

Youth Employment Toolkit Unwrapped for EMPLOYERS

On-the-job Training

INTRO

As the [What Works Centre](#) for youth employment, we're committed to helping employers access the best available evidence on interventions that deliver good jobs for young people, helping to address key issues that employers face such as a 'war for talent' and a tight labour market. Our [Youth Employment Toolkit](#) presents data from high-quality, international research showing how likely it is that a particular intervention *caused* a positive change in employment outcomes (whether it 'worked'), including where that is specific to marginalised young people.

Our resources aim to cut through the complexity of the evidence and data, dissecting and bringing to life what we know about the impact and quality of interventions in the Youth Employment Toolkit – a resource that will be updated at least annually.

Our goal is to support employers to proactively invest in activity that is more likely to be effective and have a positive impact both for the employer and for the young person. Through this series of resources, we provide guidance for employers looking to start or refine their journey towards better supporting young people from marginalised backgrounds to gain and sustain good work.

You can [explore on-the-job training in more detail](#) on our website, where you'll find:

- Case studies of employers who've used this intervention
- Webinars with young people, experts from across the youth employment sector and employers
- Other resources from the Toolkit Unwrapped series for employers

The first in our series of toolkits focused on apprenticeships, and you can find that resource and [more information here](#). This resource looks at ‘on the job training’ and next in the series will be a focus on Basic Skills and Life Skills.

For more information on Youth Futures Foundation and our Youth Employment Toolkit, please head to the back page of this resource where you will also find links to accessible versions of this resource.

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DEFINING ‘ON-THE-JOB TRAINING’

‘On-the-job’ training goes by various different names, including traineeships, in-work training, work-based training, practical training and others. Encompassing a variety of activities, currently available research and evidence suggests that a training and learning activity is ‘on-the-job’ if...

- The people who take part do the training/learning in a workplace, alongside or while doing the practical tasks associated with a particular job and/or sector.
- The main aim of the training/learning is to develop practical skills for a specific job and/or sector. Alongside this some employers might have a secondary aim to develop other skills, such as general skills for work (e.g. communication, teamwork).

In on-the-job training, young people gain practical experience of the workplace, and of working in a sector. They may receive instruction from dedicated trainers, staff with a specialism in training, managers, or a combination of these. Sometimes young people who take part may gain a qualification or credit towards a qualification, but this is not an essential feature of on-the-job training interventions.

Despite what the title ‘on-the-job training’ might lead you to believe, a young person doesn’t need to be employed to take part in on-the-job training. If they are only in a workplace in order to do the training, then they may be unemployed before and immediately after the training ends. Most on-the-job training programmes last between 1 and 12 months.

On-the-job training may be delivered alongside off-the-job training, basic skills training, life skills training, mentoring or coaching, and other interventions. It may be paid, unpaid, or subsidised.

Regardless of what you decide to call your in-work training programmes, it’s important to ensure that the training on offer is **high-quality, inclusive and well-structured** for those who participate in and deliver it.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY: TOOLKIT UNWRAPPED

KEY FINDINGS

The research suggests that:

- On-the-job training is likely to have a moderate positive impact on youth employment outcomes
- That means, on average, for every 12 young people who can take part in on-the-job training, one will get a job afterwards who wouldn't have done so without the intervention.
- On-the-job training is likely to have a **very high positive impact** on youth employment outcomes **for young people who face additional barriers to employment**. This includes young people living with a disability, young people who have been involved with the justice system, or young people with experience of the care system.
- On average, for every two young people facing additional barriers who can take part in a programme, one will get a job who wouldn't have done so without the intervention.

You can explore the evidence on on-the-job training in full, by visiting our [Youth Employment Toolkit](#). *To understand **why we haven't included any information about apprenticeships** in this resource, please see our note on the back page of this resource.

HIRE NOW, TRAIN LATER....WHAT IS THE REALITY FOR EMPLOYERS?

