

Project SEARCH Evaluation: Final Report

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SUMMARY

Policy context

In 2005 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People'¹ articulated a vision that by 2025 disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and be respected and included as equal members of society. In terms of employment, the report specifically states that by 2025 **'any disabled person who wants a job, and needs support to get a job, should be able to do so'**. An employment strategy for people with learning disabilities, 'Valuing Employment Now' (VEN), was introduced in 2009 and focused on people with moderate and severe learning disabilities because they have benefited least from previous initiatives. According to recent estimates from the Labour Force Survey, the employment rate for people with learning disabilities ranges from 8 per cent to 16 per cent². Under the Coalition Government work to develop this vision has continued with the completion of the VEN projects and through new initiatives such as the Sayce review of employment support for disabled people carried out in 2011³ and the Special Educational Needs Green Paper 'Preparing for Adulthood' (2011)⁴.

Project SEARCH

Between 2009 and 2011 the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) worked with the VEN team and other government departments on a number of demonstration projects to explore 'what works' to help people with learning disabilities realise their aspirations of paid employment. One of these initiatives was Project SEARCH, a supported internship

¹ The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People', London: The Stationery Office

² This is an estimate based on data from the Labour Force Survey (Q2, 2011).

Owing to small sample size for this impairment group it is not possible to show a specific employment rate. The quoted range is based on a central estimate of 12 per cent with a 4.4 per cent confidence interval.

³ Sayce, L. (2011), 'Getting in, staying in and getting on. Disability employment support fit for the future Department for Work and Pensions', London: The Stationery Office

⁴ Department for Education (2011) "Preparing for Adulthood" A new approach to special educational needs and disability - A consultation', London: Department for Education

programme⁵ hosted by employers, which aims to secure and retain full time employment for 'interns', or to ensure they leave the scheme ready for work and better placed to secure employment elsewhere. It was created in Cincinnati Children's Hospital in America in the mid-1990s and was originally developed to provide a transition to work for students with learning disabilities.

In order to participate in the VEN demonstration project, organisations were required to form a partnership between a host employer, education provider and supported employment provider. Fourteen of these site partnerships then participated in the demonstration year. Of these, four were previously established sites and ten were new to Project SEARCH⁶.

In order to deliver Project SEARCH, sites were licensed by Project SEARCH US, and had to adhere to the Project SEARCH model⁷. The model covers all aspects of designing, marketing and delivering Project SEARCH, and providing follow-on support to interns following completion of the programme. The core elements of the model were adapted for use in England for the purposes of the demonstration year. The US Project SEARCH team have emphasised the need to adhere to this model (referred to as model fidelity) as, based on their experience of the programme, this will maximise successful outcomes for interns.

The Project SEARCH model uses existing education and supported employment funding streams to fund the tutor and job coach with additional costs met by the host employer, for example to provide an on-site classroom.

Research aims

The Centre for Economic and Social, **Inclusion**, conducted an evaluation of the Project SEARCH demonstration sites on behalf of the Office for Disability Issues (ODI). The main aims of the research were:

⁵ The term 'supported internship' is taken from the Special Educational Needs Green Paper 'Preparing for Adulthood' (2011). In this context it is defined as a variant of supported employment which utilises an internship model to offer the student substantial experience of real work.

⁶ A full list of sites can be found in Appendix B.

⁷ See Appendix A for Project SEARCH model fidelity components for English sites.

- To explore how the Project SEARCH model operates and identify key success factors in order to inform future take-up of the model;
- To monitor employment-related outcomes for interns during and after participation in Project SEARCH;
- To explore the experiences of interns and identify potential personal and social benefits to participation in Project SEARCH.

Research methods

The evaluation involved all 14 demonstration sites during the academic year 2010-2011. Four of the 14 demonstration sites were selected as 'in-depth' case studies for the research where face-to-face interviews and focus groups were carried out with stakeholders including interns, their families and staff. The remaining sites were involved via qualitative telephone interviews with staff. Monitoring data was also collected from sites. The evaluation of Project SEARCH began in August 2010 and was carried out in three waves ending in September 2011.

KEY FINDINGS

Project SEARCH outcomes

At the end of the Project SEARCH demonstration year, data collected from 11 sites indicated that around one in three interns gained full-time or part-time employment as a result of participation. Additional 'unknown' outcomes from other sites may have skewed the overall employment figure. Project SEARCH therefore achieved a job outcome rate higher than the reported average for people with moderate to severe learning disabilities. These were early findings gathered three months after the conclusion of the Project SEARCH year, and additional job outcomes may have been achieved after the conclusion of the evaluation. Future monitoring of the sustainability of these job outcomes is not within the scope of this research.

Overall Project SEARCH interns reported a positive experience of the programme. Their parents, Project SEARCH partners and the interns themselves said that their confidence, motivation, decision-making, self-esteem and health had all improved while on the programme. This is consistent with other evidence of the wider benefits of work to individuals. Project SEARCH graduates from existing sites also reported positive outcomes of working for the host employer, and partner

organisations involved noted a range of organisational benefits. These included improvements in efficiency and positive attitudinal changes amongst staff. A number of sites also mentioned financial savings, in terms of benefit and social care budgets, for graduates who were successful in gaining employment.

Lessons from the demonstration year

The demonstration sites described a number of key lessons which they felt were important for successful delivery. They also noted a number of challenges and, partly as a result of these, some sites made adjustments to the Project SEARCH model. All of these factors are considered below in order to inform future delivery of the supported internship model.

Success factors

There were a number of important factors which sites identified for the successful implementation and delivery of the Project SEARCH model. These are summarised below:

- The need for an effective organisational partnership (host employer, education provider, supported employment provider).
 - Sites noted the importance of effective communication, and the willingness of each partner organisation to take on individual and shared responsibilities.
 - Sites also stressed the need for organisational 'buy in' at a senior level across all partners.
- The need for a full-time classroom tutor.
- The use of training in systematic instruction for delivery staff (and where possible interns' supervisors and mentors).
- The close engagement of interns' families / carers and host employer staff.
- An early focus on job search for interns which includes the engagement of external employers.

Challenges

Sites also identified a number of key challenges, and for many the biggest of these was the availability of funding. Assuming a group size of ten interns in a Project SEARCH site, the research found it costs around £10,500 per participant per year. Many sites noted that for the demonstration year they had 'absorbed' costs, or had to 'find' funding via a number of different routes, but stated that in the longer term this would not be sustainable. Future delivery therefore required access to appropriate and sustainable funding streams.

The Project SEARCH aim to provide ongoing support for all graduates was also raised as a concern. Some sites, in particular those that were established prior to the demonstration year, suggested that it was not sustainable for sites to support Project SEARCH graduates as well as supporting new Project SEARCH interns.

Some sites also raised the challenge of sustaining a flow of appropriate job opportunities for graduates. It was suggested that this could be achieved through the engagement of external employers. This was of particular importance for existing sites as there was some indication that they were approaching a level of 'saturation' in terms of the availability of suitable posts within the host employer. The issue of saturation was mainly linked to job outcomes. Sites did not express concerns with the impact on the delivery of pre-work training, as having a graduate employed in a department did not necessarily prevent the opportunity for interns to be placed there on rotation.

Overall, evidence from the Project SEARCH demonstration year does appear to confirm that the approach can achieve some successful job outcomes and a range of other benefits. It is therefore recommended that consideration should be given to wider implementation of the supported internship model. However, this needs to take place alongside an assessment of its cost effectiveness and outcomes in comparison to other provision for young people with learning disabilities and autism, including mainstream supported employment, education, training and day care.

Views on the model

Many of the features of Project SEARCH delivery draw on the established, well evidenced, model of supported employment such as employer and customer engagement, vocational profiling, job matching and in work support including the use of Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI). The distinct features of the model are linked to its

specific application as a supported internship which aims to facilitate successful transitions from education into paid work.

Overall sites were generally positive about the Project SEARCH model. In terms of the role it can play in supporting transitions, the demonstration sites viewed the model as a constructive change from more traditional vocational courses and residential colleges. They felt Project SEARCH provided an opportunity for young people with learning disabilities to end a repetitive cycle of participating in college courses. Sites also felt Project SEARCH offered interns an opportunity to participate in 'real work', rather than volunteering or work experience. The main benefits of the model identified by sites were:

- The embedding of the programme with a host employer and the length of programme which offer interns an opportunity to gain substantial experience of 'real work'.
- The close working partnership between employers, education providers and supported employment providers, who were all committed to the aims of securing employment for interns.

Model fidelity

The core elements of the Project SEARCH model were adapted for use in England, and the US Project SEARCH team emphasised the need to adhere to this model. They reported that, based on their experience of delivery, this would maximise successful outcomes for interns, although no data on direct comparisons with other supported internship models appears to be available.

Sites were generally positive about the model, and aimed to deliver the prescribed core elements. There were, however, a number of factors affecting sites' ability to adhere fully to the model. Some of these issues related to local circumstances or tensions within the partnership, however over the course of the demonstration year, there were also some suggestions that sites needed to adopt differing approaches. These adaptations were suggested or made in order to:

- Achieve or sustain the delivery of the model (i.e. fit the model to available funding).
- Facilitate interns' move towards independence from their families (i.e. not rigidly adhering to joint monthly reviews of progress).

- Improve employment opportunities for graduates (e.g. the need to make closer links with external employers).
- Sustain support for graduates (which sites felt might not be achievable in the longer term).

Making adjustments to elements of the model appeared to have varying results. Some changes, such as only completing two rotations instead of three, did not appear to have a notable impact on job outcomes achieved and in some cases was a positive for sites as it allowed for more time to set up. On the other hand, not having a full-time job coach or tutor caused more considerable problems with delivery of the programme. It was clear, however, that all partners needed to agree to any adjustments to the programme, and there were tensions between partners where this was not the case. Overall, making adjustments to the model did not appear to have a notable impact on job outcomes achieved in the demonstration year, however it is too early to say what impact these adjustments might have in the longer term.

Future use of supported internships

Going forward, there were some core elements of the model that a number of sites felt needed to be adjusted in order to continue delivering a sustainable supported internship programme. It became apparent over the course of the evaluation that some sites felt that in future, whilst they may adopt some of the key principles of the approach, they may not pursue full implementation of the prescribed Project SEARCH model.

This pragmatic approach to the implementation of supported internships may offer a route that can capture the benefits of the approach, whilst recognising the need to adapt to local circumstances and deliver a sustainable and cost effective model. As noted above, the US Project SEARCH team emphasised the need to maintain model fidelity in order to maximise successful outcomes for interns. There does not, however, appear to be any data on direct comparisons with other supported internship models and overall adjustments to the model made during the demonstration year did not appear to have had a notable impact on job outcomes.

On this basis it is recommended that consideration should be given to the use of supported internships which draw on the key lessons of the Project SEARCH demonstration year. It is, however, recommended that an ongoing review of the outcomes of any developing models, along with

those of Project SEARCH, is carried out in order to develop an evidence base on best practice in this area.

In order to facilitate the wider use of supported internships it will also be necessary to address the challenges encountered by the demonstration sites. As noted above, one of the biggest challenges identified by the Project SEARCH demonstration year was the availability of sustainable funding for education and supported employment provision. Sites reported the use of Work Choice and various streams of education funding but none appeared to have reached a long-term solution to this issue. This will be even more critical in the current economic climate as decisions about how funding is allocated to will need to consider value for money relative to other provision.

Whilst there are potential links to Work Choice which could be explored further, the current design of module one of this programme does not fit with the yearlong approach of Project SEARCH. A more appropriate link may be in the support of Project SEARCH graduates (via module one for those who do not achieve employment during the Project SEARCH year and via module two for those you do.) This approach would also address another of the concerns about the longer-term sustainability of the Project SEARCH model identified by demonstration sites, i.e. their capacity to offer ongoing support for graduates once the new academic year had commenced.

A range of education funding streams for the tutor, and some elements of supported employment provision for Project SEARCH, were utilised during the demonstration year. Information from a Jobs First report⁸ also tends to support the potential for FE funding of supported employment provision. This, alongside the SEN Green Paper commitment to explore the introduction of supported internships, suggests that an education route may be able to offer access to appropriate future funding. If this approach is adopted it is recommended that care should be taken to ensure that the core elements which the demonstration year identified as key success factors, such as employer engagement and a partnership approach to supported internships, are maintained.

It is also recommended that any future use of this approach should also consider the other factors noted by the demonstration sites for

⁸ Allott, S. (2011), 'Job First: Funding employment support with individual budgets', London: Department of Health

successful delivery, alongside the key elements of supported employment. These include:

- close engagement of participants and their families;
- job matching, vocational profiling and in work support including the use of Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI); and,
- an early focus on job searching particularly with external employers.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tackling employment for people with learning disabilities

In 2005 ‘Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People’⁹ articulated a vision that by 2025 disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and be respected and included as equal members of society. It set out a programme of action to bring disabled people fully into the scope of the opportunity society. Its focus was on supporting disabled people to help themselves to create a step change in their participation and inclusion. In terms of employment, the report specifically states that by 2025 **‘any disabled person who wants a job, and needs support to get a job, should be able to do so’**.

As part of work to achieve this vision a dedicated three-year employment strategy for people with learning disabilities, ‘Valuing Employment Now’ (VEN), was introduced in 2009. This was a cross-government strategy which several departments signed up to, including Department of Health, Office for Disability Issues, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Education and Business Innovation and Skills. This strategy focused on people with moderate and severe learning disabilities¹⁰ because they have benefited least from previous initiatives. Under the Coalition Government work to develop this vision has continued with the completion of the VEN programme and through new initiatives such as the Sayce review¹¹ of employment support for disabled people carried out in 2011 and the Special Educational Needs Green Paper ‘Preparing for Adulthood’ (2011)¹².

⁹ The Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit (2005), ‘Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People’, London: The Stationery Office.

¹⁰ There are, however, some inherent difficulties with this terminology as the UK statutory sector has no formal shared definition of mild, moderate and severe learning disability.

¹¹ Sayce, L. (2011), ‘Getting in, staying in and getting on. Disability employment support fit for the future Department for Work and Pensions’, London: The Stationery Office.

¹² Department for Education (2011) “‘Preparing for Adulthood’ A new approach to special educational needs and disability - A consultation”, London: Department for Education.

‘Valuing Employment Now’ set out an aim to radically improve employment opportunities and acknowledged that while the employment rate of disabled people in Britain has risen (to around 48 per cent), that of people with a learning disability is much lower. Estimates based on data from the Labour Force Survey put the employment rate for people with learning disabilities at between 8 per cent and 16 per cent¹³. This is far lower than the employment rate for all disabled people (48.4 per cent) and the working age population in England (77.5 per cent)¹⁴.

The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) worked with the VEN team, and other government departments on a number of projects which attempted to find out ‘what works’ to address this issue, including:

- Project SEARCH, which is a supported internship¹⁵ programme hosted by employers, designed to help young people with learning disabilities into work.
- Getting a Life, which aimed to identify and tackle the issues young people with learning disabilities face when they leave education so they can get a job and enjoy a full life.
- Jobs First, a project working with people with learning disabilities to use their individual budget to pay for the support they need to help them get a paid job.

These three projects aimed to capture evidence of ‘what works’ for people with learning disabilities to realise their aspirations for employment.

¹³ This is an estimate based on data from the Labour Force Survey (Q2, 2011). Owing to small sample size for this impairment group it is not possible to show a specific employment rate. The quoted range is based on a central estimate of 12 per cent with a 4.4 per cent confidence interval.

¹⁴ Published by Office for Disability Issues, source Labour Force Survey, 2010.

¹⁵ The term ‘supported internship’ is taken from the Special Educational Needs Green Paper ‘Preparing for Adulthood’ (2011). In this context it is defined as a variant of supported employment which utilises an internship model to offer the student substantial experience of real work.

1.2 Project SEARCH

1.2.1 What is Project SEARCH?

Project SEARCH is a supported internship programme hosted by employers, designed to help young people with learning disabilities into work. It is a year-long programme of on the job training, which is described as ‘employer-led’¹⁶.

Project SEARCH ‘interns’ take part in a programme of work training via a series of work placements with a host employer over an academic year. Over the year, the interns work across three different rotations that are situated within different departments in the host business.

The programme aims to secure and retain full time employment for ‘interns’ with their host employer, or to ensure that interns leave the scheme ready for work and better placed to secure employment elsewhere.

Project SEARCH was created in Cincinnati Children’s Hospital in America in 1996. The programme was originally developed to provide a transition to work for students with learning disabilities. Project SEARCH is still ongoing across the USA, and will be referred to as Project SEARCH US for the purposes of this report.

Project SEARCH US has been reported to be very successful. Eighty per cent of interns who completed the programme in 2006-07 are now reported to be in full time employment. Typically each year 25 – 40 per cent of interns are reported to be hired by the host organisation¹⁷. The figure produced by Project SEARCH US is a grand total of outcomes achieved over its 15 year history, in which it has developed into a large programme with multiple sites and wide ranging involvement from employers. The results of Project SEARCH US are therefore not directly comparable with the outcomes achieved during the UK demonstration year. In addition to this, the US programme has not been subject to external evaluation, and figures have been provided directly from the US team.

¹⁶ Appendix A: Project SEARCH Model Fidelity Components for English Sites (April 2010).

¹⁷ Department for Work and Pensions (2009), ‘Helping People With Learning Disabilities into Work’ (News Release 30/10/2009), London: Department for Work and Pensions

1.2.2 Project SEARCH in England

As noted above Project SEARCH is one of the demonstration projects arising from the VEN strategy which aims to support the delivery of improved employment rates for people with a learning disability. As part of the VEN Delivery Plan, organisations were offered the opportunity to participate in a Project SEARCH 'demonstration year'.

In order to meet the Project SEARCH US model requirements outlined below, organisations were required to form a partnership between a host employer, education provider and supported employment provider, and apply to participate as one Project SEARCH 'site'. Fourteen sites were subsequently invited to participate in the demonstration year. Of these, four were previously established sites and ten were new to Project SEARCH¹⁸.

1.2.3 The Project SEARCH model

In order to deliver Project SEARCH, organisations had to obtain a licence from Project SEARCH US, and adhere to the Project SEARCH model¹⁹. The model covers all aspects of designing, marketing and delivering Project SEARCH, and providing follow-on support to interns following completion of the programme. The core elements of the model were adapted for use in England for the purposes of the demonstration year.

The US Project SEARCH team have emphasised the need to adhere to this model (referred to as model fidelity) as, based on their experience of the programme, this will maximise successful outcomes for interns. Core elements include²⁰:

- A partnership supported and resourced by the host employer, education provider and supported employment provider;
- An employer-led model;
- Consistent on-site staff in order to support interns and the host employer during the academic year;

¹⁸ A full list of sites can be found in Appendix B.

¹⁹ See Appendix A for Project SEARCH model fidelity components for English sites (April 2010).

²⁰ Ibid

- Participation of young adults with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum conditions;
- Pooled or 'braided' funding and resources between the non-employer partners (education provider, supported employment provider, other partners);
- Total immersion of interns and/or employees in the host organisation (interns abide by the host employer's policies and practices with reasonable adjustments where needed);
- Operational delivery staff (tutors and job coaches) trained in systematic instruction; and,
- Support for graduates of Project SEARCH.

The model states that the ultimate aim of Project SEARCH is to obtain sustained, paid employment for each participant. In addition to this, it is noted that getting a job is more important than completing the Project SEARCH year. Any interns who gain employment before the end of the year should leave the programme, but continue to receive support in their job. A full discussion of the model can be found in section [3.8](#).

1.3 Evaluation of Project SEARCH

The Centre for Economic and Social, **Inclusion**, conducted an evaluation of the Project SEARCH demonstration sites on behalf of the Office for Disability Issues (ODI).

The main aims of the research were:

- To explore how the Project SEARCH model operates and identify key success factors in order to inform future take-up of the model.
- To monitor employment-related outcomes for interns during and after participation in Project SEARCH.
- To explore the experiences of interns and identify potential personal and social benefits to participation in Project SEARCH.

The evaluation involved all 14 demonstration sites participating in Project SEARCH during the academic year 2010-2011. Four of the 14 demonstration sites were selected as in depth case studies for the research (two new and two established sites) and the remaining sites

were involved via qualitative telephone interviews. Monitoring data was also collected from sites.

The evaluation of Project SEARCH began in August 2010 and was carried out in three waves.

The following activities were completed in the first wave of fieldwork (September–October 2010):

- Scoping interviews prior to the start of the Project SEARCH year with case study sites.
- Wave one interviews with Project SEARCH partners in case study and non-case study sites (face to face at case study sites, and via telephone at the others).
- Monitoring data spreadsheets issued to all sites for completion.

The second wave of fieldwork (January–February 2011) involved:

- Visits to the case study sites, which involved interviews and focus groups with interns, their family members / carers, and Project SEARCH partners and host employer staff.
- Wave two telephone interviews with Project SEARCH partners in non-case study sites.
- Continued collection of monitoring data.

During the third wave of fieldwork (May–June 2011) the following activities were completed:

- Visits to the case study sites, which involved interviews with Project SEARCH partners and host employer staff.
- Wave three telephone interviews with Project SEARCH partners in non-case study sites.
- Collection of outcome data from all demonstration sites (September 2011).

Details of the interviews carried out in waves one, two and three are presented in table 1.1 below:

Table 1.1 Evaluation fieldwork data

Project SEARCH participant	Fieldwork wave	Face-to-face interview	Telephone interviews	Focus Groups	Total number of people interviewed
Project SEARCH stakeholders	Scoping interviews		9		9
	Wave One	7	20	2	29
	Wave Two	6	16	3	25
	Wave Three	16	10	0	26
Interns	Wave Two	5		3 (including 28 interns)	33
	Wave Three			1 (including 6 interns)	6
Graduates	Wave Two	3			3
Parents of interns and graduates	Wave Two	7		1 (including 4 parents)	11
Managers and mentors of: interns/graduates	Wave Two	13/3			16
Total number of interviews / focus groups	Wave One, Two & Three	60	55	10*	155

* Note this total shows number of groups held, not total number of participants.

1.3.1 Report structure

This report offers an overview of the Project SEARCH demonstration year. It includes:

- An introduction to the demonstration sites and an outline of the partnerships;
- Analysis of the main factors affecting the set up, costs and delivery of Project SEARCH;
- Reflections on the use of Project SEARCH model, and how the model was delivered according to local circumstances;
- Experiences of interns, parents, graduates and host employer staff;
- Details of the employment outcomes; and,
- Discussion of the future use of supported internship programmes.

The report highlights the main challenges experienced by sites during the demonstration year. It highlights good practice in overcoming these challenges and areas that were unresolved at the conclusion of the evaluation. A series of recommendations on future use of supported internships forms part of the final chapter of the report.

2 SET UP OF THE DEMONSTRATION YEAR

This chapter details the process of setting up Project SEARCH sites for the demonstration year. It includes details of how sites became involved in Project SEARCH, the nature of the partnerships and how sites tackled the implementation process. Examples of key challenges, good practice and unresolved issues are highlighted throughout. During the final wave of the evaluation, sites were asked about their preparations for the new Project SEARCH year²¹. Where sites highlighted changes to the set-up process based on lessons from the demonstration year (for example in recruitment of interns) these are also reported below.

2.1 The demonstration sites

The Project SEARCH year was completed by 14 demonstration sites, four of which had previously delivered Project SEARCH, and ten that were new to the programme. Sites became involved in Project SEARCH by various means, some through direct contact with Project SEARCH US, and others through contact with existing sites or through the central government call for participants for the demonstration year. Applicants were asked to submit a proposal which was judged against criteria to ensure readiness to take part in the demonstration year.

