**Internships offer chance for young people with learning disabilities to thrive**

The DFN Project SEARCH University of Aberdeen team is inviting young adults with learning disabilities and their families to apply for internship opportunities and take the first steps in their journey towards employment.

The DFN Project SEARCH programme offers opportunities to get real-life work experience, training in employability and independent living skills. To date, around 80 young people who have participated in the programme at the University are in paid employment across the north-east.

The year-long programme begins in August and is open to anyone aged 16-24 with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum conditions who want to go on to find paid employment.

There are 12 places available for the 2022-2023 intake, with the successful applicants supported to undertake three work placements within the University while studying towards City & Guilds qualifications at North East Scotland College.

DFN Project SEARCH works to build a more inclusive society by helping to create much improved career opportunities for young adults with a learning disability, demonstrating how when given the right support, interns can truly thrive and make a huge contribution to society.

Professor Peter Edwards, Vice-Principal of Regional Engagement and Regional Recovery, said: “It has been an enormous privilege for the University to have hosted the local DFN Project SEARCH programme since 2013.

“Our interns gain skills and experience that are of huge benefit to them and the local businesses and organisations they go on to work for, supporting the continuing success of our local economy. To date, around 80 DFN Project SEARCH University of Aberdeen Interns are in paid employment across the North-East of Scotland.

“The number of young adults with a learning disability in employment at national level remains stubbornly low and the tremendous successes of our previous graduates who are now in work is a fantastic achievement that is testament to them and to the hard work, dedication and commitment of the DFN Project SEARCH team.

“We look forward to welcoming the new 2022/23 intake to campus in August as they begin their transformational journey towards entering employment.”

DFN Project SEARCH CEO Claire Cookson said: “We are very proud of our programme here based at the University of Aberdeen and are delighted to support the promotion of the 2022/23 programme.

“Our mission is to build a more inclusive society by helping to create much improved career opportunities for young adults with a learning disability.

“Our life changing programme is proven to work and we are looking forward to engaging with young adults and their families in the North-East of Scotland as we forge ahead with our goal of transforming workplace culture and building a more fair and inclusive society for all.”

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

Over 1,600 young adults have now graduated from [DFN Project SEARCH](https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/) programmes in the UK, with over 1,475 interns securing full-time paid employment. Typically, 70% of interns have secured employment upon completion of the programme, against the national average employment rate for young adults with a learning disability (who have not entered any post-school programme) of just 5.6%. The programme has also delivered an impressive success rate during the Pandemic with young adults performing brilliantly in front-line roles with the NHS and local authorities.

Evidence-based and outcome driven, the programme is a proven way of helping people with a learning disability get long term careers as well as helping businesses get a more inclusive workforce. Today it is running over 76 UK schemes and has supported more than 1600 young people into work.

DFN Project Search 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.

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