Over a quarter of employers, surveyed by Savanta for Youth Futures Foundation in 2023¹, said that they are delivering on-the-job training of some sort. Of these, the largest proportion, at just under a third, offer training in general workplace skills (such as communication, teamwork or self-management), while just 22% offered traineeships,

¹ Savanta Business Omni Service, 2023 – survey of 714 representatives from combined businesses in the UK

and 15% offered the work-based element of T-levels or other qualifications.

When businesses were asked who their on-the-job training was targeted at, the largest focus was on young (43%), new (44%), and/or entry-level (48%) employees. On-the-job training was most frequently offered in recognition of identified skills gaps, with large employers tending to offer a broader range of on-the-job training than SMEs.

When exploring why employers might not engage with or offer on-the-job training, 38% of employers who responded said that on-the-job training doesn't answer the need for new employees to be productive straight away and 32% said that it was too expensive to resource in-house. Interestingly large employers (38%) reported concerns about the cost of on-the-job training more frequently than SMEs (29%). Other concerns included the difficulty that employers face in evaluating the effectiveness of on-the-job training (32%), despite 74% of employer who had delivered some on-the-job training saying they *had* evaluated it.

These barriers act as a healthy opportunity and challenge for organisations who support employers to deliver high-quality on-the-job training programmes, to ensure that programmes focus on a good balance between learning and increasing productivity, cost reduction for the employer where possible and robust evaluation frameworks which support employers understand the impact the training is having on both the trainee and the company.

While risks and barriers were identified, we know from the research within our [Youth Employment Toolkit](#) that, on average, for every **12 young people who can take part in a programme, one will get a job** who wouldn't have done so without the intervention.

We also know from the employers surveyed that on-the-job training can serve their needs by providing specialist skills to the workforce and supporting young people to progress. Medium and large businesses felt confident that on-the-job training could provide the

specialist skills required (90%). Small employers were slightly less enthusiastic about the latter, but over three quarters still felt that on-the-job training delivers this benefit (78%).

Despite evidence of the benefits and positive outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds, employers were less certain that providing on-the-job training could improve diversity in the workforce (65%), even though on-the-job training can provide opportunity to a more diverse range of young people, who may not have gone down academic routes. Public sector employers were more positive about the potential for on-the-job training to help diversify workforces, while business, finance and professional services employers were least likely to name this benefit.

What this highlights is that, while there are clear potential benefits to both the employer and young employee of on-the-job training, more needs to be done to demonstrate the impact in order to offset some of the perceived costs in terms of time and delivery, alongside the lost potential from young employees moving on after receiving on-the-job training.

Youth Futures Foundation is committed, as the What Works Centre for youth employment, to filling the evidence gaps on the impact that on-the-job training, and other employment interventions, can have on young people facing barriers to employment. [Sign up to our newsletter](#) to stay up to date with our upcoming research and evaluations of on-the-job training and to receive future news and insights as they are published.

SPOTLIGHTING: SUPPORTED INTERNSHIPS

Written by Barry Fletcher, CEO of Youth Futures Foundation, and Claire Cookson, CEO of [DFN Project SEARCH](#), in December 2023. You can find the full piece on Supported Internships [here](#).

When it comes to helping young people with a learning disability or autism spectrum condition into good jobs, supported internships, which are one type of on-the-job training, are a key part of the solution. They offer a lifeline to hundreds of thousands of young people who may not envisage meaningful employment and independence in their future. At the same time, they allow employers to access an overlooked pool of talent for their recruitment.

The most recent research from [NDTi](#) shows that over 86% of people with a learning disability who do not have a paid job would like one, so it is not for the lack of ambition and drive that employment figures are so low for this group. [High-quality evidence from the US](#) highlights that supported internships are an excellent tool for young people who are transitioning from education to employment and who need extra support and exposure to employers. Youth Futures are keen to undertake further evaluation of supported internship models in the UK.

