



Northumbria University, Newcastle City Learning, DFN Project SEARCH and Sodexo welcome talented young adults as they embark on a supported internship programme

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Northumbria welcomes talented young adults with learning disabilities and/or autism to a life-changing transition to employment programme

A new life-changing supported internship programme for young adults with learning disabilities and/or autism spectrum conditions, has just launched with Newcastle City Learning, supported by Northumbria University.

Newcastle City Learning, run by Newcastle City Council, have teamed up with Northumbria University, Sodexo and national charity DFN Project SEARCH to form a collaborative partnership to give young people with learning disabilities and/or autism vital work-based learning opportunities, to help them to secure competitive employment.

The pioneering programme involves total workplace immersion at its very best, facilitating a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on skills training.

Through the partnership – the first of its kind in the region - Northumbria will provide supported work placements across different business areas of the University as well as its Sodexo-managed student accommodation, as part of the students' full time study programme, facilitated by City Learning.

Northumbria University has been a member of the Disability Confident Scheme for a number of years and was awarded Disability Confident Leader status in June 2023. The Disability Confident Scheme provides a framework to support organisations to develop a disability inclusive culture that realises the talent of disabled people.

Professor Andy Long, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Northumbria University, said: “Northumbria has a long history of successful partnership working in the North East to boost social mobility. DFN Project Search provides Northumbria with a unique opportunity to make a difference to employability outcomes for young people in the region who typically would not be reached through our higher education offer. I’m delighted that we are able to offer this opportunity, and I look forward to welcoming the students onto campus and seeing them flourish”.

Cllr Lesley Storey, Cabinet Member for a Growing City, Newcastle City Council said: “It is fantastic that we have been able to form this partnership to give more young people the opportunity to gain valuable work-based learning with the aim of securing paid employment. This project demonstrates our commitment to supporting all of the city’s young people ensuring they have access to the support they need to fulfil their potential.”

This local programme comes after DFN Project SEARCH recently launched a new employability campaign #InclusionRevolution, which aims to support 10,000 young adults aged between 18 – 25 with a learning disability or

autism into paid employment by 2030.

The initiative highlights the shocking reality that only 5% of people with learning disabilities in England secure paid employment, compared to 80% of their peers. That means an astonishing 95% will be forced to live a lifetime on benefits.

DFN Project SEARCH is a national transition to work programme for students with learning disabilities and, or autism spectrum conditions, or both. They work in partnership across the public, private and voluntary sectors to create supported employment internships within private and public settings that these young people undertake during their last year of education, helping them to make positive transitions from education to the world of work.

With the largest data set in the UK, DFN Project SEARCH's evidence-based model challenges misconceptions and changes the way society views and enables young adults with learning disabilities and autism to ensure that they reach their true and full potential.

DFN Project SEARCH works to build a more inclusive society by helping to create much improved career opportunities for those with learning disabilities and autism.

You can learn more about DFN Project SEARCH at: www.dfnprojectsearch.org

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