made about local partnerships, opportunities and awareness of supported internships growing and there being a more established programme, increased provision or plans to expand.³⁹

“[The] Council identified the need to increase the number of young people accessing a supported internship in the local authority’s 2020-2024 PfA [Preparation for Adulthood] Strategy. One of the steps that the authority has taken to increase access to provision included establishing a new provider for the area. – *Local authority survey respondent*

All employers who participated in the case study interviews had been approached to join a supported internship programme; none had actively sought out this opportunity. Nevertheless, the findings indicate three primary motivations for their initial engagement with supported internships:

- addressing specific business needs within their organisation
- fulfilling a broader organisational commitment to social responsibility
- a personal connection to someone with SEND, whether through immediate or extended family, or through a personal commitment to promoting a more inclusive and equitable workplace and society

Provider awareness and engagement

Awareness and engagement with Internships Work and related supported internships activity was very high amongst providers responding to the survey. Almost all providers were aware of (99%) and had engaged with (97%) various activities most commonly ([Annex 1](#) Table 42):

- Supported Employment Techniques (SET) training provided by BASE/Internships Work (aware 87%, engaged 68%)
- Local SEND Employment Forums (aware 82%, engaged 75%)
- support or engagement from the local authority about supported internships (aware 82%, engaged 70%)
- Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI) provided by BASE/Internships Work (aware 80%, engaged 74%)

³⁹ Local authority survey, Internships Work.

The lowest levels of awareness and engagement were seen for the regional employment network meetings, NSEF⁴⁰ and supported internship Employer Ambassadors.

Providers said that the Internships Work activity engaged with was useful, particularly the TSI and SET training and the local SEND Employment Forums (over 9 out of 10 providers that engaged with them said they were useful) ([Annex 1](#) Table 43).

Employer awareness and engagement with Internships Work

Around three-fifths of employers were aware of Internships Work activity (baseline 60%, endline 61%) and just over two-fifths had engaged with Internships Work activity (baseline 46%, endline 43%). The number of activities that employers were aware of and engaged with increased over the course of the investment period ([Annex 1](#) Table 44):

- the mean number of Internships Work activities employers were aware of increased from 1.6 at the baseline-survey to 2.7 at the endline-survey
- the mean number of Internships Work activities employers engaged with increased from 0.9 at the baseline-survey to 1.7 at the endline-survey
- there was a significant increase in the proportion of employers that were aware of and engaged with DFN Project SEARCH, SEND Employment Forums, SIQAF and the Internships Work website

Internships Work raised awareness and engaged employers through two key activities: SEND Employment Forums (with a training package) and Business Ambassadors (initially named Business Champions).⁴¹

Employer Ambassadors

As of March 2025, 805 people had attended the Internships Work Employer Ambassador training. Feedback collated by Internships Work suggested high satisfaction levels - nearly two-thirds (63% of 293) giving it the highest satisfaction rating and one-quarter (25%) giving it the second highest rating.⁴²

SEND Employment Forums

SEND Employment Forums were set up in 144 of 152 participating local authorities (as reported in March 2025)⁴³, attended by local authorities, education providers, employers,

⁴⁰ The NSEF is a network of over 250 members that share best practice in Supported Internships. NSEF existed previously to Internships Work and was not a funded contract activity of the investment period. However, as the NSEF supported Internships Work (for example, offering opportunities to promote the investment activities at events), this was included in the survey.

⁴¹ Around one-fifth (22%) of the employers responding to the baseline survey said they first heard about supported internships via activities which could be related to Internships Work (local authority 9%, Employer Ambassadors 4%, regional employment network meeting 4%, SEND Employment Forum 3%).

⁴² Source: Figures supplied by DFN Project SEARCH, Internships Work summary of figures report, 10 March 2025. Satisfaction response options ranged from 1 to 6, 1=lowest satisfaction, 6=highest. Base: 293 respondents providing feedback. Source: Employer Ambassador Training Survey, Internships Work.

⁴³ Source: Internships Work Y3 Baseline Summary Report (March 2025).

social and health care providers, voluntary sector and social enterprises, supported employment providers, government and national organisations, young people and related stakeholders.⁴⁴ Forum members responding to a survey suggested that most SEND Employment Forums were established post-Internships Work investment. They gave an average satisfaction rating of 7.6 out of 10 for their overall experience with their SEND Employment Forum.⁴⁵ Local authority leads gave an average rating of 7 when asked about how satisfied they are about their forum.⁴⁶

A training package to local authority SEND Employment Forums was delivered throughout the investment period. This was designed to support them with engagement of employers in supported internships. As of March 2025, 148 local authorities had engaged in at least one training session and the majority of Forum respondents reported feeling more confident in offering placements to supported interns. Satisfaction with the training was high, over half (54%) of respondents rated the training at the highest satisfaction level and nearly one-third (31%) rated it at the second highest level.⁴⁷

Benefits and growth through SEND Employment or supported internship Forums

In the case studies, a key theme driving the growth of supported internships was enhancing awareness and understanding of supported internships with existing and prospective providers. This was primarily through the creation of new SEND Employment Forums in local authorities or the strengthening of existing forums, supported by grant funding received via Internships Work. In some cases, these new or strengthened partnerships fostered greater collaboration, enabling coordinated efforts to raise the profile of supported internship programmes and support recruitment activities, as illustrated in the following vignette.

⁴⁴ Source: Internships Work (January 2025) SEND Employment Forum Survey Key Findings and Recommendations. Survey live from 7th October to 15th November 2024. 179 Forum members across 83 participating local authorities responded.

⁴⁵ Source: Internships Work (January 2025) SEND Employment Forum Survey Key Findings and Recommendations. Survey live from 7th October to 15th November 2024. 179 Forum members across 83 participating local authorities responded.

⁴⁶ Source: Internships Work Y3 Baseline Summary Report (March 2025).

⁴⁷ Response options ranged from 1 to 6, 1=lowest satisfaction, 6=highest. Base: 383 respondents providing feedback. Source: Supported Internship SEND Employment Forum Training Survey (February 2023 - February 2025), Internships Work.

Provider collaboration across a local authority to support supported internship recruitment

All providers in [name of local authority], that's 4, we've been working collaboratively with now for the last year and we've organised a recruitment fair together and hosted it at one of the providers, that was really successful... we sold out of tickets. All the providers gave a presentation on their programme and the type of placements that they have.

They've also referred learners to one another because obviously... it's vital that the work placement matches the young person's aspirations and skill set, so the providers, when they've had an applicant and that they know that they won't be able to offer them a meaningful placement, they've referred them on to a different provider.

So rather than competing against one another, it's like let's work together for the young people of [name of local authority] to make sure that they're on the right course, they're going to enjoy their placement and they're going to successfully complete it. – *Local authority SEND project officer*

Also driving growth in supported internships was the strategic approach adopted by some local supported internship forum leads or SEND Employment Forum leads in determining which stakeholders should be involved in supporting the promotion of the supported internship programme. These leads actively established connections with relevant partners across the local authority to raise the profile of supported internships and, where appropriate, to integrate supported internships into existing work streams. A common practice was to ensure that the Careers Service was represented within the forums, thereby enabling careers professionals to provide informed guidance on supported internships to young people and their families. Other key partners frequently included representatives from adult social care teams, Preparing for Adulthood team, the SEND team and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team.

Internships Work analysis of the survey of SEND Employment Forum members suggested that the Forums may have helped to onboard employers:⁴⁸

- 57% of respondents said their forums brought in 0-10 employers, 9% onboarded 10-20 employers, 2% 30-40 employers, 1% 40-50 employers, 1% 50+ employers, 28% were unsure
- 48% said employers did attend the Forums, albeit inconsistently (20% said employers attended occasionally, 32% said employers did not attend)

⁴⁸ Also, 41% of respondents reported that their Forum included young people. Source: Internships Work (January 2025) SEND Employment Forum Survey Key Findings and Recommendations. Survey live from 7th October to 15th November 2024. 179 Forum members across 83 participating local authorities participated.

The case studies suggested that many Internships Work activities in local authorities or regions were directed towards raising the awareness and understanding of supported internships with employers. The following vignette describes the approach of one local authority.

Employer engagement through a new SEND Employment Forum

One of my roles has been to set up the SEND Employment Forum for [name of local authority] as part of the NDTi grant... that's been really successful. We've got an action plan and a lot of it is centred around getting more employers on board which has gone really well. We've got some really good players in [name of local authority] now. We've got [name of large department store], HMRC, NHS and across all sorts of different departments in the Council now.

I've spoken at different employer network events, for example, the [name of local authority] business anchors network and the Chamber of Commerce. ...we had lots of interns who were really wanting roles in hospitality, so I went over to some hospitality networks and spoke there... [I gave] a bit of information about supported internships, and then when an employer is hooked in, depending on what they want, I'll then refer them to the [name of college or specialist] provider or sometimes both, because they have some slightly different models, so certain employers fit better than others.

We've invited them [employers] to the Forum and put on breakfast and tried to bring some interns along who've been successful and get them to speak and really inspire them. – *Local authority supported internship lead*

Even if case study participants did not describe a significant increase in employers, employer engagement was one of their main activities either directly with potential employers or through relevant local authority groups, as described below:

We're certainly doing an awful lot more with our work and skills team, you know, liaising much better with them to make sure that all of those staff, who are our main links with employers, are including supported internships. We're making sure that they're well aware that one of the vulnerable groups that they should be promoting to employers is people with SEND. - *SEND Lead for the City Council*

As well as common messages around raising employer awareness, engagement and interest in supported internships, feedback highlighted other areas of impact of the SEND Employment Forums. This included, raising awareness with parents, empowering young people, increased collaboration, shared learning and resource pooling, improved quality and number or variety of supported internships, addressing barriers to employment, and

improved employment rates.⁴⁹ Local authorities highlighted effective collaboration and sharing of best practices, leading to stronger supported internship pathways.⁵⁰

Challenges were also identified in the feedback, which included: difficulties with participation and attendance (with suggestions to move to a quarterly rather than monthly frequency), concerns over maintaining momentum when Internships Work funding ceases, a need for greater representation of employers of varying organisational size and sector, and difficulties in measuring success and long-term outcomes of the Forums.

Around half (54%) of members responding to the SEND Employment Forum survey indicated plans or hope to continue their SEND Employment Forum beyond March 2025 and one-fifth (20%) said there were no plans to continue (key reasons included lack of funding, limited staff availability, or unclear leadership responsibility), 20% were uncertain (due to uncertain budgets or senior level approvals/structural changes within local authorities).⁵¹

Provider support for intern recruitment and engagement

As well as Internships Work promotional activities, all providers interviewed reported undertaking a range of recruitment activities designed to raise awareness of the supported internship programme and to attract young people to their courses.⁵² Providers considered these activities to be part of their 'everyday' practice. They commonly included open-day events for young people and their families, where families were provided with a general overview about the programme and its benefits. The events often included guidance on matters such as the potential financial implications of choosing the supported internship pathway and information about Access to Work (AtW)⁵³. Many providers also offered taster supported internship sessions for young people which sometimes incorporated workplace visits. Current interns frequently participated in these events, for example, by accompanying providers to local colleges to speak to prospective students about the supported internship programme. Almost all the interns and families

⁴⁹ Source: Internships Work (January 2025) SEND Employment Forum Survey Key Findings and Recommendations. Survey live from 7th October to 15th November 2024. 179 Forum members across 83 participating local authorities participated.

⁵⁰ Source: Internships Work Y3 Baseline Summary Report (March 2025).

⁵¹ Source: Internships Work (January 2025) SEND Employment Forum Survey Key Findings and Recommendations. Survey live from 7th October to 15th November 2024. 179 Forum members across 83 participating local authorities participated.

⁵² Education providers were key sources of awareness for interns about Supported internships (most interns first heard about Supported Internships from a teacher/tutor (32%) or a school/college careers adviser (30%)). Providers were also the top mention for employers' source of awareness (33%), followed by a work colleague (32%).

⁵³ Access to Work is a discretionary grant scheme delivered by DWP which can assist in paying for practical support to enable disabled people or those with health conditions to overcome workplace barriers. Supported interns with EHCPs can apply for Access to Work funding to cover the costs of practical support in the workplace, if Access to Work guidance requirements are met. The DWP announced that from September 2025, in line with Access to Work guidance, they would only accept support plans for Access to Work for supported interns that request job coaching for 26 weeks or less and include tapering off. Interns who are taking part in the non-EHCP supported internships Pilot are not eligible to claim Access to Work funding.

interviewed indicated that once they had decided to apply, the application process was straightforward and progressed quickly due to the support provided by the respective provider.

In addition, case study providers involved in the Pilot reported significant benefits from engaging with a wider range of teams within the local authority. These included Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) teams, virtual schools, leaving care teams, and youth justice services. By establishing these connections, providers were more likely to identify and recruit sufficient numbers of young people for the supported internship programme. This collaborative approach demonstrated the importance of cross-service engagement in addressing recruitment challenges and ensuring that opportunities reached those young people in need of the programme.

Future demand for supported internships

The section of this report, [The need for an appropriate pathway](#), discusses how the need for supported internships has helped to drive growth over the investment period. This need continues. Local authority survey respondents gave predictions of the number of supported interns in the next year. Towards the end of the investment period, 150 local authorities predicted a total of 5,891 interns in the next academic year, ranging from 1 to 170.⁵⁴ This suggests a substantial increase in demand in the future although it is likely based on early predictions rather than confirmed enrolments. When asked about future plans for sustaining supported internships in their local area, the most common response from local authorities was that they were hoping to continue delivering supported internships with the same funding model or reduced provision ([Annex 1](#) Table 45). Some were looking to expand provision or planning to embed supported internships into wider provision. A few mentioned seeking alternative funding, exploring a financially viable model or putting together a business case to continue.⁵⁵

There were indications that demand for supported internships would be maintained or increased amongst employers. Two-fifths (40%) of employers responding to the endline-survey said they would increase the number of intern placements they would offer in the next academic year and 36% said they would stay the same. Just 4% said they would decrease the number of placements they would offer and a further 20% were unsure.

⁵⁴ Question: How many supported interns do you predict you'll have next year? Source: Local authority survey, Internships Work. Survey live from December 2024 to February 2025. Where a range was predicted, the highest number has been taken. 'Unknown' / unclear responses have been excluded from the data.

⁵⁵ Question: What are your local authority's plans for sustaining Supported Internships in your local area beyond March 2025, when the Internships Work funding is set to conclude? Base: 150. Source: Local authority survey, Internships Work.

Demand for supported internships for young people without EHCPs

Education professionals responding to the evaluation surveys believed that there is a need for supported internships for young people without EHCPs and that supported internships are a suitable model:

- almost all providers (94%) agreed that there is a need for supported internships to support young people into work who do not have an EHCP, but have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD); 63% agreed strongly
- the majority (68%) of providers not involved in the Pilot said they would be likely to enrol young people without an EHCP onto their supported internship programme if eligibility was extended to include them (55% very likely), although one-fifth (21%) said they would be unlikely
- the vast majority (85%) of job coaches believed that supported internships are suitable for supporting young people who do not have EHCP into work (57% very suitable)

Of the 12 Pilot local authorities⁵⁶, 3 said that they had a supported internship offer for every young person without an EHCP who needed one, 7 did not, and 2 did not know. When predicting the number of interns for the next year (from September 2025), this ranged from zero to 30, with an average of 5. Five local authorities stated that they would have no supported interns from September 2025.⁵⁷ However, following the announcement of additional Pilot funding, all 12 pilot local authorities continued to deliver supported internships.

Providers and local authority professionals from the case study sites similarly described a pressing need for supported internships for this cohort of young people who faced barriers to traditional education or employment pathways. One of the 4 providers had received 44 referrals for 18 places in their first year. This need arose primarily because large numbers of this cohort of young people were 'at a distance' from education and training, often having disengaged from formal learning environments. Many of these young people had presented with high levels of SEND that had never been formally identified, leaving them without the statutory support typically associated with an EHCP. In addition, severe mental health challenges and anxiety were common, which meant that classroom-based learning and traditional educational settings were initially perceived as highly stressful by many Pilot interns.

⁵⁶ The Pilot was expanded to 16 local authorities for an additional year (March 2025 to March 2026).

⁵⁷ Note that the local authority survey for the Pilot was administered before the announcement to extend the Internships Work contract (including the Pilot). Questions: How many young people without an EHCP, who are residents in your local authority, are on a Supported Internship this year? Does your local area have a Supported Internship offer for every young person without an EHCP who needs one (Yes, no, don't know)? How many supported interns without an EHCP do you predict you'll have next year from September 2025? Base: 12. Source: Local authority survey, Internships Work.

My mum looked into [supported internships] and I was just horrified because it meant meeting new people, it meant trying to push myself when I had been in my bed for the past six months. I just thought it was too much of a stretch. – *Current Pilot intern*

The demand was further driven by negative prior experiences of education, which contributed to low confidence and reluctance to re-engage with conventional pathways. These young people were frequently not ready for apprenticeships, even at entry-level, due to gaps in both academic and employability skills. Interviewees commented that many had slipped through the net of EHCP assessments and, as a result, lacked access to structured support.

Combined with a lack of alternative options within the post-16 and especially the post-18 education and training landscape, supported internships offered a practical and inclusive solution.

I was at a NEET summit last week with talk of a crisis in numbers... there is no other course. The NEET teams have skilled workers and engage with them, but they only have so many hours and at 18 the service is no longer provided. - *Supported internship provider*

Experiences of supported internships

As part of the evaluation aim around exploring how, and to what extent the policy investment improved the quality of supported internships, substantial evidence was collated via surveys and the case studies on the lived experiences of interns, employers, and job coaches.

Summary of findings

The survey and case study findings consistently indicated that interns' experiences of the supported internship programme were highly positive, with the vast majority (over 85%) of interns agreeing that they liked being on their supported internship, they enjoyed their work placement and were happy with the help they received from their tutor, job coach and employer. Male interns were typically more positive than females, particularly about their work placement. Interns frequently expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage in a workplace environment and reported that they developed constructive and rewarding relationships with both colleagues and peers. Findings for Pilot interns were very similar. In the limited cases where less favourable experiences were noted, the predominant concern identified related to the process of matching interns with appropriate work placements.

Whilst the vast majority of job coaches felt satisfied in their role and confident in their skills and knowledge, particularly around supporting interns, some lacked confidence in negotiating placements and jobs that matched interns' goals.

Employers' experiences were also highly positive: the majority were satisfied with the amount (82%) and quality (87%) of support they had received, and 93% said they felt suitably prepared to host interns. However, there were indications that improvements could be made to the training and support for employers, particularly for those in their first year of hosting interns.

Young people's experiences of supported internships

Overall young people's experiences of supported internships were positive ([Annex 1 Table 46](#)).⁵⁸ The vast majority of interns that responded to the baseline and endline surveys agreed (agree/agree strongly) that they:

- liked being on the supported internship programme (baseline 86%, endline 87%)
- had enough help and support from their tutor (baseline 92%, endline 89%)

⁵⁸ Analysis is based on all respondents who completed a baseline and endline survey, which means that the baseline and endline responses may be from different interns. Where it was possible to identify interns that completed both a baseline and endline survey (n=92), no statistically significant differences were found between their baseline and endline responses.