We have seen first-hand how the thousands of former DFN Project SEARCH interns have found their voice and place in society. In the 12 years since the Project SEARCH model has been implemented in the UK, DFN has supported 2,200 young people, over 60% of whom have gone on to paid employment, allowing many to live independently and follow their dreams, such as purchasing their first home or going on their first holiday.

So how can employers play a role in ensuring that more people with a learning disability or autism have access to a supported internship or a supported job with training that works for them?

We need more employer engagement – without them, no transition programme can succeed. It's been amazing to see larger, well-known employers like Amazon and Asda growing their supported internship

offer this year, while public sector employers like the NHS are doubling and tripling their own supported internship offers across the UK. In quarter 4 of 2023, there were 989,000 open job vacancies across the UK. And yet, more than a million young people with a learning disability remain out of employment and we need more employers to sign up, large and small, public and private.

MEET THE GRANTEE – who are we funding?

DFN Project SEARCH is a one-year transition to work programme for young adults with a learning disability or autism spectrum conditions, or both. They believe in empowering all young people to enter the workplace with confidence.

According to their research, only 4.8% of people in England with a learning disability who are known to local authorities go on to secure paid employment, compared with 80% of their peers.

Through their programmes and campaigning, DFN Project SEARCH work hard to challenge and change cultures, demonstrating how young people with a learning disability can enrich the workforce, bring incredible skills and talent, encourage greater diversity and meet a real business need. They partner with employers across the public, private, and voluntary sectors to create supported employment internships for young people in their last year of education, helping them to take positive first steps into the world of work. To date they've hosted partnerships with a variety of employers including hospitals, local authorities, universities, and a number of private sector businesses, such as Amazon and Goldman Sachs.

At the end of their one-year transition programme, on average 60% of DFN Project SEARCH graduates move into full-time permanent roles and 70% of DFN Project SEARCH graduates gain jobs in total.

To find out more about DFN Project Search and their work, please visit their website <https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/>

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY SNAPSHOT

A year of learning, with Amazon

*We spoke to **Wayne**, a current intern at an Amazon Fulfilment Centre in the Doncaster region, his line manager **Steve Day**, and Amazon's Workforce Community Engagement Manager **Olivia Grimsley** about their Supported Internship Programme in partnership with DFN Project SEARCH. They discussed the benefits that support internships can bring to employers, through reaching out to untapped talent:*

Olivia: “We recognise young people with special educational needs and disabilities as an underrepresented talent pool. They bring so many benefits to us and also diversity to our sites.

On a recent site-visit, one of the interns said, ‘I really want to mention something because I've noticed since I've been working here that there's an easier way that we could do this on site.’ And no-one had ever come up with this. It's now going to change the whole way that the site approaches this task. Without this young person being on a supported internship we could have gone on for years working in the same ways that we've always done.”

Steve: “You know, 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.

In terms of something like the Project SEARCH programme, it really brings that home that what we are doing is right for the community and for these young people who want to work. Not to mention, as Wayne explained recently, they want to be here. That's had a real, refreshing impact on the other employees in the department that

they're working in. It brings that sense of community, family and togetherness which I think could be quite easy to overlook in a big warehouse operation.”

Wayne: When I was at college last year I was having a difficult time. I struggled because I'm not a research man, I'm more of a practical guy. One of the staff members told me about this programme, so I thought, alright I'll give it a go.

That's when I met Steve and got to know the team. Then came into Amazon and did the training. I've done two rotations in different departments since September. I did packing first. Then I joined the shipping department, which I'm totally in love with because I never have a dull day. Honestly, I couldn't imagine working anywhere else. I've achieved so much more than I would have at college if I'd decided to stay. So if anyone ever asked me whether to do a supported internship, I'd just say go for it.

To see the full length versions of our case studies with Amazon and HMRC on their On-the-job Training programmes, [please click here](#).

