

How to support young people with special educational needs and disabilities into work

a short guide for schools, colleges and careers advisors

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The overwhelming majority of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are capable of sustainable paid employment, with the right preparation and support.

Both the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 strongly endorse participation in work as a legitimate and desired outcome.

There is now much anecdotal evidence of the benefits to employers as well as to individuals with SEND of employing them in full-time paid work, yet this group remains furthest from the labour market.

The employment rate for disabled people stands at 45.7% for the period July to September 2015 against an overall employment rate of 78%,¹ and yet only 6% of people with a moderate to severe learning disability known to adult social care are in work.²

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities often struggle to get paid work when they leave education but the advent of study programmes, which includes supported internships, has improved the success rate in some areas.

What this guide covers

This short guide outlines the key considerations when supporting young people with special educational needs and disabilities to move into paid work. It covers:

- Raising aspirations of children, young people and everyone around them
- Ensuring high quality, impartial career information, advice and guidance for young people and outlining how this can be built into the curriculum
- Understanding the use and importance of vocational profiles, how to include their development in classroom or tutorial time and how to ensure they inform a vocational curriculum
- Developing work experiences in real work settings in line with aspirations
- Working with social care to maximise opportunities for holiday and weekend jobs
- Creating more work opportunities through traineeships, supported internships and apprenticeships
- Ensuring that employment support is of high quality, staff are appropriately trained in supported employment and Training in Systematic Instruction and there are mechanisms for monitoring success rates
- Ensuring follow-on support is in place for young people after they leave education to maintain or gain paid work

Resources:

¹ [Office of National Statistics: Unemployment](#)

² [Measures from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, England - 2014-15. Health and Social Care Information Centre October 2015.](#)

Raising Aspirations

This needs to start when children are young. Parents, teachers and others should ask primary school children what they want to do when they grow up. As with all children, some of the responses to this may seem unrealistic such as 'I want to be a pilot', but this may be more about a love of planes and airports than the job itself and could eventually lead to a wide range of jobs in an airport.

Conversations about types of jobs can be introduced into the classroom from a young age but it is important that those people surrounding children with special educational needs have a belief that it is possible for everyone to have some kind of work, even if their support requirements are significant.³

Activities that can boost a belief that paid work is possible and is a positive outcome are listed below:

- **Annual Events** (at the least) **for schools and colleges to hold for young people and their families, school and college staff, social workers**, information, advice and guidance workers and employers that provide examples of young people's success in employment;
- **Events should communicate the 'presumption of employability'**, which is the idea that everyone can work with the right support.

Having a young person with SEND already in paid employment attending the event can present an inspiring role model to others of what is possible;

- **Images of people with SEND in employment around your building** and particularly where children are based.⁴

Also consider employing people with learning disabilities,⁵ who again can act as role models for others;

- **Involve local supported employment agencies⁶** and others who are already supporting young people into work so they can reassure families that this is not about leaving young people to flounder in the work place;
- **Use videos about success stories;**
- **Tell students about online help⁷.**

Maintained schools and pupil referral units have a statutory duty under section 42A of the Education Act 1997 to ensure pupils from Year 8 until Year 13 are provided with impartial careers guidance.

Whoever is responsible locally for providing information, advice and guidance to children and young people about possible career choices has a role to play in ensuring that they have an understanding about different jobs they can do.

It is helpful if not only work experience coordinators and careers advisors research local job options but also tutors and teachers. There are activities that can be integrated into the curriculum at various stages that will enhance their understanding of what is possible locally. Some possibilities are:

- developing role play relating to different work settings for children and young people
- visiting work settings and ideally, having a guided tour
- encouraging employers to give talks about the work they do so children and young people can ask questions.

This is particularly valuable for students in year 9 and above

- showing videos about young people employed in a wide range of work settings
- using online resources such as the Nationwide Employability Skills Book - a working life⁸ and Plotr.⁹

³ [You tube video- Marc Gold composite film from 1970s- demonstrating Systematic Instruction](#)

⁴ [Aspirations For Life pictures and posters you can download for free](#)

⁵ <http://waysintowork.com/case-studies/manor-green/>

⁶ [BASE has a list of its members on the website with links for more information](#)

⁷ [Government Publication - Helping Young Disabled People to Find and Stay in Work](#)

⁸ https://www.nationwideeducation.co.uk/employability-skills/students/04-07_working-life/int_4-7_working-life.php

⁹ <https://www.plotr.co.uk/>

Vocational Profiles

A vocational profile is a form of assessment to understand an individual's experience, skills, abilities, interests, aspirations and needs in relation to employment. The aim is to understand the person in depth and to allow for the best possible job match or work experience placement. It provides a picture of the ideal conditions needed in a workplace for the student to be successful.