- were happy about the work they were doing on placement (baseline 85%, endline 86%)
- had a say about choosing their work placement(s) (baseline 83%, endline 79%)

Notably, agreement was consistently high at both the baseline and endline surveys, suggesting interns had positive experiences throughout the programme and almost all interns said they knew where to go for help should they need it at both stages (baseline 95%, endline 95%).

Interns' survey responses were similarly positive at the endline-stage about their job coach and work placement ([Annex 1](#) Table 47). Agreement was highest for:

- I have learned and developed my job skills (net agree 93%, strongly agree 49%)
- I have enjoyed my work placement(s) (net agree 88%, strongly agree 51%)
- I have felt part of the team at my placement (net agree 88%, strongly agree 51%)
- I am happy with the help I have had from my job coach (net agree 88%, strongly agree 50%)
- my job coach has been there when I needed them (net agree 88%, strongly agree 46%)
- I am happy with the help I have had from my employer(s) (net agree 88%, strongly agree 44%)
- I felt confident with doing my work placement (net agree 88%, strongly agree 44%)
- I had enough training to do my work placement well (net agree 88%, strongly agree 42%)

Supported internships were felt to meet the needs of interns by the majority of job coaches responding to the survey (82%) and one-third (34%) said that supported internships completely met their needs.⁵⁹

All the interns who took part in the case studies were also very positive about their overall experience on their supported internship programme. Even if there had been elements of the programme which had not gone well at any point for some of them, they and their parents/carers reported that they would strongly recommend the programme to other young people if it were a suitable option for them. Three key themes emerged from the analysis of interns' experiences which describe what they particularly enjoyed about the supported internship: (i) they valued being in the workplace; (ii) their relationships with placement colleagues and peers; and (iii) the social and leisure activities built into the programme.

⁵⁹ Just 3% of job coaches said that supported internships do not really meet the needs of interns and 2% said don't know.

First, interns consistently reported that they valued being situated within a workplace environment, even when the placement did not align with their initial employment preference. Interns expressed enjoyment in undertaking daily and weekly tasks, acquiring new skills, and gaining insight into how specific industries operate. They appreciated the opportunity to be part of an organisation and found it particularly interesting to observe behind-the-scenes processes, especially in customer-facing settings. Many interns highlighted the positive experience of being treated as adults, which contrasted with their previous experiences in educational settings:

It is being treated more like an adult. At college you are an adult, but you are treated as a kid. That was very annoying for me. Here we are all equal and all adults. It is just a really friendly environment. – *Current intern*

Second, a very common positive experience reported by interns was the relationships they enjoyed with colleagues and their peers during the supported internship programme:

I like the staff a lot. I get on well with the other staff on reception and feel like one of the team. - *Current intern*

The department asked him out for a night out with them bowling and dinner. He's never had anything like that before. It's been nice for him. They made him feel included. - *Parent of current intern*

A small number of graduate interns reported maintaining friendships formed during their work placements, after completing the supported internship programme and transitioning into other employment.

Third, interns reported positive experiences of provider-led routines and events that facilitated opportunities for social and leisure activities with their peers as part of the programme. These activities included day trips and, in some cases, structured initiatives such as a 'Friday leisure day,' during which interns planned and organised their preferred activities. Additionally, one graduate intern highlighted the value of participating in a four-day residential trip, which provided further opportunities for social interaction.

Only a small proportion of intern survey respondents disagreed with any of the statements about their supported internship experiences (7% or fewer), showing some potential dissatisfaction. For interviewees who reported negative experiences during their supported internship, this mainly related to either unexpected changes to workplace routines or issues with work placements.

Challenges in managing unexpected changes to workplace routines included situations where a work mentor or close colleague was absent due to illness, leaving interns uncertain about whom to approach for support. Other isolated cases involved disruptions such as temporary relocation of work areas due to building repairs or, in one instance, the closure of the host company.

The endline-survey data suggests that a minority of interns had difficulties with their placements as there was an increase in the proportion who disagreed that they had a say about choosing their work placement(s) (baseline 3%, endline 7%). In the interviews, a small number of interns expressed disappointment at not securing a placement in their preferred work setting or at not completing the number of rotations originally planned. Additional examples included a placement being cancelled at short notice by an employer and interns experiencing periods with insufficient tasks to undertake or not fully understanding what they had to do all the time.

Supported internships Pilot

Survey responses from Pilot interns were also very positive, particularly for their experiences with their job coach ([Annex 1](#) Tables 48 to 49). Similarly, interns interviewed as part of the case studies were positive about their experiences. The following quotation is from an intern who previously described being very anxious at the thought of starting the programme.

It was life changing. I genuinely didn't think I would get an opportunity like this. I'm feeling really tearful talking about it. I think just being able to do something like this is amazing, honestly. - *Current intern*

Analyses found consistent themes of building relationships with colleagues and enjoying the tasks on their placements as the elements of the programme they really enjoyed. In addition to these common factors, two interns specifically expressed a sense of pride and personal satisfaction in undertaking the work associated with their placement.

It feels empowering knowing you are helping someone, showing them [children] how to do stuff and organising sports events. – *Current intern*

Differences by young people's characteristics and employment status

A number of differences in interns' experiences were noted based on the characteristics of interns responding to the surveys and whether they had secured employment ([Annex 1](#) Tables 50 to 53).⁶⁰ At the endline-stage:

- male interns, particularly younger males (18-21), were typically more positive about their experiences on the supported internship programme than females, particularly about their work placement
- interns with communication and interaction needs were also more positive about their work placement compared to interns with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, they were more likely to agree that they enjoyed their work

⁶⁰ The base sizes were too low for sub-group analysis of Pilot intern survey responses.

placements, were happy with the help from their employer, and felt part of a team⁶¹

- interns who were not in employment at the time of completing the endline or follow-up surveys were also less likely to be happy with their experience of their supported internship, say that their internship had helped them to be ready for working, or to recommend the pathway to others

Employers' experiences of supported internships

Overall, employers' experiences of hosting interns were positive. At the time of completing the employer baseline and endline surveys, the majority of employers were satisfied (very/quite satisfied) with:

- their experience of being involved with the supported internship programme (baseline 89%, endline 78%) and around two-thirds were very satisfied (baseline 64%, endline 67%)
- the information about what supported internships are (baseline 86%, endline 89%) and what they were expected to do as an employer (baseline 85%, endline 89%)
- the communication about the young people they were hosting (baseline 85%, endline 87%) and how well matched the interns were to their organisation (baseline 84%, endline 87%)

The vast majority of employers felt confident in their ability to host interns. At the endline-stage, 93% felt suitably prepared (very/quite prepared) to host interns and more than 90% of employers felt confident (scored 4 or 5 out of 5) that they ([Annex 1](#) Table 54):⁶²

- knew how to support interns well, make reasonable adjustments and review interns' progress
- could help interns to develop their job/sector-related and employability-related knowledge and skills

The majority of employers felt confident at the endline-stage that they had the resources and ability to support interns well (87%) and that they were able to shape the job role/s to meet interns' needs (76%). Almost all (96%) employers said they made adjustments within the workplace to accommodate interns, most commonly job or work modification (78%), adjustments to the workplace environment (56%) or provision of a support worker (42%). One-fifth of employers made accessibility adjustments (e.g. wheelchair access, space, parking) (20%) or utilised technology, aids or equipment (20%). Other

⁶¹ The base size for interns with physical and/or sensory needs was too low to conduct sub-group analysis (n=23).

⁶² Employers' confidence was similarly high at the baseline-stage, suggesting that the majority felt confident in their abilities throughout their experience.

adjustments or support provided included travel (13%) or communication (13%) support, or specialist information technology (IT) or programmes (9%).

The majority of employers felt well informed and supported by their provider. At the endline-stage:

- 91% of employers were satisfied (very/quite satisfied) with the amount, and 87% with the quality, of support provided to their intern(s)
- 82% were satisfied with the amount, and 87% with the quality, of support they had received
- 82% were satisfied they had good and regular communication regarding skills development and support for their interns and 78% with the provider's understanding of their needs as an organisation/employer
- 87% were confident that they knew where to get support to overcome any challenges

Some providers and employers involved in the case studies reported notable improvements in the preparation of workplace mentors, particularly among organisations that were relatively new to the supported internship programme. Stakeholders acknowledged that effective mentoring requires dedicated time and structured training to build the necessary understanding and skills to support interns successfully. The following example illustrates how one employer enhanced its approach to preparing and training mentors.

At the start when we first began, staff were less comfortable acting as mentors. Staff have to grow into that role. We still have staff now, newer members of staff, who are not ready to take on that mentoring role. Mentoring is developed through exposure to it and modelling mentoring behaviour... lots of peer-to-peer support in the company between staff working in the same technical area, so they get used to giving and receiving feedback before they become mentor. Some staff go into the college to run small sessions with interns based there, look at their work and offer opinions and things, so that helps develop those mentoring skills. – *Employer*

Whilst 71% of employers were satisfied with the training provided to them, 11% were dissatisfied. Furthermore, the survey data suggested that employers in their first year of hosting interns may require more support as they were less likely at the baseline-stage to say they felt very prepared to host interns (21% versus 54% for employers that had been hosting for 2 or more years) and they were less likely to feel very confident in aspects of their role in supporting and developing interns ([Annex 1](#) Table 55).

Job coaches' perspectives on supported internships

Most job coaches were positive about their role.⁶³ Around three-quarter of responders to the job coach survey were satisfied (very/quite satisfied) overall with their role (76%), agreed (agree/agree strongly) that they received enough training and support (77%) and that effective practice was shared openly within their organisation (76%). Similarly, most job coaches agreed there was a clear culture and strategy within their supported internship programme (74%), an ambitious curriculum (74%) and in particular that they had high expectations that interns would gain sustainable employment (86%).

The majority of job coaches responding to the survey were also confident in their skills and knowledge related to their role (very/quite confident), particularly for ([Annex 1 Table 56](#)):

- tailoring support to meet interns' needs (quite confident 30%, very confident 69%)
- enabling interns to be productive and integrated in their workplace (quite confident 33%, very confident 66%)
- tailoring support to meet employers' needs (quite confident 42%, very confident 53%)
- addressing barriers to participation and progress (quite confident 42%, very confident 52%)
- systematic instruction to build interns' skills and learning of complex tasks (quite confident 42%, very confident 51%)
- developing the specification of an intern's job to meet their needs and skills (quite confident 44%, very confident 49%)

However, a small proportion of job coaches were dissatisfied with their role (16%) and some lacked confidence in aspects of their role which involved employers:

- securing sustainable paid permanent positions that match interns' goals (not very/not at all confident 21%)
- helping employers understand how to recruit and retain a diverse workforce (10%)
- negotiating job matches with employers (10%)

As part of the interviews, job coaches were asked to describe the challenges of the role. A small number of job coaches described that their work could be difficult because of its wide remit with multiple stakeholders.

⁶³ The number of interns that job coaches supported varied. Job coaches that responded to the survey supported 7 or 8 interns on average (mean 7.7), however, the range was wide (between 1 and 46 interns) ([Annex 1 Table 57](#)). The majority (85%) of job coaches supported between 1 and 12 interns. Job coaches that supported Pilot interns in the first year of the Pilot typically supported just 1 (n=8) or 2 (n=2) interns.

I have three customers - parents, interns and employers and am trying to please everybody. Ultimately [I am] supporting the intern to achieve the best possible outcome, but I also want to keep the employers happy ...meet them halfway with everything you do. Parents, you also want to make sure they're well informed and supporting the young person at home. It can be spinning plates to keep everyone happy. - *Job coach*

The emotional demands of the role further add to its difficulty. One job coach described how close relationships with interns meant that the intern often shared personal or triggering issues that could be hard for a job coach to “shake off” and could impact the rest of the working day. Moreover, if an intern had had a difficult day, it could take considerable time spent with the intern working out what had gone wrong and then how to support them.

Others described how contacting new employers for placements was not straightforward, and that job coaches often faced resistance or confusion about what an internship involved and what the job coach role entailed. Finally, it could be challenging to support interns in a way that promoted independence - being present enough to guide them but invisible enough to let them learn - while managing the challenge of employers or interns becoming overly reliant on them.

By far the most common improvement job coaches mentioned that would help them in their role was more supported internship placements or employers (73%) and this was the most frequent mention irrespective of their satisfaction with their role. Job coaches who were less than very satisfied with their role also commonly requested more teamworking/support (52%), more training (47%) or improved leadership (35%).

Embedding quality in supported internship programmes

This section explores the quality of supported internship provision as described in the SIQAF domains of leadership, planning, partnership, preparedness, and progress. It also presents provider perspectives on changes in the quality of provision over the investment period.

Summary of findings

Overall, the findings indicated that practices related to leadership, planning, preparedness, and progress were embedded across the case study sites. In contrast, partnership working was identified as more challenging by some participants.

During the investment period, the vast majority (85%) of providers reported that the quality of their supported internship provision had improved, in particular for curriculum personalisation, vocational profiling and employment support for interns and training and support for job coaches.

During the case study visits, several providers reported notable improvements in the quality of assessment processes over time, which included extended transitional support, introduction of summer transition programmes, ongoing assessment throughout the programme, and use of digital tools.

Several case studies indicated that there had been a strengthening of quality assurance processes, including providers using the SIQAF and participating in peer reviews, and some local authority teams adopting a more proactive role in monitoring provider delivery.

Exploring quality through SIQAF domains

The following sections draw on the case studies to explore how quality of provision as described by the SIQAF, is practised and experienced. It focuses on the 5 key SIQAF domains of leadership, planning, partnership, preparedness and progress.

Leadership: strategic commitment as the foundation of quality

Across most case study sites, senior leadership commitment was identified as a major driver of quality. Leaders within colleges, employer organisations and supported employment services played an active role in ensuring the programme's purpose - to support interns into paid employment - remained visible and a priority.

Quality was reflected in:

- clear messaging from senior leaders that employment outcomes were the central objective of supported internships
- leaders regularly visiting interns in the workplace and attending celebration events
- investment in professional development for staff involved in supported internship delivery
- one notable example where a college strategically embedded supported internships within its five-year plan and accountability processes, requiring each department to create a business case for hosting placements

This strategic embedding ensures that supported internships are not peripheral but instead become part of the wider identity of the setting, planning and resource allocation. Where leadership was strong, programmes were considered more coherent and sustainable.

Planning: flexible, person-centred design and delivery

Planning is where providers operationalise person-centredness and the SIQAF expectation that around 70% of an intern's time should be spent in the workplace. The majority of case study sites met this threshold; where they did not, providers justified this based on interns' disabilities or the need to support those with very high levels of SEND.

Quality elements included:

- person-centred planning - where providers consistently used approaches ensuring the intern's voice guided decision-making, including:
 - job carving with employers to create tasks aligned to interns' strengths
 - aligning life skills teaching (for example, travel training) with individual need
 - offering differentiated academic support in literacy/numeracy
 - ensuring programme activities aligned with EHCP targets
 - systematic approaches like intern passports, which helped employers understand interns' strengths, interests and required adjustments
- mentoring - all interns had mentors or buddies and highly valued them. Quality mentoring was supported by:
 - providers offering mentor training (group, individual, face-to-face or online)
 - some organisations appointing a supported internship coordinator to oversee mentor-intern matching and support.

However, challenges occurred where information about interns was not cascaded effectively within the employer team or where mentoring relied on voluntary goodwill, leading to variation in commitment and capacity.

Preparedness: preparing interns, families and employers

High quality supported internship delivery was strongly evident in the focus on preparation before and during the programme.

Vocational profiling was a central feature of preparedness and often began during induction weeks, through home visits and through intensive early programme activities.

Vocational profiling supported:

- identification of strengths and aspirations
- matching to placements
- conversations between job coaches and employers to shape suitable roles

Well-structured induction programmes were an important element of preparation.

Induction periods typically lasted three to four weeks and included:

- literacy and numeracy assessments
- travel training assessments
- health and safety training
- group activities to observe teamwork
- introductions to workplace mentors
- orientation to tasks, routines, and timetables

Progress: tracking, reviewing and supporting growth

Progress monitoring was one of the strongest areas of practice.

SMART targets were widely used and reviewed regularly (often twice per term) in the case study sites. They supported:

- collaborative target setting with interns
- communication with parents
- structured reflection

Some providers creatively increased employer involvement, for example, through employment planning evenings, where interns presented their achievements and received feedback from job coaches, mentors, managers, and families.

The use of digital tools was commonly reported in the case study interviews. Many sites adopted digital platforms to share progress updates and track vocational skills, enabling accessible and granular monitoring.

Fading support - the planned reduction of input from the job coach - was embedded across sites and seen as essential for developing intern independence. Mentors took over supporting the interns as their confidence with task and the role grew, but job coaches remained available for troubleshooting.

A notable barrier to progress was employer or mentor reluctance to provide constructive criticism. Some feared upsetting interns and defaulted to overly positive assessments. This sometimes resulted in mismatches between reported readiness and employers' perceptions.

Partnerships: the most variable domain

While leadership, planning, preparedness and progress were generally strong, partnership working was not as well embedded across the case study sites.

Effective partnerships featured:

- regular contact with families
- parent and carer forums, review meetings and workplace visits
- collaborative responses during crises (for example, mental health support)

Similarly, employer partnerships flourished where:

- local authority forums supported employer engagement
- providers ran workplace training in autism and learning disability
- regular multiagency meetings were established

Some providers creatively expanded their networks, such as collaborating with EDI teams or employment training organisations to grow employer capacity around inclusive practice.

There were isolated instances within the case studies where partnership working between providers and local authorities was weak. In some cases, providers reported feeling disconnected from local authority activities, while in others, local authority representatives demonstrated limited understanding of the full scope of supported internship provision within their area.

One case study site presented clear evidence of insufficient partnership working, which adversely affected programme delivery and resulted in negative experiences for multiple stakeholders, including interns and professionals. The education provider described feeling isolated and unsupported by both their own management and the supported employment provider. The underlying causes of this situation were complex and interrelated, including staffing changes across teams, the appointment of a new manager at the work placement who lacked knowledge of supported internships, a very short lead-in time for programme implementation, and prolonged staff absences. Importantly,

interviewees emphasised that these challenges were not attributable to the supported internship programme itself.

Provider perspectives on changes in quality over the investment period

Providers responding to the survey reported an improvement in the quality of their supported internship provision over the investment period.⁶⁴ An example of such, is shown in the written case studies in [Annex 2](#). Amongst providers who responded to the surveys (Table 3):

- 85% felt that the quality of their supported internship provision had improved (much/a little improved) over the previous 2-3 years
- three-quarters (76%) of providers felt that the engagement and support from the local authority had improved over the previous 2-3 years
- the majority of providers noted improvements across a range of aspects of provision, and were most likely to report improvements in their personalisation of the curriculum (77%), the employment support they provided (75%), training and support for job coaches (75%), the quality of their supported internship employer placements (73%), matching supported internship placements to interns' interests and aspirations (72%) and placements meeting employers' business needs (70%)
- providers were somewhat less likely to feel that sustained employment outcomes had improved (55%)
- few providers reported worsening (much/a little worse) of aspects of their provision, the most common being sustained outcomes (11%), access to new employers (10%), opportunities for interns to experience business working patterns/shifts (8%) and interns spending the majority of their time on placement (7%)

Whilst these findings are positive overall, it is important to note that improvements were self-reported (not measured) and it may be that the providers that responded to the surveys were those which were more focussed on the quality of their supported internship provision.