On-the-job training and progression:

How can on-the-job training provide opportunities for employers to respond to the fast-paced tech developments, whilst providing high-quality opportunities for young employees to progress from within? We spoke to one of our Employer Advisory Board members, [Unilever](#), who told us how they've been focusing on upskilling their workforce to adapt and thrive as technology marches on and rapidly changes the types of jobs and skills their workforce needs.

Most recently Unilever have:

- Implemented a personal development framework to support employees to learn skills that align with their individual motivations and purpose.

- Developed ‘Agile Coaches’ and “Training the trainers” by using operators to train and support others in the business to be able to adjust and adapt their skills as their careers develop.
- A flexible-working programme, matching people to opportunities in other areas of the business that will help them build their skills.
- Transforming how employees work and transition from highly regular activities to more autonomous roles as a result of automations; and

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

Here are our top, evidence-based considerations for employers in making your on-the-job training offering impactful, accessible and inclusive for young people from marginalised backgrounds. See page 7 to follow our Employer Action Plan and to take your next steps.

1. Recruitment that fosters bespoke learner-to-job matching

When thinking about a role with training to place a young person in, use recruitment approaches that aim to explore young people’s interests and motivations. This could include:

- Pre-application meetings with potential programme participants to agree expectations from both sides and to explore areas of interest.
- Supporting applicants to identify areas where they want to develop their skills and building this into the on-the-job training offer.
- An orientation phase for new employees, to provide space during their induction to settle into a routine and to build group cohesion, especially if their on-the-job training will be bespoke.

2. Inclusive programme content and design

Although programme content and design varies by sector, there are some consistent features that will support inclusion:

- Providing a balance between broad and transferrable workplace skills, such as communication and teamwork, and role-specific skills.
- Opportunities for group work and project-based learning.
- Milestones where learners can ‘debrief’ and reflect on their learning often, and to apply newly-acquired skills in independent work.
- Opportunities to gain recognised qualifications, or credit towards qualifications. Partnerships with colleges and other learning providers may facilitate this.
- Partnerships with youth and community organisations, alongside existing young employees, can help programme designers to understand specific needs and apply this knowledge to programme design.

3. Modelling workplace culture and behaviours

Employers who integrate learning about the world of work with vocational and job-specific skills, can help learners prepare for employment, and also helps young people to differentiate on-the-job training from a school environment—which is important for young people who have had poor experiences in compulsory education. This could include:

- ‘Modelling’ workplace culture and expectations throughout the programme, for example in how learners are addressed, providing feedback in professional settings, expectations around punctuality and self-management of workload.
- Fostering cultures of mutual respect between all levels of employees.
- Integrating general skills for work into the on-the-job training, such as communication, MS Office, time management and so on.

4. Strong commitment from the employer

On-the-job training programmes thrive when the host employer is committed and willing to provide extended support throughout the training cycle. This may include:

- Regular contact and mutual feedback opportunities between employers, participants and any third party training providers or colleges.
- Formal agreements that document the level and nature of training at each stage
- Clearly set out roles and responsibilities, inclusive of an allocated line manager who is skilled and equipped in working with young employees.
- Links and support for young people to apply for permanent job openings, for those who complete a training programme.

ACTION PLAN FOR EMPLOYERS

If your company or organisation is looking to take the next steps to enhancing your on-the-job training offering, why not start by ticking off some of these best practice actions:

1. **Speak to other employers** in your sector who've already delivered on-the-job training and learn from their experiences whilst following our best practice guidance (on page 6).
2. Consider a **targeted approach for a certain group of young people**, who on-the-job training could provide huge benefit to, such as those with experience of the criminal justice system, young people with SEND or care leavers.
3. **Team up with a specialist organisation** that offers a pipeline of untapped talent, to support you to find and support the right candidates for your on-the-job training programmes (see our signposting at the bottom of this page).
4. **Design a balanced training programme** that marries role-specific skills with more general professional skills, co-designing the training with young people where possible!
5. Find out about the applicant's interests and goals, and **make the training as bespoke** for them as you can.

