

Investing in Potential

The Impact and Value of Somerset's Supported Internships

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1. Introduction

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face significant barriers to employment, despite their strong aspirations to work. Nationally, only around 5% of individuals with a learning disability are in paid employment, compared to 80% of their peers ([DWP, 2024](#), [Nuffield, 2023](#), [Burnett, 2021](#)). These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas like Somerset, where access to employers and work placement opportunities are limited. Systemic factors, including low expectations, variable access to vocational education and careers advice in school, and concerns about benefits, further hinder progress ([Jonckheere, 2020](#)).

Supported Internships are designed to help address some of these issues by providing young people aged 16–24 who have an [Education, Health and Care Plan \(EHCP\)](#), with a structured, work-based study programme to help them move into sustained, paid employment. An internship combines extended time in a real workplace with personalised support and a tailored study programme, which typically includes English, maths, and employability skills. A key principle of supported internships is the use of skilled job coaches who work closely with the intern and employer to ensure a good match and to facilitate learning in the workplace. The focus is on learning through doing, with the goal of equipping young people with the confidence, skills, and experience they need to gain and sustain paid work.

In Somerset, [the 'Imagine the Possibilities' Supported Internships programme](#) was created to support young people with SEND in the county move into employment. Working in partnership with education providers, employers, families and job coaches, the programme offers structured, personalised, work-based learning to build skills, confidence and independence. Over the past three years, 180 young people have taken part in the programme, gaining experience tailored to their individual needs and aspirations, helping them take meaningful steps toward paid employment.

During this time, the programme has also expanded from a single, long-established programme based at Musgrove Park Hospital to ten active programmes, with a further seven planned for launch in September 2025. This rapid growth signals increasing demand from young people and their families and highlights the critical role of employers who are actively opening up opportunities and championing inclusive recruitment practices.

In 2023, Somerset was selected as one of only twelve local authorities in England to receive Department for Education (DfE) funding to pilot Supported Internships for young people with SEND who do not have an [Education, Health and Care Plan \(EHCP\)](#). This group includes some of the most marginalised young people, such as those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), are care-experienced, persistently absent from school, attending alternative provision or without formal recognition of their additional needs. Many of these young people face significant disadvantages, in part due to the systemic barriers to the EHCP system designed to support them and have historically lacked access to meaningful employment support.

This progress marks a cultural shift in how employment is perceived and promoted for young people with SEND. More young people in Somerset are now imagining futures that include meaningful employment and a sense of belonging in their communities. The shift is also visible within the local authority, where this momentum has enabled structural change, including investment in, and recruitment of, a dedicated Supported Employment Team to sustain and grow this work.

However, challenges do remain. As a largely rural county, Somerset continues to face significant barriers related to transport and connectivity. The lack of accessible public transport infrastructure limits access to opportunities for many young people, particularly those in remote areas.

Figure 1. Map of Somerset County



Credit: Somerset Council

1.1 The work presented in this report

In 2024, Somerset successfully secured Supported Internships Development Work funding from the DfE to carry out the work presented in this report. The findings will contribute to both the local and national evidence base and inform future development of supported employment pathways for young people with SEND in 2025 and beyond.

The importance of this work is underscored by the current national policy context. Recent announcements about significant cuts to disability benefits have sparked widespread concern and debate about how best to support disabled people into employment. While this report does not seek to comment on government policy, it is important to situate the report within this evolving landscape. At the same time, the government's commitment to expanding Supported Employment, the foundational model behind Supported Internships, through the new [Connect to Work](#) programme signals continued investment in this approach. This dual context highlights both the urgency and the opportunity to embed effective, person-centred employment support at the local level.

At the heart of this report are the experiences and outcomes of four young people in Somerset who have recently completed a Supported Internship and generously shared their stories. These individual journeys highlight the personal impact of high-quality, personalised employment support. At the same time, they serve as a springboard for exploring the broader social, fiscal, and economic value of Supported Internships.

Understanding this wider impact involves recognising how tailored Supported Internships can enhance wellbeing, foster community inclusion and contribute to the economic resilience of young people with SEND, including those both with and without EHCPs ([NDTi, 2022](#)). They also generate cost savings across public services, including within education, health, and social care, by reducing long-term benefit dependency, preventing social isolation and minimising the need for intensive support within traditional day services ([Carter et al. 2011](#)).

The remainder of this report sets out the methodology used, presents case studies from four young people involved in the programme, shares aggregated findings and draws conclusions about the wider economic and social impact of Somerset's Supported Internship Programme.



2. Approach

This piece of work adopted a mixed-methods approach, with a strong emphasis on qualitative insights from young people, families, job coaches and employers involved in the Somerset Supported Internships programme. The work aimed to explore both the lived experiences of participants and the broader economic and social impact of the programme. All data was gathered between in Quarter 1 of 2025 (January and March 2025.)

2.1 Key activity

- **Case study analysis** – Capturing the experiences of four young people who participated in the programme, their families, job coaches and employers, to examine their journeys, challenges, and successes.
- **Economic and social value analysis** – Assessing the financial and social impact of the programme, including potential cost savings for public services and benefits for individuals, families, employers and communities.

These activities were closely connected, with case studies providing personal insights while also helping to illustrate the economic story of costs and benefits in four specific areas:

1. **Wellbeing** – Exploring how participation in the programme has influenced young people's confidence, independence and overall quality of life.
2. **Education and support costs** – Examining the financial investment required for each individual's education and support, including direct costs to the public sector.
3. **Service use and resource allocation** – Identifying changes in young people's lives, health and behaviours that have had an impact on their use of other services and organisations, such as health and social care.
4. **Pay and tax** – Surfacing evidence of earnings, tax contributions and reductions in benefit reliance to measure the financial and social value generated by the programme beyond direct costs and benefits.

2.2 The value of wellbeing

Wellbeing is a key determinant of both individual quality of life and broader economic value and increasingly, wellbeing is quantified to inform policy and investment decisions. The [Wellbeing Adjusted Life Year \(WELLBY\)](#) provides an

economic valuation of a one-point change in life satisfaction over a year, estimated at £13,000 per person (2019 prices), with sensitivity ranges between £10,000 and £16,000. This metric allows for a holistic evaluation of interventions, such as Supported Internships, based on their impact on life satisfaction and economic outcomes.