⁶⁴ The survey questions were guided by the SIQAF across the key domains of leadership, planning, partnership, preparedness, and progress.

Table 3: Changes in quality - providers

| | NET Worsened | Much improved | NET Improved |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Quality of your supported internship provision | 3% | 31% | 85% |
| Personalisation of the supported internship curriculum | 3% | 40% | 77% |
| Your engagement with and support from the Local Authority around supported internships | 4% | 38% | 76% |
| Support for interns for job searching, building a CV and interviews | 0% | 44% | 75% |
| Training and support for job coaches | 4% | 40% | 75% |
| Quality of supported internship employer placements | 4% | 22% | 73% |
| Vocational profiling and relevance of supported internship employer placements to the intern's job interests and aspirations | 2% | 37% | 72% |
| Placement roles meeting the business needs of employers | 1% | 29% | 70% |
| Personalised support which is faded over time, enabling interns to be as independent as possible | 3% | 35% | 69% |
| Employer/workplace support for interns' skills development and social inclusion | 6% | 30% | 69% |
| Your access to new employers to host interns | 10% | 26% | 69% |
| Matching of supported internship employer placements to the skills of the interns | 4% | 40% | 67% |
| Training and support for the employer, manager, workplace buddy and mentor | 3% | 23% | 57% |
| Interns spending the majority of their time based in off-site work placements with an employer | 7% | 30% | 51% |
| Opportunities for interns to experience the shifts and working patterns in the business | 8% | 20% | 51% |

Base: All responses (97)

Source: Provider survey

Enhanced assessment practices

During the case study visits, several providers reported notable improvements in the quality of assessment processes over time. These enhancements included:

- strengthened initial assessment - providers refined their initial assessment procedures to gain a more accurate understanding of interns' needs, enabling better alignment between individual profiles and placement opportunities
- transitional support - transitional support, including summer transition programmes, prior to the formal start of the programme was improved and, in some cases, extended to ensure smoother entry into the internship
- ongoing assessment throughout the programme - providers increasingly adopted vocational profiling as a tool to establish a baseline and monitor learner progress throughout the internship, thereby supporting personalised development plans
- use of digital tools - one provider had introduced an application that allowed staff to capture photos and videos of interns' work, creating a visual record of progress and achievements

Strengthened quality assurance processes

Several case study providers participated in a SIQAF peer review as part of an external assessment of their programme. An example of such is shown in the written case studies in [Annex 2](#). In addition, evidence indicated that some local authority teams had adopted a more proactive role in monitoring provider delivery, frequently conducting on-site visits. A key motivation for this increased engagement was to ensure confidence that referrals of young people were appropriately matched to providers, that individual needs would be met, and that participation would lead to positive outcomes. One local authority had implemented measures to promote consistency across all providers, including adherence to a model whereby approximately 70% of interns' programme time was spent in the workplace, with delivery embedded within employer settings.

In the first few years of Internships Work, we really embedded one model in [name of local authority] with supported internships [being mainly] employer based. Before that we had a number of mixed models that claimed to be supported internships, but when you looked at what they entailed, they were not a majority of time in the employer... lots of centre-based study programmes with work experience. We had to work to turn that around, they are not supported internship, we want around 70% work placement, if not more. It has helped massively with the quality of the supported internship. Providers follow this model which is employer based and it's all embedded in the employer as well. – *Local authority representative*

Facilitators of high quality provision

This section examines the key factors that underpinned and facilitated high quality supported internship provision.

Summary of findings

Central to high quality provision was the pivotal role of the job coach, whose support enabled interns to navigate workplace expectations and develop essential skills for employment. Alongside this was the importance of person-centred planning, which when embedded as an overarching ethos emerged as a key facilitator. The sustained commitment of providers and employers to the aims and purpose of the supported internship programme also served as a key driver in delivering high quality provision.

Evidence from the surveys and case studies indicated that Internships Work activities were another facilitator. Sharing good practice, through local authority forums for example, allowed providers to learn from the experiences of others. Implementation of the SIQAF and job coach training were felt by providers to be supporting improvements in the quality of provision.

The support provided by mentors and wider colleagues in the workplace was another critical factor and guidance provided by job coaches enhanced mentors' ability to support interns effectively. Interns' work contributing to meeting employers' business needs was also an important enabler and created potential pathways to long-term employment.

The factors contributing to high quality provision were similar for the Pilot, however unidentified SEND, higher levels of SEMH and increased safeguarding concerns for Pilot interns highlighted the need to adapt delivery to ensure high quality provision.

Role of the job coach

Across the case studies, interns, their parents and carers, and employers consistently identified the job coach as the most critical factor in ensuring high quality provision.

Interns particularly valued the personalised support provided at the outset of the supported internship programme. This included assistance with securing an appropriate placement, learning new tasks within the workplace, and undertaking travel training. As the programme progressed, job coaches played a key role in supporting interns with employment preparation activities such as CV writing, job applications, and mock interviews.

Employers echoed these views, emphasising the job coach's contribution in areas such as job carving, task analysis, and guidance on implementing reasonable adjustments.

Employers also highlighted the importance of job coaches working alongside interns until they achieved independence in their roles, as well as their involvement in mentor training and broader workforce development.

Job coaches are critical – in the first stages, we didn't know anything, my managers didn't know anything, we couldn't have told you anything about autism or disabilities and what that means, how to communicate with somebody and what you can expect back... Especially for small and medium enterprises [SME] you are so embroiled in the day-to-day that you don't have the time to educate yourself on what it means to employ someone with SEND. Then add the fear factor into that, it is not surprising it feels like climbing a mountain – job coaches are vital. -
Employer

Beyond the specific tasks they performed, the effectiveness of job coaches is underpinned by their extensive knowledge, professional skills, and personal qualities. These attributes were identified as critical to the success of the role and were highly valued by interns, parents and carers, and employers. These key qualities include:

- comprehensive understanding of interns' profiles and them as individuals - job coaches possessed deep knowledge of each intern's strengths, areas for development, and individual support needs
- strong communication skills - they demonstrated the ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders, including interns, families, employers, and colleagues
- relationship-building capability - job coaches established positive and trusting relationships with diverse groups quickly, fostering collaboration and confidence
- flexibility and adaptability - they managed multiple tasks and responded to varying circumstances across different settings within a single day, ensuring continuity of support
- accessibility and responsiveness - job coaches maintained availability to all parties involved, providing timely assistance and reassurance when required

These qualities collectively enabled job coaches to deliver personalised, high quality support that promotes intern independence, facilitates workplace integration, and strengthens partnerships between providers and employers.

Person-centred planning

As outlined in [Planning: flexible, person-centred design and delivery](#), case study findings provide strong evidence of personalised support for interns, both within workplace settings and through tailored curricula. Beyond these measures, a sustained commitment to person-centred planning - embedded as an overarching ethos - emerged as a key

facilitator of high quality provision. This section illustrates two specific ways in which this principle was operationalised: (i) through placement matching and (ii) through incremental, everyday practices that reinforced individualisation.

Placement matching

Interns and their parents were primarily motivated to join the supported internship programme by the chance to gain meaningful work experience and potentially secure paid employment, and although interns initially held high expectations for preferred placements, most were satisfied with their experiences. A small number were disappointed when placed in roles that did not match their interests, but many were later offered alternative or additional placements, and even those who did not receive their first choice still felt the programme had been worthwhile. Many interns began without clear career goals, requiring significant support from job coaches through vocational profiling, workplace visits, taster sessions, and reflective activities to help them understand suitable roles. Throughout the programme, interns often revised their career preferences, which required providers to remain flexible in sourcing new or alternative placement opportunities.

Providers acknowledged the practical challenge of securing sufficient employer engagement to meet individual preferences. As programme enrolments increased, the pressure to identify placements aligned with interns' interests intensified, occasionally limiting the ability to offer an exact match.

When we had 10 interns and all wanted to have different things, it's quite manageable. Now that we've got 30 next year, it is becoming quite unmanageable – we are starting to group pathways, for example, setting up a retail cohort and trying to get five employers that can take two [interns] each. - Supported internship provider

Incremental, everyday person-centred practices

The accounts provided by interns, parents and carers, and providers contained numerous descriptions of actions that, at first glance, appeared minor or inconsequential.

I do talk quite a lot, so I either get distracted with talking to someone or I get distracted doing something random in the middle of a project. They [job coaches] helped me to use a software programme to list all of the things that I need to do. But then I forgot to look at this, so it racked up a bit. So, to make it digestible we went through and prioritised the ones that I could get through in that day on a physical white board, so the list is in front of my face and I can't ignore it. – *Current intern*

If there was anything that they [interns] weren't doing right or in the right order, hopefully that is something that we would see before it became an issue. If they were struggling with something, we would take a step back out of the job for a bit and work on that skill. For example, one of our interns was working as a domestic and couldn't tie a binbag, so we spent 10 minutes every morning tying a binbag with him. He got it in the end, and we have time in the morning before they go on placement to do those things and develop those skills. - *Job coach*

However, when considered collectively across the duration of the programme, these actions emerged as significant enablers of high quality provision. While many of these measures were small in scale and tailored to the unique circumstances of individual interns, their cumulative impact was substantial and often transformative.

Commitment to the supported internship programme

The case study interviews provided clear evidence of a strong and genuine commitment to the aims and purpose of the supported internship programme, which served as a key driver in delivering high quality provision. This commitment was reflected in participants' emphasis on several core principles: recognising the critical role of work in enabling young people to achieve future independence; ensuring that young people with SEND have access to education and training that supports their success; promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion within the workplace; and contributing to the development of a more inclusive society overall. Commitment from senior leadership teams to strategically enable high quality provision was clearly demonstrated, as outlined in [Embedding quality in supported internship programmes](#). Beyond this strategic level, everyday practices also reflected this commitment, with numerous examples illustrating how staff actively embedded the programme's principles in routine interactions and operational decisions.

The staff from the first placement came to see him graduate, they are invested and really care – that was a good quality placement and fantastic people who really care and make sure interns get more out of their placement. - *Parent of graduate intern*

The goal is to instil a sense of pride in young people, no-one leaves the company worse off than when they came in, it is not just a management thing, it has to go right through all staff down. - *Employer*

Internships Work activities

Sharing good practice

In addition to raising awareness of supported internships, Internships Work activities delivered through various local authority forums were another facilitator of high quality

provision. Case study findings highlighted that the most significant benefit was the opportunity for members to share good practice, exchange resources, and learn from the experiences of other providers. In some instances, this collaboration extended regionally, with local authorities working together to disseminate learning and strengthen provision. Forum members also developed shared resources, such as informational videos, to engage stakeholders - particularly employers - by promoting best practice and supporting recruitment activities. Participants reported a shift in perceptions regarding the capabilities of young people with SEND, both among forum members and within the wider community. The following vignette illustrates how one local authority implemented workshops with interns and a business psychologist to enhance vocational profiling and job carving.

Enhanced vocational profiling and job carving

We used some of the money from the NDTI's action plan to fund and pilot some workshops with some interns and a business psychologist.

We coded up some workshops with the business psychologist and the interns around strengths and being able to recognise our strengths and job carving in the workplace.

We had two workshops with the young people where we supported them in being able to recognise their strengths but also their weaknesses. They were helped to recognise that their strengths can be double sided.

They applied what they had learned about themselves in their work placement. There was like a questionnaire, which they filled out at the beginning and at the end of the time we spent with them to see how they had progressed with their understanding. – *Local authority representative*

Awareness and use of SIQAF

The Internships Work consortium reported slow uptake of the SIQAF self-assessment tool and peer reviews at the start of their contract but this gained momentum throughout the investment period. Difficulties were experienced in engaging the sector and the time required for quality assessment to be embraced. Additionally, cancellations (often due to provider capacity issues) had particularly hampered the progress of peer reviews.⁶⁵

Towards the end of the investment period, 61% of local authorities indicated that either they or any of their providers had completed a self-assessment using the SIQAF. Taking

⁶⁵ Internships Work was contracted to deliver 118 peer reviewed self-assessments by March 2025 using the SIQAF. Due to the difficulties engaging the sector, this KPI was reduced to 100 peer reviews. By March 2025, 79 peer reviews had been completed, with a further 28 planned (reported by Internships Work).

the next stage in quality assessment was less common however, with 42% of LAs stating that they or their providers had signed up to complete a peer review using the SIQAF.⁶⁶

Of the 12 Pilot local authorities responding to the survey, by the second year of the Pilot, 10 said that either they or any of their providers had completed a self-assessment using the SIQAF, and 8 had signed up to complete a peer review.

Nevertheless, engagement and interest in the SIQAF was high amongst providers responding to the survey:⁶⁷

- almost all (97%) providers had heard of SIQAF and the majority were either working through the framework (8%), developing their action plan (31%) or had completed/were undertaking a peer review (19%)
- a further 23% were intending to use it but had not started, 12% were interested in using it and 7% were undecided
- no providers had reviewed SIQAF and decided not to use it

Most providers who had engaged with SIQAF but had not done a peer review at the time of completing the survey said they intended to do so (21 out of 29 providers) and the remainder were unsure (maybe n=5, don't know n=3) mainly because they were unsure how to find a suitable organisation to conduct the review (n=5).

Perceptions and impact of the SIQAF on quality of provision

Perceptions of the SIQAF were positive amongst the majority of survey respondents who had reviewed or engaged with it ([Annex 1](#) Table 58 and 59):

- the majority agreed that self-assessment was the right approach to improving the quality of supported internship programmes (86%), that the SIQAF fitted with their context (72%) and that the SIQAF (80%) and peer review (82%) would help them improve the quality and consistency of their provision⁶⁸
- 88% of those that had at least begun working through the SIQAF (n=43) felt that it was useful (44% very useful)

There were similar positive findings in analysis conducted by BASE which suggested that the peer reviews were useful validation exercises. Their analysis found that providers scored themselves slightly higher on average than peer reviewers and that domain 2

⁶⁶ Question: Have you or any of your providers completed a self-assessment using the SIQAF (Yes 61%, No 23%, Don't know 16%)? Have you or any of your providers signed up to complete a peer review using the SIQAF (yes 42%, No 34%, Don't know 24%)? Base: 150 LAs. Source: LA survey (December 2024 – Feb 2025), Internships Work.

⁶⁷ Data based on unique provider responses (n=74). Where providers had responded to the survey in cohort 2 and cohort 3, analysis is based on their response in cohort 3.

⁶⁸ Based on providers who had reviewed or engaged with SIQAF (n=65).

(Planning) and domain 5 (Progress) were the strongest predictors of high outcomes in the results, across both self-assessment and peer review scores.⁶⁹

The SIQAF was felt to have improved supported internship provision amongst providers responding to the survey.⁷⁰ The aspects of provision that the SIQAF was most likely to have improved/was expected to improve were sharing effective practice (65% to a great or moderate extent), leadership culture and strategy (58%), engaging and supporting interns (53%) and staff understanding of the benefits of supported internships (51%) ([Annex 1](#) Table 60).

Providers were least likely to feel that the SIQAF would improve sustained employment for interns (23%), access to funding (30%) or engaging and supporting employers (33%), so these may be potential areas for improvement. Furthermore, almost 1 in 10 (9%) disagreed that the SIQAF fitted with their context, which suggests that it may not be perceived to work for all providers ([Annex 1](#) Table 58).

Interviewees felt that the SIQAF played a significant role in promoting high quality provision across supported internship programmes. It was applied in multiple ways by both providers and local authorities, with participants reporting positive experiences and clear evidence of its impact within their respective contexts. Several case study sites undertook a formal SIQAF review facilitated by BASE, which served as an important mechanism for evaluating and improving practice.

Experienced providers also benefitted from taking part in a SIQAF review:

We benefited from doing the SIQAF assessment last year. ...it was beneficial to understand what other provision looks like, look at it objectively. Although we have been doing it a long time there's no harm in checking to see if it is still okay. - *Supported internship provider*

In addition to conducting SIQAF reviews, several local authorities reported using the framework as a strategic tool to promote greater consistency in practice across providers and to strengthen the development of programmes that had previously been identified as falling short of the criteria for a supported internship.

Case study participants reported that if there was any reluctance to take part in a SIQAF review, it was because of the time commitment. One local authority reported that one of their providers were happy with their outcomes and therefore, it was not necessary.

⁶⁹ Source: Internships Work_SIQAF_PeerReview_Analysis_Dec24. Analysis conducted by BASE, not verified by CooperGibson Research.

⁷⁰ Based on those that had at least begun working through SIQAF (n=43).

Value of the job coach training

BASE, as part of the Internships Work consortium, delivered training in Supported Employment Techniques (SET) and Systematic Instruction (TSI).

Around four-fifths (79%) of job coaches responding to the evaluation survey were aware of the TSI training and just over half (55%) had participated. Awareness and participation in the SET training was somewhat lower, with around three-fifths (58%) being aware and under one-third (30%) having participated. Just 13% were not aware of either.⁷¹ Positively, the vast majority of job coaches that had not participated in the training were interested in doing so (SET 81%, TSI 77%).⁷²

Demand was high and BASE's targets for delivery were exceeded, with high (95% or over) proportions satisfied with the quality of training⁷³. Feedback provided to the delivery team after completing the job coach training was very positive ([Annex 1](#) Table 61). The vast majority of training participants agreed that they have used the information provided by the SET and TSI courses in their practice, that this has improved their practice, and as a result, the service offered by their organisation has improved.

Attending the Training of Systematic Instruction has significantly enhanced my effectiveness as a job coach by equipping me with structured, evidence-based methods to support individuals in developing skills and fostering independence. The training emphasised breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps, using consistent prompts, and systematically fading support to encourage autonomy, which is essential for empowering those I work with. – *TSI training participant*

Job coaches responding to the evaluation survey similarly felt the SET and TSI training provided by BASE was useful and had a positive impact on their knowledge, skills and practice. Amongst those that had participated in the training ([Annex 1](#) Tables 62 to 65):⁷⁴

- the vast majority said that it was useful (TSI 86%, SET 85%), particularly the TSI training (very useful TSI 52%, SET 36%)
- both training programmes were felt by the majority of participants to have improved their knowledge and/or skills in the key areas that the course covered to a great or moderate extent

⁷¹ 39% of job coaches had participated in other TSI training and 29% in other SET training.

⁷² Reasons that job coaches that were not interested in the SET (n=8) or TSI (n=8) training were: already skilled in the areas covered (n=10), it would not add any value to their role (n=6), it would take up too much time (n=4), no capacity to release for training (n=1), covers what they already know (n=1), some aspects not relevant to role (n=1), already completed with another provider (n=1), colleagues did not recommend it (n=1).

⁷³ As reported by BASE and the Internships Work consortium in their quarterly reports to DfE. Around 724 completed SET and 791 completed TSI.