6. Pair trainees/ new employees with **experienced line managers** who can role model professional behaviours and provide consistent mentorship.
7. Check in regularly and **provide ample opportunities for 2-way feedback** between yourselves (the employer) and the trainee/ young employee.
8. **Prioritise permanent roles for trainees** at the end of their programmes.

SIGNPOSTING

Evidence

- Explore high-quality and robust evidence on On-the-job training by visiting our [Youth Employment Toolkit](#).
- A [2019 evaluation of Traineeships in England](#), which shows impacts on the likelihood of progression to an apprenticeship, and some analysis of data on employment probability.
- The [Sector-based Work Academy programme \(SWAP\)](#), and a case study of a [sector-based work academy programme](#) delivered through a partnership between an FE college and Jobcentre Plus.
- Findings from the [CIPD's Learning at Work Survey](#), and [case studies on learning and skills at work during the Covid-19 pandemic](#).
- This government [Skills for life page](#) provides links to different employment and training schemes for businesses.
- In the UK context, the [Unit for Future Skills](#) has been established to improve understanding of current skill mismatches and future demand across the UK, and [the Local Skills Dashboard](#) provides detailed information.

Support

- The CIPD [Employers' guide](#) to youth employment and UK training programmes.
- The [Government's guidance](#) highlights the benefits of working with prisons and hiring ex-offenders to help fill skills gaps and reduce re-offending.

- [DFN Project SEARCH](#) partner with organisations across the public, private, and voluntary sectors to create supported employment internships for young people.
- [Volunteer it Yourself \(VIY\)](#) combines DIY and volunteering by challenging young people aged 14-24 to help repair and refurbish community places and spaces, whilst learning vocational trade skills on the job.
- [The Timpson Foundation](#) specialises in the recruitment of marginalised groups, specifically ex-offenders, within society as well as supporting numerous other socially minded projects.
- [The Skill Mill](#) is a social enterprise providing employment for young ex-offenders in watercourse and horticulture services.
- [10,000 Interns Foundation](#) provides paid internships for Black students and graduates through the 10,000 Black Interns programme, and paid internships for disabled students and graduates of all ethnicities, through the 10,000 Able Interns programme across a range of UK industries.

Youth Futures Foundation

[Youth Futures Foundation](#) is the national What Works Centre for youth employment. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change so that young people facing the greatest challenges can find and keep good quality jobs.

Under our Employer Strategy we want to create opportunities with employers where they recruit and retain more young people from marginalised backgrounds, ensuring equitable access to good quality jobs.

Youth Employment Toolkit

The [Youth Employment Toolkit](#), launched in July 2023, is a free, online resource for anyone seeking evidence-based guidance on policy and practice to improve youth employment outcomes. It contains summaries of rigorous literature reviews that draw together

evidence from multiple evaluations of youth employment programmes in high-income countries across the globe. The Toolkit also presents information about how the interventions can be implemented, descriptions of the kinds of evidence that were used in the underlying research, and links to additional resources.

If an intervention isn't included in the Toolkit, that doesn't mean that it is not effective. It only means that it hasn't been included in the Toolkit yet. The Toolkit is a 'living' resource that we will update regularly, with additional interventions and new evidence about those that are already included.

To stay up to date with the latest news and development's from Youth Futures Foundation, [please sign up for our newsletter](#).

***Apprenticeships**

This document does not discuss or provide evidence on apprenticeships, which are defined as programmes that combine both on-the-job with off-the-job training, last for a year or more, and lead to a major nationally- or regionally-recognised qualification. [Please check out our Toolkit Unwrapped resources which explore apprenticeships.](#)

FOR ACCESSIBLE VERSIONS OF THIS RESOURCE (plain text and large font), [please follow this link](#). For an audio version, we recommend using an online PDF reading tool such as Adobe Reader or Speechify.