In this analysis, a WELLBY wellbeing score was sought against the following factors:

- **Mental health** – such as anxiety, depression and life satisfaction.
- **Education** – such as educational attainment, skills and access to learning opportunities.
- **Employment** – such as income levels, employment status and job satisfaction.
- **Recreation and leisure** – such as having free time and access to recreation.
- **Familial and community connections** – such as relationships with family, a sense of community, civic engagement and belonging.
- **Autonomy and control** – such as an individuals' sense of control over their lives.

The economic benefits of improved wellbeing are significant. Higher wellbeing correlates with greater workforce participation, reduced absenteeism and lower healthcare costs ([Adams, 2019](#); [Sturmberg & Bircher, 2019](#)). Additionally, people with higher wellbeing contribute more to society, leading to stronger, more resilient communities and reduced reliance on public services ([Adabanya et al. 2023](#); [Zahnnow, 2024](#)).

By enhancing wellbeing through Supported Internships, young people with SEND are not only likely to experience enhanced quality of life and independence but also generate broader economic and social value. These benefits reinforce the importance of investing in high-quality, personalised employment support as part of an inclusive labour market strategy.

2.3 The cost of support

Understanding the cost of support is crucial for assessing the financial investment required for employment initiatives like Somerset's Supported Internships programme. However, focusing solely on cost without considering broader outcomes risks overlooking the true value of the support.

This analysis examined the average cost of support provided to individuals before participating in a Supported Internship, rather than estimating hypothetical alternatives. This ensures a consistent comparison across different measures.

2.4 The impact on public services

Focusing only on cost and wellbeing can overlook the interconnected impact of Supported Internships on other public services. Effective support that leads to employment reduces strain on education, health and social care systems by:

- **Reducing interactions with acute services** – Lowering involvement with the police, courts and social services.
- **Preventing crises** – Reducing emergency care, hospital admissions and long-term dependency on public services.
- **Enhancing independence** – Supporting individuals to contribute economically and socially.

This view is supported by national policy, such as the [Get Britain Working](#) White Paper and the more recent [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working](#) Green Paper, which both emphasise the link between employment and health. Drawing on the independent 2006 review [Is Work Good for Your Health and Wellbeing?](#) the Green Paper reiterates that "*good employment is good for physical and mental health.*" This evidence base underlines the critical role of supported employment initiatives in promoting long-term wellbeing for people with health conditions or disabilities.

2.5 Pay and tax contributions

Building on the financial and social impacts outlined in the previous sections (2.2 – 2.4), pay and tax contributions provide another critical measure of the value of Supported Internships. Employment not only enhances individual financial independence but also generates wider economic benefits through increased earnings and contributions to public finances ([Song et al. 2024](#)).

By securing paid work through a Supported Internship, young people with SEND often transition from reliance on benefits to earning a wage, which in turn:

- **Increases personal income** – Providing financial stability and greater opportunities for independence.
- **Boosts tax revenue** – Generating Income Tax and National Insurance contributions, reducing the net cost to the public sector.
- **Reduces welfare dependency** – Lowering claims for Universal Credit and other employment-related benefits.

2.6 Social Return on Investment

As noted above, data on earnings, tax contributions and changes in benefit reliance begin to quantify the fiscal impact of Supported Internships in Somerset. When combined with evidence of wellbeing improvements, analysis of support costs and reduced use of public services, the information captured in

this report begins to contribute to an emerging evidence base for an indicative Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculation.

This indicative SROI offers an early, evidence-informed view of the potential returns generated by Supported Internships. While not a definitive valuation, it provides a burgeoning case for investment, highlighting the emerging financial and social benefits for individuals, employers, public services and the wider economy. It also lays the groundwork for further economic analysis and more robust valuation of inclusive employment support in the future.

2.7 Limitations

The analysis presented in this report is based on a small sample of four individual case studies and selected outcome data, rather than comprehensive data from all participants. While the findings offer valuable insights, not all domains of impact were available for each young person, including the voices of educators within the programme, and some were provided as an average across all programme users. As such, the analysis should be viewed as illustrative, rather than representative of the entire cohort.

Although the programme has supported approximately 180 young people over the past three years, due to timescales full data across this wider group was not received. There was also an intention to compare outcomes between young people with and without EHCPs. However, the final sample included three participants with EHCPs and one without, limiting the extent to which comparative analysis could be undertaken. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and their generalisability.

2.8 Remainder of report

As previously noted, this report builds on existing research and aligns with national policy priorities focused on inclusive employment. Its findings are intended to guide future investment in supported employment initiatives, ensuring that young people with SEND in Somerset, both with and without EHCPs, and more widely, are supported to achieve their employment aspirations.

The next section presents detailed case studies of four young people who participated in the Supported Internships programme in Somerset. These case studies highlight the outcomes and impact of the programme through the words of the interns themselves, as well as their families, job coaches, and employers.

This is followed by an analysis of the economic, fiscal and social value generated by the individual outcomes observed. The report then draws on reflections from employers and job coaches, offering practical insights into what has worked well and what could be improved. These perspectives help shape a set of recommendations for sustaining and scaling up effective supported employment approaches both within Somerset and in other local areas.



3. Case Studies

This chapter presents the case studies of four young people who participated in the Somerset Supported Internships programme who contributed to this work, three with EHCPs and one without. These case studies are based on interviews, surveys and economic data collected in Q1 2025, offering a comprehensive view of each participant's journey. Data sources include:

- interviews with young people, their families, job coaches and employers.
- surveys completed by employers.
- granular economic data provided by Somerset Council (SC) and Discovery.

To integrate insights from each of these perspectives and sources, the case studies are written in the third person, allowing a holistic picture of each young person's experience to emerge. However, it is important to note that these case studies provide only a summary of key moments in each individual's Supported Internship journey and their employment outcomes, as relevant to the aims of this report. They are not intended to capture the full depth of each person's experience or the unique, and often far-reaching impacts the programme may have had on their lives.

Each case study is accompanied by a brief economic analysis, summarising costs, benefits, and the overall value generated through the programme.

To protect privacy, pseudonyms are used and identifying details such as names and locations have been changed or removed.

The figures used within each young person's WBVc calculation are based on the guidance set out by [HM Treasury 2021](#).



Sophie's Journey

Before joining the Supported Internship programme, Sophie's future was uncertain. A dedicated and determined young woman, she had completed a supported course at college but had never had a job before. While she dreamed of working with children in a swimming environment, she wasn't sure how to turn that passion into a career. Her parents, like many, simply wanted her to be happy and safe, without placing pressure on her to follow a particular path.