⁷⁴ Number of training participants: TSI (n=56), SET (n=33).

- the majority of participating job coaches felt that the training had impacted their knowledge and skills in supporting interns (80%) and employers (71%), their confidence in their role (76%) and their knowledge and understanding of supported internships (76%), to a great or moderate extent
- the majority also agreed (agree/agree strongly) that they had gained a new perspective and fresh ideas from the training (77%), improved their practice (77%) and become more aspirational about their interns' potential (67%)
- 70% agreed that the training had helped to improve the quality of supported internships provided by their organisation

Analysis of the job coach interviews identified two interconnected themes regarding the impact of this training: (i) enhanced confidence in undertaking the role, and (ii) a deeper appreciation of the significance of the job coach role in supporting both interns and employers. These outcomes were attributed to the content of the programmes, particularly the TSI training. Job coaches highlighted the following aspects as especially useful in the case studies and in the feedback provided to training delivery teams:

- focusing on constructive feedback, coaching using systematic instruction and a range of strategies to support interns
- deeper understanding of SEND and their impact
- using task analysis and ability to break down tasks into manageable steps, with demonstration rather than verbal instruction

I am able to more closely analyse and ascertain the way in which a young person can complete a task. I am much more confident that I am offering the best support – *TSI training participant*

- skills in writing process guides and effective use of scripts to structure guidance
- strategies for fading support over time to promote intern independence, including giving interns the chance to do tasks themselves before adjustments are made

I have learned to become more hands off and find this encourages my intern to take the lead in their job role – *TSI training participant*

- insight into the employer perspective, new approaches to employer engagement (for example, promoting supported interns as 'ideal candidates' to fill vacancies), and techniques for building and sustaining relationships with employers

They also valued the opportunity to meet and work with job coaches from other settings.

Job coaches responding to the evaluation survey also felt that the SET/TSI training had a positive impact on interns. As a result of them taking part in the training, job coaches felt that there had been an improvement in ([Annex 1](#) Table 66):

- interns' confidence (73%)

- interns' preparedness for work (70%)
- interns' preparedness for adulthood (66%)
- sustained employment outcomes for interns (59%)

Two minor challenges were identified in the case studies, in relation to the job coach training. First, many of the examples provided during the course were not directly applicable to the job coaches' specific work placements. Second, some job coaches were supporting interns whose level of SEND need was significantly higher than the level for which the course content had been designed.

Work mentor and other colleagues

The support provided by mentors and wider colleagues in the workplace was a critical factor in ensuring high quality supported internship provision. Effective mentoring involved understanding the individual needs of interns, demonstrating genuine interest in them as individuals, and offering practical assistance with tasks, particularly during the initial stages of a placement. Mentors also benefited from guidance provided by job coaches on how to break down tasks into manageable steps, which enhanced their ability to support interns effectively. Furthermore, effective mentors were described as maintaining an approachable and friendly demeanour, creating a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere that enabled interns to feel comfortable and confident in their roles.

Meeting business needs

An important enabler of high quality supported internship provision was the extent to which interns' work contributed to meeting employers' business needs in the short term, while also creating potential pathways to long-term employment. An example of such, is shown in the written case studies in [Annex 2](#). As explored further in [Employers' experiences of supported internships](#), many employers reported that interns' contributions were both meaningful and beneficial to their organisations whilst they were in their placement. For example, interns undertaking administrative roles frequently assisted in reducing backlogs of data entry tasks, thereby enabling permanent staff to redirect their efforts toward higher-priority responsibilities.

Every single intern I've had has never been to the detriment to the team. It's always been a real plus point... that 10 am to 3 pm slot five days a week frees up their [officers] time to work on things like finding a young person their forever home or an elderly person that may be in a vulnerable position, a place of safety. - *Employer*

Meeting a business need was equally significant for interns, particularly in relation to their self-esteem. Interns valued the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the workplace and recognised when their tasks were useful and appreciated by colleagues and the

wider organisation. Conversely, they were quick to notice when insufficient work was available, which often led to feelings of dissatisfaction with the placement.

Supported internships Pilot

The factors that contributed to high quality supported internship provision for interns with EHCPs - including job coach support, person-centred planning, mentor support, and Internships Work activities - were consistent with those identified for the Pilot programme. However, due to notable differences in the characteristics and social contexts of interns across the two cohorts, Pilot case study providers (n=4) and local authority participants highlighted the need to adapt certain elements of the programme to ensure the delivery of high quality provision.

First, unidentified SEND and the absence of an EHCP resulted in providers receiving limited information about interns at the outset. Consequently, additional time and resources were required for initial assessments and personalised planning to identify needs and tailor support effectively. This lack of prior support often necessitated more intensive one-to-one support for interns during the early stages of the programme.

Second, the presence of higher levels of SEMH needs and increased anxiety, for example, meant that providers needed to embed enhanced pastoral and mental health support within the programme. This included ensuring access to counselling services and implementing additional training, such as, trauma-informed approaches with job coaches.

Third, experiences of homelessness, sofa surfing, and exposure to substance misuse highlighted the need for robust safeguarding measures and closer collaboration with external agencies, such as housing and social services. Extended periods out of education or training, combined with family instability, created further challenges in maintaining consistent attendance and progression, requiring providers to adopt proactive engagement strategies, such as daily check-ins and transport support.

They [interns] are very different [to those with an EHCP]. The staff team here needed a lot of support in how to respond to the differences, for example, interns who are more disengaged..., sometimes having more life experiences and they are not always willing to be supported. So, a five day a week approach might be more tricky for them – they might walk. You have to ring them first thing in the morning to make sure they got the bus or the train. They need a different type of hand holding. –
Supported internship provider

As with the job coaches, employers also needed more training in how previous life experiences (whether education and/or their home lives) could manifest at work and how to respond. One provider had secured a new part time member of the team whose role

included safeguarding training for employers. Finally, providers reported making adaptations to the curriculum to include, for example, a greater emphasis on wellbeing.

Overall, these factors demanded a more holistic and flexible approach to programme delivery, with greater emphasis on wraparound support, multi-agency collaboration, and staff training to address complex needs. Providers also needed to allocate additional resources to ensure that interns could access the same quality of supported internship provision as those interns with EHCPs.

Outcomes for young people

The findings in this section are structured around the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (2015) which outlines preparing for adulthood by focusing on:

- higher education and/or employment - involves exploring various employment options, including self-employment and supported employment agency assistance
- independent living - emphasises enabling young people to have choice, control, and freedom over their lives
- participation in society - includes having friends, forming supportive relationships, and engaging in and contributing to the local community
- health - ensuring young people are as healthy as possible in adult life

Summary of findings

At the time of completing the surveys, providers indicated that 48% of the interns from the current academic year (averaged over cohort 2 (2023/24) and cohort 3 (2024/25)) were in permanent paid employment towards the end of or shortly after they had completed their supported internship. Similarly, when asked about the previous academic year (averaged over cohort 1 (2022/23) and cohort 2 (2023/24)), providers indicated that 45% of interns were in permanent paid employment and just 17% were NEET. Similarly, local authority survey data suggested an employment rate of 32% for 2022/23, and 43% for academic year 2023/24. Other common destinations mentioned by employers and interns included voluntary work/unpaid internship, temporary employment or paid apprenticeship.

Three main themes were identified that contributed to interns' success in securing employment: (i) the proactive efforts of interns, both during and following their Supported Internship; (ii) support provided by Supported Internship programme leaders and delivery teams (including job coaches and follow-on support); and (iii) the involvement and contribution of parents and carers.

Beyond securing employment, increased confidence was identified as one of the most significant outcomes, which contributed to improvements in self-esteem and enabled interns to achieve things that they would previously have found daunting. Regardless of whether interns secured employment, the development of essential preparation for work skills was consistently reported. These included improvements in (i) communication and social interaction skills; (ii) understanding of workplace norms; (iii) teamwork capabilities; (iv) problem solving; and (v) time management skills. Enhanced independent living skills were another significant outcome for interns, including improved capabilities in travelling independently and managing personal finances. Other effects of the programme included increased maturity, engagement in society, development of friendships and supportive relationships, and enhanced physical, social and mental well-being.

Employment outcomes and destinations over the investment period – EHCP interns

Information on young people's outcomes following participation in a supported internship were collected within the provider, employer and intern surveys. Local authorities were also asked about employment of supported interns in the previous year via surveys administered by Internships Work. It should be noted that these findings are primarily based on just 2 years of data and each evidence source has its own methodological issues (see [Methodological considerations](#)). These findings should therefore, be treated with caution.

Employment intentions at the start of the supported internship

At the start of a supported internship, there is a clear intention of gaining employment amongst interns responding to the surveys, although somewhat less so amongst employer respondents ([Annex 1](#) Table 67 and 68). At the baseline stage:⁷⁵

- 76% of interns said they would like to gain a job, either at their work placement company (63%) or elsewhere (31%)
- 63% of employers said they would offer their intern(s) a job, mainly if there were relevant vacancies (55%)⁷⁶

Destinations towards the end/shortly after the supported internship

However, the survey data presents a mixed picture with regards to employment outcomes following participation in a supported internship. For cohorts 2 (2023/24) and 3 (2024/25) during the investment period ([Annex 1](#) Tables 69 to 72):

- providers indicated that just under half of interns (48%) from the current academic year (averaged over both cohorts) were in permanent paid employment towards the end of or shortly after they had completed their supported internship, with 32% working 16+ hours per week and 15% working 15 hours or less per week
- amongst interns that responded to the endline survey,⁷⁷ 23% had a job, 34% were waiting to find out if they had secured employment and 16% had applied/intended to apply for a job^{78,79}

⁷⁵ Baseline stage refers to surveys completed towards the beginning of the supported internship and endline-stage refers to surveys completed towards the end or shortly after the supported internship.

⁷⁶ Employers in their first year of hosting were more likely to say they were unsure (33% versus 12% for those that had been hosting for 2+ years).

⁷⁷ This represents only the employment outcomes of the interns that responded to the online surveys and does not represent all interns.

⁷⁸ Females were more likely to say they did not have a paid job (female 38%, male 26%).

⁷⁹ Interns who were not in employment at the time of completing the endline-survey were less likely to report improvements around working and were less ready for adulthood or to get a job.

- employers indicated that just over half (56%) had or would offer a job to interns, however this equated to less than one-fifth (16%) of the interns they had hosted in total, indicating that whilst some employers had hosted multiple interns, only some of them had been or would be offered a job⁸⁰
- other common outcomes mentioned by employers and interns included voluntary work/unpaid internship, temporary employment or paid apprenticeship⁸¹

Two-fifths (40%, n=48) of job coaches said that some interns had left their supported internship earlier than planned. The main reason was that the interns had gained paid employment (42%), and a further 19% said that the interns had started other training/another course ([Annex 1](#) Table 73). However, other reasons included some similar themes to the barriers for young people participating in supported internships (see [Supported internship programme – systemic challenges and risks](#)), including difficulties developing the right skills/attributes for work (23%), ill health (23%), parent and carer decision (19%) and that the intern did not like the type of work (10%).

Sustained employment outcomes⁸²

The vast majority of job coaches said that sustained outcomes for interns were improved by supported internships (91%) and over three-fifths (63%) that they were 'much improved'.

Data on interns' destinations for the previous academic year (i.e. cohorts 1 and 2) were collected from providers responding to the surveys and indicated that:

- just under half (45%) of interns were in permanent paid work ([Annex 1](#) Table 76)⁸³
- the most common other outcomes were looking for work (14%), further education or training (13%) or voluntary/unpaid internship (12%) and a minority were in temporary work (5%), an apprenticeship (4%) or out of work (2%)⁸⁴

Similarly, 41% of interns that responded to the follow-up surveys 3 to 9 months after their internship (cohorts 1-3) said they had a job, primarily working 16+ hours per week

⁸⁰ This represents only the intern employment outcomes indicated by the employers that responded to the online surveys and is based on the number of interns they had hosted, therefore, it does not represent all interns/employers.

⁸¹ At the endline survey, 44% of employers (n=20) said that any of their interns had left their Supported Internship early, with the main reasons being that they took another course/placement (n=6), they had difficulty developing the right skills/attributes to do the job (n=6), they did not like the work (n=6), they took a job elsewhere (n=4) or the employer could not support them in the way they needed (n=4).

⁸² Sustained employment outcomes here refers to interns being in employment at the time of completing the follow-up survey (3 – 9 months after their internship).

⁸³ Providers were asked about destinations of the previous year of interns. However, it is not clear from the survey data at which timepoint this data was recorded by providers.

⁸⁴ Unknown destination 4% (n=63).

(26%)⁸⁵ ([Annex 1](#) Table 77). A further 15% were waiting to find out about a job and 41% did not have a job.⁸⁶

Amongst those who said they were not employed (n=55), the majority were looking for a job (62%), 40% were doing voluntary or unpaid work and 24% were in further training/doing further study. Just over one-third of those who did not have a job (36%) had been to an interview and 9% had previously had paid employment but were no longer working there.⁸⁷

The vast majority of interns that were employed at the time of completing the follow-up survey (n=54) were positive about their supported internship experience and their job ([Annex 1](#) Table 78). Over 90% agreed that they:

- were happy with their supported internship experience and that they would tell other young people like them to do a supported internship
- enjoyed their job, they were given enough training and were supported well by their employer
- felt confident in doing their job, they were learning and developing their job skills and they felt part of the team

Evaluation survey data suggested that engagement with the SIQAF may be associated with improved employment outcomes. Employment rates for the previous cohort amongst providers that had engaged with the SIQAF were higher, with 47% of interns from the previous academic year being recorded as in permanent employment compared to 35% for providers that had not engaged with the SIQAF. Furthermore, a higher proportion were employed for 16+ hours per week (35% versus 25%). Whilst it is not possible to attribute any causal relationship between engagement with the SIQAF and improved employment outcomes, this association is encouraging.

Comparing employment outcomes over the investment period – EHCP interns

The most recent data available for local authorities covers academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24. Of the evidence available, according to local authorities, towards the end of investment period, there had been an increase in the employment rate of supported interns ([Annex 1](#) Table 74) over these years.

Comparing the number of interns across local authorities and the number securing paid employment (Table 4) shows an employment rate of 32% for 2022/23, and 43% for academic year 2023/24 across those responding to the survey. Whilst this is a positive

⁸⁵ Note that n=9 (7%) said don't know or prefer not to say.

⁸⁶ 3% preferred not to say.

⁸⁷ Reasons for not working there any more: temporary (n=2), let go (n=1), not informed about the job (n=1), prefer not to say (n=1).

sign of improvement, it must be viewed with caution. Further discussion of employment rates and comparative figures is provided in [Conclusions and recommendations](#).

Table 4: Comparing number of interns and number securing paid employment⁸⁸

| | AY 2022/23 | AY 2023/24 |
|--|------------|------------|
| No. supported interns | 3,206 | 3,428 |
| No. securing paid employment ⁸⁹ | 1,024 | 1,480 |
| Employment rate | 32% | 43% |

Base: All respondents No. supported interns Survey 2 (136), survey 3 (150); No. securing paid employment Survey 2 (110), survey 3 (150)

Source: Local authority surveys, Internships Work

Employment outcomes and destinations over the investment period – Pilot interns

The survey of the 12 local authorities involved in the supported internship Pilot found a total of 61 interns securing paid employment, ranging from zero to 35 and an average of 5 across these local authorities.^{90,91}

For Pilot interns responding to the endline-survey, the proportion who said they had a job was significantly lower compared to interns with an EHCP (13% versus 23%) and the proportion who had applied/intended to apply for a job was higher (33% versus 16%) at the time of completing the endline-survey ([Annex 1](#) Table 75). However, it is important to note that this is based on a small number of responses (n=45). A similar proportion were waiting to find out if they had a job (27% versus 34%).⁹²

Sustained employment outcomes - Pilot interns

The response to the Pilot follow-up survey was very low (n=15), however the number of Pilot interns who were in paid employment 3 to 9 months after their internship was n=6. A

⁸⁸ Unknown / unclear responses have been excluded from the data. LA surveys, Internships Work.

⁸⁹ Question: How many young people secured paid employment following a Supported Internship last year? Local authority surveys, Internships Work.

⁹⁰ The employment rate cannot be calculated as the definitive number of young people involved in the Pilot in the same year was not established. Question: How many young people without an EHCP secured paid employment following a Supported Internship last year? Base: 12. Source: LA survey, Internships Work.

⁹¹ The Pilot programme crossed 2 academic years and not always align with the usual academic year, therefore some Pilot interns were still taking part in their supported internship at the time that data was collected.

⁹² Data from providers will be included in the report of the extended year of the Supported Internship Pilot evaluation in Spring 2027.

further n=4 Pilot interns were looking for a job, n=2 were waiting to find out, n=2 were doing voluntary/unpaid work and n=1 was doing an apprenticeship.⁹³

Key factors contributing to employment outcomes

Analysis of the case study findings identified 3 key factors that contributed to employment: (i) the proactive efforts of interns themselves during and after the supported internship programme, (ii) the support provided by programme providers and (iii) the involvement of parents and carers.

These themes were similar for interns with and without an EHCP.

The proactive efforts of interns

Interns played a pivotal role in achieving employment outcomes, either during or following completion of the supported internship programme. Their contribution was evident in 3 key ways:

- by showing commitment, motivation and a good work ethic, as evidenced through site visits and interviews
- interns were recognised for their reliability, professional conduct and diligence in performing assigned tasks and fulfilling workplace responsibilities
- by establishing positive and constructive workplace relationships and demonstrating the ability to collaborate effectively within team environments

In addition, many interns began the job application process early, submitting multiple applications to maximise their chances of securing employment, particularly when a permanent role within their supported internship placement was not available.

The support provided by programme providers

A key strategy reported by most providers was the early initiation of job searching and application processes, typically commencing in January following a September programme start. Job coaches played a central role in this support, offering guidance on job search techniques, assisting with CV development, writing personal statements and facilitating mock interview practice. Where interns secured interviews, job coaches frequently liaised with employers in advance to identify any reasonable adjustments required and, where possible, to obtain interview questions beforehand. These proactive measures ensured that interns were well-prepared and that potential barriers to successful interview performance were minimised.

⁹³ Amongst those that did not have a job, n=4 had been to an interview, none had previously had any paid employment.

The provision of follow-on support for interns who did not secure employment at the conclusion of the programme was widely recognised as a significant factor in enabling subsequent job outcomes. Many (82%) job coaches responding to the evaluation survey appeared to be providing follow-on support for interns after their supported internship has finished (including 19% said sometimes). However, 1 in 10 (10%) said that they did not provide any follow-on support and 8% were unsure. The length of time that follow-on support was provided for varied, with 14% providing it for 3 months or less, 14% for 4-6 months and just under half (48%) for more than 6 months.⁹⁴

While the nature and extent of this support varied across case study sites, it was consistently cited as an important mechanism for sustaining progress and addressing emerging barriers. The following example from a local authority participant illustrates a typical approach to delivering follow-on support.