Some sites also became involved in Project SEARCH through the national coordinator²². Appointed by the US team, the national coordinator provided support to all sites, organised national network events and carried out model fidelity assessments over the course of the demonstration year. None of the sites had close contact with the US-based team over the course of the demonstration year, other than at national network meetings. Contact with Project SEARCH US was primarily via the national coordinator.

For the existing sites, their knowledge of the programme had come from contact with the US programme. One of these sites had become

²¹ 12 of the 14 demonstration sites were planning to continue their delivery of an internship model.

²² The national coordinator role was put in place by the Project SEARCH US team to oversee the demonstration year, and to develop Project SEARCH in the UK and Europe.

involved with Project SEARCH through the national coordinator. The other three directly engaged with Project SEARCH US through presentations given by the US team in England, and often subsequent visits to the original project in Cincinnati.

Most of the new sites came to the programme without any pre-existing relationships. Some developed independently, whilst others gravitated towards support from the national coordinator. New sites were more likely to receive support from the central VEN coordinator who was based within the Department of Health. Sites appeared to become 'clustered' based on their route into the programme, and any affiliation with other sites. This seemed to have an impact on how the programme developed at different sites, including how the programme was set up, the support received, the materials used and the attitudes towards future delivery of the programme.

Relationships with Project SEARCH US varied across the sites. A number of sites had a pre-existing relationship with the US programme. Some remained in close contact with the original programme through the national coordinator, while others developed independently over time. A small number of sites were able to support each other directly due to close regional proximity. Many issues experienced during the Project SEARCH year were common to all sites.

2.2 Sources of support

2.2.1 National coordinator support

As outlined above, a number of sites regularly drew on support and advice from the national coordinator throughout the Project SEARCH year. They included one of the existing sites, a new site based in the same region and another three new sites that received a high level of support from the national coordinator. These three sites were relatively isolated in terms of their location, and may have looked to the national coordinator for support as a result.

In addition to this, one of these sites had a team member who was originally involved in the set-up of the existing site, also supported by the national coordinator. A further site, although closely linked to another new site in terms of region and partner organisations, developed a strong relationship with the national coordinator, whereas their 'neighbouring' site did not. This may be explained by the fact that the education provider at this site was a school. The only other site with a

school in their partnership was an existing site that was very closely associated with the US programme. This site commented that it was useful for them to have contact with another 'school' site, and that they had used documents from the existing site when designing their curriculum.

Sites supported by the national coordinator tended to incorporate some additional elements of the Project SEARCH model that other sites did not. For example, two of the sites had 'job developers' as a separate job role, which is advised in the model but was not listed within the core model fidelity components for English sites (discussed further in section [3.8](#)).

These sites were very positive about the role of the national coordinator and the support they received. These sites also appeared less likely to adapt the US model, and were also most likely to state that they planned to continue to deliver Project SEARCH in accordance with the original model in the long term.

2.2.2 Internal support

A number of sites relied primarily on support from within their own Project SEARCH team, and developed with little support outside of their organisational partnership. Most were in contact with other sites and were aware of the external support available to them, but appeared to have chosen to develop the programme based on their own experience and expertise.

These sites designed and implemented Project SEARCH in their own way. Some encountered difficulties as a result of this, while others developed robust working models that suited their local environment. These sites often appeared to have strong leadership either within, or in addition to, the active partnership²³. This allowed them to run the programme without relying on the support of the national coordinator.

As previously mentioned, sites relying on internal support typically had one overall lead with a high level of expertise in the field of employment support for people with learning disabilities, or they had this expertise within the partnership. These sites appeared to be most successful where the programme leads had a strong sense of how they wanted to

²³ According to the Project SEARCH model, the 'active' partnership consists of the host employer, education provider and supported employment provider.

design and implement the programme, and had support both within their own organisations and across the partnership.

A few of these sites experienced difficulties in delivering Project SEARCH despite having a strong lead partner. This was typically due to an underdeveloped partnership, or a lack of clear direction within the partnership. For example, at one site a single organisation operated as the host employer and supported employment provider, with limited assistance from an education provider.

The view of the national coordinator was that a lack of support from operational partners would indeed lead to considerable difficulties in delivering Project SEARCH. They felt this was a particular issue they had encountered during the Project SEARCH demonstration year.

“What we’ve wrestled with in England is missing partners, that’s been very hard, partners who can only offer a little bit, you know, say an educator who sends a part-time Tutor and doesn’t join it up to anything else they’re doing.”

National Project SEARCH coordinator, wave 3

2.2.3 Cross site support

There were a number of sites that, whilst independent from Project SEARCH US, worked very closely together. They consisted of two existing and two new sites in the same region. The two existing sites originally had close links with Project SEARCH US.

Over time, these sites took the core principles of the programme and began to develop their own ways of working, such as producing their own materials. These sites relied on support from each other, and communicated regularly. The support they received from each other was described by the partners as invaluable to the delivery of the project.

2.2.4 Existing and new sites

As noted, four of the demonstration sites had previously delivered Project SEARCH and 10 were new to the programme. New sites experienced more set up and delivery issues, such as organising partnerships and gaining senior buy-in. Existing sites were much less likely to go through the set up and delivery issues experienced by new sites, as many of these issues had been resolved in their first year of delivering the programme. However, these sites, particularly those with

public sector host employers, were much more likely to experience difficulties in placing interns into jobs with the host employer. This was possibly due to the fact that these sites had experienced previous success of interns gaining employment with the host business, but had now reached a level of 'saturation' in terms of suitable posts. Some existing sites were considering options to address this issue, such as involving external employers to a greater extent. However, the issue of saturation was mainly linked to job outcomes and sites did not express concerns with the impact on the delivery of pre-work training, as having a graduate employed in a department did not necessarily prevent the opportunity for interns to be placed there on rotation. As a result of the difficulties outlined, job outcomes achieved varied most between new and existing sites, with new sites tending to achieve higher levels of job outcomes (see [4.1.1.](#)). Where relevant, the differences between new and existing sites and the potential impact on job outcomes are discussed throughout the report.

The following table gives details of sites participating in the Project SEARCH demonstration year.

Table 1.2 Project SEARCH sites

Site (host employer)	SE provider	Education Provider	Project SEARCH year	Demonstration year start date
Local Authority	Remploy	College	1	January 2011
Local Authority	Remploy	School	1	September 2010
NHS Hospital	Independent Supported Employment Provider	College	1	September 2010
NHS Hospital	Remploy	School	2	September 2010
NHS Hospital	Remploy	College	1	September 2010
NHS Hospital	Independent Supported Employment Provider	College	1	September 2010
Local Authority	Local Authority Supported Employment	College	1	September 2010

	Service			
NHS Hospital And Local Authority	Remploy	College	2	September 2010
Government department	Remploy	College	1	January 2011
Local Authority	Local Authority Supported Employment Service	College	1	January 2011
NHS Hospital	Remploy	College	1	September 2010
NHS Hospital	Remploy	College	2	September 2010
Private Company	Remploy	College	2	September 2010
NHS Hospital	Remploy	College	1	September 2010

2.3 The project partners

As previously mentioned, Project SEARCH involves a partnership between a host employer, an education provider (college or school) and a specialist employment agency. Of the 14 sites, there were 13 public sector employers and one private sector employer. Public sector employers included four local authorities, eight NHS hospitals and one central government department. Education providers across the sites included 12 colleges and two schools. Eight of the 14 sites used the same national supported employment provider organisation. Of the remaining four, two used in-house provision, and two used other supported employment providers²⁴.

The Project SEARCH model defines the three main partnership organisations outlined above as the 'active partners'. Some partnerships also included a project lead from another organisation, such as a Local Authority or charity, which held overall responsibility for the project.

²⁴ Full details of the sites can be found in Appendix B.

The partnerships that were formed at the demonstration sites appear to be a key success of the programme. Organisations generally worked extremely well together and Project SEARCH was driven forward by the positivity, enthusiasm and determination of the partners. In addition to organisational contributions, many of the individuals involved in Project SEARCH also articulated their strong personal commitment to the programme and ‘**doing what it takes**’ to ensure successful delivery.

However, as noted in [2.2.2](#) above, at a small number of sites where the partnership was underdeveloped there were considerable difficulties in delivering the programme in line with the Project SEARCH model.

2.3.1 Roles and responsibilities

Within each organisation, there were often a number of staff members involved in Project SEARCH and staff were often separated into strategic and operational roles. Roles within each site often included:

Table 1.3 Project SEARCH roles

Organisation	Strategic roles	Operational roles	Other roles
Host Employer	Business Liaison		Human Resources Department managers and mentors
Education Provider	Education Lead	Classroom Tutor	Learning support assistant
Supported Employment Provider	Supported Employment Lead	Job Coach/ Job Developer	
Local Council / Charity	Overall Lead		

Within sites, in addition to the day-to-day working relationships between operational partners, such as job coaches and tutors, most had a formal steering group that oversaw the running of the programme. Where the

operational staff ran into any issues they were unable to resolve, these were usually taken to this group for further discussion.

As part of the Project SEARCH model, each team member had set roles and responsibilities. However, many of the responsibilities were agreed between the partners. The programme appeared to have worked best when each of the partners agreed their roles at an early stage, and met regularly to discuss this as the programme evolved. Several sites agreed that the partnership worked best when team members all knew what their responsibilities were, and delivered accordingly.

Strategic leads

Strategic leads were responsible for the set up of the programme, and continued to have an overview during the demonstration year. They were most likely to sit on the steering group, and responded to the needs of operational staff, but were not involved in the day-to-day running of the programme. Sites typically had at least one person from each organisation in a strategic role.

The leadership of the strategic partners appeared to have a considerable impact on the delivery of the Project SEARCH at the majority of sites. Where Project SEARCH was delivered most successfully, it often appeared to be closely connected with the ability of the strategic partners to steer the project internally, and as a partnership.

Strategic partners appeared to have the most impact where they were able to drive the programme from within their own organisation. For example, a well-connected business liaison may have been more likely to be able to generate a larger number of rotation options across departments. It was not essential that strategic partners held senior positions within their organisations, although if not in this position themselves, it was crucial that they had the support of the senior management team within their organisation (discussed further in section [2.5](#)).

Operational leads

Operational partners were responsible for the day-to-day delivery of Project SEARCH. These team members were typically based at the host employer site and were primarily involved in supporting the interns. Operational staff often liaised closely with the business liaison, who was commonly the first port of call if there were any issues with programme delivery. This importance of this relationship was particularly evident at

sites that did not have a business liaison. One site commented on the difficulty of communicating with the host employer, as they did not have someone in this role.

Operational staff were employed full-time on Project SEARCH. However, a small minority of sites were unable to provide full-time operational positions due to difficulties within the partnership (discussed in section [2.2.2](#)).

As a result of operational staff being embedded within the host business, they were commonly separated from their own organisations. A small cohort reported feeling isolated, and some had limited awareness of activities or changes within their organisation that may have had an impact on them. However, a larger number commented that this was not a concern, and they felt as though they were part of an independent Project SEARCH team. Many had regular communication with their organisations via telephone or email, and most felt that this was sufficient contact.

2.3.2 Summary

During the demonstration year, more than half of the sites developed relatively independently, whilst the remaining sites relied more heavily on the support of the national coordinator. The main factors affecting the route sites took included pre-existing relationships (either with other sites or the national coordinator), similar partnership structures and regional proximity. It is clear that there were benefits associated with both routes. However, the prevailing factor across the support offered to all sites was the ability to draw on support and advice from a source with relevant experience, knowledge and expertise.

The programme developed most successfully where strong partnerships existed. The structure of the partnership was similar across all the sites, although a small number of sites did not have full-time operational partners (tutors/ job coaches), or strategic partners from all organisations (one site had no business liaison). These missing partners had a considerable impact on the delivery of the programme, as more responsibility was placed on other partners. Communication between partner organisations also suffered as a result.

It is evident that having an effective partnership was key to successful implementation and delivery of Project SEARCH, and should be a core focus for sites when entering into the programme. Partnerships

appeared to work best where individuals were willing to compromise and let go of their organisational “egos” in order to make the programme work. Partners also noted the importance of effective communication, particularly between strategic and operational partners, and the willingness of each partner organisation to take on individual and shared responsibilities.

2.4 Project SEARCH set up

The majority of demonstration sites began preparation for Project SEARCH at least six months prior to the start of the first academic year. When starting Project SEARCH, sites were given a timeline detailing tasks to be completed before the start of the first year. The national coordinator and a number of the sites described the timeline as being essential to successful planning and delivery of Project SEARCH. It was suggested that using the timeline created a structure around the programme and made all of the partners aware of their responsibilities, making partnership working easier. Tasks in the timeline included:

- Identifying partners/leads;
- Obtaining buy-in from partner organisations;
- Determining funding streams;
- Training staff in Systematic Instruction;
- Organising on-site delivery at the host employer (setting up rotations, securing on-site facilities (i.e. a classroom));
- Creating a marketing strategy; and,
- Planning the intern recruitment process.

In the first wave of the evaluation (October 2010), there were a range of initial challenges raised, directly related to the tasks listed above. However, many of the implementation issues had been resolved by wave 2 (January 2011). At the final stage of the evaluation, a number of sites reflected that the initial set up of the Project SEARCH had been the most difficult part of the process.

Set up issues had the potential to impact upon sites’ ability to meet the model criteria and to develop strong working relationships within the partnership. At the recruitment stage, sites also made decisions about

the nature and level of disability of the intern. All of these factors may have had an impact on job outcomes and attitudes towards the practicalities of delivering Project SEARCH and its future sustainability.

Some of the main challenges associated with setting up Project SEARCH are outlined in the sections below.

2.5 Partnership lead

Project SEARCH is described as an ‘employer-led’ model, meaning that the host employer should deliver the programme “as part of their core business”. The business is required to participate fully in the set up and organisation of the model, and to oversee its delivery. The model also requires that interns abide by the policies and practices of the host employer.

Many of the sites were in favour of the model being employer-led, and described this as a unique and essential element of the programme. Employers themselves also expressed the importance of being in a position to influence the set up and delivery of the programme. The common perception amongst employers was that taking a business-led approach gave the programme credibility, both internally and with other employers.

Although the model is ‘employer-led’ in the terms outlined above, this does not necessitate that the employer should have overall say within the partnership. In fact, the majority of sites and the national coordinator agreed that the partnership worked best when each organisation worked at the same level, rather than having one dominant partner.

In reality, the internal structure and roles taken on by partner organisations varied by site, and in a few cases there was a lack of clarity about roles. Decision making processes often reflected any internal tensions around the issue of who was ‘leading’ the project, i.e. education provider or employer. Areas for discussion (and occasional disagreement) between host employers and education providers included the working hours of interns, the status of half-term holidays and disciplinary procedures used. Some sites reported that there had been differing expectations amongst partners. For example, education providers had anticipated that the programme would only operate during term time and over normal college hours rather than the working hours of the host employer. Thus some education providers were unwilling or unable to provide tutor cover during college holidays, and whilst the

Project SEARCH model states an expectation that interns would work through college holidays as required by the employer, some sites have given holidays to interns during college breaks.

“At the end of the first term and the beginning of the second term what really came to the fore was that tension between it being an education and an employment support programme. And so we had problems with how decisions were being made and who was leading on those decisions.”

Project coordinator, case study site, wave 2

Negotiations over the Project SEARCH timetable were not always problematic. A number of sites did follow the college timetable and felt that it was a positive way of working. At these sites, host employers and education providers agreed that it was important for the interns to follow a routine that they were accustomed to, and to have recognised holidays built into this routine. Although this approach did not strictly adhere to the programme model, these sites felt that the college structure worked best for them.

During the final wave of the evaluation there appeared to be increased tension at some sites between host employers and non-employer partners (Education Providers and Supported Employment Providers) due to the lack of jobs available with a host employer. Some of the partners expressed disappointment at the lack of internal positions available, and this may have been heightened due to a lack of external job opportunities. However the model does not stipulate that the host employer is obligated to provide jobs for interns at the end of the year, and the national coordinator reiterated that only a proportion of interns were likely to secure work with their host employer.

“The experience of the model is 30 per cent year on year jobs in the host business... maybe people don’t hear that part initially, you know, so then they’re getting mad at the business because they’re not hiring everybody and yet the model is employer-led and there’s no forcing of businesses to employ.”

National project coordinator, wave 3

The impact of this tension may have affected job outcomes directly. It is possible that if the non-employer partners were relying on internal positions, they may have concentrated their efforts on this, rather than

on seeking external job opportunities (see section [3.8.1](#) for more detail), resulting in few prospects for the interns. One site in particular experienced relatively low job outcomes compared to other sites.

Tensions between partners were most likely to occur at new sites that were unused to the type of partnership working involved in Project SEARCH. However, some existing sites reflected on facing similar issues during the early stages of setting up. The majority of issues were resolved with most partners working well together and in regular communication by the end of the demonstration year. However, the process of learning to work together appears to be a key area for consideration when arranging the partnership and initiating the project.

“It's been really good. I mean, we worked really... you know, we work really well as a team, to be honest, and it's been fantastic trying something new.”

Employer Lead, non-case study site, wave 2

Some new sites that developed independently appeared to be more likely to experience difficulties within the partnership, although this was not universal. This may have been linked to the fact that all were new to Project SEARCH, and had limited external support from the national coordinator or from existing sites. This suggests that external support from those with previous experience of Project SEARCH is useful in helping sites prepare for tackling the challenges associated with partnership working and to have realistic expectations of this relationship.

2.6 Gaining organisational buy-in

The importance of achieving ‘buy-in’ from the employers and, in particular, securing this at the highest levels of the organisation, was highlighted by all sites as a critical factor during the set up of Project SEARCH. Some new sites had initially experienced difficulties in gaining this senior / board level support for the programme and therefore drew on support from existing sites to secure this. This involved inviting employer representatives to attend project events and visit other sites in order to gain a better insight into the running of Project SEARCH. Some employers also appointed a ‘champion’ who was responsible for promoting the programme within their organisation.

Concerns about involvement with the host employer at one new site in particular appeared to be due to a debate about whether it was

appropriate to be involved with Project SEARCH. This was due to the fact that it was clear that they would not be able to offer any jobs to interns, due to a recruitment freeze. Anticipated changes in the structure and administration of the employer organisation also resulted in some caution about starting the programme at a time of organisational uncertainty. Upon reflection during the final wave of the evaluation, this site felt that it would have been more beneficial to use their subcontractors to provide rotations and potential jobs for the programme.

Overcoming these types of concerns, and the ability of demonstration sites to secure employer involvement overall can be viewed as a major success for the project. However, sustaining buy-in is also essential for longer term delivery of the programme. This is particularly the case for public sector employers, who have experienced considerable pressure on budgets, reductions in staff numbers and recruitment freezes due to the economic climate. Although still in support of Project SEARCH, some of these sites indicated that they were increasingly aware of the financial implications of dedicated staff time and maintaining an on-site facility (discussed further in section [2.6](#) below).

In addition to this, some existing sites were approaching a level of saturation, having already employed previous interns. Although not required to provide internal opportunities, this may have caused employers to question future sustainability of delivering job outcomes. In response to this, a small number of sites were seeking to expand on the number of employers involved in the programme. Although not delivering Project SEARCH themselves, these external employers could potentially ease the burden on the host employer by employing interns, and possibly hosting final rotations (discussed in more detail in [3.5.1](#)). However, the issue of saturation was mainly linked to job outcomes. Sites did not express concerns with the impact on the delivery of pre-work training, as having a graduate employed in a department did not necessarily prevent the opportunity for interns to be placed on rotation.

2.7 Arranging funding

A major challenge articulated by all demonstration sites was meeting project costs. Concerns were also voiced about the availability of funding beyond the demonstration project year as a number of organisations

within site partnerships indicated that they had ‘absorbed’ project costs but felt they would not be able to do so in the longer term.

There appeared to be a range of funding models in place with a varying amount of financial monitoring/analysis taking place. Financial monitoring information was not obtainable from all sites, and there was variation in the level of detail captured.

From the data that was available the Project SEARCH Central Team produced average costs per site shown within the table below.

Costs (data from central team)	£
Average tutor/teacher costs	41,375
Average job coach/Supported Employment costs	46,040
Average classroom/equipment	7,844
Average other set up costs	5,940
Average other ongoing costs	3,707
Average total costs	104,906

Using these costs as a benchmark and, assuming a group size of ten interns within the Project SEARCH site, costs would be around £10,500 per participant.

This is lower than the figure calculated by one case study site, who reported they were carrying out a more detailed financial analysis. They estimated that costs would be around £130,000 for the year or £13,000 for each of their ten interns. It should however be noted that at the time the calculations were made, this site had two job coaches as five of the ten interns they recruited have a severe learning disability and more intensive support needs.

This site also reported that a specialist college would be an alternative to Project SEARCH for those interns with severe learning disabilities. They estimated that the costs for this provision would be in the region of £45,000 per student per year, making Project SEARCH a considerably less costly option. It should also be noted that Project SEARCH is a fixed one year programme, with a clear employment objective. A theme

arising from a number of interviews was that, in the absence of employment, participation in college provision can become a 'revolving door' with many young people continuing to attend college courses over a number of years.

The more general case on the financial benefits of supported employment, as opposed to alternatives such as ongoing college courses or social care support (adult day services), was made by a recent Department of Health review²⁵. This paper considered studies carried out in North Lanarkshire²⁶ and in Kent²⁷ which examined the financial flow-backs when people were supported into work, and whether these outweighed the costs of delivering supported employment. These flow-backs included increases in tax revenue, reductions in welfare benefits and decreased dependency on social care support. There were consistent findings between the North Lanarkshire and Kent studies, and both were reported to have demonstrated that investment into supported employment can produce savings at the Local Authority and taxpayer levels.

The site offered the following estimates of their costs to date although a number of details (such as employer costs) had not been calculated at the time of reporting.

²⁵ Department for Health (2011), 'Financial Case for supported employment: Commissioning high quality supported employment makes financial sense' London: Department for Health

²⁶ Beyer, S. (2007), 'An evaluation of the outcomes in supported employment in North Lanarkshire: North Lanarkshire Social Work Service', Cardiff: Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities

²⁷ Kilsby, M and Beyer S. (2010), 'A financial cost: benefit analysis of Kent Supported Employment: establishing a framework for analysis – interim report', Kent: Kent Social Services.

Costs (from a case study site)	£
Full time tutor (College Lead / admin time)	35,000
2 full time job coaches	70,000
Benefits adviser (from SE provider)	Not obtained
Employer costs	Not obtained
Classroom (costs split between college and employer)	7,000
IT set up costs	10,000
Other set up and ongoing costs	8,000
Estimated total costs	130,000

A number of other sites also commented on the range of other costs associated with running the Project SEARCH demonstration year, in addition to funding the job coach, tutor and classroom / equipment.

These included:

- Employer cost – often not calculated, but this included staff time for business liaison and costs within departments offering rotations;
- Supported employment provider and college / school – management and administrative support ;
- Staff training (in particular Training in Systematic Instruction);
- Attendance at Project SEARCH events;
- Equipment, stationary and hosting Project SEARCH events.

Sites noted that, although many of the costs outlined above were incurred as part of Project SEARCH set up, several of these costs continued over the course of the demonstration year. This was due to that fact that training was often rolled out to other staff within the host employer, and equipment and stationary were replaced and replenished as needed. Sites also continued to host events to promote Project

SEARCH, and attended network events throughout the year. Therefore, there was no notable difference between 'set up' costs and 'running' costs for the sites.