Everything changed when her college introduced her to the Supported Internship programme. With the encouragement of her tutor, she was matched with placements at a local leisure centre and later at a prestigious sports facility. The transition wasn't easy—meeting new people and adjusting to a workplace was daunting—but with the support of her job coach, Sophie quickly adapted.

"At first, it was different" she recalls, "but I got used to it."

Sophie's job coach played a crucial role in her journey, helping her prepare for interviews, develop her CV, and navigate the challenges of working life. ***"She helped me find the internship and supported me through it,"*** Sophie explains. Over time, her confidence grew, and she started assisting with swimming lessons, working closely with instructors and even supporting young learners. ***"I'm better with new people now,"*** she says proudly. Her ability to communicate improved, and she became more independent, walking to work and local shops on her own—something she had never done before.

The impact of the programme extended beyond her work skills. Her family noticed a remarkable change in her confidence and independence. ***"She has grown so much,"*** her mum shares.

"She's earning her own money, making decisions for herself, and proving that she can do more than we ever imagined."

Sophie's employer echoed this transformation, saying ***"It helps people to open up on diversity and helps individuals grow in confidence and become valued team members."***

Today, Sophie has secured a paid role as a swimming teacher's assistant, with plans to complete her Level 1 qualification and progress further. She is already leading some one-to-one lessons and has ambitions to develop her skills even more.

"She's constantly surprising us," says her mum. ***"We never imagined this is where she'd be."***

Economic Analysis of Sophie's situation.



Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) - Sophie's reported wellbeing score prior to her involvement with the Supported Internships programme was 5, and since she has been supported by the programme this reported wellbeing score has changed to 10 out of a possible 10. This is an increase of 5 points. Using the agreed figure of £14,781 per person per annum for each 1-point increase in wellbeing. This resultant Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) associated with this is £73,905.

Differential Costs of Support: Before undertaking her Supported Internship, Sophie attended a post-16 mainstream college with an EHCP for one year. This has a representative average cost of £25,499.25 per annum. Sophie required council provided transport to attend college. This has a representative average cost of £25,000 per annum. Sophie's current costs of support have been given as £9,506.25 per annum. The difference between these costs of support is £40,993 per year.

Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC): No incidents that could be reasonably attributed to the care, wellbeing and / or health were reported for Sophie either before or after her involvement in the Supported Internships programme. As such, there is no fiscal value to report.

Earnings: It was reported that prior to taking part in the Supported Internship programme, Sophie did not have an income and was not in receipt of any benefits. Sophie is currently employed part-time (two hours a week) as a Swimming Assistant, working towards her Level 1 Swim England qualification. This has representative value of £11.26 an hour, or £1,171.04 per annum gross salary. Sophie does not pay tax on these earnings.

Calculated value of current support.

Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc):	£73,905
Differential Costs of Support:	£40,993
Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC):	£0
Tax	£0
TOTAL	£114,898



Isla's Journey

Before joining the Supported Internship programme, Isla faced significant challenges in finding employment. A quiet and reserved young woman, she found it difficult to communicate with people outside of her family, often relying on her mum to speak on her behalf. Her parents worried that she would struggle to secure a job, as she lacked confidence and rarely initiated conversations.

The turning point came when Isla's family heard about the Supported Internship programme through her college. Although her first placement didn't work out, she was given the chance to extend her time on the course and was later placed in the IT department of a local hospital. There, she was paired with a mentor who recognised her abilities and provided the guidance she needed to thrive.

During her internship, Isla's confidence began to grow. Her role involved processing email requests, setting up new accounts and managing the leavers' process for staff exiting the organisation. At first, the biggest challenge was communication. However, with support from her job coach and workplace mentors, she developed strategies to interact more comfortably with colleagues.

"They helped me put things in place to communicate better," Isla explains.

As her confidence improved, so did her performance. She even became the first intern in her programme to take on an off-site placement, an experience she described as transformative.

"I loved the work—it made me feel more confident."

The impact of the programme on Isla's life has been profound. Not only did she secure a part-time job in the IT department following her internship, but she also gained the independence and self-belief that once seemed out of reach. ***"She is more confident and will now do things I never thought she would,"*** her mum reflects. While challenges remain, Isla is far more self-assured than before and continues to build on the skills she developed during her internship.

Looking ahead, Isla aspires to move into a full-time role and further develop her ability to communicate in professional settings. The Supported Internship has not only helped her find meaningful employment but has also changed her family's perception of what she is capable of achieving.

"The programme made all the difference," her mum says.

Economic Analysis of Isla's situation



Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) - Isla's reported wellbeing score prior to her involvement with the Supported Internships programme was 2, and since she has been supported by the programme this reported wellbeing score has changed to 7 out of a possible 10. This is an increase of 5 points. Using the agreed figure of £14,781 per person per annum for each 1-point increase in wellbeing. This resultant Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) associated with this is £73,905.

Differential Costs of Support: Before undertaking her Supported Internship, Isla attended a post-16 mainstream college with an EHCP for two years. This has a representative average cost of £25,499.25 per annum. Isla required council provided transport to attend college. This has a representative average cost of £25,000 per annum. Isla's current costs of support have been given as £9,506.25 per annum. The difference between these costs of support is £40,993 per year.

Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC): No incidents that could be reasonably attributed to the care, wellbeing and / or health were reported for Isla either before or after her involvement in the Supported Internships programme. As such, there is no fiscal value to report.

Earnings: It was reported that prior to taking part in the Supported Internship programme, Isla did not have an income and was not in receipt of any benefits. Isla is currently employed full-time with a reported gross annual salary of £23,614 per annum. This generates £2,208.80 per annum income tax.

Calculated value of current support.

Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc):	£73,905
Differential Costs of Support:	£40,993
Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC):	£0
Tax	£2,208.80
TOTAL	£117,106.80



James's Journey

Before joining the Supported Internship programme, James was in a difficult place. A bright and capable young man, he had completed A-levels in business, sociology and health & social care and later undertook a business and customer service apprenticeship. However, when the apprenticeship failed to lead to a job, James was left feeling lost and unsure of his next steps. Traditional job interviews didn't play to his strengths—his tendency to take time to process questions often led employers to overlook his potential. His mum, recognising his abilities, fought to find the right opportunity for him. As she put it,

"I always knew he had it, but we had to find what made him click—what was the thing that piqued his interest."