We know that all of our providers have six months follow-on support. But in reality it can be longer than that if they [interns] call them up two years later, saying they need some help. – *Local authority representative*

Some providers signposted interns to local authority services responsible for continuing supported employment support, regardless of whether the intern had already secured employment. These services helped both in sustaining existing employment and in supporting interns who were seeking their first or subsequent job opportunities.

An important aspect of follow-on support, highly valued by interns and their parents or carers, was the provision of emotional support for those who had submitted multiple job applications without success. Interns frequently reported receiving no response to applications - not even a formal rejection - and rarely received feedback explaining why they had not been shortlisted for interview. This persistent lack of response had a detrimental impact on their confidence and emotional well-being. The experience was particularly challenging given the positive nature of their placements and the high expectations they held at the outset of the programme regarding progression into employment.

They [provider] just help in any way they can, and when you are gone, they are still there for you if you need help and if you need someone to talk to. Whenever you need them they are there. I have all their phone numbers; I can just call [Tutor]. - *Graduate intern*

The involvement of parents and carers

There was evidence that parents and carers played an important role in supporting interns to secure employment. This support was often practical in nature, including assistance with completing job applications, ensuring punctuality by helping interns

⁹⁴ 2% of respondents said the length of follow-on support varied based on the intern's needs and 20% were unsure.

prepare for the day, and providing appropriate clothing for interviews. In addition, parents and carers frequently offered motivational support, particularly when interns experienced repeated setbacks, such as submitting multiple job applications without success.

They have been trying to tell me that things are my decision, and they can't make it for me. Mum tells me it is my life, not hers and I won't learn and get to where I want to be in life if she keeps telling me what to do. She tells me I will make mistakes in life, but I have to go out there and learn and try things. She tells me I will always have the whole family to support me and they will always have my back. They have been a big part of it for me. - *Current intern*

Young people's confidence

Interns, their families, and the professionals who supported them consistently spoke of increased confidence being one of the most significant outcomes of participation in the supported internship programme for an intern. An example of such, is shown in the written case study in [Annex 2](#).

Improvement in interns' confidence was consistently recorded across the evaluation surveys ([Annex 1](#) Table 79 to 80 and Table 82):

- almost all job coaches (99%) completing the survey said that supported internships improved young people's confidence and over 9 out of 10 (93%) that their confidence was 'much improved'
- over four-fifths (84%) of interns completing the endline-survey said that their confidence at work was better since they had been on their supported internship and almost two-thirds (64%) that their confidence was 'much better' although the figure was lower amongst older females (females 22+ 50%)
- 78% of interns without an EHCP on the Pilot also said at the endline-survey that their confidence at work was better (44% much better)

This enhanced confidence was demonstrated through greater ease in initiating conversations and engaging with colleagues both within and beyond the workplace, a willingness to try new tasks and experiences, and an improved ability to seek assistance or ask questions when needed. Over time, this growth in confidence fostered a stronger sense of self-belief, enabling interns to complete tasks that might previously have seemed daunting. Collectively, these developments contributed to improvements in self-esteem and positively influenced how interns perceived themselves.

You can literally see them transform right in front of you because someone actually believes in them. – *Employer*

Interns involved in the Pilot of supported internships for young people without an EHCP described similar outcomes of feeling empowered and capable after gaining experience in a structured environment. The confidence gained often extended beyond the workplace, positively influencing family relationships and social interactions. Job coaches also spoke of internships broadening interns' horizons and raising aspirations beyond entry level roles.

There is a massive change with my confidence – before that I wasn't working, going anywhere. Everything has changed for me and my family and they have really noticed a change in me.... I feel better about myself since I started. – *Pilot current intern*

Preparation for work

Interns, job coaches and employers responding to the surveys felt that supported internships help young people to be better prepared for work ([Annex 1](#) Tables 79 to 82). Amongst survey respondents:

- over 80% of interns that completed the endline-survey said that their skills and knowledge about working, understanding of the workplace rules and how to work in a team, and around three-quarters of interns said that working on their own without support, knowing how to talk to people, their feeling ready to get a job and knowing how to get a job was better. Similar findings were noted for Pilot interns without an EHCP
- the vast majority (92%) of interns that completed the follow-up survey agreed that their supported internship had helped them to be ready for work. Interns that were in employment were particularly likely to agree (98%) and almost all of those in employment (96%) also agreed that supported internships really help young people like them to get a job
- almost all job coaches (98%) said that interns' preparedness for work was improved and 86% that it was 'much improved'
- all employers answering the endline survey (100%) said that young people's job skills and knowledge were improved by the supported internship programme and almost all said that young people's preparedness for the world of work (98%) and their ability to find employment (96%) was improved, with the majority saying these aspects were 'much improved' (91%, 84% and 76% respectively)

Evidence from the case studies indicated that participation in the supported internship programme had a transformative effect on interns' social interaction skills. Many interns entered the programme with limited social networks and, in some cases, significant social anxiety or isolation. Through the internship, they engaged with peers in the classroom and encountered colleagues across multiple workplaces, meeting people of different ages, backgrounds, and levels of experience. This exposure was described as a catalyst

for personal growth, enabling interns to transition from school or college into the “real world” and develop confidence in social settings.

The placement and job coach support are excellent. Before this, if I’m honest, I was a social recluse, I could barely talk to people. But now I can talk to people, it is drastically better. Even now I can’t always talk well, I have nerves and they drastically spike, even if I am talking to a family member. Now I can work and talk with the team and you. Before the internship, I would have had a panic attack by now. – *Current intern*

Employers corroborated these accounts, observing marked changes in interns’ sociability and sense of belonging within workplace teams. Examples included interns who initially avoided eye contact later participating in social events such as Christmas parties and demonstrating workplace etiquette, such as offering drinks to colleagues. Employers also reported that interns who began the programme shy and withdrawn were, by its conclusion, greeting staff confidently and integrating into team routines.

Alongside communication and social interaction skills, interns developed a deeper understanding of workplace norms, including both explicit expectations such as timekeeping and dress codes and more implicit conventions often referred to as the ‘rules of work’. Evidence also indicated a positive impact on teamwork capabilities, with interns showing greater ability to collaborate and contribute within group settings.

It has improved my general knowledge of work. Like before I thought work would be very task orientated, very focused and busy, but now I understand it isn’t always that. Work is more about unity than productivity. It’s definitely about productivity but supporting each other to get there. – *Current intern*

Interns showed an improved ability to problem solve at work.

Problem solving, they will look at things now and work out what to do. For example, a lad who was working on the coffee machines with another intern and they saw a queue forming. He has worked on the tills before, so he said I’m going to go and use the till because there is a queue. That was amazing that they could take the initiative. He wouldn’t talk to anyone at the start of the course and now he can see what the problem is, what to do about it and then communicate it to everyone. - *Job coach*

Finally, interns strengthened their time management skills, which included recognising the importance of punctuality, planning travel arrangements, and organising daily tasks to ensure completion within the working day.

Preparation for adulthood

Supported internships help young people to feel better prepared for adulthood ([Annex 1 Tables 79 to 82](#)). Amongst survey respondents:

- 70% of interns responding to the endline-survey said that there had been an improvement in how ready they felt for adulthood (42% much better). Findings were similar amongst Pilot interns (71% net better, 31% much better)
- almost all job coaches (97%) said that interns' preparedness for adulthood was improved and 77% that it was 'much improved'

Participation in the supported internship programme resulted in the development of a range of independent living skills among interns. A major outcome was the ability to travel independently, which for many interns represented their first experience of using public transport alone. This achievement had a wider impact, as the confidence gained through travelling for work extended to leisure activities, enabling interns to visit local towns and shops independently and travel to take part in leisure activities. In addition, interns demonstrated improved money management skills, which supported their engagement in shopping and paid leisure activities. Parents, carers, and employers consistently observed increased levels of maturity as the programme progressed, noting that interns became more self-reliant and better prepared for adult life.

I didn't expect him to get on as well as he has. I was worried about him doing the supported internship and would have had him doing another year at college first. I think I felt he would struggle with doing 9 to 5 work. I've always said to him you are in work for a long time. Once you start working, that's it. I was happy for him to do another year at college before going to work. I didn't want him to rush into work and have a bad experience. But he has matured a lot this year. - *Parent of current intern*

I've really seen him mature... but he's kind of broken away from us a little bit... on his days off you know he's here... he will say "I'm going to call in the shop do we need anything". - *Parent of graduate intern*

Participation in society

Overall, friendships and supportive relationships forged during the supported internship programme were considered highly important by interns, parents, and professionals. These relationships not only enhanced social well-being but also supported broader outcomes such as confidence, independence, and community participation.

Participation in a supported internship programme had a significant impact on interns' social development, particularly in forming and sustaining friendships. Job coaches observed that students who previously avoided group activities began engaging in

shared experiences, such as bringing in cakes for peers, and transitioned out of college in a much better social position than when they started.

Interns also developed meaningful relationships within workplace settings. Employers described interns building friendships with colleagues and rapport with customers, which fostered a sense of belonging that extended beyond the college environment. Providers highlighted that these connections often broadened interns' social networks outside their families, reducing isolation and creating opportunities for inclusion in community activities, for example, employers inviting interns to social events such as bowling.

Parents and carers confirmed these outcomes, noting that interns made new friends during the programme and, in some cases, maintained these friendships beyond its completion. One parent reported that their child now meets friends outside the programme, while another described how an intern who initially doubted their ability to make friends successfully formed several close relationships. Additional evidence indicated that interns gained confidence to access social groups independently, contributing to more meaningful lives and reducing the risk of isolation.

Health and wellbeing

Participation in the supported internships programme had notable positive effects on interns' health and wellbeing. Case study evidence indicated improvements in mental health, and reduced stress as a result of engaging in meaningful work, being challenged, and experiencing a shift in routine compared to college-based learning. Participants involved in the Pilot reported that interns entered the internship during a period of significant personal difficulty, including feelings of isolation and disengagement from education. Supported internships could serve as a catalyst for recovery, providing structure, purpose, and a supportive environment that promoted wellbeing.

Physical health also improved, as interns became more active and spent less time isolated at home, which contributed to enhanced overall wellbeing. In addition, the programme supported the development of personal care habits, including attention to general hygiene and taking pride in appearance. Increased independence was evident in interns' ability to manage their own health needs, such as arranging and attending medical and dental appointments. Collectively, these outcomes demonstrate that the supported internship programme not only facilitated employment readiness but also promoted healthier lifestyles and greater self-care among participants.

The wider impact of supported internships and value for money

This section explores findings from the costing feasibility study, the costings surveys, case studies, surveys and programme monitoring to explore the wider impact of the supported internship programme and assesses whether it delivers value for money. The findings are reported on the programme for interns with EHCPs only as a very low response to the costing survey for the Pilot cohort prevented any meaningful analysis.

Summary of findings

The findings from the costing feasibility study demonstrated a clear demand for a consistent and standardised approach to recording supported internship programme costs. Consequently, a supported internship costing tool was designed and trialled as part of the feasibility study with positive responses on the acceptability of the content of the tool. Findings from the costing surveys (relating to 452 interns in cohort 2 and 439 interns in cohort 3), showed an average cost per intern, ranging from £14,676 in May 2024 (for 2022/23) to £15,697 in May 2025 (for 2023/24). Using the 4Es Framework to assess value for money and taking evidence from the surveys, case studies, costing surveys, programme management information and national datasets, the supported internship programme overall has the potential to demonstrate a good case for value for money.

- Economy - the average cost per intern, and the expenditure profile of the providers in the costing surveys are broadly consistent with comparable sector norms
- Efficiency - survey and case study evidence indicated that the supported internship programme inputs were being used to achieve most of the targeted outputs
- Effectiveness - findings on employment outcomes from the costing surveys align closely with those reported in the provider, local authority and intern surveys. Of providers responding to the costing survey, the percentage of interns entering employment was 39% in May 2024 (for 2022/23) and 46% in May 2025 (for 2023/24). These outcomes suggest that the programme is achieving its core objective of supporting interns into meaningful employment. Case study evidence points to the supported internship programme positively influencing organisational culture and promoting greater equality in the labour market. There were also signs of positive benefits for parents and carers and emerging evidence of wider benefits for local authorities
- Equity - survey findings indicated that the benefits of the programme were not the same for all interns, particularly with respect to gender and the SEND profile of interns

Demand for and acceptability of a supported internship costing tool – findings from the costing feasibility study

The initial analyses from the costing feasibility study demonstrated a clear demand for a consistent and standardised approach to recording supported internship programme costs. First, participants reported concerns regarding the lack of knowledge and understanding across the sector about how to accurately calculate the costs associated with delivering supported internship programmes. This gap was considered a risk factor because supported internship programmes were inherently complex to manage financially. The complexity stemmed from the integration of multiple funding streams into a single programme and the variability in funding allocations for individual interns. For example, the amount received from Access to Work and Element 3 funding⁹⁵ differed according to each intern's assessed needs, creating inconsistencies and administrative challenges. Providers highlighted that this lack of clarity often resulted in uncertainty during financial planning and increased the likelihood of miscalculations or underestimations of programme costs.

Second, feasibility participants cited the lack of publicly available benchmarking data or financial models to support both existing and prospective providers. This absence hindered effective financial management and strategic planning, as organisations had no reliable reference points for estimating costs or comparing expenditure patterns. Providers noted that this gap was particularly problematic for new entrants to the supported internship market, who faced considerable uncertainty when attempting to forecast costs and allocate resources.

Third and closely related was the lack of clear financial guidance on the costs associated with establishing a supported internship programme for the first time. Participants emphasised that start-up costs could be substantial and varied widely depending on organisational context, staffing requirements, and infrastructure needs. The absence of structured guidance created additional barriers for organisations considering supported internship provision, potentially limiting the expansion of opportunities for interns.

Consequently, with the involvement of participants, a supported internship costing tool was designed and trialled as part of the feasibility study (further details are in [Annex 1](#)).

⁹⁵ High needs “top-up” funding (sometimes referred to as Element 3) is the funding which is required over and above the core funding a school or college receives to enable a pupil or student with high needs to participate in education and learning. The core funding consists of high needs place funding (sometimes referred to as Element 2) and the basic programme funding (Element 1) that all students attract. The top-up funding is paid to the school or college by the local authority commissioning the high needs placement. Most high needs funding is associated with an EHCP, but local authorities have the flexibility to provide high needs funding outside the statutory assessment process for all young people with high needs up to the age of 19. The level of top-up funding should take into account not only the core funding a school or college receives but also any Access to Work funding for a young person on a supported internship programme. Further information is available in the [high-needs funding guidance](#).

Participants who completed the costing tool, were positive about the costing tool itself, for two main reasons:

- the information requested addressed the different components that make up the principal income and cost elements of delivering a supported internship programme, which was considered meaningful cost data for a setting without being overly burdensome
- many of the participants, across all the different types of providers, reported that tool was easy and straightforward to complete

Challenges with recording supported internship costs

Although feedback from providers suggested that the costing tool was broadly acceptable in principle, actual completion rates were notably low. At the feasibility stage, only 7 out of 24 providers submitted data. Completion rates remained low in the second survey round (May 2024, n= 12) and the third round (May 2025, n = 13). This limited response constrained the robustness of cost analyses and highlighted systemic challenges in collecting accurate financial data for supported internship programmes. Analyses of feasibility study findings, survey responses, and case study interviews revealed three interrelated challenges:

- complex funding structures requiring providers to secure and manage multiple income streams which created substantial administrative burden of applying for, monitoring, and reconciling these streams, and therefore increased the likelihood of incomplete or inconsistent financial records
- the challenges of diverse and shared expenditure categories encompassing staffing, intern-specific expenses, and overheads (see [Annex 1](#) for further details), which were often shared across multiple programmes, making it difficult to isolate supported internship-specific expenditure
- collaboration and co-ordination between at least two professionals to complete financial data and programme-specific details, which was challenging given competing priorities and limited capacity

Finally, it is further acknowledged that low completion rates may have been influenced by the way in which the costings tool was distributed as part of the evaluation. The costings tool was disseminated as part of a wider survey package during a period when providers were already heavily engaged in other evaluation activities. Consequently, the tool may not have been perceived as a priority, particularly given the time-intensive nature of the costings data collection process.

Cost per intern

Although a small number of providers took part in both costing surveys, the analyses is based on their number of interns (survey 1: n=452, survey 2: n=439). Intern numbers per provider, varied considerably, with totals ranging from very small cohorts (n=3) to much larger groups (n=178). There was representation in terms of provider profile. All types of provider, model, region and location were represented in the survey responses ([Annex 1](#)).

Analyses of the reported costs per intern from the costing surveys were consistent across May 2024 (survey 1) and May 2025 (survey 2). In the first survey, costs ranged from £3,609 to £31,853 per intern, showing a very wide variation. It was £8,296 to £23,824 in the second survey. The average cost per intern was £14,676 and £15,697⁹⁶ (Table 5).

Table 5: Cost per intern (with EHCP)

| Cost per intern | Survey 1 (2022/23) | Survey 2 (2023/24) |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Range | £3,609 - £31,853 | £8,296 - £23,824 |
| Average | £14,676 | £15,697 |

Base: Survey 1 (12 providers), survey 2 (13 providers)

Source: Costings surveys

The wide variation observed in both surveys was explained by respondents and supported by case study findings. These were attributed to:

- varying levels of SEND among interns and the corresponding level of support or intensity of support required
- additional requirements associated with individual placements, such as for longer travel distances which increased transport costs, or supplementary training for interns prior to commencing their placement (for example, health and safety certification or food preparation courses)
- differences in job coach salary structures across providers, some organisations reported paying salaries in the range of £20,000–£25,000, while others paid between £30,000–£35,000, contributing significantly to overall cost differences

Exploring value for money

The following sections explore value for money using the 4Es Framework⁹⁷ – focusing on Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity.

⁹⁶ The data entered by providers was based on the previous complete financial year.

⁹⁷ [opm-value-money-vfm-approach-v2-1.pdf](#).

Economy

Economy within a value for money framework explores the extent to which costs are reasonable considering the required quality and intended outcomes of the supported internship programme. Expenditure for the supported internship programme was predominantly staffing-related, accounting for 83% in the May 2024 survey and 78% in May 2025. For context, the average staff cost ratio for further education colleges during the 2020/21 academic year was 67%,⁹⁸ while schools and trusts in the UK typically allocated around 80% of their total budgets to staff salaries between 2023 and 2025.⁹⁹ These comparisons indicate that the supported internship programme remains broadly in line with sector norms whilst focusing on the education, training and employment of young people who are in the most vulnerable categories and whilst delivering a very complex programme.

Table 6: Expenditure (with EHCP)

| Expenditure | Survey 1 (2022/23) | Survey 2 (2023/24) |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Staffing | 83% | 78% |
| Resources | 10% | 11% |
| Overheads | 5% | 8% |
| Service Level Agreement | 1% | 2% |
| Other | 1% | 1% |

Base: Survey 1 (12 providers), survey 2 (13 providers)

Source: Costings surveys

Efficiency

Efficiency within a value for money framework looks at how quickly and easily inputs into a programme (staff, time, resources) are converted to outputs. Survey, case study and programme monitoring evidence indicated that supported internship programme inputs (as shown in the [Theory of Change](#)) were used efficiently to achieve targeted outputs. This was demonstrated through the implementation and integration of standard requirements and activities outlined in the SIQAF guidance (see [Embedding quality in supported internship programmes](#)). At a national level, funding via the Internships Work consortium enabled targets for job coach training to be exceeded, SIQAF peer reviewers were recruited and trained and after a slow start more providers had signed up to take part in a SIQAF peer review. SEND Employment Forums were established across all local authorities. However, there were challenges in meeting the target for recruiting Employer Ambassadors.