As noted above, a number of sites reported that they had 'absorbed' these costs or had additional discreet pots of funding provided, for example to pay for training. However, these budgets had mostly been spent at the time of the final wave of the evaluation, and many commented that they would no longer be able to cover these costs in future.

2.7.1 Education funding

The funding of a full time tutor was a particular concern in a number of sites, with most indicating a shortfall in the cost of teaching staff. One site reported that the education provider was only able to offer one hour of tutor time per day. At the final stage of the evaluation, the majority of sites had secured education funding for an additional Project SEARCH year. However, many expressed frustration and concern at having to 'find' funding year on year, rather than having access to a sustainable source.

Sites had previously reported using Additional Learner Support (ALS) to top-up funds although the timing of the Project SEARCH year meant that some had missed the window for ALS allocations, and one site reported that they would not be able to use ALS next year due to an overspend in this year's budget. A number of sites had had to change the type of funding they were using as previous sources were no longer available. New funding sources included Local Authority Education funding, Specialist Placement funding, and other Further Education funding. This had implications for the design of the programme, and in particular for the interns recruited. For example, one site reported that they had to change their recruitment criteria for the coming year as their funding required them to assess the interns' needs in a way that they had not done previously.

Some sites had considered the development of a Project SEARCH qualification, which would not in itself resolve a shortfall in funding, though it would go towards expanding the range of qualifications for which education providers can draw down tutor funding. This was not a preferred option as it would not provide a comprehensive resolution to funding concerns. It was also feared by some that having a qualification in place could fundamentally alter the structure of the programme, in that

the completion of a qualification would become a primary focus, rather than placing interns in employment.

In terms of other qualification routes currently utilised, sites reported a variety of these including employability skills and City and Guilds qualifications. These qualifications were deemed to be flexible enough to allow for sites to maintain an employment focus, with support from the curriculum.

2.7.2 Supported Employment Funding

In addition to the differing routes used to secure tutor funding, the provision of job coach support varied. In general, at the sites where Remploy was the supported employment provider, they were able to cover the costs of a job coach via their block Grant in Aid allocation from the Government. This offers the organisation greater flexibility in how funding is utilised.

However, there is an inherent difficulty in the utilisation of Work Choice funding, namely that module one of the Programme (pre work support) only runs for six months, with a possible extension to nine months. This means that the whole Project SEARCH year is not covered.

One site that also operated as a contracted Work Choice provider had found this problematic as funding is linked directly to the individual participant and could not be drawn down automatically from the prime provider. To combat this issue, this site had decided to run Project SEARCH over two rotations rather than three if they decide to continue with the programme next year. This would allow the programme to fall within the Work Choice pre-work module, and alleviate funding difficulties.

Some sites saw the potential benefit of referring interns who did not find jobs onto Work Choice at the end of the Project SEARCH year. It was suggested that interns would benefit greatly from this ongoing support, and would be close enough to the labour market to realistically find work within the six month pre-work support period.

“From the job coach point of view we have slight issue around the fact that we’re supporting people on Work Choice which is only a six to nine month programme. So that only just covers the actual academic year, and we’re supposed to get a job outcome in that time as well. So for me the best way forward would be if there’s a way of funding Project SEARCH

job coaches to support the academic year, and then at the end of that academic year they would then go on to Work Choice and pick up support to actually find and secure jobs.”

Supported Employment Lead, Case Study Site, Wave 2

The potential links between Project SEARCH and Work Choice are further explored in section [5.2.1](#).

Of the non-Remploy sites, one was using internal development and innovation funds for the demonstration year. However, this was not a long-term funding solution, and the site was hoping to attract external funding in order to maintain the level of supported employment provision available in the demonstration year. Two sites used Local Authority funding and planned to continue to draw down this funding after the demonstration year. One of these sites had secured the use of funding for the provision of supported employment via Adult Social Care budgets, with the provision of support to Project SEARCH being written into the Service Level Agreement with the Local Authority supported employment provider. This local solution was not, however, achievable at most sites.

A number of sites mentioned Access to Work as a possible funding source. However, this would only be available to interns once they had completed Project SEARCH and entered employment. It was suggested that Access to Work may help sites to continue to support graduates after Project SEARCH and this use of Access to Work funding is noted within section [3.6](#).

2.7.3 Employer Funding

The main costs for the third partner organisation, the employer, which some sites felt may be difficult to sustain in the longer term, was that of the Business Liaison who, according to the model, should be able to dedicate 20 per cent of their time on Project SEARCH. Few sites had attempted to quantify this cost and, in general, host employers did not indicate that allocation of internal resources to support this role was problematic. Some sites, however, reported this may not be the case in future.

“I know my manager's trying to secure my role as a permanent post, so if it happens then hopefully it should be

fine, but I'm not sure. There's not been any confirmation given yet as to what's going to happen.”

Business Liaison, non-case study site, wave 2

With the current pressures on public sector budgets it seems likely that funding for these roles may come under additional pressure in Local Authority and NHS organisations that are currently Project SEARCH demonstration sites.

2.7.4 Project SEARCH support funding

The final element of programme costs, raised at some demonstration sites, was that of the ongoing licence fees and consultancy support from the US Project SEARCH team. This was a particular issue where partner organisations were exploring the potential to support expansion of this type of provision.

Whilst the cross-government Valuing Employment Now team will cover the licence fees of £300 per site for the demonstration sites for the year ahead (i.e. 2011-12 year), the cost will have to be absorbed by sites after this period. Although a relatively small additional cost, a few sites were concerned about covering this fee, which had to be paid yearly in order to renew the Project SEARCH licence, and felt that they would not be able to. In addition, although sites would not have to pay the one-off consultancy fee of £23,000 for new sites starting Project SEARCH, many reported that they would no longer be able to fund additional activities such as attendance at national networking events.

At the conclusion of the evaluation, sites were yet to find a suitable solution to the funding issues they faced. Several sites considered adapting the structure of the programme to minimise the strain on funding. For example, one site planned to reduce the number of hours spent in the classroom (discussed further in section [3.8.2](#)). Difficulties with funding were most likely to impact on the future sustainability of the programme. Some sites feared that they would no longer be able to maintain full-time operational staff, and may lose partners altogether if they were no longer able to afford programme delivery (a particular issue for education and supported employment providers).

Although all sites experienced funding difficulties, sites that developed independently, both new and existing, were more likely to suggest adapting Project SEARCH in order to address this issue. A number of sites commented that Project SEARCH required central government

support in order to make the programme more sustainable. The suggestion here was that government backing would lend credibility to the programme and make obtaining funding easier. Sites also noted that government support may also be useful in locating funding sources, particularly for education provision. These funding issues are discussed further in [chapter five](#).

2.8 Staff training

In line with the approach recommended as one of the core elements of the Project SEARCH model, the delivery staff at the majority of demonstration sites received Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI).

TSI is a method of job coaching that supports disabled people in the work place, and it is felt to be a particularly useful approach for those with a learning disability. The main principles of the TSI approach are:

- Learning for work is best undertaken in a “real” workplace;
- Individuals are expected to succeed or behave in a certain way, and when they do they often live up to this expectation;
- Training for the job is best delivered through natural supports such as a workplace mentor;
- Support needs to be available for the individual and the trainer;
- Responsibility for learning rests with the trainer.

In line with the TSI approach, most job coaches completed an analysis of each job rotation prior to interns starting Project SEARCH. This involved doing the jobs themselves in order to assess the suitability of each placement. Job analysis was also complemented by an element of ‘vocational profiling’, which involved assessing each intern’s skills and preferences to ensure that they were placed on the most suitable rotations. In a few cases, the first rotation was not considered to be the ‘right fit’ for the intern. Partners commented that this most commonly occurred when an intern had a pre-formed idea of what they wanted to do, usually based on what they had done at college, but found that in practice they did not enjoy the job. In a small number of cases, the rotation was deemed to be inappropriate for the intern and they were moved to a new rotation that they found easier to manage.

“The placement that really didn’t suit her, she worked it out that it wasn’t for her and the staff worked it out that it wasn’t for her ... Within a week it was set up to do something different. I thought that was brilliant, because she could have been stuck there struggling. But people spotted it really quickly.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

Staff at the demonstration sites viewed TSI very positively and identified it as a key factor for the successful delivery of Project SEARCH. Operational teams at a number of sites had begun to train employer staff in systematic instruction, as it was seen to be useful, particularly for managers and mentors working closely with interns. Managers and mentors trained in systematic instruction commented that it had increased their understanding of working with people with learning disabilities, and aided them in supporting the interns (see section [3.3](#) for more detail)

“All the staff that I’ve spoken to have definitely appreciated it and those who we didn’t get to in the beginning and that had it later on wished that they’d had it before they’d started. So they see it as really, really important in terms of the success of the interns in their area.”

Business Liaison, case study site, wave 1

One site also highlighted the importance of focusing on the abilities of interns instead of their disabilities, and felt that using TSI helped facilitate this important cultural shift.

“I think it’s been really important...getting some of that cultural shift from disability to ability, so focusing on what people can do rather than what they can’t do, and looking at how they might be able to do things well, so rather than seeing a disability and thinking no they won’t be able to do this... actually systematic instruction tells you to look at people’s abilities and what they can do.”

Project coordinator, case study site, wave 1

However for a number of the Project SEARCH Supported Employment Providers, the use of the TSI technique was something that they were already familiar with. Two of the Supported Employment Providers

stated that they already carried out TSI with their staff prior to their involvement with Project SEARCH. The use of TSI was one aspect of the 'place and train' model of supported employment that these providers used to support disabled people to secure and retain paid employment. This model of supported employment, and how it compares with the Project SEARCH model is discussed further within [chapter five](#).

2.9 Negotiating Rotations

The Project SEARCH model involves the interns in a series of job placements with their host employer over the course of the year. These placements were referred to as job rotations. Data collected from ten sites totalled 110 different types of rotations, averaging 11 per site²⁸. Rotations differed depending on the type of host employer. Typical rotations across all employers included catering, administration, reception and cleaning²⁹. Interns' experience of completing rotations is discussed in section [4.2.2](#).

As standard practice, interns should complete three rotations over the course of an academic year. During the demonstration year, 11 sites completed three rotations, and the remaining three completed two rotations. Those sites completing two rotations experienced numerous difficulties during programme set up. These included problems with acquiring funding, gaining senior buy-in, and establishing a full partnership. The large majority of these issues were resolved prior to these sites starting the programme. However, two sites were unable to resolve their partnership issues, and ran the programme with absent or marginal partners.

The set up and delivery of rotations was dependent upon the co-operation and support of the staff and managers within the departments involved. Managers within the host employer were initially informed about Project SEARCH through announcements in staff meetings, specific meetings about Project SEARCH, and through the Project SEARCH team visits to departments. When negotiating the set up of rotations, sites came across a number of potential barriers, and the most

²⁸ The total number of rotations is estimated at 154 across all 14 sites based on the data collected.

²⁹ A list of rotation examples for NHS, Local Authority and Private Sector employers can be found in Appendix C.

common was a concern that interns would require too much support and would be a burden to staff who were already very busy.

As noted in [2.5](#) above, sites identified that gaining senior level support within partner organisations was vital in order to set up job rotation opportunities. Project SEARCH staff felt that if this was led and agreed at a senior level then other staff are easier to engage.

“Because they work in a very hierarchical top down, you know, and they are and that’s the structure of a hospital it has to be, it means that when top says yes, bottom say, of course, there isn’t an argument over it at all.”

Project lead, non-case study site, wave 3

Sites noted that a key element of sustaining Project SEARCH was to expand on the number of rotations available each year, particularly as some rotation opportunities had been filled by interns who had secured employment following their rotation. Some sites commented that they were concentrating on developing new rotations for the next Project SEARCH year. One site had collected specific feedback from managers and mentors to ensure that the rotations and support in place was suitable for all parties.

Despite their efforts, the current economic climate was seen as being a factor influencing the number of rotations for some sites going forward. One site noted that managers within the host employer were not offering rotations as they believed it would be negative for staff morale when they were looking at making a number of redundancies across the host employer.

This view was echoed by another site that noted that the restructuring within the host employer, although not affecting this year’s programme, could impact negatively on the number of rotations available in the coming year, and on securing employment for the interns when they finished Project SEARCH.

2.10 Accommodation and equipment

The Project SEARCH model states that all sites should have classrooms based on the host employers’ premises or very close by. The on-site classroom was considered to be a core part of the model, as it is where the curriculum was delivered. The classroom was also considered the

'home' of Project SEARCH. It provided the base for the operational team, and was often used for events and site visits.

Having a classroom on-site was seen by partners as a sign of a commitment from the employer to embed Project SEARCH within their organisation. The location of the classroom (if not on-site) could have had a considerable impact on the programme. Where classrooms were far away from the host site, both interns and staff were likely to feel less integrated into the host employer. This was the case for one existing site, but was rectified during the demonstration year.

A number of demonstration sites reported that the establishment of an on-site classroom, and justifying the need for a permanent space and equipment for Project SEARCH, was one of the most problematic areas faced during project implementation. Many sites adopted a creative approach to addressing this issue and managed to resolve these difficulties in the majority of cases.

At one site, project partners were able to secure a porta-cabin and have it moved to the employer's site for use as a classroom. At another site a temporary classroom was secured a short taxi ride from the host employer, but following discussions with the local university a classroom facility was secured adjacent to the host employer. For this site, the classroom off-site created additional travel costs (e.g. taxis) for the project, and had an impact upon time spent in the classroom with interns. The Job Coach and Tutor were far more positive once a permanent facility adjacent to the host employer was secured, allowing them to undertake travel training from the classroom to the various departments in the host employer.

The size of the classrooms and equipment being used was not seen to be ideal in every case. Where conditions were cramped, it was suggested that it was harder for interns to concentrate and stay focused and difficult for the tutor to move around the classroom to support individuals. Some sites reported that interns had to go to a library to use computers as there was limited computer access in their classroom. Another site noted that whilst they had enough computers for all the interns, only a small number of the computers had access to the internet. This was something that they hoped to address for future cohorts as the use of online diaries and videos was felt to assist the interns in developing their confidence and IT skills.

2.11 Designing the Project SEARCH materials

A full set of Project SEARCH US materials were adapted for UK purposes for the demonstration year. Core materials such as the model fidelity assessment were adapted by the central team. Other materials such as the programme timeline, and the recruitment rubric were adapted by individual sites.

There appeared to be some divergence of opinion about the direct use of Project SEARCH material and documentation. A number of sites reported that they had found it very useful to have access to materials provided by the US Team and did not specifically report the need to adapt this for use locally.

“It’s pointless to re-invent the wheel and they’ve been very forthcoming in sharing all the materials, which has been very helpful.”

Project Coordinator, non case study site, Wave 1

Some sites, however felt that the materials were useful but required adaptation to be more specific for use by Project SEARCH in Britain.

“The information that’s been given to us from America is very good and all the documentation you can adapt to use over here.”

Business Liaison, non- case study site, Wave 1

Finally some of the existing sites felt that whilst the documentation was useful for initial set up, there were key areas that required considerable adaptation from the original Project SEARCH materials, or needed to be covered. In such cases, additional local materials were developed.

“We got a pack when we went over there which was information really about setting up and information about the curriculum. It was just a kind of general overview of information that we got from them. It wasn’t any kind of detailed information; something about the kind of roles and different people that you needed on Project SEARCH...a lot of the American material just wasn’t useable because it had to operate very differently here and also it was language that people wouldn’t be familiar with here. So we developed a lot of the stuff around the initial stuff.”

Project coordinator, case study site, Wave 1

One issue that remained largely unresolved at the final wave of the evaluation was that of combining the use of materials needed with operational procedures, such as risk assessments. In some cases each partner had to duplicate these types of processes to meet the needs of their individual organisations, despite their efforts to produce joint documentation where possible.

2.12 Marketing Project SEARCH

Marketing and promotion of Project SEARCH served two main purposes during the demonstration year. Marketing in the early stages was primarily focused on recruiting interns. Towards the end of the year, some sites began to focus on marketing the programme to external employers.

This section concentrates on the recruitment marketing process. Marketing to employers is addressed in section [3.5.1](#).

In the demonstration year, the majority of sites recruited Project SEARCH interns via education providers (colleges and schools). Interns and graduates reported that they found out about Project SEARCH through colleges or direct contact with a Project SEARCH representative.

“One of the ladies [at college] offered me something called Project SEARCH, learn about the jobs and the hours that you get, and then I thought it might be just what I'm looking for.”

Male graduate, case study site, wave 2

Advice on how to market Project SEARCH was included in the model and the majority of sites followed the guidance outlined there. Communication was often via paper-based documentation to students, followed by presentations within colleges from the job coaches and/or the tutors. A number of sites also held open days at the host employers' site. These events were advertised on posters in, for example, supported accommodation and special schools, and in local newspapers.

At the final wave of the evaluation, a number of sites had already begun or completed recruitment for the coming Project SEARCH year at the final wave of the evaluation. Sites commented on the changes they had made to the marketing process, or their plans for the coming year. Some

sites were continuing with the same methods of approaching education providers, but others had moved into more widespread marketing. Examples included: engaging other colleges and schools as well as their education provider, distributing Project SEARCH flyers, writing articles about Project SEARCH in the host employer's newsletter, and posting a video about Project SEARCH on the host employer and supported employer's website.

“I think it was our marketing process was a lot more robust this year. We went out much wider to special schools and things like that and we didn't do that last year, because of time restraints.”

Business Liaison, non-case study site, wave 3

2.12.1 Impact of marketing on intern recruitment

For many sites, their broader marketing of Project SEARCH for the new academic year had resulted in a rise in the number of applicants and range of applicants. Although sites saw it as a positive that more people knew about Project SEARCH, some commented that they received a lot more unsuitable applicants.

Sites that had only taken on candidates with mild learning disabilities in the demonstration year stated that they had used the opportunity of an increased number of applicants to recruit interns with a wider range of disabilities this year. A number of these sites recruited interns with moderate to severe learning disabilities as well as mild learning disabilities for their next Project SEARCH year.

A number of sites had also recruited interns with a physical as well as a learning disability for the next year. Some sites, however, commented that it would be difficult to include interns with a physical disability, citing the nature of the rotations, the physical structure of the site, or the potential financial impact if the intern were to require additional support.

Despite some sites feeling they would have applicants with a broader range of learning disabilities in the coming academic year, this was not the case everywhere. A small number of sites felt that the candidates coming through from the colleges during this year's recruitment period were of a higher ability than usual and, that as a result of this, there would be less of a range of disabilities on Project SEARCH.

“I don’t think we had the range of people with learning disabilities who came, or who were put forward to us. I don’t know why that is, but some of the people who were sent to us I was not even sure that they actually had learning disability.”

Business liaison, case study site, wave 3

There were also concerns from some sites that as the number of applicants increased, there would be more instances of partners ‘cherry-picking’ the best applicants and, therefore not offering the opportunity to participate in Project SEARCH to people with a range of abilities.

“This year my observation would be when I went to the open evening and when I went to the introduction we’ve got a bunch of more able students. Where the project becomes more and more successful you will have more and more students and you can cherry pick and I think there has to be that pick and mix, the mix has to go across the range of abilities.”

Classroom tutor, non-case study site, wave 3

A number of sites commented that they felt in the second year the level of ability of the interns was higher than the previous year, and one partner questioned whether the candidates were being pre-vetted for Project SEARCH by the education provider.

Whilst this issue of ‘cherry picking’ was not widespread, it is one that may have an impact on whether Project SEARCH sites will support the cohort which the initiative was originally aimed at i.e. those with a moderate to severe learning disability.

2.13 Recruitment

A range of processes were used to assess and recruit the 132 interns who commenced Project SEARCH during the demonstration year, and a number of factors were considered during the recruitment process. However, recruitment in the demonstration year was not selective at all sites as, in order to recruit a minimum number of interns, some sites took on everyone who applied.

Some of the areas taken into consideration during recruitment were:

- The severity and nature of the interns’ learning disability;

- The age of the interns;
- The area in which the intern lived (catchment areas);
- Intern's educational attainment level (entry level, level 1, level 2, etc).

In addition to the criteria outlined above, there was a higher proportion of male-to-female interns recruited for the demonstration year. Not all sites reported interns' gender in the monitoring data collected. Where this was reported, 46 per cent of interns were recorded as male and 20 per cent were female.

The types of interns recruited had an impact on the delivery of the programme in terms of the support required by interns. This in turn affected funding commitments, in that some sites brought in additional staff to support interns with greater needs (discussed in section [4.2.6](#)). Host employer staff views of working with interns were also shaped by the amount of support interns needed during rotations (see section [3.3](#)). There was also an indication that sites working with interns with milder disabilities were more likely to achieve a greater number of job outcomes. One site that specifically recruited interns with mild disabilities achieved a high number of job outcomes, despite experiencing considerable difficulties in set up and implementation. There may, however, have been other contributing factors, such as the level of expertise and commitment of the lead partner (discussed further in [4.1.1](#)).

2.13.1 Nature of disability

Sites were encouraged by the central team to comply with the particular Project SEARCH focus on people with moderate to severe learning disabilities as part of their recruitment process, but it was not mandated. It was, however, difficult to assess how closely sites applied these criteria when recruiting interns as there appeared to be no clear, consistent definition of mild, moderate or severe learning disability in place. It should be noted, however, that there are some inherent difficulties with the definitions and assessment processes associated with learning disability (as previously noted the UK statutory sector has no formal definition and there is no consistently applied assessment process across health and social services).

Interns participating in the demonstration year had a variety of different learning disabilities and severity of disability. In each site learning

disabilities were categorised as mild, moderate or severe. Common learning disabilities included Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) which ranged from the mild form of Asperger Syndrome, to more severe forms. Other learning disabilities included Downs Syndrome, DiGeorge syndrome, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. A few interns also had physical disabilities such as visual impairment, for example.

Data on the level of interns' learning disability was not monitored in a consistent format by all sites. Where available it was reported as follows:

- 9 mild learning disability;
- 11 mild to moderate learning disability;
- 71 moderate learning disability;
- 3 moderate to severe learning disability;
- 25 severe learning disability;
- 13 unknown.

Some sites commented that for the demonstration year they had specifically recruited more able interns with a 'less severe' or 'mild level' of disability. This appeared, in part, to be due to employer concerns that they would not be able to manage interns with more intense support needs. A number of sites suggested that the needs of employers were a major factor when assessing intern suitability for the programme, and one reported that they were conscious of the fact that the employer would need to be able to identify a potential role for an intern.

However, one site specifically recruited interns that fell into the moderate to severe spectrum. At this site, half of the interns were assessed as having a moderate learning disability, and half were assessed as having a severe learning disability. This site's criteria for identifying the level of learning disability was defined by their local Learning Disability Partnership, based on the levels of support interns required. Interns who had attended specialist schools and had a care manager and access to social services support were defined as having a severe learning disability.

This site aimed to examine how the programme operated for these two groups in the demonstration year. Based on their experience of this, the site reported that they plan to recruit more interns with moderate to

severe learning disabilities, as they felt that the programme worked well for this group.

2.13.2 Age

The large majority of sites recruited interns between the ages of 18-25 for the demonstration year. However, a few of the interns started at age 16. Monitoring data collected from sites indicated that ten per cent of interns were aged 16-18, and 90 per cent were aged 16-25³⁰. However, not all sites provided this data.

Sites that had not previously included 16-18 year olds were considering extending the age range for the next Project SEARCH year. For one site, the decision to extend the age range was made as this matched a qualification that would allow the site to draw down funding. Some sites were also looking at recruiting interns from schools, which would bring down the age range of Project SEARCH at these sites to 16.