That opportunity came through a Supported Internship at Leonardo Helicopters UK. With the guidance of his job coach, Emma, and lecturer, Sarah, James was matched with a role in the Business Intelligence team, where his skills with data and technology quickly became apparent. Initially hesitant and struggling with confidence, James was supported through tailored lessons on workplace skills, budgeting and independence. His buddy, Tom, played a key role in making him feel safe and valued in his team.

"They almost give me support I didn't know I needed. They taught me I'm not just rubbish and help you to realise you are good at stuff."

Throughout the internship, James grew in confidence. Tasks that once felt overwhelming—such as navigating changes to his daily routine—became manageable. Even challenges linked to his OCD, like using public toilets, became easier to handle. For James, the programme was life-changing: ***"They put me on the right path and really helped me develop."*** His abilities impressed his team so much that they fought to create a permanent role for him, securing his place in the company. His mother reflected, ***"The fact he got a job through it lifted a big weight. He has been able to flourish and got something from the end of it."***

James's employer also recognised the significance of the opportunity:

"Yes, in our case, this has been a positive experience and demonstrates how someone who may otherwise be overlooked has a lot to offer and just needs the opportunity and environment in which to succeed."

The impact of the programme extends beyond employment. James is now more independent travelling to work on his own, managing his finances, and even socialising with colleagues outside of work. His success has also inspired his older brother to rethink his own career path. As James reflects ***"I don't know how it could have gone better, the result was good and being part of it and the process was really good...Hopefully I am less of a worry constantly for mum."***

Economic Analysis of James's situation



Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) - James's reported wellbeing score prior to his involvement with the Supported Internships programme was 3, and since he has been supported by the programme this reported wellbeing score has changed to 8 out of a possible 10. This is an increase of 5 points. Using the agreed figure of £14,781 per person per annum for each 1-point increase in wellbeing. This resultant Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) associated with this is £73,905.

Differential Costs of Support: Before undertaking his Supported Internship, James attended a post-16 mainstream college for three years. James did not have an EHCP. This has a representative average cost of £12,931.29 per annum. James required council provided transport to attend college. This has a representative average cost of £25,000 per annum. James's current costs of support have been given as £0 per annum, as he no longer receives any support. The difference between these costs of support is £37, 931.29 per year.

Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC): No incidents that could be reasonably attributed to the care, wellbeing and / or health were reported for James either before or after his involvement in the Supported Internships programme. As such, there is no fiscal value to report.

Earnings: It was reported that prior to taking part in the Supported Internship programme, James did not have an income and was not in receipt of any benefits. James is currently employed full-time with a reported gross salary of £29,000 per annum. This generates £3,286.00 per annum income tax. James is also in receipt of PIP, which calculated at the standard rate is £103.10 per week or £5,361.20 per annum.

Calculated value of current support.

Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc):	£73,905
Differential Costs of Support:	£37, 931.29
Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC):	£0
Tax	£3,286.00
Benefits received	-£5,361.20
TOTAL	£109,761.09



Noah's Journey

Before joining the Supported Internship programme, Noah was studying Learning for Life and Work at college. He enjoyed aspects of it but felt it didn't push him enough. At that stage, he considered a range of next steps—an art course, or maybe something to boost his independence—but ultimately realised, ***"the one thing I really needed was a job."*** That's when he applied to Project SEARCH at Musgrove Hospital.

Noah's first placement was in the hospital kitchens, where he took on cleaning and customer service tasks in a busy environment. It gave him a real sense of what working life is like, but he quickly realised he wanted to try other options. His next placement as an activity facilitator on a dementia ward was a turning point; he was fascinated by the life stories patients shared and, through the experience, developed empathy, emotional insight and confidence in working with people.

Andrew, his job coach, described this as a demanding but rewarding role. ***"It's probably one of our busiest and most physically active rotations. From what I understand, Noah did well. He told me he didn't enjoy the ACA[?] side of it, but this role gave him a chance to shine."***

Noah picked up valuable soft skills simply by observing and reflecting. ***"If a patient lost their temper, I learned not to talk back. You never know what they're going through,"*** he said. His final placement was in the hospital's Academy, where he helped with reception, scheduling and restocking snacks—his favourite task, especially when he got to see students' excited reactions.

After graduating from the internship, Noah briefly worked as a healthcare assistant, but found the long hours in a static role didn't suit him and soon returned to the Academy, as a paid employee. ***"The rest is history,"*** he said. He now works flexible hours through a bank contract and appreciates the balance it offers.

Support from his mentors and job coach was critical. "It's about getting to know the young person really well," Andrew explained. "We use vocational profiles to understand their goals, support needs, and strengths. That way, we can match them with placements where they can thrive."

Noah describes himself now as ***"a completely new person"*** compared to five years ago. He takes the bus to work, manages his own time, and navigates challenges, like anxiety, with the support of a trusted line manager and mental health first aiders. ***"Sometimes, the challenge isn't just about skills—it's about helping someone believe they belong in the workplace,"*** Andrew noted.

Noah's line manager reflected that he ***"thrived in the role and brought a great sense of humour and commitment to the team. It was a pleasure to work with him and support his development."***

Noah is happy in his current role, but he's also thinking ahead and might like to return to working with patients one day or perhaps explore work involving animals, especially dogs. He's also looking into semi-independent living, possibly in an annexe next to his parents' home, as a stepping stone toward full independence.

Reflecting on the programme, Noah said, ***"Project SEARCH is one hell of a course. Musgrove has loads of job opportunities, and everyone's so welcoming."*** For Andrew, this is what success looks like: ***"When interns leave with real-world experience, a CV they're proud of, and the belief that they have something to offer—it's a game changer."***

Economic Analysis of Noah's situation.



Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) - Noah's reported wellbeing score prior to his involvement with the Supported Internships programme was 7, and since he has been supported by the programme this reported wellbeing score has changed to 5 out of a possible 10. This is a reduction of 2 points. Using the agreed figure of £14,781 per person per annum for each 1-point increase/decrease in wellbeing. This resultant Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc) associated with this is -£29,562. This reduction was noted by Noah to be due to having recently increased his hours at work.

"I love my job but have currently upped my hours and still adjusting".

Differential Costs of Support: Before undertaking his Supported Internship, Noah attended a post-16 mainstream college with an EHCP for two years. This has a representative average cost of £25, 499.25 per annum. Noah required council provided transport to attend college. This has a representative average cost of £25,000 per annum. Noah's current costs of support have been given as £ 9,506.25 per annum. The difference between these costs of support is £40,993 per year.

Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC): No incidents that could be reasonably attributed to the care, wellbeing and / or health were reported for Noah either before or after his involvement in the Supported Internships programme. As such, there is no fiscal value to report.

Earnings: It was reported that prior to taking part in the Supported Internship programme, Noah did not have an income and was not in receipt of any benefits. Noah is currently employed full-time with a reported gross salary of £23, 614 per annum. This generates £2,208.80 per annum income tax.

Calculated value of current support.

Wellbeing Value Calculation (WBVc):	-£29,562.00
Differential Costs of Support:	£40,993
Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC):	£0
Tax	£2,208.80
TOTAL	£13,639.80



4. Analysis

This chapter presents an aggregated analysis of the economic impact of the Somerset Supported Internships programme, based on data from the four young people interviewed. It includes estimates of wellbeing value, support costs and the impact on public service use, alongside a summary table of individual-level costs and an indicative Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculation.

As noted earlier, it is important to bear in mind whilst reading this chapter that this analysis is only one metric for understanding the value of the Programme. Things like the reported improvements in wellbeing have implications on young people's quality of life, which are not discussed in detail here.

The chapter concludes with reflections on additional data provided by Somerset Council and Discovery, which outlines average programme costs over the past three years.

4.1 The value of wellbeing

Out of the four young people we spoke to, all had an attributed Wellbeing Score out of 10 for “before” - representing the time prior to starting with the Supported Internships programme in Somerset - and “after” their engagement with the programme - a current estimated score. As noted in Chapter 2, these were based on a view of each young person's circumstances around mental health, including anxiety, depression; life satisfaction; income levels, employment status, and job satisfaction; quality of familial and social relationships, educational attainment; the availability of leisure and recreation opportunities; and their sense of autonomy and control over their own life. Each of these factors contributes to the complex and multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing.

All four young people recorded Wellbeing scores. The average overall score range showed a movement from 4.25 out of 10 to 7.5 out of 10. The median point of the economic value of this was used as £14,781 per person per annum, calculated as one year.

In total, for the four young people this equated to **£192,153 of economic value for one year.**

4.2 The cost of support

Information about the support that young people received before joining the Supported Internships programme was provided; this was calculated in the referenced in Table 2 (below). All four young people were attending mainstream post-16 college for at least one year before joining the programme. Three of them had EHCPs and one did not. For the three young people who had an EHCP prior to joining the programme, the current expenditure on their support is lower than it was previously. Whilst for the young person without an EHCP when joining the programme, the current expenditure on their support is higher than it was due to the benefits now being received. However, it is important to note that this young person is also earning the highest salary of the four.

Overall, the total cost of the previous support was calculated as £189,429.04 and the overall current costs as £33,879.95, which is a difference of £155,549.09 - an average of £38,887.27 per young person.

4.3 The impact on use of resource

None of the four young people reported any histories or health conditions that had been addressed through their participation in the Supported Internship programme. Similarly, no current issues were identified that could be quantified for analysis.

As a result, these individuals did not generate identifiable fiscal costs to public services, such as hospitals, ambulance services, police, justice, GP, healthcare, or social care, either before or after their involvement in the programme.

It is important to note that this will not be the case for all young people who have undertaken or have completed a Supported Internship in Somerset, or across England. It is likely that significant numbers of young people who engage with programmes like the one in Somerset will have previously been engaged with acute services (police, criminal justice, social services) and/or experienced periods of crisis (emergency care, hospital admissions). For example, data from across the Somerset programme suggests that several young people have generated identifiable fiscal costs to public services due to their being [‘a child in need’](#) (79%), a [‘looked after’](#) child (6.5%), or persistently absent from school (32%).

Future work would do well to capture the stories of a larger sample of young people who've engaged with a supported internship in order to analyse the impact on the wider use of resources.

4.4 Indicative Social Return on Investment

Based on the analysis presented so far, an indicative Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculation has been undertaken to offer an early, evidence-

informed view of the potential returns generated by the Supported Internships programme in Somerset. While not a definitive valuation, it provides a burgeoning case for investment, highlighting the emerging financial and social benefits for individuals, employers, public services and the wider economy. It also lays the groundwork for further economic analysis and more robust valuation of inclusive employment support in future.

SROI is a recognised method to assess the value of social programmes by comparing the social, fiscal, and economic benefits generated with the cost of delivering support. It is calculated as:

$$\text{SROI} = \text{Total Value} / \text{Total Cost of Support}$$

In this report, we have examined the journeys of four young people, Sophie, Isla, James and Noah, through the Supported Internship programme in Somerset. For comparability and simplicity, we applied a standard support cost of £9,506.25 per young person. This is the average direct delivery cost associated with the Somerset Supported Internship programme per year (as reported by Somerset Council).

Table 1. SROI Calculation Summary

Name	Total Value	Total Cost of Support	SROI
Sophie	£114,898.00	£9,506.25	£12.00
Isla	£117,106.80	£9,506.25	£12.31
James	£109,761.09	£9,506.25	£11.55
Noah	£13,639.80	£9,506.25	£1.43
Total	£355,405.69	£38,025.00	£37.29

These calculations account for:

- wellbeing value (improvements in confidence, independence, reduced anxiety and employment status),
- changes in support costs (reduced education or support package costs),
- employment-related fiscal contributions (earnings and tax),
- absence of public service costs (as none of the young people had significant incident-based costs before or after the programme).