⁹⁸ [Managing Money in Colleges | Association of Colleges](#).

⁹⁹ [Schools' costs 2023 to 2025](#).

Effectiveness

Effectiveness within a value for money framework is demonstrated by the evidence that the supported internship programme was delivering the desired outcomes and where possible achieving results that were transformational and sustainable. When assessed against the medium-to-long-term outcomes outlined in the [Theory of Change](#), there is evidence of progress across several intended outcomes.

Intern outcomes

Findings on employment outcomes from the costing surveys align closely with those reported in the provider, local authority and intern surveys. As shown in Table 7, the percentage of interns entering employment was 39% in the May 2024 survey and 46% in the May 2025 survey. Roles of 16 or more hours per week were 23% in 2024 and 27% in 2025.

Table 7: Destinations (employment of interns with EHCP)

| Destinations (employment) | Survey 1 (2022/23) | Survey 2 (2023/24) |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 16+ hours | 23% | 27% |
| Up to 15 hours | 12% | 13% |
| Temporary work | 1% | 2% |
| Apprenticeships | 3% | 4% |
| Total | 39% | 46% |

Base: Survey 1 (12 providers), survey 2 (13 providers)

Source: Costings surveys

Case study and survey findings also point to longer-term impacts of the supported internship programme - the programme is contributing to improved quality of life for interns and supported internship graduates, as measured against the “Preparation for Adulthood” domains (see [Outcomes for young people](#)), and it is fostering the development of a more inclusive workforce.

Employer outcomes

Employers responding to the endline-survey were positive about the impact of hosting interns on their organisation ([Annex 1](#) Table 90):

- 87% said that hosting supported internships improved their organisation’s disability awareness and confidence
- 84% said that their organisation’s ability to support employees with SEND had improved
- 80% said that their organisation's culture and staff morale had improved

- 71% said that their ability to provide secure, sustained employment for young people with SEND had improved

Positively, almost all employers responding to the endline-survey did not think that hosting interns had a negative impact on their productivity. Just 2% felt that their productivity had worsened, whilst 42% said that there had been no change and 51% felt that it had improved.

Beyond meeting business needs, employers involved in the case studies reported that the programme has influenced organisational culture and attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. Supported internships had made many organisations more inclusive by changing how they recruited, trained, and supported staff. Employers said the programme helped people with learning disabilities and other needs to get jobs that they would not have been able to through normal recruitment. Many candidates would have struggled in standard interviews, showing how supported internships remove barriers and make hiring fairer.

It was common for interviewees to describe how having interns in the workplace raised awareness and encouraged inclusive practices, like training staff in sign language. These changes created a more supportive environment and showed a real commitment to accessibility and equality. Some employers said the programme had a big cultural impact. Staff at all levels got involved, often because of personal experiences with disability. This had created a positive atmosphere where inclusivity was seen as “the right thing to do.” The benefits went beyond the interns, improving team morale and workplace dynamics. Interns were valued for their work and the social impact they had which influenced whole teams.

Organisations also changed how they trained and assessed staff. For example, some had replaced written tests with practical evaluations to suit different learning styles. These changes made things fairer and more accessible for everyone, not just interns. The programme had changed attitudes to recruitment. Employers felt more confident about hiring people with disabilities outside the supported internship programme because of the awareness and experience they gained. This showed that inclusivity can work alongside business goals. The following vignette shows the wider impact of the supported internship programme on one organisation.

Employer perspective of the impact of supported internships

It has really been an education for all of us. I think it has really benefited us because as an employer, you can sometimes get stuck in what you do, because you expect a certain response from an individual. So, it has made us think and adapt as individuals.

[Employee] downstairs is the admin assistant. He started with us as an apprentice at 16. He has been with us for five years. He has been the work buddy for the [previous intern] last year and the [current intern] this year. It has given him mentoring skills that he wouldn't have had the opportunity to develop without having supported internships. He has developed himself and learnt different techniques for things like how to give instructions.

We have recently employed a colleague who has Down Syndrome (not through the supported internship, they just applied for a job) and I don't think I would have done that if we hadn't had experience of working with people with SEND before. It sounds really bad, but it is true. I wouldn't have known what to expect from them in the job.

Because I remember having [previous intern] do some of the training on the supported internship last year it made me think about how to adapt it. [Previous intern] can read well, but he isn't great at writing things down. It is the same with our new colleague, she's great at getting all the information, but she isn't good at getting down what is in her head on paper in a time limit. So, it has made us change the assessments to show competency to practice. We wouldn't have done that without doing the supported internship.

As a business we have benefitted from doing the supported internships and I don't think we would have as much as we have. It's not just a benefit to us in the office, but to the whole staff. They have taken them under their wing; they get excited when a new intern comes. When [previous intern] was here last year, we couldn't get staff away from the office.

Parent and carer outcomes

Parents and carers were overwhelmingly positive about the supported internship programme, with many stating they would recommend it to other families even in cases where their child did not receive their preferred placement or experienced last-minute changes. The interviews showed that parents and carers were proud of their child's achievements and the benefits it had brought them.

Since the supported internship I've just got a new son all together. He's very confident.... very, very good at communicating. He will ask the right questions. He knows when to speak, when not to speak. And he is very hardworking and very likeable. You know I am very, very in awe. *Parent of a graduate intern*

Many parents and carers felt the programme had delivered significant personal benefits for themselves. These included a marked reduction in stress, as they no longer needed to advocate for their child in the same way, which had been a major part of their life for many years.

So, coming here has been life changing for all of us. Being able to go to work and not have to worry about him. As their mum and dad, I genuinely don't know where we would be without this. It absorbs your life. I see our role as helping them to become independent adults one day. Without this we would have been again trying to fit him into a square peg, round hole situation which would have had more detrimental impact...They [providers] did it all – in a good way and took so much pressure off me, providing that support. - *Parent of a current intern*

Others spoke of a new opportunity to join a wider community of families and professionals for support. Additionally, a small number of parents and carers who had previously been unable to work were able to return to employment, highlighting the broader impact of the programme on family life.

Local authority outcomes

Another wider outcome of the supported internship programme was the potential for significant savings to local authority budgets. Although few local authority representatives interviewed could provide precise figures for the number of EHCPs ceased in the previous year, participants indicated that EHCPs were typically discontinued for interns who gained employment or chose to volunteer. However, EHCPs were maintained for those continuing in further education. One local authority that could provide exact figures reported funding placements at approximately £16,000 per intern, with costs reaching up to £20,000 for interns with very high levels of need. In the 2023/24 academic year, 9 interns had completed the programme, 4 of whom secured employment, All the EHCPs for the 9 interns were ceased, generating savings of approximately £195,000 for the local authority. More longitudinal data on intern employment and wellbeing outcomes would help to provide evidence as to whether these emerging savings to local authority SEND budgets would extend to savings for adult social care budgets.

Equity

When compared with the relevant ILR data¹⁰⁰ for the period 2018/19 to 2023/24, the demographic profile of the survey participants broadly reflects sector-wide patterns. ILR data show that approximately 68–70% of supported internships were male, which aligns with the gender imbalance observed in supported internships in the survey. Age distribution was also consistent, with the majority of learners aged 18–20 (58%) and a smaller proportion aged 15–17 (8%) or 21–26 (35%).

Additional socio-economic indicators from national administrative datasets (2018/19 to 2023/24), measured through the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), showed higher proportions of learners in lower deciles (13–15%) compared to higher deciles (7–8%), suggesting that supported internship provision during these periods was reaching more disadvantaged groups. Ethnicity patterns remained stable over time, with 76–81% of learners identifying as White and Asian/Asian British learners representing the next largest group (6–8%).¹⁰¹

Analysis of survey data indicated that the experiences of supported internships are not distributed evenly across gender and age groups. Male interns were consistently more positive about their experiences compared to female interns, particularly in relation to work placements. For example, 58% of male respondents (particularly younger males (18-21 63%)) reported enjoying their work placement, compared to 41% of females. Similarly, males were more likely to express satisfaction with key aspects of the programme, including having a say in choosing placements (43% versus 26%), being happy with the type of work undertaken (55% versus 36%), and feeling part of a team (57% versus 43%). They were also more likely to report feeling confident in their placement (51% versus 34%) and to agree that they had learned and developed job skills (56% versus 37%), particularly younger males (18-21 61%). These findings suggest that younger male interns in particular derive greater benefit from the programme compared to other demographic groups.

Other age-related differences were also evident. Older females (22+) were less likely than males and younger females (18-21) to say there had been an improvement in confidence at work (50% much better versus males 67% and younger females 71%) and feeling ready to get a job (37% much better versus males 59% and younger females 60%).

Differences were further observed when considering interns' primary special educational needs. Interns with communication and interaction needs were particularly likely to report positive experiences, with 91% agreeing that they enjoyed their work placements, 92%

¹⁰⁰ ILR data does not include Pilot interns. The extended evaluation to spring 2027 aims to explore Pilot interns in the ILR data with the introduction of a Pilot flag in the data.

¹⁰¹ Office for National Statistics (ONS, Census 2021) indicates slightly different proportions for ages 15 to 26 in England - any White ethnicity (75%), any Asian ethnicity (12%). Source: [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) Census 2021; Ethnic Group by age and sex in England](#) and Wales (2023).

satisfied with employer support, and 92% feeling part of a team. In contrast, those with cognition and learning or social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs were less likely to agree, with positive responses at 76% respectively.

Value for money - an overall judgement

Taking all the evidence into account, findings from the costings survey about 452 interns in survey 1 and 439 interns in survey 2, the supported internship programme demonstrates the potential to show a good case for value for money, albeit with important caveats such as the small number of providers (survey 1: n=12, survey 2: n=13).

Alignment of costs with sector norms

The average cost per intern, for example, £15,697 (for academic year 2022/23), is relatively lower compared to, for example, the costs to local authority budgets of a one year placement in a specialist education setting (independent special schools £61,500 per year and state-funded specialist placement £23,900).¹⁰² Although the variation in costs across providers is substantial, this is largely explained by factors such as differing levels of SEND, intensity of job coach support, travel requirements, and salary structures. These variations are more likely to reflect the complexity of delivering highly personalised provision rather than inefficiencies in programme design

Economy and resource allocation

The programme's expenditure profile is broadly consistent with sector norms. Staffing accounted for 78–83% of total costs, which is comparable to schools and trusts (approximately 80%) and higher than further education colleges (67%).¹⁰³ This emphasis on staffing is appropriate given the programme's focus on intensive, individualised support for interns with complex needs. Allocations to overheads and resources are modest, indicating that the majority of funding was directed toward frontline delivery

Efficiency and effectiveness

There was evidence to indicate that supported internship providers were using resources to deliver the required outputs of the programme. The programme has delivered measurable improvements in employment outcomes. According to the cost surveys, between May 2024 and May 2025, the proportion of interns entering employment was 39% (2022/23) and 46% (2023/24), with notable gains in sustained roles of 16 or more hours per week within this time period. Local authority data showed a similar pattern although it must be acknowledged that both sources are based on just 2 years of data and come with methodological caveats. Nevertheless, the consistent findings among the range of data investigated for the evaluation, suggests that the programme is achieving its core objective of supporting interns into meaningful employment. Survey evidence

¹⁰² DfE (2024), [Schools' costs 2023 to 2025](#).

¹⁰³ DfE (2024), [Schools' costs 2023 to 2025](#).

also points to wider organisational benefits, although it should be noted that the survey base was low (n=45): 87% of employers reported improved disability awareness, 84% noted enhanced capacity to support employees with SEND, and 80% observed positive cultural change. Importantly, hosting interns did not negatively affect productivity; in fact, 51% of employers reported improvements

Long-term and social impact

Beyond immediate employment and preparation for adulthood gains for interns, the supported internship programme is fostering wider systemic change. Employers described shifts in recruitment and assessment practices, making workplaces more inclusive and accessible. These changes extended benefits beyond those interns, influencing organisational culture and promoting equality in the labour market. Such impacts represent a significant benefit in terms of social value. Additionally, parents and carers had reported personal positive effects such as reduced levels of stress and for a few, being able to return to work. Finally, there was evidence of potential savings for local authority SEND budgets

Equity considerations

Despite these successes, benefits are not evenly distributed. Male interns, particularly those aged 18–21, reported more positive experiences than females, and interns with communication and interaction needs were more satisfied than those with cognition and learning or SEMH needs. While demographic patterns align with sector-wide SEND data, these disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions to ensure fairness and inclusivity

Supported internship programme - systemic challenges and risks

Summary of findings

Several consistent barriers were identified which often functioned as systemic challenges within the supported internship programme for interns with and without an EHCP. Securing employer placements was a notable difficulty, as was misunderstandings and misconceptions about SEND and perceived demand on time and resources, which could negatively affect employers' willingness to engage with the programme. The current economic landscape was also felt to profoundly impact on supported internship placements and employment opportunities.

Interns' readiness for a supported internship was another key barrier, particularly in terms of anxiety and fear of change, lack of independent travel skills and physical and mental health challenges. Anxiety amongst parents and carers and their concerns around EHCP loss and the perceived financial implications of participation in a supported internship and gaining employment could lead to parental resistance and concerns around their child's participation.

Securing sufficient and timely funding and costs of the programme were key challenges for providers. Securing Access to Work funding was a particular issue due to its bureaucratic complexity, and inflexible structures which often resulted in long periods of delay and financial uncertainty for providers and interns. Inconsistencies in local authority funding models and provider budget shortfalls created additional challenges in sustaining and growing supported internship provision. For local authorities and providers offering or seeking to offer the Pilot programme, survey responses and case study data indicated that securing sustainable funding following the cessation of DfE support emerged as the most significant challenge.

Analysis of the case studies and surveys highlighted a number of consistent barriers across the programme for interns with an EHCP and those on the Pilot programme ([Annex 1](#) Tables 84 to 89). These barriers often functioned as systemic challenges within the supported internship programme. Systemic challenges are defined as complex, multi-layered, persistent, and interconnected issues that collectively influence programme effectiveness and impact outcomes for interns and other stakeholders.

Securing sufficient supported internship placements

Securing supported internship placements, was commonly highlighted as a resource intensive activity subject to constraints external to the programme. Evidence from job coaches, providers, local authorities, and across all case studies suggested that finding suitable placements and employment opportunities were significant challenges. Providers

commonly reported challenges with regards to employers in providing high quality supported internships:

- lack of paid employment opportunities at the end of a supported internship (70%)
- difficulty finding new employers to host interns (61%)
- lack of employer placements (45%)
- difficulties engaging with employers (42%)

Similarly, providers not involved in the Pilot also identified potential barriers relating to employers that they might face if they were to extend their supported internship programme to include young people without EHCPs, including lack of employer placements (56%) and employers' concerns about behaviour/attitude (28%).

According to job coaches surveyed, common barriers preventing young people participating in supported internships were finding the right job match/placement (60%) or lack of supported internship placements/employers (54%). Job coaches frequently described the initial difficulty of "getting a foot in the door" with potential new employers, often relying on cold calling and having difficulties engaging senior leaders, due to lack of understanding of supported internships.

Concerns of employers' time and capacity to support interns well was mentioned by two-thirds of job coaches (67%) and around half of employers surveyed (baseline 46%, endline 56%). This was particularly mentioned at the baseline-stage by employers who were in their first year of hosting interns (60% versus 36% for employers who had hosted for 2+ years). These findings were consistent with feedback in the case studies where resource and capacity were commonly highlighted, with concerns that hosting interns would require substantial time and investment, particularly when supporting young people with SEND.

Resource and capacity challenges were amplified for SMEs, which often have limited capacity to release staff for training or provide sustained support. Providers described how employer capacity was further constrained by competing demands from other work-based programmes, such as apprenticeships, T-level placements, and work experience initiatives, leaving some organisations feeling overwhelmed by requests.

Other common barriers preventing employers from hosting interns expressed by job coaches in the survey were:

- belief that they do not have any job roles that a young person with SEND could do (61%)
- concerns about impact on productivity/workforce (52%)
- concerns over the level of support employers would be offered (45%)
- unwillingness of staff to support/engage with interns (40%)

- concerns about/the costs of making workplace adjustments or providing equipment to support interns (40%)

Accessibility challenges in some workplaces were highlighted by job coaches as another barrier to finding new placements. This was particularly the case for interns with complex physical or medical needs who may require wheelchair access and/or access to suitable facilities, such as toilets and changing areas.

Aligning placements with business needs was another recurring challenge in the case studies. The structure of supported internship programmes - typically operating on academic calendars and a Monday-to-Friday schedule from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. - did not always align with workplace realities, reducing their appeal to employers.

The changing labour market

More broadly the current economic landscape was described by participants as having a profound and lasting impact on supported internship placements and employment opportunities for interns. Employers frequently expressed willingness to retain interns but had no vacancies and/or lacked the financial capacity to create new posts. Rising costs, such as increased National Insurance contributions and higher living wages, discouraged some employers from engaging with supported internships. Recent redundancies within organisations also created sensitivities, as introducing interns could be perceived negatively by staff who had lost their jobs. Case study local authorities described how economic disruption caused by the pandemic increased budgetary pressures and organisational changes. This included widespread restructures and recruitment freezes which had meant that earlier commitments to ringfence or reserve roles for interns were withdrawn, and proactive recruitment strategies were scaled back or abandoned altogether.

The increasing digitalisation of administrative processes and hybrid working were described as having an impact on the availability of placements and employment in office-based roles. Employers and providers reported a transition of entry level administrative tasks to online platforms and the widespread adoption of cloud-based systems, and digital tools. They also highlighted working practices changing to accommodate hybrid and remote working models and a reduction in on-site staff, which not only limited the number of available placements but also created challenges in providing adequate supervision and mentoring for interns.

Participants in the case studies and particularly interns, described intense labour market competition as another challenge to securing employment. If an employment opportunity did become available within the placement, interns were frequently competing against external candidates who had more experience. Similarly, the presence of highly qualified candidates in the labour market, including recent university graduates, reduced the likelihood of interns securing even an interview.

Job coaches described how traditional recruitment processes, particularly those relying on formal interviews and competency-based assessments, often placed interns at a disadvantage compared with other applicants. Employers were described as reluctant to adopt alternative approaches such as work trials demonstrating interns' practical skills and suitability for roles, due to adherence to established hiring protocols. They described employers not having the knowledge of such options, or they were concerned about deviating from traditional methods of recruitment, and what it might mean for fairness and compliance. Consequently, interns were often required to compete in processes that did not accommodate their needs or provide equitable opportunities for success.

Persistent rejection and the absence of constructive feedback could have a negative impact on interns' morale, confidence and the risk of interns wanting to 'give up' on applying for roles. Interns and their parents and carers reported feelings of frustration and disillusionment after investing considerable effort in their placements and in the job application process without achieving the anticipated outcome of paid employment.