Although the Project SEARCH model allows for the inclusion of interns of any adult age (over 16), some sites reported that they had only recruited interns under the age of 25, who were not receiving out-of-work benefits in order to avoid dealing with complex benefits issues (discussed further in section [4.2.5](#)).

2.13.3 Catchment area

A number of sites expressed a preference for recruiting interns that would be able to travel to the site easily via public transport. This did not necessitate the intern living close by, but did mean that interns needed to have easy access to transport links that would take them to the site. One site also noted that interns should not have to change modes of transport (for example, changes buses), more than once or twice. This site also felt that it was unreasonable to ask interns to commute for much more than one hour, as this was the average length of commute for other staff.

The home catchment area of the interns had caused a problem for one site, where some applicants were living in supported accommodation outside the area of the Local Authority funder. This problem remained

³⁰ Sites gave intern ages in a number of different ranges therefore the age ranges have been grouped together into two categories.

unresolved at the conclusion of the evaluation although the site was still looking into ways to address this.

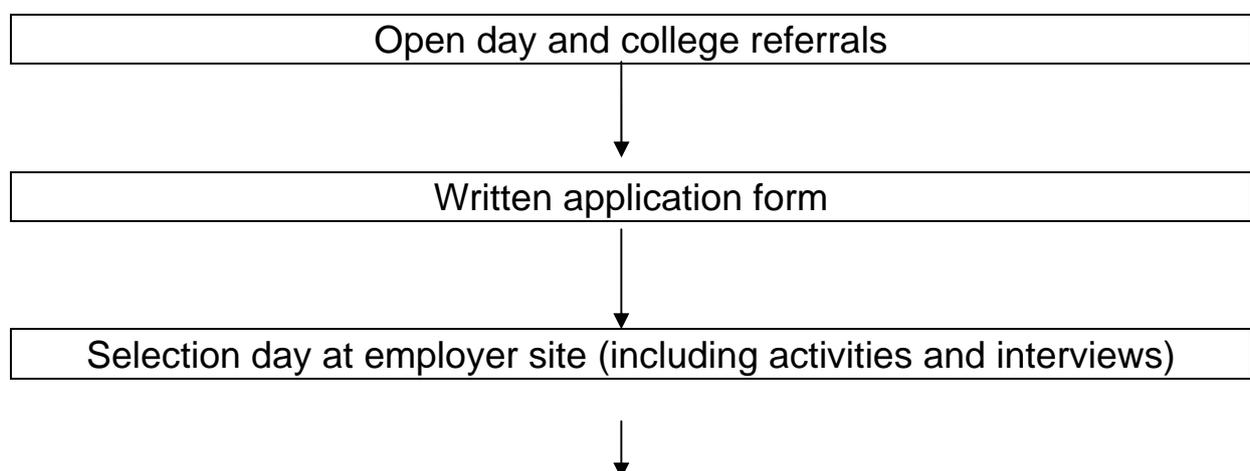
2.13.4 Education attainment level

The use of qualification linked educational funding also had an impact on recruitment at some sites, in that their interns had to fall within a particular education level in order to be eligible for Project SEARCH. The education level applied was dependent on the qualification each site had chosen to use. For example, at one site the qualification attained in the classroom was a City and Guilds Level 3 in Employability. Therefore any applicants who had qualifications at Level 3 and above were not eligible for Project SEARCH.

For the next academic year, some sites had changed the eligibility of the education level the interns had to meet to match the qualification. This allowed the sites to draw down funding. For some sites, this meant lowering the education level. Sites did not foresee any problems with this, however, this meant applicants deemed to be 'too qualified', but whom the partners felt could have benefited from Project SEARCH were turned away. For example, one site, that had specifically recruited interns with autism stated that someone with autism could be highly qualified but still require the employability and social learning skills offered by Project SEARCH.

2.13.5 Selection process

For the majority of sites the recruitment process followed the process outlined below.



Interns selected



A 'get to know you day' with selected interns

There were slight deviations from the above structure. For example some sites did not hold an open day and recruited the interns directly from the education provider. In a few cases the interviews were held at the college instead of the employer site.

2.13.6 Open days

The open day was a chance to inform people about Project SEARCH prior to them making a decision about whether to apply for a place. At these events, the Project SEARCH team informed attendees about Project SEARCH; what it was, who it is for and what would be required of the interns. The team then answered questions from attendees, who included prospective interns, parents and carers, and staff from the host employer. Open days were typically held at the host employer site, giving the interns and their guardians an opportunity to visit the workplace. Interns that subsequently expressed an interest in Project SEARCH were invited to attend a selection day.

2.13.7 The application form

Sites used an application form to assess the candidates' eligibility for Project SEARCH. For example, the form requested information on the age group of applicants and whether they were receiving support from any other services. Following the demonstration year, one site also added a question about previous criminal convictions in response to an issue that had arisen during the demonstration year.

2.13.8 Selection days

At the majority of sites, those that had attended the open day and subsequently applied to Project SEARCH were invited to attend a selection day. The activities on the selection day varied across the sites. Some sites organised group exercises in order to assess the applicants' problem-solving ability. Other sites linked activities directly to workplace tasks. For example, at some hospital sites, applicants were shown how to wash their hands thoroughly, and how to navigate around buildings. All these activities were also used to assess team working and initiative.

Many sites used the Project SEARCH rubric as a tool for assessing applicants' abilities. The rubric, originally a Project SEARCH US tool, was adapted for the use in England for the demonstration year. It included a range of assessment areas including:

- Communication skills
- Interest in the employer environment, e.g. a hospital environment
- Appropriate behaviour and social skills
- Attitude to work
- Personal presentation
- Ability to follow instructions
- Teamwork
- Transportation

Some sites had used the Project SEARCH rubric but had made further amendments to suit their requirements. For example, one site felt that the applicants' ability to communicate was of particular importance, so increased the number of questions in this assessment area.

Some sites commented that they planned to continue using the Project SEARCH rubric for future recruitment and found it useful. However, a number of sites questioned the purpose of the rubric, and did not feel that it influenced how they recruited their interns.

“I mean I know that Project SEARCH has the Rubric and we did try and use it, I’m not quite sure how you use it, I mean I do know how you use it, but I’m not sure if it would work!”

Classroom tutor, case study site, wave 3

One to one interviews between partners and candidates were also held on the selection day. Partners stated that the candidates were asked questions about how they felt about being part of Project SEARCH. The questions included asking why they wanted to take part in Project SEARCH, what they wanted to gain from the programme and what their plans for the future were.

The interviews allowed the Project SEARCH partners to examine which of the candidates would be committed to the course and which candidates would gain the most out of taking part in Project SEARCH. Commitment to the course was seen as an important focus during recruitment, and partners felt they could probe this in the one to one interview. The interviews also enable partners to see how the candidates behaved in a more formal setting, compared to other informal elements of the day such as the group activities.

2.13.9 Future recruitment

Some sites noted that they were able to use their experiences from the demonstration year and previous years to refine the recruitment process for the coming year. This was due in part to some of the partners, particularly at new sites, having more time to devote to recruitment than in the previous year when they were setting up Project SEARCH for the first time. As noted in section [2.12](#), some sites reported that improvements to their marketing methods had resulted in a higher number of applicants for the coming year.

As well as being more selective around levels of disability, some sites stated they have developed their recruitment processes to take into account criteria around the intern's desire to work and an understanding of the workplace. In the interim stage of the evaluation, partners discussed the need for the intern to have an understanding of workplace requirements such as reliability, punctuality and appropriate behaviour. This continued to be a concern at the final stage of the evaluation, as did the intern's desire to work described as 'work ethic' by some sites. This is something partners felt should be an important aspect of recruitment. A small number of sites mentioned that they had amended the Project SEARCH rubric to assess characteristics such as work awareness and distance from the labour market.

“I do think that the candidates for next year, I think another factor that needs to be brought is in work ethic... because I think there have been one or two that have come on because it is something to do and they had to realise this is work, you need to do this... Also do they really want a job, is Project SEARCH right for them?”

Business Liaison, case study site, wave 3

At the final stage of the evaluation, a number of sites reflected recruitment needs to take into account the fact that a number of interns may leave Project SEARCH over the course of the year. In total, 132 interns started Project SEARCH and 101 completed the year. However, five interns left the course early to move into jobs.

Outside of achieving job outcomes, some sites had up to one third of their original intake leave the course, with only two sites having no one drop out. Those that had experienced a number of leavers had decided to recruit more interns for the next academic year in order to achieve a sufficient number of graduates. For example, some suggested recruiting 12 interns with the expectation of eight completing the course.

2.14 Summary of project set up issues

Overall the majority of sites were in favour of an employer-led model for Project SEARCH, as it gave credibility to the project with the host and external employers. Although at many sites the model was employer-led, Project SEARCH appeared to operate most effectively where each of the parties worked at the same level rather than having one partner dominating the project.

The roles taken by each of the partners across sites varied considerably. There were occasional examples of internal tensions between partners, particularly around college timetables and employer expectations. The lack of potential job opportunities within host employers was an emerging tension in Wave 3 of the evaluation. Sites that were expecting job opportunities to be provided by the host employer may have delayed looking for external opportunities which may, in turn, have affected job outcomes.

A key success factor for many sites was gaining senior organisational buy-in across the partners. Having commitment at the highest level often meant that any potential areas of concern or dispute could be more easily overcome. Maintaining this buy-in was also seen as crucial for future sustainability. It was suggested that the economic climate may have affected employers' attitudes towards the programme, particularly in the public sector. However, some sites had begun to implement measures to relieve the burden on the host employer, such as engaging with external employers.

The biggest challenge for many of the demonstration sites was the availability of funding for Project SEARCH sites. Many sites noted that

for the current year they were absorbing costs but long term this would not be sustainable without accessing appropriate funding streams. Funding through education had been secured by a number of sites as the year progressed, however, many partners felt that there was a lack of guidance on potential funding opportunities and described having to “find” funding year on year rather than having a sustainable funding source.

A further challenge was arranging classrooms on-site at the host employer. Whilst all sites viewed this as an essential part of the model as it promoted the integration of interns into the host employer, a number of sites struggled to arrange a classroom on-site at the start of Project SEARCH. The majority of sites had resolved this issue as the year progressed, although the suitability of the classroom and its facilities was still a concern for some.

The availability of TSI was seen as essential for many sites in setting up Project SEARCH. For some Partners TSI represented a cultural shift, focusing on ability of interns rather than disability. For some Supported Employment Providers this was not a new approach to working with disabled people as they already used TSI when appropriate within their ‘place and train model’ of supported employment provision.

When recruiting interns, sites considered a number of factors such as severity and nature of an intern’s disability, the age of interns, area in which the interns lived, and their current education level. A number of sites utilised the Project SEARCH rubric to assess interns, with some sites amending the rubric in areas such as work awareness, distance from the labour market and communication.

3 DELIVERING THE DEMONSTRATION YEAR

This chapter of the report explores the experiences of Project SEARCH delivery over the course of the demonstration year. All demonstration sites completed the Project SEARCH year. Eleven of the 14 sites started the year in September/October 2010, which marked the start of the academic year for schools and colleges. One site started in September 2010, with interns only participating in classroom activities and all 14 demonstration sites commenced classroom activities and job rotations from January 2011. Late starting sites experienced many of the implementation issues discussed in [chapter two](#), such as funding and gaining senior buy-in. The chapter also includes an outline of the Project SEARCH model, and summarises factors affecting delivery of Project SEARCH in accordance with the model.

3.1 Delivering the Project SEARCH curriculum

The Project SEARCH model states that sites should deliver an employability skills curriculum as part of the programme. Interns should attend classroom sessions for at least one hour in the morning and afternoon. The majority of sites delivered the curriculum according to the model. However, a small number were unable to do this due to a lack of involvement from the education provider partner. As noted in section 2.6.1, the type of funding obtained also had implications for curriculum delivery.

In the initial stages of Project SEARCH, interns were based in the classroom for a number of weeks. During this time tutors and job coaches worked intensively with the interns to prepare them for entering the workplace, focusing on appropriate conduct, dress, timekeeping and personal hygiene. Partners reported that most interns responded well to these lessons and had made improvements in their appearance.

Following the introductory classroom based period, the Project SEARCH day is split into classroom based activities and job rotations. Interns spend one hour in the classroom each morning and afternoon. The core hours of the day are spent in job rotations. The current Project SEARCH curriculum consists of a combination of employability and life skills.

Lessons include health and safety, CV writing, interview skills, time management, money management, job search and healthy living.

The Project SEARCH curriculum evolved throughout the year. For example towards the end of the year, work in the classroom moved towards more intensive work on job applications and interview techniques.

The time spent in classroom had changed at some sites to fit in with working hours, for example one site spent less time in the classroom in the morning and longer in the afternoon. One classroom tutor suggested spending a whole day in the classroom and four days on rotation, as it was difficult to complete tasks in the short time available. It took time for the interns to settle and then they may have to leave early to get to their rotations on time.

What was taught in the classroom is very closely linked to the skills needed for the rotations, so it was crucial that each complemented the other. It appeared to be the case that if there were problems in the rotation they were resolved in the classroom, and what was learned in the classroom was subsequently taken back into the workplace.

“At the beginning of the year I was thinking well it hasn’t got the instructions, no one has told me what to do but now coming to the end of the year it is naturally obvious what I have to teach them, what we have to go through, what we are doing, it has a natural flow to it.”

Classroom tutor, case study site, wave 3

3.1.1 Addressing behaviour

A number of sites had experienced minor issues with interns misbehaving in the classroom and on their rotations. This included using bad language, and acting inappropriately or generally misbehaving. Some Project SEARCH partners felt that this was partly due to the interns being young rather than having anything to do with their disability. It was also suggested that some bad habits such as swearing, were picked up from colleagues on rotations. In most cases any issues with behaviour had been resolved quickly and interns’ behaviour improved once they had settled into the programme.

“One of them ... I don’t know whether it’s maturity with him or he’s probably been a bit giddy in this [second] rotation ... I’ve

worked with him in the first rotation it was a matter of, ‘no we’re doing work, we’re not here to mess about. His mindset needs a bit more encouragement to change into work mode rather than play mode.’

Job coach, non-case study site, wave 2

One issue that came up at a few sites was the interns going beyond appropriate boundaries. This ranged from interns asking for hugs from members of staff to an intern couple being reprimanded for being publicly affectionate. There were also at least two female interns who became pregnant during the course of the Project SEARCH year. A few sites reported that they discussed boundaries and sexual relationships with interns. However, it is an issue that may require further attention in the future. This could mean adding sex education into the Project SEARCH curriculum, or addressing the subject through reviews of behaviour.

“There’s definitely big work to be done on sexual relationships and behaviour, sexual health stuff ... we really need to challenge that next year to try and support those young people through that time in their lives.”

Business liaison, case study site, wave 3

3.1.2 Handling different abilities

A few sites also experienced difficulties with the curriculum due to the varying abilities within the classroom. There appeared to be a need for extra support in the classroom where the ability range of interns varied considerably. One site taught two different courses in one classroom as one intern had already completed the main curriculum course. Another site split the interns into 3 groups having encountered complications with varying abilities in the classroom.

“The group has to be split into three, because there’s three that need you constantly, because they can’t read and write. There’s two that actually need you to do quite a bit with them.... and then there’s two or three that can manage on their own.”

Job Coach, non-case study site, wave 3

Whilst some sites were able to draw on additional support, others were unable to enlist the services of a full-time tutor and/ or job coach. This was primarily due to funding issues and meant that other partners had to provide more resource to keep courses on track. Sites operating under these conditions also failed to comply with model fidelity. These sites appeared to struggle much more than sites with full-time operational partners. Further implications for additional support required by interns are discussed in sections [3.3](#) and [4.2.5](#).

3.2 Engaging families

Engaging family and gaining their support for Project SEARCH was seen as important to the interns' success on the course. Several sites worked with family members prior to the start of the Project SEARCH year to ensure that they were fully aware of the purpose and nature of the programme. These efforts to engage with parents were developed in part as a response to difficulties experienced by established sites in previous years (families' views on Project SEARCH are discussed in section [4.2.5](#)).

It emerged that some parents were not fully aware of what was involved, and viewed Project SEARCH as another college course. This resulted in some instances of absenteeism and late attendance.

“There were some issues around parents not taking it seriously and then at the end of the course saying, “oh no, I don’t want them to work; I think he’s better on benefits.” Or, “I just thought he was going through another college course”... but it’s been much better this year because we’ve been very upfront with parents and carers about what it is about, what the expectation is and how they can support that.”

Project coordinator, case study site, wave 1

These parental attitudes towards Project SEARCH also had implications for job outcomes, as some parents expressed a general lack of commitment to the intern finding a job at the end of Project SEARCH. This was sometimes caused by views that their children couldn't work, but also by practical issues such as families' reliance on benefits received by the intern. These issues are discussed further in section [4.2](#).

As a result of these experiences, the commitment of parents and/or carers was taken into account by many sites during the recruitment

process. For example, one site asked parents to sign a form at recruitment stage to say they are fully committed to their child taking part in Project SEARCH. The partners commented that they wanted to ensure the interns had full parental support before embarking on Project SEARCH. However, despite efforts to ensure that family members were well informed, there were still some concerns that a small number of interns were not receiving enough support from home.

According to the Project SEARCH model, sites should conduct monthly reviews with parents to discuss the progress of the intern. Although many sites kept in regular contact with parents, most were not following this element of the model. Sites justified this by stating that the level of contact with parents/carers was sufficient. For example, one site followed the college method of regular phone contact and reviews each academic term.

“There’s regular meetings, there's regular updates on how his progress is going, and they're very, very on the ball with everything. We have regular meetings as parents, as well, to interact with each other.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

Many programme tutors and job coaches also operated an ‘open door’ policy, making themselves available to respond to any queries or concerns family members had. Some parents also arranged separate meetings with other parents as an opportunity to support each other. Parents were generally very complementary about the support they received from the Project SEARCH partners. Where incidents had occurred, family members commented on how well the Project SEARCH partners had handled the situation. The general view was that one of the partners would be able to deal with any issue that arose.

“Everybody was giving me all the right advice ... [the job coach] was very keyed up, he said “if ever you get stuck on what you’re allowed to apply for come back to me”. Well I never did have to but I would imagine some of the other students whose parents weren’t able to support them dealt with [him], and he would have said “this is what you’re entitled to.”

Parent of graduate, case study site, wave 2

Many sites also questioned whether there was a need to follow model fidelity in holding monthly reviews. Most sites felt they successfully engaged parents and were working to improve this. A few sites felt it was unnecessary to have such regular contact with families, as this might take away the newly acquired independence many interns gained on the programme. In addition to this, some interns were living in supported accommodation and moving out of the home, meaning their reliance on their parents was decreasing, as was the responsibility of the parents. In these instances, sites rationalised that such a high level of contact with parents may not be practical. These sites were not suggesting that parental support was not essential, however, it was felt that methods such as regular phone contact may be a more realistic approach.

“How does that feel as you grow up and we’re telling them to be independent and we say and this year your parents are going to be called in 12 times you know.”

Classroom tutor, case study site, wave 3

The national coordinator disagreed with site views on this issue. She commented that this was an essential part of the model and suggested that many of the issues sites had encountered regarding engagement with families may be resolved by implementing the reviews.

3.3 Engaging staff

During wave 2 of the evaluation, interviews were conducted at case study sites with host employer staff. This included department managers and mentors who ‘buddied’ interns during their rotations. Staff views of working with interns had implications for future sustainability of the programme, particularly as their experiences would be relayed to other departments not involved in the programme. How these staff talked to other colleagues about Project SEARCH may have persuaded or dissuaded departments to set up rotations or employ interns.

Staff experience of interacting with people with learning disabilities prior to Project SEARCH varied and some staff reported that they previously had no direct experience. Others mentioned having family members or friends with a learning disability, treating patients with a learning disability and working with people with a learning disability on other initiatives. The views staff expressed about Project SEARCH and the prospect of working with interns appeared to be closely related to this

previous experience. Those who had previous experience tended to be more positive about Project SEARCH and had less concerns and questions about the project.

“Having worked with young adults with learning disabilities in the community, I can, actually, see how they just revolve around the same system and they don’t, they didn’t really have the opportunity to progress any further than that, so, I thought it was fantastic.”

Manager, case study site, wave 2

Those with little or no experience were more anxious about working with the interns and articulated a need for guidance and support. For example, some managers were anxious about how prepared the interns would be coming into the work place, such as whether they would be trained in health and safety procedures, for example. They were also unsure about what support staff and interns would receive from Project SEARCH partners.

“I think, initially, some of the staff found it quite daunting, quite alien. Weren’t sure how to react with the students, weren’t sure how to treat them. The tutor has done quite a lot of work with the staff where she’s had them all together, and they’ve had chats.”

Education Lead, non-case study site, wave 2

In reality, staff experience of working with interns was largely positive. A number of staff described how, once they began working with interns, they were surprised by the level of interns’ capabilities. This was particularly the case for staff with little or no prior experience of people with learning disabilities. One existing site showed potential new rotation managers a DVD which gave first hand feedback of the experiences of a manager that had taken on Project SEARCH interns. This “promotional” DVD was seen to be very positive as it gave potential managers a view from their perspective. This site also invited managers to attend classroom activities, and to meet potential interns face-to-face. Managers were often very positive about the opportunity to meet interns, with the face-to-face contact helping them to overcome some of their “fears”. The Employer Lead described how initial “scepticism” turned to “excitement”, as managers were positive to see such enthusiasm from the interns.

Despite this, in a few cases Project SEARCH partners felt that the interns' progress was hindered by staff views of their capabilities. Some felt that interns were not being given enough work to do, or that tasks were not of an appropriate level, which meant that interns would not gain the maximum benefit from their time on the rotation. From the staff viewpoint, there were some cases where extra time was needed to support the interns, particularly by a designated mentor. This sometimes presented problems, predominantly where the time and level of support was not as readily available.

“Well, yes, because my time is very precious because I have to cover the whole three sites. So, obviously having to take an hour or two out to look after the intern did have an impact on my workload.”

Manager, case study site, wave 2

There was some sense that interns were to an extent protected from the demands of the workplace, and partners described working with staff to ensure that interns were treated in a similar way to other staff. One site stated that they were working with the departments to encourage them to give the interns more complex tasks in order to stretch them and improve their skills. At another site job coaches, in conjunction with managers, planned to create a programme of activities for each rotation to ensure interns always have an activity to progress to.

“A lot of staff are fantastic with the young people but possibly too mothering. So there has been a little bit of needing to say, actually, they can do this, they don't need that.”

Education Lead, non-case study site, wave 2

Project SEARCH partners supported staff through the same open-door policy pursued with families. In general staff concerns were addressed by the information and support provided by Project SEARCH partners. Some sites held meetings every few months with managers and mentors to discuss and resolve any issues. This system appeared to work well for both staff and the Project SEARCH team.

3.4 Tracking progress during Project SEARCH

Tracking progress was an important part of providing support for the interns and for department staff working with interns. Operational staff and the majority of sites appeared to have developed a thorough system

for this. Operational staff were therefore able to monitor interns' progression and address support needs.

All sites received weekly or bi-weekly feedback from managers and mentors in the rotation department. Most sites also took a proactive approach to gaining feedback and visited departments regularly for 'five minute catch ups', where they received informal feedback on the progress of the interns. The job coaches and tutors would then meet regularly with the interns to discuss this feedback. This approach ensured any problems were noticed and dealt with quickly. At the end of a rotation the majority of sites set up meetings with the Project SEARCH partners, the manager and mentor of the department and the intern to give feedback and discuss skills acquired during the rotation.