It is helpful to start working on a vocational profile from year 9 so that any information collected informs future subject choices, work experience, weekend or holiday job options as well as feeding into an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan if the young person has one. If there are existing person-centred planning documents in use, it will be important to ensure that any vocational profile used is complementary to it rather than simply duplicating information. The compiling of the vocational profile can be a part of the normal curriculum or tutorial time and should be completed with the young person as the conversation about each aspect covered is important in allowing exploration of different possibilities that may not have been considered previously. This will need to be kept up to date as young people experience the world of work. There may already be a vocational profile form in use in your area for supporting adults with learning disabilities to move into work. If so, you may wish to use this for consistency but if not, look at the one being piloted in Bath & North East Somerset.¹⁰ The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities has also developed materials for schools and these are downloadable.¹¹

Work Experience

The study programme curriculum in schools and colleges requires **all** students to undertake work experience. In order to make it as meaningful as possible for each young person, work experience should:

- **be based on in-depth knowledge of the student** (using a vocational profile, if possible)
- **have clear educational and vocational goals**
- where the young person has an EHC Plan, **be in keeping with the work aspirations expressed** in Section A of the plan, particularly if these specify a particular type of work
- **involve on-the-job learning** with individualised training programmes
- **provide clear expectations and feedback** to the student and the employer
- **include adequate support for all partners**, i.e. enough but not too much support for the student so that s/he can meet the employer's requirements
- **scheduled meetings with the employer** at the start and end of the placement as well as a willingness on all sides to respond quickly to any queries or concerns
- **be sufficiently long that the individual can experience a range of the typical activities** that people do in the work setting during a working week.¹⁴

Case Study:

At Castle School in Berkshire, students begin their vocational profiles in year 8 and 9. This working document evolves with the young person to capture all of the information in relation to their aspirations, skills, interests and ability to work to ensure they are supported on their journey towards employment. This person-centred approach is critical to finding the right work placements so young people can flourish in them. To date this process has been exceptionally positive and the information gained has helped their students and employers build positive working relationships, resulting in a number of students gaining employment straight from school.

[Visit Castle School's Website](#)

The SEND Code of Practice¹² states that work tasters (very short placements) and work experience should be part of a range of options that schools and colleges make available.

Work experience while at school has been shown to improve students' self-esteem, to promote learning of workplace culture and what is expected, and to develop ideas for future job searches.¹³

Resources:

¹⁰ [Link to B&NES tools](#)

¹¹ [A work Profile and Facilitators handbook free to download](#)

¹² [Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years. Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities](#)

¹³ [Wehman, P. \(2001\). Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes. \(5th Edition\)](#)

¹⁴ Some of this list cited in [A Review of the Research Literature on Supported Employment: Steve Beyer and Carol Robinson \(2009\)](#).

Following on from a work experience placement, it is helpful to have a review of the young person's views and performance and to ensure that these are recorded in the vocational profile and inserted into the EHC Plan if one exists. Employment should be discussed at the next annual review and any key considerations should inform the next work experience or job search. Any positive feedback from the employer or the other people at work should be recorded as this can help when trying to find further work placements or paid work. Work experience should also be progressive so whilst it might be appropriate to place someone who has no clear idea about what work they wish to do in the school or college café, any further placements should build on this. So for example, if the young person shows real flair for customer service whilst in the college café but does not want to work in catering, consider other customer facing options that are available with local employers for the next work experience.

Working with others to maximise opportunities for holiday and weekend jobs

There is potential to work with partner agencies to use money for care and support, such as short breaks teams paying for specific work experience (see below) or job coaching for holiday and weekend jobs. A young person's funding would need to be converted into a direct payment but this can generally be used to employ a Personal Assistant to provide care and support or to accompany the child or young person to social or leisure activities. There is no reason why a recognised job coach could not be recruited to help a young person work since this would also allow the family and the young person to have a break from each other. However, it should be recognised that the direct payment may fund fewer hours of a job coach than it would a care worker.

Apprenticeships, traineeships, and supported internships

The SEND Code of Practice states that **one of the most effective ways to prepare young people with SEND for employment is to arrange work-based learning that enables them to have first-hand experience of work**, such as apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships. So what are these programmes and who can access them?

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are paid positions and apprentices learn the skills they need while working; a training provider helps them get a recognised qualification. There are four levels of apprenticeship, with entry requirements for level 2 (the lowest level) being an E grade at GCSE in English and Maths in Functional skills. However, the requirements tend to vary a little depending on the vacancy being offered. It is worth noting that employers are bound by the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to ensure that they are accessible. An apprentice aged 19-24 who has an EHC Plan, and those not subject to an EHC Plan who self-declare a learning difficulty or disability, may also be eligible for Exceptional Learning Support if their support costs are more than £19,000¹⁵.

