**DFN PROJECT SEARCH ANNOUNCES NEW LICENCE HOLDER FOR UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN PROGRAMME**

DFN Project SEARCH, a leading charity supporting young people with learning disabilities and autism to move into work, has announced that Values Into Action Scotland (VIAS) will be the new license holder for its prestigious University of Aberdeen programme.

The programme in Aberdeen is a collaborative project between the University of Aberdeen, North East Scotland College, and Values into Action Scotland (VIAS), and is also supported by Skills Development Scotland, Department of Work and Pensions, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council.

Since being established in 2013, over 68 young people have graduated through the programme.

VIAS will be providing the Job Coaching support for the programme, working alongside the education provider North East Scotland College to support interns through three term-long rotations during their internship year.

In addition to the 1-2-1 Job Coaching to DFN Project SEARCH interns, VIAS will also work with the partners to secure employment opportunities for the interns of the programme both inside and outside of the University to meet the students’ aspirations.

DFN Project SEARCH now has 16 programmes in Scotland, offering all partners a high-performing evidenced-based programme that supports young people with learning disabilities and autism to transition from education into full-time, integrated, competitive employment.

In the past 12 months in Scotland, 66 per cent of its 145 interns secured a paid job. Eighty of these graduates, secured a full-time job, which is a huge improvement on the percentage of people in Scotland with Learning Disabilities and Autism who are known to Local Authorities which stands at just seven per cent.

Carmel McKeogh, director and programme specialist at DFN Project SEARCH, said: “We are extremely pleased to announce that the fantastic charity Values Into Action Scotland is the new licence holder for our University of Aberdeen programme.

“The programme has brought great success in creating employment opportunities and transforming the lives of young people with learning disabilities and autism throughout the area.

“VIAS has been a key partner in supporting people with learning disabilities and autism in Scotland for many years and its role as the new licence holder will further strengthen the DFN Project SEARCH offer in Aberdeen, bringing valuable skilled job coaches and developing good engagement with the wider business community.”

VIAS has a vision for Scotland where people with learning disabilities and/or autism have the same opportunities as everyone else and are supported to achieve their goals and dreams.

The charity enables organisations to support people to achieve maximum independence, choice and control, achieving this through offering quality improvement services including evaluation, training and consultancy to organisations which work with people with learning disabilities and/or autism.

VIAS is a disabled-person led organisation, and its board of trustees also consists of 50 per cent of people with learning disabilities and/or autism.

Norma Curran, Chief Executive Officer of VIAS said “We have long been admirers of the Project SEARCH model and have collaborated on a number of joint projects over the last decade. We are delighted to become more formally involved as a partner in DFN Project SEARCH Aberdeen. Young people have told us throughout the years that they want to work but their employment rates have been consistently low through good economic times and bad so to be part of a service that tackles this head on and helps people to show how much they can contribute is hugely exciting.”

The University of Aberdeen, Business Liaison/Employer Partner Co-ordinator, Heather Crabb said: “The University of Aberdeen is delighted to welcome VIAS to the DFN Project SEARCH University of Aberdeen partnership.  We are proud to host this innovative programme at the University and are looking forward to working with VIAS and our other partners to support more young people into employment.  The success of our programme is testament to our ongoing engagement with a variety of public, private and third sector organisations within our local community.  We would welcome approaches from employers who would be interested in supporting our work, either through the provision of work placements and/or employment opportunities for our graduates.”

Today DFN Project SEARCH has 75 internationally recognised programmes across the UK, Ireland and Iberia, and has supported over 1500 interns into work, 1350 of which meet Project SEARCH’s success criteria. This criteria means that the work is over 16 hours per week, is non seasonal, is paid the prevailing wage for the role and that the work is in an integrated setting.

On average 60 per cent of graduates obtain full-time paid employment meeting these criteria, which is well beyond UK wide statistics of 5.9 per cent.

To learn more about the DFN Project SEARCH University of Aberdeen programme visit [www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/project-search-2431.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/project-search-2431.php) or email dfnprojectsearch@nescol.ac.uk

You can also learn more about DFN Project SEARCH at <https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/>

**ENDS**

**DFN Project SEARCH**

DFN Project SEARCH programmes throughout the country are creating life changing opportunities, offering young people a one-year transition to work programme in their final year of school or college to enable inclusion and empowerment.

Evidenced-based and outcome driven, the programme is a proven way of helping people with learning disabilities get long term careers as well as helping businesses get a more inclusive workforce. Today it is running over 60 UK schemes and has supported more than 1350 young people into work.

DFN Project Search now has a target of getting 10,000 young people into work during the next 10 years, which will be transformative for them, their families, communities and business.

For more information please go to <https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/>

**Issued by Media Zoo on behalf of DFN Project SEARCH.**

For further information contact:

Neil McDonald neil@mediazoo.tv 07428 398 402 / Jessica Leslie jessica@mediazoo.tv 07867 763 724