Project SEARCH teams used documentation to track progress of the interns. These included a rotation review where evidence of the intern's progress in areas such as reliability, communication, social skills and behaviour were recorded. An informal feedback form was also used by the operational team and staff on the intern's rotation to keep an ongoing record of the intern's progress.

Some sites used the documentation provided by Project SEARCH US and others designed their own methods of tracking progress. One site designed a traffic light system of tracking progress where the intern could progress to 'green' in areas such as timekeeping and communication skills. This development of site based materials appeared to be feeding back into the overall development of Project SEARCH. For example, a job coach from one site was invited to present the locally developed method of tracking progress at a US conference.

“They’ve had developmental plans right the way from the beginning and it’s something that [the job coach] has actually been invited to America to talk about at one of the workshops and the development plan is produced by the intern with support from the Project SEARCH Team, so it’s not something like I would have an appraisal and the manager would say right I think you’ve done well in this and I think you’ve done well in that, what do you think? With their development plans it’s how do you think you’ve done, where are your areas of development and then it’s all been measured right the way along.”

Business liaison, non-case study site, wave 3

3.5 Supporting interns into work

Towards the end of the Project SEARCH year all sites focused on job search support for the interns. In a few cases sites began by only looking for internal opportunities with the host employer, and appeared confident of finding posts for all of their interns who they viewed as relatively close to the labour market. There were also a few sites who looked for external opportunities where there were recruitment freezes in place at the at the host employer, therefore no option of internal recruitment.

Many sites undertook extra activities to improve interns' chances of finding work. These included:

- Creating video CVs;
- Holding mock interviews with an external employer to give interns experience of attending interviews;
- Creating a weekly job check-list including CVs, job applications and references to encourage interns to stay up-to-date with applying for jobs after the programme;
- Organising weekly job search appointments at the supported employment provider's offices to prepare interns for looking for work in this environment following Project SEARCH;
- Enlisting the help of parents and carers to help their children with job searching;
- Allowing the interns to continue to apply for internal vacancies with the host employer for one month after they graduate from Project SEARCH; and
- Holding summer 'job clubs'. These were weekly meetings throughout the summer with the job coach and classroom tutor to search for employment opportunities after the Project SEARCH year ended.

Two sites had a specific job developer role. For these sites, this role was in addition to the job coach. The job developer came to the sites once a week from the supported employment provider to help the interns look for work. At other sites the job coach primarily took on the 'job developer' role, although all operational partners supported interns in looking for

jobs. All partners discussed their involvement in helping interns look for work and supporting them with job search activities. Activities included mock interviews, CV preparation, job searching and support in completing job applications.

The national project coordinator described the job developer role as essential, although it does not appear in the model fidelity assessment criteria. However the coordinator stated that this role is important to enable interns to achieve external jobs, as there are limitations on the number of interns who can expect to secure a job with the host employer.

“You need a really good Job Developer looking for jobs outside for the people who are unlikely to get jobs inside the host business, because that’s the model, the experience of the model is 30 per cent year on year jobs in the host business.”

National project coordinator, wave 3

The national coordinator suggested that, whichever way the sites chose to implement this role, job searching should have started earlier. She stated gaining a job should have been the focus of the Project SEARCH team throughout the course of the year. However whilst there may be specific value in this additional job developer role it would involve an additional cost, when sites have already noted the difficulties faced in funding core roles.

Many sites did not start focusing the interns on job searching until the third rotation. The national coordinator suggested that for some sites this was due to a focus on completing the classroom activities in order to gain a qualification, rather than a focus on finding the intern a job. A number of partners agreed that they should have started job searching earlier, and maintained that their focus towards the end of the demonstration year would remain on employment, rather than ‘finishing the year’. Early job search and maintaining focus on employment was a lesson many sites noted for next Project SEARCH year.

3.5.1 Sourcing additional employment opportunities

As previously discussed in section [2.2.4](#), many of the existing sites were approaching a level of saturation in terms of the availability of suitable posts within the host employer. These sites were seeking to expand on external job opportunities in order sustain job outcomes going forward.

Some sites commented that engaging local employers could potentially broaden the range of employment opportunities for the interns. However, only a small number of sites had begun this process. Driven by previous experience and a lack of internal vacancies, these sites were primarily concerned with the practicalities of sustaining employment opportunities for the interns. They had begun to develop procedures for working with external employers, and were considering making adjustments to involve these employers earlier on in the programme, for example sending interns to external rotations.

In order to encourage employer engagement, these sites had organised training on employer engagement for all job coaches. The aim was for the job coaches to build relationships with employers and develop an understanding of the local labour market before attempting to place interns into jobs. Rather than trying to immediately place interns in specific jobs, the premise was that employers would be encouraged to share vacancies that interns could apply for.

“We’ve been given some contacts with external businesses and building that up so that they can come on board and share their vacancies with us, and supporting them to kind of understand the approach that we use.”

Project Coordinator, case study site, wave 3

One site also had the additional benefit of relationships with sub-contractors. This site had used their influence to approach business contacts and market the programme to them directly through presentations and marketing materials such as DVDs. The business liaison at this site had also advertised Project SEARCH to other employers on the radio.

However the majority of sites did not mention any plans to engage local employers. Those who had did not have sufficient relationships with local employers in time for the end of demonstration year. This meant that interns were applying for external jobs with employers who knew nothing about Project SEARCH.

It was widely acknowledged that engaging external employers was an area for improvement across the majority of sites. The national coordinator reported that they had offered support to some sites in approaching employers. A small number of sites had also set up business advisory councils, some with the assistance of the national coordinator. Along with site partners, external employers were invited to

sit on these councils to exchange ideas on expanding local employment opportunities for interns. One site was also considering setting up a national advisory group, although at the time of interview this was in the early stages of development.

The issue of saturation was mainly linked to job outcomes and may not have had as great an impact on the delivery of pre-work training, as having a graduate employed in a department did not necessarily prevent the opportunity for interns to be placed on rotation.

3.6 Supporting interns after Project SEARCH

Plans to support interns once they were in work varied across the sites. All sites had committed to supporting interns, both in employment and not, after Project SEARCH, as this was a core part of the model. Many sites stated that partners would continue to informally support the graduating intern if they were internally employed and track their progress. However, there were concerns that when the new interns started they would require all of the Project SEARCH team's time, leaving no time to support previous interns.

This concern was reflected in the experience at some of the more established sites. In some situations where graduates had secured employment with the host employer, and also where they had not and were continuing to look for work, both tutors and job coaches found that they were needed to provide ongoing support. They had, however, found that as the new Project SEARCH year commenced the support they could offer graduates was considerably constrained. At times this was proving to be problematic and they indicated that this could potentially become an increasing difficulty with year on year delivery.

Most sites stated that they would review this issue over time. One site, considered employing a job coach to solely support graduates who gained employment with the host employer. This site planned to apply to Access to Work to gain funding for this role if there were enough interns employed internally.

Sites also stated that graduates who were externally employed would be more difficult to support. Many planned for the supported employment provider to provide or arrange in-work support, and track progress for this group. One graduate who had found work was also looking into the option of acquiring support from Access to Work.

All sites planned to refer graduates who did not find work by the start of the new Project SEARCH year to the supported employment provider. A group of sites in close regional proximity also had the option of referring their interns onto a specialist employment programme run by the education provider. This programme was able to take on Project SEARCH graduates at the start of the new Project SEARCH year and provide dedicated employment advisers for those in and out of work. Some sites also reported that they planned to move interns onto Work Choice support if they did not find employment. This contrasts with the use of the 'pre-work' module of Work Choice funding for job coaching during the Project SEARCH year reported by some sites (see [2.7](#) above). The potential links between Project SEARCH and the Work Choice programme are explored in more detail in [chapter five](#).

3.7 Summary of project delivery issues

There were a number of important factors which sites identified for the successful delivery of Project SEARCH. A full time classroom tutor was essential as the interns' abilities tended to vary greatly. In some cases of severe disabilities, extra support was needed, although not all sites could provide this due to funding issues. General behaviour of the interns' was good, though an area of concern was the interns' awareness of boundaries and sexual behaviour. Partners suggested that sex education should be introduced into the curriculum to tackle this issue.

Engaging families was considered essential to the interns' success on Project SEARCH in terms of their commitment to full participation and take up of employment. However, with the interns moving towards independence there was a question whether regular family contact in the form of monthly review meetings (which is part of model fidelity) was required. Many sites were following their own ways of engaging with families, which they felt was sufficient.

Staff experience of Project SEARCH was largely positive. Interns' progress was hindered in some cases by staff members' views of their capabilities as the interns were only given basic tasks. Sites planned to address this issue in the next academic year by, for example, producing a task list which the intern would progress through. Staff commitment was important for future sustainability, as staff views may have affected whether other departments chose to participate in the programme or hire interns.

The demonstration sites aimed to continue tracking the progress of those employed by the host employer, with the supported employer partner taking responsibility for those who remained unemployed. However there were concerns that it was not sustainable for sites to support Project SEARCH graduates as well as supporting new Project SEARCH interns, and additional support would be required to do both.

All sites had worked with interns on job searching and developed some innovative methods such as video CVs. Some partners and the national coordinator were concerned though that job search had not started early enough and that this may lead to low job outcomes. It was suggested that a major area for improving job outcomes would be through engaging external employers. This was of particular importance for existing sites that were approaching a level of saturation in terms of the availability of suitable posts within the host employer, and they needed to find other ways of sustaining employment opportunities. However, only a small number of sites had started to do this. These sites did not express concerns with the ongoing delivery of pre-work training, as having a graduate employed in a department did not necessarily prevent the opportunity for interns to be placed on rotation.

3.8 Views on the Project SEARCH model

As previously described, all demonstration sites aimed to adhere to the Project SEARCH model and were working towards achieving 'model fidelity'. All sites were assessed by the national coordinator against a set on model fidelity criteria during the demonstration year. These criteria, adapted for England from the original US model, consisted of the core elements described in section [1.2.3](#). Sites were generally positive about the model, and viewed it as a change from traditional education and employment models for young people with learning disabilities. The prevailing view was that Project SEARCH offered a real alternative to traditional vocational courses and residential colleges, and provided an opportunity for young people to end a repetitive cycle of participating in college courses. It also offered a chance to participate in 'real work', rather than volunteering or work experience. The main benefits of the model were said to be:

- **The length of the programme/placements:** A year long programme with three 12 week placements was said to be considerably longer than other work experience models and

allowed time for interns to learn a substantial amount about the world of work.

- **Partnership working:** For many organisations, this was their first experience of working in partnership. The strength of the partnership in terms of the contribution of each partner and the support offered was seen as essential to the success of the model.
- **Embedding into the host employer:** having facilities, operational staff and interns all at the host employer's site allowed for a level of integration that was seen as unique to Project SEARCH. Also, placing the interns in 'real jobs' rather than 'created' ones was perceived as an opportunity to experience a real working environment.

3.8.1 Model fidelity

Whilst all 14 sites aimed to adhere to the core model elements of Project SEARCH, some sites adapted elements of the model in order to fit with their local circumstances. Adjustments to the model made during the demonstration year have been noted throughout the report. This section offers an overview of site attitudes towards meeting the model and some of the factors affecting sites' ability to fully implement the core elements.

Overall sites were generally enthusiastic and committed to using the Project SEARCH model, and to a large extent met the core elements of the model such as including creating a three-way organisational partnership and embedding the programme within the host employer. However there were areas where some sites did not fully meet the model. These included:

- Not delivering the programme over a full academic year;
- Not having a full time tutor and/ or job coach;
- Not having an on-site classroom;
- Not conducting monthly reviews with parents;
- Following an education provider lead rather than an employer lead.

Sites were described as "moving towards" full model fidelity by the national coordinator, who felt that sites were generally meeting the core

elements with some areas for improvements, such as provision of follow-on support for interns and adequate contact with parents.

Some sites, particularly those that developed independently, questioned the Project SEARCH model and how relevant some of the core principles were to delivery under local circumstances and in a broader UK context. However, there appeared to be some confusion across the sites regarding the model, and many sites were unsure of which elements could be adapted and which could not. This led to some sites' partners commenting that the model was not flexible enough to adapt to local conditions, and questioning whether they needed to strictly adhere to the model in order to achieve the desired outcomes for participants. This was, perhaps, a pragmatic acknowledgement of the practical difficulties that had been faced in the delivery of the project to date. These partners appeared to be implicitly suggesting that the implementation difficulties that were encountered demonstrated a need for more flexibility to operate the model to fit within the local delivery context.

“We had to take all the principles and kind of make them fit what we knew we could do within our funding and our structures.”

Job coach, case study site, wave 2

This view was contradicted by the national coordinator, who felt that the model was very flexible as long as sites adhered to the core elements, and had high expectations of finding employment for the interns. Several elements of the model classified as flexible by the national coordinator included the number of interns, the nature of the business, the role of the business liaison, the level of disability of the interns, the location of the classroom (on site or close by), the types of rotations, the budget spent, the initial lead partner and the number of operational staff.

“It has these model fidelity components, but other than that, you know, people can do it however suits their business and their community ... You just have to do the things that the originators see as the elements that make it work.”

National Project SEARCH coordinator, wave 3

Whilst the majority of sites expressed their commitment to the approach and attempted to implement it, local circumstances dictated that this was not always fully achievable. Some of the adjustments made appeared to

be problematic, and may have indirectly affected job outcomes as well as causing considerable difficulties in setting up and implementing the programme. These included:

- Making adjustments without partnership agreement, causing tension between partners;
- Having an off-site classroom that was not close to the site;
- Struggling to engage parents and having interns taken off the course or not able to accept a job opportunity because of parental concerns .

Some of the difficulties in adhering to the model were primarily caused by tensions between partners at a few sites. Tension often centred on the role of the partners and one area of contention focused on whether the programme should run as an educational programme, which adopts the conditions of a college course, or an employment programme with terms defined by the employer (see [2.3.1](#)).

Whilst this had led to some difficulties, site partnerships often agreed on adjustments, such as following a college timetable rather than that of the employer, which was unproblematic. Another difficulty encountered was the lack of commitment from some partners. In this instance, having one particularly strong partner that was able to 'carry' the programme, may have made up for the lack of commitment or absence of other partners.

Some sites felt there was potentially a need to develop the approach in order to maximise employment outcomes. This suggestion arose from an acknowledgment that not all of the interns would be successful in obtaining employment within their host employer organisation following the completion of the Project SEARCH year. For example it was suggested that there was a need to secure placements with a range of employers during the final rotation, to ensure that participants are offered the widest possible range of opportunities for securing work. Sites proposing this option were unclear on whether this was within the realms of the model, but felt it offered the best opportunity of gaining employment outcomes for the interns.

In addition to the practical issues, which could potentially be resolved through clarification of flexibility within the model, there were some issues such as funding sources, interns' benefit eligibility, and the fact that interns are not paid a wage (in contrast to other DWP supported employment programmes for disabled people i.e. Work Choice), which

all presented substantial barriers to programme delivery. However, these issues were often outside of the sites' immediate control.

A review of the outcomes data suggests that making adjustments to the model did not appear to have had a notable impact on jobs outcomes achieved at the end of the year. In fact, some necessary adjustments, such as only having two rotations, may have had a positive impact. One existing site commented that only doing two rotations in their first year made the programme more manageable, and this may have been the case for some sites struggling with set up difficulties. It appeared, however, that there were core elements of the model that supported effective delivery, such as the strength of the Project SEARCH partnership; and overall the programme needed to be flexible enough to adapt to local circumstances.

3.8.2 Future changes to the model

In addition to changes made during the demonstration year, a number of sites discussed plans to make further adjustments for the coming year. These included:

- Evaluating the outcomes of Project SEARCH not solely on employment of the Project SEARCH graduates, as a lack of job outcomes could give the impression that the programme was unsuccessful. Other positive outcomes could include confidence and independence gained by the interns.
- Changing the teaching model to one day in the classroom and four days on rotation. Although this would equate to a similar number of hours, it was suggested that changing the structure in this manner would allow the site to fit a lot into the curriculum. Often the hour in the morning was cut short by waiting for the interns to settle down and then leaving early to reach their rotations on time. Another site, planned to move to a four day working week in the next academic year because of funding issues.
- Allowing the reviews of the interns to be more flexible. One site commented that they did not need as many reviews at the beginning of Project SEARCH as at the end when interns were job searching. This site planned to change the number of reviews to reflect this.

3.8.3 Summary of views on the Project SEARCH model

The Project SEARCH model formed the basis for design, set up and delivery of the model. Sites were primarily positive about the structure of the model, and aimed to adhere to its core elements. However, there were a number of factors affecting sites' ability to adhere fully to the model. Some of these issues related to local circumstances or tensions within the partnership. However, as the programme evolved, there were some suggestions that sites needed to adopt new approaches, in order to sustain employment for the interns.

There was a considerable amount of confusion around the extent to which sites could adapt the model, and this led to suggestions that there was a lack of flexibility and room to evolve. However, according to the national coordinator many of the adjustments sites had made fell within the realms of 'model fidelity'. This would suggest some claims of rigidity were due to sites' uncertainty about the model, rather than a lack of flexibility. There were core elements of the model that appeared to be most important in successfully delivering Project SEARCH. These included having a committed partnership and embedding the programme in the host employer site.

Making adjustments to other elements of the model had varying results. Some changes, such as only completing two rotations, did not appear to have a notable impact on job outcomes achieved and in some cases was a positive for sites as it allowed for more time to set up. However, not having a full time job coach or tutor caused more considerable problems to delivery of the programme. It was clear that all partners needed to agree to making adjustments to the structure of the programme, and there were tensions between partners where this was not the case. Overall, making adjustments did not appear to have a notable impact on job outcomes achieved, however it is too early to say what impact these adjustments might have in the longer term.

Going forward, there were some core elements such as the structure of the programme that a number of sites felt that they needed to adjust in order to continue delivering a sustainable supported internship programme. It became apparent over the course of the evaluation that some sites felt that in future, whilst they may adopt some of the key principles of the approach, such as the 'place and train' model of supported employment, they may not pursue full implementation of the prescribed Project SEARCH model.

4 PROJECT SEARCH OUTCOMES

This chapter provides an overview of the outcomes of the Project SEARCH demonstration year. It includes job outcomes achieved at the conclusion of the Project SEARCH year. Alongside this the experiences of interns, graduates and families are reflected, which identify some of the social and personal benefits that participation in the programme was felt to offer. An organisational perspective on the benefits of the programme is also included within the final sections.

4.1 Outcomes data

The data presented below offers an overview of the destinations of the 132 interns who started Project SEARCH during the demonstration year. Job outcomes data was collected from sites after September 2011 in order to account for any outcomes achieved while interns were being supported by sites the summer period. Sites were asked to provide details of the following:

- Job outcomes achieved: internal (with host employer) and external, part-time and full-time, permanent and temporary.
- Other destinations: Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) actively seeking work or not actively seeking work, in training or education, undertaking personal development opportunities (e.g. voluntary work).

Job outcomes data was collected from 11 of the 14 demonstration year sites. Data was collected for all interns, including those that had left the programme early. Other than those that had left to move into work, most sites did not know the destination of interns who had left the programme. Interns who had not gained employment by the end of the programme were primarily reported to have been referred on to the supported employment provider partner. Four new sites did not return any job outcomes data. Where data has not been collected from sites, outcomes have been reported as 'unknown'. Employment figures provided may therefore be skewed by unreported outcomes i.e. those presented may be lower than what has actually been achieved.

4.1.1 Intern outcomes across sites

Table 1.4 below outlines job outcomes achieved across the 14 Project SEARCH demonstration year sites.

1.4 Employment outcomes across sites

Site Group	No. interns started	No. interns completed	No. interns not completed	No. interns in work	Other – seeking work	Other – not seeking work	Other – not known
Totals	132	101 (76.5%)	31 (23.5%)	41 (31.1%)	42 (31.8 %)	10 (7.6%)	39 (29.5%)

As described in section [2.1](#), some sites relied on support from the Project SEARCH US team, through the national coordinator, whilst others developed independently. Those being supported by the national coordinator were more likely to adhere to the Project SEARCH model, whilst ‘independent’ sites were more likely to make adjustments.

As indicated previously, making adjustments to the model did not appear to have a notable impact on job outcomes achieved by the demonstration sites. Sites that adapted elements of the model achieved similar job outcomes to those that did not. It is however important to note that the large majority of sites met the key elements of the model outlined. Where sites did not achieve this, or where other elements of the model were adapted or not achieved, such as monthly parental reviews, this was likely to have more of an impact on set up and implementation in the early stages. Many sites were able to resolve or work around this issue over the course of the Project SEARCH year, meaning there may have been a limited impact on job outcomes (These issues are discussed in section [3.8](#)).

It is notable that there was a particularly high dropout rate for new sites that developed independently. Almost half of interns who started at these sites did not complete the year, which was almost double the average attrition rate of 23.5% for all Project SEARCH sites. The high

attrition rate may have been related to the fact that all of these sites were new to Project SEARCH, and interns joining the programme may have been less aware of what was required of them than at other more experienced sites. This was noted as one of the barriers to participation noted in section [4.2.6](#).

In addition to this the attitude of some parents was sometimes a barrier to ongoing participation in Project SEARCH. Sites noted that some parents were not fully engaged and supportive of their child's participation in the programme. These parents were reported to view Project SEARCH as 'another course' rather than a route into work that involved a commitment to full engagement in 'real' work placements. This resulted in the early departure of some interns from the programme. Sites sought to address this issue by involving parents from the recruitment stage. They aimed to ensure parents were fully aware of the objectives of the programme and what participation involved. Parental attitudes and how sites responded to these are discussed further in sections [3.2](#) and [4.2](#).

Many new sites noted that the need to take account of potential drop outs was a lesson learned from their involvement in the demonstration year (see [2.13](#) for more details).

As indicated in section [2.2.4](#), the data presented in table 1.5 below does appear to suggest that the new sites were more likely to achieve job outcomes than existing sites.

Table 1.5 Employment outcomes by new and existing site

Site group	No. interns started	No. interns completed	No. interns in work	Other – seeking work	Other – not seeking work	Other – not known
New sites	83 (of 132) (62.9%)	68 (of 83) (81.9%)	33 (of 83) (39.8%)	22 (of 83) (26.5%)	7 (of 83) (8.4%)	21 (of 83) (25.3%)
Existing sites	49 (of 132) (37.1 %)	33 (of 49) (67.3%)	8 (of 49) (16.3%)	20 (of 49) (40.8%)	3 (of 49) (6.1 %)	18 (of 49) (36.7%)
Totals	132	101 (of 132) (76.5%)	41 (of 132) (31.1%)	42 (of 132) (31.8 %)	10 (of 132) (7.6%)	39 (of 132) (29.5%)

The results indicated that existing sites may be approaching a point of saturation in terms of the availability of suitable posts within the host employer, and this was a particular concern for the future sustainability of the programme. The issue of saturation was mainly linked to job outcomes and may not have had as great an impact on the delivery of pre-work training, as having a graduate employed in a department did not necessarily prevent the opportunity for interns to be placed on rotation. As noted in section 3.5.1, some existing sites had begun to develop methods of engaging external employers, however, most were in the early stages of doing this. Within the existing sites, public sector sites had particularly low job outcomes, whilst the private sector site, who had been successful in engaging providers and subcontractors, achieved the highest job outcomes. The economic climate appeared to have a particular impact on public sector sites who were often dealing with recruitment freezes and job losses, making it more difficult to employ interns.

These results suggest that it is crucial that the sites begin engaging external employers as soon as possible. Examples of this type of activity are discussed in section [3.5](#) above and included radio, presentations to

employers, promotional DVDs and invitations to visit sites. In addition to this, using subcontractors and suppliers may also be a way to create job opportunities.