Any provider wanting to set up an apprenticeship scheme must be on the UK Register of Learning Providers and have a direct contract with the Skills Funding Agency. For advice and support, contact the National Apprenticeship Service¹⁶.

Top Tip:

It is beneficial for students to write and **thank employers for their work placement and to recognise exceptionally supportive employers by providing a certificate of recognition**. But take care not to give these out too liberally otherwise they lose their impact. If you are able to offer employers training in disability awareness, this is likely to be well received and could help future placements run more smoothly.

Case Study:

M is 15 years old and attends a special school. He is a talented young actor who has performed in school and community productions. M wants to become an actor and has successfully auditioned for a place on a course run by National Theatre Connections at the Lowry Theatre, Salford. In order to pay for his course, which will provide both work experience and skills development, targeted short breaks money has been used. This money is being taken as a direct payment of £200. Everyone recognised this is a real opportunity for M to work towards his aspiration to be an actor.

For further information email: j.gray1@manchester.gov.uk

Resources:

¹⁵ [Information on the funding mechanisms](#)
See under Apprenticeships

¹⁶ contact: servicedesk@sfa.bis.gov.uk or call 0800 015 0400

Traineeships¹⁷

Traineeships are open to young people aged 16-24 who are eligible to work in England; are unemployed and have little or no work experience and have qualifications below Level 3. The delivery of traineeships is generally a partnership between education and training providers and employers.

Traineeships were introduced in 2013 and offer a work experience placement, work preparation and English and Maths (if needed). The work placement is unpaid but employers sometimes cover expenses for travel and meals. The programme can last up to 6 months and is funded through a provider's existing funding allocation on a per student basis by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). Providers no longer have to have a good or outstanding Ofsted rating so from 1 February 2016 all EFA-funded institutions can choose how much funding to devote to traineeships.

Supported internships¹⁸

A supported internship is a structured study programme based primarily with an employer. They enable young people aged 16-24 with a Special Educational Needs Statement, Learning Difficulty Assessment or an EHC Plan to achieve sustainable paid employment by equipping them with the skills they need for work, through learning in the workplace. Supported internships are unpaid, and last for a minimum of six months. Wherever possible, they support the young person to move into paid employment at the end of the programme. In addition to spending the majority of their time with the employer, young people complete a personalised study programme which includes the chance to study for relevant substantial qualifications, if appropriate plus English and Maths. They have proved to be an effective way of helping young people with SEN into work.^{19 20}

Follow on support after supported internships and other study programmes

A key issue for supported internships, or other study programmes with work experience as a core aim, is support for learners after the course has ended – especially for those that do not have a job offer lined up. This will entail careful planning around young people coming to the end of study programmes, not only for employment support but the transition to adult life more generally. It will be helpful to ensure that students and their families know about the support available through Job Centres as well as potential sources of funding which may provide longer-term support which includes Personal Budgets, health and social care services and Department for Work and Pensions programmes that can be accessed through local Job Centres.²² It is helpful for schools and colleges to start working in partnership with external agencies who can offer ongoing support well ahead of courses ending.

Resources:

¹⁷ Online traineeship service: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/delivering-traineeships-through-efa-funding>

¹⁸ <http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/what-we-do/supported-internships>

¹⁹ Kaehne, A (2014) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jar.12207/abstract> full report at:

<http://base-uk.org/knowledge/project-search-evaluation-august-2014>

²⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263205/DFE-RR314.pdf

²¹ <http://base-uk.org/knowledge/national-occupational-standards>

²² For more information on sources of funding: Mendel, A and Robinson, C. (2015)

http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/media/416726/dec_2015_practical_funding_guidance_doc_5_.pdf

Ensuring good quality employment support

The role of a job coach is to support young people to enable them to help them find and learn from any work placements and to make a positive progression into paid employment. **Job coaches need high levels of energy and enthusiasm and a belief in the right and ability of young people to work** even if they need high levels of support.

Effective job coaching means being creative and flexible so that the individual being supported gets just the right amount of support to learn the job well. Job coaches need to be able to recognise when and how to provide support, and when to increase, decrease or remove it. In order to do this, they will need specific skills and should be willing to undertake Training in Systematic Instruction so they can support young people who are likely to need it to learn complex tasks. They should also be skilled in working with employers. Job coaching may involve supporting people in jobs with unsocial hours so their contract will need to reflect working outside of term times and allow for different work shifts.

New National Occupational Standards exist for supported employment across the UK and it is increasingly likely that staff involved in supporting people into work will be expected to comply with these standards.²¹ To measure the effectiveness of the support provided, it will be important to have clear and ambitious outcomes for each young person and a systematic and regular approach to monitoring progress.

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