Based on this analysis, the average SROI across the four young people is: £9.35

$$\text{SROI} = \text{£355,405.69 (Total Value)} / \text{£38,025 (Total Cost of Support)} = \text{£9.35}$$

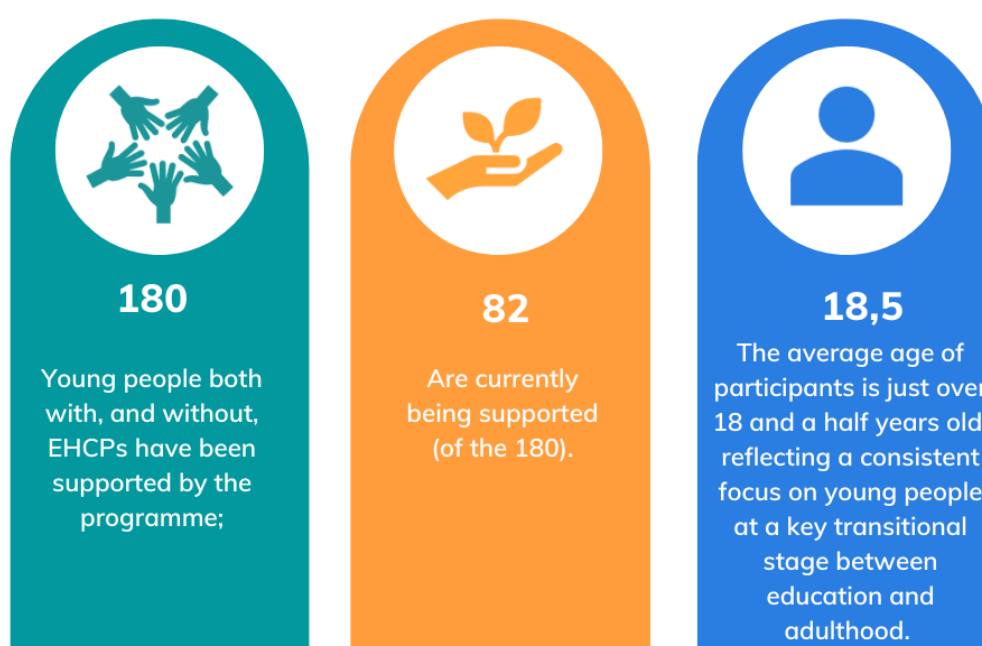
This means that for every £1 invested, an estimated £9.35 of social and economic value is generated. This is considered to be very strong indicative value as it suggests that investment in 'Imagine the possibilities' in Somerset is highly effective generating over nine times its cost in measurable benefits (9:1). In many sectors (like public health, education, or community development), anything above a 3:1 ratio is considered a good return.

While this is an impressive early estimate, it is important to bear in mind that one of the young people (Noah) experienced a reduction in their wellbeing (WBVc) within the snapshot taken by this report, which isn't necessarily reflected when considering the SROI value alone. That is, at the time of capturing Noah's current self-reported WBVc (March 2025), he was in paid employment, managing his mental health, and working towards greater independence, but had recently increased his hours which he was adjusting to. This led to him reporting a lower WBVc than before he started his internship. This example illustrates the importance of qualitative context and longitudinal tracking. Future work would do well to take a longitudinal approach to analysis in order to capture the ebb and flow of the journey through employment for young people who have undertaken supported internships.

4.5 Data from the wider programme

While this report has focused in depth on the experiences of four young people, data collected from the wider Supported Internship programme adds valuable context to their journeys and the analysis undertaken. It demonstrates that these case studies are not isolated success stories, but part of a broader pattern of engagement and support that is taking place across Somerset.

For example, in the last three years:



This wider data shows the reach and scale of the programme, highlighting that the intensive, personalised support captured in the case studies is being delivered at scale.

It also provides assurance that the experiences of the four young people featured in this report are likely to resonate with those of many others in the cohort. Although we have not undertaken a full quantitative analysis of the programme data at this stage, as the nature of the data makes it better suited to descriptive use, it nevertheless enriches the picture. It supports our understanding of the systems and structures within which these young people are navigating their transitions into adulthood, work and greater independence.

To build on this early evidence, further work is needed to undertake a comprehensive analysis across the full cohort of participants is needed. This includes

- deeper exploration of long-term outcomes,
- disaggregated impacts for young people with, and without, EHCPs, and
- wider benefits to families, employers and public services.

Investing in this next phase of evaluation will be crucial to fully understanding the sustained impact of Supported Internships and strengthening the case for policy and funding decisions at both local and national levels.

Table 2. Summary of Costs and Benefits.

Name	WBVc (before)	WBVc (current)	WBVc value	Cost or previous support	Cost of current support	Difference in Support Costs (DSc)	Difference in Incident Fiscal Costs (IFC)	Current Earning (pa)	Tax (pa) (Tc)	Benefits (pa) (BR)	TOTAL VALUE (WBVc+ DSc+IFC+Tx -BR)
Sophie	5	10	£73,905.00	£50,499.25	£9,506.25	£40,993.00	£0	£1,171.04	£0	£0	£114,898.00
Isla	2	7	£73,905.00	£50,499.25	£9,506.25	£40,993.00	£0	£23,614	£2,208.80	£0	£117,106.80
James	3	8	£73,905.00	£37,931.29	£0	£37,931.29	£0	£29,000	£3,286.00	£5,361.20	£109,761.09
Noah	7	5	-£29,562.00	£50,499.25	£9,506.25	£40,993.00	£0	£23,614	£2,208.80	£0	£13,639.80
Total			£192,153	£151,497.75	£28,518.75	£160,910.29	£0		£7,703.60	£5,361.20	£355,405.69



5. Learning from employers and job coaches

This piece of work primarily set out to understand the impact of Supported Internships on young people SEND in Somerset and calculating the value of those outcomes. However, during the data collection process, it became apparent that the reflections of those delivering and enabling the programme offered rich and valuable learning in their own right.

The perspectives of job coaches and employers highlighted not only how the programme works in practice, but also how it shapes perceptions, teams and wider organisational culture. This chapter therefore presents a synthesis of employer and job coach perspectives drawn from feedback shared.

5.1 Why employers got involved

Employers told us they first engaged with the Supported Internship programme following targeted outreach from job coaches, college staff and the programme itself. Some were already committed to inclusive employment; for others, it was their first time supporting someone with additional needs in the workplace. Their motivations were diverse but often grounded in a shared willingness to give someone a meaningful opportunity.

“In our case, this has been a positive experience and demonstrates how someone who may otherwise be overlooked has a lot to offer and just needs the opportunity and environment in which to succeed.”

Employer, Engineering Sector

Participation was not driven by compliance, but by a sense of social responsibility and a readiness to uncover untapped potential.

One job coach reflected that it's often job coaches who broker these relationships:

“Their engagement really depends on the job coach... I try to align the aspirations of my interns with what the employer is willing to offer and support them to make reasonable adjustments.”

5.2 How Internships were managed

The structure of the [Supported Internship model](#), consisting of rotations, matched placements, job coaching, was repeatedly cited as a strength. Interns were supported with a clear routine and employers appreciated having a consistent point of contact. This coordination was essential to bridging the gap between individual needs and workplace expectations.