4.1.2 Interns in work

Where interns moved into work, data collected identified whether they found part time or full time positions and whether these were permanent, temporary or fixed term positions.

Table 1.6 below outlines how many interns entered into full-time and part-time employment. The table also indicates whether the employment was with the host employer, or another employer.

Table 1.6 Interns working hours

Job outcomes	Number of interns
Full-time work with host employer (over 16 hours per week)	15 (of 41) (36.6%)
Part-time work with host employer (under 16 hours per week)	11 (of 41) (26.8%)
Full-time work with another employer (over 16 hours per week)	2 (of 41) (4.9%)
Part-time work with another employer (under 16 hours per week)	9 (of 41) (22.0%)
Unknown	4 (of 41) (9.8%)
Total number of interns in employment	41 (of 132) (31.1%)

The table illustrates that where interns did move into work, it was most common for them to have gained employment with the host employer. This may have been due to a commitment, particularly from new sites, to provide some jobs internally. The small number of external positions obtained suggests that sites had not developed strong links with external employers.

Interns moved into a range of different jobs during and after the Project SEARCH year. Many of the jobs interns moved into were similar roles to those they had completed during rotations on Project SEARCH, indicating that previous experience of working in departments where interns had completed a rotation, was an influencing factor in securing employment, both internally and externally. Typical jobs included:

- Administrative assistant;
- Clerical assistant;
- Catering assistant;
- Porter;
- Cleaner.

4.1.3 Other destinations

Not all Project SEARCH interns had moved into work at the end of the year. There were a number of alternative destinations including returning to education, Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET), looking for employment, and not available for work.

Table 1.7 below details the ‘other’ destinations interns had moved into after Project SEARCH. Those recorded as ‘unknown’ include the majority of interns who did not complete the demonstration year.

Table 1.7 Destinations of interns not in employment

Destination interns not in employment	Number of interns
NEET- Actively seeking work/attending interviews	40 (of 91) (43%)

NEET- Not available for work	3 (of 91) (3.3%)
Training/education /apprenticeship	3 (of 91) (3.3%)
Personal development opportunities e.g. Voluntary work, Work experience	6 (of 91) (6.6%)
Unknown	39 (of 91) (42.9%)
Total	91 (of 132) (68.9%)

The relatively small number of interns not actively seeking work suggests that interns were motivated to find employment as a result of participating in Project SEARCH. As noted above, the majority of unemployed interns were referred to supported employment providers, and continued to look for work. Some sites noted that there was a 'window of opportunity' following completion of the year where interns would be more likely to gain employment, and supported employment providers were working hard to keep interns engaged in job searching during this period.

In the instances where interns were reported as NEET and unavailable for work, this was due to female interns becoming pregnant (see section [3.1.1](#) for further detail).

4.1.4 Learning disability employment rates and Project SEARCH

The data provided from 11 of the 14 sites placed the employment rate for the Project SEARCH demonstration year at 31 per cent, based on the number of interns who started the year. This means that approximately just under one in three interns at these sites had moved into full-time or part-time employment as a direct result of their

involvement in Project SEARCH. This figure was recorded 3 months after the end of the Project SEARCH year and it is possible that more jobs were obtained after the conclusion of the evaluation period. Future monitoring of the sustainability of these job outcomes is not within the scope of this research. Additional 'unknown' outcomes from other sites may have skewed the overall employment figure (i.e. those presented may be lower than what has actually been achieved). In addition to this, around 29 per cent of interns were reported as actively seeking work, suggesting that interns were more 'work-ready' as a result of completing the programme.

Employment rates for Project SEARCH interns were compared against data taken from the Labour Force Survey. According to this source, the employment rate for people with learning disabilities is between 8 per cent and 16 per cent³¹, and one of the lowest employment rates for disabled people. Benchmarked against moderate to severe learning disability employment rates, Project SEARCH interns had a higher employment rate than the national average. However, it is important to note that job outcomes from Project SEARCH are based on a cohort of young people who included some with mild to moderate learning disabilities (see [2.13.1](#)), which may have had an impact on the overall employment rate achieved.

The employment rate for Project SEARCH is below the national average for all 16-24 year olds (including non-disabled and disabled people), which stood at 50.2 per cent³² in the third quarter of 2011. The rate also fell below that previously achieved by Project SEARCH US, which was quoted as 80 per cent in employment since 2006-2007. This figure, however, was reported in 2010 and included job outcomes achieved over a number of years (see section [1.2](#) for further details). Additionally, Project SEARCH US has not been subject to external evaluation, and figures reported were provided directly from the US team. The job outcomes quoted by Project SEARCH US do, however, illustrate the potential need to track job outcomes over a period of time, in order to ascertain the sustainability of job outcomes over the longer term.

³¹ This is an estimate based on data from the Labour Force Survey (Q2, 2011). Owing to small sample size for this impairment group it is not possible to show a specific employment rate. The quoted range is based on a central estimate of 12 per cent with a 4.4 per cent confidence interval.

³² Source: ONS data.

4.2 Participants' experiences of Project SEARCH

In addition to capturing data on employment-related outcomes for Project SEARCH, the research aimed to explore the experiences of interns and to identify potential personal and social benefits to participation. Interviews were therefore conducted with interns, graduates and parents/ carers during the second wave of the evaluation. This section reflects on their attitudes towards and experiences of participating in Project SEARCH.

4.2.1 Before Project SEARCH

A small number of the interns had worked part-time prior to joining Project SEARCH, the majority, however, had been at college or school. Many were taking vocational qualifications such as Catering, Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Gardening. Several were also taking basic skills courses in literacy, numeracy and life skills. The majority of the interns stated that they were happy at college, although a small number felt frustrated by continually repeating courses. This view was echoed by most family members who felt that college offered limited opportunities to progress.

“It just felt like I kept on going on different courses, so I got a bit tired of that. It got me a bit stressed, because I wasn't moving on. I was just keeping going back.”

Female intern, case study site, wave 2

“He was in an environment where he was doing the same sort of thing, and not really progressing to an extent that he really needed.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

Some of the interns reported experiencing problems at college such as bullying and feeling isolated. Some parents felt that the college environment was not stimulating, and mentioned that their child had only been on courses with other young people with learning disabilities. Parents commented that this appeared to have a negative impact on their child's self esteem and also meant they may have had a limited social circle.

“I wanted to see her branch out into not being entirely surrounded by people with special needs because it just changes the way she thinks about herself.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

A small number of parents were happy for their child to stay at college as feel they their child would not be able to do anything else. For these parents, the decision to join the programme appeared to be driven by either their child or a Project SEARCH representative.

“That was what she wanted to do so we always let her do what she wants to do.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

Several parents, however, stated that they had been proactively trying to find their child work, and had set up various work placements prior to hearing about Project SEARCH. The parents of some of the older interns commented that they felt it was time for their child to move on from education, and had encouraged them to work, but were unsure of what they would do. Some expressed frustration at the lack of knowledge and support from employment services such as Jobcentre Plus.

4.2.2 Joining Project SEARCH

Most parents and interns commented that they were excited by the prospect of joining Project SEARCH. The majority of parents felt that participating in the programme would open up a wide range of opportunities that were not previously thought to be achievable. Many expressed the view that Project SEARCH was a ‘lifeline’, and an opportunity for their child to move forward with their lives.

“I jumped for joy when I heard, because he really did need it. He's a wonderful young man and he really needs to progress.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 1

The majority of interns stated that they were happy about the prospect of finding work, although several reported they were nervous about the transition from their previous activities into Project SEARCH.

Some were worried about entering a new environment and leaving friends behind.

“Initially I had mixed feelings about it because it was a completely new thing and all I ever knew really was college and I was sort of used to that way of life.”

Male intern, case study site, wave 1

The majority of interns undertook travel training prior to starting or in the early stages of the programme. This caused concern for some parents who were unsure about their child’s ability to travel on their own. This was compounded by the fact that a large number of interns had to travel long distances and change buses in order to get to their site.

“When he first started here I was getting him a taxi and I couldn’t cope with the fact of allowing him to go onto a bus on his own. And they worked with him on a one to one where they did transport training. And after about two weeks they said that he was quite capable of doing it on his own. I was like ‘I don’t want him to’. I was going to follow him in the car and make sure he was all right and got there.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

Parents and Project SEARCH partners commented that the interns generally responded well to travel training, and reported that most interns were travelling independently. Some arranged to meet with other interns along their route and travelled in together. A small minority were still receiving lifts from family members or taking taxis, although this was mostly due to convenience rather than inability to travel alone.

4.2.3 Rotations

Interviews with interns took place during wave two of the fieldwork. At this stage interns were a few weeks into their second rotation. Almost all had completed their first rotations (one had not due to illness) and had enjoyed their placement. Several described feeling nervous or stressed prior to starting rotations, but stated that these feelings subsided once they were settled in their placement. Interns received a considerable amount of support from mentors, tutors and job coaches in the early stages of rotations, but many went on to do their job with

minimal supervision. A large proportion felt they were treated well by other members of staff, and appreciated being part of a team.

“They didn’t really visit me much because I was fine with it ... [other staff] treated me like I was just another member of staff.”

Male intern, case study site, wave 2

Interns’ experiences on their first placements were taken into consideration by job coaches and tutors when selecting second rotations. All of the interns stated that they were happy in their second rotations. Several commented that they were enjoying this rotation more than their first, although some felt this rotation was harder.

Although they enjoyed their rotations, a large proportion of the interns reported that they struggled with tiredness. Partners and staff noted that this sometimes affected their timekeeping and ability to concentrate, however, this was seen as a relatively minor issue. Partners attributed the high levels of fatigue to the increase from a three day week at college, to a five day week on Project SEARCH.

Some parents commented that the process of transitioning the interns into their rotations could be improved. Interns were moved into their rotations consecutively in order to ensure they received intensive support in the first few days. This meant that some interns had to wait their turn and some parents were confused by this and wondered why their child was being sent home for a few days after starting the programme. Most understood once the procedure was explained to them.

“They were spending a couple of days settling different members into different departments and so [my daughter] was home ... that just threw me ... Logic tells me they had to see other people into departments but that just proved to be a little bit of a hiatus.”

Parent of graduate, case study site, wave 2

4.2.4 Support finding a job

Parents generally reported that they were mainly concerned about whether their children would be able to find work after Project SEARCH. For most, this was the desired outcome, although a

minority were unsure about the prospect of full-time employment. As discussed in section [3.2](#), this had implications for job outcomes, as some parents may have discouraged their children from entering into employment at the end of the demonstration year.

Most parents were realistic about the prospect of their child finding work. Some were considering other options such as volunteering if jobs were not available with the host employer. Despite there being no guarantee of jobs with the host employer, several parents were more confident about their child's job prospects as a result of participating in Project SEARCH. Many felt the experience and skills gained would broaden the options available and considerably improve their child's chances of successfully obtaining employment.

“I tried to be realistic about what the outcome could be. I said to him, just imagine now, you might have to go back to the Jobcentre; what would you say now? He said, well, I'd tell them I can do woodwork, I can do office work, and I can do catering; so immediately... that's brilliant. That means you can go to anybody and tell them, just teach me for ten weeks and I'll do anything.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

4.2.5 Benefits for interns

In addition to improving their opportunities of finding work a number of interns and parents reported social and personal benefits which they related to participation in the programme. These are discussed below.

Confidence and motivation

Prior to joining Project SEARCH, many interns reported feeling shy and lacking self confidence. According to their parents, some had suffered from depression and low self esteem, and a number were reported to have had limited social circles. Some parents were used to having their children spend all of their time with them at home and commented that their child spent most of their time alone.

“He was quite depressed with just coming home every night. Like sitting in a room at college with say 12 other people who were Asperger's who maybe didn't communicate and then, coming home and sitting on his own in his room on the computer.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

Following participation in Project SEARCH many family members and Project SEARCH partners reported what they perceived to be considerable improvements in levels of self confidence, maturity and independence in the interns. The interns themselves confirmed this, and many expressed pride at being more responsible and sensible. They took their role as interns very seriously and appreciated being treated as adults.

“I'm more sensible... I'm more confident and grown up.”

Male intern, case study site, wave 2

“I've changed to a more responsible adult... I know how important work is, and it really is important.”

Male intern, case study site, wave 2

Along with feeling more confident, a number of parents also felt their child now had ‘a sense of purpose’. Many interns were doing more for themselves at home, such as getting themselves up in the morning, washing and dressing themselves and preparing lunches. Some felt that their child was more motivated and had an improved attitude and approach to each day.

“I'm being pretty much fully independent upon myself to get here, and having to get up really early. I have to get up at quarter to six in the morning. It's just learning to do things for myself now.”

Male intern, case study site, wave 2

Decision making

A few parents also noted improvements in areas such as decision making and money management. These changes were not widely mentioned but may have applied to a number of interns.

“Her problem-solving has improved, so whereas before a problem came up and, ‘I don't know what to do about it, now she's learnt not to panic.”

Foster parent, case study site, wave 2

“I used to give him pocket money and he’d be frittering it away straight away; but now he doesn’t. I give him his bus fare every week; but I’d say ‘it’s three pounds over so you can have that’. ... Two or three days later, he says, ‘I’ve still got that three pounds left’. Any other time he’d have gone straight into the shop and spent it; so I’m pleased about that.”

Parent, case study site, wave 2

Communication skills

Several parents and interns also noted improvements in communication. It was suggested that many interns were more able to respond to questions and hold conversations. This change appeared to have an impact on both their relationships with friends and family, and their job skills. Some interns who previously struggled to communicate were able to do public facing jobs, such as reception, where they were required to respond to face-to-face queries and answer telephone calls.

“Her communication, that’s the thing that I think we’ve really noticed is that ... when she first started you’d ask her a question and you wouldn’t necessarily get a connected answer. Whereas now it might take a bit of thinking about but you can have a proper conversation.”

Parent, case study site, wave 2

“I’ve changed in speaking more clearer to other work colleagues. When I first started I used to sometimes stumble words ... I can now speak more clearer to work colleagues.”

Male intern, case study site, wave 2

Interns’ health

A number of parents stated that they had seen improvements in their child’s health as a result of working in rotations that required them to move around regularly. Some interns had lost weight or were more mobile. However, in a few instances interns’ health had worsened and a very small minority could not complete a rotation or had to move rotations for health reasons.

“He’s lost three stone since he’s been working here because before he just used to sit in college and then sit at home,

whereas here, he's been pushing trolleys and walking the whole distance of the hospital all day."

Parent, case study site, wave 2

Socialising

The change in the interns' social lives was commented upon frequently by parents. It was suggested that this was closely connected with new levels of independence and increased confidence. Many interns had made friends with each other and spent time together outside of Project SEARCH. Some parents felt that interns' ability to travel independently gave them more freedom to meet with friends in the evenings and at weekends using public transport.

"Since he's started Project SEARCH he's just excelled and excelled and excelled in confidence ... He's now got friends, which he's never had. They all arrange on a weekend that they meet up and they'll go off to bowling, cinema. [He's] even been for a pint now, and they're talking about a night club!"

Parent, case study site, wave 2

"I was shy but I came out my shyness now. I'm an independent traveller."

Male intern, case study site, wave 2

Although social relationships were available through Project SEARCH, they were not desired by all. One mother of a graduate commented that there had been no improvement in her son's social life, but felt that this was because he did not see it as important. This was confirmed by his mentor, who reported that this graduate had limited social contact with other staff members.

"[My son] hasn't got any friends. This is his social life as well as his job. He comes home and he goes to his room and does computer games or whatever, and that's it ... It's something he feels he's got to do as part of his job: socialise. So that's how he might see it, as part of his job is to socialise."

Parent of graduate, case study site, wave 2

Family relationships

Most parents appeared to be extremely pleased with the changes in character and lifestyle their child had experienced, although some were surprised at the speed of the changes. Many commented that they were used to having their child completely dependent on them and found it a challenge to let go, although they were happy to do this. Some spoke of having a new found freedom themselves, and having more time to spend with their other children.

“I won't say that I'm not worried about him. Of course I am ... but as an over-protective parent I have to sort of let go.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

“It's been really hard for me to adjust because it's been like sort of over such a short period of time ... so it's changed my life, his life and probably the family unit's life because [a sibling] was always second.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

A very small minority were still concerned about their child's ability to progress to full independence. These parents were concerned that their child could not cope with full-time work, and would still require their support.

“I'd like for her to have a job, but I don't know if she'll be able to hang onto it. I don't want her to do anything that she can't manage.”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

One mother wanted her son to be able to repeat Project SEARCH if he was unable to find a job. The structure of the programme appeared to provide the right balance of support, while enabling interns to develop their independence. Any difficulties that occurred in the early stage of the programme appeared to be part of the process of adapting to a new environment. These issues are likely to be a reflection on this transition and the age of the interns, as well as their disability. The way in which most interns progressed in their rotations suggests that they were able to adapt to new circumstances which was key to successful participation in Project SEARCH and to potentially gaining future employment. In addition to this there

appeared to be a range of social and personal benefits associated with programme participation.

4.2.6 Barriers to participation

Despite the success of Project SEARCH in engaging young people with learning disabilities, and the strength of positive feeling towards the programme, there were a number of issues that made participation problematic for some. This included limitations in understanding about what participating in Project SEARCH involved, attitudes toward interns' capabilities and benefit related financial concerns.

Intern attitudes and work-awareness

Levels of work-awareness and distance from the labour market varied across the interns and a minority did not feel that Project SEARCH was appropriate for them. As with the family members, some had not understood what was involved in participating in Project SEARCH, for example a few had not realised the amount of time they would spend in the classroom. A small number of interns had left the programme for this reason although others continued but felt that they just wanted to work.

“You've heard it all before, and you want to get out there and earn your own money, instead of having the same lessons all over again.”

Female intern, case study site, wave 2

In a few cases, interns struggled to keep up with the pace of their rotations and the demands of the classroom activities. At one site an intern had left the programme because he was unable to cope with the academic requirements, although he had performed well in his rotations. Another site had considered asking an intern to leave as staff had commented that she was not able to manage the work she was given in her rotations. The department felt that they were having to make too many adjustments to accommodate the intern, and suggested she leave the programme if she continued to struggle. At other sites tutors and job coaches had either provided additional support themselves or had extra staff, for example a teaching assistant to help them.

“I think some interns need more support than others. Some will need virtually ... constant supervision and to sort of leave them alone I think it’s just not fair on the intern, and it’s not fair obviously on our team member.”

Business liaison, case study site, wave 2

The benefits system

Difficulties related to interns’ receipt of benefits were reported during wave one of the research. It was noted that the participation of Project SEARCH interns in an unpaid programme did not reconcile with the current structure of the benefits system. This had caused difficulties for potential interns who were in receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), as the conditionality of this benefit stipulates that claimants must be available for, and actively seeking work. Difficulties also occurred for those claiming Incapacity Benefit, related to their attendance at mandatory interviews.

“Benefits was a massive issue for quite a lot of people.... a big concern and an issue for a lot of our people and parents.”

Supported employment lead, case study site, wave 1

Of the data collected from sites on intern benefits, only six reported interns receiving out of work benefits during the demonstration year. This included:

- Ten interns on incapacity benefit;
- Six interns on Employment Support Allowance (ESA);
- One intern on Income Support.

Sites had tackled the issue of intern benefits in different ways, with some avoiding the recruitment of those in receipt of benefits and others providing benefits advice and support to interns.

Project SEARCH partners continued to report difficulties related to interns’ benefit status during wave two, with a particular issue being the transfer from ESA to JSA if an intern failed their Work Capability Assessment. This led back to the difficulty noted above regarding the receipt of JSA, and meant some individuals would need to end their benefit claim if they wished to participate in the programme.

“It’s really quite difficult, because the whole ESA thing is, a lot of people with learning difficulties or mental health problems particularly are failing the medical because you could argue that a lot of the students we’ve got, they’ve got a learning disability, but then medically there’s nothing wrong; they’re perfectly fit and healthy. My concern is they go on Jobseeker’s Allowance, they go and sign once a fortnight and then they’ll not get the support they need to get a job.”

Supported employment lead, case study site, wave 2

Some Project SEARCH partners also noted that the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which some interns relied on, was being withdrawn. This, in combination with the benefit issues outlined above, was felt to present a major barrier to potential participation for those from low income families.

“We understand that it’s a very difficult thing, because if you make a set of rules, you’ve got to apply them to everybody, but it is certainly disadvantaging [potential interns]. The ones that are still with us are supported by their families. The danger is of course that that then becomes elitist; it’s only available for people of families that can afford it.”

Supported employment lead, non-case study site, wave 1

A small number of parents at the case study sites also reported that they were struggling financially, having lost benefits for their child and also personal benefits.

“The situation that is the biggest issue has been finances. At college, he was getting his EMA, that’s obviously gone; then he was getting money from Job Seekers. But, coming here, nothing ... We’ve lost our working tax credits, child benefit, and we’ve had to take a massive hit. We could have sent him back to college to do another level one entry course just so that we could be financially better off ...”

Parent of intern, case study site, wave 2

4.2.7 Experiences of employed graduates

As part of the evaluation, a small number of interviews were completed at existing sites with graduates of Project SEARCH who were now

employed at the site. Some parents and mentors of graduates were also interviewed. Graduates' experiences of participating in Project SEARCH were broadly similar to current interns.

Graduates, parents and mentors were also asked about any changes that had occurred since the graduate entered full-time employment. The general view was that the process of becoming more confident and independent which started during their internship had continued into employment. Graduates were able to manage their workload with minimal supervision or independently, and were able to take on additional tasks that they had not carried out during their internship. A few mentors mentioned that some colleagues were nervous about giving the graduates more responsibilities, and noted that they had to convince their colleagues that the graduates were capable of taking on extra work. In these situations the colleagues were generally reported to have been impressed by the graduates' work and were happy for them to continue.

“She takes blood gases [now] ... At first the doctor said, ‘will that be okay’? I said, ‘I’ve been with her several times, she shadowed me for a long time’ ... I said, ‘okay you take it down and I’ll follow you’. We did it like that and they’ve got no hesitation at all now.”

Graduate mentor, case study site, wave 2

Mentors reported that other staff had generally responded well to having a graduate employed in their department. In the majority of cases, the graduate had been welcomed as a full member of staff and joined in with all the activities that other staff members were involved in, such as attending staff meetings or going to social events. Only one mentor reported that staff had initially been concerned when some of their regular tasks, such as filing, were taken away from them and given to the graduate. This graduate also struggled with social situations so did not interact with other staff as much as other graduates. His mentor mentioned that she would have liked ongoing support from the Project SEARCH partners in case any issues arose.

“If you’ve got any issues then you would probably ask somebody within the Project SEARCH team ‘how should I now deal with this’? So that’s the only thing, you don’t have that ... I think you feel that perhaps you’ve employed someone now and it’s down to you.”

Graduate mentor, case study site, wave 2

The capacity of partners to provide this ongoing support for graduates is discussed in section [3.6](#). Whilst partners from established sites acknowledged this need, and aimed to offer support, they also noted that once the new Project SEARCH year commenced, there were constraints on their capacity to provide this.

Parents commented that they were delighted and relieved that their children were employed after Project SEARCH, and all felt that the jobs the graduates secured suited them well. One parent was surprised by her child's choice of job, and commented that it is not something she would have thought of as suitable. However, this mother was very pleased with her daughter's job and now felt it was the perfect job for her. Another parent commented that her child's job in administration utilised his skills in IT and his desire to work with computers. Parents also mentioned their child's new financial independence, and commented that their children were responsible with their money, and contributed to the household. All parents felt their child would remain in their job for the long term.

