Supported Internships:
Frequently asked questions by parents and carers

Understanding the basics

What is a Supported Internship?
These are study programmes for young people aged 16–24 with an EHCP, combining workplace learning with education and personalised support.

Who is eligible?
Young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) aged 16-24 who want to move into employment and can travel (with support if needed).

Are Supported Internships only suitable for young people who are already work-ready?
No. Supported Internships are designed for young people with SEND who want to build their work skills and may need support to do so.

Is a Supported Internship just unpaid work experience?
No. They are structured programmes with clear learning goals, designed to help young people develop skills and progress into paid employment.

Is a Supported Internship paid?
Interns themselves are unpaid, but the goal is to move into paid employment.

Is it right for my young person?

Is a Supported Internship too big a step after school or college?
Supported Internships are designed as a transition programme, gradually building confidence and independence while providing ongoing support.

What are the benefits of a Supported Internship?
Supported Internships help young people:

- Gain real work experience
- Build confidence and independence
- Develop employability skills
- Improve social and communication skills
- Increase chances of securing paid work

Is there a clear outcome at the end of the programme?
The goal is to support young people into paid employment although it cannot be guaranteed that the young person will be offered a paid role at the end of their internship. Many programmes have strong success rates in helping participants move into jobs or further opportunities and suppport the gaining of invaluable skills and experience.

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Applying for a Supported Internship

When should applications be considered and submitted?
It is helpful to start thinking about Supported Internships early, ideally from Year 9 or 10, for example during annual reviews or when starting to explore work experience options. Speaking to a teacher, SENDCo, careers or transition worker at this stage can help with planning.

Applications typically open during the academic year before the programme starts (often from autumn through to spring), so beginning the conversation early, especially in Year 11, allows time to explore options and prepare.

Where can Supported Internship opportunities be found?
Applications are usually made through a college or training provider that delivers Supported Internships. School or college staff can help identify suitable programmes and support the application process.

Information and opportunities are also available through:

- Local colleges and training providers
- Preparing for Adulthood: Parents and carers guide to post-16 opportunities
- Links within the Essex Local Offer website

How does the programme work?

How long does a Supported Internship last?
Typically up to one academic year although this can vary depending on individual needs and progress.

Do Supported Internships run during term time?
Yes. Supported Internships usually run in line with the academic year, similar to a college course. This means they usually start in September and finish by the end of the academic year.

Will my young person get holidays and time off?
Yes. As these are study programmes, young people will follow a structure similar to both college and employment:

- They will usually receive around two weeks off at Christmas as part of the college holiday period
- They do not automatically get Easter or half-term breaks off but are expected to request annual leave in the same way as in a real job. This leave can be booked during normal college holiday periods or, where appropriate, during term time
- Typically they receive four weeks annual leave a year in addition to the Christmas break
- Attendance during holiday periods is not expected unless clearly agreed in advance

How does the programme work (cont.)?

Where do Supported Internships take place?
They take place in real workplaces, often with local employers across different sectors.

How many days a week will my young person be in college and in the workplace?
This can vary depending on the Supported Internship programme and provider, but typically young people will spend most of their week in the workplace, with some time in college.

In many programmes, this might look like:

- 3–4 days in a workplace placement
- 1–2 days with their education provider (e.g. college), focusing on employability skills and any relevant qualifications such as English and maths

The exact balance will be tailored to the individual and reviewed regularly to make sure it meets their needs and supports their progress.

Is attendance flexible?
Attendance expectations are similar to those of a workplace, as this helps prepare young people for employment. Providers also expect a high attendance as with any other college course, and will follow their own attendance policy if required. However, Supported Internships are designed to be supportive and flexible, taking individual needs into account. Any concerns about attendance can be discussed with the provider.

What support is available?

Will my young person be supported in the workplace?
Yes. Each young person receives tailored support, including help from a job coach to learn tasks, help with workplace routines, build confidence, and develop independence.

What is the “fade and train” approach?
“Fade and train” is central to Supported Internships. A job coach provides initial support to help the young person learn tasks and build confidence, then gradually reduces this support as independence grows. The goal is sustainable, independent employment.

Examples of how support may be faded include:

- At the beginning, a job coach may be present throughout the day, demonstrating tasks and supporting communication with colleagues
- Over time, the job coach might step back to check in at set times rather than staying constantly
- The young person may move from being guided through tasks step-by-step to completing them independently with occasional prompts

What support is available (cont.)?

Will employers make adjustments for my young person?
Yes. Employers involved are committed to being inclusive and will work with providers to make reasonable adjustments to support success.