Job coaches described the importance of relationship-building not just with the intern, but with the employer:

“My role isn’t to tell individuals exactly what to do or manage them directly. I observe, step in when needed and help the employer understand that support means helping them become more independent—not doing the job for them.”

The support job coaches provided, included:

- building one-page profiles and vocational profiles
- job analysis and task matching
- supporting interns with travel, routines and social interactions
- preparing employers for how to adapt roles or environments.

Despite the mostly positive feedback about how interns were managed, we did hear that there were opportunities for improvement in the future. For example, some employers noted a desire for more upfront planning and SEND-specific training.

“More partnership working, meeting before starting, and more guidance from the college before the intern starts would help.”

Employer, Leisure Sector

Job coaches further echoed this challenge, noting that while some partners are closely aligned, differing approaches within the partnership, such as how to encourage independence, can create confusion for interns.

5.3 What interns did

Interns undertook a range of roles tailored to their preferences and strengths:

- In an engineering firm, an intern contributed to digital and analytical tasks in a business intelligence team.
- In a leisure centre, an intern supported swimming instruction and went on to lead 1:1 sessions.
- At a hospital, interns undertook reception duties, customer support and ward-based activity facilitation.

Job coaches ensured that tasks aligned with interns' goals and worked with employers to identify suitable placements.

“We get a job description and create a job analysis. That way, we can anticipate which tasks might be challenging—but we also stay open to surprises. Often, interns do better than expected in areas we hadn’t considered.”

5.4 Impact on the workplace

The presence of interns had a tangible impact on staff and teams. What often began with cautious curiosity turned into deep appreciation.

“It helps people to open up on diversity and helps individuals grow in confidence and become valued team members.”

Employer, Leisure Sector

" His fantastic attention to detail and natural talent for ensuring reports are readable carved a role within the team... This greatly improved the overall calibre of what we deliver as a team, and [James] quickly become an important contributor to ensuring we deliver a quality final product."

Employer, Engineering Sector

Interns influenced not only the culture, but the outlook of their teams. Job coaches described how colleagues went from uncertainty to advocacy—especially when they saw interns contribute meaningfully.

“Employers often think they know what being inclusive means—but through the internship, they learn what it really takes. It challenges assumptions.”

Job Coach

And this leads to great success stories for interns and employers alike.

“One intern was placed in clinical coding. After the placement ended, the employer actively sought him out across the hospital to offer him a job. He’d seen his strengths and was willing to advocate to bring him on board.”

Job Coach

Finally, employers also spoke about the morale boost and culture shift interns inspired. In one case, a former intern became a mentor to a new recruit, which is a testament to the programme’s long-term value.

5.5 Would they do it again?

The overwhelming answer from employers who engaged in this work was a consistent 'yes'. Every employer involved said they would consider hosting another intern. For some, it led directly to a permanent role.

“We felt supported throughout—it was a good experience, and one we’d be open to repeating.”

Job coaches also expressed optimism but noted that scaling the model may require broader systems change—more accessible training, sustained employer engagement and more consistent digital or accessibility tools.

“As we expand, job coaches will need to learn new skills too—especially digital ones. Interns are starting to explore media, coding, video editing. We need to be ready for that.”

5.6 Summary

Supported internships in Somerset are unlocking real opportunity not only for young people, but also for the employers and job coaches walking alongside them. These partnerships are building a more inclusive workforce, one relationship at a time.

From the employer's perspective, the programme:

- enabled young people to meaningfully contribute to the workplace
- strengthened inclusion and team morale
- challenged assumptions around disability and employment
- fostered long-term change through structured support.

Job coaches are central to this success. They provide the invisible scaffolding that allows interns to succeed and employers to adapt; their dual role supporting the intern and educating the employer, is essential to sustaining inclusive practice.

“We might never have seen his potential in a traditional interview—but this gave us the chance to really see what he could do.”

Employer, Engineering Sector

The learning captured in this chapter, alongside the economic analysis presented in Chapters 3 and 4, demonstrates that Supported Internships in Somerset are more than just an opportunity for young people, they are a catalyst for wider change. When delivered thoughtfully, these programmes model what truly inclusive employment can look like in practice.



6. Discussion

This chapter brings together the learning garnered from across the data collected in this piece of work to reflect on the wider implications of Somerset's Supported Internship programme. Drawing on the rich qualitative data gathered from young people, families, job coaches and employers, as well as early signals from the economic analysis, this discussion explores how the programme is contributing to meaningful change at individual, organisational and systems levels.

The findings presented here are organised across six key themes that reflect both what has been achieved and where further evidence and investment could strengthen impact; Supported internships as a catalyst for change; the role of relationships in driving impact; redefining readiness and contribution; economic, fiscal and social value; the systemic implications of the programme; and what this means for future development and investment.

6.1 Supported Internships as a catalyst for change

The information presented in this report demonstrates how tailored employment support provided through the Somerset Supported Internship programme significantly altered life trajectories for the four young people who contributed to this work. Across all four case studies, we saw transformative gains in confidence, independence, employability and wellbeing. These were not just shifts in skillset, but in identity, ambition and self-belief.

Each young person - Sophie, Isla, James, and Noah - entered the programme with different experiences, strengths, and support needs. Yet a common thread across their stories is that they each needed *the right environment* and *the right support* to thrive. The combination of real-world placements, skilled job coaching and thoughtful employer engagement created a scaffolding, through which these young people could explore their potential. For each, the result was not only paid work, but a meaningful shift in their sense of self and their role in society.

6.2 The role of relationships in driving impact

A consistent theme across the case studies is the central role of relationships between interns and job coaches, employers and mentors, and families and

professionals. These relationships are not incidental to the programme's success they *are* the mechanism through which success is achieved.

Job coaches served as translators, advocates and bridge-builders. They enable employers to see capability rather than perceived risk, and help young people navigate unfamiliar terrain with increasing autonomy. Employers, once engaged, often became champions for inclusion, describing how the experience changed their understanding of what young people with SEND can do.

Importantly, families also underwent transformations shifting from worry and uncertainty to pride and hope. For many parents, the internship became the first time they saw their child in a professional environment, succeeding independently on their own terms.

6.3 Redefining readiness and contribution

One of the most powerful insights from this work is how Supported Internships challenge traditional notions of "job readiness." In many cases, participants would not have succeeded in a competitive interview process, yet with structured support and the chance to prove themselves on the job, they not only coped but excelled. This reframes inclusion not as charity or compliance, but as a strategic way to unlock overlooked talent.