“She pays for her own lunches here, she pays for anything to do with travel, be it my petrol or her sister's petrol or the bus so it's all progressed to where, at 21, I am very pleased with the state of play and I hope this continues for as long as possible.”

Parent of graduate, case study site, wave 2

The graduates were very happy that they had been able to find work, and expressed their pride at being 'responsible' and 'professional'. All agreed that their work had improved since becoming employees and that they needed less assistance now.

“When I first started I wasn't sure about what they do here and how to do things, and now that I am employed, I have learnt all of those things about the tasks and now I can do them without much hassle.”

Male, graduate, case study site, wave 1

“I felt pretty proud of myself [when I got a job] I'm growing more confident every day because now I know what it's like being a working person.”

Male, graduate, case study site, wave 1

Some of the graduates also reflected how happy they were to have their own income and gave example of things they could now afford to buy. One graduate's mentor also highlighted the benefit to family finances that some graduates were now able offer.

Although all of the graduates felt they were coping well with full-time work, some did comment that they were more tired now than they had been as interns. This was said to be because of the increased hours on the job and the requirement to arrive at work earlier than they had to for Project SEARCH. One graduate had also had to give up social activities such a sports clubs because of her working hours, although she was happy to do this to accommodate her job.

It was clear that the graduates were performing well in their roles, which suggests that they were given jobs on merit and suitability. The knowledge and skills that graduates gained through Project SEARCH appears to offer the basis for their success in their jobs and a strong foundation for continued progress once they are employed.

Staff were positive about the standard of graduates' work and stated that they would be happy to hire more graduates if jobs were available. Whilst many sites articulated concerns about the availability of suitable jobs in the future, two of this years' interns had already been hired by their host employer. It therefore appears that the goal of achieving employment with host sites remains a possibility.

4.2.8 Summary

Overall interns, graduates and their parents were very positive about the Project SEARCH experience. Whilst there were some concerns from parents as to whether interns would find work, in general the outcomes of being involved in Project SEARCH were constructive. It was reported amongst parents, Project SEARCH partners and interns themselves that their confidence, motivation, decision making, self esteem and health had all improved while being on Project SEARCH. This is consistent with other evidence of the wider benefits of work to individuals.

Not all interns benefited from their involvement in Project SEARCH. At least one graduate from across 12 of the 14 demonstration sites did not complete the programme. This was mainly down to practical or attitudinal issues. Firstly, some interns had not expected to be spending so much time in a classroom setting, and wanted to go out and find work themselves. Others were not capable of completing tasks expected of

them during rotations. Secondly, for some interns and their families, the financial impact of interns' benefits and other financial support being terminated created a financial strain on the family.

Although interns' ability is assessed at recruitment, it may be the case that some interns are either too close to or too far from the labour market to fully benefit from the Project SEARCH model. This may indicate that further development of the recruitment and assessment of potential interns is required.

As Project SEARCH is aimed at young people with moderate to severe learning disabilities, it may be that additional resources are needed to ensure interns with a higher level of support receive the required assistance. This is evidenced by the fact that interns with more severe disabilities often required extra support in the classroom or on their rotations. In many cases tutors and job coaches were stretched, and could not always provide extra support themselves. Where intensive assistance was needed, sites often used additional resource in the form of teaching assistants or more than one job coach.

Graduates from existing Project SEARCH sites who were in work reported positive experiences of working, whilst some noted that they had to give up social activities and were tired from working full-time, it was evident that they had thrived in a working environment and continued to maintain work performance at the standard achieved during their rotations. Generally, graduates had continued to develop new skills in their jobs, and most staff members that had not worked with interns during Project SEARCH had been positive about working alongside the graduates. The only concern sites voiced was the lack of jobs available within the host employer. This perhaps is a concern for future years, when more interns graduate from the programme.

4.3 Additional benefits identified by the demonstration year

In addition to job outcomes and the benefits to the interns identified above, project partners also identified a number of wider benefits arising from involvement in Project SEARCH. These included benefits to host employers such as improvements in efficiency and cultural change within organisations. Experiences and views of host employers are reflected throughout the report, specifically in relation to funding (section [2.7.3](#)) and experiences of staff (section [3.3](#)). Wider benefits of project involvement are outlined below.

4.3.1 Benefits to host employers

During fieldwork, staff commented on increased efficiency in some departments with the simpler, more streamlined processes that had been brought in specifically for the interns, having a benefit for all staff. For example, one site stated that, the job analysis process completed as part of implementing systematic instruction, gave host employer departments the opportunity to reflect on job descriptions. Staff were then able to address how a job can be done differently or adapted to save timings and costs.

“When somebody comes in and looks at your job, a systematic instruction. they go ‘why do you do it like that’, you go ‘we’ve always done it like that’ and so there is no real rationale sometimes and it is kind of like wallpaper you stop seeing how you do things, so when you have to reorder them and reorganise them you think actually that makes a lot more sense and is more cost effective.”

Business liaison, case study site, wave 3

Generally it was reported that changes could prove to be cost effective for the organisation and specific examples included faster turn-around of patients in day service wards due to the efficiency of the intern in carrying out routine tasks, and a colour coded filing system that made it easier for all staff to locate and store files.

“Each area benefits from having a Project SEARCH student in that it helps them examine the processes and things that they thought were efficient. When they have to sort them out for somebody with a learning disability they realise that maybe they’re not quite as efficient as they thought.”

Business liaison, case study site, wave 1

Generally staff were content with the changes introduced, and some indicated that they felt the changes had produced a positive effect on the work of their department overall.

“We’ve changed a couple of work methods, which we’ve now actually found easier for everybody, you know, and quicker. And we’ve had some really productive changes, and structural changes, in our team, because some of the

students' ability to look at things in a different way to what we have been able to."

Mentor, case study site, wave 2

A number of staff also described other benefits such the extra capacity an intern could offer, and the way that interns could take on more routine tasks, which freed up time for the paid employees.

"I work in the NHS and we're very short staffed, so it was extremely good to have another hand, a person to come along and help and that's the impact that the person has had on the team."

Manager, case study site, wave 2

4.3.2 Cultural change

On the whole Project SEARCH demonstration sites reported that the supported internship programme had a positive impact on all partner organisations. Specifically, it was noted that there had been an increase in positive staff attitudes toward working with people with a learning disability, and increased enthusiasm among departments who had taken on a Project SEARCH intern to develop spaces for interns in a future Project SEARCH year.

"Attitudes are changing about the hospital because we have got people asking for students, we are not begging anymore."

Classroom tutor, non case study site, wave 3

Furthermore, the overall awareness and understanding of people with a learning disability had improved among staff members across Project SEARCH partner organisations. Some sites also felt that these changes were contributing to change at an organisational level.

"Definitely the culture change within the council... the perception of our students, the fact that they are gaining skills and proving to people that they can do the same job."

Job coach, non-case study site, wave 2

"Mentors say well it's given us a much wider view of people with learning difficulties, so that has got a much bigger effect than the one person in their department, because they view

people differently, which has a knock on effect everywhere I think.”

Classroom tutor, case study site, wave 3

Managers across the sites felt that their staff had learnt from the Project SEARCH interns. Partners also commented that staff had developed an understanding of how to interact with people with learning disabilities and were able to recognise their capabilities.

“I think for some of them it was a huge leap of faith to actually say, yes, this department will take a student.... and I think it’s paid off because it’s been wonderful for our learners, but it also has been a learning process as far as the staff are concerned.”

Education Lead, non-case study site, wave 2

It was suggested that culture change within organisations could spread further through staff telling friends and family about their experiences. Some sites also anticipated that interns working in their organisation would also have a positive impact on the perceptions and attitudes of customers and patients.

4.3.3 Wider benefits

The employment outcomes arising from the Project SEARCH demonstration sites may also offer savings to both local and central government budgets. Interns that moved into work were no longer dependent on Local Authority services such as day services. Many had also successfully completed ‘travel training’ as part of their learning and development during the Project SEARCH year, so were no longer reliant on transport and travel support facilities.

Interns, who had moved into work, were also not claiming out of work benefits, such as Jobseekers Allowance or Incapacity Benefit, achieving a reduction on benefit expenditure.

“(Graduate name) is a good example, who got a job in the post room and she was someone who received a personal budget from the Local Authority to do day services, well other things as well, but she now works 30 hours, so it’s a saving to the Local Authority, she’s also not on benefits anymore and

that's the same for all of the students that have gone into work, you know, there's been that benefit saving."

Project coordinator, case study site, wave 3

A few education providers also noted that they now had 'real life' examples of graduates who had moved into work. By becoming involved in Project SEARCH, education providers were able to put into focus what a future after education could potentially be for students with a learning disability. Such examples were felt to offer clear and positive evidence that can challenge assumptions and raise aspirations for the future of young people with learning disabilities after they leave full time education.

"Sometimes we talk a lot about preparing youngsters for life after [education] then we spend a lot of time teaching national curriculum subjects and it's hard to marry the two together. Actually this has given us quite a real focus to where we want to go. We know where we're heading."

Project coordinator, non case study site, wave 3

A number of partners noted the importance of the Project SEARCH approach in breaking the cycle of young people with learning disabilities repeating college courses and training with limited opportunities for employment. As noted in section [3.8](#) this is viewed as one of the main benefits of the Project SEARCH model.

4.4 Chapter summary

Outcome data was available from 11 of the 14 demonstration sites. This showed that around one-in-three interns gained employment as a result of participating in the Project SEARCH demonstration year. This was split relatively evenly between full-time and part-time positions, and was most commonly secured with the host employer. However, these were early findings gathered three months after the conclusion of Project SEARCH year. Employment outcomes included full-time and part-time jobs. Future monitoring of the sustainability of these job outcomes is not within the scope of this research. Additional 'unknown' outcomes from other sites may have skewed the overall employment figure i.e. those presented may be lower than what has actually been achieved.

In addition to this, almost a third of interns continued to look for work after completing the Project SEARCH year. Overall, 80 per cent of

interns, who started the Project SEARCH year, successfully completed it or left early to take a job.

It appeared to be the case that making adjustments to particular elements of the model did not have an impact on job outcomes. The length of time sites had been delivering Project SEARCH did, however, appear to have an impact. New sites in their first year were far more likely to achieve job outcomes than existing sites in their second or third year. Also, public sector sites were likely to achieve lower job outcomes than the private sector site in this category. This has implications for sustainability of the programme and suggests that sites need to dedicate more time and resources to engaging external employers at an early stage of the programme.

Based on the data collected, Project SEARCH achieved an employment rate considerably higher than the national average for people with moderate to severe learning disabilities. However, it should be noted that the demonstration year cohort included some young people with mild to moderate learning difficulties. Also, data collected included both full-time and part-time job outcomes.

Overall Project SEARCH interns reported a positive experience of the programme. It was also reported by parents, Project SEARCH partners and interns themselves that their confidence, motivation, decision making, self esteem and health had all improved while on the programme. This is consistent with other evidence of the wider benefits of work to individuals. Furthermore, Project SEARCH graduates from existing sites experienced positive outcomes of working for the host employer.

A minority of interns across all 14 demonstration sites did not complete Project SEARCH. There appeared to be several potential barriers to fully participating in Project SEARCH which were both practical and attitudinal. Some interns had not expected to spend so much time in a classroom and claimed they wanted to move into work, so left the programme to do so. Others were not capable of completing tasks expected of them, so were not able to complete rotations. Further to this, there were some issues with benefit claims. Interns who were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance were no longer eligible to continue their claim whilst on the programme. This caused some financial strain for a few families with interns on the programme, and in some instances led to interns leaving the programme.

Whilst sites made efforts to clarify what involvement in the programme entails, there was confusion amongst some parents and interns and this led to difficulties once the programme started. It therefore appears to be vital that sites ensure there is full understanding and support for the programme from all parties.

Project SEARCH sites also reported a number of benefits to host employers. These included improvements in efficiency and positive attitudinal change amongst staff. A number of sites also mentioned the financial savings, in terms of benefit and social care budgets for graduates who were successful in gaining employment.

Finally some partners noted that successful graduates offered positive examples that can challenge assumptions and raise aspirations for young people with learning disabilities after they leave full-time education.

Overall the views and experiences reported during all three waves of the research demonstrated that participating in Project SEARCH had been a life changing experience for many interns and Project SEARCH partners. Although some interns may achieve employment without participating in the programme, it would appear likely that the experience and skills they gain will improve their position in the labour market.

5 THE SUPPORTED INTERNSHIP MODEL

The preceding chapters have outlined the main findings from the Project SEARCH demonstration year. They describe the key elements that sites identified as important factors for the successful set up and delivery of Project SEARCH within the context of delivery in England. As already noted some of these factors, such as the use of a ‘place and train’ model and the application of Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI) are not unique to the Project SEARCH model (see [2.8](#) above). This chapter will therefore briefly explore the similarities between Project SEARCH and supported employment and aim to draw out specific features of Project SEARCH.

When considering future use of supported internship models³³ such as Project SEARCH it would also be helpful to consider the potential challenges to their implementation. The experience from the demonstration sites offered practical lessons in terms of ‘what works’, potential challenges and approaches adopted to overcome these. One of the biggest challenges reported was availability of funding for the education and supported employment partners. Sites addressed this in a number of ways, such as using funding from education routes and DWP supported employment provision, such as the Work Choice Programme (see [2.7](#) above). Sites did however note that they had not been able to identify a long term solution to the funding issue, and described having to ‘find’ funding for the year ahead. This chapter will therefore also explore the potential links of the supported internship model to Work Choice and other funding streams.

5.1 Supported Employment

The Valuing Employment Now (VEN) paper on job coaching³⁴ described supported employment as a well evidenced³⁵, personalised approach to

³³The term ‘supported internship’ is taken from the Special Educational Needs Green Paper ‘Preparing for Adulthood’ (2011). In this context it is defined as a variant of supported employment which utilises an internship model to offer the student substantial experience of real work

³⁴ HM Government (2010), ‘Valuing Employment Now: Job Coaching or Supported Employment- Approach and Progress in Developing Standards’, HM Government

working with people with considerable disabilities (including people with learning disabilities and autism) to access and retain employment, with support.

The VEN paper noted that there are different terms used to describe supported employment which include 'job coaching' and the 'place, train and maintain' model. It outlines some guiding principles of supported employment and in particular notes that it is designed to support people who do not necessarily meet traditional criteria for job readiness or employability.

The report also refers to key stages of supported employment which are described by the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE) as a 'flexible and continuous process, designed to meet all anticipated needs'³⁶. These key stages or elements of supported employment, as outlined by BASE, are described below, alongside the way these are reflected in the Project SEARCH model.

5.1.1 Employer engagement

Within supported employment close engagement with employers is seen as a key element which helps to overcome traditional recruitment and selection barriers. This may involve the use of 'working interviews' which adopt a 'place and train' rather than 'train then place' in an employment model. It recognises that most people learn skills better in situ and this helps to overcome the 'job readiness' barrier where people can be stuck in a cycle of permanent training. It is also reported to increase a participant's motivation because they see from the beginning that they are employed.

The key element of employer engagement is central to the Project SEARCH model, which is described as 'employer-led', with programme delivery embedded within a host employer.

³⁵ Beyer, S. and Robinson, C. (2009), 'A Review of the Research Literature on Supported Employment: A Report for the Cross-Government Learning Disability Employment Strategy Team', Cabinet Office

³⁶ British Association of Supported Employment (BASE)

<http://base-uk.org/information-commissioners/what-supported-employment>

5.1.2 Customer engagement

In the past, professionals and families have had low expectations of people with disabilities finding sustainable work. The VEN strategy, 'real jobs for people with learning disabilities' (2009), highlighted the crucial importance of promoting the fact that people with learning disabilities can work and have careers. The strategy stated the single most important thing to facilitate positive change in employment rates was to change expectations about work. Supported employment recognises the importance of raising these expectations for individuals and their families, and across education, health and social care services. The Project SEARCH model also recognises this and promotes close engagement, for example via regular reviews with interns and their families. As discussed in [3.2](#) above the majority of the demonstration sites did not strictly adhere to this element of the model and in some cases felt it was inappropriate. They did however note the importance of engaging with interns and their families, for example the need to communicate very clearly about what is involved in a Project SEARCH internship during the recruitment process. They also ensured that ongoing support for interns and families was available during the course of the Project SEARCH year.

5.1.3 Vocational Profiling and Job Matching

The delivery of supported employment should include a mechanism for the identification of the aspirations, learning needs, skills, and job preferences of the participant. This 'vocational profile' then informs job searching to ensure a high quality job match is obtained, which best suits the participant's skills and preferences.

Once an employer's commitment to offering work is secured, a job analysis is usually undertaken. BASE describe this process as checking assumptions made in the job description and thoroughly investigating the job so that the supported employment provider can describe all of its aspects and those of the workplace. Although it is common practice for employers to set out the basics of a job for new recruits, it is not common for a detailed analysis of the job and environment to be available. The job analysis might point towards ways of carving together parts of job descriptions that suit the worker's talents, or creating new job descriptions that suit the worker and are cost effective for the employer.

Demonstration sites described how the processes of vocational profiling and job matching were both utilised to some degree to support the process of Project SEARCH job rotations (see [2.9](#) above).

5.1.4 In-work Support

The process of vocational profiling and job analysis should ensure that the support requirements of a participant are properly considered, which will allow in-work support to be individually tailored and targeted. Where appropriate, in-work support to the participant and their employer may include systematic instruction, and the development of natural supports within the workplace. The BASE definition of supported employment also notes that it is important to offer appropriate levels of support and encourage the involvement of the employer and co-workers. Supported employment providers should ensure that induction and ongoing training takes place and may offer out of work support if needed. Providers should also ensure that goals are agreed with the participant and progress against these is recorded on a development plan.

All of these elements of in-work support were reported within the Project SEARCH demonstration sites, including support for the interns and their co-workers on job rotations (see [3.3](#)). The use of tutors and job coaches trained in systematic instruction is also a core element of the Project SEARCH model, and was delivered and well received at most of the demonstration sites (see [2.8](#)).

5.1.5 Distinct features of the Project SEARCH model

Whilst the Project SEARCH model does involve many of the elements of supported employment discussed above it also has some differences. For example within supported employment there is a focus on 'real jobs' which means that participants are employed on the same terms and conditions as other employees including pay at the contracted going rate and equal employee benefits. Project SEARCH interns are generally expected to adhere to the host employer's terms and conditions but are not paid, although the aim is that, following Project SEARCH, they will enter paid, sustained employment.

There are also distinct features of the Project SEARCH model which relate to its specific application as a supported internship programme for young people leaving education, which aims to facilitate a successful transition from education into paid work.

In terms of this role in supporting transitions the demonstration sites viewed the model as a positive change from more traditional vocational courses and residential colleges. They felt Project SEARCH provided an opportunity for young people with learning disabilities to end a repetitive cycle of participating in college courses. 'Getting A Life'³⁷ reported that whilst a job is identified in transition guidance as a legitimate aim of transition planning³⁸ the most common routes remain a college placement or a day service placement, with employment an infrequent option.

Sites also felt Project SEARCH offered interns an opportunity to participate in 'real work', rather than volunteering or work experience. The main benefits of the model identified by sites, noted in [3.8](#) above were:

- The embedding of the programme with a host employer and the length of programme which offer interns an opportunity to gain substantial experience of 'real work'.
- The close working partnership between employers, education and supported employment providers, who were all committed to the aims of securing employment for interns.

As previously discussed in [3.8.1](#) the degree to which sites rigidly applied the precise details of the Project SEARCH model did appear to vary, and there was some confusion as to what were core elements that must be delivered, and where there was flexibility. However, as noted in [4.1.1](#) above, in terms of the employment outcomes achieved there did not appear to be any particular relationship between the outcomes achieved at sites, and the degree to which the sites appeared to maintain strict Project SEARCH model fidelity.

Nevertheless evidence from the demonstration year does appear to confirm that that the overall approach of the Project SEARCH internship, as applied within the demonstration sites, can achieve successful job outcomes. Whilst beyond the scope of this research, further tracking of

³⁷ Beyer, S. and Kaehne, A. (2010), 'Transition to employment: The role of Getting A Life in developing an employment pathway for people with learning disabilities', Cardiff: Cardiff University

³⁸ The review of the Statement of Special Educational Need for students with a learning disability should involve the development of an individual transition plan

interns would also be helpful to examine how sustainable the job outcomes achieved are over the longer term.

5.2 Future funding for supported internship models

The evaluation of the Project SEARCH demonstration year does indicate the potential of the supported internship model, although one of the biggest challenges reported was availability of funding for the education and supported employment partners. Sites addressed this in a number of ways, such as using funding from education routes, Remploy and the Work Choice Programme (see [2.7.2](#)) in order to deliver the programme. However at the end of the demonstration year they also reported they had not been able to identify a long term solution to this funding issue, and described having to 'find' funding for the year ahead. If supported internship models are to be promoted and used more widely it would therefore be useful to explore how this funding issue may be addressed.

5.2.1 Supported employment funding and links to Work Choice

As reported above some sites had utilised Remploy funding to support the provision of the job coach role, and for the ongoing support of graduates. Work Choice is a DWP programme aimed at people who, by reason of considerable disability, cannot be helped into employment through Jobcentre Plus mainstream programmes. It aims to offer a flexible modular approach to helping people find and maintain employment and details of the three Work Choice modules are described below:

- **Pre-employment support (module 1)** is normally offered for six months, although it can be extended to a maximum of nine months.
- **In-work support (module 2)** aims to offer a holistic, managed service based on coaching, training, establishing relationships in the workplace, and regular engagement with the employer. Work Choice providers have the freedom to tailor the package to suit the needs of customer and this initial period of supported employment is expected to last no more than two years, with regular reviews built in.
- **Long term in-work support (module 3)** recognises that some very disabled customers will need longer term support.

A review after two years will identify these customers and set further, appropriate review points.

Work Choice provision is delivered via two routes, by Remploy, which operates as a company limited by guarantee and is a non-departmental government body; and through a range of contracted provider organisations, from the public, private and third sector. Remploy currently delivers Work Choice via their block Grant in Aid allocation from Government and the funding of contracted provision is linked to the service delivery and job outcomes for their individual programme participants.

At the demonstration sites where Remploy was the supported employment provider they reported that funding for Remploy's Work Choice provision was used to cover the costs of a job coach. This approach could perhaps be utilised by Remploy as they receive a block funding allocation and this may offer greater flexibility in how funding is utilised. Contracted providers did not use Work Choice funding in this way as funding is linked directly to the individual participant and could not be drawn down automatically from the Prime Provider.

In addition to this, sites noted an inherent difficulty in the utilisation of Work Choice funding, in that module one of the Programme (pre work support) only runs for six months, with a possible extension to nine months, which does not cover the whole Project SEARCH year.

One site that also operated as a contracted Work Choice provider was exploring whether in future they could run Project SEARCH over two rotations rather than three if they decide to continue with the programme next year. This would allow the programme to fall within the Work Choice pre-work module, and alleviate these funding difficulties. At the time of reporting this issue had not been resolved.

In addition to the use of Work Choice funding for the job coach involved in the delivery of the demonstration year, some sites reported that graduates who did not secure jobs could be referred onto the pre-work module of Work Choice at the end of the Project SEARCH year. Some were also exploring the provision of in-work support to graduates who did secure employment via Work Choice, in order to address concerns about the sustainability of support for the Project SEARCH team once a new year had commenced (a concern raised in [3.6](#) above).

