

Investing in Potential

The Impact and Value of Somerset's Supported Internships

Executive Summary | Dr. Victoria Mason-Angelow, NDTi, May 2025

Overview

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face persistent barriers to paid work. Despite having the ambition and ability to contribute meaningfully to their communities and local economies, just 5% of people with learning disabilities are in paid employment nationally, compared to 80% of their peers ([DWP, 2024](#), [Nuffield, 2023](#), [Burnett, 2021](#)).

In Somerset, Supported Internships have been developed as a targeted response to this inequality. Since 2021, over 180 young people—both with and without Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)—have taken part in structured, work-based learning programmes delivered through partnerships between education providers, local employers, job coaches, and the local authority.

This report explores the outcomes and wider value of these programmes through an in-depth analysis of four individual journeys, supported by economic and social impact data.

What we did

NDTi undertook a mixed-methods evaluation between January and March 2025, combining rich qualitative data with early economic modelling. This included:

Four detailed **case studies** with young people, their families, job coaches, and employers.

Economic analysis exploring wellbeing, support costs, tax and benefit impacts, and indicative social return on investment (SROI).

Thematic reflections from job coaches and employers to capture wider systemic and organisational learning.

What we found

1. Transformational impact on young people

The programme provided a life-changing scaffold of support. Each young person entered with different challenges; low confidence, social anxiety, disrupted education, or lack of experience, but all achieved meaningful progress in independence, wellbeing, and paid work.



- **Sophie** is now a paid swimming assistant with new confidence and social skills.
- **Isla**, once unable to speak to strangers, now works in IT and manages professional interactions.
- **James**, who had been overlooked in traditional job interviews, is thriving in a data role at an engineering firm.
- **Noah** is building a career in a hospital training academy while navigating his mental health and planning for independent living.

These stories reflect more than just job outcomes, they represent identity shifts, increased autonomy, and new horizons for young people and their families.

2. Meaningful economic and fiscal value



Using wellbeing valuations ([WELLBY](#)), changes in support costs, and data on earnings and tax contributions, we calculated the total annual value generated by the programme across the four case studies:

- Total combined value: **£355,405.69**
- Average indicative annual SROI: **£9.35** – For every £1 invested, over £9 of value is generated.
- Key drivers of value: Improved life satisfaction and confidence, reduced reliance on public services, increased income, and tax contributions.

Even where wellbeing temporarily declined (as in Noah's case, due to adjustment to increased hours), the individual was in paid work, growing in independence, and generating fiscal benefit.

3. Inclusive employment is possible and powerful

Employers across sectors, from engineering to leisure and healthcare, consistently reported that interns:

- Added value to their teams.
- Helped challenge assumptions around disability and capability.
- Improved organisational culture and inclusion.



Crucially, every employer engaged in this work said they would host another intern. Several created roles to retain interns after programme completion.

What helps it work

Job coaches	Act as the bridge between interns and employers—coaching, translating, advocating, and quietly scaffolding success.
Tailored placements	Matched to interests and strengths, enabling young people to thrive on their own terms.
Relationships	Sustained connections between interns, mentors, job coaches, and families drive lasting change.
Flexibility	Recognising different paces and paths toward independence is key to outcomes that endure.

Opportunities to build on

This is an effective, values-led programme that’s already delivering strong outcomes. To ensure its long-term success, we recommend:

-  **Positioning Supported Internships within national policy reform** efforts around employment and disability benefits.
-  **Expanding access**, particularly for young people without EHCPs and those living in rural areas.
-  **Scaling with care** by investing in job coach training, supporting employer readiness, and co-producing next steps with young people.
-  **Embedding robust outcome tracking** to capture long-term impact on individuals, families, and public systems.

Conclusion

Somerset's Supported Internships are not just preparing young people for the world of work, they are preparing communities and workplaces to be more inclusive. They challenge outdated assumptions about who can work and how, and demonstrate that with the right support, every young person has the potential to contribute meaningfully.

These programmes deliver significant personal, social, and economic value and they should be central to any strategy focused on inclusive employment, social justice, and public service transformation.

At a time when national policy is increasingly focused on reducing benefit dependency and reforming disability support, this work offers timely, practical evidence of what *does* work. Rather than punitive measures or narrow eligibility reform, this programme models a hopeful, rights-based pathway to economic participation—one that centres relationships, dignity, and potential.