....towards the end he was applying for lots of jobs and kept getting knocked back, some places didn't even say why....thought he's doing the supported internship, getting up every day, working, getting two buses, putting all the effort in, but he's not getting anywhere with the jobs he was applying for, compared to someone else who is sat at home getting benefits for doing nothing, that's quite hard. - *Parent of current intern*

Misunderstanding and misconceptions about SEND

Misunderstanding and misconceptions about SEND could negatively affect the number of employers who offered placements for interns (see also [Securing sufficient supported internship placements](#)). Job coaches surveyed said that the key barriers preventing employers from hosting supported internships were:

- lack of understanding of young people with SEND (83%)
- lack of awareness/understanding of supported internships (72%)

Similarly, a common challenge reported by surveyed employers was apprehension about how to support interns' additional needs, which increased significantly at the endline-stage (baseline 23%, endline 44%). Other relatively common challenges at the endline-stage were:

- willingness of staff to support/engage with interns (baseline 18%, endline 29%)
- employers' ability to adapt to suit interns' needs, which was significantly more likely to be a barrier at the endline-stage than at the baseline-stage (baseline 15%, endline 29%)
- knowing how to get the best out of interns (baseline 19%, endline 22%)

- knowing how to communicate effectively with interns (baseline 17%, endline 18%)
- lack of support from leadership at their organisation, which was significantly higher than the baseline stage (baseline 4%, endline 18%)

Providers and local authority participants described how some employers assumed that young people with SEND would not be able to do the job or would need constant supervision, believing they would have to “hold their hands the whole time,” which made them reluctant to offer placements. Managers, mentors and their colleagues often worried about, “What if we do the wrong thing?”

Fixed ideas about conditions like autism also caused problems such as assuming all interns with autism needed the same type of support or behaved in the same way. This led to unrealistic expectations, like, for example, assuming new interns would perform at the same level as previous interns and not realising that new interns needed more time to build skills. Employees were often unsure about how to respond to intern behaviours that were new to them. Communication differences could create challenges. An employer explained that they had never spoken to someone with Down’s Syndrome before and did not know what to expect. Initially, they thought training would take too much time because the intern “could not follow instructions.”

Finally, stereotypes about capability could reinforce stigma, such as the belief that people with neurodiverse conditions could only do very basic tasks. In reality, many interns were eager to work and had valuable strengths, such as enjoying repetitive tasks that others might find boring. When employers understood these strengths, placements were more successful - but without that understanding, opportunities for intern learning were lost.

Intern readiness – interns with EHCP

Overall, almost three-fifths of interns with EHCPs mentioned barriers that made it difficult for them to participate in their supported internship at both the baseline and endline-survey stages (baseline 57%, endline 58%). As part of the case studies, interviews with interns, parents and carers, and professionals corroborated these findings around intern readiness. Prominent issues were: readiness for the work environment, independent travel, and health concerns.¹⁰⁴

Readiness for the work environment

Common barriers affecting participation highlighted by interns were anxiety about working (baseline 23%, endline 23%) and making friends at work (baseline 16%, endline

¹⁰⁴ Other barriers highlighted by interns: the cost of going to work (baseline 10%, endline 9%), being unsure how to do the job (baseline 9%, endline 10%), travel to/from college/training (baseline 8%, endline 5%), poor support from my job coach (baseline 2%, endline 4%), poor support from my employer (baseline 2%, endline 4%), poor support from my tutor (baseline 1%, endline 3%), losing my benefits (baseline 3%, endline 2%), my parents and carers losing benefits (baseline 5%, endline 1%), other (baseline 3%, endline 4%).

15%). Anxiety and fear of change of transitioning from a familiar, peer-supported classroom environment to the uncertainties of a supported internship, leaving trusted relationships and established routines for unfamiliar settings and meeting new people, could discourage participation.

There were also indications that female interns and those with SEMH needs may need greater support during their placement, as they were more likely to say at the endline-stage that anxiety about working made it difficult to do their supported internship (32% and 41% respectively).

Job coaches gave similar feedback about interns in their survey – 58% said that young people’s lack of confidence/anxiety about working was a barrier.

Independent travel

Interns highlighted travel (baseline 23%, endline 18%), particularly travel to/from work (baseline 19%, endline 15%) as a barrier to participation. Job coaches gave similar feedback in their survey – that travel was seen as a barrier, particularly travel to/from work (49%, to/from college 34%).

The lack of independent travel skills among many young people could limit access to supported internships for those most in need of support. Certain providers required interns to demonstrate these skills before enrolment, which created an additional hurdle for those without prior experience. Families were often unable to provide the necessary support to develop these skills, and local authority travel training courses could have extensive waiting lists, frequently exceeding a year.

Health concerns

Some interns (baseline 12%, endline 9%) reported that health could be a barrier and just over one-third (37%) of job coaches said that young people’s SEND or health was a barrier to participation in supported internships.

Physical and mental health challenges could hamper participation for those who struggle to sustain the working days expected as part of the structure of the programme. Physical constraints could make it difficult for interns to meet employer expectations and maintain reliability. Some could find the social demands of workplace settings overwhelming, particularly if they had autism or other conditions that affect flexibility and coping skills. In extreme cases, mental health difficulties can prevent interns from coping in any placement beyond highly controlled environments, limiting their ability to benefit from the programme and/or find employment.

Intern readiness – Pilot interns

Barriers for Pilot interns were very similar to those highlighted for interns with EHCPs. However, Pilot interns were more likely at the baseline-stage to say that anxiety about working (baseline 41%, endline 36%), the cost of going to work (baseline 25%, endline, 16%) and travel to/from college (baseline 18%, endline 13%) were barriers compared to interns with EHCPs, which may indicate that these barriers are more prevalent amongst interns without EHCPs. The only significant change baseline-to-endline was for travel to/from work or college (baseline 34%, endline 16%), which may be related to the travel training provided by the programme.

Providers not involved in the Pilot were asked about barriers for young people without EHCPs. They highlighted concerns around young people's readiness for the supported internship, including interns' concerns about losing benefits¹⁰⁵ (65%), lack of confidence/anxiety about working (44%), readiness for work (43%), disengagement from the system (30%) and their SEND or health (28%). A related issue, resistance from parents, was mentioned by just over one-third (37%) of providers.

Parent and carer readiness

Around half of job coaches surveyed said that resistance from parents and carers (50%) was a barrier to young people with an EHCP participating in a supported internship. Job coaches also felt that financial concerns, such as losing benefits (58%) and the cost of going to work (29%), were considered barriers to young people participating in supported internships. Local authorities also highlighted parent and carer concerns around losing benefits (if interns were to gain employment), adequately addressing the support needs of young people, and finding suitable placements that meet their needs and interests.

Providers and job coaches in the case studies frequently perceived that parents and carers thought that if their child did not secure employment at the end of the programme, their EHCP would cease. They described how many parents and carers viewed the EHCP as a vital safeguard - one that offered structured support and access to resources they had often fought hard to obtain and were anxious this was not lost if employment was not an immediate outcome. This was not apparent in any of the case studies, but professionals described how this concern may have meant that some parents and carers had reservations about their child taking part in a supported internship.

It was frequently described by parents and carers and professionals that parent and carer anxiety about employment and workplace integration was a common challenge that could affect supported internship recruitment and post programme employment.

¹⁰⁵ Whilst participating in a supported internship does not affect benefits, they may be impacted when a young person achieves paid employment.

He was in [a] special needs school until he was 19. And some of that was in COVID-19, with reduced chances to do things like preparing for adult skills. Then he left and then all of a sudden, he is a young adult. - *Parent of graduate intern*

Before starting the supported internship, many parents and carers in the case studies remembered questioning whether their child would be able to manage the structured routines and expectations associated with a professional environment, which contrasted sharply with the familiar and supportive context of educational settings. The ability to sustain full-time hours was a recurring worry, especially if they had previously struggled with attendance or engagement in school or college.

Social integration within the workplace was another major source of anxiety. Parents and carers expressed apprehension about how their child would navigate interpersonal relationships, communicate effectively with colleagues, adapt to workplace norms, travel safely to work, and whether there would be adequate support networks in place. These concerns were heightened when the young person lacked prior work experience or had limited opportunities to develop independence.

Alongside educational and social concerns, professionals described their perceptions that parents and carers frequently worried about the financial implications of moving from education into employment. With a complex benefits system, families found it hard to predict how paid work would affect entitlements such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or other allowances, leaving them uncertain and apprehensive about a reduced household income. They described occasional intergenerational reliance on welfare benefits and family perceptions that remaining on benefits offered greater financial security than entering the labour market, particularly in regions affected by long-term economic deprivation and limited job prospects. Providers reported instances where parents and carers actively discouraged their child from pursuing work opportunities, even when the young person demonstrated readiness and capability for employment.

Parents and carers of interns in the case studies who had entered employment were asked if there had been any negative financial implications for the family, and the majority indicated that it was cost-neutral. However, a small number of families did describe losing benefits when their child went into work but seeing the outcomes for their child, such as increased independence, was more important to them.

We lost our child benefit at that time and we, we lost some working tax credit. I think it was about £400 a month or something, which at the time was quite a lot, but meant that he [intern] has his own money, and he obviously pays for his own things now. So, although he is dependent on us, he lives with us, he pays us some, you know, not rent, but he pays us some housekeeping. It was a quite a lot of money that we lost, but he got it... we're not sort of too badly off where I think, you know there is at least one or both parents working. - *Parent of a graduate intern*

Funding and resources

Providers were asked in the survey about challenges they faced in providing high quality supported internships. A theme around funding and costs was consistently highlighted, particularly accessing Access to Work funding (53%) – see [Access to Work](#) for further details. Also highlighted were: delivering supported internships within the available funding (28%), the cost of training job coaches (23%) and accessing high needs funding (20%). Similarly, local authorities showed concerns about a lack of long-term strategic planning and budgets, including issues relating to Access to Work funding, funding for job coaches, and general capacity or financial constraints within the local authority.

Access to Work

[Access to Work](#) is a discretionary grant scheme delivered by DWP which can assist in paying for practical support to enable disabled people or those with health conditions to overcome workplace barriers. Supported interns with EHCPs¹⁰⁶ can apply for Access to Work funding to cover the costs of practical support in the workplace, if Access to Work guidance requirements are met. However, providers and families reported significant challenges in accessing and managing this resource. The main themes were:¹⁰⁷

- complexity and administrative burden - providers consistently described the Access to Work application process as “frustrating,” and “not straightforward.” Completing forms often required ink signatures and involved appointees, creating confusion for parents and learners who did not understand their role in the process. Paper-based and postal processes added delays
- time consuming and resource-intensive - the process demanded significant time from providers, who must chase signatures, explain procedures to families, and manage repeated communications
- financial risk for providers - providers described having to front substantial costs for job coaches and other support without certainty of reimbursement. One college reported spending £55,000–£60,000 on job coaches with only £123 received from DWP to date. This created a major financial risk and required ongoing justification to leadership teams on the part of the supported internship course lead
- impact on families - providers reported that families could find the process confusing and cumbersome and that letters from Access to Work can cause

¹⁰⁶ Interns who are taking part in the non-EHCP supported internships Pilot are not eligible to claim Access to Work funding.

¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that the DWP announced that from September 2025, in line with Access to Work guidance, they would only accept support plans for Access to Work for supported interns that request job coaching for 26 weeks or less and include tapering off. Interns who are taking part in the non-EHCP supported internships Pilot are not eligible to claim Access to Work funding.

anxiety and misunderstanding, with parents believing large sums are guaranteed when, in reality, funding depends on accurate and timely claims

- delays and limited duration - slow processing times meant that interns could start their placements or employment without the necessary support in place, undermining the purpose of Access to Work. Providers reported that the recent reinforcement of the 26-week limit on Access to Work funding further reduced flexibility, particularly for study programmes with interns that required longer-term support. It could also make it difficult to employ job coaches on a sustainable basis. The implications according to some providers were that this shift could likely increase pressure on local authorities to cover costs

In summary, the challenges of Access to Work funding stemmed from a combination of bureaucratic complexity, financial uncertainty, and inflexible structures. These issues placed significant strain on providers and families, potentially limiting access to essential support for learners transitioning into employment and attracting new providers who may be put off by the process.

Variation in local authority funding models

Findings from the case studies showed some variation in funding models adopted by local authorities and providers. There was also evidence of inconsistency in how local authorities funded supported internship programmes. Two providers reported receiving no Element 3 funding and were engaged in ongoing discussions with local authority teams to discuss this issue, which diverted time and resources away from programme delivery.

Another variation related to whether Element 2 and Element 3 funding were allocated separately. Some local authorities provided a single, fixed sum per intern (combining Element 2 and Element 3) - one example cited was £10,000 - while another issued a block grant per cohort, regardless of the number of interns enrolled. Such variations presented a challenge to the sector as a whole leading to uncertainty and misunderstandings, especially for new providers.

In addition to these structural differences, administrative and resourcing barriers were evident in applications to local authority funding streams as described by one national provider in the following vignette.

Applying for Elements 2 and 3 funding

The tested subjects were the 5 most widely taught in Europe: biology, chemistry, physics, history and geography. Each jurisdiction tested their pupils in 2 of these subjects. In England, these were chemistry and physics.

I know individually how much every individual student is costing us. We've got a local authority tracker which we use to quantify the income and to make sure that we're getting what we've asked for. We haven't put our costs up at all in 7 years and every year we're still challenged about our costs. Yeah, in some areas we're not viable, but we do it because we love the students.

The biggest barrier is the elementary top up funding from the local authorities. Some local authorities are fantastic, and we have the open discussion, and they're engaged and you know all that that entails but some can be very, very difficult. And I have a team...their job is chasing income from the local authorities. We've still got students that have finished in July, and we haven't had the payments for them yet.

The documentation that we have to submit as a funding application to the local authorities includes what are called the Element 2 and the Element 3 costs, and then we just request the difference so that the top-up element which ranges say from about £3,000 to £5,000 per student. Some local authorities have their own documentation which aren't user friendly, [it takes an] amount of work to complete all of the applications. Then some of them are quality assured so they'll send back questions.

Then some of them turn around and say, well, you've asked us for this, but we'll pay you that. That's what we think it's worth, but it doesn't correlate to the EHCP education, or any of the assessments we've done. – *Provider*

Budget shortfalls

Analysis from the costings strand of the evaluation, and supported by case study interviews with providers, highlighted a significant risk of budget shortfalls in delivering supported internship programmes. In the first costings survey, half (n=6) of the providers reported operating with a deficit. Several factors contributed to these shortfalls. Providers noted that they had not increased their programme charges to local authorities despite inflation and escalating salary expenses. Smaller providers were particularly vulnerable, as they lacked the financial resilience and economies of scale available to larger further education colleges and providers. To mitigate these pressures, providers adopted various strategies to supplement their budgets, including drawing on college hardship funds, seeking charitable support, and, where feasible, operating at a loss by offsetting costs against other internal funding streams.

Supported internship Pilot programme funding challenges

Providers not involved in the Pilot were asked about the challenges they would face in providing supported internships for young people who do not have an EHCP. The most common barriers mentioned were around costs/funding:

- the cost of extending the supported internship programme (89%)
- navigating the different funding sources is difficult (81%)

Analysis of Pilot survey responses and case study data indicated that securing sustainable funding for Pilot provision following the cessation of DfE support emerged as the most significant challenge for local authorities and providers. Among the 12 local authorities participating in the Pilot surveys, the predominant responses regarding future delivery of supported internships for young people without EHCPs were either that they were not able to continue without funding, currently unsure, or they were considering options/plans were in progress. This was followed by some local authorities seeking or using alternative funding.

I don't think it's necessarily something that a local authority could just pick up and run with. I mean we would, we would like to, but you know we're carrying a £XX million deficit on our high needs block. So you know in that space it does become really difficult. Obviously, we've got Safety Valve agreement as well. So you know I yeah, I mean I think we would try and prioritise it but it would probably be at the expense of something else. – *Local authority representative*

Some providers also reported that the costs associated with supporting interns without an EHCP were sometimes higher than those for interns with an EHCP, due to increased Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) involvement to assess and address individual needs, provision of counselling and mental health support, and assistance with travel arrangements.

Accurate and consistent messaging of supported internships

Despite the impact of the Internships Work programme on raising awareness and understanding of supported internships there remained ongoing challenges with the need for accurate and consistent messaging of the supported internship programme.

A common barrier highlighted in the job coach survey was lack of awareness and understanding of supported internships amongst parents and carers (45%), young people (42%) and schools/careers advisers (38%).¹⁰⁸ In the case studies, local authorities also highlighted a lack of programme visibility at local and national levels.

¹⁰⁸ A less common challenge mentioned by providers responding to the survey was lack of communication or support from the local authority (22%).

Some case study providers and local authority participants reported that many education settings remain unaware of and/or misunderstand supported internships, which hampered recruitment. Misunderstandings included some education settings being 'over protective' about student readiness for the workplace and/or not being aware of the effectiveness of supported internship programme at preparing interns for work.

Some professionals said that employers often misunderstood what supported internships involved, perceiving them to be equivalent to short-term school work experience rather than a structured pathway into employment. This misconception meant that employers did not recognise the potential benefits, such as gaining a committed employee and improving workforce diversity, and therefore did not sign up for the supported internship programme. Similarly, families could lack clear and accurate information, for example, likening the supported internship to volunteering in charity shops and therefore not being beneficial.

Compared with the supported internship programme for interns with an EHCP, professionals interviewed for the Pilot reported a need for an even broader marketing and communication strategy to raise awareness of the supported internship programme. This was because of the complexity of recruitment pathways for this cohort, which required providers to identify and engage with multiple teams and organisations. These included, for example, NEET teams, virtual schools, leaving care teams, and youth justice services within a local authority.

Staffing instability

In terms of key challenges, staffing/job coach recruitment was mentioned by almost half of providers surveyed (47%) and capacity for training job coaches by just under one-third (31%). When thinking about providing supported internships for young people without EHCPs, concerns about staffing/capacity were also mentioned by three-fifths (61%) of providers not involved in the Pilot. Local authorities also highlighted the lack of job coaches and support for organisations as particularly problematic.

As with the delivery of all programmes, staffing changes had the potential to influence the quality of delivery, the experience of participants, and ultimately programme outcomes. While the case studies did not provide evidence of extensive staff turnover, the supported internship programme was particularly vulnerable to such changes due to its person-centred nature and the requirement for coordinated staffing across both provider and workplace settings. Any prolonged instability in staffing had the potential for a negative impact on employers and interns. As previously noted, interns experienced challenges when mentors were absent for extended periods, which disrupted continuity of support. Similarly, changes in job coaches required interns and employers to establish new working relationships. During these transitions, job coaches needed time to become familiar with the workplace environment, job roles, and specific tasks. This adjustment

period could affect the consistency and quality of support provided to both interns and employers.

Setting up new and extending supported internship provision

A challenge identified by job coaches was the lack of education providers offering supported internships (25%).

Setting up new supported internships or expanding supported internships intern numbers and placements was described as a highly complex and time-consuming process which had affected the speed at which new providers and new placements could be delivered in the timeframe of the Internships Work investment period.