5.2.2 Education funding

As discussed in (2.7.1) the funding of a full time tutor was a particular concern in a number of sites, with most indicating a shortfall in this funding. Some sites reported using Additional Learning Support (ALS) for learners under the age of 25 as this route gives Further Education (FE) providers the flexibility to respond to the needs of learners so that they can meet their learning aims and can progress in learning and work. A 'Jobs First' report on funding employment support³⁹ with individual budgets, reports that in addition to tutor funding ALS could be used to funding the learning element of supported employment (e.g. job coaching).

However, the timing of the Project SEARCH year meant that some sites had missed the window for ALS allocations, and one site reported that they would not be able to use ALS next year due to an overspend in this year's budget. Some sites had therefore considered the development of a Project SEARCH qualification, which would not in itself resolve a shortfall in funding, though it would go towards expanding the range of qualifications for which education providers can draw down tutor funding. As reported this was not a preferred option as it would not provide a comprehensive resolution of funding concerns. There was also a concern that a specific 'Project SEARCH' qualification could fundamentally alter the focus of the programme, with the completion of a qualification becoming a higher priority rather than placing interns' in employment.

Thus at a number of sites the future funding for the tutor remained unclear, although the 'Jobs First' report⁴⁰ offers details on the range of ways that colleges can use FE funding for employment support (within Annex A). Consideration of support for the supported internship model from the education system is also presented within the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Green Paper 'Preparing for Adulthood'⁴¹. The Green Paper stated that by 2015, disabled young people and young people with SEN will have '**access to better quality vocational and work-related learning options**' and '**good opportunities and support**

³⁹ Department of Health (2011), 'Job First: Funding employment support with individual budgets' London: Department of Health

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Department for Education (2011) "Preparing for Adulthood" A new approach to special educational needs and disability - A consultation', London: Department for Education

in order to get and keep a job.’ There is also a specific commitment to **‘explore whether we could introduce supported internships for those for whom an apprenticeship may not be a realistic aim’**.

This could facilitate a clearer route for education funding to support the introduction and running of a supported internship model such as Project SEARCH. The only potential risk with this approach may be that an emphasis on education funding may place the education provider as the dominant partner, potentially undermining the ‘employer-led’ model. Lessons from the Project SEARCH demonstration sites (discussed in [2.5](#) above) also indicate that the approach appears to work best where there is a more equal partnership. Care would therefore be required to ensure that the core elements of employer engagement, and a partnership approach, remain a key focus in the development of any supported internship model.

5.2.3 Individual budgets

Whilst the recent Sayce review of specialist disability employment support ⁴² did not specifically address internship models, it did identify this as a potentially important route into work for disabled people. The review also made some suggestions about the reallocation of DWP funding for some specialist disability employment support into areas such as internships. More specifically the report recommends that consideration be given to rolling out existing funding, in particular Work Choice and Access to Work, into an individual budget-based programme.

Whilst there is considerable evidence to support the delivery of personalised services, as a key element of effective supported employment provision, the evidence on individual budgets for employment support is less clear. The interim report on the evaluation of Jobs First sites in England⁴³ appears to highlight a number of difficulties related to implementation, so that little progress on delivery or the assessment of outcomes has been possible. This mirrors what was found during a pilot on provision of employment support and Access to

⁴² Sayce, L. (2011), ‘Getting in, staying in and getting on: Disability employment support fit for the future’ London: Department for Work and Pensions

⁴³ Stevens, M. and Harris, J. (2011), ‘Jobs First Evaluation: Interim Report’, London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit Kings College

Work alongside Individual Budgets⁴⁴ which reported implementation difficulties and very low uptake. There has also been no formal reporting on use of individual budgets to fund employment support from the Right to Control trailblazers to date.

Given these limitations in the available evidence it is not possible to assess whether supported internship models can be delivered through individual budgets, although any future development of individual budgets should consider this potential application.

5.3 Conclusions

Many of the features of Project SEARCH delivery draw on the established, well evidenced, model of supported employment such as employer and customer engagement, vocational profiling, job matching and in-work support including the use of TSI. The distinct features of the model are linked to its specific application as a supported internship model which aims to facilitate successful transitions from education into paid work. Evidence from the Project SEARCH demonstration year does appear to confirm that that the overall approach, as applied within the demonstration sites, can achieve some successful job outcomes (although longer term tracking would be required to ascertain if these are sustained).

One of the most considerable challenges to the establishment and delivery of Project SEARCH identified by the demonstration sites was the availability of sustainable funding for education and supported employment provision. Sites reported the use of Work Choice and various streams of education funding but none appeared to have reached a long term solution to this issue. If the model is to be adopted more widely consideration will need to be given to funding. This will be even more critical in the current economic climate as decisions about how funding is allocated will need to consider value for money relative to other provision.

There are potential links to Work Choice which could be explored further, although the current design of module one of this programme does not fit with the yearlong approach of Project SEARCH. A more appropriate link may be in the support of Project SEARCH graduates

⁴⁴ Aston, J, (2009), 'Evaluation of Access to Work: Individual Budget Pilot Strand' DWP research report 620, London: Department for Work and Pensions

(via module one for those who do not achieve employment during the Project SEARCH year, and via module two for those who do). This approach could address one of the concerns about the longer term sustainability of the Project SEARCH model identified by demonstration sites, i.e. their capacity to offer ongoing support for graduates once the new academic year had commenced.

A range of education funding streams for the tutor, and some elements of supported employment provision for Project SEARCH were utilised during the demonstration year. Information from a Jobs First report⁴⁵ also tends to support the potential for FE funding of supported employment provision. This, alongside the SEN Green Paper commitment to explore the introduction of supported internships, suggests that an education route may be able to offer access to appropriate future funding. As noted above, if this approach is adopted, care should be taken to ensure that the core elements of employer engagement, and a partnership approach to supported internships, are maintained.

⁴⁵ Department of Health (2011), 'Job First: Funding employment support with individual budgets' London: Department of Health

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Outcome data presented in [chapter four](#)⁴⁶ showed that around one-in-three interns gained either full-time or part-time employment as a result of participating in the Project SEARCH demonstration year. Project SEARCH therefore achieved an employment rate higher than current estimates of the employment for people with learning disabilities (between 8 per cent and 16 per cent⁴⁷), and performed well against the backdrop of a difficult economic climate and increasing national unemployment rates for young people aged 16-24.

Overall Project SEARCH interns reported a positive experience of the programme. It was also reported by parents, Project SEARCH partners and interns themselves that their confidence, motivation, decision making, self esteem and health had all improved as a direct result of being on the programme. Project SEARCH graduates from existing sites also reported positive outcomes of working for the host employer and the partner organisations involved noted a range of organisational benefits. These included improvements in efficiency and positive attitudinal change amongst staff. A number of sites also mentioned financial savings, in terms of benefit and social care budgets, for graduates who were successful in gaining employment.

Evidence from the Project SEARCH demonstration year does therefore appear to confirm that the overall approach can achieve some successful job outcomes and a range of other benefits. On this basis it is recommended that consideration should be given to wider implementation of the supported internship model. However, this needs to take place alongside an assessment of its cost effectiveness and outcomes in comparison to other provision for young people with learning disabilities and autism, including mainstream supported employment, education, training and day care.

⁴⁶ Outcome data was only available from 11 of the 14 demonstration sites at the time of reporting.

⁴⁷ This is an estimate based on data from the Labour Force Survey (Q2, 2011). Owing to small sample size for this impairment group it is not possible to show a specific employment rate. The quoted range is based on a central estimate of 12 per cent with a 4.4 per cent confidence interval.

The final sections of the report will therefore revisit the features of the Project SEARCH model and examine the key lessons and challenges that sites noted as important during the demonstration year.

6.1 The Project SEARCH Model

As discussed in [chapter five](#), many of the features of Project SEARCH delivery draw on the established model of supported employment such as employer and customer engagement, vocational profiling, job matching and in-work support including the use of Training in Systematic Instruction (TSI). The distinct features of the model are linked to its specific application as a supported internship which aims to facilitate successful transitions from education into paid work for young people with a learning disability.

Overall sites were generally positive about the Project SEARCH model. It was reported that it can play an important role in supporting successful transitions and the sites viewed the model as a constructive change from more traditional vocational courses and residential colleges. The main benefits of the model identified by sites noted in [3.8](#) above were:

- The embedding of the programme with a host employer and the length of programme which offer interns an opportunity to gain substantial experience of ‘real work’.
- The close working partnership between employers, education and supported employment providers, who were all committed to the aims of securing employment for interns.

6.2 Key set up and delivery lessons for the Project SEARCH model

As discussed within chapters [two](#) and [three](#), on the set up and delivery of the Project SEARCH demonstration year, sites noted a series of key lessons that they felt were important to ensure successful delivery of the Project SEARCH model. Many of these issues may be of relevance when considering the wider implementation of supported internships of this nature.

6.2.1 Organisational partnerships and ‘buy-in’

Overall having an effective partnership between the host employer, education provider and supported employment provider appeared to be

key to the successful implementation and delivery of Project SEARCH. Partners also noted the importance of effective communication, and the willingness of each partner organisation to take on individual and shared responsibilities.

Most demonstration sites were in favour of the 'employer-led' model of Project SEARCH, as it gave credibility to the project with the host and external employers. This was viewed as essential in terms of embedding the internships within the workplace, allowing interns to experience 'real' workplace experience. However the model appeared to operate most effectively where each of the parties worked at a similar level, sharing responsibilities rather than having one partner dominating the project.

Another key success factor noted by many sites was achieving organisational 'buy in' at a senior level across all partners. Having a commitment at the highest level often meant that any potential areas of concern or dispute could be more easily overcome. Maintaining this buy-in was also seen as crucial for sustainability as it was suggested that the economic climate may have affected employers' attitudes towards the programme, particularly in the public sector. In response to the issue of sustainability some sites had begun engage with external employers, and this discussed further in section [6.3](#) below.

6.2.2 Specific Delivery Lessons

There were a number of other important factors which sites identified for the successful delivery of Project SEARCH and these included the need for a full time classroom tutor alongside the provision of Training in Systematic Instruction for staff involved in project delivery.

Sites also reported that adequate engagement with families or carers was crucial to the interns' success on Project SEARCH. There was however some debate about the form of this engagement and many sites felt that the monthly review meetings prescribed by the Project SEARCH model were not essential or desirable.

Positive engagement with host employer staff was also seen as important. Some sites noted that interns' progress could be hindered by staff having low expectations of interns' capabilities. Engagement with staff was also seen as helpful for future delivery as this could affect whether departments chose to offer rotations or potentially employ interns.

Whilst all sites worked with interns on job searching there were some concerns that this had not started early enough in the year, potentially leading to low job outcomes. An early focus on job searching was therefore identified as important. Alongside this the engagement of external employers was viewed as offering a positive contribution to increasing potential job outcomes. This was of particular importance for existing sites where there was some indication they were approaching a level of 'saturation' in terms of the availability of suitable posts within the host employer (i.e. section [4.1.1](#) notes that new sites tended to achieve better job outcomes than existing ones). The issue of saturation was mainly linked to job outcomes and sites did not express concerns with the impact on the delivery of pre-work training, as having a graduate employed in a department did not necessarily prevent the opportunity for interns to be placed there on rotation.

In summary the demonstration sites highlighted the following key factors for successful implementation and delivery of the Project SEARCH model:

- The need for an effective organisational partnership (host employer, education provider, supported employment provider):
 - Sites noted the importance of effective communication, and the willingness of each partner organisation to take on individual and shared responsibilities
 - Sites also stressed the need for organisational 'buy-in' at a senior level across all partners;
- The need for a full time classroom tutor;
- The use of training in systematic instruction for delivery staff (and where possible interns' supervisors and mentors);
- The close engagement of interns' families / carers and host employer staff;
- An early focus on job search for interns which includes the engagement of external employers.

6.3 Challenges to implementation

The biggest challenge for many of the demonstration sites was the availability of funding for Project SEARCH delivery. Assuming a group

size of ten interns in a Project SEARCH site, the research found it costs around £10,500 per participant per year. Many sites noted that during the demonstration year they had 'absorbed' costs but in the longer term this would not be sustainable.

A further challenge was availability of a classroom on site at the host employer. Whilst all sites viewed this as essential, as it promoted the integration of interns into the host employer, a number of sites struggled to arrange a classroom on site at the start of the demonstration year. The majority of sites eventually resolved this issue, although the suitability of the classroom and its facilities remained an issue for some.

The Project SEARCH model aims to provide ongoing support for all graduates, whether they were employed at the end of the year or not. There were, however, concerns that it was not sustainable to support Project SEARCH graduates as well as the new Project SEARCH interns. Some sites reported that the supported employment provider would take on this responsibility for graduates who remained unemployed. This approach, along with other routes of support, was being explored for employed graduates.

Some sites also raised the challenge of sustaining a flow of appropriate job opportunities for graduates. As noted above, the involvement of external employers was seen to offer a constructive route for addressing this issue, and was felt to be of particular importance for existing sites.

6.4 Views of Project SEARCH model overall

As discussed in the introductory section of the report, the core elements of the Project SEARCH model were adapted for use in England, and this adapted model formed the basis for the set up and delivery of the demonstration year. The US Project SEARCH team emphasised the need to adhere to this model, i.e. model fidelity. They reported that, based on their experience of delivery, this would maximise successful outcomes for interns, although no data on direct comparisons with other supported internship models appeared to be available.

As noted above sites were generally positive about the model, and aimed to deliver the prescribed core elements. There were, however, a number of factors which affected the way in which sites' adhered to the model. Some of these issues related to local circumstances, although over time some sites also made suggestions about a need for

adjustment to the approach. These adjustments were suggested or made in order to:

- Achieve or sustain the delivery of the model (i.e. fit the model to available funding or circumstances);
- Facilitate interns move towards independence from their families (i.e. not rigidly adhering to joint monthly reviews of progress);
- Improve employment opportunities for graduates (e.g. the need to make closer links with external employers) and;
- Sustain support for graduates (which sites felt would may not be achievable in the longer term).

There was some confusion around the extent to which sites could adapt the model. The Project SEARCH national coordinator suggested that some adjustments fell within the realms of 'model fidelity'. This may suggest that there was some lack of clarity about the model, rather than a complete lack of flexibility within it.

Making adjustments to elements of the model appeared to have a varying degree of impact. Some of the changes, such the completion of two rather than three rotations, did not appear to be major in terms of level of job outcomes achieved. However the absence of a full time job coach or tutor caused more noteworthy implementation problems within sites. Overall, however, adjustments to the model within demonstration sites did not appear to have a substantial impact on the level of job outcomes achieved.

6.5 Recommendations on the future use of supported internships

Going forward, there were some core elements that a number of sites felt they needed to adjust in order to continue delivering a sustainable supported internship programme. It became apparent over the course of the evaluation that some sites felt that in future whilst they may adopt some of the key principles of the approach, such as the 'place and train' model of supported employment, they may not pursue full implementation of the prescribed Project SEARCH model.

This pragmatic approach to the implementation of supported internships may offer a route that can capture the benefits of the approach, whilst

recognising the need to adapt to local circumstances and deliver a sustainable model. As noted above, the US Project SEARCH team emphasised the need to maintain model fidelity in order to maximise job outcomes for interns and so potentially diluting the model may risk the success of the model. There does not, however, appear to be any data on direct comparisons with other supported internship models and as noted above, overall adjustments to the model made during the demonstration year did not appear to have had a major impact on job outcomes. However it is important to note that many of the demonstration sites were in their first year and so it is not clear what impact these adjustments may have in the longer term.

On this basis it is recommended that consideration should be given to the use of supported internships which draw on the key lessons of the Project SEARCH demonstration year. It is, however, recommended that an ongoing review of the outcomes of any developing models, along with those of Project SEARCH, is carried out in order to develop an evidence base on best practice in this area. This would also allow for a more robust assessment of the cost effectiveness of different approaches.

In order to facilitate the wider use of supported internships it will also be necessary to address the challenges encountered by the demonstration sites. As noted above one of the major challenges identified was the availability of sustainable funding. Sites reported the use of Work Choice and education funding although very few appeared to have reached a long term solution to this issue. One site had secured the use funding for the provision of supported employment via Adult Social Care budgets, with the provision of support to Project SEARCH being written into the Service Level Agreement with the Local Authority supported employment provider. This local solution was not, however, an option for many sites.

As discussed in [chapter five](#) a range of education funding streams were utilised during the demonstration year. Information from Jobs First⁴⁸ also tends to support the potential for Further Education funding of supported employment provision. This, alongside the SEN Green Paper commitment to explore the introduction of supported internships suggests that an education route may be able to offer access to future funding. If this approach is adopted care should be taken to ensure that

⁴⁸ Department of Health (2011), 'Job First: Funding employment support with individual budgets' London: Department of Health

the core elements which the demonstration year identified as key success factors, such as employer engagement, and a partnership approach to supported internships, are maintained.

[Chapter five](#) also discussed potential links to Work Choice and suggested this route could support Project SEARCH graduates (via module one for those who do not achieve employment during the Project SEARCH year, and via module two for those who do.) This could address concerns raised about the sustainability of offering ongoing support for graduates once the new academic year has commenced.

It is also recommended that any future use of this approach should consider the other factors noted by the demonstration sites as factors for successful delivery, alongside the key elements of supported employment. These include:

- close engagement of participants and their families;
- job matching, vocational profiling and in work support including the use of TSI;
- an early focus on job searching particularly with external employers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Project SEARCH Model Fidelity Components for English Sites

Core Model Elements
1. The stated outcome of Project SEARCH is sustained, paid employment for each participant
1.1 Employment occurs in integrated work settings, experiencing real jobs and meeting real business needs.
1.2 Employees earn the prevailing wage for a given job.
1.3 Employees generally work the same schedule and hours as colleagues in similar posts and at least the DWP definition of full time (16 hours each week).
1.4 Paid Jobs and internships involve a variety of posts that include complex but systematic work.
2. Collaboration: Project SEARCH is a partnership with support and resources from the Host Employer, Education and Supported Employment Provider.
2.1 Roles and Responsibilities of the different partners are clearly defined and agreed upon [guidance on roles and responsibilities in England to be issued to sites]
2.2 The following are active partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host Employer • College or School • Supported Employment Provider(s) <p>It is usually beneficial to add Jobcentre Plus and Connexions</p>
2.3 Partners meet on a regular basis, at least monthly during the set up and development phase to drive and monitor progress.

3. Project SEARCH is employer-led

3.1 The host employer is not paid to participate in Project SEARCH – delivering the model as part of their core business.

3.2 The host employer is fully involved in crucial decisions such as student selection, internship site development, active internal marketing of Project SEARCH throughout the organisation, and assists with internal recruitment of qualified candidates via a business liaison post responsible for supporting Project SEARCH for typically at least 10% of their time.

3.4 Project SEARCH should be based in a large, quality organisation with a minimum of 200 employees, offering a variety of internships, and has a reasonable level of staff turnover.

3.5 Host employer provides an on-site classroom dedicated to Project SEARCH that provides a base for tutor, job coach and interns.

4. The partners provide consistent on-site staff in order to support interns and the host employer at all running times during the academic year

4.1 Staff should conduct monthly reviews with interns and their family or carers to discuss internship progress and career planning.

5. Project SEARCH supports the Government’s employment strategy for people with learning disabilities, *Valuing Employment Now*. The model focuses on serving young adults with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum conditions, who can benefit from intensive, personalised support in preparing for and finding work.

6. Pooled or “braided” funding and resources are in place between the non-employer partners.

6.1 Funding is a reallocation of existing resources.

6.2 Funding is sustainable.

7. There is total immersion of students and/or employees in the host organisation. Interns abide by the host employer’s policies and practices (with reasonable adjustments where needed)

7.1 Interns are on site at the host employer for a minimum of six hours each academic day, for an entire academic year (or until they secure employment if earlier).

7.2 Interns train in real work settings, meeting the needs of the host employer.

7.3 The internships provide participants with structured, personalised work-based training. As such, interns are separate to people who volunteer with the host employer.

7.4 Students participate in the internships 20-25 hours a week.

7.5 Project SEARCH teaches competitive, marketable, transferable skills. Emphasis is on layering on additional skills.

7.6 Project SEARCH includes an employability skills curriculum taught each morning and customised to the host employer and local labour market. The curriculum will include things like independent travel training.

8. Tutors and job coaches will be trained in systematic instruction

9. Each site will provide follow on support for graduates of Project SEARCH, ideally students are made eligible before they start or early in the Project SEARCH programme

9.1 Each site will make provision to support graduates who secure employment within the host organisation employer by a single supported employment provider.

9.2 Each site will support graduates who do not gain employment with host employer, to find employment elsewhere. Services should be tailored to meet the needs of the individual.

10. Each Project SEARCH site will collect data on participants and employment outcomes:

- Number of interns who began the programme;
- Number of interns that completed the programme;
- Number of interns that gained paid employment with the host employer and elsewhere.

Once employed:

- Wages earned (average and range);
- Hours worked per week;
- Benefits received from employer e.g. staff discount schemes, pension etc.

Sites will share this information with Project SEARCH us via the Valuing Employment Now (VEN) Team. Much of this information will be used in the Government evaluation.

11. Each site has a licensing agreement signed with Project SEARCH Cincinnati.

12. Getting a job is more important than completing the Project SEARCH year.

12.1 The model is sufficiently flexible, to allow interns to leave the programme at any time during the academic year, when a suitable job opportunity arises with the host employer or elsewhere.

Appendix B - Project SEARCH sites

Site	Job coach/supported employment provider	College/school	Host Employer
Bath and North-East Somerset	Remploy	Norton Radstock College	Bath and North-East Somerset Council
Bolton	Remploy	Firwood School	Bolton Council
City of Manchester	Pure Innovations	Manchester College	Manchester University Hospital
Plymouth	PLUSS	City College, Plymouth	Derriford Hospital
Newcastle	Remploy	Newcastle College	DWP - The Pensions Service, Newcastle
Great Yarmouth	Remploy	Great Yarmouth FE College	James Pagett Hospital
Kent	Kent Supported Employment Services	Thanet College	QEQM Hospital
Leicester	Remploy	Leicester College	Leicester City Council/Leicester College
Norwich	Remploy	City College Norwich	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital
Norwich	Remploy	City College Norwich	NORSE
Kings Lynn	Remploy	College of West Anglia	QE Hospital
Bath	Remploy	Fosse Way School	Royal United Hospital
Sandwell	Council's in-house provision	Sandwell College	Sandwell Borough Council
London (The Southwark Partnership)	Remploy	Southwark College	Guys and St Thomas' NHS Trust

Appendix C – Rotation examples

Typical NHS hospital rotations	
Department Hospital	Rotation
Catering	Catering/Kitchen assistant
Payroll	Administrative Assistant
Pharmacy	Pharmacy Assistant
Post room	Post Room Operative
Health records	Health Records Porter
Reception	Receptionist/ Switchboard Assistant

Typical Local Authority rotations	
Department	Rotation
Sports Health and Inclusion	Admin and Events Assistant
Catering	Catering Assistant
Early Start Children's Centre	Centre Assistant
Early Start Children's Centre	Admin and Events
Heaton Fold Plant Nursery	Plantsman and Customer Service Assistant
Customer Services Division	Customer Service Assistant

Private sector organisation rotations	
Department	Job title
Transport	Administrative Assistant
Transport	Bus Valeter
Community Equipment Stores	Equipment Cleaner
Transport	Bus Station Cleaner
FM/Catering - County Hall Restaurant	General Kitchen Assistant
Human Resources/Payroll	Administrative Assistant
Community Equipment Stores – (Fabrication)	Fabrication Assistant
County Hall	Caretaker
County Hall	Cleaner
Community Equipment Stores	Refurbisher