What if my young person is unwell or needs time off?
If a young person is unwell or needs time off, this should be discussed with the provider and employer, just as it would be in college or work. Reasonable adjustments and support can be put in place where needed.

Choosing and reviewing placements

How is the right placement chosen?
The programme team will consider:

- The young person's interests
- Their strengths and support needs
- Career aspirations
- Feedback from you and the young person

How is progress measured?
This is through individual learning plans, workplace feedback, and development of employability skills.

What happens if a Supported Internship isn't the right fit?
At the start of a Supported Internship, each young person will take part in a 6–8 week probation period. This gives everyone the opportunity to make sure the placement is the right fit for them.

Parents and carers will be invited to a review meeting at the end of this period to discuss how things are going, including progress and any concerns. If needed, alternative options can be explored with the provider, such as returning to college, moving to a different programme, or progressing into supported employment, to ensure the young person continues to move forward positively.

After the probation period, interns will have regular reviews every six weeks. These reviews help to ensure they are making good progress, feeling supported, and enjoying their Supported Internship.

Travel and practical concerns

Will transport be supported?
Travel training can take place before or during the Supported Internship by a job coach if required. As with college or other post-16 education settings, young people are usually expected to pay for their own travel costs to their Supported Internship placement. However:

- Some young people may be eligible for support through Access to Work, which can contribute towards travel costs where needed
- If Access to Work funding is agreed, parents and carers are typically required to pay travel costs upfront and then claim the money back. Families should therefore plan for the possibility of covering costs in advance (please note that in some cases, reimbursements can take over 6 months to be processed)
- If a young person receives the higher rate mobility component of DLA/PIP, or has access to a mobility vehicle, they are unlikely to be eligible for Access to Work travel funding. This is because the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) may view this as duplicate (double) funding

Reassurance for families
Travel costs can be a concern for some families. Information and guidance about possible support, including Access to Work, can be explored where appropriate. Attending a placement helps young people develop important skills for adulthood and future employment, including confidence and independence in travel.

Parent and carer involvement

Can parents/carers be involved?
Yes - working together with providers helps to achieve the best outcomes. Parents/carers may be invited to:

- Reviews and progress meetings
- Planning discussions
- Updates on the young person's progress

Job coaches encourage parents and carers to take part in termly reviews to keep up to date with the young persons progress and to share or discuss any concerns if needed.

To help young people build independence and reflect a real workplace experience, parents and carers are not expected to contact the employer directly or indirectly (including through social media). If there are any concerns about the Supported Internship, these should be raised with the job coach in the first instance, who will work with both the family and the employer to address any issues.

Parent and carer involvement (cont.)

What can parents and carers do to support their young person during a Supported Internship?
Parents and carers play a vital role in helping their young person succeed. They can support by:

Encouraging independence at home
- Promote taking responsibility for daily routines (e.g. getting up on time, preparing for the day)
- Support young people to get a good night's sleep
- Encourage them to organise their own belongings (work clothes, lunch, travel items)
- Support them to problem-solve rather than stepping in immediately

Building confidence and belief
- Show that you believe in their ability to succeed
- Celebrate small achievements and progress, not just big outcomes
- Encourage a positive attitude towards trying new things and learning from mistakes

Reinforcing workplace behaviours
- Talk about the importance of:
  - Being reliable and punctual
  - Respecting others (colleagues and supervisors)
  - Following instructions and accepting feedback
- Role-play situations if needed (e.g. asking for help, responding to feedback)

Encouraging communication
- Support the young person to speak up if they are unsure or need help
- Encourage them to share how their day went
- Help them reflect on what went well and what they found difficult

Promoting travel independence
- Support travel training where appropriate
- Gradually build confidence in travelling to and from placements

What happens next?

Does this replace college learning?
No. Supported Internships are a study programme. Young people continue to work on relevant qualifications, such as English and maths if needed, alongside their placement.

What happens after the Supported Internship ends?
Many young people move into paid jobs, sometimes with the same employer, or progress into further training or apprenticeships. If paid employment is not achieved, supported employment services can work with the young person to help them continue developing their skills or explore other opportunities.

Does their EHCP cease after a Supported Internship?
A Supported Internship is often a significant stepping stone toward independence and employment. If a young person successfully achieves their EHCP outcomes and is ready to move into sustained paid work or adulthood pathways, the cessation of the EHCP can reflect the progress they have made and the success of the support around them. It represents achievement, growth, and preparation for the next exciting chapter.

What about if they get an apprenticeship?
An EHCP can stay open during an apprenticeship if the young person still needs the support outlined within it. Moving into an apprenticeship is something to celebrate — it shows the Supported Internship has helped open the door to the next stage of their career journey.

For more information please email:

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