New and existing supported internship programmes required multi-stakeholder collaboration between local authorities, education providers, employers, job coaches, parents and carers, and interns. This coordination was time-consuming and demanded skilled staff to manage relationships and different priorities or expectations effectively. For example, providers had to ensure that employers understood the purpose of supported internships, while also reassuring families about safety and progress.

As previously described, initial contact with an employer could be challenging - getting past gatekeepers and explaining the concept took time and persistence. Further steps included site visits, risk assessments, and training workplace buddies. In addition, setting up a supported internship involved numerous practical tasks: matching interns to suitable placements, arranging transport, managing uniforms, and ensuring workplace readiness. These administrative and intern preparation processes could take weeks or even months, therefore, slowing programme expansion within the timeframe.

Job coaches are essential for the success of supported internships, providing on-site support and helping interns develop independence. However, recruiting job coaches was often described as difficult. The role requires a unique blend of skills - educational support, workplace integration, and emotional resilience – yet interviewees often said it was low-paid compared to its responsibilities. High turnover and short-term contracts added further recruitment challenges. Without sufficient job coaches of the required level of skills, providers faced risks with increasing the number of internships offered.

Conclusions and recommendations

There were consistently very positive findings from interns, employers and job coaches in particular, about their experiences of supported internships. Most interns enjoyed their work placement, and valued the opportunity to experience the work environment and the social benefits of working. The majority of employers were very satisfied with their experience of being involved and with the amount and quality of support they received. Similarly, most job coaches felt satisfied in their role and were confident in their skills and knowledge, particularly around supporting interns. Overall, the evidence consistently showed that supported internships provide a meaningful and often crucial progression route into employment.

Increase in the quantity and growth of supported internships

Due to the complexities and inconsistencies in data collection around supported internships, evidence from a variety of sources was used to explore the number and profile of supported interns. The range of evidence consistently showed an increase in the number of supported internships during the Internships Work investment period¹⁰⁹. There were indications of increased engagement from local authorities, employers, new providers entering the supported internships market and expansion of existing provision. The evidence demonstrated there is a clear demand for supported internships and there were indications that there would be an increase in demand in the future, based on local authority and employer predictions.

Within the investment period, the Pilot of supported internships for young people without an EHCP and furthest from the labour market had been established, with others joining the Pilot for the extended year of the Internship Work contract for 2025/26.

Findings from across the surveys and case study data show that there were three main enablers for the expansion of the supported internship programme for those with and without an EHCP. These were: (i) the significant demand and perceived need for the programme, as expressed by interns their families, and professionals across various sectors; (ii) the contribution of the Internships Work programme to raising the awareness and understanding of supported internships and with supporting the coordination of recruitment activities; and (iii) existing recruitment activities that were embedded in provider practice.

The absence of a comprehensive national dataset or counterfactual (as it was a national programme aiming to engage all local authorities) against which to benchmark these findings makes the attribution of growth to Internships Work more challenging. Nevertheless, it is evident that the relevant Internships Work initiatives have contributed

¹⁰⁹ The Internships Work contract was extended for an additional year to March 2026 with a focus on targeted support and engagement. This evaluation report focuses on the original contract period and does not include the extension.

to establishing structures at both national and local levels, facilitating this expansion. Considering the significant challenges associated with securing work placements and the complexities involved in setting up a new supported internship programme within tight timescales, the number of interns almost doubling (based on local authority reporting) within the investment period, is very encouraging. It reflects the sector's commitment to supported internships, as well as the demand and necessity for such provision. The risk is now sustaining and embedding those structures in the light of the investment coming to an end.

Perceived improvements in the quality of supported internships

During the investment period, professionals perceived notable improvements in the overall quality of supported internship programmes. The vast majority (85%) of providers in the surveys reported that the quality of their supported internship provision had improved, in particular for curriculum personalisation, vocational profiling and employment support for interns and training and support for job coaches. The case study findings identified three main themes underpinning these changes: (i) the enhancement of intern assessment practices to identify their needs; (ii) the strengthening of quality assurance approaches; and (iii) the improvement of mentor training initiatives.

Overall, there was a self-reported improvement in perceptions of the quality of supported internship provision over the period of the investment amongst the majority of the providers surveyed. Key practices, including leadership, strategic planning, preparedness, and the monitoring of intern progress, were reported as consistently implemented across the majority of case study sites. However, the analysis revealed that partnership was less consistently embedded compared to other SIQAF domains.

The key factor that underpinned and facilitated high quality supported internship provision was the pivotal role of the job coach, whose support enabled interns to navigate workplace expectations and develop essential skills for employment. Alongside this, was the importance of person-centred planning, sustained commitment of providers and employers to the programme, the contribution of Internships Work activities such as implementation of the SIQAF and job coach training, mentor support, supported internships meeting business needs, and the importance of family support.

The evaluation provides strong evidence that participants had a clear understanding of what constitutes quality. However, significant challenges remain in embedding and sustaining quality consistently across the sector. There is currently no external examination framework or definitive 'pass' mark for the supported internship programme, as the outcomes are multifaceted and in part influenced by external factors. At present, the SIQAF serves as the specific primary mechanism for detailed quality assurance in addition to broader mechanisms such as Ofsted.

Participants reported finding the SIQAF process as valuable and impactful. However, its use is not yet fully embedded across the sector. While there is some evidence of local authorities employing the SIQAF more strategically to support programme development, it is not, for example, commonly linked to funding decisions. Given the wider challenges of securing placements and employers, tying funding to specific SIQAF outcomes would be problematic. Nevertheless, requiring providers to engage with the SIQAF process would demonstrate a commitment to quality and transparency in practice.

Early indications of improving employment and wider outcomes

At the time of completing the surveys, providers indicated that 48% of the interns from the current academic year (averaged over cohort 2 (2023/24) and cohort 3 (2024/25)) were in permanent paid employment towards the end of or shortly after they had completed their supported internship. Similarly, when asked about the previous academic year (averaged over cohort 1 (2022/23) and cohort 2 (2023/24)), providers reported that 45% of their interns were in permanent paid employment and just 17% were NEET. Similar employment rates were found from local authority survey data; 32% of interns from academic year 2022/23 and 43% from 2023/24, secured paid employment. When compared with data for 2013/14 to 2019/20 (prior to the Internships Work investment period) there are indications of improvement in employment rates. Data released to FE Week under the UK's Freedom of Information laws revealed an average of 25% of students on supported internships in employment the year following completion of their supported internship.¹¹⁰ Analysis across the case study findings identified three main themes that contributed to interns' success in securing employment: (i) the proactive efforts of interns, both during and following the supported internship programme; (ii) the support provided by supported internship programme leaders and delivery teams (including job coaches and follow-on support); and (iii) the involvement and contribution of parents and carers.

Interns, their families, and professionals consistently identified increased confidence as one of the most significant outcomes of participation in a supported internship programme for an intern. Regardless of whether interns secured employment, a consistently reported outcome was the development of essential preparation for work skills, enhanced independent living skills, and an increase in interns' engagement within society.

The absence of a national dataset against which to benchmark these findings (the lag in availability of LEO data meant that supported internships employment longitudinal outcomes could not be investigated), makes a wider evaluation more challenging. However, whilst not identical in context or sample profile, there are some broadly

¹¹⁰ Noble J., (18 November 2022), [Supported internships: Only 1 in 4 SEND students in work one year on](#), FE Week. Source: FOI request to DfE (SEND survey, ILR and LEO datasets).

comparative figures. For example, longer term destinations data shows 1.6% of the 2019/20 cohort of students with a SEN statement or EHCP had sustained at least 6 months of employment activity in their first year after finishing key stage 4 (for the 2018/19 cohort the proportion was 2.3%). After 3 years, sustained employment was achieved by 8.7% for the 2019/20 cohort (8.2% for 2018/19).¹¹¹ Longer term destinations data are not yet available for later cohorts, however, in comparison, the supported internship employment rates are very favourable.

The most recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) dataset indicates that approximately 940,000 to 950,000 young people aged 16-24 were classified as NEET in late 2025, representing around 12.7% of this age group. The largest increase within this cohort was attributable to individuals inactive due to disability or ill-health, with 39% of NEETs citing a mental health condition or disability as the primary reason for not working.¹¹² Further evidence from the 2025 Family Resources Survey (FRS) revealed that three-quarters (76%) of 16–24 year-olds receiving Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA) were NEET.¹¹³ Although the surveys did not record PIP and DLA status directly, if these payments are considered a proxy for Access to Work support - corroborated by evidence of EHCPs - then an employment outcome of approximately 45% for young people on a supported internship appears strong.

Three recent national reports on preparation for adulthood have highlighted many of the persistent challenges faced by young people with SEND, their families, and local area partnerships. Local areas continue to struggle with shortages of training providers and employers able to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of young people with SEND. Too often, systems rely on predetermined pathways that fail to consider an individual's potential or personal goals.¹¹⁴ There can be too much emphasis on reactive approaches whereas proactive, person-centred practices remained inconsistent across regions. Preventative services, which are essential for developing practical life skills such as independent living, work experience, and financial literacy, are reported as frequently delayed or inconsistently delivered. Although the initial emphasis of supported internships within preparation for adulthood is employment, their influence extends beyond this area. The evaluation findings show that supported internships have demonstrated a positive impact on other key aspects, particularly in promoting independence and social participation. By adopting a preventative, person-centred and relationships approach, the

¹¹¹ National longer term destinations, [Explore Education Statistics](#), accessed 13th January 2026.

¹¹² Office of National Statistics (ONS) (2025) Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK.

¹¹³ Casey & Elliot (2025), [Unlocking the potential of young people furthest from the labour market](#).

¹¹⁴ Ofsted & CQC (2024), Thematic reviews of preparation for adulthood arrangements in local areas. [Preparation for adulthood arrangements in local areas: a thematic review - GOV.UK](#).

programme is helping to address existing preparation for adulthood gaps and overcome challenges in current practice. ^{115,116}

Emerging evidence of value for money

Using the 4Es Framework¹¹⁷ to assess value for money and taking evidence from the surveys, case studies, costings survey, and programme monitoring data and national datasets, the supported internship programme overall has the potential to demonstrate a good case for value for money in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. There was less evidence for equity with some evidence to show that the benefits of the programme were not the same for all interns, particularly with differences found with respect to gender and the SEND profile of interns.

Systemic challenges persist in an ever more challenging labour market

It is evident that certain challenges, such as ensuring intern and parent readiness, will persist. These issues require a systemic, coordinated, and sustained approach by providers and local authorities, as illustrated by numerous examples within this report. However, there are additional challenges that significantly influence outcomes yet remain beyond the control of any single organisation. These include, most notably, the difficulty in securing employers for placements, facilitating intern employment within a challenging labour market, and establishing a funding model that offers greater long-term security for local authorities and providers to enable programme expansion and delivery.

Notably, at no point did any participant indicate that the programme was not fit purpose, nor did they call for a review or propose alternative pathways for consideration. This suggests that the programme for young people with EHCPs represents an appropriate pathway within the national framework for post-16 education and training.

Supported internships Pilot – early insights

With only four Pilot case studies and a relatively small sample of survey respondents as part of this evaluation, it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the similarities and differences between the type of programme for interns with and without an EHCP. Preliminary analysis indicates that the programme is being delivered in a largely similar

¹¹⁵ IMPOWER & ADASS (2024), Preparation for Adulthood. [IMPOWER-ADASS-Preparing-for-Adulthood-Report-2024.pdf](#).

¹¹⁶ Kids (2024), On the cliff edge. Disabled young people and their journey to adulthood. Kids_Transitions_Report.pdf

¹¹⁷ [opm-value-money-vfm-approach-v2-1.pdf](#).

way for both cohorts. However, some early insights suggest there may be key differences worth noting. These were:

- greater complexity with recruitment as the interns without EHCPs could be referred through a variety of pathways
- additional time and resources at the start of the programme for initial assessments to identify the interns' needs due to unidentified SEND or lack of transition information
- enhanced pastoral and mental health support due to the presence of higher levels of SEMH needs, increased anxiety and longer periods out of education for this cohort
- additional and/or adapted training for job coaches and employees to take account of some of the differences in characteristics and backgrounds of the Pilot cohort of interns

With respect to outcomes there were similar findings to interns with an EHCP, particularly around gaining confidence and feeling empowered, although there were indications that this cohort of young people are more dissatisfied with aspects of their internship. However, there was a very limited lead in time for delivery and further evidence will be available after another year of evaluation (expected to report in spring 2027).

Recommendations

Whilst this report suggests that Internship Work investment has contributed to improvements in quantity, quality and employment outcomes, this could not be definitively established within the limits of the evaluation (see [Methodological considerations](#) for further details). Further improvements are likely to be seen, particularly where practices have been established but take time to embed (for example, around quality). National, regional and local level structures established as part of the investment offer a potentially strong legacy but this requires leadership to drive forward further developments.

Build upon the growing engagement with and profile of supported internships

- DfE should ensure the supported internship programme is embedded in all relevant Post-16 and Skills White Paper initiatives
- DfE should collaborate with relevant government departments to launch a national campaign aimed at improving the visibility and profile of supported internships (akin to the profile of apprenticeships), including through careers services, and parent and carer networks

- DfE should explore how to encourage greater employer engagement with supported internships and the employment of young people with SEND, including supporting national messages to incorporate supported internships into recruitment strategies, and continued commitment to offer placements to interns
- DfE should consider mechanisms to incentivise employers to participate in supported internships
- providers should continue to work with employers to support them with more inclusive and accessible recruitment practices

Supported internship sector leadership and coordination

- DfE in collaboration with the supported internship sector should consider how the work of the Internships Work consortium (including local SEND Employment Forums, Employer Ambassador networks, and strong links with wider networks, such as NSEF) can be sustained to coordinate activities across the sector
- local authorities should aim to continue with the supported internship lead role to ensure the coordination and to support the quality of supported internship provision across their respective areas, and should build this into their strategic plans
- providers, with senior leadership in their settings, should ensure that supported internships remain embedded in strategic planning

Development and integration of the SIQAF

- DfE in collaboration with the supported internship sector should review whether the SIQAF requires further development following its use during the Internships Work investment period, and how it can be better embedded within practice
- local authorities should consider how the SIQAF can be utilised for quality assurance, linking it, for example, to funding, and sharing it with school and college leaders
- providers should, at a minimum, use the SIQAF for internal planning and quality assurance
- DfE should work with the supported internships sector to explore how use of SIQAF and quality improvements can be monitored going forwards

Data collection and monitoring

- DfE should explore how supported internship participation and outcome data and monitoring can be improved, ensuring alignment with the ILR and SEN2 data requirements

- local authorities and providers should develop comprehensive databases to accurately track the number of programmes, interns, immediate destination outcomes, and outcomes up to three years post-completion
- DfE, local authorities and providers should use data to monitor equity and how all groups of young people with SEND might benefit from taking part in the programme

Funding models

- DfE and DWP should investigate how challenges in existing funding models can be addressed to ensure funding is more consistent, sustainable and secure
- DfE should work with DWP to expedite Access to Work payments and review practices supporting job coach provision across the academic year
- DfE and the supported internship sector should consider the merits of piloting alternative funding models
- local authorities should strive for a more consistent approach to funding across all to ensure equity for young people and providers

Professionalisation of the job coach role

- DfE, DWP and the supported internship sector should consider how the job coach role, fundamental to quality and outcomes, might be developed into a viable, rewarding and long term career pathway

Further research

- DfE and the supported internship sector should consider conducting further longitudinal research, particularly exploring longer term outcomes using administrative/national data and follow-up research with interns to explore sustained employment destinations and the factors that support interns to remain in employment
- DfE with the supported internship sector should consider conducting a feasibility study to explore the implementation of the SIQAF nationally
- DfE and local authorities should conduct an audit of how many EHCPs cease and the subsequent savings to each local authority, after completion of a supported internship

Appendix 1: Theory of Change

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|------------------|---|-------------|--|
| Situation | <p>Young people with SEND are underrepresented in the workforce and overrepresented in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) data</p> <p>There are few 'tested' education and training routes available for young people with SEND that are known to effectively support employment and preparation for adulthood</p> | Aims | <p>More young people taking part in a supported internship</p> <p>More young with SEND secure sustained employment</p> <p>More young people with SEND live more independent lives, are active members of society and experience greater health and wellbeing</p> |
|------------------|---|-------------|--|

| Inputs and activities | Outputs | Change mechanism | Outcomes | Impacts |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Inputs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government funding £18m + (£3m for the Pilot) to Internships Work - LA SEND funding - Access to Work funding - 16-19 study programme funding - Adult Education Budget funding - Internships Work consortium - Local authority teams - Supported Internship providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEND Employment Forums established, and training delivered in all English local authorities - All English local authorities offer supported internships - Secure Employer Ambassadors - Training for job coaches - Deliver SIQAF self-assessment trial - SIQAF peer review training - Providers engage in SIQAF peer review process - Develop a national communication strategy, including a website for Internships Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through participation in the SEND Employment Forums, local authorities and providers, collaborate more effectively and share good practice in relation to recruitment, programme quality and supporting interns into employment - Through training, job coaches are more confident and competent to support interns and employers - Person-centred planning and tailored curricula are embedded into programme activities by providers | Short term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in intern numbers and ranges of ages and SEND needs - Stakeholders report positively on their awareness and quality of the programme - Increase in interns' awareness, confidence and preparedness for adulthood - Increase in employer awareness, understanding and confidence with supporting internships Medium/long term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased choice (region, employment sectors) and availability of internships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved quality of life as measured by the preparation for adult life domains for interns and graduates - Increased diversity in the work force - Reduced pressures for universal credit applications for adults with SEND - Supported internship programme is financially sustainable at the local authority level |

| Inputs and activities | Outputs | Change mechanism | Outcomes | Impacts |
|--|---------|---|--|---------|
| Activities - Funding and support to Local Authorities - Engagement and support for employers - Embedding quality assessment framework in the sector - Effective communication across sector and externally to promote supported internships | | - Employer Ambassadors 'speak' to current and potential new employers and act as 'role models' for the benefits (e.g. business and more inclusive workforce) of supported internships to support with recruitment and programme quality | - Increased quality of supported internship provision as evidence by SIQAF/OFSTED inspections - Increased numbers of interns transitioning to sustained paid employment - Increase in numbers of interns in part time employment, in voluntary work (unpaid) or studying for a further/ higher qualification that shows progression - Understanding of the costs of a typical internship programme - Local authorities understand the value/benefit of internships to assess the viability of their own investment in the programme - Internships potentially deliver value for money | |

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| Evidence assessment | Two small scale national evaluations, case studies from professional organisations and annual reports have demonstrated 'proof of concept'. There have been no randomised control trials of the programme. There is no evidence available for the Pilot programme. |
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|--------------------|--|---|---|
| Assumptions | - Local authorities and providers are willing and capable of expanding provision - Employers are willing and capable of providing placements and jobs - There is a demand for the programme from young people and their families | Possible unintended consequences | Broader understanding within the further education of what 'good' vocational education and training looks like for young people who experience disadvantage |
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