



### Getting on-the-job experience at Amazon

*Wayne is a supported intern at an Amazon Fulfilment Centre in the Doncaster region. From scanning and packing, to loading and stacking, he says he loves the work because there's never a dull moment. His advice to employers and prospective supported interns? Go for it!*

We spoke to intern, **Wayne**, Operations Manager, **Stephen Day**, and Workforce Community Engagement Project Manager, **Olivia Grimsley**, about Amazon's Supported Internship Programme in partnership with \*DFN Project SEARCH. They discussed the skills, experience and confidence interns gain through the programme and the benefits to employers of reaching out to untapped talent.

**\*DFN Project SEARCH** provides real work experience, combined with training in employability and independent living skills, to young people with a learning disability or autism spectrum conditions, or both. Delivered in a business setting, the supported internship programme is a partnership between a host business, education provider, and supported employment provider. It aims to provide interns with work experience, helping young people make successful transitions to adult life.



## Wayne, we're really interested to hear how you came to be doing the internship. How did that all happen?

**Wayne:** So, I started out at college at 16 but I didn't technically have to leave college until about 22 because I can stay in education longer than students who go to mainstream colleges. My only problem was I'm not much of a research man. I'm more of a practical guy. So I was going through a bit of downtime from college. I was working in catering and one of the staff members came up to me and told me about this programme called Project SEARCH, based at Amazon. I thought, alright I'll give it a go.

I've done two rotations since September. First I was on a team where we were packing customer orders. Then I joined the shipping department, which I'm totally in love with because I just never have a dull day. So, my job at the moment is to empty chutes which hold customer orders. We have 15 chutes and I've got my scanner and I'll go for the busiest chutes. I'll scan the corner of the box and it tells me which pallet it needs to go on for shipping. Then it's a bit like playing tetris really, just with all these items.

## Can you tell us more about who's supporting you? Why is it important that there are lots of different people in your network?

**Wayne:** Obviously I've got my fellow interns, I've got my tutor and then on the shop floor I've got my manager and team leads. I'm also talking to other people working in shipping, just having a normal chat. Sometimes I can be a bit stubborn and not ask for help and then someone will come to me and give me a nudge to ask for help if I am stuck, or give me a hand. That's one of my targets at the moment. So, for me it's important so I can learn.

## Why is it important for Amazon, hiring young people and employees from a diverse range of backgrounds?

**Olivia:** We really recognise that young people with special educational needs and disabilities have a lot to bring to the UK workforce. They enrich the workplace and bring fresh, diverse perspectives to our teams.

For example, last week our Country Manager visited one of our sites that hosts supported interns. During a discussion, one of the interns approached him with an idea to make one of our processes when handling fragile items a bit easier.

Supported internships also provide an opportunity to gain experience for a future career and that doesn't have to be with Amazon. For many of these young people, the internship is a pathway for experience and a way to get the skills for their career goals whether inside or outside of Amazon.



**Stephen:** No two people will tackle the same problem in exactly the same way. So that wealth and breadth of experience and knowledge and everything that everyone brings really enhances the ability of Amazon to be what it is in terms of its performance, its problem solving, its ability to adapt.

But I think it also makes it a rich and vibrant place to be. We have 13 affinity groups (employee resource groups) that are open to all employees and bring people from different backgrounds and communities together. That identity helps bring the workplace to life, gives you that variation, that excitement day-to-day.

In terms of something like the supported internship programme, it really brings home that what we are doing is right for the community, and for these young people who want to work. It brings that sense of community which I think could be quite easy to overlook in a big warehouse operation.

### **That all sounds amazing. Tell us about any challenges you've faced.**

**Stephen:** I mean it's not the answer you want, but was it easy? Yes it was. We had a really on-board site team and our General Manager is very, very keen on this. Our learning development team, right from the very start, made processes to onboard these programmes that we've been able to share widely across the business. And feedback has been really positive!

Onsite, we have made sure all our supported interns are included and integrated into the business, the same as any other employee. We want to give everyone an opportunity to gain experience for a future career.

The leads and managers had additional training to understand what the programme was about and what they can expect to see from the young people.

**Olivia:** As Stephen said, it has been fairly straightforward. Our sites are really excited about the programme and that has really helped our expansion.

### **Do you think there are any barriers?**

**Olivia:** It's great to work with colleges, for example we've had parents come into one of our sites with the young people to really make sure that they're ok with it. If anyone was really unsure of whether they wanted to do this I would always say come and see our site, and see exactly what the environment is.

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### So finally, Wayne, what would a really good job look like for you? What makes a job opportunity a good one?

**Wayne:** Oh, I'll be honest with you. When it comes to applying for jobs I'd love to stay at Amazon. I've done all this training. I couldn't imagine working anywhere else. At Amazon you've got friendly people, you can get on with your job. I've always recommended this to my mates. I just go to them, you don't need college degrees and all that. You can just do this and it can offer you the best opportunities you can get out there. From the nearly half a year I've been here, I've achieved so much more than I would have at college if I decided to stay. So if anyone ever asked me, I'd just say go for it

### Stephen and Olivia, what would you say to other employers thinking about supported internships?

**Stephen:** There's no downside to it. We've seen positive results from our own teams in terms of their engagement at work. The interns bring a breath of fresh air to the place and everyone who's worked with the interns have nothing but positive things to say about their interactions.

**Olivia:** I would say to any organisation, this is something you should be doing. It's fantastic the diversity it brings. It's changed a lot of our processes and it also brings just a diverse pool of talent that you would probably never had otherwise. Just do it!

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