Participants contributed to their workplaces in real and valuable ways, from improving IT workflows to supporting patients on hospital wards. In doing so, they not only gained employment, but reshaped how teams perceived disability, support and potential.

6.4 Economic, fiscal and social value

The analysis of the four case studies - Sophie, Isla, James, and Noah - provides early, but compelling, evidence that the Somerset Supported Internship programme is not only delivering positive personal outcomes but also generating significant economic, fiscal and social value.

For three of the four young people, the programme has led to meaningful improvements in wellbeing, reduced support costs, and in two cases, contributions to public finances through income tax. Collectively, these individual outcomes represent a shift away from dependency and toward economic participation and independence. The combined total value of benefits across the four case studies is estimated at £355,405.69. When offset against the programme delivery cost of £9,506.25 per intern, this results in an average **Social Return on Investment (SROI) of £9.35 - meaning that for every £1 invested, over £9 of social and economic value is generated.**

Even in the one case where wellbeing had decreased at the point of data collection (Noah), the analysis highlighted other important positive outcomes,

including paid employment, reduced support costs and improved independence. This underlines the need for longer-term follow-up to fully capture the evolving benefits of the programme.

The wellbeing gains alone account for £192,153 across the four interns, underscoring the importance of interventions that go beyond employment outcomes to support broader life satisfaction, autonomy and mental health. The reduction in average annual support costs across the four young people, from £37,874.45 to £7,129.89, further demonstrates how personalised employment pathways can alleviate long-term pressure on public services.

These results are early indicators, but they offer a strong case for continued investment and broader analysis across cohorts. Supported Internships should be seen as both a high-impact social intervention and a financially sound public investment delivering outcomes that benefit individuals, families, communities, and the wider economy.

6.5a Systemic implications

At a systems level, the Somerset experience highlights the importance of sustained, strategic investment in inclusive employment pathways. The programme illustrates how cross-sector collaboration, between education, health, social care and employers, can produce outcomes that are both human and economic in nature.

This reinforces existing evidence that Supported Internships are not a *'nice to have,'* but a high-impact intervention with wide-ranging implications. They reduce long-term dependency, prevent crisis, and promote healthier, more resilient lives.

6.5b Policy alignment and strategic relevance

As noted earlier, this report and its findings sit within a complex and evolving policy landscape. On the one hand, the national discourse is increasingly focused on punitive reform of disability benefits and reducing long-term welfare dependency. Whilst on the other, the government has signalled a commitment to expanding employment support for disabled people through initiatives such as [Connect to Work](#) and ongoing investment in Supported Employment.

The Somerset Supported Internship programme provides a practical example of how these two strands can be aligned in a way that works for individuals and the public purse. The economic analysis demonstrates how investment in personalised, relationship-based employment support leads to reduced reliance on public services, increased earnings and improved wellbeing.

At a time when national policy is increasingly focused on “what works” in supporting disabled people into employment, the evidence from Somerset offers

clear evidence that thoughtful, inclusive employment programmes can deliver meaningful outcomes without resorting to punitive measures. It is a model that enhances capability rather than penalising the need for support.

6.6 Future development and investment

While the programme has achieved a great deal, there is also learning about what can be improved and scaled up. Employers and job coaches highlighted the need for more consistent training, better planning at the outset of placements, and accessible tools to support wider roll-out. As more young people express interest in digital careers, creative industries and entrepreneurship, job coaches will need training and support to keep pace with evolving aspirations.

Moreover, it will be important to explore how to ensure equity of access to Supported Internships across Somerset, especially in rural areas and for young people not currently engaged in college. It is noted that Somerset are keen to continue monitoring the four young people who participated in this work to determine the medium- and long-term impacts to them, their families and community.

6.7 Summary

The Somerset Supported Internships programme is delivering far more than access to employment; it is reshaping lives, expectations and systems. The journeys of Sophie, Isla, James and Noah illustrate the transformative potential of tailored, relationship-driven support that values each individual's strengths and aspirations.

This programme is not only preparing young people for work, it is preparing society to better recognise and include them. The economic analysis reinforces this impact, showing strong returns on investment and long-term cost savings across education, employment, and wellbeing domains. At a time when national policy is focused on reducing benefit dependency and scaling up employment support, Somerset's experience offers a compelling example of how inclusive, person-centred approaches can deliver on both social justice and fiscal priorities.



7. Next steps: Building on what works

Based on the learning garnered throughout this piece of work, this chapter presents a series of next steps that are intended to support the continued development, sustainability and impact of Somerset's Supported Internships programme, and may be useful for wider stakeholders involved in inclusive employment policy and practice.

Our evidence-based recommendations are as follows:

- **Position Supported Internships within national policy dialogue** by engaging with DWP, DfE, and DHSC to share evidence of local impact, and advocate for policies that expand and protect personalised employment support for young disabled people.
- **Use cost-benefit and SROI analysis** to evidence financial and social value of the whole cohort of young people supported by the Supported Internship, including wider impacts on family circumstances.
- **Develop a local policy narrative** that demonstrates how Supported Internships contribute to both national ambitions (e.g., reducing welfare dependency, increasing workforce participation) and local priorities (e.g., reducing NEET rates, improving inclusion).
- **Explore co-commissioning opportunities** with adult social care, Integrated Care Systems and local Jobcentre Plus teams to sustain and scale up delivery.
- **Build on learning from delivery** so far to develop Supported Internships which respond to the aspirations of young people e.g., digital Supported Internships and hybrid working.
- **Expand routes into the programme** beyond colleges, including through social care and community referrals.
- **Ensure equitable access** in rural areas and for those with more complex needs.

- Offer consistent pre-placement guidance and training to employers.
- **Celebrate inclusive employers** and build a network of champions to encourage wider take-up.
- **Invest in training** and manageable caseloads for job coaches.
- **Involve young people** in shaping programme design and continuous improvement.
- **Strengthen induction processes** and ensure shared understanding across partners.
- **Embed data collection** on outcomes, service use and wellbeing.

These next steps aim to secure the long-term impact of Supported Internships ensuring more young people with SEND can access meaningful, paid work and thrive in inclusive workplaces. The myriad of benefits for young people, employers and society are clear from the evidence presented in this report. It is essential to keep the momentum going and drive this progress forward.